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# Farewell A Separate Peace: The Great War in Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time and A Farewell to Arms

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Farewell A Separate Peace:

The Great War in Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms*

By Esther Kim

A thesis submitted to the  
Department of English  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
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A man is not made for defeat... a man can be destroyed but not defeated.

Ernest Hemingway

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## INTRODUCTION

In Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), characters affirm "a separate peace," an evocative phrase, which suggests that division or separation from the whole produces an individual's peace, particularly during the First World War (1914-1918). Yet the phrase's connotation of withdrawal contradicts the impulse that possessed Hemingway to run towards violence. Throughout his life, he stood as both spectator and participant at the edges of the trenches and the bullfighting rings. Hemingway once explained, rather superciliously, to F. Scott Fitzgerald (who never saw action in the Great War because of late enlistment), "War is the best subject of all." The Great War *was* a popular subject for writers, especially European ones, who keenly felt the after-effects of the War on their families, lives, and landscape and sought to make sense of their experiences. Poems, memoirs, novels, and plays all portrayed the thrills and horrors of a war of attrition that wiped out ten million men of Europe and shattered the image of noble and heroic warriors. From initially believing the War to be "a very fascinating thing—something, if often horrible, yet very ennobling and very beautiful" (Brittain 103), Roland Leighton, an Oxford-educated soldier who died in battle at the Western Front, revised his opinion: "I used to talk of the Beauty of War; but it is only War in the abstract that is beautiful" (Brittain 172). The Great War catalyzed change in the attitudes towards war and in the language used to write about this changed reality.

I came to consider Hemingway and the First World War through a circuitous route. My academic foundation began anachronistically with Modern Poetry, Modern British Novel, and a seminar on Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles. Only during my semester abroad in Edinburgh did I grow interested in the magnitude of the First World War. Two things led to my burgeoning interest. First, Edinburgh is considerably closer in spirit and in geography than Wellesley to the battles of the First World War. Secondly, through conversations with an American graduate student, I had the opportunity to learn indirectly about the subject and to borrow her copies of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* and Dominic Hibberd and John Onions's anthology *The Winter of the World*. Reading the war poems in Edinburgh, a city that once harbored Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, animated the history. Learning about the consequences of the Great War partly explained the newness of the modern British novel, which I had studied previously. I became interested in this period of radical transition. Wellesley English courses espouse New Criticism, which has its merits but understates historical context. Thus, I found the theoretical approach of "Eighteenth-Century Poetry," a course I took at Edinburgh, helpful and refreshing because it encouraged me to investigate the historical and intellectual contexts of the poetry. Believing that this approach illuminates Modern Literature as well as Eighteenth-Century Poetry, I intended to study Hemingway's writing on the War and to learn about the contexts of his writing in order to answer the broader questions: Why did literature seek to modernize itself? How did the War change the creation of literature, if at all?

Critics such as Paul Fussell, Jay Winter, Vincent Sherry, Trudi Tate and Samuel Hynes provide a more general answer to this question than my thesis, which is a focused case study, and they each articulate their views on the effects of the First World War particularly on modern British literature. They often disagree on the relation between modern and war literature, but, for the purposes of my thesis, I rely on Paul Fussell's argument from the classic *The Great War and Modern Memory* that the Great War ushered in modernism. In reading secondary sources, I also found that there was a gap between Hemingway scholars and Modernist scholars. While scholars often identify T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, or Ezra Pound as modernist writers, they exclude Hemingway from the standard list (or if he was one, he was an *American* modernist to be studied alongside Jean Toomer and Willa Cather) or they overlook his contributions to the relation between war literature and modernism. So this thesis attempts to elevate Hemingway as a modernist writer worthy of canonization.

While Hemingway participated in the Great War, his experience was short-lived. Following the United States' three-year-late entry into the War in April 1917, Hemingway first tried to enlist in the army at the age of 18, but he failed the physical examination due to poor eyesight. Undeterred, he signed up to volunteer with the Red Cross to drive ambulances and was stationed in Italy. Within less than two months of service, he was wounded while distributing chocolate and cigarettes to soldiers and hospitalized in Milan in July 1918. His experience of the War varied greatly from the years spent in trenches that war poets describe so vividly. Compared

to many young men, Hemingway was relatively lucky. He also never was imprisoned in a French prison for four months as was E.E. Cummings, an American poet and writer, who also volunteered as an ambulance driver. Nonetheless, Hemingway used his short-lived wartime experiences in his art.

Many soldiers and civilians preceded him in this literary endeavor. British soldiers drew on their education of the English literary tradition and their copies of Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*. The First World War was, to echo Fussell, a highly "literary war." To name several prominent British poets, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Laurence Binyon, Rupert Brooke, David Jones, and Isaac Rosenberg, all wrote alternatively patriotic, ambivalent, and cynical poems about the Great War, but the list of famous British writers could continue. While the United Kingdom produced volumes of poetry, in continental Europe, France became the first country to publish a war novel on the Great War with Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (or *Under Fire*) in 1916, and the work was translated into English the following year. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* was published in 1929, a decade after the war's conclusion, along with Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Among his American modernist "competitors," Hemingway read Willa Cather's portrayal of a soldier's return in *One of Ours* (1922) and John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1920). He was already trying to figure out how to "beat" both. He faced a common creative writing dilemma then: If the subject was tried and already somewhat old, then how did Hemingway "make it new," as Ezra Pound advocated?

Hemingway contributed to the preceding literary and intellectual conversations on the War and on modernism, but his distinctive style changed the way all succeeding writers wrote. Indeed, James Fenton begins his Introduction to *Ernest Hemingway: The Collected Stories*, “Hemingway’s greatest achievement was his style, the simplicity and economy of which was so influential that it is almost impossible to imagine modern fiction without it” (Fenton xiii). His style drew from several sources, including American vernacular, “British phlegm,”<sup>1</sup> journalist reportage, cablese, and the modernist poets, who were writing before 1914: “Hulme wanted poetry to be ‘impressionist’, ‘precise,’ ‘direct,’ ‘hard’ and ‘dry’, free, as Pound put it in 1912, from ‘emotional slither’” (Hibberd 12). Hemingway’s style can be described in similar terms. From Pound, Hemingway learned the art of omission. As Hemingway explained: “you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood” (*A Moveable Feast* 75). From Gertrude Stein, Hemingway learned the principle of insistence, or repetition to achieve implicit, rhythmic effects. With this new style, Hemingway portrayed a universal event among the European soldiers and civilians. He found, as the other creators of literature found in the years following the War, that while the Great War ended the lives of millions, it inspired and liberated creative work.

My first chapter focuses on five interchapters and two short stories from *In Our Time*, Hemingway’s first published short-story collection, that overtly deal with

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<sup>1</sup> Fussell coins this term in *The Great War* to refer to a kind of dry, sardonic understatement.

the First World War. *In Our Time* takes its title as an ironic echo of a prayer in the Book of Common Prayer and provides an immediate study of war and life. I suggest that the First World War holds a major influence over its form and content. Its sixteen interchapters fragment the overall unity of the collection to create an impression of the disordered experience of war and give expression to the ensuing trauma. These short interchapters can be likened to the flash of the searchlights, which reappear in the stories, or “the flicker,” brief flashes of individual human experience that demonstrate a new way to address modern subjects. Hemingway’s experimentation with narration and temporality also draws attention to immediate circumstances rather than the personalities of the narrators and expresses the loss of understanding, agency and control generated by the First World War.

In my second chapter, I observe that the retrospective first-person narration of Frederic Henry influences his conception of Catherine Barkley as he casts her into a statue by the end of *A Farewell to Arms*. These elements animate *A Farewell to Arms* as an example of literary modernism. I contend, furthermore, that the process of storytelling represents an act of destructive creativity for Frederic Henry the narrator, whose entire identity becomes consumed by his past relationship and in recovering it through his story. *A Farewell to Arms* emerges as a novel of and on memory, in the vein of modernist novels. While the narrator’s memory idealizes his relationship with Catherine Barkley and dramatizes the fatalistic inevitability of her death, Hemingway invites ironic consideration of Henry’s highly subjective interpretations.

Through looking at these two works by Hemingway, I present a case study that demonstrates that the First World War led to the birth of modernist literature and the production of new forms. Often the Great War is written about in terms of a rupture in a historical continuum or in terms of the fragmentation of former ideals and values. Morag Schiah writes, “Modernism is characterized both by a recognition of fragmentation and by a desire to resolve or overcome this through the integrity of aesthetic form. The urgency of achieving such integrity was apparently intensified by the traumas of the First World War...” (Stewart 10). Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms* demonstrate through experimental narratological form these desires to unite in the aftermath of the War. Though in a longer study I would seek to examine and integrate *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) into my argument, I have chosen to exclude it from my thesis because it addresses the emotional wasteland after the war, rather than the War and the period that witnessed complexities of transitioning values.

