

***Insight Text Guide***

Ross Walker

# A Farewell to Arms

Ernest Hemingway



**insight**

Copyright © Insight Publications 2009

First published in 2009 by  
Insight Publications Pty Ltd  
ABN 57 005 102 983  
219 Glenhuntly Road  
Elsternwick VIC 3185  
Australia

Tel: +61 3 9523 0044  
Fax: +61 3 9523 2044  
Email: [books@insightpublications.com.au](mailto:books@insightpublications.com.au)

**[www.insightpublications.com.au](http://www.insightpublications.com.au)**

### **Copying for educational purposes**

The Australian *Copyright Act* 1968 (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact:

Copyright Agency Limited  
Level 19, 157 Liverpool Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Tel: +61 2 9394 7600  
Fax: +61 2 9394 7601  
Email: [info@copyright.com.au](mailto:info@copyright.com.au)

### **Copying for other purposes**

Except as permitted under the Act (for example, any fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review) no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Walker, Ross, 1957–  
Ernest Hemingway's A farewell to arms : insight text guide / Ross Walker.  
1st ed.  
9781921411076 (pbk.)  
Insight text guide.  
Bibliography.  
For secondary school age.  
Hemingway, Ernest, 1899–1961. A farewell to arms.

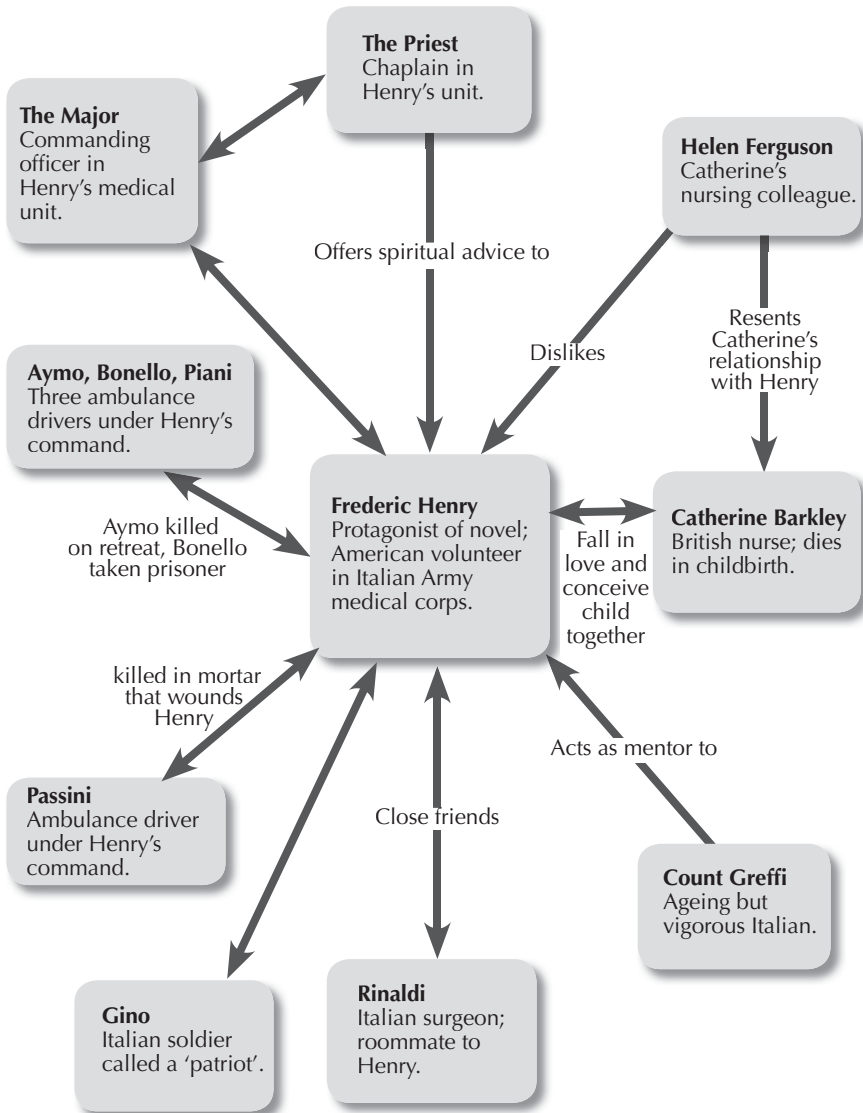
813.52

Printed in Australia by Hyde Park Press

# contents

<b>Character map</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About the author</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Synopsis</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Character summaries</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background &amp; context</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Genre, style &amp; structure</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter-by-chapter analysis</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Characters &amp; relationships</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Themes, ideas &amp; values</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Different interpretations</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Questions &amp; answers</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Sample answer</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>References &amp; reading</b>	<b>66</b>

