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Ernest Hemingway's

A Farewell to Arms



Text Guide by **Ross Walker**

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Ross Walker

A Farewell to Arms

Ernest Hemingway



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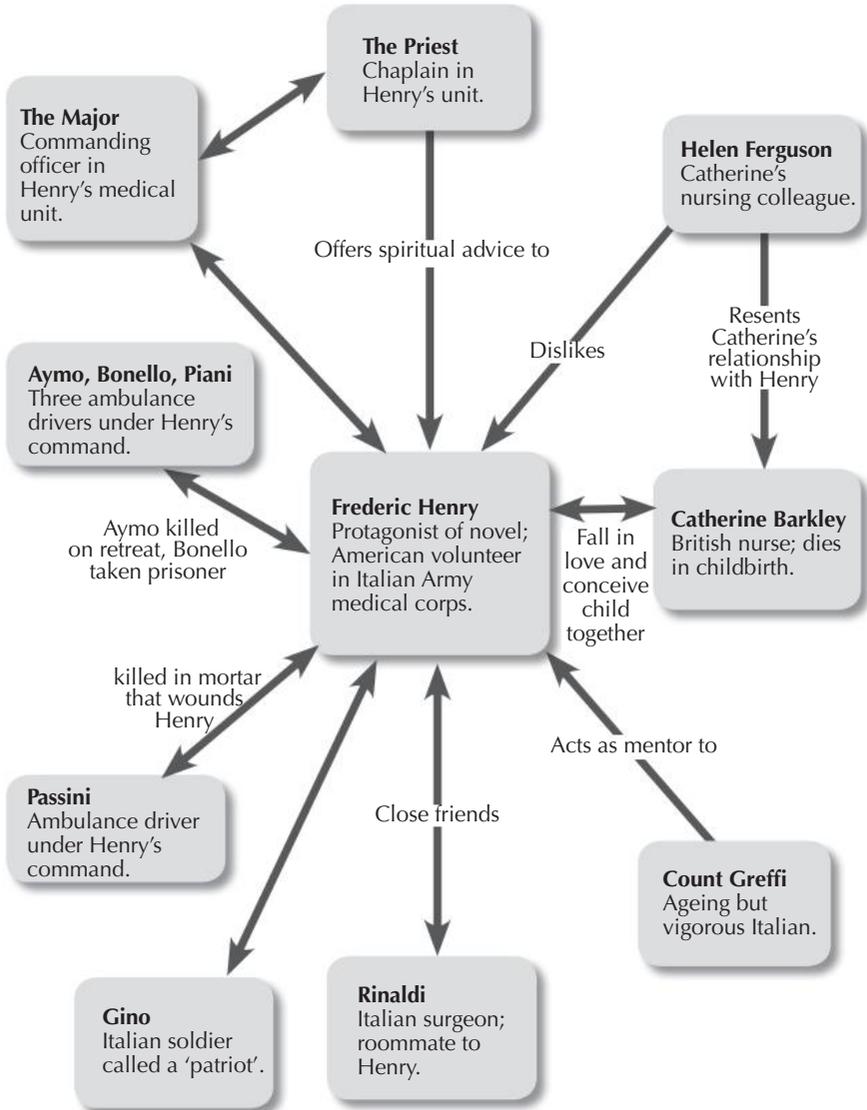
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CHARACTER MAP



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.

Over 600,000 Italians were killed and almost a million more wounded on the Italian Front. The Austro-Hungarian Empire lost 1,200,000 killed and three times that number wounded in the war, one third of these casualties occurring on the Italian Front. The rocky, mountainous terrain (the Italian Front was also known as the Alpine Front) in which much of the fighting occurred made conditions terrible for the combatants. In the high mountain ranges (Dolomiti, Adamello/Presanella and Ortler Ranges), during three years of war more than 60,000 men on both sides were killed in combat. Another 60,000 froze to death and at least another 60,000 died in avalanches. In his accounts of the war, Hemingway emphasises the hostility of nature to the soldiers; indeed, a broader theme of his novel is the seeming indifference of nature to human beings.

One of the most memorable sections of the novel is Hemingway's account of the retreat from Caporetto following the battle there (Chapters 27–33). This was the most famous battle of the Italian Front and was a disaster for Italy. The Italians lost approximately 300,000 men – of these, almost 270,000 were taken prisoner. The rest were killed or wounded. The battle took place from 24 October to 19 November 1917. Today, more than 90 years after the battle, Italians still use the phrase 'It was a "Caporetto"' to mean, 'It was a complete disaster'.

The United States in World War I

The United States did not enter the war until 2 April 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war on Germany. He told the Congress and the public that the war had to be fought so that the world could be 'made safe for democracy'. Before officially entering the war, however, America had been far from neutral in action, having liberally supplied England and France with weapons and other war materiel. Isolationism had nevertheless been strong in the United States prior to the declaration of war; Wilson's campaign slogan for the presidential election of 1916 had been 'he kept us out of war'. The United States entered World War I with a burst of patriotism expressed in popular songs like 'Over There', which assured the world that 'the Yanks are coming' and that they would not go home until 'it's over, over there'.

The Allies won the war largely due to American intervention. In the early months of 1918 the tide had turned strongly in favour of Germany, but the rapid influx of fresh American troops – as many as 10,000 new troops each day – reversed this trend and enabled the Allies finally to prevail. The mass rejoicing in the Allied capitals following this victory, however, was soured by the continuing suffering of the bereaved and by the disillusion felt by many returned soldiers. The American writer, Gertrude Stein, an older contemporary of Hemingway, described the generation of young people coming of age in the United States during and shortly after the war as ‘the lost generation’. Hemingway himself became identified with this ‘lost generation’, and his disillusion with the war is clearly evident in *A Farewell to Arms*.

The theme of war in American literature and society

It is useful to consider Hemingway’s novel in the wider context of American history and literature. The novel appeared in 1929, during the period between the two World Wars. In the United States, this period was known as a time of ‘isolationism’, when successive American governments tried to satisfy the widespread public mood to keep the country out of involvement in foreign conflicts. This policy was largely the outcome of America’s involvement in World War I. The tide of patriotism upon which America was swept into the war receded, and many Americans felt that the country had already sacrificed more than its share of lives and treasure in Europe. Many young men became disillusioned with war: as well as Hemingway, other writers such as Dalton Trumbo, in *Johnny Got His Gun*, and John dos Passos, in *Three Soldiers*, expressed an anti-war message that struck a chord with many Americans. So strong was the opposition to American involvement in trouble spots in the outside world that even during the election of 1940, when Nazi Germany was menacing the world, President Franklin Roosevelt had to promise the voters that young Americans would not be sent into any foreign wars.

At the same time that we note this opposition to war in American society, we also need to consider that war and the military have held a strong fascination in its culture. This is exemplified by the surprisingly

large number of soldier-presidents, including George Washington, the country's 'father' and architect of the Revolutionary War; Andrew Jackson, victor at the Battle of New Orleans; Zachary Taylor, hero of the Mexican War and Ulysses S. Grant, conqueror of the Confederate armies in the Civil War. In the 20th century, the list has included Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and George Bush Snr. In American popular culture, many television series have been set in the military world; World War II sparked the making of countless patriotic films.

But as well as being a patriotic country, the United States is a country with a strong tradition of protest and dissent that can be traced through American literature, particularly in the 20th century. Frederic Henry's decision to leave the war and to make 'a separate peace' (p.217) is echoed in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, a comic novel set in Italy during World War II, in which the central character, Yossarian, leaves the war zone, bound for neutral Sweden. The same theme of escape from war and the military can be found in novels and memoirs of the Vietnam War. In *Going after Cacciato*, Tim O'Brien tells the story of a young deserter from the war who sets out to walk from Vietnam to Paris, where the peace talks attempting to end the war are taking place. And in Philip Caputo's Vietnam War memoir, *A Rumor of War*, the author describes his own making of a 'separate peace' in terms which are remarkably similar to Hemingway's: 'The war simply wasn't my show any longer. I had declared a truce between me and the Viet Cong, a personal armistice, and all I asked for now was a chance to live for myself on my own terms' (Caputo 1977, p.332).

The reception of *A Farewell to Arms*

A Farewell to Arms appeared in 1929, more than 10 years after the end of World War I. In this same year, a spate of other works by writers who had served in the war appeared. Among them were *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque; *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves; *Generals Die in Bed*, by Charles Yale Harrison; *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* by Siegfried Sassoon and *Her Privates We* by Frederic Manning. It is clear that these authors needed that decade-long distance from the

events they had experienced and witnessed before they could put them down in writing. The same was true of veterans of the Vietnam War much later, whose memoirs appeared at a similar distance from the end of that war. The general public, too, was thoroughly sick of the news of these terrible wars and was thus unwilling to read further about them until long after they had ended.

The novel's influence and popularity have persisted through the 80 years since its publication largely because Hemingway deals with at least three timeless themes: love, war and heroism, and he does so with remarkable clarity and immediacy. Two film versions of the novel have been made: the first in 1932 starring Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes, the second in 1957 starring Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones. The novel's publishers, Scribners, heavily publicised it at the time of its release. Hemingway's son, Jack, commented that his father's own role in the war was magnified, so that Hemingway himself emerged to the public as a genuine war hero. He became internationally known, publicly depicted as a swashbuckling, macho figure. Members of his own family, however, have tried to alter this view, claiming that this was not the real Hemingway. He was described instead as a very vulnerable man who was attempting to live the life heroic – and this must have created considerable conflict within him.

Australia and the experience of war

What does this novel, set during a war which ended nearly a century ago, have to offer to Australian readers? Our role in World War I has been much chronicled and mythologised, though the battlefields most associated with our soldiers were Gallipoli, in Turkey, and French ones such as Passchendaele and Ypres. History has generally given scant attention to the Italian Front, yet the sufferings of the soldiers whom Hemingway memorialised were no doubt similar to the sufferings of the soldiers who fought in other theatres of war. The human cost of war is a

theme to which everyone can relate, and given the persistence of war in human life, novels like Hemingway's will always speak to us. Each new generation of soldiers has to learn afresh the same lessons of war which have been taught since war began. In the course of our recent involvements in the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, we have heard the same calls of patriotism heard by Hemingway's generation. The same post-war traumas encountered by soldiers of World War I – in those days known as 'shellshock', today as 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' – plague today's veterans. We have not yet learnt to say 'farewell to arms'.

GENRE, STYLE & STRUCTURE

Genre

The two main forms of prose response to war in the 20th century have been fairly similar in nature. The first is personal memoir (such as Graves' *Goodbye to All That*); the second is the autobiographically based novel. Hemingway's novel is much closer to the second kind of text. While he has used some of the raw material from his own experience of war – and, we presume, of personal relationships – he has shaped his experience into a work of fiction. The historical background to the war is always there, but the characters are fictional, and the work as a whole is carefully constructed to build with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. That is, the novel's ending, in which the heroine dies, is carefully foreshadowed from the outset. In this respect, the novel also contains elements of another classical tragedy – Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – in which the deaths of the two protagonists are foreshadowed from the beginning. The novel could be described as a tragedy, the recurring motif of death in the rain setting the sombre mood. Life is set in a minor key. 'All stories, if continued far enough, end in death', Hemingway once wrote, 'and he is no true story-teller who would keep that away from you' (quoted in Aronowitz and Hamill 1961, p.220).

Like most novelists, Hemingway uses his narrator's 'voice' to express the key ideas that he wants to communicate to his readers. Frederic Henry is closely modelled upon Hemingway himself and is thus used to express Hemingway's moods and feelings. Indeed, there are passages where the mask of Frederic Henry slips off and Hemingway speaks to us directly. We constantly feel the author's deep personal engagement with this story. Like most novelists, too, he uses dialogue as a means of characterisation and of highlighting central themes.

Alongside the central love story is the historically based story of war on the Italian Front. It is in his accounts of the fighting and the military strategies that Hemingway's training as a journalist come to the forefront.

There are many passages in the novel which could well have appeared as a journalist's copy. You can read some of Hemingway's war reporting from World War II in the collection *By-Line*.