## CHAPTER I

### The “Perpetual Now” of the Great War in Hemingway’s *In Our Time*

While the visual structure of *In Our Time* (1925) suggests that Ernest Hemingway arbitrarily tossed together his published pieces to create the book, Hemingway deliberately arranged his short stories and interchapters from the original 1924 manuscript of *in our time* in order to achieve what he deemed “a pretty good unity” (Baker 128). The interchapters, however, which feature short, imagistic vignettes that cut between the lengthier short stories, develop a formal complexity to *In Our Time* that distinguishes the book from short story collections by Hemingway’s contemporaries, such as James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) or Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). As a radical modernist experiment, “only the barest devices of novelistic cohesion can be found in *In Our Time*: it’s as if the Great War not only blew apart the beautiful world, as Dick Diver says in Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*, but shattered the customary narratological ways of making sense of it,” observes Jim Barloon (Barloon 7). The detached narrative voices, inconsistent points of view, and play on chronology convey the experience of the Great War inside the interchapters and short stories. Together, these elements of *In Our Time*, departing from traditional narratological forms, reinforce the sense that the violence of the First World War

intrudes into lives, confounds understanding, and transforms individuals into believing they live in a world perpetually at war. Passive suffering then becomes the logical consequence of the Great War.

In this paper, I have organized Hemingway's interchapters to emphasize the implications of the Great War on narrative voice, following it from the naively exuberant first-person soldier to the disassociated third-person narrator. I believe this narrator, who is, to borrow James Joyce's phrase, "refined out of existence," represents a withdrawal of personality in the observing soldier. Like the *Guardian's* recently published portraits of the eyes of the Marines before, during, and after deployment in Afghanistan, Hemingway's articulation of the trauma of the First World War reveals the loss of the soldier-narrator's innocence and ability to communicate with the world through the breakdown of customary narratological ways of storytelling. The variation between the anonymous first-person and the anonymous third-person reflects this loss as well as the narrator's attempt at self-preservation through increased psychological distance. These fragments told by the first-person narrators represent a modernist experiment in form to show the young soldier's naivety and his attempts to understand the magnitude of the Great War, of killing, and of death.

## The Interchapters

Out of five interchapters that directly address the Great War, I grouped the three first-person narrators and two third-person narrators together to demonstrate the breakdown of comprehension in the face of war.

Interchapter One, set in France, establishes the absurdities of war, that is the violence and sudden deaths, which lead characters to feel helpless. The narrator develops the sense of foreboding with repetitious hints of oncoming slaughter. The retrospective narration disturbs the jovial retelling of a memory of the entire troop getting drunk prior to the battle of the Champagne. The narrator's naïve exuberance clearly situates the story in the past as he starts, "Everybody was drunk" (13). While getting drunk with the company is fun, a nervous edge tugs on the narrative. The narrator gestures towards the future by repeating "drunk" three times and "in the dark" and "kept riding" twice in order to emphasize the risk and uncertainty along the road. The adjutant senses the danger and makes paranoid, but later prescient, warnings to the narrator, a kitchen corporal, about his highly visible kitchen fire – "the adjutant kept riding up alongside my kitchen and saying, 'You must put it out. It is dangerous. It will be observed'" (13). The quick shift in verb tense from present to future sharpens the urgency and fear of his three declarative statements. The brevity of his speech suggests a clear mind and contrasts with the drunkenness of the entire battery. Yet the adjutant is not entirely sober. His repetitive cautions to put out the

fire grow more absurd since “the further away we got the more he worried.” While his warnings seem absurd at the time, the retrospective narrator realizes later the prescience of the adjutant’s fear in the context of the First World War.

Indeed, the retrospective narration emphasizes the unforeseen due to the obscuring effect of the Great War. The narrator emphasizes his temporal distance from the incident with, “It was funny going along that road. That was when I was a kitchen corporal” (13), indicating a changed, almost wistful, attitude towards this episode. The retrospective “It was funny” also hints that the episode no longer seems so. The adjutant’s warnings prove prescient when the narrator reveals their destination is the Champagne, which was “not a wine but a frontal assault against an intricate German defense... plainly, the Champagne was mass execution” (Tetlow 20). The Champagne offensive resulted in 120,000 French casualties in its first three weeks and 145,000 after three months. The narrator, however, avoids speaking directly about the horrors of the Champagne. He chooses instead to describe a light-hearted episode preceding the battle, which generates even greater pathos through its contrasts. The battery’s destination undercuts the spirit of jollity and highlights the opposition between the dark, “the front,” and the light of the kitchen fire, the incident when “everybody was drunk.” The interchapter can be read as simply a comical incident during the War, yet the narrator’s memory reveals moments of fear “in the dark” before the mass slaughter of the Champagne. Despite the amusing nature of the episode, the impending devastation of the Great War inevitably creeps into the interchapter and infuses it with tragedy as the soldiers march forward to their

deaths. This first interchapter posits a question that persists through *In Our Time*: How can one retain a sense of agency over one's future when war intensely obscures that future?

Interchapter Three more explicitly addresses the obscure future and the soldiers' ignorance about their impending loss of innocence through its language and shifts in narrative perspective. Told by a British narrator, the interchapter lightly describes the experience of killing the Germans during the War. The soldier begins the interchapter by speaking as a collective unit "we" – "we were in a garden" and "we waited" and "we shot them" – and only breaks once from the collective when he sees the Germans: "The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden" (29). In describing the German's death, the narrator's paratactic construction mimics the rapid action and his euphemistic language ("awfully surprised") conveys his naivety. His slang, "We... potted him" minimizes the gravity of ending another life and even reveals a note of pride and excitement in killing the first German.

Despite the thrill, the soldier reveals a more complex attitude towards killing through his intensely perceived personal confrontation. The sentence construction of "the first German I saw climbed" with its break from the collective "we" expresses the soldier's surprise. The confrontation becomes startlingly personal with the juxtaposition of "the first German" and "I", and so the soldier must revert quickly back to "we". Then, the successive killings become easier. He narrates, "Then three

more came further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that” (29). He marvels how the rest of the Germans “all came just like that” and consequently die just like that. Overall, the tone of the interchapter is bright but the narration tries to reconcile the soldier’s unsettled feelings about the killing.

Although the interchapter captures the experience of a soldier still mostly enraptured by the War, the setting of the interchapter “in a garden at Mons” alludes to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden and enriches the ambivalence of the narrator. The narrator's ignorance over the consequences of killing parallels the Germans’ ignorance over what lies beyond the garden wall. The soldier marvels at the strange ease of killing the Germans. They simply hopped over and were surprised with death. The lingering confusion in “They all came just like that” opens up questions for the reader: Didn’t the German soldiers know better? Didn’t they hear the shots? Why did they all follow each other? Thus, the language used to relay the event is simple but betrays the soldier’s increasing confusion and complexity of emotions over shooting the Germans. The narrator’s burgeoning awareness of these consequences parallels the biblical tale of the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. While the Germans are the men who literally fall dead into the garden, the religious allusion expands the significance of their deaths to suggest that this shooting is the entrance of death and sin into the narrator’s life. The event signifies the end of all their innocence. The Great War forces all soldiers to become complicit in the guilt, and it even reverses the garden’s traditional significance of vitality and fertility to ironically become the location of killing. The setting of the garden anticipates the Fall

of Man, and how the emphatically youthful, exuberant and euphemistic tone of the first-person narrator will be lost with each episode of killing the Germans.

*Third person narrative voice*

Once this loss of innocence occurs, the third-person narrator tells the stories, deferring the responsibility, culpability, and narratorial authority of identifying himself. In the following two interchapters, Hemingway further refines the narrators out of existence to show the lack of control that characters hold over their impending fate. The progression from these first-person narrators to the strangely distant and “deauthored” third-person narrative voice also represents a way to cope traumatic events. The “deauthored” narrator appears to give “no firm basis for discerning the speaker’s attitude” with a tone that “might best be described as impregnable” (Barloon 11). Because of the responsibility of assuming a single narrative voice, the narrator adopts an evasive, impregnable tone, shifting attention from personality to circumstance. Despite the objective, reportorial tone, the interchapters are deeply subjective reactions of the observer. These interchapters focus on bleak circumstances, which, in turn, encourage a sense of fatalism as characters lose agency and struggle helplessly against the inevitable.

