CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE WRITING OF
A FAREWELL TO ARMS - FACT AND FICTION

For a generation, it was known with only a trace of irony, as the "Great War", "the war to end war", the war to make the world safe for democracy. Ultimately it was not the world's greatest war, did not end war, and produced no lasting world movement for democracy. But the First World War did mark the beginning of the modern era, shattered a cultural universe and in the United States shaped the literature of a generation.

Readers and critics, however, tend to look upon the great crusade either with nostalgia or impatience. Lauded for its excitement or attacked for its naivete, the work of post World War I writers has suffered from the fact that the burden of their protest has been so rapidly and so thoroughly absorbed in the national memory. But Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cummings, Faulkner and many other American writers of the twenties began their work at a time of unique crisis. In order to understand their development it is necessary to understand the nature of the crisis itself, to see it clearly and without nostalgia. For it was the great crusade which gave to American literature an art not simply "influenced" by war, but in a vital sense, created by it.

The impact of the war is not a simple thing to recreate, either for new generations of readers or for critics who look back upon the experience of the twenties through a haze of sentiment. World War I for the vast majority of Americans, including the young men who were to produce the literature of the post war period, was a crusade in the fullest sense of the term.
It was a call to glory, a struggle against the hosts of darkness... to lean down and revitalise a materialistic society, a prelude to the 'socialist commonwealth' which many Americans saw as part of the inevitable future of the nation.¹

The explosive enthusiasm, as well as the subsequent disillusion of the war experience, requires an act of retrospective imagination if the literature of the twenties is to be seen clearly for what is was.

In a very real sense we are all creatures of World War I, both in aesthetic and political terms. The great authoritarian movements of our century, the experiments in art and literature against all forms of rhetoric, the triumph of technological civilisation - these things were then new, and they were the raw material for art, an art which found its expression not merely in "negativism" or "escapism" but rather in an examination of possible alternatives to a framework of obsolete values.

The aim of this section then, is not merely to "criticise" a literary period, but rather to reexperience it, to get at something of the essence which made of the twenties so vital a decade in American letters, producing such enduring novels as Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms.

During the years preceding the First World War there was a faith seldom doubted, a secular faith of man in man: democracy was coming into its own. Europe was seen as the most advanced civilization - the centre of a "luminous intelligence" of which Henry James was the chief American spokesman in literature. The excesses of the industrial revolution were arrested, social no less than intellectual awareness was added proof of the progress of civilization. By 1912, when Woodrow Wilson said "it is a new age", change was the keynote and the golden age was as sure as the

annual boom in population. The journey to happiness, however, a material happiness based on better wages, newer goods and wider stock distribution was not universally accepted. For some the very complacency of material progress was stifling. Unprepared for the stuffy materialistic quest for happiness, by reason of their cultural pretensions, academic and artistic young men retreated into the twin towers of humanism and aestheticism. Other young men in offices, factories or sales rooms were bored despite the better wages or perhaps because of the better wages. When the war did arrive it was seized as the very breath of glory as the big chance by the young aesthete, humanist and commercial man alike.

The impact of the war on the older writers and thinkers, who were developing a culture of intelligence and reason, defies description. The context in which they worked, and in which they were struck by the war, is remote. The heart wrack of the man like Henry James, despite his Anglophilism speaks through a letter he wrote to Howard Sturgis in 1914:

It is vain to speak as if one weren't living in a nightmare.... The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and horror.... this unspeakable giveaway of the whole fool's paradise of our past ... this is what we were so fondly working for.²

War - the fire in which heroes had been forged throughout man’s history - drained Europe and ruined America. But in place of fire there was mud, in place of heroes there were faceless masses of men butchering each other with none of the personal tests celebrated in epics reaching back to the origins of language itself. There were no identifiable gestures of nobility in this war, and the young Ernest Hemingway had not forgotten that, when in 1923 he wrote a snatch of verse bitterly titled Champs d'Honneur for Poetry magazine.

² ibid, Page VIII
Soldiers never do die well:
Crosses mark their places—
Wooden Crosses where they fell,
Stuck above their faces.
Soldiers pitch and cough and twitch—
All the world roars red and black;
Soldiers smother in a ditch,
Choking through the whole attack.  

The scientific century had produced what was probably the first of the scientific wars, and as John Peale Bishop remarked, “The most tragic thing about the war was not that it made so many dead men, but that it destroyed the tragedy of death”.