# CHARACTER MAP



## OVERVIEW

### About the author

Ernest Hemingway was born in Chicago on 21 July 1899 and died in the small town of Ketchum, Idaho by suicide in 1961, just short of his 62nd birthday. His life spanned several major wars of the 20th century. Hemingway was only 19 years old when he went to Italy to join the Red Cross ambulance service in 1918, the last year of World War I. His job was to dispense coffee, chocolate, jam, soup and cigarettes to the soldiers. He survived the war, and used his experiences as the raw material for his writing for the rest of his life, most famously in *A Farewell to Arms*. Like the novel's protagonist, Frederic Henry, Hemingway was wounded in the leg, in his case just six days after arriving in Italy. The date was 8 July 1918. Every year he observed the anniversary of what he called the 'Big Wound'. No fewer than 237 shrapnel fragments riddled his wounded leg. For long afterward, he would not go to sleep in the dark. Subsequently, Hemingway exaggerated the stories of his war service, just as he often exaggerated the stories of his sexual conquests, but he was indeed decorated by the Italian government for bravery under fire.

He spent three months in a military hospital in Milan, and while there he fell in love with a beautiful nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky. His passion for her inspired the novel's story of Henry's love for nurse Catherine Barkley. An indication of the depth of his feeling for Agnes is that Hemingway had her love letters by his side when he killed himself, 40 years and four wives later. When she ended their relationship, Hemingway was heartbroken. It appears likely that the very young writer was drawn to this woman at least in part because she played the role of a mother figure to him in this time of stress – and the motherly qualities of Catherine Barkley are certainly evident in Hemingway's portrait of her. Von Kurowsky said that she loved Hemingway 'more as a mother than as a sweetheart' (quoted in Villard and Nagel 1997, p.246) – she was in fact about eight years older than he. Interestingly, Hemingway's first wife, Hadley Richardson, whom he married shortly after the break-up with Agnes, was 10 years older.

Hemingway went to Spain in the 1930s as a journalist to cover the Civil War there, and he also sent dispatches from Europe during World War II. Throughout his life he sought danger, not only in war, but also in hunting and big-game fishing. The poet Archibald MacLeish remarked that Hemingway 'lived it up to write it down' (MacLeish 1961, p.71), for he used these experiences as the raw material for a number of his works. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, for example, is set in Spain during the Civil War, and *The Old Man and the Sea* describes the epic battle between an aged fisherman and a giant marlin. As a novelist and adventurer, Hemingway became world famous. *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, among other works, were also made into films.

Hemingway also became famous as one of a number of expatriate American authors, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, John dos Passos and Gertrude Stein, who lived and wrote in Paris in the 1920s. Later in his life he lived in Havana, Cuba, where he indulged his passion for big-game fishing. It was a major blow to him when he was forced to leave Havana in 1959, after the advent of Fidel Castro's communist regime. His last years of life, in rural Idaho, were plagued by unhappiness and depression, but he was able to take comfort in his lifelong love of the natural world.

Many people have speculated about what drove Hemingway constantly to seek out danger and adventure. He was a physically powerful and handsome man, and perhaps felt compelled to live up to the personal mystique which grew around him. As a writer, he drew his material from the outer world of action rather than from the inner world of thought and contemplation, which is not to say that he was incapable of these. Some critics, however, felt that his life became a cliché of the hard-drinking, womanising, hyper-masculine man of action and that all of his books were really about the same theme: his struggle to prove his own masculinity. While he was physically strong, he was by no means emotionally strong. He suffered from severe depression throughout his life, an illness to which he may have been predisposed by his father, who also committed suicide (as did one of Hemingway's sons).

Some of Hemingway's finest works are the short stories known as the 'Nick Adams stories'. This character appears to have been closely modelled on the young Hemingway. Like Nick Adams' father, Hemingway's own father was a doctor. Like Hemingway, Nick Adams goes to war and is wounded. Hemingway's hero suffers from 'shell shock', that psychiatric condition caused by war trauma which afflicted so many soldiers of World War I. Frederic Henry, to a lesser extent, also suffers from this. Nick Adams also experiences the night terrors which Henry describes: 'Now I Lay Me', for example, is about Nick's attempts to deal with the long waking hours of an insomniac. Other stories, such as 'The End of Something' and 'Soldier's Home', describe the difficulties encountered by soldiers returning home from Europe in World War I. 'In Another Country' is a poignant account of war wounded in a military hospital in Milan. This story explores the theme, common to all wars, of how its experience separates soldiers from civilians who cannot share that experience. The narrator of the story remarks that he and his comrades 'felt held together by there being something that had happened that they, the people who disliked us, did not understand' (Hemingway 1968, p.216). Another story well worth reading is 'Indian Camp', set during Nick Adams' boyhood. In this story, Hemingway explores the issues of death by suicide, and the connection between birth and death, as he does in *A Farewell to Arms*. The story describes the agonising labour of a Native American woman and the suicide of her husband, which takes place during it.