Ultimately these interchapters document that sense of futility in struggling against the magnitude and the omnipresence of the First World War. The anonymous third-person voice is a product of the violence and death that intrudes into the most unexpected places, a garden or a hospital courtyard. These interchapters, then, echo

Vera Brittain in her memoir *Testament to Youth*: “Few of humanity's characteristics are more disconcerting than its ability to reduce world-events to its own level, where-ever this may happen to lie” (Brittain 100). Because of the disconcerting reduction of world events to the personal level, I believe that the restrained, reportorial style of the third-person narrative voice acts as an anaesthetic to the observer. It distances the observer from the immediate event and attempts to remove culpability from the events witnessed. Yet the third-person narrative voice documents the horrors of War with such objective vividness and exactitude that he appears complicit in the scene. The objective, removed tone, however, operates as a façade, which occasionally breaks to reveal the narrator’s emotions.

In contrast to the offhand, bright tone of the first-person narrator in the previous interchapters, the narrator of Interchapter Two floats from the distance to describe the evacuation during the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922). Despite the lack of personal identification or explicit reference to subjective emotions, the narrative voice conveys pity for the evacuees through observed details. The narrative voice seems devoid of internality as it describes the misery and physical stasis of the crowd as well as its own emotional and physical paralysis. The heavy rain causes the Maritza River to run “yellow almost up to the bridge,” and the crowd seems especially immobile alongside the fast Maritza as “the carts were jammed solid on the bridge” (20). The narrator floats, observing the hopeless, slow-moving crowd in the rain: “Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. No end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned. The old men and women,

soaked through, walked along keeping the cattle moving” (20). The clipped, declarative sentences demonstrate little emotion, yet they echo a numbness that the people feel as they leave their homes. The onslaught of rain and heavy mud expresses and heightens the despair of the evacuees. The external environment and subjective surface correlates to the internal subjective emotions.

Although the narrator remains firmly outside the minds of the crowd, his close, precise observations of the carts, cattle, and people suggest his physical proximity – as if he is on foot with them – and his pity. The overwhelming nearness, and perhaps emotions, of the crowd forces him to adopt an objective tone in order to speak about the scene before him. The adverb “just” in “Just carts loaded with everything they owned” suggests the narrator’s surprise as he lingers over the material goods packed inside the carts, such as “mattresses, mirrors, sewing machines” (20), reminders of domestic comfort, to emphasize the magnitude of leaving home. To illustrate the pitiful nature of the scene, the narrator also describes the evacuees’ likeness to cattle as they “walked along keeping the cattle moving” and as the “Greek cavalry herded along the procession” (20). The word “herded” suggests the powerless state of the crowd as they move through the natural elements away from their homes. In order to speak about the powerless people, the narrator speaks from a powerless position. Clearly, he feels deeply for the crowd as he witnesses the evacuation and his disassociation speaks to his inability to come to terms with his emotions of the scene.

Throughout the sketch he breaks involuntarily from the objective surface by using sentence fragments, such as “No end and no beginning” as well as “Scared sick

looking at it.” For the narrator to even identify the subject of “No end and no beginning,” the infinite nature of the evacuation and misery, would give it an end and a beginning. The last three lines, where “Scared sick looking at it” appear, also obliquely reveal emotion: “There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It rained all through the evacuation.” The line, “Scared sick looking at it,” exposes the narrator’s inward emotions for the first and only time in the sketch. The lack of a subject also suggests that any number of people could have felt “scared sick looking at it,” such as the young girl holding the blanket, the passing crowd or the reader. But the narrator moves quickly onto to a flat observation about the rain. With the concluding sentence, “It rained all through the evacuation,” the narrator moves from the disturbing to the banal as he “zooms out” from the image of the woman giving birth on the road to a panoptic view of the rainy evacuation. The narrator attempts unconvincingly to recede back into the dispassionate third-person, but the sentence fragments and the concrete details of the interchapter reveal his true emotional reactions.

When the narrator details the otherness of the setting and the crowd, this interchapter still makes universal statements about war. An exotic air hangs about the setting with the mention of “minarets,” “camels bobbing,” “Greek cavalry,” and the precise naming of “the Maritza,” “Adrianopole” and the “Karagatch road.” While the Karagatch road in Turkey lies far away from the road to the Champagne in the first interchapter, these locations are all historically significant. The Maritza river,

Adrianopole and Karagatch road each refer to military memorial sites in the Balkans. Adrianopole was the location of a major Roman battle in 378 A.D., considered the start of the final collapse of the Western Roman Empire; the Maritza River was the site of the Battle of Maritza (1371) between the Ottoman Turks and the Serbs; and the Karagatch road was part of the defensive line in the First Balkan War (1912-13). To the civilian reader, these sites are simply symbols of foreignness. To the soldier, these are major sites of battles that the evacuees retread. Like the evacuation, war and battle have neither end nor beginning, so the interchapters, too, lack beginning, middle, and end.

The disruption of a single, sustained narrative voice and chronological sequence serves to underline the narrator's sense of displacement and the inevitability of the following execution in Interchapter Five. The rain that floods the Maritza river reappears in this interchapter, set in a hospital courtyard, an ironic setting for an execution during wartime. War brings violent deaths to unlikely places – bullets are as unexpected in a garden as in a hospital courtyard, typically the sanctuary of the sick and weakly. Compared to all previous interchapters, this interchapter takes the disassociation of the narrator to an extreme. We rely on the objective observations to convey internal feeling as the narrator ominously notes, “all the shutters of the hospital were nailed shut,” suggesting the need for defensive enclosure. The preceding sentences, “There were pools of water in the courtyard. There were wet dead leaves on the paving of the courtyard. It rained hard,” (54) establishes the scene, but erases any expressivity markers that normally distinguish a voice. The staccato

rhythm of the sentences flattens the tone. As in the previous interchapter, the narrator also adopts a removed, dispassionate, and objective tone to anaesthetize himself from the horror of the execution.

Although he tries to anaesthetize himself, time works with a strange circularity in this interchapter, suggesting a consciousness traumatized by the War, developing the sense of fatalism. The first line of the interchapter speaks in the past tense about the six cabinet ministers who are “shot,” hence already dead, “at half-past six in the morning against the wall of a hospital” (54), yet the cabinet ministers are revived – “stood very quietly against the wall” – as the officers prepare to shoot them. As in the first-person story about the Champagne, retrospective foreknowledge of the ending imparts a sense of fatalistic inevitability to the action. By first giving their deaths at precisely “half-past six,” the narrator creates the sense of fatalistic inevitability and helplessness for the cabinet ministers. As the narrator’s memory recreates and replays the scene with no beginning and no end, the narration creates the sensation of immediacy. The circular chronology shows how “the war isn’t just ‘out there’, but is ‘here all the time’” in the interchapter (Tate 25). For this witness, the War is eternally, painfully present. Even with the foreknowledge of the cabinet member’s deaths, the certain expectation of death does not minimize the shock of the execution in the interchapter.

While the execution of the cabinet ministers is politically motivated, the lack of explanation emphasizes the senseless and brutal nature of the violence. The narration follows the cabinet minister, who is sick with typhoid and must be carried

downstairs out of the hospital. The soldiers attempt again and again “to hold him up against the wall but he sat down in a puddle of water” and the officers agree “it was no good trying to make him stand up” (54). The cabinet minister’s fetal position before the firing squad speaks volumes about his vulnerability and helplessness: “When they fired the first volley he was sitting down in the water with his head on his knees” (54). This undignified death expresses cynicism over the ideals of war. Even with political reasons, it seems needlessly cruel to execute an already dying man. As in Interchapter Two, the narrator avoids describing the faces of the ministers or explicitly revealing his inner thoughts and emotions. Rather, he impassively focuses on the external setting and the bleak natural elements, such as the “wet dead leaves,” to express his dread. The rain becomes an active witness to the scene and an expression of misery as in the evacuation of Interchapter Two. With the mention of “pools of water in the courtyard” and “wet dead leaves,” the narrative voice alludes to the wet dead humans and pools of blood. These details show that the narrator seems impartial but feels deeply.

While the removed, objective narrative voice masks the identity and emotional reactions of the narrator, the ambiguous point of view provokes questions about the narrator’s personal relation to the scene. Is he complicit in the execution despite his frequent attributions to the officers as responsible? The narrative voice lists how “They shot,” “They tried” and “They fired.” They act with agency while the narrative voice only observes, so the contrast pushes a sense of helplessness. The narrator seems to float around the hospital courtyard, observing the horror of the scene

without objection or intervention. The narrator does limit his perspective to one particular view, but he assumes a panoptic view, hovering over all without ever entering the minds of the characters. In contrast to the bright first-person narration of the three interchapters, the narrator retracts and grows more distant while witnessing the evacuation and the execution. But perhaps this retraction both expresses and develops the sense of futility to the sequence of events already established by the circular chronology in the interchapter.