Why did the people who reelected Wilson in 1916, because he kept them out of the war swing on a pendulum from neutrality to total involvement? The reasons — often paradoxical, none simple — related to economic pressures, to the enormous growth of propaganda-as-science, to the need of organised religion for the holy cause, and to the concept of battle as the personal proving ground for manhood.

The first of these reasons, the pocket book has perhaps been given the most attention of all. The United States profited enormously during the early years of the war, almost entirely because of trade with the Entente. By 1917, (the year Ernest Hemingway went out to Italy as an ambulance driver) the United States had a two billion dollar stake in allied victory with munitions shipments alone. Yet Anglophiles and Francophiles within the United States soon perceived that economic interests alone would not produce a war fever. Their subsequent propaganda sought to induce an emotional infection — consequently the distribution of atrocity stories became a major weapon of the war. The stage was set for the

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3 Poetry — XXI (January 1923), Page 19
4 Quoted by John Alfred Atkins in The Art of Ernest Hemingway (London, 1952), Page 116
rhetoric describing German bestiality with the sinking of the Lusitania – the most effective single propaganda issue of the war. Directed against Teutonic depravity abroad, a large quantity of fiction was written and read for indictment and inspiration. The books reflected horror upon a specific target and reduced tragedy to a single cause. Above all they gave reassurance that the reader was hating the right people. Propaganda novels today, however, must take into account a vast increase in political and ideological sophistication on the part of the reading public. Simple epithets no longer possess the efficacy they did during the First War – there is some control of rhetoric, and at the very least a posture of objectivity dealing with the complexities of motivation and situation.

Horrified by episodes such as that of the Lusitania, primed by atrocity dispatches from London or Paris, American clergymen too joined the propaganda clamour and clearly embraced the concept of Holy Cause, “Jesus in Khaki” and represented the war as a test of spiritual righteousness. God was confronting the devil, and under the circumstances, pacifism was not only unpatriotic, but also blasphemous – and religious rhetoric flowed with a heat unequalled before – or since.

Like the press and the pulpit, American literature during World War I had been placed at the service of the propaganda machine, and the willing assent of older writers to such indentured service helped shape post war disillusion in two directions: a rhetorical protest by young men who utilised their war experience as material for fiction, and a form of anti-war propaganda no less absurd than the pseudo literature of the crusade itself. Ultimately reaction struck at both. A movement of counter rhetoric developed during the twenties and early thirties,
bringing into articulate focus the general cynicism represented by the anesthetised “I” of Hemingway heroes, and the broad, objective, scientific non-involvement of Dos Passos’ collectivist novels. For the most serious craftsmen, value inflated by rhetoric was suspect, whether it celebrated or protested against the glory of democracy at war.

Propaganda – the rhetoric of atrocities, of religious cause, of race hate and of glory through battle – was only a single factor in the bold journey which was to stall and turn back in mud and blood. Propaganda was a stimulant, but young men at the time of World War I were often looking for a stimulant and were bored for lack of it. Their idealism was real enough, but the idealism of war was embraced all the more enthusiastically because it sanctioned a release from a world increasingly self-centred and materialistic.

In The End of American Innocence Henry F. May points out that while “the First World War was clearly, an enormous experience for the peaceful and optimistic country”, during the years preceding the war there were numerous cracks in the “official surface” of “intolerable placidity and complacency”. This is an important insight, for there can be no doubt that new currents in art, philosophy, economics and politics were already in evidence before the impact of the war speeded up the process of change. The war, however, was seized upon by those most disaffected with their time – it was taken precisely as a means of escaping materialism, for achieving personal nobility and social mobility, for carrying the banner of disinterested justice, for “living life to the hilt”. America’s “loss of

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innocence" was inevitable even if World War I had never occurred; that so many Americans innocently embraced battle as an antidote for their dissatisfaction, however, accounts for the shattering impact of the war itself. Far from being a corrective for, the war was discovered to be an excrescence of, hypocritical values and a tragically flawed society. This was the final – and unforgivable – disillusion. And it was this disillusion which brought new pressure on what Henry May calls "cracks in the surface" of an American culture still very much nineteenth century. The cracks in other words were there; but only the intense pressure of war – or rather of its failure – brought the walls tumbling down.

In the better liberal arts colleges young men were going through a process of alienation from a society for which their education rendered them useless. There were, Malcolm Cowley says, the aesthetes and the humanists, both equally estranged from the productive thrust and material values of pre-war America.⁶ For these young men war was a call to adventure, sanctioned by idealism. In the pre-war period furthermore, going abroad was both cause and effect of culture; to go abroad with the opportunity of becoming a hero was no less than a golden chance.

