

A farewell to arms



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A Farewell to Arms If The Sun Also Rises was one of the best books I have ever read, then A Farewell to Arms is Truth. I simply cannot believe that these books existed so long without my knowledge of how grand they are. I consider myself to read constantly, more than almost anyone I know, literature and simple, and here in less than a month I read two books that are undoubtedly among the best I have encountered. How many other good books exist that I have yet to read? Am I really a reader? Will I ever finish them all? What will I do if I tire of reading? When I finished FTA I was of course stunned by the death of Catherine and the baby and Henry's sudden solitude. "What happens now?" I felt, as I so often do when I finish a book that I want to go on forever. This is infinitely more difficult with a book that has no conclusion, and FTA leaves a reader not only emotionally exhausted but also just as alone as Henry and with nowhere to go. The entire work was aware of where it was going and what was going to happen next, and then to stop the way it did was unfair. Now, I've read enough essays while deciding which would be the topic for my class presentation that I know many people see that the unfairness of life and the insignificance of our free will are apparently the most important themes in the book, but I don't agree. I also don't agree that it is a war story or a love story. Exactly what it is, though, is not clear to me. Can't art exist without being anything? "There isn't always an explanation for everything." War and love are obviously important themes in the book, and the relationship between the two is explored by Hemingway and, somewhat, by Henry. In the first two Books we are in the war and the war is overwhelming. In the last two Books we are in love. And, just as the first two Books are peppered with love in the time of war, the last two Books are tinged with war in the time of love. The third Book is the bridge between

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the two 'stories' and it is not surprising that it centers on the escape. It is during the escape that Henry resolves that he is through with the war (a war in which he really has no place) and decides that all he wants is to be with Catherine. Until the third Book Henry doesn't seem to be agonizingly concerned with matters of right or wrong in the war and it seems, in fact, separate from him. Even when he is injured it doesn't appear that he is really a part of the war which surrounds him. He maintains a distance from it and this distance isn't really closed until Aymo is killed by his own army, he discovers that Bonello is only staying with him out of respect, and he is almost killed as a spy. After this he resolves to desert the army and be reunited with his love, Catherine. Henry is no dummy and he could easily tell that everything was not all correct with Cat, which leads to the question of his love for her. You must admit that Cat is a bit... well... flaky when they first meet. She loses that persona soon enough, although I couldn't help but distrust her integrity until somewhere in the middle of the fourth Book. It is also difficult to believe wholeheartedly in his love for her until much later in their relationship, and it leaves me wondering if he is leaving his involvement in the war because of his unfailing love for Cat or if Cat and any feelings he has for her are just excuses to escape the insanity of the war he experiences in the third Book. When he is with Catherine, they are in another place, untouched by the war, both symbolically (in the tent of her hair) and literally (in Switzerland). It seems like I don't ever say anything earth-shattering, or even critical, in these response papers, and I'm not sure if I'm supposed to do that. The line, " The war seemed as far away as the football games of some one else's college," is beautiful.