In an effort to undermine our customary modes of sense-making, Hemingway includes various points of view even within the self-contained unit of the interchapter. Chapter Seven, the last interchapter in the sequence to directly treat the War, best demonstrates the disorientation of War through inconsistent points of view. Hemingway initially wrote the entire sketch from the first-person singular view of the soldier and later decided to change the first line to the third-person limited view of the soldier. The shift from the confessional “I lay very flat and sweated” to “he lay very flat and sweated” dramatizes the moment when the reader is thrust into the soldier’s mind as he lies trembling in a trench at night in the middle of a bombardment. The soldier starts cursing, “oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ” (67), which switches into a desperate form of praying. The stream-of-consciousness style and change in tense mark the entrance into his mind. The repetition of “please” gives his thoughts an incantatory quality, but the lowercase spelling of “jesus christ” confirms the soldier’s insincerity and later hypocrisy. The damning, unflattering first-person fully discloses

that terror motivated the soldier to bargain with God. In the trenches, Christ is an abstraction that holds little power and majesty. The hollowness of religion shows in the final sentences of the sketch: “The next night... he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody” (67). In the last sentence, the interchapter returns to “he,” that is the third-person limited, but within the first sentence, the rapid movement from the third-person limited to the first-person disorients the reader.

The soldier-narrator cannot represent the War through a consistently first or third-person perspective, which reflects a movement towards the evasion of the religious and heroic ideals of the past. Christ holds no dominion in the trenches. Hemingway makes one more switch in narration: After “the shelling moved further up the line” (67), the narrator switches to the first-person plural midway through the interchapter. We exit the soldier’s mind and the action relaxes with a succession of conjunctions, “We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet” (67). The sudden appearance of the third-person plural in the trenches indicates that the narrator works physically alongside the soldier, “he” who nearly died of terror in the trenches. Who is this first-person narrator, hiding himself in “we,” and how did he overhear the thoughts of the soldier? How did he know that the soldier “never told anybody” about Jesus in the end? Hemingway “suggests an unrealistically double narrator who is both participant in the story and omniscient voice outside the story” (63 Cheatham). In using the first-person plural, Hemingway generates confusion over the narrator’s identity. The

interchapter begins and ends with the knowledge of the third-person limited, yet speaks from the first-person plural. The narration feels like a pastiche of various witnesses and demonstrates a movement towards evasion, implying that the burden of heroism weighs too heavily on the observer and shatters the traditional single unified consciousness. The multiplicity of narratorial perspectives leads to ambiguity over the narrator's identity, mimicking the disordered experience of the trenches and reflects that the breakdown of narrative connects to the loss of former ideals and absurd, sudden violence of war.

### **The Short Stories**

Finally, I turn my attention to the short stories, "Soldier's Home," "A Very Short Story," and "Big Two-Hearted River", which use customary modes of narrative, recounting the story of the soldier's return home from a single, third-person limited point of view. Hemingway includes stories about two veterans of the Great War in *In Our Time* as contrasts. While Krebs from "Soldiers' Home" lies to others about the First World War, unable to connect with or interest anyone in his true war stories, Nick Adams avoids society altogether by staying in the wilderness and silencing his thoughts on his wartime experiences. These two short stories capture the consequences of the War on two individuals who fought in it.

“Soldier’s Home” captures a sense of alienation and disillusionment that originates in Krebs’s psychological immobility and anxieties about communicating to a uninterested audience back home:

His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice, he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them... Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggerations (69-70).

Krebs’s inability to communicate the truth derives in part from society’s unwillingness to listen and talk about the War. The narrator shows how Krebs’s “rather ridiculous” (69) timing for his return home after the war heroes and his stories about the actualities of war estrange Krebs from society. A society fed steadily on sensational atrocity stories becomes bored with true war stories. Their brand of patriotism bars them “from interest in any German machine gunners who were not chained” (69), and his experiences are trivialized. Yet the narrator evaluates and satirizes the town’s expectations of soldiers. Krebs’s singular circumstance represents a wider problem caused by the ubiquitous false atrocity stories. The prevalence of propaganda during the First World War posed problems for writers, soldiers, and civilians who wanted to bear truthful witness to the War (Tate 41). Krebs’s attitude towards his wartime experiences changes from “cool and clear” feelings to “nausea” because what was good and simple has become contaminated from the lies,

“untruth” and exaggerations he has told. Krebs’s “reaction against the war” repeats the previous explanation that “the reaction had set in” (69), connoting a scientific process to the town’s changing attitude from hysteria to distaste over the war. This objective tone emphasizes the absurdity of how “the greeting of heroes was over,” a phrase implying a scheduled time exists for hero greeting. Even his mother’s “attention always wandered” and “his father was noncommittal” (70) when it comes to his war experiences. The town’s distaste for the War and Krebs’s desire “to be listened to at all” compel him to lie.

Not only does Krebs suffer from inability to express what he has seen to a disinterested audience, but he also struggles to fully understand and organize the significance of his wartime experiences. As a soldier who fought in “Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne” (69), he stood too close to the battles. Like the British narrator exulting over the clever barricade on the bridge, only to realize his flank has retreated, or the kitchen corporal witnessing his merry, drunken troop march towards the massacre at the Champagne, Krebs experienced the unknowable nature of the First World War. Hemingway develops this irony sharply when Krebs sits on the front porch reading a history book on the war “about all the engagements he had been in” (72). His personal experiences cannot inform him the way a book can, and he states with satisfaction, “Now he was really learning about the war. He had been a good soldier. That made a difference” (72). Trudi Tate writes of how this ignorance was a common phenomenon: “Woolf remembers the First World War as a time of darkness... in which no one, including the combatants,

knew what was going on nor why they were involved.” Tate adds: “Writing in 1915, Freud remarked that he was standing too close to the war to see it properly” (Tate 1). Thus, when Krebs is set in his small hometown, the trouble of ordering the disordered experience of war, a problem tackled by the interchapters of *In Our Time*, overwhelms him. Yet the satisfaction he derives from the maps about the War simply deceive him and the public into thinking that the War followed a coherent narrative. Krebs’s own uncertainty about his wartime experience leads to his inability to communicate and connect.

His failure to communicate limits his ability to connect with his family and the girls whom he watches so keenly, yet his fear of consequences suggests that he intentionally avoids this connection. In the passage about Krebs watching the young girls in town, “He did not want” appears nine times within the three-paragraphs while the phrase “He liked” appears six times. While he shows interest in these girls, Krebs lacks the “energy or the courage” to break into their “too complicated” world (71). That world frightens and paralyzes Krebs. To connect and enter this world requires him to lie in order to fulfill expectations, which leaves him feeling “sick and vaguely nauseated” (76). Despite his attempts “to keep his life from being complicated” (77), at the very end of the short story, Krebs is forced to lie to his mother, who smothers him with lectures on religion and compares him to other sons. Like the narrator witnessing the Maritza evacuation, Krebs remains emotionally immobile and ambivalent about pursuing connection because he dreads the consequences. He emphatically insists that he “did not want any consequences. He did not want any

consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences” (71). He observes them as an outsider because he knows too well that finding a girl and captivating the townspeople with his war stories require the same means, “courting” and telling “more lies” (71) that live up to the expectations and ideals of war that people hold as they inspect a photo of Krebs at the Rhine for instance.

The photo of Krebs in Germany, mentioned at the start of the short story, humorously develops the disillusionment over war. The picture “shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture” (69). By defining the photo by what it lacks – beautiful German girls, the Rhine visible in the background and Krebs and the corporal looking well-suited – the narrator flatly dismisses every romantic notion of war. Rather than paint a rosy portrait, the unglamorous, unflattering reality becomes pronounced.

In contrast to Krebs’s forced engagement with civilian life, Nick Adams returns from War in “Big Two-Hearted River” and chooses to retreat from human company into the utter isolation of nature. Back in his familiar woods and stream of trout, Nick settles comfortably into existential sensations and simple tasks of camping outdoors. Because the short story never once mentions the Great War, only knowledge of Nick Adams’ background from previous short stories reveals that Nick returns home from the Great War, wounded but alive. “Big Two-Hearted River” can be read entirely, then, as an American story about fishing and camping, but underneath the surface observation lies tension and depth over the trauma of the

Great War. The reader must dive below the surface, and trust Hemingway's commitment to the "iceberg principle" for his writing, by which he means that he gives only one-eighth above the surface, with seven-eighths (the bulk of his meaning) below it. Nick recapitulates Hemingway's point that the Great War cannot be confronted directly or even rendered in a direct, sustained narrative.