The chief literary antecedent in the matter of war heroism was the work of Stephen Crane. And as the United States stood on the threshold of its first real battle, the concepts fundamental to The Red Badge of Courage (i.e., war was a phenomenon having a beginning, a middle, and an end; that war had a rational and attainable purpose, and that the individual, either as observer or participant, could benefit from the experience of war) were still intact. Crane’s influence is

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overwhelming, yet one tends to underestimate the enormous contrast between the symbolic experience he described (war as the achievement of manhood) and the actual experience of World War I — a contrast rendered all the more psychologically and emotionally damaging precisely because of Crane’s influence. Good soldiers and bad soldiers alike, men like the Frederick Henrys or the Andrews of the post-war novels came not only to reject the absurdity of external causes, but also the absurd role of the individual soldier. What Crane saw in warfare, writers like Hemingway had to find elsewhere; the latter’s “moment of truth” could come only in other spheres of action where the individual could take a stand, even that of loser, and preserve the nobility of his manhood. Only at the beginning of the war did young men on both sides of the Atlantic see in conflict the values achieved by Crane’s hero Henry Fleming. Opportunity to show what he is made of; opportunity to show himself what he is made of. “It was this entire concept of proving ground that was broken in World War I and it was broken violently enough to affect permanently the literature of a generation.” The great enthusiasm for exchanging the “uniforms of culture for military uniforms” was not, Cowley points out, as radical for the young men in the universities as it might seem. American patriotism differed from that of the French peasants, who were defending their own fields and farms. American patriotism was abstract: “it concerned world democracy and the right to self determination of small nations.....” It was based on disinterested ideals, providing a means to action without the vulgar economic distractions of the

8 Cowley, Malcolm — Exile’s Return (Viking, New York, 1951) Page 36
market place. War was the test, the exercise in manhood, at once the prerogative of selfless youth and – an idea widely held and widely voiced – the most reliable method of toughening a flabby society.

Some young dilettantes, however, were not interested in the war as proving ground or cure for social decadence; they were motivated by a more personal need for grand gesture. “Sickened by writing or reading poems to love goddesses, arguing about form, scribbling music reviews or floating in a many coloured dream of beauty”, such young men embarked on a journey to get away from it all, to find a solid base in real experience with common people.

The search for experience and adventure, on the other hand, was by no means limited to the educated class. The young men of office, farm and factory welcomed the war with equal enthusiasm. It must be remembered that American attitudes towards struggle – whether or not shaped by the frontier imagination so essential to this country’s cultural growth – had always been ambiguous. One might say that the “Onward Christian Soldiers” complex typified a national, emotional schizophrenia regarding questions of war and peace. As Frank T. Phipps has suggested, although most Americans believed they hated war, on the level of the imagination they consistently imaged America (and Americans) as honourable, courageous soldiers, marching with divine guidance, towards a destined future.10

In One of Ours, Willa Cather utilises the war drive beneath the peaceful surface of American life during these years as a major aspect of Claude Wheeler’s

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journey into meaning – through violence. Claude is typical of the mid-westerner reaching for war, “the bright face of danger”. For Claude the war came as a release from the rigidity and unsubmitting will of his wife. Certainly the small town morality permitted no corrective for restlessness. Claude could be justified in saying, “I never knew there was anything worth living for, until this war broke out”.

The desire for adventure was equally entrancing for young men who were bound neither by small town rigidity nor deracinated by over education. Unlike the aesthetes, these young men themselves used the yardstick of material wealth. And the war, for men in the factories, salesrooms and offices, was more than adventure; it was a means of achieving a stature they could obtain in no other way. This theme, the hope for social and material stature – through glory so tragically reversed by the war experience itself was to be a major one in the post-war novel of protest.

“The green field shriveled in an afternoon”, Vernon Parrington remarks of the Great Crusade; “the moral and philosophical structures of the earlier society collapsed,” writes Frederick Hoffman; “you could have supposed the whole of Europe had been tilted up with all of its anciantly established things being up ended and tilted into the sea”, noted H.M.Tomlinson. The impact of World War I must be seen not only in terms of the military and political realities for which soldiers and civilians alike were unprepared, but in terms of a naivete so profound as to require an act of retrospective imagination only a few decades afterward. It is this quality of naivete which sets up the dramatic process of disillusion and impact in the post

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11 Cather, Willa – One of Ours (New York, 1951) Page 466
World War I novels. After the second conflict and the continuing threat of atomisation such naivete may well seem fantastic. In no World War II novel do protagonists set out with a comparable mixture of innocence and baroque expectation. It was precisely this expectation of progress, together with the concept of war as a lance and plume affair and Europe itself as cultural monument and picture postcard, which resulted in so sharp a recoil in the World War I literature of disillusion. In the words of Stanley Cooperman, “The world itself was broken. It was still broken when World War II began, but by then the family china had long been cracked.”