Style

Hemingway is famous for his distinctive style of writing: clear, pared down, uncluttered. At his best, his pen became a scalpel used with unerring precision. He stripped bare the American writing style of the early 20th century, favouring rougher, blunter Germanic and Anglo-Saxon words to the smoother, longer Latinate words. Words such as 'fine', 'cold', 'clear' and 'clean' – all monosyllabic – are frequently represented in the prose. The style reflected the man and the image he tried to cultivate: tough, decisive, masculine, reluctant to discuss feelings and emotions at length.

Hemingway's writing is, above all, tightly controlled. Reading his work, one often has the feeling that this control is his way of reining in difficult feelings and emotions, and thus focusing instead on the external realities of life. James Nagel describes Hemingway's language in the novel as:

restrained and controlled, suggesting that the emotion generated in telling the story is almost too much for him to bear. *A Farewell To Arms* is related ... by a man who feels he has nothing left in the world, nothing but the memories of the most painful and meaningful episode of his life. (Villard and Nagel 1997, p.268)

Hemingway's writing is noteworthy for what is omitted: he strips his narrative back so that only the most important details are included, and we as readers are invited to fill in the gaps. This is especially true in the treatment of the love relationship between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley: the details of their intimacy are implied rather than stated. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the style fits the theme: that life at war is a dour, dark, difficult struggle.

Hemingway's style has often been imitated and sometimes parodied by other writers. His training as a reporter with the *Kansas City Star* no doubt helped him to develop this style, as the paper's style-book instructed writers to 'use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs' and above all

to 'use vigorous English' (as quoted in Hemingway's introduction to the Octopus edition of his novels and short stories). His accounts of the fighting in Italy are often journalistic in style. Two other maxims, from *The Elements of Style* by the American writers William Strunk and E. B. White, and followed by Hemingway in his writing, are 'omit needless words' and 'never use a long word when a short word will do'. Hemingway himself described his goal as an author as being to 'write it down, making it clear so that the reader will have the same feeling you have' (quoted in the film *Rivers to the Sea*).

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway achieves a sense of immediacy remarkable given that he was writing at a distance of some 10 years from many of the events described. Yet among his terse, journalistic prose, Hemingway can also use very long, descriptive sentences. In the sentence beginning 'People lived on in it' (p.5) in the second chapter, for example, the steady accumulation of detail brings many different images together in a very concentrated way. It is the prose equivalent of a montage in a film, and is very characteristic of Hemingway's writing. So too is the acute attention to even the most commonplace physical activities, such as the eating of spaghetti (p.6), again in a long sentence, each part of which describes a specific physical action. In this way Hemingway celebrates simple, everyday pleasures – another characteristic of his writing. Indeed, the description is often so precise that a film-maker could create storyboards from them for many of the scenes.

The writing heightens our capacity to be aware; often a number of our senses are engaged simultaneously. 'You've got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it', he once said (quoted in Fenton 1987). The description of Henry's wounding (Chapter 9) is one of the most striking passages in the novel, as Hemingway makes us acutely aware of the many sensory impressions which Henry experiences during the incident. The use of short, sharp sentences highlights each moment. The use of verbs, one rapidly following after another, gives a sense of rapid, terrifying movement. The suggestion of synaesthesia adds drama to the writing. Synaesthesia is the evocation of one kind of sense impression when another sense is stimulated, as in the passage, 'there was ... a roar that started white and went red' (p.51), where sound and colour are fused. The dominant impression of

the passage, however, is that of noise – the strident, terrible noise which soldiers in combat have always had to endure.

Hemingway is especially adept at creating a sense of movement through the rhythms of his sentences. And there is often beauty in the writing, passages in which his poetic sensibility is fully exposed. His style may be spare and blunt, but Hemingway nevertheless manages often to communicate genuine warmth when writing about particular people and places.

The narrative voice of Frederic Henry is an interesting aspect of the novel. His style of speaking fits his personality: withheld, reserved, sharply tuned in to the physical world. Characteristic of his narrative is the inclusion of passages resembling internal monologues (for example in Chapter 32); through these, Hemingway sometimes seeks to reproduce the moment-to-moment thought processes of his hero.

Structure

The narrator of the novel tells his story chronologically, starting with his memories of the late summer of ‘that year’ (p.3) – the date is not specified – when the war on the Italian Front was going very badly, and ending when the rapid influx of American troops has begun to turn the tide in favour of the Allies. The narrative alternates between the accounts of events in the war zone and of the ripening love relationship between Henry and Catherine. Critical stages in the narrative are used to divide the novel into five sections, or numbered ‘books’. Book 1 ends with Henry’s wounding and hospitalisation; Book 2 begins in Milan, describes the developing relationship between Henry and Catherine, and ends with Henry’s return to the war zone; Book 3, memorable for the account of the retreat from Caporetto, ends with Henry’s escape and determination to make a ‘separate peace’ (p.217); in Book 4 Henry returns to Milan, finds Catherine in Stresa, and together they flee to Switzerland. Book 5 is the tragic conclusion to the novel, ending with the long-foreshadowed death of Catherine, and Henry’s agonising bereavement.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER ANALYSIS

Book I

Chapter 1 (pp.3–4)

Summary: *We are introduced to the novel's wartime, Italian setting.*

The novel begins with Hemingway's characteristic highly controlled, pared-down style. The mood is bleak. The narrator sets the scene by describing the landscape of the late summer of 'that year', with the signs of autumn's advent: the leaves of the trees have already started to fall. Even though the plain is 'rich with crops' the mountains are 'brown and bare' and the countryside 'wet and brown and dead'. The cumulative effect of this series of monosyllabic words is to create a dour, grim mood (pp.3–4). We are also made aware of the ever-present motif of rain in the novel.

Against this background, the war makes its presence felt. The dust raised by the marching troops makes the leaves and trunks of the trees dusty, as if to underscore the effects of the war on nature itself. The sweep of the long last sentence of the first paragraph gives a strong sense of movement as it describes the soldiers marching (p.3); the same effect is created through rhythms of the second sentence of the third paragraph, with its long series of 'ands', another typical feature of Hemingway's style. This also creates a sense of the tedium experienced by the soldiers, for whom life at war amounts to just one more thing after another. Then there is the image describing the soldiers marching 'as though they were six months gone with child' (p.4). The image is paradoxical when we consider that the men appear to be pregnant not with new life, but with the weapons of death. In the wider context of the novel, too, the image foreshadows the fatal pregnancy of Catherine. The suggestion is that childbearing is a burden for women analogous to the burdens that men in war carry – a fatal burden in Catherine's case. The connection between fertility and life, on the one hand, and death on the other, is here established.

In keeping with the mood of the opening, on page 4 we learn that the war is going 'very badly'. The common foot soldiers bear the full brunt of that. The officers, by contrast, instead of marching, travel by car, with only cap and face visible, and the King passes through 'especially fast' on his daily inspections, as if to get away as quickly as possible. The trials of the war have been compounded by the 'permanent' rain which has led to cholera – nature seems intent on working against the human world. The narrator's matter-of-fact observation that '*only*' 7,000 died of the cholera in the army strongly suggests that this number of dead is only a small fraction of the thousands who have already died in the war itself.

Q What impressions are we given of the narrator from the way he begins the story?

Q How effective do you find this chapter as the opening to a novel?

Chapter 2 (pp.5–9)

Summary: *We meet some of the officers at the hospital in Gorizia.*

After the gloom of the opening chapter, this one opens on a brighter note with the information that 'the next year there were many victories' (p.5). The fighting is no longer at such close quarters; it is now 'in the next mountain beyond and was not a mile away' (p.5). The house where the narrator is living in Gorizia is described very briefly as having 'many thick shady trees in a walled garden and a wistaria vine purple on the side of the house' (p.5), details which contrast sharply with the description of the bleak, grey, ravaged landscape described in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, the marks of war are obvious, such as the 'sudden interiors' (p.5) of houses whose walls have been destroyed, and the absence of the forest of oak trees.

In the course of this chapter, the author at last introduces some dialogue involving the priest, the captain and others as they eat and drink in the mess for officers. The dialogue is light-hearted, yet touches on an important theme in the novel as a whole: the question of religious belief. The narrator takes little active part in the discussion: his quiet, and the

fact that we have not yet learnt his name or anything personal about him, points to the taciturn, withheld nature of his personality.

Q How does the tone of this chapter differ from that of the previous one?

Chapter 3 (pp.10–14)

Summary: *Lieutenant Rinaldi, a surgeon from Amalfi and Henry's roommate, is introduced.*

The narrator naturally finds Rinaldi's warm personality attractive; they are good friends. There has been a lull in the fighting; Rinaldi explains that most of the patients in the hospital are there as a result of non-battle causes. For the first time, Catherine Barkley is mentioned, as Rinaldi explains that he is 'now in love' with her (p.11).

Henry begins to reminisce about the places he has been, describing characteristics of life in wartime, such as 'the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you' (p.13). He tries to describe these places and experiences but concludes that 'I could not tell it, as I cannot tell it now'. Hemingway's writing at this point (in the long paragraph on page 13) is interesting, as he omits main verbs in an attempt to give a rapid series of sense impressions – a technique which illustrates the maxim that a writer may break the rules of grammar, as long as he knows what the rules are.

Q Describe your initial impression of Rinaldi.

Q What aspects of wartime life does this chapter illustrate?

Chapter 4 (pp.15–20)

Summary: *Catherine Barkley and Helen Ferguson, nurses from England and Scotland respectively, are introduced.*

Catherine tells Henry about the loss of her fiancé, killed the previous year at the Battle of the Somme. This sets the date as 1917. Catherine regrets their eight-year engagement, wishing now that they had married. In the light of his untimely death, she feels she 'could have given him

that anyway' (p.18). This experience has changed the romantic notions of war she held at the beginning of her nursing service: she had thought she might treat her fiancé for some 'picturesque' injury. Instead, she explains, '[t]hey blew him all to bits' (p.19). Henry is quickly attracted to Catherine, though as usual he uses few words to tell us this: 'I thought she was very beautiful' (p.18).

Q Describe your initial impressions of Catherine Barkley and Helen Ferguson.

Q What do we learn about the nature of this war from what Catherine says about it?

Chapters 5–6 (pp.21–31)

Summary: *The relationship between Henry and Catherine begins.*

The narrator describes his visit to the bridgehead at Plava, a 'smashed-down town' full of trenches (p.22). He reflects that the Austrians would be able to make 'a shambles' of it. 'Shambles' originally meant an abattoir, a connotation echoed in a later description comparing the killing of war to that at the Chicago stockyards (p.165). For the first time we learn the narrator's name, as Helen Ferguson addresses him as 'Mr Henry' (p.23).

When Henry tries to kiss Catherine, she slaps his face, explaining that 'I just couldn't stand the nurse's evening off aspect of it' (p.24). Does she mean by this that she wants more than a one night stand? Whatever she means, she seems to envisage a long-term future with Henry, as she predicts that 'we're going to have a strange life' (p.25). Whether Henry feels the same way at this stage is uncertain; all we can be sure of is that he wants a sexual relationship with Catherine, 'seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game' (p.24). Certainly, Catherine has engaged Henry on some level, but he is not yet in love with her.

At their next meeting, in Chapter 6, Henry lies when he tells Catherine he loves her. Her feelings are definitely more deeply engaged than his; for him this new relationship is 'a game', and he speaks with some indifference about it: 'I did not care what I was getting into' (p.29). All he can say at this stage is that the relationship offers the prospect of

something better than the casual love play at the bawdy house for officers. Catherine senses that he has lied, but dismisses the matter casually: 'You don't have to say you love me. That's over for the evening' (p.30). She is quite self-possessed as she deflects his advances, reluctant to embrace a man who appears merely to be playing a game with her.

- Q** Why do you think Catherine resists Henry's advances in Chapter 5?
- Q** Catherine tells Henry: 'Don't write anything that will bother the censor' (p.23). What kind of material might she have in mind here? What does her instruction imply about what the public is allowed to know about the war?
- Q** Comment on Henry's attitude to the relationship he is about to begin.