The language compounds this effect of emotional distance from Nick: "slowly the feeling of disappointment left him. It went away slowly, the feeling of disappointment that came sharply after the thrill that made his shoulders ache" (151). Rather than active construction, the feeling of disappointment acts with agency on Nick. But why does Nick feel disappointed?

The landscape of the story reminds us of the destruction of wartime landscapes and perhaps the landscape of Nick's mind. Nick observes the destruction of the fire on the landscape as the first paragraph repeats "burnt" or "burned" four times. There is no town, no saloon, no Mansion House hotel, and he expresses the extremity of destruction with a contradiction: "Even the surface had been burned off the ground" (133). Later in the short story, he sits at a "charred stump" and smokes a cigarette. It takes him some time and travel to escape from the burnt-over land and wasted town of Seney. When seated by the charred stump, Nick sees many "sooty black" crickets that are different from the variety of yellow and black or red and black ones he'd seen in the past. The camouflaged crickets harken back to nature's mechanism of adaptation. Like these sooty black crickets, Nick himself must learn how to adapt back into society after the destruction and trauma of the war.

As in the past interchapter, the landscape and natural elements announce Nick's internal, emotional trauma but the narrator also dwells on the trauma of his war wounds in one passage where Nick drops his pack. He stops to nap on the earth: "He lay on his back and looked up into the pine trees. His neck and back and the small of his back rested as he stretched. The earth felt good against his back" (137). The narrator repeats "his back" about four times to remind the reader of the interchapter on Nick and Rinaldi. Once Nick was leaning against smashed up walls with a wound to his spine, but he has returned to his familiar woods and his back leans protected against the earth.

Like in the past interchapter with Nick and Rinaldi, Nick seeks to steady himself and "make a separate peace." The precise, declarative sentences on nature, "The sun was just up over the hill. There was the meadow, the river and the swamp. There were birch trees..." (141) follow Nick's sight as he surveys the landscape, but the accumulation of declarative sentences betrays his struggle against exhibiting his interior emotions. The imagery of the placid, smooth surface of water resistant to tension underneath evokes Nick's inner turmoil. The river bulges "its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of log-driven piles of the bridge" (134). There's also a profusion of images of tension and bubbling: his boiling coffee, the bubbling in his buckwheat pancake mix, his pulling against the trout.

The trout in the river, resistant to swift currents, also evokes a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for relief in Nick. In contrast to the burnt landscape, the "clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom" of the river provides relief in the

burnt landscape. The river reminds Nick that he can “feel cool and clear inside himself,” as Krebs hopes for “Soldier’s Home.” The trout are more than trout to Nick. Their resistance to the current and ability to keep themselves steady quietly inspires him. Nick notes that they keep “themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again” (134). Repeatedly, the narrator uses the word “steady” and “unsteady” to describe Nick or his actions. That is the quality he seeks most, steadiness. The trout exemplify endurance, steadiness that Nick seeks in solitude in nature rather than in speech or in company.

Nick’s endurance through the trauma of war embodies itself in fastidious attention and focus on pure physical tasks and sensations. While Nick’s attention to nature, to cooking and pitching camp isn’t unusual, the level of attentiveness implies an attempt to maintain control, to keep his head clear of thinking. He says, “He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him” (134). The sentences are simple and convey that Nick does wrestle with “thinking” and with disturbing memories of the war. He contrasts the “thinking” with the doing, physical pleasure in the pitching the tent, hiking, fishing, and being self-sufficient. “Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. It had been a hard camp. He was very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him” (139). His repetition in completed tasks reflects a sense of confidence and completion with the repetition of the word “done”. Despite this, the reassurance that “Nothing could touch him”

reflects his inner anxiety and paranoia. Once many things could reach him, harm him. But out in nature, he has found uncomplicated, simplicity and wants to stick to that.

Whatever Nick's trauma was, whatever he must deal with, it is suppressed. He must take a long time to resolve his anxieties because he intends to stay a long time at his campsite. He says he could "get grasshoppers there [at the log] every morning" (146) and "there were plenty of days coming." His trauma necessitates a long, isolated recuperation and whether he succeeds is debatable.

The structure of *In Our Time* documents the interactions between form and message, how the breakdown of customary ways of storytelling relates to the breakdown of understanding, agency, and heroic ideals. The disjointed interchapters and short stories of *In Our Time* suggest, too, the obscuring effect of War. The traditional chronological, cohesive narrative structure of the novel fails to capture the brutal, fragmented aftermath of War. Hence, contrary to the critics who contend that Nick's single consciousness or the central vision of the world and human condition composes the transcending unity of *In Our Time*, the structure of *In Our Time* as a whole and its individual short stories or interchapters only evasively pin down a single fragmented moment of the War or obliquely reference wartime experience.

The fatalism of *In Our Time*, an overwhelming sense that the War disrupts lives, narratives, and ideals, anticipates the themes of the more cohesive novel *A Farewell to Arms*. While the war novel is narrated by a single consciousness, in the next chapter, I will examine how *A Farewell to Arms* also retains the sense of fatalistic

inevitability as Frederic Henry, the first-person narrator, tells his story retrospectively and works to allay a movement toward disaster and fragmentation.

## CHAPTER II

### Fragmentation, Irony, and Continuity in the Retrospective Narration of *A Farewell to Arms*

While some critics emphasize the major chords and hopeful tones of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, suggesting that Frederic Henry overcomes his trauma by fashioning his experience into an ordered narrative, Frederic as narrator interprets his own experience as deeply traumatic and fortifies his fatalistic, nihilistic worldview. Because he connects so intimately to the dead past, Henry cannot move on and helplessly repeats his story, revising it within his consciousness. Rather than reach cathartic understanding through the retrospective narration, Frederic Henry relives the trauma of his loss through a tale that grants him no future and no past. While Henry's overwrought portrayal of Catherine and the events of the Great War stress the bleak and cruel tragedy of the story, Hemingway invites an ironic consideration of Henry's narratorial artistry.

While Frederic Henry hopes to comprehend and to articulate his experiences, his intrusion into the narrative underscores discontinuity and division between himself as the character and the narrator. Rather than a novel of memory deeply embedded within the present and unified consciousness of Frederic Henry, *A Farewell*

*to Arms* underscores differences between past and present. Critic Mary Prescott looks at several stream-of-consciousness passages to assert that these intrusions are epiphanies produced by a consciousness in the process of active revision. In one such passage, Frederic tells the priest:

I tried to tell about the difference between the night and the day...and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it now. But if you have had it you know... He had always known what I did not know and what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later (13).

Frederic's insistence on distinguishing between his present knowledge and past ignorance separates himself into the character and the narrator. In this passage, his consciousness is disjointed. His jumbled, drunken thoughts verge between the past and present, and Henry indicates that he, as retrospective narrator, holds a different set of knowledge from his past self, the character. Henry's statement that "If you have had it you know" also reveals that his new knowledge derives from empirical experience.

In the quoted passage, Henry struggles to tell the priest about his experience with prostitutes in the night, but the narrator's intrusion indicates that his struggle also concerns a broader subject and larger audience. Henry initially struggles to "tell about the difference between the night and the day", yet his continued rambling about what the priest "had always known," "what I did not know," and "what... I was always able to forget" refers to his later experience of love.<sup>2</sup> In another key moment of the story, Frederic again promises "If I ever get it I will tell you" (72) to

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<sup>2</sup> Trevor Dodman argues that Frederic specifically refers to "a set of wartime experiences that remain resistant to the meaning-making structures of language" (259) but I think that too limited.

the priest, who foretells that Frederic will experience love. The whole narrative of *A Farewell to Arms* represents Frederic Henry's struggle to "get it" and "tell it now" to the priest and also to Catherine Barkley, from whom he learned about love. But with his paradoxical statement that "what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget," Henry reveals a desire and, more importantly, an ability to forget. If Henry does hold an ability to "always" forget, as he claims, then he limits the hope for comprehension and expression of his traumatic memories.

Frederic's conception of Catherine Barkley also sheds light on why Henry's continuous process of revision only performs and inflicts an act of destructive creativity upon himself. Because Catherine, who represents fusion and continuity, dies in the end, Frederic loses his will to live. The epiphanies he reaches after her death will, as a result, be wholly negative. Entirely unlike Rupert Birkin's desire for "a strange conjunction... not meeting and mingling... but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings" in *Women in Love* (Lawrence 139), Catherine Barkley articulates an ethic of love as fusion: "I want us to be all mixed up. I don't want you to go away" (300). She insists on an all-consuming love, telling Frederic, "There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me" (115), and rejects individuality. While Catherine first proposes this idea of love as fusion, Frederic reciprocates and adopts the idea of unification: "We're the same one" (299) and "There isn't any me anymore" (106). Such a closely-forged and intimate bond inevitably excludes the world and Catherine insists, "We really are the same one: if anything comes between us we're gone and then they have us" (139). Because of this intense unity, Frederic suggests through

narratorial intrusions that anything and everyone, including Catherine's gestating baby, threatens their relationship. He casts Catherine Barkley as the exclusive embodiment of love and life.