Besides the elements mentioned above, Hemingway drew on other life events after World War I to create *A Farewell to Arms*: among them the suicide of his father, the loss of his first son, Bumby, and the near death of his wife Pauline and son Gregory in childbirth. It is worth remembering, though, that the novel is a work of fiction, not of autobiography. It differs from Hemingway's experience in vital respects. Frederic Henry serves in the Italian Army from 1915 onwards. Hemingway was never in the Italian Army, and he did not arrive in Italy with the American Red Cross until 1918. Hemingway moved time back, so that he was able to portray the retreat from Caporetto in the autumn of 1917. He loses Catherine at a time when the war is going badly for Italy: James Nagel has commented that '[t]he progression is thus towards total defeat' (Villard and Nagel 1997, p.267).

## Synopsis

Frederic Henry, a young American serving with the Italian Army medical corps in the Italian theatre of war during World War I, meets and falls in love with a beautiful English nurse, Catherine Barkley. While Henry is recovering in a Milan hospital from wounds sustained during an attack by Austrian forces, their relationship deepens, and Catherine soon becomes pregnant. Henry returns to the war, but later deserts when threatened with summary execution by Italian military police who think he is German. Escaping by river, and then by jumping onto a moving train, he returns to Catherine, in Stresa, in the Italian lakes region. They escape by boat to neutral Switzerland. There, Catherine's pregnancy ends with her death and also that of her baby. Henry is left inconsolable.

## Character summaries

### **Frederic Henry**

Hemingway's hero, often called 'Tenente' (Lieutenant), is the narrator of the story. He is a volunteer ambulance driver from the United States.

### **Catherine Barkley**

An English nurse who volunteered to serve in the war at the same time her fiancé of eight years joined the army. He is killed in 1916 in the Battle of the Somme. She forms a romantic relationship with Henry, becomes pregnant to him and dies in childbirth.

### **Rinaldi**

An Italian surgeon. Hemingway depicts him as an embodiment of the zestful, emotional Italian male. He shares quarters with Henry, and they form a close friendship.

### **The priest**

The chaplain in Henry's unit. Henry befriends him, and he offers him spiritual advice. Many of the philosophical issues raised by the novel are brought into sharp focus through their conversations.

**Helen Ferguson**

Catherine's friend and fellow nurse. She is unhappy about Catherine's relationship with Henry, fearing that he will get her pregnant, which of course happens.

**Count Greffi**

An elderly (over 90) but vigorous and life-loving Italian. He serves as a mentor to Henry.

**Bonello, Aymo and Piani**

The three ambulance drivers under Henry's command during the retreat from Caporetto. Aymo is killed and Bonello deserts to be taken prisoner by the Germans.

**Gino, Passini**

Two other Italian soldiers. Passini is a pacifist who is killed by the same mortar that wounds Henry; Gino is a patriot who insists the war must be fought to its conclusion.

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### World War I

World War I, also known as the First World War or the Great War, began in August 1914 and ended in November 1918. This war is recognised as one of the greatest calamities of the 20th century. It ultimately killed nearly 10 million people, and caused untold destruction of land and property. It involved most of the world's great powers. The main belligerents were the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France and other nations, including Russia, the United States and Australia) against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, among others). The war developed into a bloody stalemate fought in trenches stretching from the Swiss border to the English Channel. In battles such as the Battle of the Somme, in France, masses of men on both sides were thrown against each other, resulting in enormous slaughter, for almost no gain in ground. Indeed, in the first hour of this battle, which began on 1 July 1916, the British Army suffered 57,470 casualties, 19,240 of them killed. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Catherine Barkley, whose fiancé was killed at the Somme, remarks that 'People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on' and feels that '[t]hey can't go on doing things like the Somme and not crack' (p.19).

### The Italian Front

At the outset of the war, Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, but did not declare war, arguing that the Alliance was defensive in nature and therefore Italy was not obliged to take part. In the early stages of the war, Allied diplomats (English and French) approached Italy and eventually secured her participation on the Allied side; this was formalised through the Treaty of London of 26 April 1915, in which Italy renounced her obligations to the Triple Alliance. On 23 May, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary.