

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

Love, wounds, and the making of 'Hemingway's Women'

Review of 'Hemingway's Women' (Panjeree Publications Ltd., 2021)

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Some books announce their ambition quietly. Others reveal it at a glance. The book *Hemingway's Women: In Love and Hate, Life and Literature* by Faruq Mainuddin belongs to the latter kind. Even before one turns to the first chapter, the architecture of the book suggests a carefully composed literary journey rather than a conventional biography.

The chapter titles themselves read like fragments of a long, unfinished poem. "First Love", "The First Novel After the Second Love", "No Passage Beyond the Breaking", "A New Dwelling in the Web of New Love", and "A Fragile Astonishment". Each heading hints at passion, rupture, longing, and reinvention. They do not merely map the chronology of Ernest Hemingway's life; they evoke its emotional weather. Through these titles alone, one senses that Mainuddin is not interested in presenting a dry record of dates and marriages, he is tracing the restless pulse of a writer whose life was as dramatic and conflicted as his fiction. What makes the structure even more compelling is its subtle intertextual resonance. The naming and literary sensibility suggest that the writer approaches Hemingway not only as a scholar but as a creative writer shaped by his own literary tradition. Thus, this layered consciousness enriches the narrative from the outset. The result is a biography that seems a bit expansive in scope yet intimate in tone.

Hemingway's Women begins not with fame, not with glory, but with a wound. A young Ernest Hemingway lies injured in a Milan hospital in 1918, decorated for bravery yet disarmed by love. The opening chapter, centered on Agnes von Kurowsky, sets the emotional blueprint for a life where passion, pride, insecurity, and art would remain inseparable.

Faruq Mainuddin does not approach Hemingway as a distant literary monument. Instead, he brings him down to the fragile terrain of human attachment. Agnes was older, composed, and realistic; Hemingway was 19, intense, and already prone to emotional absolutism. Their brief

