



ABOUT THE BOOK

A Farewell to Arms follows the experiences of Frederic Henry, a volunteer for the Italian ambulance services in the First World War. It is a story of comradeship, of military injustice, and of disillusionment, but above all it is a love story, between the American Henry and an English nurse, Catherine.

Despite the brutality of the story, the hard-drinking central character and the starkness of the prose, *A Farewell to Arms* is a moving testament both to love and to the overwhelming loss of war.

‘A novel of great power’ *Times Literary Supplement*

‘A most beautiful, moving and human book’ Vita Sackville–West

‘The impartiality of the presentation of war is as remarkable as the sincerity of the record of love’ *Guardian*

REACTIONS TO THE BOOK IN 1929

Goodbye to all that?

A Farewell to Arms reviewed in the *Guardian*, December 13, 1929

There is something so complete in Mr Hemingway's achievement in *A Farewell to Arms* that one is left speculating as to whether another novel will follow in this manner, and whether it does not complete both a period and a phase.

The story starts brilliantly with the love-making between the young American hero, Henry, a volunteer in the Italian Ambulance Service, and Catherine Barkley, an English nurse in the British hospital at Goritzia. There is subtle feminine charm in the Englishwoman's response to the man, who, at first, is just amusing himself, but the affair soon develops into real passion.

Henry, whose good relations with the Italian officers in his mess are drawn with delightful freshness, is wounded, with a smashed knee in a night assault near Plava, and is sent down from the field hospital to the American hospital at Milan, where he is the first case, and here Miss Barkley gets a transfer to nurse him.

All the descriptions of life at the front and in the hospitals, the talk of the officers, privates, and doctors, are crisply natural and make a convincing narrative, though the hero is perhaps already a little too mature and experienced. Catherine (who might be a younger sister of the heroine of *Fiesta*) is most skilfully modelled as the eternal feminine in nursing dress.

In the scenes in the Milan hospital, where love laughs at matrons and maids, the author increases his hold over us. And the story deepens in force when Henry, patched up, returns to the Isonzo front. The year has been a serious one for the Italian army, and the breakthrough of the Germans at Caporetto brings disaster.

The last 50 pages of book three describe the Italian army in retreat, the block of transport on the main roads, the bogging and abandonment of Henry's cars on a side road, the Italian privates' behaviour and their hatred of the war, and finally the shooting of the elderly officers in retreat by the Italian battle police at the Tagliamento – these pages are masterly.

The American hero escapes death by diving into the river and, later, arrest by concealing himself in a gun truck till it reaches Milan. Thence in mufti he gets to Stiesa and meets Catherine, and the lovers escape to Switzerland by a long night row up the lake. The scenes on the Italian plains hold more atmospheric truth than those of the mountain roads, but all are admirably wrought.

The impartiality of the presentation of war is as remarkable as the sincerity of the record of love passion. With remorseless artistic instinct Mr Hemingway proceeds to match the horrors of human slaughter by his final chapter of Catherine's agony and death as, 'a maternity case'.

Here he rises to his highest pitch, for Catherine's blotting-out is but complementary to the massacre of the millions on the fronts. Henry's coolness of observation in its detailed actuality is perhaps too stressed in the last pages, for in hours of great emotional strain material fact seems to detach itself as a separate phenomenon, and Henry remains too set; but the author's method prevails and triumphs in the last line.

Orlo Williams's review of *A Farewell to Arms* was published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of November 28, 1929

Mr. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (Cape, 7s. 6d. net) is a novel of great power. Though it adds one to the now many novels of war, it is unlike any other, for Mr. Hemingway's method and outlook are entirely his own. Though his mental processes, his language and his subject-matter are not what we in England should call 'typically American,' he is one of the few writers in the English language who is distinctively and absolutely American. To everything British he is foreign, and the British, though he likes them, are foreign to him. Nobody but an American could have his staccato style, his particular turn of dialogue, his power of rejecting everything that is extraneous to his keen but selective vision, his dismal animation, his unrationalized pessimism. It is always the same mind, the same man – one who finds no comfort but in vivid circumstance and pleasure of the senses – who tells the story: he tells it to himself, either in long passages of terse dialogue or in direct reflections of his own retina, hardly ever stopping to register a mental comment.

Here, at all events, he has found a theme more suited to him than any before.

Boston Police Bar Scribner's Magazine; Superintendent Acts on Objections to Ernest Hemingway's Serial, *A Farewell to Arms*.

BOSTON, Mass., June 20.—The June issue of *Scribner's Magazine* was barred from bookstands here yesterday by Michael H. Crowley, Superintendent of Police, because of objections to an instalment of Ernest Hemingway's serial, *A Farewell to Arms*. It is said that some persons deemed part of the instalment salacious.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born in 1899. The son of a doctor, he was the second of six children growing up in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park. In 1917 he became a journalist. A year later, he volunteered as an ambulance driver in Italy, where he was wounded and twice decorated, an experience that informed his 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

An admired and much-imitated writer, he was famed for his masculine pursuits, such as bull-fighting, and his deceptively simple style of writing. His best known works include *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, after the publication of which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1954. He also published other novels, short stories and a posthumous memoir, *A Moveable Feast*.

After an often troubled life, including several marriages and involvement in The Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, Hemingway settled in Cuba, where he lived for fourteen years. He died in 1961.

STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION:

What sort of traits does Henry admire in Rinaldi? Does he represent Hemingway's vision of the ideal Italian, and is Henry the ideal American?

What is the effect of the contrasts in landscape and lifestyle in Italy and Switzerland?

Do you think that Catherine is a childlike character? Do she and Henry speak to each other like children, and why?

In both the army and the nursing home, how does Hemingway treat authority?

How easy is it to imagine Henry outside the context of a war?

How do you react to the bleakness of Hemingway's prose style?

How could the fate of Catherine and her baby be representative of Hemingway's view of the nature of war itself?

How are food and drink used to create atmosphere in the book?

OTHER BOOKS BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY:

Stories:

Three Stories & Ten Poems, 1923

In Our Time, 1925

Winner Take Nothing, 1933

The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories, 1938

Novels:

The Torrents of Spring, 1926

The Sun Also Rises, 1926

Men Without Women, 1927

To Have and Have Not, 1937

For Whom the Bell Tolls, 1940

Across the River and Into the Trees, 1950

The Old Man and The Sea, 1952

Non-fiction:

Death In The Afternoon, 1932

Green Hills of Africa, 1935

A Moveable Feast, 1964

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks

Goodbye to All That by Robert Graves

The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

ONLINE RESOURCES:

The Ernest Hemingway foundation: www.ehfop.org

The Ernest Hemingway Resource Centre: www.lostgeneration.com