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*Teaching Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (review)*

Mark Cirino

The Hemingway Review, Volume 28, Number 2, Spring 2009, pp.  
140-143 (Review)

Published by The Hemingway Foundation and Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hem.0.0038>



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*Teaching Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms*. Edited by Lisa Tyler. Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2008. 257 pp. Paperback \$36.00.

What a remarkable moment to introduce *A Farewell to Arms* to students. The novel is quite possibly more relevant today than when it was published in 1929. Among other things, the novel forces us to ask ourselves how we use language to coerce, to convince, to mask, and to express our desires—desires between man and woman, between humankind and God, and between government and citizens. Students will inevitably consider Hemingway's cautionary novel in the wake of an outgoing U.S. President who referred to the American struggle in Afghanistan as “exciting. . . in some ways romantic” and who vowed following the 4,000<sup>th</sup> death in Iraq to “make sure that those lives were not lost in vain” and that “there is an outcome that will merit the sacrifice.” To Frederic Henry, such comments would exemplify the obscene abstractions of wartime language. Students will recognize that in this novel written eighty years ago about a war that took place more than ninety years ago, Hemingway was addressing what Faulkner called “the old verities and truths of the heart.”

Guiding us through approaches to teaching this novel in various levels of study, editor Lisa Tyler has given us *Teaching Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms* (Kent State UP 2008). The book follows *Teaching Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises*, edited by Peter L. Hays (U of Idaho P 2003). Tyler's volume seems to be consciously more modest in scope than its predecessor: paperback, where the first was hardcover, containing fourteen instead of seventeen essays, and 257 pages instead of 403. The volume is usefully divided into four sections (although they occasionally overlap), each delineating a broad approach to the novel.

Charles M. Oliver and Frederic J. Svoboda each contribute an essay to the first section, “Backgrounds and Contexts.” Oliver traces the Hemingway biography relevant to the novel, and includes a helpful chronology of the war and *A Farewell to Arms*. Svoboda, who had two essays in the *Teaching The Sun Also Rises* volume, describes how to contextualize the novel for students who might otherwise be unaware of its historical framework. Svoboda puts great emphasis on the “use and misuse of language” of such concern to Frederic Henry, and asserts, “Current events again have lent

urgency to the novel.” For students apt to be closely affected by the present wars, and inclined to connect the novel to their current concerns, this angle is crucial not to overlook.

The next three essays—by J.T. Barbarese, Gail D. Sinclair, and Kim Moreland—are grouped by their attention to Hemingway’s style. Barbarese’s scrupulous attention to Hemingway’s grammar and syntax may shed new light for a teacher who tends not to use the word “hypotactic” during discussions of *A Farewell to Arms* (or anything else). Barbarese includes passages from Dreiser, Hawthorne, and Hurston to demonstrate how he differentiates the novel’s style from those of Hemingway’s contemporaries and predecessors, striving towards a definition of that fluid, vexed, and often misappropriated term: “Hemingwayesque.” Sinclair offers what she terms a “cartography” for teaching the novel, with special attention to the novel’s opening paragraph, a passage highlighted by several of the volume’s essays. She pursues the way the novel’s style reveals theme and content, expertly guiding the reader through the novel’s principal themes and linguistic markers. Like Sinclair, Moreland makes great use out of the “I was always embarrassed by the words” passage, which she refers to as her “point of entry.” Moreland’s sharp essay cites Frederic’s reference to the Chicago stockyards to emphasize the loss of the romantic view of war, and the contemporary relevance of its realities.

The next section—titled “Modernism and World War I”—contains essays by Ellen Andrews Knodt and Jennifer Haytock, essentially companion pieces in their respective pursuit of Hemingway as a modernist author related to Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Cather, and Eliot. Their articles guide us through their work on the novel with their classes, and include reading questions and key observations. In an innovative move, Knodt teaches the novel out of sequence from its 1929 date of publication, positioning it in her modernist survey before post-war literature written earlier.

In the other essay in this section, Jackson A. Niday II and James H. Meredith co-author a fascinating article about teaching the novel at the Air Force Academy. They chart three different notions of distance they see in *A Farewell to Arms*: geographical, chronological, and narrative. They question Frederic’s “competence and commitment,” and outline the typical trajectory of their class discussions, along with representative reactions from their cadets. They also correct what they find to be the prevailing misconception of Hemingway’s hawkish attitude toward war.