Their conception of love as all-consuming and exclusive also contains sacred elements. Catherine refuses to marry Frederic on the basis that she has no religion and tells him, "You're my religion. You're all I've got" (116). Other characters, such as the Count, affirm Henry's reverential attitude towards love for Catherine: "Then too you are in love. Do not forget that is a religious feeling" (263). Even Rinaldi grows astonished and dismayed that Henry has acquired "sacred subjects" (169) via Catherine Barkley. He teases Henry about his transformation from "the remorse boy" "trying to clean your conscience with a toothbrush... brush away the Villa Rossa from your teeth in the morning, swearing and eating aspirin and cursing harlots..." (168) into the boy who worships Catherine as a "lovely cool goddess. English goddess" (66). Frederic's relationship with Catherine Barkley even gives him spiritual awareness.

Reinforcing the pseudo religious aspect to Catherine and Frederic's relationship, Rinaldi's choice of the word "goddess" echoes the George Peele poem from which the novel draws its title. The speaker of the poem, an aged soldier, puts down his arms in the service of Queen Elizabeth, addressing her as "Goddess". He asks her permission, "Goddess, allow this aged man his right/ To be your beadsman now that was your knight" (Peele 151), and the line suggests that Frederic takes on a similar role as "beadsman" in his story, worshipping Catherine as goddess. Because

neither Catherine nor Frederic Henry espouses the prevailing religious beliefs of the time, they attempt at redefining religion in terms of love and in terms of each other. But Frederic's frequent intrusions into the narrative also remind the audience that he has lost his goddess and suffers deeply as a result. When the speaker of the poem pronounces, "a man-at-arms must now serve on his knees," he invokes the image of Henry at his knees full of remorse and despair.

As retrospective narrator, Frederic despairs because he evaded death and his survival allows Catherine to live on in his memory. Catherine's ability to see into the future and her explicit disregard for the constraints of time and death imply the workings of Frederic's consciousness and memory. So Catherine's foresight suggests the supernatural and Frederic's artistry in piecing her together through his tale. Throughout the tale, her voice is imbued with a power and ability to reach beyond time past into time present, to address both Frederic the character and the narrator. She frequently makes offhand predictions, such as: "I suppose all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us. But you don't have to worry about it" (116) and "We're going to have a strange life" (27). Her tone of certainty and her resignation towards the "dreadful things" and a "strange life" imply a level of foresight, not simply anxious worrying.

Most significantly, her irrational fear of rain proves eerily prescient. As if aware of the last line of the novel, "After a while I... walked back to the hotel in the rain" (332), she confesses to Frederic Henry, "I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it... And sometimes I see you dead in it" (126). While

Henry dismisses her fears as the talk of an anxious, mentally unstable lover during the tumult of the Great War, Catherine's fear of the rain, which appears as a persistent symbol of loss and separation throughout the novel, solidifies the sense that she perceives the future and affirms the determinist framework of the novel. Even her nightmare, which alternates between sometimes "me dead" and "you dead," accurately describes the intense degree to which the two identify with each other and how Frederic's will to live dies with her by the ending. Catherine's powerful, eerie foresight and her conception of an exclusive, all-consuming love characterize her as the embodiment of continuity for Henry.

In addition to the rain, the nighttime operates as a symbol of Catherine's persistent and haunting presence. The night acts as the realm of the supernatural and spiritual. Catherine envisions her dead fiancé returning "in the night" (30) and Henry tells the Count that his religious feeling "comes only at night" (263). During the Caporetto retreat, Frederic addresses a dream-vision of Catherine, asking, "You wouldn't go away in the night, would you... Are you really here?" She responds, "Of course I'm here. I wouldn't go away. This doesn't make any difference between us" (197), referring to their wartime separation. While Lisa Tyler notes, "Catherine does precisely that, dying at night and leaving her lover alone" (Tyler 83), Catherine promises throughout her difficult pregnancy to stay with Frederic at night:

Catherine smiled, 'No.' Then a little later, 'You won't do our things with another girl, or say the same things, will you?'

'Never.'

'I want you to have girls, though.'

'I don't want them.'

‘You are talking too much,’ the doctor said. ‘Mr. Henry must go out. He can come back again later. You are not going to die. You must not be silly.’  
‘All right,’ Catherine said. ‘I’ll come and stay with you nights,’ she said. It was very hard for her to talk. (331)

Despite the doctor’s condescension and confidence that Catherine will live, she seems convinced of her impending death. But her casual promise to “stay with you nights” suggests that she believes in a permeable divide between life and death and in a supernatural existence during the night. Her promises to Frederic, such as “We will always be together” (150) and “You’ll be sick of me I’ll be so faithful” (105), initially seem sentimental, but given her sincere belief in her continued existence through the night, they take on the haunting tone of truth,<sup>3</sup> and Catherine’s ethic of love as fusion develops the illusion of continuity and hope to the tale.

While both lovers attempt to use love to guard against the physical and mental fragmentation caused by death, ultimately Frederic Henry witnesses and experiences also how the world breaks everyone. After Catherine dies, the attempt to revive broken things leads to fragmentation within Henry because her inevitable death represents the destruction of love and personal identity. While Henry’s artistry as retrospective narrator may explain in part the accuracy of Catherine’s predictions, they also suggest his mental breakdown. Throughout the story, Henry attributes Catherine’s foresight to her mental instability, especially after the death of her fiancé. More than once, he states, “I thought she was probably a little crazy” (30), and “I thought you were a crazy girl” (154). Catherine even admits, “I’m not mad and I’m

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine warns Henry of the persistence of her ghostly existence (as well as revenant folklore and second-sight myths,) which critics George Dekker and Joseph Harris write so eloquently about.

not gone off. It's only a little sometimes" (31), and "when I met you perhaps I was nearly crazy. Perhaps I was crazy" (116) and finally declares, "I am Scotch and crazy" (126). Her craziness allows her, in Henry's mind, to attain a supernatural foresight. Her craziness also leads her to first mistake Frederic for her dead fiancé, who was blown up in the Somme, ("You've been away a long time" "Oh, darling, you have come back haven't you?" (30)). Frederic complies with Catherine's eerie instructions to play a "game of pretend" (30) and repeat after her, "I've come back to Catherine in the night" (30), allowing her to momentarily revive her dead fiancé.

Henry continues in the game of pretend because of his personal physical trauma, which leads to recognition of his loneliness and hollowness. The near-death experience marks the beginning of his own instability and awakens his fear of separation and disconnection via death. It dramatizes how "lonely and hollow" (41) he was—whoring and getting drunk. During the bombardment at the front line, Frederic believes momentarily that he has died:

I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. (54).

In the passage, the paratactic sentences rapidly describe how Henry's singular self becomes multiple selves. The five-time repetition of "out" also emphasizes an extreme, perhaps irreparable, division. Hemingway chose an unusual modifier for Henry, who "rushes bodily out," rather than "physically" or "spiritually" in order to emphasize this disconnect between self and body. His wounding arouses the

awareness of his body's fragility leading him to cleave with Catherine Barkley. While Henry's statement "I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died" is contradictory, its truth applies to the future narrator Henry who is both dead and not dead. He filled the void with Catherine but since her death, his narrative, which revisits the traumatic events leading up to her death, reminds the narrator of his present loneliness and hollowness.

From the start, then, Catherine solidifies the bond between herself, Henry, and her dead fiancé, and perpetuates the fragmentation of the mind and body. Even tucked away safely in Switzerland, Catherine dies "broken" in the same way that she predicted that "We'll crack" (20) in the War and in the same way her fiancé died in the Somme, "blew him all to bits" (20). Her language to describe her pain near death also evokes fragmentation: "now I'm all done and all gone to pieces" and "I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now... They just keep it up till they break you" (322-3). Because Catherine embodies love as fusion, awakens Henry's spiritual hope, and represents everything to him, her death means his mental and spiritual fragmentation and he must recover her, that is everything, through his story. So Henry absorbs the trauma of death through her, and even mirrors her game of pretend by piecing Catherine together. But his effort to revive her in order to achieve peace, continuity, or mastery over his trauma, ultimately fails.

