

Love and War in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

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More than a decade after World War I ended, 1929 saw the publication of two of the most powerful depictions of the war, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Both novels provoked strong reactions in their own time—they were lauded in some quarters and banned in others—and both are canonical and widely read today. For many readers, these two novels are the definitive literary representations of World War I. In a now-classic essay that is frequently anthologized in critical guides to *All Quiet*, Helmut Liedloff compares Remarque's and Hemingway's depictions of the war at some length. Liedloff notes that both works “stress that side of the war which was, at that time [1929], not the official one: the unheroic, dirty, painful, bloody side of it” (404). Yet Liedloff identifies several differences between the two novels. War is only part of Hemingway's novel, for his protagonist, Frederic Henry, is able to escape from the front in a way that his counterpart in *All Quiet*, Paul Bäumer, cannot. Moreover, Liedloff finds that Hemingway's novel “makes extensive use of symbolism, whereas *Im Westen* [*All Quiet*] employs comparatively little” (391). The comparison is a valid one, and Liedloff's essay has no doubt directed many readers of Remarque to see in his work strong parallels with that of Ernest Hemingway.

Yet in stressing the difference between Hemingway's use of symbolism and Remarque's refusal to move beyond concrete description, Liedloff risks missing the forest for the trees. Symbolism in Hemingway's novel is not merely a gloss on concrete description nor should it be read as evidence that *A Farewell to Arms* is necessarily greater or more ambitious in scope than *All Quiet*. Rather, this difference in language indicates a more fundamental difference in genre, plot, and theme. Remarque and Hemingway both depict the war, but they do so

in the context of two very different literary modes. For Hemingway, war is inextricably bound up with love, and his war story quickly modulates into a romance. In fact, this romantic impulse runs not only through this novel but also through most of Hemingway's depictions of war. He tends to present combat as a rite of passage and an initiation for a young man who will eventually find love. Remarque, on the other hand, raises the possibility of romantic love only to underscore how impossible such a fiction is to maintain in the face of war. The starkest difference between the worldviews of these two novelists may therefore be found not in their respective use of symbolic language and patterns of imagery but in their depictions of women and in the very different conclusions that each draws about whether romantic love can offer a means of escaping the hardships of war.

An American who has volunteered as an ambulance driver in the Italian Army, Frederic Henry enters World War I in advance of his country. When a British nurse asks him why he joined the Italians, he responds laconically, "I was in Italy . . . and I spoke Italian" (22). But this hardboiled response does little to explain the sense of duty or purpose that prompted Henry to volunteer. As is typical of the Hemingway protagonist, he must be judged by his actions rather than by his words. Henry's voluntary service in an army with whose cause he agrees is the first and surest sign of his romantic disposition. Like Byron fighting for Greek independence a century earlier, Henry has followed the dictates of his conscience. Remarque's Paul Bäumer, on the other hand, enlists in his native German army because his classmates and his schoolmasters, particularly the patriotic Kantorek, expect it of him. Caught up in a wave of patriotism, he is too youthful, dutiful, and self-conscious to make a decision on his own terms. At the front, Paul soon finds that the romantic sentiments of his schoolmaster are entirely at odds with the grotesque and dehumanizing reality of modern warfare.

This gap between the schoolmaster Kantorek's romantic vision of war and the stark realities of the trenches may help to explain why