

University of Waterloo

In Defense of Damianakes: How a Cover Illustration Upholds Symbolism and Form in

*A Farewell to Arms.*

By: Emma Tristan Little

Submission for the Betty G. Headley Senior Essay Award, 2020

Ernest Hemingway denounced the cover of *A Farewell to Arms* under the verdict that “The Cleon drawing has a lousy and completely unattractive decadence i.e. large, misplaced breasts, etc. about it which I think might be a challenge to anyone who was interested in suppressing the book” (Leff, 115). The illustrator responsible for the cover’s design, Cleonike “Cleon” Damianakes, composed for the novel a drawing depicting a man and an angel posed under an arched flowering branch (Fig. 1). At first glance, Hemingway’s criticism appears well founded as the illustration is heavily romanticized and unrepresentative of any scene that the author writes. However, further examination and close reading of both Hemingway’s text and Damianakes’ illustration reveals the cover artwork to be an extension,



Fig. 1: Cleon Damianakes’ cover illustration for *A Farewell to Arms*.

rather than a detraction, of the symbolism that depicts Frederic and Catherine’s Edenic love, that same love’s shortfall in its isolation, and the novel’s form as it points to an overarching sense of fleeting time and inevitable tragedy.

The first hints of the illustration’s symbolic significance come through in Damianakes’ rendering of her figures. The angel in particular, whose anatomy Hemingway so disliked, bares through her pose similarities to the figures *Danaë* (Fig. 2) and *Sleeping Venus* (Fig. 3) painted by Venetian Renaissance artist Titian. The bent and draped legs of Damianakes’ angel are arranged similarly to those of Titian’s *Danaë*, while the tilt of the angel’s head and her right arm closely resemble those of *Sleeping Venus*. Titian himself gets a mention in the novel, being alluded to

by Frederic and named by Catherine (Hemingway, 241). By composing her angel in such a way, Damianakes creates a touchstone to the mentioned artist and links her own illustration—via the motif of the reclining nude—to the Italian Renaissance, an art movement teeming with symbolic, allegorical artworks. Damainakes’ illustration, while perhaps having debatable aesthetic value, acts the part of a pared-down Renaissance painting as it is saturated with symbolism pointing to the narrative of Hemingway’s novel, and to the love between Frederic and Catherine.



Fig. 2: Titian, *Danaë*, 1544-1545.



Fig. 3: Giorgione and Titian, *Sleeping Venus*, 1510.

From the onset of their courtship, the love affair between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley is established by Hemingway as an Edenic space in which the lovers are safe from the tortures of The First World War. In Christian tradition “God planted a garden in Eden, in the East, and there he put the man he had formed. He made all kinds of beautiful trees grow there and produce good fruit” (*Good News Translation*, Gen. 2.8-9). These first humans, Adam and Eve, are created and live in the garden of Eden, while similarly Frederic and Catherine spend their early time together in the garden outside the British hospital. During their first meeting, Frederic notes that “Miss Barkley was in the garden” (Hemingway, 15) and upon their second meeting notices of the space “It was really very large and beautiful and there were fine trees in the grounds. Miss

Barkley was sitting on a bench in the garden” (21). By staging Frederic and Catherine’s early meetings in a garden, Hemingway maps the couple in his novel onto Christianity’s first couple: Adam and Eve. The connection between Frederic and Catherine, and Adam and Eve, through both pairs finding each other in a garden establishes the environment around Frederic and Catherine as their own version of the Edenic space.

The theme of the pair of lovers in an Edenic garden is communicated in Damianakes’ illustration through the presence of the orange-red flowers at the top of the composition. The flowers bloom over the heads of the man and the angel, while the arching shape of the branch suggests a protective cover that is bending around to envelop the pair. Rather than the foliage in the illustration being simply a disconnected background, it shelters the lovers, adopting the role of a shield that takes the garden from being a neutral space, to a protective space just as the Eden of Christian tradition is a protective space closed off from the outside world. The garden elements in Damianakes’ illustration symbolize a protective Edenic paradise that points back to how the British hospital’s garden provides a safe place for Frederic and Catherine into which they can, for a time, escape the war.

Later in the novel, the Edenic space between Frederic and Catherine becomes attached symbolically to Catherine’s hair. One of the first details Frederic notices about Catherine when he meets her is that she is blonde (16), and a little while later he mentions to her the beauty of her hair. After Frederic’s injury, when he is hospitalized and spends the nights with Catherine, there is a moment in which Catherine lets down her hair and “it would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls” (98). Catherine’s blonde hair becomes a golden tent that envelops herself and Frederic.

The hair, like the garden, becomes a protective Edenic space in which Catherine and Frederic are safe from the world.

Damianakes extends the idea of the two lovers inside a golden haven by rendering the male and angel figures of the cover illustration in a golden hue. The dominant colour for the illustration's larger shaded areas is a pale gold, while the linework—as well as the shading of the angel's hair, and the man's loincloth—are done in a metallic, darker gold that is reminiscent of the gold leaf used in gilding. The figures of Damianakes' illustration are together and enveloped in gold, just as Frederic and Catherine are together under the golden tent of Catherine's hair.

While gold is often associated with beauty, wealth, and the upper class it is also, from a physical standpoint, incredibly delicate. The thin gold leaf used in gilding can easily become unworkable if folded over onto itself, or will crumple if touched by the human hand. The golden hue of Damianakes' illustration, while primarily pointing to Catherine's enveloping hair, carries with it an array of positive and negative connotations. Such positives are the suggestions of Frederic and Catherine's golden tinted love as a space of beauty and richness. The negatives, however, are rooted in gold's delicate nature, and subtly drop the first hint of the love's ultimate fragility.