Chapter 7 (pp.32–9)

Summary: *Henry expresses his feelings of detachment from the war.*

Henry meets a fellow American soldier from Pittsburgh; he is suffering from a hernia and has thrown away his truss (support) to worsen his condition and thus avoid having to return to the front. Henry devises a plan to help him avoid returning, showing that his commitment to the war is less than total, as he soon confirms with his statement that the war 'did not have anything to do with me' (p.35). He speaks disparagingly of the Italian war leaders, dismissing Generale Codorna as 'fat and prosperous' and King Vittorio Emmanuele as 'the tiny man with the long thin neck and the goat beard' (p.35). At this stage, Henry feels emotionally distanced from the war, convinced that it will not endanger him: 'It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies' (p.35). Reflecting this distance, Henry's mind wanders back to Catherine, as he imagines being with her in Milan. The long sentences on page 36 closely reflect his train of thought from moment to moment, as he imagines a meeting with her culminating in a summer night of lovemaking.

- Q** Why do you think Henry has distanced himself from the war?
- Q** What other aspects of his personality are illuminated in this chapter?

Chapter 8 (pp.40–3)

Summary: *Henry visits Catherine before a trip to the fighting.*

Although she has little interest in religion, and knows Henry is not a Roman Catholic, Catherine gives him a Saint Anthony medal. Saint Anthony is the Patron Saint of lost things: not just lost objects, but lost feelings or emotions, such as happiness. And so it is ironic that Henry observes: 'After I was wounded I never found him' (p.41). Through this small vignette, Hemingway is gently touching on one of the key themes of the novel, that of loss itself. As he returns to the front, Henry observes row after row of mountain ranges – an ominous note, as it is in these mountains that the fighting is taking place, and they are making that fighting most difficult and dangerous for the combatants.

Chapter 9 (pp.44–57)

Summary: *Henry is badly wounded in the leg.*

In the early section of this chapter, Passini explains to Henry how the Italian soldiers are forced to continue fighting, out of fear of reprisals against their families if they desert. Hemingway uses this information to show us the growing unpopularity of the war. By this stage of the war, indeed, there was growing unrest amongst European armies: uprisings had taken place in the Italian, French and Russian armies. Passini contends that '[t]here is nothing as bad as war' (p.47). It is only because ordinary soldiers are afraid of their officers that 'the war is made' (p.48). It is the ruling class, according to him, who are responsible for the continuation of the war, not least because 'they make money out of it' (p.48). Henry, at this stage, still believes that the war must continue: 'I know it is bad but we must finish it'. Passini disagrees: in his view, '[t]here is no finish to a war' (p.48). This statement is true when we consider that the legacies of war continue on long after the fighting has stopped. Hemingway is suggesting to us that there are no clean or conclusive endings to war.

One of the key events of the novel takes place, as Henry is wounded by a mortar while eating cheese and drinking wine – an indication of

the randomness of war, the way in which people are killed or wounded while performing the most commonplace activities. Passini is mortally wounded as one of his legs is ripped off (see 'Genre, style & structure' for a closer look at Hemingway's style in this passage).

Now Hemingway turns his attention to the aftermath of the battle. At the field hospital, the doctors 'were red as butchers' (p.53) – the war zone is depicted as a slaughterhouse. At first Henry is clearly in shock but as it wears off pain dominates his consciousness. He is given preferential treatment among the wounded by a British surgeon because he is American. The chapter ends with a sobering account of the death of the wounded man above Henry in the ambulance – Henry feels his blood dripping onto him as his life ebbs away. The last paragraph of the chapter has a saddening beauty, with the description of the drops of blood falling 'very slowly, as they fall from an icicle after the sun has gone' (p.57) – an entirely apt image, suggesting as it does the coldness of a human body after the life has gone from it.

- Q** How successfully do you think Hemingway conveys the experience of being wounded in war?
- Q** Discuss the different attitudes to war expressed or implied in this chapter.

Chapters 10–12 (pp.58–72)

Summary: *Henry spends time in a field hospital before being sent to Milan.*

In the field hospital Henry emphasises the physical world, his physical state, far more strongly than any emotion. There is the painful itching of his wounded legs, but also the welcome coolness of the mineral water poured on the wounds. There is a sense of relief, of safety, strongly contrasting with the sense of danger of the previous chapter. Rinaldi greets the wounded Henry warmly, addressing him affectionately as 'baby' and describing the two of them as 'war brothers' (p.62). He tells Henry that he is likely to be decorated for bravery; Henry makes light of his wounding by saying: 'I was blown up while we were eating cheese' (p.59). Such a statement omits acknowledgement of the reality that he showed sufficient bravery to place himself in harm's way. Yet, at the same time, the statement

expresses the truth that in war, events are random – death comes out of the blue and kills or maims the hero as well as the coward.

In Chapter 11 Henry discusses the war with a young priest who comes to visit him. The priest's war weariness is clear as he tells Henry, 'I hate the war' (p.64) and speaks against the officers who 'don't see anything' and the people in Italy 'who would make war' (p.65). Henry cannot share the priest's belief in, and love of, God; insofar as he is aware of God at all, he is 'afraid of Him in the night sometimes' (p.66), a cryptic statement suggesting that he feels a sense of insecurity in times of uncertainty. For Henry, there is no consoling presence beyond himself. Later a feeling of security in the long hours of the night will be provided by the presence of Catherine beside him.

Chapter 12 opens with a poignant description of the view from the windows of the field hospital: new graves, and the making of crosses for them, tell of the growing death toll in the war. The American role in the war is growing, following the declaration of war on Germany. Two long paragraphs (pp.70–1) detail the conversation between Henry, Rinaldi and a major. Hemingway's technique for presenting dialogue here is unusual. Instead of being written on separate lines to suggest the words of the different speakers, it comes in a series of short, sharp statements that follow each other in rapid-fire fashion. This technique suggests the growing animation of the speakers, probably fuelled by prodigious consumption of alcohol – an excellent example of Hemingway's implying far more than is directly stated. There is little direct reference to the intoxicated state of the three men, but statements such as, 'We must be quiet ... Already we have been asked many times to be quiet' imply it (p.71). Amongst the information given to us in the course of this dialogue is the news that Catherine – 'your English' – will be in Milan when Henry arrives there the following day (p.71).

- Q** In what ways does Chapter 10 illustrate the camaraderie (comradeship) of war?
- Q** How do you interpret Henry's remark about being 'afraid of [God] in the night sometimes' from Chapter 11?
- Q** Discuss the priest's attitude to the war and to his own role as a priest.

Book II

Chapter 13 (pp.75–81)

Summary: *Henry's first day in the American hospital in Milan.*

Once again, in this chapter, the emphasis is on the physical world, especially the pain which Henry's wounds cause him. Henry's desire for alcohol – an increasingly important part of his life, but prohibited in the hospital – attests to the soldier's need for creature comforts in times of stress. He takes pleasure at the feeling of the cool Cinzano bottle against his stomach, before hiding it away, out of sight of the nurses. Henry says little about his emotional state and feelings. His reference to a nightmare, undoubtedly related to the ordeal he has recently undergone, occupies no more than one sentence: 'I slept heavily except once I woke sweating and scared and then went back to sleep trying to stay outside of my dream' (p.81). This reinforces our impression of a man who is stoic and uncomplaining in his suffering.

Q 'I'm not sick. I'm wounded' (p.79). What is the difference? What does this statement tell us about Henry?

Chapter 14 (pp.82–5)

Summary: *Catherine comes back into Henry's life.*

Henry's feelings for Catherine have intensified: 'When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me' (p.84). They make love for the first time. We are given very little detail and almost everything is implied, which is very characteristic of Hemingway's writing. Catherine is concerned that the nature of their relationship will be exposed. No doubt she feels that it would be considered improper for a nurse to have an intimate relationship with a patient. Many people at this time would also have considered it improper for a sexual relationship to take place between two unmarried people.

Q Are there signs in these last two chapters that Henry is becoming more open about his feelings?

Chapter 15 (pp.86–91)

Summary: *Henry finds the right surgeon to operate on his knee.*

Henry's legs are X-rayed, and he is told that it will take probably six months for his wounds to heal, which upsets him. When asked by the doctor if he wants to keep his knee, he replies: 'I want it cut off ... so I can wear a hook on it' (p.88), an instance of his wry, ironic humour. Despite the setting for this scene, a military hospital, the mood is often light and playful. A different surgeon, Dr Valentini, while probing Henry's wounds, tries to keep his mind occupied with more pleasant thoughts, asking him about Catherine, the 'pretty girl' who 'will make you a fine boy'. He is a cheerful soul: when asked if he will have a drink, he replies, 'Certainly. I will have ten drinks. Where are they?' (p.90).

Q Henry's wounded legs 'had the look of not too freshly ground hamburger steak' (p.87). Comment on the implications of this image. What comparable images can we find in other parts of the novel?

Chapters 16–17 (pp.92–100)

Summary: *Catherine and Frederic spend their first night together; Helen Ferguson expresses her unhappiness with the relationship between Henry and Catherine.*

Chapter 16 opens with a lovely description of Henry's and Catherine's night together – it is the night before Henry's operation. Hemingway works hard to create the feeling of night-time, not only through the repetition of the phrase 'in the night', but through the careful recording of the ambient sights and sounds. The two lovers share their room with a bat which, quite at ease, 'hunted in the room as though he had been outside' (p.92). Catherine and Henry, too, seem quite at ease; a creature conventionally associated with Gothic-style images of menace and disquiet becomes a quite benign part of the scene. In their contentment with one another, they seem to be at one with all around them.

The sounds and sights of the war outside are present in the background – the searchlight and the voices of the men of the anti-aircraft gun on the

next roof – but these, too, are comfortably knitted into a scene of security and contentment. We are aware of how dependent Henry has become on Catherine; he is constantly aware of her intermittent presence and absence throughout the night. There is a slight undercurrent of anxiety because of their need to be undetected together, hence Catherine's visit to the outside of Miss Van Campen's room to ensure that she is asleep.

Catherine, too, is deeply in love; it is expressed not only physically but also through her strong maternal instincts, as she reassures him, as a mother might, before his operation. 'You have such a lovely temperature and you sleep like a little boy with your arm around the pillow and think it's me'. But then a note of uncertainty enters in: 'Or is it some other girl? Some fine Italian girl?' (p.94). She has now given her heart and soul wholly to him: 'I want what you want' she tells him. 'There isn't any me any more' (p.96).

In Chapter 17 Helen worries that Henry will get Catherine pregnant: 'You get her into trouble and I'll kill you' (p.98). Catherine's absence of three days feels much longer to Henry, indicating his strong need of her: 'It was as though we met again after each of us had been away on a long journey' (p.100).

- Q** What do you feel about Catherine's statement in Chapter 16: 'I want what you want. There isn't any me any more' (p.96)?
- Q** 'Fight or die. That's what people do. They don't marry' (p.98). What attitudes to love and marriage does Helen Ferguson display in Chapter 17? What does the statement reveal about her?

Chapter 18 (pp.101–5)

Summary: *Henry settles into an account of the 'lovely time' he and Catherine enjoyed during the summer.*

The tone of the writing is cheerful and positive here. Henry's relationship with Catherine has an edge of excitement, caught through details such as '[i]f we let our hands touch, just the side of my hand touching hers, we were excited' (p.101). He feels her brief absences acutely: 'When she came upstairs it was as though she had been away on a long trip'

(p.102). They discuss the matter of marriage; though not legally married, they feel married, and count their 'wedding day' as the first day Catherine had come to the hospital. An official wedding is unimportant to them, for neither has any real religious conviction. Indeed, each is the other's religion, in the sense that each worships the other. Even the death of Catherine's fiancé is now construed positively – 'if he hadn't [died] I wouldn't have met you' (p.104). But in the midst of this happy mood, there is an unsettling note struck when Catherine reflects that 'I suppose all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us' (p.104). This ironically foreshadows Catherine's tragic death at the end of the novel.

Q In what ways do Catherine and Henry challenge conventional ideas of marriage in this chapter?

