Analysis of A Farewell To Arms (1929)

by various authors

'WHETHER the artist was a genius or not, A Farewell To Arms should perhaps prove. That novel, of course, a was destined for popular greatness. Coming at the end of a time distinguished in most histories as the 'post-war decade,' this novel of Hemingway's seemed to many to have made a definitive statement about the post-war generation and about its source. This was a time of genius; and the events, good and bad, that happen to a person who is pre-eminently there , in the public eye, began to happen to Hemingway. After a period of four years of pleasant isolation, he shot into public attention, where he has remained ever since. The reception of his new novel was more widespread, less tentative, and more spirited than any previous critical attention.

The London Times Literary Supplement (Nov. 28, 1929) called it 'a novel of great power'; Hemingway, it went on to say, is 'an extremely talented and original artist.' In the high offices of the Saturday Review of Literature, Henry Seidel Canby proclaimed it superior to Sun because in it Hemingway 'has found meaning in existence again' (Oct. 12, 1929). We have, he stoically said, 'passed from the anarchic to the stoic view of things.'

Malcolm Cowley began to speculate (NYHTB, Oct. 6, 1929) on the reasons for his great popularity; the chief one was 'his having expressed, better than any other writer, the limited viewpoint of his contemporaries, of the generation which was formed by the war and which is still being demobilized.' This remark became one of the true reasons for Hemingway's continuing popularity, even his notoriety. Cliches of explanation began to cluster about it; and Cowley found his usual aptness of phrasing, his biographical and autobiographical sense of the Zeitgeist .

One of the curious paradoxes of the criticism began here to develop; it is expressed in this way by Clifton Fadiman (Nation, Oct. 30): 'Arms is not merely modern, but the very apotheosis of a kind of modernism' . . .

Somehow the note of love in war served to mollify some critics, who thought, as did T. S. Matthews (NR, Oct. 9, 1929), that Hemingway had shifted from the negative note of Sun to the 'tragic note' of Arms: Catherine Barkley is 'an ennobled, a purified Brett, who can show us how to love, who must die before she forgets how to show us.' The author of 'New Novels' in the New Statesman (Nov. 30) called the love of Henry and Catherine more beautifully described than any other in recent fiction . . . Dorothy Parker gave the finest touch to the new popularity [of Hemingway], in a New Yorker 'Profile':

No woman, she said, 'within half-a-mile of him is a safe woman' (Nyer, Nov. 30). This among other observations helped to introduce the new literary hero to the suburbs.'

Frederick J. Hoffman, 'Ernest Hemingway',
Sixteen Modern American Authors:
A Survey of Research and Criticism.

'A Farewell To Arms, published in 1929, was reviewed with little of the hedging which had marked the response to The Sun Also Rises. Some of the critics who praised it grumbled a bit but their fault-finding seemed perfunctory in the context of the praise. The moral issue raised by the Boston guardians of morality who banned the distribution of the serialization was only a minor issue, which proved that the delicate moral atmosphere which had prompted some of the responses to The Sun Also Rises had been dissipated considerably. Almost vehemently everyone commended the style and in almost the same terms which were by now traditional. The description of the retreat at Caporetto was thought by many to be one of the best things ever written by Hemingway or any other American. The inevitable classification of Farewell as a 'war' novel led to comparisons with other war novels, a genre which had an unexpected flourishing in 1929. It fared quite well by the comparison and placed Hemingway's name in a new and somewhat formidable context of writers . . . The critics in general were convinced that Hemingway had passed the severe test of a second novel and in doing so had achieved a high position in American literature.'

Frank L. Ryan, The Immediate Critical
Reception of Ernest Hemingway (U Press of America 1980)

'A Farewell To Arms is a book important in the annals of the art of writing because it proves that Hemingway, the writer of short, perfect episodes, can keep up the pace through a volume. There have been other writers of impeccable — of matchless — prose but as a rule their sustained efforts have palled because precisely of the remarkableness of the prose itself. You can hardly read Marius the Epicurean. You may applaud its author, Walter Pater. But A Farewell To Arms is without purple patches or even verbal 'felicities.' Whilst you are reading it you forget to applaud its author. You do not know that you are having to do with an author. You are living.

A Farewell To Arms is a book that unites the critic to the simple. You could read it and be thrilled if you had never read a book — or if you had read and measured all the good books in the world. That is the real province of the art of writing . . . Whatever he does can never take away from the fresh radiance of this work. It may close with tears but it is like a spring morning . . . A Farewell To Arms ends incomparably . . . Incomparably, because that muted passage after great emotion still holds the mind after the book is finished. The interest prolongs itself and the reader is left wishing to read more of that writer.'

Ford Madox Ford 'Introduction to A Farewell To Arms' (Random House 1932)

'Mr. Ludwig Lewisohn is undoubtedly correct in saying that A Farewell To Arms 'proves once again the ultimate identity of the moral and the esthetic.' In this critic's view, Hemingway 'transcended the moral nihilism of the school he had himself helped to form' [with The Sun Also Rises] by the very intensity of his feelings for the contrast of love and war. 'The simply wrought fable,' Lewisohn continues, ignoring all the symbolic complexities yet still making a just appraisal, 'has two culminations — the laconic and terrible one in which the activity of the battle police brings to an end the epically delineated retreat of the Italian army with its classically curbed rage and pity . . . and that other and final culmination in Switzerland with its blending in so simple and moving a fashion of the eternal notes of love and death.' The operation of the underlying imagery, once its purposes are understood, doubly underscores Mr. Lewisohn's point that there is no moral nihilism in the central story of A Farewell To Arms .'

Ludwig Lewisohn, Expression in America (New York 1932) quoted by Carlos Baker Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton 1952-73)

'As if in answer to critics who preferred his short stories to The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway wrote another novel, A Farewell To Arms (1929), which has been commonly thought his masterpiece. His account of the Italian retreat after Caporetto is his most powerful sustained narrative. The story of the American hero's love for an English nurse, who dies in childbirth, is Hemingway's most moving love story. He looked upon them as a war-time Romeo and Juliet, separated by a malign feud into which they had been fatally born. More humane than any of his earlier stories, this was more popular, and in the year of Dodsworth many readers thought that with Farewell To Arms Hemingway had succeeded Sinclair Lewis as the first among contemporary American novelists.'

Carl Van Doren, The American Novel 1789-1939.

'Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service during World War I, falls in love with an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. She returns his feeling, and when Henry, wounded during a bombardment, is sent to a hospital at Milan, Catherine comes to nurse him. They spend a happy summer together while he recuperates, and in the autumn Catherine confesses that she is pregnant, but will not marry him, fearing to be sent back to England. Henry returns to his post, finds his comrade Rinaldi depressed by the monotonous horrors of the war, and shares the suffering during the disastrous retreat from Caporetto. He deserts, learns that Catherine has been transferred to Stresa, and joins her there. Although he is in civilian clothes, he is suspected, and forced to flee

with Catherine to Switzerland. They go to Lausanne for the birth of their child, but both mother and baby die, leaving Henry desolate and alone in a strange land.'