Damianakes' illustration becomes a messenger of not only the idealized Edenic space created by Frederic and Catherine's love, but also of the love's great shortcoming: that it is isolating. At several points in their journey, either Frederic or Catherine lament that there is no where for the two of them to go. Frederic expresses this exact concern, "I wish there was some place we could go" (26) as the two walk through the British hospital's garden. To Frederic's discontent Catherine replies, "There's isn't any place" (26). Such transactions of dialogue emphasize the idea that the Edenic space is removed from the larger world. This larger world—

at the time afflicted by war—is hostile and unaccommodating to the peaceful lives the lovers wish to have. Frederic and Catherine are isolated in the sense that while they are indulging in the Edenic space that is their love they are separated from the world around them, and the larger world also has no protective space for them.

Just as Frederic and Catherine have no safety or peace beyond their Edenic sphere, the figures in Damianakes' illustration have no world beyond the scene in which they are posed. The entire contents of the illustration are arranged into a circular composition, while everything outside this central scene is a simple field of dark blue. This dark blue colour used for the background is complementary to the red-orange hue of the flowers, the man's sword hilt, and the angel's loincloth. These complementary colours (orange and blue) are opposites on the colour wheel, and this opposition, while striking to the eyes, sets the two elements in stark contrast to one another. The world of the illustration is cast in warm hues and is tinted an idyllic gold, while the world outside the illustration is cold, dark blue, and empty of any other identifying details. There is no other area of Damianakes' artwork for the man and the angel to stretch into, just as there is nowhere welcoming in the larger world for Frederic and Catherine to escape to.

Unfortunately for the lovers, Edenic happiness precedes an inevitable fall. Just as Adam and Eve invoke the Fall of Mankind and are cast out from the garden of Eden (*Good News Translation*, Gen. 3.1-24) Frederic and Catherine are ultimately destined to lose their own version of the Edenic space in which they have found refuge. This eviction from their Edenic space, felt most jarringly by Frederic, comes right at the end of the novel and is heralded by both the novel's content and form as they point to a sense of fleeting time.

At several points in *A Farewell to Arms* a character's intended actions are put off for a later date, and the resulting delay then causes said actions to never come to fruition. These

problematic deferrals become a particular concern in the final act of the novel. As Catherine lays dying, she admits to Frederic “I meant to write you a letter to have if anything happened, but I didn’t do it” (Hemingway, 282). For long stretches of the novel it appears that there will be time for Frederic and Catherine to be together, whether during Frederic’s recovery in Italy, or later when the lovers seek peace in Switzerland. Despite these attempts to have a safe space for their love the ending that Frederic and Catherine envision, much like Catherine’s letter, never comes to term.

The finality of time running out becomes painfully evident when Frederic is forced to confront, and vehemently denies, the notion that Catherine is going to die. Frederic’s internal monologue, which throughout the novel is crisp and precise, suddenly becomes rushing and desperate. “Please, please, please, dear God, don’t let her die. Dear God, don’t let her die. Please, please, please don’t let her die” (282), Frederic pleads, making a last-minute appeal for more time with the woman he loves. The repetition, both of the sentences and of the individual words, supports the idea of racing time, and of trying in vain to delay the ending before time does inevitably run out.

Fleeting time as it is communicated by the novel’s change in tone from precise to desperate, is another element carried over into Damainakes’ cover illustration through the round composition’s similarity to a clock face. The viewer’s eyes move around the illustration in a clockwise pattern, starting with the red flowers at twelve o’clock, moving down the man’s torso and arm from two to four o’clock, around the angel’s feet at five o’clock, following the curved lines of her loincloth through six o’clock, up the angel’s wing from seven to ten o’clock, across the branch at eleven o’clock, and back to the flowers at twelve o’clock. Each individual piece of imagery in the illustration occupies an important position on the subtle clockface: the red flowers

of the early hours signify Frederic and Catherine's time in the garden in the early chapters, while the broken sword (suggesting a failed battle) is positioned at approximately four o'clock and corresponds with Frederic's reluctant return to the frontline at the end of the novel's second book.

A possible reading of the angel in Damianakes' illustration is that she is symbolic of death. The portrayal of the angel as a female adds support to the argument that she is symbolic of Catherine specifically, while the man could be interpreted as Frederic, his head hanging as he mourns his deceased lover. The fact that the angel's wing—the feature that distinguishes her as a symbol of death—is drawn in a position equal to the later hours of the clock face signifies Catherine's demise at the very end of the novel. By the time the viewer's eye can take in the wing the journey around the illustration is nearly complete. With Catherine's death time runs out, both for the lover's Edenic happiness and for the story of the novel itself, just as how the angel's wing marks time running out for the eye's journey around Damianakes' illustration. Through the careful construction of her drawing Cleon Damianakes foretells the theme of fleeting of time, the loss of Catherine, and the devastating end of Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* before the novel itself is even opened.



## Works Cited

Damianakes, Cleonike. *Cover Illustration of A Farewell to Arms*. 1929, Scribner.

Giorgione and Titian, *Sleeping Venus*. 1510, Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden State Art Museums, Dresden. Photograph from *Google Arts and Culture*.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/sleeping-venus/>

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. The Hemingway Library Edition, Scribner, 2012.

Leff, Leonard J. *Hemingway and His Conspirators: Hollywood, Scribners, and the Making of American Celebrity Culture*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997. Google Books.

<https://books.google.ca/books?id>

Titian. *Danaë*. 1544-1545, National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples. Photograph from *Google Arts and Culture*. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/danae/>

*The Bible*. The Good News Translation, Catholic Edition, The Canadian Bible Society, 1994.