Chapters 19–20 (pp.106–19)

Summary: *Henry's physical rehabilitation continues, as does the war; Henry and Catherine go to the races.*

Through his narrator, Hemingway fills in some of the details about the war: the dominant impression is of costliness and seeming endlessness. 'The Italians were using up an awful amount of men' (p.107), remarks Henry; the use of the word 'amount' instead of 'number' suggests the dehumanisation of the war, as if to imply that tonnes of flesh, rather than individual people, are being flung into it. Nature itself seems to be working against the Italians; it is as if they are being swallowed up in the endless rows of mountains. Henry looks back nostalgically to wars of previous centuries, such as those of the Napoleonic era: commanders like Napoleon used strategies that led to solid results, he implies. By contrast, now '[p]erhaps wars weren't won any more. Maybe they went on forever' (p.107).

In the hospital the patients talk about their wounds. Ettore has three wound stripes on his sleeve; they are indeed badges of honour for him: 'I'd rather have them than medals', he says (p.110). But there is no glamour here: he immediately tells his listeners that '[t]here's dead bone in my foot that stinks right now'. This chapter ends on a very disquieting note, with

Hemingway, as at the end of the previous chapter, again foreshadowing Catherine's death. As she and Henry talk quietly in the heavy rain, she tells him that 'I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it' (p.114). He comforts her, but the rain continues unabated, as if to forecast what is to happen to her at the end of the story.

Henry's description of a pleasant day at the races in Chapter 21 briefly lightens the mood. Even the names of the horses – Japalac and Light For Me – sound cheerful.

- Q** 'Maybe (wars) went on forever' (p.107). In what ways do wars go on forever?
- Q** '[Ettore] was a legitimate hero who bored everyone he met' (p.112). Write about notions of heroism in this novel.

Chapters 21–2 (pp.120–31)

Summary: *Catherine tells Henry that she is pregnant; Henry is due to go back to the front.*

In Chapter 22 Henry reports the progress of the war through the comments of a British major who declares that the warring parties on both sides are all 'cooked'. Huge numbers of men continue to be killed. But the most important news which Henry receives is that Catherine is pregnant. They must stick together and be true to each other, she tells him, because 'if anything comes between us we're gone and then they have us'. Henry reassures her, telling her that '[n]othing ever happens to the brave' (p.125). This contradicts the thought he expresses later in the novel: that the world kills everyone, including the very brave (p.289).

In Chapter 22 Henry comes down with a bout of jaundice, a liver disease which Miss Van Campen, the nurse, accuses him of bringing on deliberately through alcohol abuse in order to avoid returning to the front. At this time, Miss Van Campen seems to be more his enemy than the enemy soldiers he will face: '... she had disliked me for a long time and she was now cashing in on it' (p.130). He strikes back at her with a caustic remark which infuriates her.

- Q** Henry complains in Chapter 21: 'You always feel trapped biologically' (p.125). What does he mean by this?

- Q** Even if Henry did not intentionally give himself jaundice, is there anything to Miss Van Campen's remarks in Chapter 22 about the level of his drinking?

Chapter 23–4 (pp.132–44)

Summary: *Henry and Catherine's last night together before he returns to the front; Henry rides the train back to the mountains.*

Catherine indirectly expresses unhappiness at their situation. When she and Henry see a soldier with his girl and he tells her, 'They're like us', she retorts unhappily, 'Nobody is like us', suggesting that she feels isolated as a woman pregnant to a man to whom she is not married (p.133). She tells Henry that she feels like a 'whore' (p.137). He quotes two lines from Andrew Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress' (p.139). This poem is the plea of a man to his reluctant lover to make the most of the time they have together – no doubt an objective at the forefront of Henry's mind. And at the forefront of Catherine's mind, too: she has learnt from her hesitancy with her late fiancé and is determined not to make that mistake again. Just how much time they will have together is uncertain. When Henry leaves, it is once again raining, dampening an already sombre mood. The troop train is crowded with soldiers heading for the front – many have room only to stand.

- Q** Find the poem 'To His Coy Mistress'. Discuss why Hemingway may have included this extract from it at this stage of the novel.

Book III

Chapter 25 (pp.147–58)

Summary: *Henry returns to Gorizia.*

It is nearly winter as Henry rides by car from Udine to Gorizia. Hemingway suggests the passage of time by describing the appearance of the roads in this season. This is another atmospheric, sharply detailed description, reminiscent of the novel's opening. The matter-of-fact style of the writing fits the bleak mood. The road is covered with 'wet dead leaves' and the

mountains are obscured by fog, and Henry recalls that '[i]t did not feel like a homecoming' (p.147). The bleakness of the weather reflects the progress of the war; the major tells Henry that 'it's all over' and 'it's been a bad summer' (p.148). Fighting is taking place at Caporetto, which Henry remembers in a few carefully chosen words as 'a clean little town (with) a fine fountain in the square' (p.148). This description acquires a note of poignancy in the light of what we learn a little later about the events in that town.

Rinaldi greets Henry warmly, as usual, despite showing signs of the strain associated with his role as a doctor in wartime. The war is 'killing' him; he appears to be numbing his feelings to cope with the job: 'I don't think', he tells Henry, 'I operate' (p.151). Rinaldi retains his fondness for drink and sex, but now he seems to be drinking too much; and he is worried that he has contracted syphilis.

Q How are the personalities of Henry and Rinaldi contrasted in this chapter?

Chapter 26 (pp.159–61)

Summary: *Henry has a talk with the priest.*

Hemingway underscores the war's awfulness by showing its effect on the priest. His revulsion against the war has crystallised since Henry saw him last. 'Many people have realized the war this summer' (p.159), he tells Henry. With the odd choice of the word 'realized', he means that many people have been deeply, personally affected by the war. He comments that the major has, like many other men, become 'gentle' as a result of the war, an interesting observation which reminds us that war can sometimes humanise people because they react against its savagery. This conversation also sheds light on the way Henry's thinking and feeling about the war are developing. His opposition to the war has been growing in his unconscious mind: 'I never think and yet when I begin to talk I say the things I have found out in my mind without thinking' (p.161).

Q 'That is why the peasant has wisdom, because he is defeated from the start. Put him in power and see how wise he is' (p.160). What does Henry mean by this?

Chapter 27 (pp.162–72)

Summary: *The Austrian offensive begins.*

Henry notices everywhere the evidence of war damage to the environment. He talks with Gino, who tells him of how the war is straining his nerves. The noise of the guns leads him to ask: 'What's the use of not being wounded if they scare you to death?' (p.163). Gino tells Henry that the thought of defeat cannot be countenanced: 'What has been done this summer cannot have been in vain' (p.165). This statement sparks Henry's most strongly anti-war sentiments in the entire novel, expressed in a famous passage in which Hemingway uses his character to speak for him. Henry denounces the notion that there should be any sense of glory associated with war. 'Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow', he argues, 'were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates' (p.165). In one of the novel's dominant motifs, the men killed in the fighting are likened to slaughtered cattle: 'the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it' (p.165).

As if to underscore the author's message, this passage is followed by a grim account of fighting amidst a wild rainstorm. The narrator does not comment on events; he describes them objectively, heightening the impact by focusing our attention on the physical realities. Sentences such as '[t]hey fought in the dark in the rain and a counter-attack of scared men from the second line drove them back' and '[t]hey were wet to the skin and all were scared' (p.166) have power because of their bluntness and total clarity.

- Q** 'What has been done this summer cannot have been done in vain.'
Does this sentiment help to explain why wars often continue longer than necessary?

Chapter 28 (pp.173–80)

Summary: *The retreat begins.*

The chapter begins with a beautifully written description of the retreat from Caporetto. The fitful movements of the trucks are suggested through the rhythm of the prose, created by the short, sharp sentences. Once again, the narrator emphasises the steady rain in the background. There is 'big rain' and 'small rain' and the men are caught in the big rain – a metaphor for the bleak, disconsolate state of his own mind, which 'the small rain would not quiet' (p.176). If only Catherine might rain down, his loneliness would be assuaged. In his imagination, he brings Catherine near to him, telling him, 'I'm always here. I come whenever you want me' (p.176). He feels for her, carrying the weight, both physical and psychological, of her pregnancy.

Another impressive feature of this chapter is the poignant vignette of the peasants who are retreating from the battle zones. The image of 'a sewing-machine on the cart ahead of us in the rain' (p.176) is a touching, pathetic detail which embodies the sufferings of civilian populations in all of the wars of the 20th century.

Q Consider how Hemingway makes us aware of Henry's loneliness in this chapter.

Chapter 29 (pp.181–5)

Summary: *Henry tries to take a short cut away from the stalled column, but one car gets bogged down.*

In this chapter, we see the ruthlessness of which Henry is capable when he executes a sergeant who defies his order to cut brush needed to help pull Aymo's car out of the mud. It is interesting to note that the two young girls who have accompanied them take 'no notice of the shooting' (p.183), suggesting their familiarity with the routine violence of war.

Q We have not seen this side of Henry before. What are your feelings about his shooting at the two men? Does this episode alter your view of him? What role does the pressure of the retreat, and his responsibility to see his men to safety, play in it?

Chapter 30 (pp.186–200)

Summary: *Henry and his men have to abandon their cars; Aymo is killed by 'friendly fire'; Henry barely escapes execution as a German spy.*

Henry shows his growing frustration with Italian military incompetence: a small, insignificant bridge has been blown up while a strategic one on a main road has been left intact, and now German bicycle troops are moving 'smoothly, almost supernaturally' (p.188) across it. Shortly after this, Aymo is killed by Italian fire. Henry grieves his death, remarking that 'I had liked him as well as anyone I ever knew' (p.191). Once again, the rain forms the background to this death.

Now follows a beautiful passage in which Henry describes how he takes shelter in a nearby barn. The pleasant rural smells and the feeling of safety bring memories of his childhood to his mind: 'The hay smelt good and lying in a barn in the hay took away all the years in between' (p.192). He enjoys a few moments of peace and sanity; this, we feel, is the way life ought to be. Amongst the pleasant feelings are mixed darker, more fearful thoughts about imminent dangers. The Italians and the Germans constitute a double threat: the Italians shoot blindly in fear and therefore endanger their own men, while some Germans wear Italian uniforms and blend in with those retreating in the north. Henry feels stuck. 'You could not go back', he remarks. 'If you did not go forward what happened? You never got back to Milan. And if you got back to Milan what happened?' (pp.192–3).

We can sense that Henry's opposition to the war and his role in it is growing. Piani informs him that Bonelli has deserted in order to be taken prisoner, telling him, 'we don't believe in the war anyway, Tenente' (p.193). If Italians fighting in defence of their own country feel this way, then we can imagine what Henry, an American, must feel. Soon the crucial incident occurs in which he is corralled by the *carabinieri* (military police) who suspect that he is German and will kill him. With his characteristic dry humour, he sizes up the situation: 'I saw how their minds worked; if they had minds and if they worked' (p.199). And so, in a desperate act of self-preservation, he runs away and jumps into the river, grimly clinging to a piece of driftwood – his only means of support. Interestingly, Henry

says 'we [my italics] passed the brush of an island above the water', (p.200) as if to suggest that the driftwood is his companion – he and this piece of wood, alone against the current, and against the world.

- Q** A great deal happens in this chapter. Study closely the ways in which Hemingway highlights the main episodes.
- Q** In what ways does Henry's near execution reflect his killing of the sergeant?

Chapters 31–2 (pp.201–7)

Summary: *Henry finds safety floating down the river and hiding on a freight train.*

Hemingway's gripping account of his hero's escape down the river is a fine example of how well the novel works on the level of an adventure story. The detail of what is happening moment by moment and the short, sharp sentences (p.201) create enormous tension, and we care desperately about Henry's plight. He jumps on a moving train, hides under the canvas of the freight car, and rides away from the war forever.

'Anger was washed away in the river', explains Henry, 'along with a sense of obligation'. This statement suggests that his experience in the river has been a baptism into a new life, one where the war 'was not my show any more' (p.206). From this point onwards, Henry decides to commit himself to the pleasures of the flesh, to 'eat and drink and sleep with Catherine' (p.206). The episode in the river contains within it echoes from other key American works of literature, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, in which Mark Twain relates his hero's exploits on the Mississippi River, or Ambrose Bierce's short story *Incident at Owl Creek Bridge*, in which the central character, a Confederate soldier condemned to death, imagines his escape in the river above which he is about to be hanged.