Rather than renewed hope, Henry's multiple intrusions into his narrative indicate that he firmly latches onto a bleak and nihilistic worldview. It is pleasant to believe, as Lisa Tyler asserts, that Frederic Henry "mastered his trauma by making it

an ordered narrative” or “overcame his trauma by reliving it” (Tyler 91), but his insights lack a sense of mastery or triumph. Henry devotes his narrative to reinforce the sense that people are always “trapped biologically” (139), and he espouses nihilism, “total rejection of prevailing religious beliefs, moral principles, laws, etc., often from a sense of despair, and the belief that life is devoid of meaning” (OED).

Near the end of Catherine’s life, Frederic’s parable about the ants and burning log vividly demonstrates this despair. He describes how he once threw a log full of ants into a fire while camping and watched as the ants swarmed back and forth. Whichever way the ants turned they “finally fell into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah... But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log” (328). Although the death of the ants reflects the casualties of the wartime massacres, the emotional impact of Catherine’s death—more than the death of his comrades—triggers Henry’s memory and leads him to feel “it was the end of the world.” During the process of narration, Frederic draws the parallels between himself as the potential messiah over the ants and a hypothetical God who oversees the death of his son, Catherine, and his comrades. The comparison of humans to ants suggests that only such an attitude towards humans as insects could explain a messiah’s cruel passivity in the face of death. Consequently, Frederic rejects prevailing religious beliefs of a benign God. Instead Catherine becomes representative of life after death.

As seen by her supernatural foresight and revenant presence, Catherine Barkley becomes a goddess to Henry, but his wartime experience and her atheism

reinforce his lost faith. As the victim in a world eternally at war, Frederic Henry perceives division and hollowness as the logical outcome. Early in the novel, Catherine gives Henry a medallion of Saint Anthony, the Patron Saint of lost things, although she is not a Catholic, saying that it's known to be "very useful" (44). Yet, after Frederic wears the Saint Anthony medallion around his neck, he intrudes as narrator into the past, realizing: "Then I forgot about him. After I was wounded I never found him. Someone probably got it at one of the dressing stations" (44). Although at this point in the story Frederic has not yet been wounded, he chooses to hint that he will be. His casual, offhand reflection on the Saint Anthony medallion and its fate reveals in the fact that superstitions about the medallion did little in the face of material realities. Catherine, too, finds religion useless when she redefines religion in terms of love for Frederic. Prior to labor, in the hospital lobby, Frederic includes the key fact that "She said she had no religion and the women drew a line in the space after that word" (313). In his contempt for a messiah who'd willingly allow Catherine to die, Frederic, like Catherine, rejects gods and messiahs and his whole tale draws "a line in the space after the word [religion]".

Although Henry challenges the existence of conventional gods or messiahs, he repeatedly intrudes into the tale to attribute injustice to the world that separates and breaks. His nihilistic moments throughout the tale focus on the injustice and the certainty of death. Midway through the novel, Frederic's descriptions of the night at the hotel with Catherine and the lovely feeling that they were "no longer alone" triggers his insight that "It has only happened to me like that once" (249). The

narrator's tone changes dramatically from the light and pleasant and cheerful to one of the most famous quotes from the novel:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and very brave impartially (249).

Henry repeatedly construes “the world” as an active and malicious agent, seeking to break everyone and to kill “the very good... gentle...brave,” people like Catherine Barkley, in order to break them. Catherine’s conception of their exclusive and sacred love speeds the process that “They” will come between the two lovers to undermine their isolated and self-contained “separate peace” (243). According to Henry’s philosophy, he also is broken in the present, and the narrator leaves ambiguous whether he counts as one of the “many...strong at the broken places”. If he is strong, he draws strength from his beliefs in meaningless determinism.

He repeats this philosophy again near Catherine’s death through the image of entrapment. He angrily laments “Poor, poor dear Cat. And this was the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap. This was what people got for loving each other” (320). Here, Frederic sees with narrow and extreme clarity how “loving each other” led to “sleeping together” which ultimately led to “the end of the trap.” With these words, he repeats his earlier sentiment that “You always feel trapped biologically” and implies that Catherine stumbled unknowingly into her death. While his previous statement blames the world, Frederic also feels guilty in laying the biological trap for Catherine’s death. When taken together, his personal

experiences, then, lead him to conclude that we humans are all hunted by the world that finally breaks and kills us. While the circumstances of the Great War and Catherine's death warrant his despair, Frederic never opens the possibility of hope after death or volunteers an answer to the question: If life always ends in death, that is the trap, what then?

Instead, Henry as narrator connects the unexpected, ironic circumstances of Catherine's death to the Great War from the start of the novel. These intimations of her death and of Henry's past naivety reveal his current attitude that death is the inevitable trap of life, both on and off the battlefield. Although Henry deserts the Italian army in order to return to Catherine Barkley, and the two run away together to Switzerland, a neutral and presumably safe country, death still finds them through Catherine's protracted labor, and her pregnancy then portends death, rather than life, in the novel. (Hemingway also subverts rain, which normally signifies rebirth and renewal.) From Chapter One, the narrator, speaking in the disembodied, first-person plural, gestures towards Catherine's unexpected death through an image of "the men, passing on the road, marched as though they were six months gone with child" (5). The soldiers appear to carry life, yet underneath their capes they carry lethal rifles and cartridges. Frederic as narrator notes how the Great War highlights the preexisting ironies of life and deceptiveness of perception.

Furthermore, he expands Paul Fussell's contention that "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected" (Fussell 7) when Henry describes in Chapter One, "There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the

flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming” (3). Because the artillery closely approximates the look of summer lightning, it does not generate “the feeling of a storm coming,” neither changes the precipitation nor promotes vigilance. The comparison of man-made violence, “flashes from the artillery,” to a natural event, “summer lightning,” hints at the former poignant romanticism of battle. Yet Henry draws the comparison to highlight the deceptiveness of one’s perceptions and the irony of one’s expectations, rather than to idealize the picturesque front. The frame of reference for the soldier-narrator in 1915 is the natural world, and while lightning is beautiful and dangerous, it could not ever approximate the danger of the front for soldiers. Similarly, Henry’s blissful time with Catherine could not have foretold her painful death. Through his story, Henry expands Fussell’s contention into “Every death is ironic because every death is worse than expected”. He suggests, then, through recurrent images and insights that his process of storytelling fragments, and he darkens the past as more bleak and ironic.

Although Frederic Henry adopts a bleak, fatalistic philosophy, Hemingway leaves room to question it: Given Catherine’s unceasing desire to subsume her identity entirely into Frederic’s and their redefinition of religion in terms of each other, Hemingway hints at the ironic nature of their story. Perhaps their love is adolescent—justifying Hemingway’s comparison of *A Farewell to Arms* to *Romeo and Juliet*—unsustainable and unhealthy due to the extreme degree that they identify with

each other. Through Catherine Barkley's eerie foresight, Hemingway also indicates that Henry as retrospective narrator plays a heavy hand in her portrayal.

While Catherine's active second-sight and affirmative philosophy rescues her character from the trope of the damsel in distress, she has an unreal quality to her, especially in her moments of insecurity around Frederic. Rarely does she argue or contradict him, and repeats herself, "I do anything you want... I want what you want...I'm good. Aren't I good?... You see? I'm good. I do what you want" (106) and "I'm a good girl again" (152). Her fawning is overly obsequious. In Henry's memory, they "never fight" (108) as he informs the more skeptical Nurse Ferguson. The two lovers worship each other and want to spend every minute together. Even throughout the horse race in the company of others, Catherine asks him, "Don't you like it better when we're alone?" (132) She never desires time away from Henry. They even start to resemble each other by the end when they cut their hair in similar styles. The more sacred and idealized Catherine and their relationship seems, the more Henry deepens the tragedy.

Tellingly at the end of the novel, Frederic confesses that he cannot say goodbye to Catherine because "it was like saying good-by to a statue" (332) and while Henry's language is metaphorical, Hemingway opens a point of ironic ambiguity here. Henry shows that the deeply impersonal and cold corpse of Catherine fails to capture her spirit. So Frederic Henry never does say goodbye. The statue becomes the impetus, then, for him to revive and preserve her in the tale. *A Farewell to Arms* reverses the myth of Pygmalion because rather than fall in love with his personal

creation, Henry falls in love with a living human, and after her death, animates her through the story only to reduce “Catherine Barkley to the level of a cold piece of stone, but an artistically shaped stone,” by the end (Prescott 8). Henry attempts to preserve pieces of Catherine into statue but turns her into a vague approximation of her living self by the end of the story, and the tale ultimately disserves Catherine’s memory.