James D. Hart, The Oxford Companion to American Literature.

'War is horror again in A Farewell To Arms, whose hero musters himself out, makes 'a separate peace,' when his interests and those of Catherine Barkley demand it . . . Hemingway had often used sex, as he used to drink, to blot out painful thought, but when passion turns to love in his world, it is at once taken up into the quest for meaning. The affair between Catherine Barkley and her patient, Frederick Henry, begins casually and sensually enough, but it develops into an overwhelming romantic ardor of the classical variety, which thinks in terms of 'forever' — and the world well lost — which is unblessed by conventional social sanctions only because of the disturbed conditions under which it flowers, and which culminates in an effect of overwhelming pathos when Catherine dies in childbirth.

Both here and in For Whom the Bell Tolls, Hemingway ponders the special character of the relationship in anything but a libertarian spirit; old Pilar warns Robert Jordan not to think lightly of Maria because she has come to him, in the midst of revolution, without benefit of clergy, and the young man himself ponders the cruel destiny of lovers for whom a whole life must be telescoped within a few weeks of time. In Maria's case there is, moreover, one further complication. This is her imperious need, if she would survive as an emotional being, to be reconciled to life and the fundamental life-experiences after the outrages she has suffered at the hands of the fascists in the Spanish war.

Few male critics have been dishonest enough to declare that Catherine and Maria — or even Renata, in Across the River — do not appeal to them; but …a good many have accused the author of infantilism in his treatment of love … He might well ask why the prerogatives which from time immemorial have been accorded writers of Romance should be denied to him. If we are going to refuse to accept Jordan and Maria because they fall in love at first sight and give themselves to each other in haste, what becomes of Romeo and Juliet, Pelleas and Melisande, and all the rest? We have no reason to suppose that Shakespeare ever asked himself whether the two of Verona were psychologically well qualified to build a life together and establish a good family, for he was writing neither a Kinsey report nor an Edith Wharton or Dorothy Canfield novel about family relationships. And neither was Hemingway.

Robert Penn Warren has shown how Frederic's encounters with the priest lend religious significance to A Farewell To Arms by pointing up the quest for meaning behind his careless life. 'In the end, with the death of Catherine, Frederic discovers that the attempt to find a substitute for universal meaning in the limited meaning of the personal relationship is doomed to failure.' It may be that this consideration bulks larger

in the critic's mind than it did in that of the author. The love experience in For Whom the Bell Tolls is not quite the same as in A Farewell To Arms . Frederic Henry could hardly have been capable of Robert Jordan's sense of mystical union with Maria, even through separation and death. And for Jordan there is no conflict between love and duty, for both he and Maria are completely devoted to the Loyalist cause. This time the separate peace is 'out'.'

Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel: From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century.

'The appearance of A Farewell To Arms in book form on September 27, 1929, marked the inception of Hemingway's still lengthening career as one of the very few great tragic writers in twentieth-century fiction. His next book, Death in the Afternoon, furthered his exploration into the esthetics of tragedy . . . Projected in actualistic terms and a matter-of-fact tone, telling the truth about the effects of war in human life, A Farewell To Arms is entirely and even exclusively acceptable as a Naturalistic narrative of what happened. To read it only as such, however, is to miss the compelling symbolism: the deep central antithesis between the image of life and home (the mountain) and the image of war and death (the plain) . . .

The position occupied by A Farewell To Arms among Hemingway's tragic writings may be suggested by the fact that he once referred to the story of Lieutenant Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley as his Romeo and Juliet . The most obvious parallel is that Henry and Catherine, like their Elizabethan prototypes, might be seen as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway might also have been thinking of how rapidly Romeo and Juliet, whose affair has begun as a mere flirtation, pass over into the status of relatively mature lovers . . . Neither in Romeo and Juliet nor in A Farewell To Arms is the catastrophe a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation. Catherine's bodily structure, which precludes a normal delivery for her baby, is an unfortunate biological accident . . .

The first sentence here fixes the reader in a house in the village where he can take a long view across the river and the plain to the distant mountains. Although he does not realize it yet, the plain and the mountains (not to mention the river and the trees, the dust and the leaves) have a fundamental value as symbols. The autumnal tone of the language is important in establishing the autumnal mood of the chapter. The landscape itself has the further importance of serving as a general setting for the whole first part of the novel. Under these values, and of basic structural importance, are the elemental images which compose this remarkable introductory chapter.

The second sentence, which draws attention from the mountainous background to the bed of the river in the middle distance, produces a sense of clearness, dryness, whiteness, and sunniness which is to grow very subtly under the artist's hands until it merges with one of the novel's two dominant symbols, the mountain- image. The other

major symbol is the plain. Throughout the sub-structure of the book it is opposed to the mountain-image. Down this plain the river flows. Across it, on the dusty road among the trees, pass the men-at-war, faceless and voiceless and unidentified against the background of the spreading plain.

In the third and fourth sentences of this beautifully managed paragraph the march-past of troops and vehicles begins. From the reader's elevated vantage point, looking down on the plain, the river, and the road, the continuously parading men are reduced in size and scale — made to seem smaller, more pitiful, more pathetic, more like wraiths blown down the wind, than would be true if the reader were brought close enough to overhear their conversation or see them as individualized personalities.

Between the first and fourth sentences, moreover, Hemingway accomplishes the transition from late summer to autumn — an inexorability of seasonal change which prepares the way for the study in doom on which he is embarked. Here again the natural elements take on a symbolic function. In the late summer we have the dust; in the early autumn the dust and the leaves falling; and through them both the marching troops impersonally seen. The reminder, through the dust, of the words of the funeral service in the prayer- book is fortified by the second natural symbol, the falling leaves. They dry out, fall, decay, and become part of the dust. Into the dust is where the troops are going — some of them soon, all of them eventually . . .

In application to Frederick and Catherine, the term 'star-crossed lovers' needs some qualification. It does not mean that they are the victims of an actual malevolent metaphysical power. All their crises are caused by forces which human beings have set in motion. During Frederick's understandably bitter ruminations while Catherine lies dying in the Lausanne hospital, fatalistic thoughts do, quite naturally, cross his mind. But he does not, in the end, blame anything called 'Fate' for Catherine's death . . . The parents do not happened to be formally married; still, the pain of the child-bearing would have been just as it is even if they had been married fifty times . . . The anonymous 'they' is nothing but a name for the way things are . . . It plainly a gratuitous death which comes to the ants on the burning log in Frederick's remembered campfire. Some immediately die in flame, as Catherine is now dying. Others, like Lieutenant Henry, who has survived a trench-mortar explosion, will manage to get away, their bodies permanently scarred, their future course uncertain — except that they will die in the end . . .

Years later, in 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro,' he would use the mighty peak of East Africa as a natural image of immortality, just as in the Green Hills of Africa he would build his narrative in part upon a contrast between the hill-country and the Serengeti Plain. When Frederick Henry lowers his eyes from the far-off ranges, he sees the plain and the river, the war-making equipment, and 'the broken houses of the little town' which is to be occupied, if anything is left of it to occupy, during the coming attack.