- Q** Does Henry's failure to get his ambulances and his men to safety (with the exception of Piani) play a role in his decision to quit the war?

Book IV

Chapters 33–4 (pp.211–24)

Summary: *Henry joins Catherine in Stresa.*

Henry arrives back in Milan. His friend, Simmons, advises him of the procedure for getting to neutral Switzerland, and fits him out with new clothes, symbols of the new life he will have as a civilian. Having made his 'separate peace' (p.217), he has difficulty adjusting to the idea that he is now a civilian: 'In civilian clothes I felt a masquerader' (p.217). He feels a sense of guilt at leaving the war, like 'a boy who thinks of what is happening at a certain hour at the schoolhouse from which he has played truant' (p.219). Later, he tells Catherine that he feels like a criminal (p.224).

In Stresa he is reunited with Catherine, but Helen Ferguson's disapproval of their relationship strikes a sour note. She says openly that she 'can't stand' Henry, accusing him of being a 'seducer' who has got Catherine pregnant and who will now probably 'sneak off' (p.220). She is especially bothered by the fact that the couple are not married.

At last Henry and Catherine are able to sleep together again, turning a time which would otherwise be heavy with fear and loneliness into one of comfort and happiness. We learn this in a famous passage in which Hemingway uses his narrator as a vehicle to express some of his ideas about the nature of courage (p.222). Catherine's death is foreshadowed when Henry reflects that '[i]f 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 kills 'the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially'. Addressing the reader, he goes on to warn that even if 'you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry' – as if to warn us not to feel immune.

- Q** 'I myself felt as sad as the wet Lombard country that was outside through the window' (p.217). How would you account for Henry's feelings here?
- Q** Read again the passage about courage (p.222). Why do you think Hemingway included this at this stage of the novel?

Chapter 35 (pp.225–34)

Summary: *Henry has a discussion with Count Greffi.*

Catherine has now become Henry's whole world: '... if you aren't with me', he tells her, 'I haven't a thing in the world'. Her sympathetic words to him: 'I know it must be a dreadful feeling to have nothing at all suddenly' (p.228) foreshadow the crushing loss he will soon endure when her death leaves him totally bereft.

A key element of this chapter is the meeting in the hotel between Henry and Count Greffi, a great survivor, a nonagenarian who is still full of the joy of life and still in possession of a sharp, lively mind. Their dialogue forms a delightful interlude in the novel, but it is a serious conversation, dealing with weighty matters such as the nature of faith, or belief – an important issue in the novel as a whole. When he asks Henry if he is 'croyant' (a religious believer), Henry's answer, 'At night' (p.232), recalls his comment to the young priest about fearing God at night (Chapter 11); but it also suggests that it is when he is in bed with Catherine that he finds the focal point of meaning in his own life. As he has said before, Catherine is his religion; Greffi himself echoes this idea when he tells Henry that being in love is 'a religious feeling' (p.234).

- Q** The barman, Emilio, says that he would not go to war (p.227). Does the novel give us any insight into what leads men to go to war?
- Q** Greffi and Henry discuss the subject of wisdom. Which, if any, of the characters in the novel display this virtue?

Chapters 36–7 (pp.235–54)

Summary: *Henry and Catherine escape to Switzerland.*

Emilio tells Henry that he is going to be arrested the following morning. He and Catherine set out for Switzerland by boat with the barman's help. Water again represents the path to liberation, as Henry rows throughout the night. In Switzerland, it is raining, but this is a 'cheerful rain' (p.248), due to the fact that Switzerland is a neutral country and thus not involved

in the war. Henry and Catherine are arrested after breakfast, but after giving false identities they manage to continue on their way.

Q How does Hemingway give a sense that Henry and Catherine are about to embark on a new, different life in Switzerland?

Book V

Chapters 38–40 (pp.257–75)

Summary: *Frederic and Catherine spend the winter in Montreux.*

A year has passed since the first scenes in Gorizia. The weather is frosty, suiting the mood of the events that are about to transpire. Henry and Catherine set up house in a chalet near Montreux, where they stay through winter until the baby is due. The war seems distant in this setting. They talk of getting married. Catherine tells Henry about the sights she wants to see in the United States. 'I want you so much I want to be you too', she tells him (p.266).

Q In what ways does Hemingway explore the relationship between Henry and Catherine in these chapters?

Chapter 41 (pp.276–93)

Summary: *Catherine's labour proves difficult and then catastrophic: she and the baby die.*

In this chapter the novel reaches its tragic conclusion. Catherine's agonising labour pains begin. Henry's heart aches for her, and he reflects ruefully: 'This was what people got for loving each other' (p.283). His mind begins its relentless ruminations; he is convinced that the labour will prove fatal, and the word 'die' appears over and over again in his inner monologue. In Henry's mind, love, sex and death become inextricably linked: those fundamental urges which lead to the creation of new life also lead to death. The doctor recommends birth by caesarean section, a much more dangerous procedure than today. Catherine, in words which echo Henry's meditation about the way the world breaks everyone, declares, 'I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken' (p.285).

Outside, it is raining again. The baby, a boy, is born dead, his mother's umbilical cord strangling him, although this is not immediately made clear. He is described as resembling 'a freshly skinned rabbit', a pathetic, heartbreaking comparison (p.286). Henry goes to a nearby cafe for breakfast, noting the things happening around him in a futile attempt to shift his mind off events inside the hospital. People go on with their everyday lives; Henry is alone with his anguish. Catherine's courage remains strong at the end: 'I'm not afraid. I just hate it' (p.292). Nothing can save her, and her utterly bereaved partner walks off back to the hotel – fittingly 'in the rain' (p.293).

Q Do you feel a sense of inevitability about the ending? If so, how has Hemingway created this?

CHARACTERS & RELATIONSHIPS

Frederic Henry

KEY QUOTES

'My life used to be full of everything ... Now if you aren't with me I haven't a thing in the world.' (p.228)

'Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation ... it was not my show any more.' (p.206)

Henry provides Hemingway's narrative voice, and his consciousness dominates the novel. He tells his story retrospectively; as he recalls the events of this earlier time in his life, it is as if he relives them as he relates them. As he is a first-person narrator, we are able to see his perspective of events at close range, yet it takes quite a while before we get a strong sense of his personality. He takes the trouble to sketch the details of his environment before even revealing his name. Hemingway skilfully has his hero reveal himself little by little, so that we feel we are getting to know him in the same way that we get to know a real person – a person who is reserved, but of depth, so that there is always something new to discover about him. As the narrative progresses, we gain a sense of a man who is gradually becoming increasingly aware of feelings which have remained below the surface of his conscious mind. Henry is a deeply thoughtful man, yet he tells the priest, 'I never think' because he becomes depressed when he does. It is by speaking that he becomes aware of what is going on in his mind: 'when I begin to talk I say the things I have found out in my mind without thinking' (p.161) – that is, he learns what he thinks when he hears what he says.

Henry has a deep capacity for feeling, as his story makes abundantly clear. We feel his pain acutely at the end of the novel, when the world has 'broken' him, too, as he feels it breaks everyone. Whether he has become, in his words, 'stronger at the broken places' (p.222) is arguable, as it appears that he has failed to move on from his personal tragedy

and that his grief is still fresh. This makes him very human, for although he is stoic, he is still deeply vulnerable to pain. As his relationship with Catherine deepens, so too does his emotional capacity. When he first sets eyes on her, he is at once strongly drawn to her, but his feelings take a while to develop into love. Eventually, he feels 'faint with loving her so much' (p.230). His love for her gives him respite from the sufferings of life at war, but later, of course, draws him into the deepest suffering of all.

Henry may deny that he thinks, but he cannot fool us. As was Hemingway, his creator, he is highly intelligent, observant and reflective, even poetic at times. He knows about military history and has a strong sense of historical perspective, comparing Napoleon's war strategies with those of World War I (Chapter 19). He has an ironic sense of humour which emerges sometimes at unexpected times – especially when he is in hospital and trying to cheer himself up with his own wit. His powers of observation can be seen from his acute sensitivity to his environment, especially the natural world. Some of the most attractive parts of the novel demonstrate this, such as the scene in which the bat enters the room in which he and Catherine are sleeping, and the scene when he shelters in the barn following his escape and recalls his boyhood happiness in the outdoors.

Henry is tenacious and a survivor, although his survival is certainly attended by a good deal of luck. His desertion reveals, more than anything, a capacity for quick thinking and for self-preservation. We feel that under the circumstances it is entirely justifiable. Yet Henry shows an unexpectedly ruthless streak when he shoots one of the two Italian sergeants who refuse to help him (Chapter 29). Henry does not question his own motives about the incident, but the fact that he faces a similar situation a day later – but as the possible victim – suggests that Hemingway wants his readers to do so. The way that Henry comes up with a scheme to help the soldier from America escape combat duty (Chapter 7) demonstrates that he is hardly a 'stickler' for rules. Why does he kill the sergeant for an arguably milder act of insubordination? We are not given the answer, but remember: Henry has been given the responsibility of getting his ambulances and the men under his command to safety. At

this point in the retreat, it is clear that his choices (letting his men sleep for three hours before starting; trying to take a short cut to Udine) are leading to failure in that mission. By the end of the retreat he has lost all his ambulances and two of his three drivers.

On the banks of the Tagliamento *carabinieri* are summarily shooting officers. They declare they are doing so because the officers have 'abandoned' their troops (p.199), but it is apparent that the origin of these actions lies in their frustration and humiliation that the tide of war has turned against Italy. Does Henry, too, shoot the sergeant out of a similar sense of humiliation and personal failure?

Catherine Barkley

KEY QUOTES

'She had wonderfully beautiful hair and I would lie sometimes and watch her twisting it up in the light that came in the open door and it shone even in the night as water shines sometimes just before it is really daylight.' (pp.102–3)

'I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now.' (p.285)

It is important to consider that the portrait which Hemingway has his narrator paint of his beloved is likely to be idealised. Those we have loved are often enlarged in death beyond what they were in life, and Frederic Henry has probably presented Catherine to us in this light. Nobody is ever perfect, yet we are given very little sense of any faults that Catherine may have had. She is a very capable and conscientious nurse, 'greatly liked by the nurses because she would do night duty indefinitely' (p.97). Her most admirable quality is her courage, and it is likely that Hemingway has created her as an embodiment of the kind of courage which, though indomitable, offers no protection against the blows of the world. Therefore, the woman whom Henry at one stage said would never be broken is finally killed by the circumstances which life deals her.

She has undergone many trials in her most recent years, from the tragic death of her fiancé at the Battle of the Somme to the strains of nursing in a war zone. Then she has to cope with the circumstances of her pregnancy at a time when an unmarried pregnant woman would

likely have been adversely judged. Her pregnancy occurs at a time in history when the rate of death of women in childbirth was far higher than it is today, and there was often real danger involved. Her suffering during labour is truly pitiable, and given that this episode closes the novel, we are left with a feeling of deep sadness.

Yet there is also plenty of evidence of her strength. It takes courage to defy convention by having a child while unmarried, even though she cannot cut herself loose completely from the values of her time – at one point she says that she feels ‘like a whore’ (p.137). She is strong minded and frank with Henry when she needs to be; for example, in the early stages of the relationship when she slaps his face (p.24) and tells him she realises he is not really in love with her (p.30). But when she commits herself to their relationship, she does so wholeheartedly, perhaps as a result of her regret at not having deepened her relationship with her fiancé when she had the chance.

Like Henry, she has no religion other than her worship of her beloved. In fact, the way she describes their relationship is in terms of the biblical concept that a married man and woman are ‘one flesh’ – ‘I want you so much I want to be you too’, she tells him, to which Henry responds, ‘We’re the same one’ (p.266). She and Henry, indeed, feel just as married to each other as if they had been legally married. Some of her statements of her feelings suggest complete, albeit willing, self-denial, such as, ‘I want what you want. There isn’t any me any more. Just what you want’ (p.96).