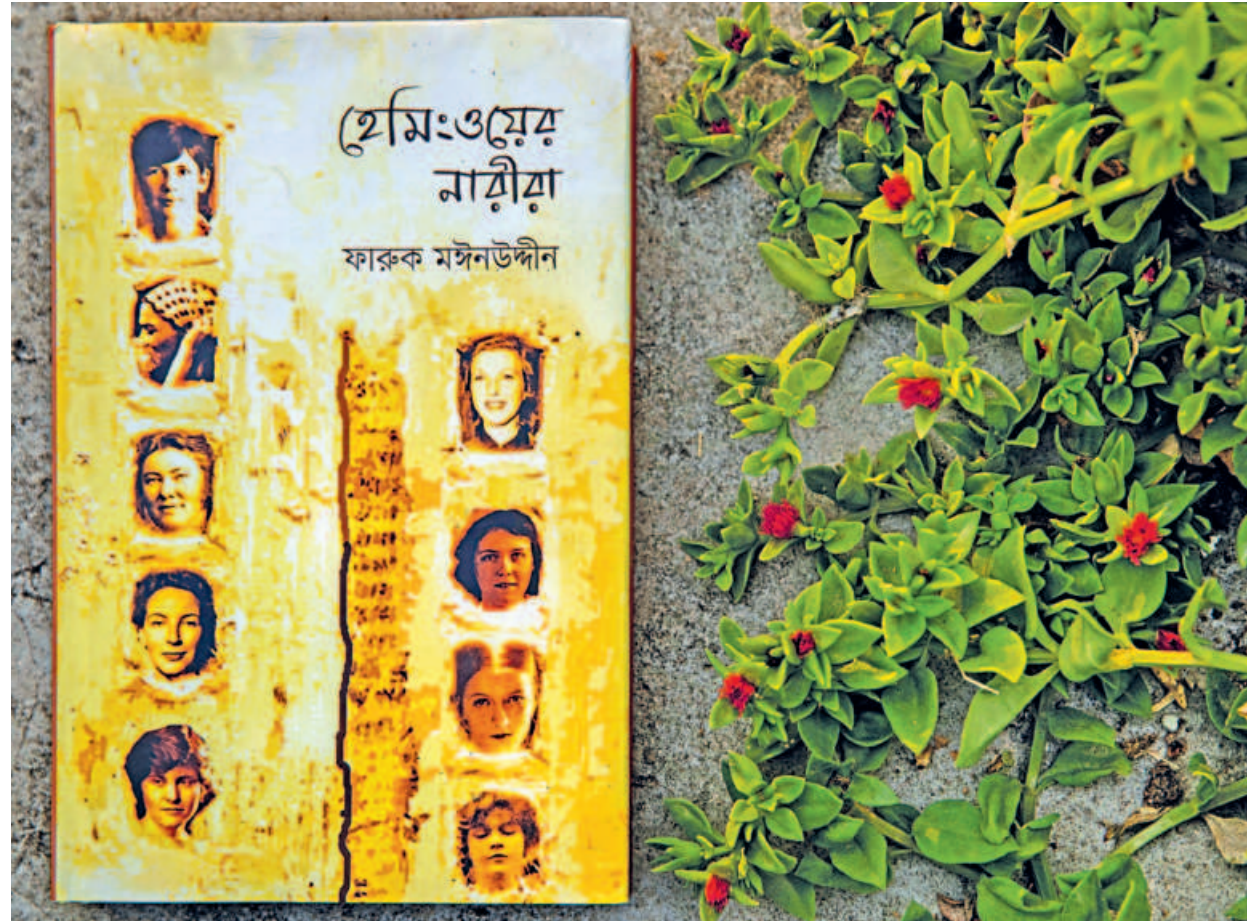


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romance, sustained through letters and illusion, ended with quiet rejection. That early heartbreak did not merely bruise a young soldier. It planted a pattern. Love, for Hemingway, would rarely exist without rivalry, overlap, impatience, or replacement.

The strength of this book lies in how it traces that pattern across the major women in his life without turning the narrative into gossip. Mainuddin places each relationship within its emotional and creative context. Hadley Richardson is shown not only as the devoted first wife but as a stabilising presence behind *The Sun Also Rises* (Scribner, 1926). Pauline Pfeiffer is placed alongside the creation of *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribner, 1929), her own words revealing both resignation and irony about loving a man who fell in love repeatedly. Martha Gellhorn

appears not simply as a spouse but as an intellectual equal whose presence shadows *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940).

One of the most compelling sections examines Hemingway's long and turbulent involvement with Jane Mason. Their intimacy, stretching over several years, ended in rejection that cut deeply into Hemingway's pride. Mainuddin carefully connects this emotional injury to its fictional echoes. In *To Have and Have Not* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), the characters Tommy and Helen Bradley bear a striking resemblance to Jane and her husband Grant Mason. The portrayal is sharper, almost vindictive. Through these parallels, we witness not just artistic transformation but the author's wounded ego and possessiveness finding narrative form.

A major achievement of the book lies in its ability to humanise Hemingway without excusing his faults. Mainuddin's Hemingway is not merely a victim of his upbringing, fame, or war trauma. He is a man often unwilling to accept strong women, frequently insecure, and sometimes emotionally manipulative. And yet, he is also sensitive, passionate, and fiercely loyal, if only briefly. Mainuddin shows how Hemingway's bipolar tendencies, alcoholism, hunger for danger, and need for validation intersected with his romantic life. The women were not mere companions; they were catalysts, critics, muses, rivals, and sometimes mirrors. Their presence shaped tone, theme, and temperament in his writing.

In reading *Hemingway's Women*, one realises that Hemingway's literary landscapes—war zones, bullrings,

African plains—were never free from emotional undercurrents rooted in real relationships. The personal and the artistic were intertwined to the point of inseparability. His loves were often incomplete, sometimes overlapping, frequently restless. Yet from those fractures emerged some of the most enduring works of twentieth-century literature.

Faruq Mainuddin's achievement lies in presenting this complicated emotional mapmaking with clarity and restraint. He restores depth to the women who stood beside, behind, and sometimes against Hemingway. In doing so, he allows readers to see not only the celebrated writer but the vulnerable, impulsive, and often conflicted man whose art was inseparable from his affections. It is really great to observe its balance. Mainuddin neither glorifies nor condemns. He is well suited to this task. In this book, his combined expertise as a storyteller and researcher is on full display. He not only interprets Hemingway but also presents the women as complex, resilient individuals who defy the one-dimensional roles they are often assigned in literary histories.

Mainuddin's writing style is clear, unpretentious, and the book avoids sensationalism while never losing narrative energy. It does not rely on overt wit or flamboyance. Rather, it invites the attentive reader to discover its quieter ironies and subtle humour. Above all, it recognises that Hemingway's life, filled with romance, ambition, trauma, and self-destruction, needs no overstatement. It only needs careful telling.

For general readers, the book offers a fascinating portrait of a literary icon seen through the prism of his relationships. For serious students and researchers, it opens pathways for deeper exploration. Throughout the book, one understands that this is not merely a book about Hemingway's women. It is, in essence, a portrait of Hemingway himself, reflected through love and conflict, tenderness and rupture, life and literature.