Already now, a few dozen pages into the book, the mountain-image has developed associations; with the man of God and his homeland [the Abruzzi], with clear dry cold and snow, with polite and kindly people, with hospitality, and with natural beauty. Already it has its oppositions: the lowland obscenities of the priest- baiting captain, cheap cafes, one-night prostitutes, drunkenness, destruction, and the war . . . Catherine's death occurs at Lausanne, after the March rains and the approaching need for a good lying-in hospital have driven the young couple down from their magic mountain — the closest approximation to the priest's fair homeland in the Abruzzi that they are ever to know . . .

Hemingway's heroines ...are, on the whole, an aspect of the poetry of things. It is perhaps a sign of an attitude innately chivalric that they are never written off ... Even Margot Macomber, in the bottomless slough of her bitch-hood, is seen to be 'damned beautiful' . . . All of Hemingway's heroines, like all of his heroes, are placed in a special kind of accelerated world. We do not see them puttering in their kitchens, but only dreaming of that as a desirable possibility. They are never presented as harassed mothers; their entire orientation tends to be, in this connection, premarital. Wars and revolutions, the inevitable enemies of peace and domesticity, set them adrift or destroy their lives. Yet they contrive to embody the image of home, the idea if not the actuality of the married state, and where they are, whatever the outward threats, home is . . . They have substance and cast shadows, but they lack the full perspective and chiaroscuro that one finds among most of the people in For Whom the Bell Tolls . . . They are the men and women of action, the meaning of whose lives must be sought in the kind of actions in which they are involved, very much, again, as in Romeo and Juliet . . .

His working assumption that character is revealed through action will, if rigorously adhered to, produce the kind of fiction in which characterization-in-depth is in a measure sacrificed to the exigencies of narrative movement. Even there, however, it is advisable to notice that a close reading of any of the early books reveals far more in the way of nuances, or light and shade, or in subtle shifts of motivation, than one at first imagined was there. This half-concealed power is easily explained by what is now acknowledged in all quarters: Hemingway's carefully controlled habit of understatement . . . If Hemingway had not yet met head-on the problem of characterization-in-depth, perhaps it was unfair to ask a writer who had done so much so brilliantly that he should do so much more.

He had developed a memorably individualized style . . . He showed an unerring ability to keep his narratives in motion. Finally, he had achieved a mastery of that special combination of naturalistic and symbolic truth-telling which was the despair of those who could (and so frequently did) imitate his style and his narrative manner. In the absence of other evidence, it is probably wisest to assume that Hemingway knew what he was doing. That he could draw a character fully, roundedly, and quickly is proved by a

dozen minor portraits in the first two books . . . If he went no deeper into the backgrounds of his displaced persons, he went as deeply as he needed to do for the purposes of his narrative. And the paring-out of the superfluous had always been one of his special addictions.

There is, finally, a [tendency] in A Farewell To Arms which helps to account for the opinion that Hemingway has somehow failed in his attempt to present Catherine as a credible characterization. In a large and general way, the whole movement of the novel is from concretion towards abstraction. This became apparent in our consideration of the wonderfully complex opening chapter … The fact that the whole story is projected in actualistic terms ought not finally to obscure the symbolic mythos on which it is built and from which a great part of its emotional power derives . . . Catherine …has a symbolic part to play. It is indeed required of her that she should become, as the novel moves on towards its denouement, more of an abstraction of love than a down-to-earth portrait of an actual woman in love and in pain. The truly sympathetic reader may feel that she is a woman, too.

But if she does move in the direction of abstraction …the novel is in this respect symbolically and emotionally justified. For when Frederick Henry has closed the door of the hospital room in order to be alone with his dead wife Catherine … Saying good bye is 'like saying good bye to a statue.' The loved woman has become in death an abstract unvital image of her living self, a marble memorial to all that has gone without hope of recovery. Her death exactly completes the symbolic structure, the edifice of tragedy so carefully erected. This structure is essentially poetic in conception and execution. It is achieved without obvious insistence or belaboring of the point, but it is indubitably achieved for any reader who has found his way into the true heart of the book. And it is this achievement which enables Hemingway's first study in doom to succeed as something far more than an exercise in romantic Naturalism. Next to For Whom the Bell Tolls, it is his best novel.'

Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist.

'A Farewell To Arms (1929), which borrows its title from a poem of that name by George Peele, reverts to the war and supplies the background for The Sun Also Rises. As in the case of many of Hemingway's titles the allusion to the poem is slightly ironic, for Peele mourned the fact that he could no longer fight. For the germs of both of its plots, a war plot and a love plot, it reaches back to In Our Time.

An outline of the human arms in the novel is to be found among these early stories in a piece called 'A Very Short Story.' This sketch, less than two pages long, dealt quickly, as the novel does extensively, with the drinking and love-making in an Italian hospital of an American soldier, wounded in the leg, and a nurse, and had told of their love and their wish to get married. But where the book ends powerfully with the death in

childbirth of the woman, the story dribbled off in irony. The lovers parted, the soldier leaving for home to get a job so that he could send for his sweetheart. Before long, however, the nurse wrote that she had a new lover who was going to marry her, though he never did; and then, shortly after receiving the letter, the soldier 'contracted gonorrhea from a sales girl in a loop department story while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park.' Except for the venereal element (which according to a paperback biographer was thus contracted by a friend of the author), it appears that this sketch tells how it actually was, the novel-to-be how it might have been. In life Catherine Barkley, the heroine of the novel, was Agnes H. von Kurowski, the Bellevue-trained daughter of a German-American father; Hemingway intended to bring her home from Italy and marry her. (Leicester's biography prints an excellent photograph of her; Marcelline's biography prints a picture Ernest sent home from Italy of a 'nice-looking bearded older an ...Count Greppie' — possibly the model for Count Greffi in the novel.)

The war plot of A Farewell To Arms ...is a greatly expanded version of that Chapter VI sketch [In Our Time] in which Nick was wounded and made his separate peace — with Rinaldi, who also appears in the longer work. This wound, which got Nick in the spine, and 'I' in the knee, and emasculated Jake, has returned to the knee, which is where Hemingway was most badly hit. Then the same story is rehearsed again in lengthened form. Recuperated in Milan, Lt. Frederic Henry becomes bitter about the society responsible for the war and, caught up in the Italian retreat from Caporetto, he breaks utterly with the army in which he is an officer. And this is again the old protagonist, who cannot sleep at night for thinking — who must not use his head to think with, and will absolutely have to stop it. He is also the man who, when he does sleep, has nightmares, and wakes from them in sweat and fright, and goes back to sleep in an effort to stay outside his dreams.