It is this kind of statement that some feminist critics adduced as evidence for their judgement that Hemingway depicts Catherine as a weak, submissive woman – a view which I think is untenable in the light of other evidence. Such a judgement ignores the strength in Catherine. Often this is a strength that emerges through her capacity to love and to nurture, to give herself without stint. She is a life-giving person in that she turns a time of desolation for Henry into a time of delight.

- Q** Do you find Hemingway’s portrait of Catherine to be idealised?
- Q** Do you find her too self-denying?
- Q** Would you consider her to be heroic? In what ways, if any, might a heroic woman differ from a heroic man?

Helen Ferguson

KEY QUOTES

'You're two of the same thing ... I'm ashamed of you, Catherine Barkley. You have no shame and no honor and you're as sneaky as he is.' (p.220)

'Be nice to her. Think how much we have and she hasn't anything.' (p.229)

In contrast to her fellow nurse Catherine Barkley, Helen Ferguson is a negative personality, certainly not a life-giving person. In some respects, she is a stereotype of a dour Scot. She consistently expresses disapproval of Catherine and Frederic's relationship: for a long while it appears that this arises from jealousy for people who have the intimate relationship which she lacks, or from genuine concern for Catherine, or perhaps from both. Later we learn that she is really quite emotionally dependent upon Catherine and fears losing her if she goes away to live with Henry.

She can be quite fierce, telling Henry: 'I'll kill you!' (p.98) if he gets Catherine pregnant. When she learns that Catherine is indeed pregnant, she tells her: 'I can't stand him', and accuses Henry of 'ruin[ing] you with his sneaking Italian tricks' (p.220). This is the puritan in her coming through, a puritanism which tends to see 'morality' as applying solely to one's sexual behaviour. Her attitude that 'I don't want you happy the way you are' (that is, unmarried) is hardly attractive.

Rinaldi

KEY QUOTE

'All summer and all fall I've operated. I work all the time. I do everybody's work. All the hard ones they leave to me. By God, baby, I am becoming a lovely surgeon.' (p.150)

Rinaldi, the surgeon and 'war brother' of Henry is, by contrast, an attractive character. The vigour of his personality adds spirit and colour to a story which is often quite bleak. As with his portrait of Helen Ferguson, there is an element of stereotyping in Hemingway's portrait of him: he has the emotiveness, enthusiasm and volubility often associated with Italians. He loves Henry, often addressing him with terms of endearment. It is possible to see a homoerotic element in the friendship. When Rinaldi

joshes Henry that he and the priest are 'a little that way' (p.61) – that is, homosexual – he may be saying he is aware of this element. Hemingway sets up Rinaldi as a foil (an interesting contrast) to Henry, the much more reserved and laconic American. He playfully accuses Henry of talking 'like a time-table' when describing his travels, listing the places he has been instead of describing 'any beautiful adventures' (p.11). Yet he also tells Henry, 'you are just like me underneath ... you are really an Italian. All smoke and fire and nothing inside' (p.61). In dialogues between the two men, Rinaldi always says far more. Rinaldi is mercurial in nature, labile (quickly changing) emotionally. When we first meet him, he explains to Henry that he has designs on Catherine, but shortly afterwards expresses pleasure when he learns that his friend has established a connection with her.

Rinaldi's work as a surgeon in wartime is stressful, as he indicates when he tells Henry: 'This war is killing me' (p.150) or again, 'I know many things I can't say' (p.153). He has to suppress his thoughts and feelings in order to survive the strain. 'I don't think', he explains, 'I operate' (p.151). Rinaldi does not lose his courage or his good humour. No sooner has he complained to Henry about how terrible the war is, than he tells him, 'We'll both get drunk and be cheerful' (p.151). He often provides light relief with his bawdy sense of humour, such as when he describes the only 'two other things' he likes apart from his work (p.153). Yet there is a palpable sense, after Henry returns from Milan, that Rinaldi may be starting to crack. His jokes at the mess soon turn serious and belligerent: 'You can't do it. You can't do it. I say you can't do it. You're dry and you're empty and there's nothing else ... Not a damned thing' (p.156). The 'two other things' he loves besides surgery – drink and sex – are starting to turn on him: the major believes he is drinking too much and Rinaldi believes he has contracted syphilis.

Count Greffi

key quote

'This life is very pleasant. I would like to live forever ... I very nearly have.'
(p.232)

The Count is a minor but important character. He is clearly a man of great charm and warmth, and for a short time, as he and Henry drink and play billiards together, he gives the American the gift of himself, his wisdom, his deep appreciation of life. The time they spend together is brief, but he has obviously made a powerful impression upon Henry, so that he becomes an important part of his story. Although Greffi is 'looking very fragile' his interest in life is still strong. In fact, he tells Henry he feels he *has* lived forever: by this I think he means that he sees living forever in terms of quality of life, rather than in chronological terms – although he has certainly done well in that regard. Indeed, he stands out for his longevity in a story which tells of the premature deaths of so many. He is an example of the way life can turn out for some fortunate people – long, rich, and full of interest. The scene in which he appears is a patch of light in a story filled with much darkness. Although the nearness of his own death shadows the conversation between him and Henry, the impression we are left with is one of life. When he tells Henry that to be in love is 'a religious feeling' (p.234) he gives him a blessing – one which he remembers and presumably values, even in the light of the painful loss of his own beloved.

- Q** Why do you think Hemingway may have included this scene at this stage of the novel?
- Q** The Count contends that growing careful is 'a very unattractive wisdom' (p.232). What do you think he means by this?

THEMES, IDEAS & VALUES

Hemingway's world view or philosophy of life

KEY QUOTE

'That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you.' (p.289)

I think it is possible to trace the essence of the author's world view, or philosophy of life, in the novel. For Frederic Henry, as for Hemingway himself, life is lived against a constant background of difficulty, discomfort, and loss. Hemingway's hero, at the end of the novel, is left empty in the rain and the dark – those recurring motifs of rain and darkness give the message that life is always shadowed by insecurity and uncertainty. At the heart of the novel is the matter of faith: how are we to live against the background of such uncertainty? Hemingway keeps bringing this question to the surface of the novel through the reflections of the narrator, and through his dialogue with characters such as the priest, Rinaldi, and Count Greffi.

The term 'the Hemingway code' is central to an understanding of the author's view of life. For Hemingway, our only certainty is our own death, and death is the end of everything. The possibility of an afterlife is discounted. Therefore, we must make the most of the one life we have, in particular by satisfying our sensual desires such as eating, drinking, or enjoying sex. The enjoyment of the world of nature and of good conversation is also highly valued.

Loss

KEY QUOTE

'... after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.' (p.293)

The background of World War I is especially important here, as this traumatic event left the world in shock, brutally separating everything

before it from everything after it. The idea of loss is key. The war worsened the loss of confidence in old certainties that had begun years earlier, both from the rapid changes brought by industrialism and from new ideas – for example, Charles Darwin’s theory of the evolution of the species, which undermined for many the traditional, Bible-centred view of the world. In 1867, the English poet Matthew Arnold wrote his famous poem ‘Dover Beach’, which reflects upon such uncertainties. The poem concludes with the speaker addressing his wife. He speaks of their need to ‘be true/ To one another! for’, he continues:

... the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

These words express, to a remarkable degree, many of the sentiments of Hemingway’s novel. The conditions of life are those of defeat, and our hold on it is always fragile. Life is frighteningly random – the episode in which Henry battles against the raging current of the river is a metaphor for this randomness. Night is a particularly disquieting time for Henry, as the darkness seems to intensify his insecurities and memories of war. For Frederic and Catherine there is no help to be found beyond this life, so they must find comfort in their love for one another. Each describes the other as their religion. Count Greffi, too, describes love as a religious feeling (p.234).

Through the words of the Count, and of Frederic and Catherine, Hemingway implies that the only heaven is to be found in the love and comfort we find in each other; but here, too, hell is to be found, the hell of losing those whom we love. The anguish of loss is the price we pay for love. And the loss which Henry endures at the end of the story is total and crushing. The pleasure of sex leads only to death, just as life itself leads inexorably to death. Death is ‘the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap. This was what people got for loving each other’

(p.283). These sentiments show a mind on the edge of despair. We might conclude that nothing is worth this degree of pain, and that the major in Hemingway's story 'In Another Country' is right when he tells Nick Adams that 'a man must not marry' because '[I]f he is to lose everything, he should not place himself in a position to lose that. He should not place himself in a position to lose. He should find things he cannot lose' (Hemingway 1968, p.217). For Frederic Henry, the emotional pain of his loss is worse than the physical pain of his wounds, for it persists far longer and there is no treatment to alleviate it.

We have to see the pessimism of the novel's ending in the context of a man who *has* lost everything that is dear to him. The intensity of his despair is entirely understandable when viewed in this light. And yet it would be inaccurate to construe Hemingway's view of life as represented in the novel as totally pessimistic. If it were so, it would be impossible for the novel to be as satisfying as it is. For against the background of personal loss, and of the massive destruction and suffering of war, there is an affirmation of the ultimate value of life. The author describes the pleasures of daily living – the love, the good company, the pleasures of the flesh, the delightful memories of childhood – with freshness and vitality. Courage, humour, passion for living, the possibility of happiness: all these still survive, although we may have to remind ourselves of this when confronted with the uncompromising harshness of the ending.

Courage and heroism

Key quote

'If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, and 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.' (p.222)

Courage was, for Hemingway, the greatest virtue, because, he said, it was the quality which guaranteed all the others. He defined courage as 'grace under pressure', and this is exactly what many of his characters display. The soldiers stoically endure the daily terror of warfare; Rinaldi maintains his good humour in the midst of increasingly distressing work; and Catherine carries uncomplainingly the burdens of both her work and

her pregnancy. Courage may not save us ('if people bring so much courage to this world the world has to break them'), but it can ennoble and inspire us. Sometimes the most courageous act can be simply to get up in the morning and go on with life, putting one foot in front of the other.

To what extent is Frederic Henry presented as a hero? He may dismiss his wounding as no more than an accident, but this should fool no one, for any man wounded in war has knowingly put himself in harm's way. It is integral to Hemingway's conception of his hero that, before he makes his 'separate peace' (p.217), he earns his wound 'stripe' in war. Without the tangible evidence of bravery which these badges of honour bestow upon Henry, would we see his later decision to desert in a less favourable light? Certainly, Henry's own conception of honour makes him feel uncomfortable with this decision. Catherine's remark that it was 'only the Italian Army' (p.224) from which he deserted is, I think, Hemingway's attempt to deflect any blame that may have attached to his hero. Without doubt, once Henry makes his decision, he begins to feel detached from his old friends, even from the Italian way of life. We may ask whether desertion from the American army would have been viewed in a similar light by Hemingway's original readers. After all, although anti-war novels were in abundance at the time he published *A Farewell to Arms*, mainstream America was still a long way from accepting a viewpoint such as that of Tim O'Brien, the Vietnam War veteran and writer, who claimed: 'I was a coward' because 'I went to the war' (O'Brien 1990, p.71).

Although Henry feels qualms about deserting, the circumstances under which he flees the *carabinieri* are justified: he would, after all, have been needlessly killed. His escape reads like an episode from a novel of adventure; his dangerous battle with the currents of the river has an heroic quality. Whether or not we see him as heroic depends on many other considerations, for example his killing of the Italian sergeant. Undoubtedly Henry tries to fulfil his orders as best he can during the retreat from Caporetto, but in the end he fails, arguably through mistakes in judgement. Moreover, there is nothing stopping Henry from rejoining his unit after he has escaped from the *carabinieri*. The experience has left him shaken, but it has also made clear to him just how tenuous all

along were both his connections to his comrades and his loyalty to the Italian Army.

- Q** Which of the characters in the novel embody heroic qualities?
- Q** Do you see Frederic Henry as heroic? How do you feel about his decision to desert from the army?

War and its effects on those involved in it

KEY QUOTE

'Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.' (p.165)

The war in the Italian theatre is a constant presence in the novel, whether in the foreground or the background. At times the narrator describes the broad sweep of events; at others, like the war correspondent Hemingway was, he describes the close-up picture of events on the battlefield. Always we are aware of the cost of the war: the massive death toll which was a defining feature of this war, as well as the damage to property and the environment. Then there is the cost in sheer human misery: while Henry gives little detail of the psychological effect on him, he does speak of nightmares and a general fear of the night-time, and he describes unforgettably the shock of his own wounding and of the deaths of his fellow soldiers. We learn that news from the war zone is being censored, and we may ask if the war would have continued as long as it did if it had been fought under the multiple and ever-present spotlights of today's technology.

While the narrator speaks little about the politics of the war, we are left in no doubt that he feels the war to be futile. Few of the combatants seem to believe in what they are doing. This is a fairly accurate representation of the historical reality of the war: the tide of patriotic enthusiasm upon which it began soon receded, leading to revolt in many of the major armies. In the novel, Piani explains to Henry that '[w]e don't believe in the war anyway' (p.193), while other soldiers are heard shouting: *Viva la Pace!* (Long live peace!) and *'Andiamo a casa!'* (let's go home!, p.195).

One of the few voices in favour of continuing the war is that of Gino, the patriot, who contends that '[w]hat has been done this summer cannot have been done in vain' (p.165). This is the thinking which has led to the unnecessary continuation of many a war, up until the present day. In order to justify the sacrifice of those who have died, even more men are sent to die.

Hemingway, through his narrator, separates himself from this viewpoint, for Gino's statement sparks Henry's tirade against the rhetoric which seeks to defend war by presenting it as a noble and glorious cause and a sacred duty. 'I had seen nothing sacred', Henry declares, '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' (p.165). Both in his writing and in his philosophy, Hemingway always valued the concrete over the abstract, the actual over the hypothetical – and the sentiments in this passage are entirely in keeping with that scale of values. Hemingway has nothing but respect for the poor souls who suffer in war and nothing but contempt for those who send them to war. His narrator contemptuously dismisses such men: General Codorna is 'fat and prosperous' and Vittorio Emanuele is 'the tiny man with the long thin neck and the goat beard' (p.35). Many of the Italian soldiers are boys from peasant backgrounds who have been forced to continue fighting a war in which they do not believe, often in fear of reprisals against their families.

Hemingway's depiction of the randomness of war emphasises his sense of the randomness of life itself, a key theme in the novel. Passini is killed in the incident in which Henry is wounded, but it just as easily could have been Henry bleeding to death. As in all wars, deaths occur by error or 'friendly fire': Henry's friend Aymo dies pointlessly in this way, victim of an accident. Officers of the rank of major or above are killed by the *carabinieri*, whether they behaved well in the retreat or badly. These are all senseless deaths. Any idea of overarching purpose in the conduct of the war is thus gradually eroded in the all-consuming mess of war. Of course the most terrible, and most random, death of all is Catherine's. The violence of war cannot be blamed, yet as in a Shakespearean tragedy, there seems to be an inevitable quality to it (it is

foreshadowed a number of times in *A Farewell to Arms*), just as the love between Frederic Henry and Catherine seems doomed from the start. The aura of loss and death surrounding everything about this novel breaks the 'separate peace' Henry thought he had claimed. No other ending seems possible, or correct.

- Q** Would you consider this to be an anti-war novel?
- Q** What does this novel, about a war which took place nearly a century ago, have to say to us today about the nature of war?

Values

An author's values are often embedded in the text, implied rather than directly stated. While Hemingway explicitly writes in praise of courage, for example, he does not quite so explicitly make clear what else he values. But, by looking at the characters in the novel that are depicted favourably, we can surmise that he values generosity of spirit, good humour, warmth and intelligence, all qualities to be found in characters such as Catherine, Rinaldi and Count Greffi. Hemingway clearly values the love which people can give to each other, whether romantic or otherwise. His hero finds ultimate value solely in this life, for this is all we know, and he affirms the pleasures of the body and of the physical world around us: the pleasures of love, of food and drink, of nature. Frederic Henry is acutely sensitive to the world around him, as was his creator.

Through his accounts of the ugliness of war, Hemingway clearly says 'no' to war and to the violence and suffering that it causes. Every 'no' implies a corresponding 'yes', so we can assume that Hemingway is saying 'yes' to the deep sanity which living in peace would bring. This is implied in the scene in which Henry and Catherine spend the night together in the hospital, their love a contrast to, and a respite from, the sounds of war heard outside.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

Different interpretations arise from different responses to a text. Over time, a text will give rise to a wide range of responses from its readers, who may come from various social or cultural groups and live in very different places and historical periods. These responses can be published in newspapers, journals and books by critics and reviewers, or they can be expressed in discussions among readers in the media, classrooms, book groups and so on. While there is no single correct reading or interpretation of a text, it is important to understand that an interpretation is more than a personal opinion – it is the justification of a point of view on the text. To present an interpretation of the text based on your point of view you must use a logical argument and support it with relevant evidence from the text.

Critical viewpoints

A Farewell to Arms was Hemingway's second novel, and it attracted very complimentary reviews at the time of its publication. Critics admired its realism and the clarity of its style, and considered it to represent a great advance over his first novel. However, some critics expressed reservations about its language. Robert Herrick of the *New York World*, for example, described the novel as 'dirt' because of what he saw as its vulgarity. Evidently, a number of people took exception to the language, as an edited version of the novel later appeared with words like 'shit' and even 'testicles' edited out. Such language is tame by today's standards.

The novel became very popular in Europe, especially in France, where Hemingway has always been popular. In Nazi Germany, however, the novel was one of the books burned by Hitler's regime, perhaps because its anti-war theme, and plot in which the hero chooses to make love rather than war, were at odds with the Fascist glorification of war as 'the organising principle of the state'.

In the 1950s and 1960s attention was given to the individualist philosophy expressed in the novel. Earl Rovit, in his essay 'Learning to

Care', put forward an interesting point of view when he argued that the novel is not a tragedy in any sense, since the hero learns 'who he is'. For Rovit, the central point of the novel is that Henry comes to realise what is most important in life. 'The total effect of the story depends on the degree of Frederic's self-realisation or acceptance of the implicit meanings of his experience', he wrote, continuing by arguing that 'the identity of man is measured by the progressive recognitions of his meaningful experience'. (I will argue for this point of view in one of the two different interpretations of the novel below.)

Later, feminist critics, especially in the 1970s, found fault with the novel, regarding Hemingway as a male chauvinist and Catherine Barkley as a passive, two-dimensional character. Throughout the 1980s, however, Catherine came to be seen as a more complex figure. The posthumous publication of Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* also led to examinations of his interest in androgyny (the state of having both male and female characteristics), and *A Farewell to Arms* was thus re-examined in the light of this.

What is most important when you are writing an interpretation of a novel is that you can support your reading with evidence from the text, and that you take into consideration everything that is in the text. Your interpretation may be less than convincing, for example, if you ignore evidence from the text that contradicts your interpretation. A good strategy for reading is to follow the imagery of the text – look for repeated words, phrases, or images: these give a clue to the writer's emphasis. We cannot fail, for example, to be aware of Hemingway's repeated reference to rain and dark throughout the novel. Look, too, at the dialogue, for what the characters talk about can point to the key ideas, or themes, of a text.

Two interpretations

Here are two different, but possible, readings of *A Farewell to Arms*.

Reading 1

***A Farewell to Arms* is not a tragedy in any sense.**

One student described *A Farewell to Arms* as a tragedy because 'the woman died at the end', and 'the difference between tragedy and comedy

is that someone dies in a tragedy'. We would certainly not be likely to classify Hemingway's novel as a comedy (although it does contain mildly comic episodes and dialogue), but must we classify it as a tragedy simply because 'the woman died at the end'? While it is hard to deny that the ending is very sad, we should not lose sight of the fact that the author shows us many positive aspects of life.

Frederic Henry's love relationship with Catherine Barkley ends prematurely and painfully, but while it lasts, it gives each of them intense pleasure. The fact that our lives are fragile and so may end at any time does not negate the reality that there is still much in them to enjoy. Indeed, the awareness of death can inspire us to make the most of the time we have. This is so for both Frederic and Catherine; each has seen a great deal of death and therefore they live intensely while they can. Together they enjoy the physical, emotional and spiritual delights of their intense relationship. Neither is under any illusion that their relationship will necessarily last forever, given the dangers of the time and place in which they live. Both are aware of the need to make maximum use of the opportunity given to them: Henry quotes to Catherine lines from the poem 'To His Coy Mistress', speaking of the need to make the most of time, and Catherine has obviously learnt that her hesitation to marry her late fiancé deprived both of them of opportunities they may have had. Neither Frederic nor Catherine loses any opportunity to tell of the love that they feel for each other.

Furthermore, although Henry certainly encounters tragedy and deep sadness in his life – not only the loss of Catherine but the loss of friends in the war – his own life is far from a tragedy. On the contrary, his story can be seen as an inspiring one of progressive self-discovery. Instead of continuing to expend his courage and to risk his life in a cause which he has come to regard as futile, he uses his courage to make his 'separate peace' (p.217) and, in so doing, saves himself from a useless death. He is thus free to continue what will almost certainly be a useful and productive life – given that he is a man of intelligence, wit and spirit. At his best, he is a man fully alive: certainly in his body, and, as time passes, in his mind and spirit, too. It is possible to view Henry as a hero embodying the best spirit of American individualism, reflecting a very positive aspect of a

country which has sometimes displayed totalitarian tendencies. In many stories considered to be tragic, the hero will often destroy himself, or other people, or be destroyed by other events or people. Such is far from the case for Frederic Henry.

Reading 2

***A Farewell to Arms* displays a tragic view of life.**

Hemingway's novel is set against a background of profound suffering: the battles of World War I in Italy. The constant references to rain and mud, as well as to the death, injury and destruction caused by the war, make this a very dark work. Frederic Henry, the narrator, constantly emphasises the human cost of the war, such as the loss of well-liked friends such as Aymo, and his own severe wounding. What makes this picture of war so grim is that the war itself is depicted as increasingly futile, so that all this suffering and sacrifice is in vain. And while Henry himself manages to escape from the battle zones and make his own 'separate peace' (p.217), most of his comrades in arms are not so fortunate. As the war continues, more and more of the Italians fighting it express disillusion. The war itself, then, is a large part of the tragedy which Hemingway depicts.

Added to the tragedy of the war is the personal tragedy described in the novel: that of Catherine Barkley's death in childbirth. Since we have been shown the depth and intensity of her love relationship with Frederic, the sudden loss of this relationship is all the more painful to contemplate. The narrator's grief and sense of futility are total: 'That is what you did', he remarks. 'You died' (p.289). The love which he and Catherine have struggled to preserve under adverse conditions is lost with a single, brutal blow. To add to the loss, their baby also dies. The fact that the novel ends on this note of anguish is significant, suggesting that the last impression Hemingway wants to leave with his readers is of the ultimate tragedy of life. As Frederic Henry walks away alone into the rain, we are left to contemplate the helplessness of humans at the mercy of a cruel fate.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

This section focuses on your own analytical writing on the text, and gives you strategies for producing high-quality responses in your coursework and exam essays.

Essay writing – an overview

An essay is a formal and serious piece of writing that presents your point of view on the text, usually in response to a given essay topic. Your ‘point of view’ in an essay is your interpretation of the meaning of the text’s language, structure, characters, situations and events, supported by detailed analysis of textual evidence.

Analyse – don’t summarise

In your essays it is important to avoid simply summarising what happens in a text:

- A **summary** is a description or paraphrase (retelling in different words) of the characters and events. For example: ‘Macbeth has a horrifying vision of a dagger dripping with blood before he goes to murder King Duncan’.
- An **analysis** is an explanation of the real meaning or significance that lies ‘beneath’ the text’s words (and images, for a film). For example: ‘Macbeth’s vision of a bloody dagger shows how deeply uneasy he is about the violent act he is contemplating – as well as his sense that supernatural forces are impelling him to act’.

A limited amount of summary is sometimes necessary to let your reader know which part of the text you wish to discuss. However, always keep this to a minimum and follow it immediately with your analysis (explanation) of what this part of the text is really telling us.

Plan your essay

Carefully plan your essay so that you have a clear idea of what you are going to say. The plan ensures that your ideas flow logically, that your argument remains consistent and that you stay on the topic.

- Highlight the key words of your chosen topic. Jot down all the thoughts which each word sparks relating to the text. Keep 'brainstorming', writing down what comes into your mind in note form.
- Identify a number of key aspects of the topic around which your essay will sit. Formulate a heading for each.
- Each heading will form the basis of the topic sentence for each paragraph. You will thus be able to start each paragraph with a sentence which clearly relates to the topic you are discussing. A topic sentence is like a signpost for you and your reader. Like a signpost, it should be short and easy to take in. Shorter opening sentences are more effective than longer ones.
- Gather together some detailed notes under each heading. This detail will form the basis of each paragraph of your essay.

Structure your essay

An essay is a complete, self-contained piece of writing. It has a clear beginning (the introduction), middle (several body paragraphs) and end (the last paragraph or conclusion). It must also have a central argument that runs throughout, linking each paragraph to form a coherent whole.

See examples of introductions and conclusions in the 'Analysing a sample topic' and 'Sample answer' sections.

The introduction establishes your overall response to the topic. It includes your main contention and outlines the main evidence you will refer to in the course of the essay. Write your introduction *after* you have done a plan and *before* you write the rest of the essay.

The body paragraphs argue your case – they present evidence from the text and explain how this evidence supports your argument. Each body paragraph needs:

- a strong **topic sentence** (usually the first sentence) that states the main point being made in the paragraph
- **evidence** from the text, including some brief quotations
- **analysis** of the textual evidence explaining its significance and **explanation** of how it supports your argument
- **links back to the topic** in one or more statements, usually towards the end of the paragraph.

Connect the body paragraphs so that your discussion flows smoothly. Use some linking words and phrases like ‘similarly’ and ‘on the other hand’, though don’t start every paragraph like this. Another strategy is to use a significant word from the last sentence of one paragraph in the first sentence of the next.

Use key terms from the topic – or similes for them – throughout, so the relevance of your discussion to the topic is always clear.

Keep quotations short and integrated with your own words. For example: Henry believes that ‘the world breaks everyone’ and that sometimes it ‘has to kill them to break them’.

The conclusion ties everything together and finishes the essay. It includes strong statements that emphasise your central argument and provide a clear response to the topic.

Avoid simply restating the points made earlier in the essay – this will end on a very flat note and imply that you have run out of ideas and vocabulary. The conclusion is meant to be a logical extension of what you have written, not just a repetition or summary of it. Writing an effective conclusion can be a challenge. Try using these tips:

- Start by linking back to the final sentence of the second-last paragraph – this helps your writing to ‘flow’, rather than just leaping back to your main contention straight away.
- Use similes and expressions with equivalent meanings to vary your vocabulary. This allows you to reinforce your line of argument without being repetitive.
- When planning your essay, think of one or two broad statements or observations about the text’s wider meaning. These should be related to the topic and your overall argument. Keep them for the conclusion, since they will give you something ‘new’ to say but still follow logically from your discussion. The introduction will be focused on the topic, but the conclusion can present a wider view of the text.

Essay topics

- 1 'Hemingway is far more aware of the hardships of life than of the pleasures. Thus, the view of life he presents in *A Farewell to Arms* is unbalanced.' Discuss.
- 2 'Frederic Henry's life is most difficult, but Catherine suffers more deeply.' Discuss.
- 3 'We pity Frederic Henry rather than admire him.' Discuss.
- 4 '*A Farewell to Arms* demonstrates the power of love in the midst of adversity.' Discuss.
- 5 'The love story in *A Farewell to Arms* is a distraction from the real interest of the novel, Hemingway's account of life at war.' Discuss.
- 6 Passini says, "There is nothing worse than war". Does *A Farewell to Arms* show this to be true?
- 7 'The novel shows that adversity brings out the most admirable human qualities.' Discuss.
- 8 "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them." Does the novel show that courage is useless?
- 9 "You don't know much, darling, for such a wise boy." How much wisdom does Frederic Henry gain in the course of his story?
- 10 'The novel shows us both the pain and the pleasure of life.' Discuss.

Vocabulary for writing on *A Farewell to Arms*

World War I: also known as the Great War. This war lasted from August 1914 to November 1918, was fought in a number of different theatres, and involved many countries.

The Italian theatre of war: the locations in Italy which became battlegrounds during World War I.

The Battle of the Somme: a massive, protracted battle in France during World War I, beginning on 1 July 1916. Catherine Barkley's fiancé was killed in this battle.

Carabinieri: Italian military police.

Separate peace: Henry's act of laying down arms and leaving the war.

First-person narrator: a narrator, or storyteller, who is the main character in a story and tells that story from their own perspective (using the first-person pronoun, 'I').

Analysing a sample topic

'We pity Frederic Henry rather than admire him.' Discuss.

Key words in the topic are 'pity' and 'admire'. Keeping in mind the importance of using a wide and varied vocabulary, we can look for synonyms for these two words to avoid constantly repeating them. Instead of 'pity', for example, we can write 'sympathise with', 'feel compassion for', 'empathise with'. Instead of 'admire', we can write 'respect', 'recognise the attractive qualities of', or 'like' – all related terms.

This topic is set up to discriminate between more thoughtful and less thoughtful students. Like many essay questions, it may trap us into taking an 'either/or' approach: that is, to argue that we either pity Henry or admire him. But why can't we do both? We may pity him at certain stages of the story and admire him at others, or both pity and admire him simultaneously – such as when he is wounded, for at this time he suffers badly yet shows great courage. Often we are tempted to view issues in terms of 'either/or' or 'black/white', but life is rarely that simple.

In any essay, we need to recognise the difference between analysing and paraphrasing – that is, simply retelling the story. This is an important skill to learn. The advice to give here is: refer, don't reproduce. That is, assume that your readers know the text, so don't retell aspects of the storyline in great detail. Consider these two examples which students writing on the topic above may have composed.

Student A:

Frederic Henry is wounded by Austrian mortar fire and Passini is killed in the same blast. Henry's legs are seriously damaged and as a result he has to spend several months in hospital in Milan. He is in considerable pain from his wounds.

Student B:

We can admire Frederic Henry for his courage when he is wounded. Despite his immediate shock and pain, he is still responsive to the sufferings of those around him. While hospitalised with his wounds, he is uncomplaining and maintains his sense of humour, as we see from the jokes he makes to the nurses.

See the difference? Student A has simply retold part of the story; Student B has used that part of the story to make a point relating to the topic under discussion.

So, what kind of material could we use in this essay? Given that there is much about Henry and his life that we can both admire and pity, we can reframe the prompt so that it is closer to our own reading of the text. We might begin thus:

Frederic Henry, the narrator and main character of *A Farewell to Arms*, endures great suffering in the course of the events which he describes from his life. Not only does he undergo the trials of a terrible war, but he also loses the woman he loves in tragic circumstances. It is impossible not to pity him at the end of the story, as he walks away, alone and totally bereft, into the rain. And yet, Henry endures his difficulties with a courage and strength which we can admire. And as we get to know him as a character, we find that there is much else about him which we can admire.

We can now arrange our more detailed material into separate paragraphs. We could, for example, write a couple of paragraphs about Henry's experience of the war: the dreadful scenes he witnesses, his wounding and so on. We could write another paragraph about his intelligence, perceptiveness, responsiveness, and other admirable qualities. We could then write about his relationship with Catherine – how much it means to him, how much he loses. All this material can be used in such a way that it answers the question.

We might end in this way:

'The world breaks everyone', Henry tells us, and we are saddened by the way in which this has come to pass in Henry's life. We feel deep pity for him at the end of the story, as he feels he has lost everything that matters to him. But we can still admire the courage with which he has lived through this difficult period.

SAMPLE ANSWER

‘The novel shows us both the pain and pleasure of life.’ Discuss.

Hemingway’s novel *A Farewell to Arms* is set against the background of a terrible war, the Italian theatre during World War I. For the majority of the novel, this war and the sufferings it causes are never far from the consciousness of the narrator, Frederic Henry. The atmosphere of the novel is often bleak, with constant references to the rain and the dark setting a sombre mood. Then, too, an important element of the story is the love relationship between Frederic Henry and the nurse, Catherine Barkley. This relationship ends tragically with the deaths in childbirth of both Catherine and her baby, leaving Henry completely bereft and broken. And yet, despite these grim events, so central to the novel, there is much in it which is life affirming and which speaks of the happiness to be found, even against a backdrop of anguish and suffering. The narrator displays a deep responsiveness to all elements of life, not just the most painful.

The war in which Henry is a participant brings great suffering to all those involved in it. He describes, for example, in intimate detail, the moment at which he is wounded, the shock and pain of it. He also witnesses the agonising death of his comrade, Passini, who has not long before declared that ‘there is nothing worse than war’. The manner of his death seems to demonstrate the truth of this statement. Henry also witnesses the death by ‘friendly fire’ of his friend Aymo, a man whom ‘[he] had liked ... as well as anyone [he] ever knew’. As well as the pain of these losses, and the physical pain of his leg wounds, endured over months in hospital in Milan, Henry endures nightmares and terrible memories of what he has seen in the war; often he speaks of his fear of the darkness and of the night-time.

Catherine Barkley, too, has endured the pain of loss caused by war – the death of her fiancé in the Battle of the Somme. The mention of this battle, with the massive casualties that were so typical of World War I,

reminds us of the terrible cost of the war in terms of lives lost and of sheer human misery. It is apparent that many of the Italian soldiers do not believe in the war, remaining in it often out of fear of reprisals against their families. We are shown instances of soldiers who desert and shout slogans such as '*Viva la Pace!*' (Long Live Peace) and '*Andiamo a casa!*' (Let's go home). Henry himself is forced to desert from the army in order to avoid a completely futile death at the hands of the Italian *carabinieri* (military police). And it is not only the combatants who suffer; there is also the suffering of the civilians caught up in the war, so poignantly demonstrated in Hemingway's account of the retreat from the disastrous Battle of Caporetto.

But the human spirit can be tough and resilient, and Hemingway shows us characters who give life in the midst of so much death. There is, for example, the camaraderie between Henry and Rinaldi, the cheerful and entertaining Italian surgeon. He is an affectionate man, giving warmth and happiness to his friends. He is the kind of person who is responsive to both the pain and pleasure of life: even though he has witnessed things about which he cannot speak, he still enjoys his creature comforts such as wine, and women, although he jokes that the pleasure of love making is all too short. Then there is the aged Count Greffi, whom Henry meets in Switzerland. Like Rinaldi, he is a life-giving person, a man who feels he has already lived forever, but a survivor who still takes much pleasure from life. Love, he tells Henry, is 'a religious feeling'. He even inspires Henry, an atheist, to assure him that he will pray for him – which we can take to mean that Henry believes in him, that he sees great value in people such as him.

Henry himself shows a strong capacity to find blessings in his life. We recall, in this respect, the incident in which he shelters in the barn during his escape, and recalls with deep pleasure his boyhood experiences in the outdoors back in the United States. Then there is the scene set at night-time in Milan, when he and Catherine, while sleeping together, become aware of a bat in the room, and this visitor, which would normally be unwelcome, becomes a happy addition to the scene. We become aware

in this scene, too, of the comfort that people in love can derive from each other's presence, the importance of intimate relationships in pushing back the darkness, both literal and metaphorical, with which we are often surrounded.

Of course, the relationship between Catherine and Henry ends tragically, pulling Henry back into the darkness of utter loss and desolation. We cannot gainsay that the ending of the novel is very bleak and even distressing to read. The description of Catherine's agonising death, as well as of her dead baby, looking 'like a skinned rabbit', is almost unbearable. And yet, it is possible to argue that the novel as a whole would be intolerable to read if it were not for its author's deep responsiveness to the life-giving people who are to be found in even the most difficult environments, and who help to lighten even the heaviest burdens.

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