

## Document Citation

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## A FAREWELL TO ARMS

(U.S. 1932) 78 minutes \$30.00

Directed and Produced by Frank Borzage - Screenplay by Benjamin Glazer with Oliver Garrett from the novel by Ernest Hemingway - Cinematography by Charles Lang - A Paramount Picture, Reissued by Warner Brothers. Players: *Helen Hayes, Gary Cooper, Adolph Menjou, Jack LaRue, Mary Forbes, Gilbert Emery.*

### Review No. 1

Much of Hemingway's dialogue lives on in this historically interesting, early sound film, but unfortunately, much of it dies--in the rain, in the heat of battle, in the scenarist's re-writing, under the film editor's relentless shears and in the studio heads' final cut, which in those days was never permitted the director.

Some of the war scenes, quickly intercut and done with much overlapping montage, reach heights comparable to many in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Had Lewis B. Milestone done this film, the production would have dealt more directly with the war and the men who made the war, but--as Bill Horrigan points out below--romanticism was Borzage's forte and it emerges as a film of romance during wartime instead. Sometimes the film is over-romanticized to a point slightly beyond belief. A case in point is the closing scene where Cooper carries his lost love to the window to show her that the rain--of which she harboured much psychological dread--and the war had both ended. Since she has been dead for several minutes *before* he carries her to the window, she naturally experiences some difficulty in taking it all in. The book was essentially a book of pacifism; the film seems more about love and moral cowardice. My assumption is that it was Adolph Zukor, not Frank Borzage, who had trouble distinguishing the finer points among the three.

### Review No. 2

Although there's no absolute reason why it should be of much critical consequence, Ernest Hemingway's reported dissatisfaction with Frank Borzage's version of his novel has tended to keep this film from being allowed to stand on its own considerable merits. In 1932,

it must undoubtedly have been a riskier position to side with an assembly-line Hollywood director than with the ascendant star of the Lost Generation, but today there's no longer any excuse for denying Borzage's film its right to exist, unburdened by the Hemingway connection.

Borzage is *the* romantic director: whatever the material at hand, Borzage's practice characteristically transforms it into a love story--into a meditation on the world's vicissitudes besetting the couple. *A Farewell to Arms* represents this tendency at its most extreme: World War I is foregrounded only to the extent that it thwarts the history of the romance. As the lovers, Helen Hayes and Gary Cooper are unexpectedly

affecting; those who associate them only with their later more celebrated roles tend to forget the intensity and the range of physical passion they were allowed to exhibit. Indeed, the film amounts to a series of such surprises. Those sensitive to *studio style* of the period would be interested in seeing such a highly unlikely Warner Brothers film, with Charles Lang's Oscar-winning photography--its abundant soft-focus images strongly suggestive of the vision one might have thought Paramount had patented.\* The long subjective camera sequence, however, giving Cooper's point of view as he's carried along on a stretcher, remains striking both on its own terms as well as comparatively to other films of the period.

Borzage occupies an exalted position in the surrealist pantheon of cineastes, placed there partly thanks to his commitment to the annihilating force of love--to a world-denying *l'amour fou*. *A Farewell to Arms* is interestingly symptomatic in this respect. The only real problem (and it belongs not to the film but to the viewer) is that Borzage made an exceptional film whose title could lead one to expect other than what's being given . . . which situation could be compared to ordering hamburger, being served *chateaubriand*, then throwing it to the floor because it isn't hamburger.

-Bill Horrigan