Unlike Jake Barnes, however, Frederic Henry participates fully in the book's action, and as a person is wholly real. But he is also a little more than that, for just as the response of Americans of the period to the aimless and disillusioned hedonism of Jake and his friends indicated that some subtle chord in them had been struck, so something in the evolution of Frederic Henry from complicity in the war to bitterness and escape has made him seem, though always himself, a little larger than that, too. Complicity, bitterness, escape — a whole country could read its experience, Wilson to Harding, in his, and it began to become clear that in Hemingway as elsewhere 'hero' meant not simply 'protagonist' but a man who stands for many men. Thus it is that when historians of various kinds epitomize the temper of the American Twenties and a reason for the adventures of that lieutenant come almost inevitably to mind . . . His words: 'I was always embarrassed by the word sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through ...now for a long time, and I had seen nothing

sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards in Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene . . . '

It is on the implications of these sentiments, and in order to escape a certain death which he has not deserved, that Henry finally acts. He jumps in a river and deserts: the hell with it . . . Memorable too, in her devotion and her ordeal — though much less memorable, and much less real — is Henry's English mistress. Idealized past the fondest belief of most people, and even the more realistic wishes of some, compliant ...Catherine Barkley has at least some character in her own right, and is both the first true 'Hemingway heroine,' and the most convincing one . . . Catherine Barkley, as it happened, was very good, very gentle, very brave. Unlike the hero, who broke and survived to become eventually quite strong, she would not break and so she was killed . . . Completely real, once again and at once, are the minor characters — especially Rinaldi, the ebullient Italian doctor, and the priest, and Count Greffi, the ancient billiard player, and the enlisted ambulance drivers.

Chiefly, again, it is their speech which brings these people to live and keeps them living. The rest of the book, however, is less conversational in tone than before, and in other ways the writing is changed a little. The sentences are now longer, even lyrical, on occasion, and, once in a while, experimental, as Hemingway, not content to rest in the style that had made him already famous, tries for new effects, and does not always succeed. Taken as a whole, however, his prose has never been finer or more finished than in this novel. Never have those awesome, noncommittal understatements, which say more than could ever be written out, been more impressive. The book has passages which rate with the hardest, cleanest and most moving in contemporary literature.

The novel has one stylistic innovation that is important to it. This is the use of an object, rain, in a way that cannot be called symbolic so much as portentous. Hemingway had used water as a metaphoric purge of past experience before, and so Henry's emergence from the river into a new life, as from a total immersion, was not new. What is new in A Farewell To Arms is the consistent use of rain as a signal of disaster. Henry, in his practical realism, professes a disbelief in signs, and tells himself that Catherine's vision of herself dead in the rain is meaningless. But she dies in it and actually, glancing back at the end, one sees that a short, introductory scene at the very start of the book had presented an ominous conjunction of images — rain, pregnancy and death — which set the mood for all that was to follow, prefigured it and bound all the ends of the novel into a perfect and permanent knot.

This is really the old 'pathetic fallacy' put to new use, and — since there is no need to take it scientifically or philosophically, but simply as a subtle and unobtrusive device for unity — quite an acceptable one, too. Good and bad weather go along with good and

bad moods and events. It is not just that, like everyone, the characters respond emotionally to conditions of atmosphere, light and so on, but that there is a correspondence between these things and their fate. They win when it's sunny, and lose in the rain. [This secular critic tries hard to explain away Catherine's premonition as perhaps signifying a spiritual dimension beyond the material world.]

Thus, then, the weather, which as both omen and descriptive background ...is a matter of style, cannot be extricated from the book's plot, or structure. This is of course built on the two themes involved in the ambiguity of 'arms,' [love and war] which are developed and intensified together, with alternating emphasis, until at the extremity of one the hero escapes society, and the heroine everything . . . In his affair with the war Henry goes from desultory participation to serious action and a wound, and then through his recuperation in Milan to a retreat which leads to his desertion. His relationship with Catherine Barkley undergoes six precisely corresponding stages — from a trifling sexual affair to actual love and her conception, and then through her confinement in the Alps to a trip to the hospital which leads to her death. By the end of Hemingway's novel, when the last farewell is taken, the two stories are as one, in the point that is made very clear, lest there be any sentimental doubt about it, that life, both social and personal, is a struggle in which the Loser Takes Nothing, either.

This ideology, which is the novel's, has two related aspects which are implicit in the united elements of the plot. In the end, a man is trapped. He is trapped biologically — in this case by the 'natural' process that costs him his future wife in the harrowing scenes at the hospital, and is trapped by society — at the end of a retreat, where you take off or get shot. Either way it can only end badly, and there are no other ways. How you will get it, though, depends on the kind of person you are: 'If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure that it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.'

It does not really matter very much that there is something a little romantic about this passage, perhaps the finest in all of Hemingway, or that the novel is a romantic one as a whole. It must be just about the most romantic piece of realistic fiction, or the most realistic romance, in our literature. Henry's love affair, which blossoms glamorously from the mud of the war, is but the most striking of several factors which go together to make his war a remarkably pleasant one, as wars go, and much more attractive than wars actually are. The lieutenant has a somewhat special time of it, with orderlies and porters and little or no trouble with superiors, and good wine and good food and a lot of free time in which to enjoy them. But it is not important that these aspects of his army experience are highly untypical. Nor does it matter on the other hand that women

usually survive childbirth, and many men are discharged from armies in good shape, and then life goes on much as before.

What matters instead is that this time Hemingway has made his story, and the attitudes it enacts, persuasive and compelling within the covers of his book. And after we have closed the covers there is no inclination to complain that this was, after all, no literal transcription of reality which exaggerated neither the bitter nor the sweet. It was rather an intensification of life. Willingly or not, disbelief is suspended before a vision that overrides objections, withers preconceptions and even memory and imposes itself in their place. This novel has the last word, always.'

Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration.

'A Farewell To Arms (1929) is largely autobiographical in its external details. Its hero is Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance corps during the First World War. Henry meets Catherine Barkley, an English nurse, and enters into an affair with her which at first he considers merely casual. When he is wounded by a mortar shell, however, he is thrown together with Catherine in a hospital, and the romance becomes more serious. Catherine is portrayed as a deeply feminine woman who has the ability to 'make a home' — i.e., to create an atmosphere of stability and serenity — wherever she pauses, be it in a hospital room or in a sordid hotel. She is temperamentally monogamous; her intense love for Frederic has a deep maternal permanence about it. Under her care he begins to regain his health and to find a new meaning in life. During the period of his convalescence there are several interesting conversations with doctors, nurses, and fellow patients; Henry's dialogues with the eccentric major of his outfit are particularly notable. Rinaldi, an Italian army doctor, is a minor classic among Hemingway's characters.

The turning point of the novel is the retreat from Caporetto, a debacle in which the Italian army is completely disorganized and in which Henry narrowly escapes being shot as a deserter. At length he regains Catherine; they flee to the high mountains of Switzerland, where they find happiness for a time. But Catherine dies in childbirth and Henry is left disillusioned and cynical. The structure of A Farewell To Arms is that of the classic tragedy; the cathartic ending is carefully prepared by foreshadowing and mood. Catherine dies not as much because of the war as through the tragic fate which has determined that she and Frederic shall not succeed in their love; the novel has been compared to Romeo and Juliet with its 'star- crossed lovers.' The symbolic contrast between the plain (war, misery, corruption) and the mountain (happiness, purity, love) extends throughout the novel.'

Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature.

'A story of World War I, in which the fortunes of an American lieutenant, Frederic Henry, and an English nurse, Catherine Barkley, become inevitably and remorselessly interwoven with the fortunes of war. When the lieutenant is wounded, the nurse takes care of him at Milan. They live happily together through the summer months, but even though she is pregnant she refuses to marry him, fearing that this will lead to her being sent back to England. The American goes back to the battle-front, and witnesses the retreat of the Italian army from Caporetto — one of the great battle scenes in literature and one that because of its frank description of the attitude of the Italian soldiers led to Hemingway's being barred from Italy and the book's suppression there. The lieutenant deserts, rejoins the nurse, and is with her when her child is born at Lausanne, where both mother and child die. The theme is ancient — a love ending with the death of one of the lovers — but Hemingway treats it with imagination, gives it a setting of powerful vividness, joins it with the tragedy of mankind itself, often reaches high poetry in his style. The novel was dramatized by Laurence Stallings (1930) and film versions were made in 1932 and 1958.'

Max J. Herzberg & staff, A Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature.

'Ernest Hemingway was already regarded, by a limited literary public, as a writer of extraordinary freshness and power, as one of the makers, indeed, of a new American fiction. A Farewell To Arms more than justified the early enthusiasm of the connoisseurs for Hemingway, and extended his reputation from them to the public at large. Its great importance was at once acknowledged, and its reputation has survived through the changing fashions and interests of passing years . . .

What was the immediate cause of its appeal? It told a truth about the First World War, and a truth about the generation who had fought the war and whose lives, because of the war, had been wrenched from the expected pattern and the old values . . . and mangled in the great anonymous mechanism of a modern war fought for reasons that the individual could not understand, found insufficient to justify the event, or believed to be no reasons at all . . . A Farewell To Arms ...seemed to sum up and bring to focus an inner meaning of the decade being finished . . . The hypnotic force of the book was felt from the first . . .

A Farewell To Arms served, in a way, as the great romantic alibi for a generation. It showed how cynicism or disillusionment, failure of spirit or the worship of material success, debauchery or despair, might have been grounded in heroism, simplicity, and fidelity that had met unmerited defeat. The early tragedy could cast a kind of flattering and extenuating afterglow over what had come later. The battlefields of A Farewell To Arms explained the bars of The Sun Also Rises — and explained the young Krebs, of the story 'Soldier's Home,' who came back home to a Middle Western town to accept his own

slow disintegration . . . A Farewell To Arms gave him his first substantial popular success and established his reputation. It was a brilliant and compelling novel; it provided the great alibi; it crowned the success story of the American boy from the Middle West …

The priest's role is to indicate the next stage of the story, the discovery of the true nature of love, the 'wish to do things for.' And he accomplishes this by indicating a parallel between secular love and Divine love, a parallel which implies Frederick's quest for meaning and certitude. And to emphasize further this idea, Frederick, after the priest leaves, muses on the high, clean country of the Abruzzi, the priest's home that has already been endowed with the symbolic significance of the religious view of the world . . . In a world without supernatural sanctions, in the God-abandoned world of modernity, man can realize an ideal meaning only in so far as he can define and maintain the code . . . Death is the great nada. Therefore whatever code or creed the hero gets must, to be good, stick even in the face of death . . . In taking violent risks man confronts in dramatic terms the issue of nada that is implicit in all of Hemingway's world . . . Physical nature is nowhere rendered with greater vividness than in his work, and probably his only competitors in this department of literature are William Faulkner, among the modern, and Henry David Thoreau, among the older American writers . . . Hemingway's expressive capacity is very powerful and the degree of intensity is very great.'

Robert Penn Warren, Introduction, A Farewell to Arms Three Novels by Ernest Hemingway.

'In the novel A Farewell To Arms (1929) we get something like an explanation of the general attitude of the author in his earlier phase and of the whole 'lost generation.' The book is generally considered a war novel and one of the most impressive at that, but the decisive point is that the horrors of warfare, the accumulation of cruelty and death, are set in relief by the narrator's passionate attachment to a nurse and by her own death in childbed. It would be wrong to speak of disillusionment in this case. It is more than that.

The main characters, in contrast to those in The Sun Also Rises, have all our sympathy because they try to do their best, according to generally accepted standards of ethics. But they are absolutely defeated in the end, not through their own faults, but through nature herself. It is a strictly deterministic attitude . . . The result is despair of any conception of a possible justice in the machinery of this universe. Just as the military police in the retreat of the army pick out a few officers at random and shoot them, so at the end of the story, after the couple seem to have overcome all dangers and difficulties, the nurse dies in spite of her lover's prayers. From this…there is only a small step to the apparent cynicism of The Sun Also Rises.'

Heinrich Straumann, University of Zurich, American Literature in the Twentieth Century.

‘Boston’s police chief barred the June issue of Scribner’s Magazine from the bookstands of the city because part of the instalment of Farewell was deemed salacious. What bothered the Boston censors, and what bothered most of the readers who canceled their subscriptions to the magazine, was not the language of the book so much as the subject matter, particularly the love affair between the unmarried protagonists… A Farewell To Arms was ‘a red flag to the Boston bull,’ but in book form it was not censored even there . . .

Save for a few adamant defenders of literary respectability, Farewell too the reviewers by storm. Without understanding the novel in any deep or lasting sense, they nonetheless recognized that it was a remarkable performance. ‘I have finished A Farewell To Arms and am still a little breathless, as people are after a major event in their lives,’ James Aswell commented in the Richmond Times-Dispatch . John Dos Passos, writing in The New Masses , called the book ‘a first-rate piece of craftsmanship by a man who knows his job,’ and lest that sound like faint praise, he went on to mention half a dozen brilliant passages that ‘match up as narrative prose with anything that’s been written since there was any English language.’ Clifton Fadiman touted the novel for the Pulitzer Prize (it did not win). In England, J. B. Priestley suggested that before long readers might be able to boast of owning a first edition of A Farewell To Arms , and Arnold Bennett called it ‘strange and original,’ yet ‘superb’ . . .

Generally, the early reviews found Farewell to be an advance beyond Sun. Both books portrayed a world in the throes of despair, but the hopelessness of Sun gave way to a kind of affirmation in its successor. As Bernard DeVoto put it, the ‘new book has what its predecessor lacked, passion. It has, too, a kind of sublimity.’ The subject matter itself contributed to that effect. Fishing, drinking, and bullfighting might not be the stuff of tragedy, but love and death assuredly were . . . For the most part, the early commentators thought the love affair itself honestly rendered, idyllic, moving, ‘charged with sentiment, beauty, and tragedy,’ comparable to the story of Romeo and Juliet or of Tristan and Isolde in its poignancy. Yet to some, Frederick and Catherine seemed not fully realized …with no discernible difference between them. It would be a long while before critics came to recognize the complexity of the novel and its characterization . . . If the newspaper and magazine responses to Farewell prove anything, it is that early reviews of major books rarely achieve a high level of understanding. Despite occasional gleams of insight, nothing that was written in the months after publication approached a proper evaluation of the novel . . .