In the next grouping, Amy Lerman, Peter L. Hays, and Thomas Strychacz offer gender readings. Strychacz expands on the complexities of introducing the novel into the classroom, specifically the all-female class he teaches at Mills College. His focus is primarily on the novel's narrative problems and theme of sexual politics. Strychacz's thoughtful essay takes the reader inside his evidently vibrant classroom, generously citing (and graciously crediting) the compelling observations and probing questions of his students. He makes much of the notion of masquerades in the novel, pointing out that Catherine dies while wearing a mask and that Frederic receives the news, in Strychacz's words, behind a "cold, tough mask of fortitude."

The final three essays, in a section titled "Pedagogical Approaches," include Mark P. Ott's description of the unconventional Harkness class structure, as well as David Scoma and Brenda G. Cornell's essays on a multimedia approach to the novel. Ott's essay is a lucid description of unusually democratic and empowering classroom conditions. Ott operates from the perspective that the novel is indeed a masterpiece, and the goal is for students to appreciate its greatness and recognize its relevance, rather than evaluate its worth. The final two essays contrive ways to teach the novel by incorporating the various cinematic treatments of *A Farewell to Arms*. Scoma uses film to entice reluctant readers to the novel, presuming that however unrepresentative the movie adaptations of *A Farewell to Arms* may be, a movie will be more accessible than the novel itself. Likewise, Cornell's plan to teach the novel to community college students relies heavily on catering to "visual learners."

Just as the essays revisit the same crucial moments and sentences in the novel, this volume also serves as an incidental retrospective of criticism devoted to *A Farewell to Arms*. Michael S. Reynolds's *Hemingway's First War: The Making of A Farewell to Arms* is a touchstone for delineating the history and biography behind the fiction. These essays confirm the colossal debt all teachers owe to Reynolds's text, which emerges as the most important book of Hemingway criticism devoted to a single novel. Thematically, Carlos Baker's "The Mountain and the Plain" reading also remains part of the current critical discussion. Sandra Whipple Spanier's essays on Catherine Barkley provide valuable counterpoints to the once-prevailing critical trend that underestimated her worth as a character.

As satisfying as this book is, I hope that future volumes of *Teaching Hemingway* will draw from an international pool of Hemingway critics.

An Italian scholar's perspective on the depiction of the retreat from Caporetto, or an Eastern critic's reaction to Hemingway's depiction of wartime propaganda, for example, would enhance these entirely American views. An international novel and a globally known writer would benefit from a less provincial examination.

I read this book a couple of weeks before Barack Obama's inauguration, and a couple of months before I will teach *A Farewell to Arms* again. The innovations and ideas in these essays are exciting. Newly inspired by this valuable book, I am looking forward to exploring this novel's myriad components with my students once more. These essays, even while occasionally challenging the novel, combine to celebrate the power and timelessness of Hemingway's vision.

—Mark Cirino, *University of Evansville*

*Hemingway's The Dangerous Summer: The Complete Annotations.* By Miriam B. Mandel. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2008. xxv + 370 pp. Cloth: \$100.00.

"I started it all, but I doubt if it would have gone quite so far off the track if Hemingway hadn't come on the scene and, as usual, got the picture all wrong"—so noted Luis Miguel Dominguín later in his life, in response to Hemingway's rendering of his 1959 *mano a mano* series with Antonio Ordóñez (Mandel 61). Dominguín and other Spanish aficionados took some umbrage at Hemingway's (mis)representation of the matadors' joint corridas and individual talents in his serialized and posthumous versions of the text. As Miriam Mandel shows throughout her excellent study, *The Dangerous Summer* says as much about Hemingway's life, creative struggles, and tastes as it does about the cape work and cultural roots of its two protagonists. "Everything [. . .] had changed in the quarter-century since Hemingway last saw bullfights, and to him, of course, that meant that everything was worse. Had he seen the great years of Dominguín's and [Manuel Rodríguez Sánchez's] careers, he might have come to appreciate their talents and art, their innovations and stylistic excellences. But