A dream passage of Frederic Henry’s supports this contention that the tale disserves Catherine’s memory, dissolving her true self into an abstraction. When Henry deserts the Italian army as a stowaway in a train, and Henry as narrator intrudes into the stream-of-consciousness of the character:

You did not love the floor of a flat-car nor guns with canvas jackets and the smell of vaselined metal or a canvas that rain leaked through, although it is very fine under a canvas and pleasant with guns; but you loved some one else whom now you knew was not even to be pretended there... (232).

Henry, who worships Catherine as goddess, attempts to recreate her vitality by portraying her in his tale, but in this passage she becomes an abstraction against the elements of war, that is the hard floor of the flat-car, the concrete guns with canvas jackets, and the vaselined metal. The awkward construction of “some one else whom now you knew was not even to be pretended there” conveys Henry’s recognition of his game of pretend, that Catherine is not there in the flat-car as he deserts the Italian army, as well as the retrospective narrator’s recognition of his whole tale as a game of pretend. Frederic Henry pretends in past and present simultaneously that Catherine is there to comfort himself. Yet Henry also registers a change in heart that “now you

knew” the pretend someone is “not even to be pretended”. His narrative disserves Catherine by creating an overwrought idealization of her.

The real, flesh-and-blood Catherine cannot be likened to a statue; hence, Henry’s fashioning of Catherine into a statue also describes his own stoniness, his paralysis generated by his bleak philosophy. If the narrator finds any hope of continuity, it is towards pursuing a circular purpose: Henry’s mind retreads old memories in order to develop his fatalistic, nihilistic outlook in the narrative. While the reader passes over the early, poignant intimations of “a statue” in Henry’s narrative in the first reading, subsequent rereading of *A Farewell to Arms* show Henry’s foreknowledge and his present despair over Catherine’s death. Frederic notes the smell of “marble floors and hospital” (11) prior to ever meeting Catherine Barkley, and while waiting for her, he observes that the hospital’s “Marble busts all looked like a cemetery... all uniformly classical. You could not tell anything about them” (28). The morbid comparison of the marble busts to a cemetery subtly prefigures Catherine’s death and Henry’s grief. The “uniformly classical” and unreadable marble busts, which resemble Catherine Barkley’s corpse in the end, show Henry’s perception of death as the great equalizer and the great effacer. In foreshadowing Catherine’s death, Henry’s narrative consciousness seems unable to move on from the past, disregarding her hope that Henry will “have girls, though”. The bleak narratorial intrusions and characterization of Catherine Barkley destroy Henry’s hope for a life without her.

Although Henry's bleak perspective may seem legitimate, Hemingway's editorial decisions for the ending invites reconsideration of Henry's perspective. Hemingway experimented with nearly 40 variant endings for *A Farewell to Arms* before settling on the published version. Scholar Michael Reynolds notes that in only one of variant endings, Hemingway kept the baby alive. In some of the others, Hemingway continued after Catherine's death scene to write, "Everything blunts and the world keeps on... It never stops" (Reynolds 48) and to describe Rinaldi's cured syphilis and Henry's meeting with the undertaker. While Hemingway could have chosen any of these variant endings, he ultimately decided to cut the ending to when Henry walks alone back to "the hotel in the rain" (332). He also cut the ending with the living baby, a representation of continuity and new life, in favor of the stillborn baby, ridding the novel of any sentimental hope. The bleakness and immediacy of the end demonstrates that a future without Catherine is impossible and unbearable for Frederic. These variant endings show the extremity of Henry's reaction: His life is more or less over, and all he has left is the memory of his life with Catherine.

Furthermore, Hemingway demonstrates that Henry has become his story as a result of basing his religion and his identity entirely on Catherine. Henry holds no interest in conceiving of or elaborating on a time after her death. He becomes so consumed with Catherine that he becomes a disembodied voice by the end. We, as readers, realize later how little information Frederic Henry divulges about himself. He omits information about the funeral, the current year, his current location, Rinaldi's health, the priest, his present relationship with his stepfather in America, and even the

political result of the Great War. Henry also never explicitly explains why he entered the ambulance service in the first place or why he has been in the war for so long. Michael Reynolds' extensive detective work situates the beginning of *A Farewell to Arms* to 1915 and the ending to March 1918, but Hemingway omits information about Henry's life before and after Catherine because Henry cannot have either a future or a past. His desperation to temporarily recover Catherine is his identity.

Henry's narrative consciousness moves towards comprehension, but his insights and his story lament the inevitability and the senseless cruelty of Catherine's death. His idealistic conception of Catherine and of their love powers the nihilism, irony and tragedy of the tale, and once Catherine dies broken, his story works to preserve and reconstruct her, ultimately reducing him into a disembodied voice by the end. Because of the extreme subjectivity of Frederic's narrative, critics hold wildly different responses to him as a character. Some see him as a hero while others see him as passive victim. Writer Wyndham Lewis famously compared Hemingway's characters to "the cannon-fodder, the cattle outside the slaughterhouse, serenely chewing the cud—*of those to whom things are done*, in contrast to those who have executive will and intelligence" (Lewis 90). Surely he misses the point: passivity is how Frederic reads himself. But Hemingway invites other perspectives.

## *Conclusion*

In narrowing my focus to Hemingway's war writing, I have connected his experimentation with narration and temporality in *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms* to the sense of a radically changed world brought about by the Great War. For me, Hemingway's work thus provides a case study into the relation between war and modern writing. Although neither *In Our Time* nor *A Farewell to Arms* have been described as primarily modernist works, the two exhibit many features of modernism, which is, according to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*:

- (a) a reaction against 19th-century conventions of representation and narrative omniscience and is often non-chronological, with experiments in time such as sudden jumps, temporal juxtapositions, simultaneity, or a concern with duration (making a great deal occur within a small amount of text, or stretching a small amount of action over a large textual space) in evidence
- (b) [Works] break narrative frames or move from one level of narration to another without warning or foreground the reflexivity of their texts. Instead of plot events, there is an emphasis on characters' consciousness, memory, and perception...
- (c) Authority is often vested in strangely limited third-person or unreliable first-person narrators, or there are multiple, shifting narrators. Instead of using closure and the fulfillment of reader expectations, or following genre conventions and formulas, as in a Victorian novel, modernist novels often work towards open endings and they make free use of ellipses, ambiguity, and complexity

Hemingway's war stories maintain a simple, objective surface that deceives readers into thinking his characters lack internality, but his stories are deeply embedded in the narrator's consciousness and dependent on his memory and perception. The two previous chapters articulate how the historical event of the Great War encouraged modernist experimentation in Hemingway's writing.

Of the two works, *In Our Time* stands as more boldly experimental and modernist. If the collection is unified, it is because each fragmentary interchapter and short story reinforces the bleak vision of the world at war. *In Our Time* is visually and narratologically disconnected. The brief vignettes of the interchapters cut between the short stories, and even the stories lack a single unified consciousness, a single point of view, and common setting. These qualities of *In Our Time* simultaneously respond to and convey the subjective, disordered, and traumatic experience of the Great War in a few ways. In one way, Hemingway avoids the used up words of the Great War. He avoids the elevated diction, genteel language and abstractions of the Victorian, in favor of the simple, vernacular, and concrete words. Additionally, Hemingway uses his laconic style and the fragmentary interchapter in order to express the need for emotional-restraint and stoicism (the “objective correlative”) from the soldier-narrator. The progression from the first-person to third-person narrator suggests also that these soldier-narrators aspire and fail to assert narratorial agency. All of the stories maintain that sense of fumbling and bleakness, highlighting the parallels between the War and life outside the trenches.

That vision of the world continues into *A Farewell to Arms* where Frederic Henry’s single consciousness seems hell-bent on emphasizing the violence and brutality of the world through his retrospective narration. Henry’s narrative consciousness moves towards comprehension, but his insights and his story lament the inevitability and the cruelty of Catherine’s death. His idealistic conception of Catherine and of their love powers the nihilism, irony, and tragedy of the tale. Once

Catherine dies “broken,” his story works to preserve and reconstruct her, thereby reducing him into a disembodied voice by the end and consuming his identity.

Hemingway, then, implies that the experience of the Great War informs experience outside the war, transforming all our subjective interpretations to make us realize that life means biological entrapment.

*In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms* manage to be simultaneously about the Great War and about *more* than the Great War. Many of Hemingway’s stories are set in the context of the War, portraying the historical events, yet the stories do not become mere reportage on it. While *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms* capture wartime experience and, more importantly, the War’s emotional aftermath and impact on literary form, the stories rise above the immediate conditions of their making. In this way, Hemingway’s writing endures and fulfills Ezra Pound’s dictum to the modernists to “Make it new.”

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