[The] title stands in ironic counterpoint to its source, George Peele’s chivalric poem in which an aging knight regrets that he can no longer serve his queen in battle. And as practically everyone has noticed, it nicely combines Frederic’s dual farewell — to the war and to his lover . . . Hemingway was scrupulous about getting the facts right, on the one hand, and was determined, on the other hand, to distance himself from what happened

to his protagonist. … At no time in Book Three, for instance, does it rain in the novel when it had not actually rained on that day in 1917 . . . Surely Frederic is not a self-portrait of the author. Hemingway went out of his way to dissociate himself from his protagonist and also remarked, pointedly, that he was not to be held accountable for the opinions of his narrators. Looked at in one sense, the novel exists only because Frederic felt the need to justify himself, and 'the position of the survivor of a great calamity is seldom admirable,' as Hemingway wrote on a discarded page of manuscript . . .

Catherine has been judged more favorably than Frederic in recent criticism. Long regarded as a kind of fantasy woman constructed for little more than the pleasure of Lieutenant Henry, she has increasingly been construed as an admirable person who, though psychologically troubled, is more mature, more loving, and more blessed with a capacity for humor than her lover. In the course of their affair, according to such interpretations, she not only regains her mental health but also is instrumental in teaching Frederic how to love . . . In her total devotion to Frederic, Catherine most resembles Hemingway's first wife Hadley, but in her difficulty giving birth, his second wife Pauline.'

Scott Donaldson, ed., Introduction New Essays on A Farewell To Arms.

'Too many critics in dealing with Catherine Barkley have all but forgotten that she is functioning in the environment of a brutal and irrational war — a war that, by extension, becomes a metaphor for the condition of life itself in our time. Yet it is in this original context that Catherine emerges in her full outline as the truly heroic figure of the novel. As much a victim of the war as her fiancé who was killed, Catherine has made a deliberate retreat into a private world of her own construction, within the perimeter of which she can achieve at least a limited autonomy. Her willingness to submerge herself in a personal relationship, far from being a sign of female spinelessness, is an act of will.

A model of courage and stoic self-awareness, Catherine is determined to forge a meaningful and orderly existence — if only temporarily — in a world in which all traditional notions of meaning and order have been shattered. Jake Barnes, another casualty of the Great War, declared in The Sun Also Rises , 'I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it.' Catherine Barkley is one of the 'initiated.' She has a fair idea of what it is all about, and it is her part to teach Frederic by example how to live in it . . .

The principle problem with most of the interpretations of Catherine Barkley's character …is that most critics have judged her actions and speeches against 'normal' behavior. When we consider A Farewell To Arms as a novel of the Great War by a young writer considered at the time a spokesman for the generation that Malcolm Cowley declared in 1929 still 'undemobilized,' the view of Catherine as initiate and exemplar

becomes far clearer . . . Catherine's fiancé was killed in the battle of the Somme, the British attack that began on July 1, 1916 and cost them 60,000 casualties on that day alone, without gaining any ground whatever. The fighting continued for four months …and eventually exacted 400,000 British casualties. The attempt on the Somme marked the end of any illusions that the war might soon be won . . . Catherine has come to their relationship painfully wiser to the world than is the young man who happens into the war thinking it has nothing to do with him . . .

Catherine Barkley has been dismissed as a neurotic female by critics who certainly have not then automatically excluded Nick Adams from consideration as a creditable or substantive character because of his troubles. But Catherine, perhaps even better than Nick, has mastered the tactics of psychological survival . . . Judith Wexler's 1981 article 'E.R.A. for Hemingway: A Feminist Defense of A Farewell To Arms' was the first sustained argument for Catherine's overlooked strength of character. My own view falls within this critical camp, although I give Catherine even more credit as the exemplary figure of the novel than would most of my predecessors. I read Catherine Barkley not simply as a strong and sympathetic character, but as the one character in the novel who, more than any other, embodies the controls of courage and honor that many have called the 'Hemingway code' . . .

If Catherine is a romantic, it is in the Emersonian sense. In her self-reliance she is far more advanced than Frederic. She cares nothing for tradition or convention; her values are private and personal. When she checks into the hospital to have the baby, it is clear that her only allegiance is to herself and Frederic, their love, indeed, her only 'religion' … Catherine's mode of ironic understatement (she is British) and her Great War humor most often have been overlooked — her laconic style considered, if at all, as evidence of her underdeveloped character . . . It is startling to any reader who sees Catherine as the model of self-awareness, stoicism, and courage in the novel that her exemplary strength of character has so consistently and so long been ignored. One obvious reason is the persistent dogma in Hemingway criticism [by Feminists] for the past half-century that Hemingway created only two types of women. With Catherine neatly accounted for as the docile idealized heroine, there may have seemed little else to do with her . . .

In the case of A Farewell To Arms , a number of [Feminist] critics have expressed open scorn for the very values that Catherine represents. They see a concern for personal love as a female weakness, unworthy of serious consideration as an organizing principle of one's life, rather than as a human strength . . . The feminists who follow this tack assume the same premises as the most chauvinist of male critics who are glad to see Catherine dead . . . In Hemingway studies, as in literary studies in general, it must be remembered that a critical reading of a text may reveal more about the values of the critic than of the author. The impact of the unstated premises and hidden biases of

critics on our understanding of A Farewell To Arms has not been adequately examined … The history of the critical views of Catherine Barkley is a case study of the ways in which the personal and cultural values of critics, their unstated premises, and hidden (even unconscious) agenda can color and cloud our perception of a novel.'

Sandra Whipple Spanier, 'Hemingway's Unknown Soldier: Catherine Barkley, the Critics, and the Great War' New Essays (1990)

'There are no preliminary fictions, either in manuscript or published, that look forward to The Sun Also Rises — with the possible exception of the bullfight chapters of in our time — whereas there is a horde of stories and sketches dating from 1919 on that are intimately related to A Farewell To Arms . And in these fictions we can witness Hemingway trying out the novel… [including in our time Chapters III, IV, VI and VII, 'A Very Short Story,' 'Soldier's Home,' 'The Original Beginning,' 'In Another Country,' 'Now I Lay Me'] Why did Hemingway write A Farewell To Arms after The Sun Also Rises ? … He didn't. It seems now that he began A Farewell To Arms in 1919, and it took him ten years to get it right, to try it out.'

Paul Smith, 'The Trying-out of A Farewell To Arms' New Essays.

[The first] paragraph is often cited (and parodied) as a quintessential example of Hemingway's style, and in fact at least two critics have been moved to recast Frederic's prose into verse. Perhaps because Frederic's style conforms so closely to our general notion of how Hemingway sounds, critics frequently do not inquire closely into the relations between author and narrator here. When we look closely, however, we can see that Hemingway is providing the ground for establishing a significant distance between himself and Frederic. The passage establishes a contrast between the natural landscape without the troops (the river is 'clear and swiftly moving and blue') and that landscape with the troops ('the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees'), and it notes the disruption of nature's cycle by the troops ('and the leaves fell early that year') . . . The question whether or not Frederic sees the causal connection between the marching of the troops and the early falling of the leaves is the question whether or not his vision at the time of the narration includes an understanding of such causation . . .

One of the generating features of the narrative is Frederic's inadequate view of his own situation; we read on in part to see the consequences of his faulty knowledge — and see if his faulty vision will be corrected . . . Despite the authority attached to Frederic's objective descriptions, Hemingway introduces him as someone whose values Hemingway questions rather than shares . . . One of the striking features of A Farewell To Arms is how skillfully Hemingway gradually closes the distance between himself and Fredric and how he uses the narration to signal Frederic's changes.'

James Phelan, 'Distance, Voice, and Temporal Perspective in Frederic Henry's Narration: Successes, Problems, and Paradox' New Essays (1990)

'Although Frederic is ostensibly telling his own story, the narrative contains two simultaneous voices: Frederic's and Hemingway's. Together, they give us the simultaneity of a sliding discourse — a simultaneity that allows Hemingway to superimpose two time schemes: one corresponding to the events as they first occurred, the other corresponding to hindsight. Although the novel is written in the first person, on five different occasions Frederic shifts from the first-person pronoun 'I' to the second person 'you' . . .

Because the world in A Farewell To Arms is sick, the hospital is a metaphor structuring the novel's symmetry . . . Catherine is a composite character of Agnes, the nurse, Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's first wife, and Pauline Pfeiffer, his second. Hemingway spent an idyllic winter in Montreux with Hadley, and he suffered through Pauline's eighteen-hour labor, followed by a cesarean delivery of a healthy child. Pauline did not die, as Catherine does, nor did the baby . . . Having explored these aspects of Frederic's different identities, it is safe to say, I think, that they belong to Hemingway's conscious manipulation of narrative strategy, as opposed to any unconscious symptom they may be revealing. The Lacanian discourse of the Other is not involved in the deliberate pronominal shifts from 'I' to 'we'.'

Ben Stoltzfus 'A Sliding Discourse: The Language of A Farewell To Arms' New Essays (1990)

'Some critics have attacked Catherine as an especially disturbing example of Hemingway's one- dimensional, submissive, simpering, and self-effacing female (Fetterley; Fiedler; Martin, 'Seduced and Abandoned'); others regard her as an independent, self-contained individual who chooses to love Frederic Henry and is loved by him in return (Lewis; Miller; Wexler; Whitlow). Some readers stress that the story is told by Frederic (who should not be confused with Hemingway), and that our picture of Catherine is created by Frederic's selective memory (Lewis; Nagel). Others point out that the lovers are acting in the extraordinary and extenuating circumstances of war (Spanier). Still others remind us that Catherine, like the other characters, changes and develops throughout the book (Phelan; Whitlow). Increasingly in recent criticism, Catherine has been vindicated as one of Hemingway's strong, heroic individuals.

Measured by the gender standards current during World War I and extending into the late 1920s when Hemingway composed the book, Catherine emerges as a modern, independent young woman — quite possibly Hemingway's definition, at the time, of the ideal woman. Essentially, she is an improved — actually more modern — version of

Brett. Catherine is just as sexually liberated but, as a self-supporting nurse, is more emancipated than the financially dependent and irresponsible Brett. Moreover, Catherine is perfectly monogamous and faithful. Her ethical and moral standards are much more orthodox. True to ideals of the New Woman that emerged during Hemingway's youth (McGovern), Catherine is a good sport and pal, possessing traditional maternal and domestic qualities (without, however, their institutional rigidity). She is self-reliance and competent but without that cruelty or mannishness displayed by some strong women in Hemingway's later fiction. She is ready and qualified to run away with the man she loves and to help him domesticate the world of his wishful dreams.

Contrary to Leslie Fiedler's assertion that Hemingway's men prefer each other's company and the dangers of the manly world to the responsibilities associated with women and civilization (355), the protagonist of this novel flees from the corrupt and untrustworthy male world into a woman's arms. As the book opens, a naïve Frederic is surrounded by father surrogates, is called 'baby' and 'good boy,' and behaves thoughtlessly. Introduced to Catherine, he is perfectly willing to lie to make his conquest. But when Catherine sees through his game and insists on honesty (31), she is establishing the ethical terms for a relationship that will become their private retreat from a deceptive, lawless world.

It is not so much that Catherine is more noble than Frederic; she is simply more experienced. Like Brett, Catherine has lost her true love to the war, but unlike Brett she seems strengthened rather than demoralized by the experience. In retrospect, she realizes that she 'didn't know about anything' before the death of her fiancé (19). After that death, she behaves like someone who has been psychologically wounded by the war and by the loss of her first love, but she endures and gradually comes to realize the finality of death and what that implies for the living. Typical of Hemingway's heroic figures, Catherine not only accepts her pain but shares her insights and growth with Frederic. What the priest and Catherine know (before Frederic himself discovers it) is that the only certainty in life is the imminence of death. In contrast to Frederic, who explains 'winefully' the uselessness of his good intentions, the priest and Catherine realize that dissipation equals defeat and that the only choice is to snatch 'a fine life' out of the jaws of death, to carve meaning out of meaninglessness, spirituality out of worldliness.

Following the desertion from the front, Frederic adopts Catherine's perspective that 'there's only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them' (139). Together, he says, they are 'never lonely and never afraid' (249). Catherine and Frederic are married by nature, through their compatibility, if not by law, and their moments of togetherness add up to a flight from civilization into a prelapsarian state. When Frederic lets Catherine's long hair down and they are inside of it, it feels as if they were 'inside a tent

or behind a falls' (114). The scene anticipates the getaway scene in the rowboat when Frederic uses the umbrella as a makeshift sail to propel the couple toward freedom.

Like Huck Finn and Jim (the runaways in one of the books Hemingway admired most), Frederic and Catherine manage to improvise and to make a home for themselves wherever they are, however outlawed the territory. Often — as in the hotel and in the rowboat — everything becomes much more homey once they share a meal (153,275). Finally as Joyce Wexler has pointed out, there is a symbolic parallel between the description of the lovers' home in winter in Switzerland and the landscape of the priest's beloved home in the Abruzzi. The parallel hints that their 'oneness' signals a loss of self-consciousness comparable to that of a mystical, spiritual experience. With the right woman, so the novel seems to say, paradise may be regained.

A Farewell To Arms is the only book by Hemingway that centers on a fully developed and happy modern love affair. It may be his happiest book because in it he gave fullest expression to his fantasy of paradise on earth. And even here the fantasy is qualified — not only, of course, by Catherine's death, but by our knowledge that she is the creation of Frederic's bereaved memory. Hemingway said that he rewrote the last chapter of A Farewell To Arms over forty times. That it ends with the death of Catherine and the (stillborn) son does not prove, as Judith Fetterley charges, that the book's 'message to women readers' is that 'the only good woman is a dead one' (71). Rather, the ending sounds the final note of fatalism and Frederic's realization that he cannot avoid losing 'the happiness of the Garden that a man must lose' (Baker 460).'

Rena Sanderson, 'Hemingway and Gender History'
The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway,
ed. Scott Donaldson (Cambridge U 1996)

'A Farewell To Arms was written for the generation who experienced the Great European War that we now call World War I. The next generation of readers brought to the text its experience from World War II. We are now past the third generation with its Vietnam experience and well into postmodernist readings. The first generations of readers grew up with the public image of Hemingway engraved on their collective consciousness, a condition that encouraged misreading and frequently irrelevant biographical readings of Hemingway's fiction. The author opened his texts to such readings when he used recognizable prototypes from the Left Bank as characters in his first novel, The Sun Also Rises (1926). Afterwards it became an easy generalization to say that Hemingway wrote only about his own firsthand experiences and that his central male character was a thinly veiled self-portrait . . .

Frederic Henry's experience on the Italian front bears only superficial resemblance to that of his author . . . We discovered that A Farewell To Arms was a map accurate down to the smallest details…so accurately described that one could follow the novel's

progress on large- and small-scale maps (see Reynolds, Hemingway's First War). We found that every battle Frederic mentions was, in fact, an actual engagement whose results were accurately reported. The Italian debacle at Caporetto was so embarrassingly accurate that the fascist government banned the novel from Italian publication until after World War II. Italians who had taken part in the retreat assumed that Hemingway had been with them, for how else could he have been so knowledgeable about troop behavior, weather and road conditions, or the precise timetable of the retreat? ...

That first generation of critics was in awe of Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, who wore their intellectual credentials on their sleeves; those same critics saw Hemingway as a talented but primitive naif who did not understand his fiction as well as they. What else could they, with their Ivy League degrees, think about a young writer with only a high school education? It was not until the 1980s that the full picture of Hemingway's self-education emerged. Now we know that each year between 1920 and 1940 about two hundred books passed through his hands. When he died, he left six thousand to eight thousand books in his Cuban library . . .

In Oak Park, young Hemingway grew up with his father's medical practice ...fascinated by the mysteries in his father's medical books, first the pictures and later the texts ...Hemingway was far wiser than his boyhood contemporaries about birth, death, and what lay between them, and that knowledge both informs and silently supports the text of A Farewell To Arms . . . The Hemingway canon reads like Saturday night at the emergency room . . . Into this sick world come Frederic and Catherine, whose desperate love is made in the face of death, made in the world of hospitals and doctors whose cures are temporary at best and deadly at worst. Nowhere in Hemingway's fiction are we more aware of medical detail, specific treatments, hospital rooms, and the demeanor of doctors than in A Farewell To Arms . . . All of these signs ask us to examine Frederic's narrative with more attention to his medical condition, for he is wounded in flesh, mind, and spirit more deeply than he ever tells us outright . . .

While Frederic may place his faith in rank, the 'competent' surgeons have other shared characteristics. Rinaldi, the doctor at Plava, and Dr. Valentini are all supremely confident in their abilities, sure and quick in their judgments, and good-humored. All three provide Frederic with brandy. Rinaldi and Valentini make sexual jokes about Frederic's relationship with Catherine and give him advice beyond the medical. These three doctors, cut from the same bolt of cloth, are contrasted with the other three, who are altogether too serious, make no jokes, share no brandy, and are judged incompetent. None of those Frederic regards as competent bear the least resemblance to Clarence Hemingway, who did not drink, curse, or joke, and who had volunteered to deliver his son's second baby. Ernest and Pauline declined the offer . . .

After Frederic's wounding, he is a changed man. When Catherine walks into his hospital room in Milan, we are told, 'When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me . . . God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her' . . . Before the blast at Plava, Frederic was certain that he would not die in this war; afterwards he has lost this false sense of immortality. Vulnerable and crippled, he turns somewhat desperately to Catherine for support. Call it love, call it need, call it psychic dependence, but the only difference between Frederic in the nurse's garden and in the Milan hospital is his violent wounding. Like a victim of shell shock, he exhibits altered feelings, affection, temper, and habits. However, as much could be said about Catherine Barkley, whose behavior is erratic enough to compare with Frederic's. In fact, Catherine exhibits many of the traits associated with war stress on the home-bound women who each day scanned the military casualty lists for the names of their husbands, sons, and lovers. When we first meet her, in April 1917, we discover that her fiancé of eight years was killed in the battle of the Somme, which began on the Western Front in July 1916. The British forces lost sixty thousand men on the first day of the Somme; five months later six hundred thousand British men were dead. The autumn rains turned the mud so deep that men drowned in it . . .

Their sexual union makes them both more whole, relieving Catherine's guilt for not giving herself to her dead fiancé, while comforting Frederic's night fears. Both are living for each other's moment, completely interdependent. As the summer waxes, Frederic becomes her religion, and he replaces the lost company of soldiers with his love for her . . . Both he and she are war wounded, and both use each other, in the best sense, to bind those wounds . . . After Catherine has been in labor the entire day, the doctor tells Fredrick that she appears unable to have the baby naturally . . . But it is worth noting that this doctor, despite his confidence, has none of the identifying traits associated with earlier doctors whom Frederic judged competent: He has none of Valentini's confidence, makes no sexual jokes, and provides no cognac . . .

Frederic may have had no knowledge of such complications, but Hemingway certainly did. Not only was his father an obstetrician, but just weeks before he finished A Farewell To Arms, he observed a Kansas City doctor perform a successful cesarean section on his wife, Pauline Hemingway, after twenty-four hours of labor. Given his great interest in all things medical, it is reasonably certain that he discussed all the details and possibilities with his wife's surgeon . . .

Frederic Henry learns that he is not immortal, that he needs Catherine beyond sexuality, that life is neither fair nor foul, and that there is little he can do about it. The surgeon, skillful or not, can only postpone, not abrogate death. As Frederic tells Catherine, one always feels trapped biologically. The novel's wealth of medical detail calls our attention to our own vulnerability: We are all permanently at risk, trusting in doctors, medical and metaphorical, to preserve us in a world where we have little

control. As with the ants on the burning log (327-28), one may die quick and early, or late and scarred; we are born into the world's hospital, each of us a terminal case.'

Michael Reynolds, 'A Farewell To Arms: Doctors in the House of Love' Cambridge Companion (1996).

'The bleak war story, based not on his experiences but on historical accounts of key events in World War I, used the familiar romance plot as an overlay to the war narrative, and while its real interest may have been the friendships among the men on the Italian front, readers were much more involved in the story of the doomed, unmarried lovers, Catherine and Frederic. While The Sun Also Rises as an entity remained etched in readers' minds, what was indelible about A Farewell To Arms was the desperately sad ending of the novel. Hemingway had given the world a contemporary version of Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde but he had been wise enough to set that tale in the inherently tragic atmosphere of the war nobody won. In 1929 the world was just beginning to realize that truth.'

Linda Wagner-Martin, ed., Introduction A Historical Guide to Ernest Hemingway.