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ESSAY

On 'Bridgerton': When romantic escapism clashes with the realities of class

SHABABA IQBAL

Romance has never existed apart from inequality. The genre depends on distance—on obstacles that make love feel hard-won. Season four of *Bridgerton* (2026) understands this dynamic with precision. Rather than dismantling its fantasy world, the show uses class tension as romance's emotional engine. It gestures toward realism, but remains loyal to the genre's central promise: that love can be transformative without fully overturning the social order that makes it feel desirable.

The result is one of the show's most emotionally mature seasons—less glittering spectacle, more psychological restraint—though not without its blind spots.

Season four adapts Julia Quinn's *An Offer from a Gentleman* (Avon, 2001), preserving its Cinderella-inspired romance while sharpening its focus on class and social mobility. By centring Benedict Bridgerton (Luke Thompson) and Sophie Baeck (Yerin Ha), the illegitimate daughter of an earl forced into domestic service, the show reframes the fairy tale through questions of structural inequality. Their relationship unfolds across economic and social fault lines, where affection is real but never free from imbalance.

Instead of relying on spectacle or melodrama, season four trusts emotional stillness—lingering glances, charged silences, and small humiliations carry as much weight as sweeping declarations. The writing allows vulnerability to develop slowly, making the romance feel genuinely earned.

Luke Thompson plays Benedict with a restless softness, his entitlement unconscious rather than cruel. Yerin Ha anchors the spectacle with emotional clarity; her Sophie carries quiet resilience, quick wit, and the fragile thrill of borrowed glamour. Ruth Gemmell's Violet Bridgerton becomes a subtle bridge between worlds. In her perceptive conversations with Benedict,



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Violet recognises both the privileges that shield her son and the emotional courage required to challenge them—reinforcing the season's central tension between love and hierarchy.

That tension is embedded in the characters themselves. Sophie is educated and intelligent, yet constrained by gender and illegitimacy. After her father's death, her descent into servitude exposes how precarious security can be for women without wealth or protection. Benedict, by contrast, drifts through life with aristocratic ease—curious, unhurried, and insulated from hardship. The difference between them is not romantic tension alone; it is the friction between two worlds.

Their love develops inside a structure where opportunity is unevenly distributed, meaning desire itself is conditioned by what each stands to lose.

Violet's masquerade ball illustrates this imbalance. Disguised as the 'Lady in Silver' Sophie is briefly freed from her social identity. Masked and luminous, she meets Benedict as a near-equal. But the illusion shatters in a reflex: when she accidentally steps on his foot during a dance, she instinctively kneels to clean his shoe. Years of service surface in one intimate gesture. Power rarely announces itself; it lives in posture, habit, and instinct. As audiences grow more fluent in the language of privilege and power, even a Regency romance cannot

pretend hierarchy is invisible.

Elsewhere, intimacy deepens without dissolving those barriers. At My Cottage, Benedict's countryside retreat, connection unfolds in fleeting reprieves: a joyful kite-flying scene that momentarily levels their difference, a lakeside encounter charged with longing before their first real kiss. The romance swells—but the world around it remains intact.

And the stakes are real. Sophie risks unemployment, homelessness, reputational ruin, vulnerability to sexual assault, and even legal punishment. Benedict risks social fallout and family strain if he openly defies expectation. Their eventual union resonates because the show allows us to sit

with that imbalance before gently bending the rules in their favour.

The season's sharpest confrontation with power and gender dynamics comes through Benedict's proposal that Sophie become his mistress. The offer functions as a Regency-era compromise—acknowledging rigid class boundaries while allowing intimacy only within the limits of privilege. The show frames the gesture as sincere and emotionally grounded. Yet its implications remain stark. What appears protective still preserves his freedom while constraining hers.

As his mistress, Sophie would exist in the shadows—socially peripheral, discreet, dependent. Benedict, meanwhile, would remain securely within aristocratic life. Men of his rank can absorb scandal with little consequence; for Sophie, the cost would be total. His concession preserves his social mobility. Hers would require surrender. Even kindness, in this world, protects privilege.

The season also broadens its scope below stairs, echoing *Downton Abbey*-style portrayals of the domestic labour that sustains aristocratic comfort. Kitchens bustle, bells summon servants, gossip travels through narrow corridors, and 'maid wars' erupt when Sophie's stepmother, Araminta, poaches staff from various households. Where the season succeeds is in making this world feel textured and lived-in; where it falters is in how briefly it lingers there. The servants are vividly drawn but rarely given the sustained focus their stories deserve.

This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature's* websites.

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