The tragedy of 1914 (and later wars as well), is that while no one actually wanted war, a great many individuals and groups had urgent desires which could not be gratified without it. The ultimate irony was not that national leaders – and populations for that matter – “wanted” a war, but rather that they did not want the war they got. What they did get – cynic or idealist, profiteer or patriot, clergymen or militarist – was a juggernaut that could no more be controlled by its drivers than by its victims. It was a war of stasis and futility, but equally important was the fact that “fighting” became a passive rather than an active procedure. The man was separated from the act; the potential hero could be – and often was – splattered by a stray shell under circumstances that had nothing whatever to do with soldiering – as Frederick Henry was wounded in A Farewell to Arms. The result of this passivity was a psychic emasculation inherent in the combat environment itself, a sense of violation which had such vitally important results as the subsequent preoccupation of

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Hemingway with death and *cojones*. Survivors, furthermore, were often individuals who did survive only by perfecting the virtues of cleverness rather than of intelligence – the latter according to the almost universal testimony of post-war novelists resulting in either desertion or death.

Besides United States army training was often vastly inadequate. In fact, many troops were shipped overseas with only six weeks of actual training. In *Through the Wheat* by Thomas Boyd, Captain Powers, with his dreams of sabre charges, who almost before Hick's eyes was to become a bit of uniform, a leg and a pile of brains modestly contained in a battered helmet, was a historical type no less than the creation of a writer's imagination. There were many men – of all combat ranks – who suffered the same fate in either physical or psychological terms. And many of those who did not, who survived, did so only by developing a numbness and a broken indifference. Together with this was an inner vacuum and the flight from nada of Frederick Henry – and we have the post World War I literary attitude in broadest outline.

The impact of twentieth century fire power on the American troops first exposed to it helped produce the combination of absurdity, protest and numbness which were to become characteristic of the anti hero in the post World War I novel. It must be emphasised that the reaction to horror, indecency, squalor, chaos and filth was especially violent in the work of American novelists precisely because of the more naive expectation, and subsequent impact of the American experience. Words like “putrefaction”, “stench”, “decay”, “nausea”, “infested”, are reiterated in the novels and with good reasons.
It is interesting to compare such descriptions with those of Willa Cather’s who, in 1922 was able to describe trench warfare in a somewhat different light. Miss Cather’s dugout is “clean”, the land though bleak is “quiet”; dawn comes up “saffron and silver”; even shell holes are delicately described as “opaque”. The importance of Miss Cather’s view of World War I combat, however, lies not in its own limitations, but rather in the fact that similar limitations have persisted ever since 1918 and have indeed, through a growing nostalgia abetted by the necessities of continuing world conflict, actually conditioned critical attitudes to World War I fiction as a whole. Readers of Hemingway, for example, have often assumed a continuum of violence-in-the-north-woods to violence-in-war, to violence-in-the-bull ring; as recently as 1960 John Killinger in Hemingway and the Dead Gods could actually see Nick’s war experience as “a moment of truth”. That such assumptions are made is an indication of how completely the World War I impact has been blunted by time and a sense of continuing crisis.

For idealistic young Americans from April 1917 to November 11, 1918, and even earlier for some volunteers, the Great War represented a glorious opportunity for both adventure and the advancement of American idealism. For some this desire to serve, based apparently on both idealism and a wish not to miss what at the time appeared to be the new country’s greatest spectacle, predates America’s entry into the First World War. One of the greatest attractions for American volunteers was the ambulance service. Charles A. Fenton in his Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy 1914-1918 notes that Harvard led in the number of volunteers with 325 and Yale followed with 187 – a highly educated group of volunteers, at least by World War I era’s standards. Among these individuals, there were also a large number of aspiring
writers—some of whom would in the post war world achieve various degrees of fame in literature, poetry and criticism. Among those so destined were E.E Cummings, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and Malcolm Cowley. As Fenton observes, in the disillusioned 1930s it was fashionable to deprecate the war efforts of the ambulance men, and their particular duties did leave them in a strangely spectatorial role, usually living better than common infantrymen while enjoying officers' privileges and a fair degree of safety.

Perhaps, no American author of the twentieth century has been the object of as much critical attention as Hemingway. However, thanks in large part to Hemingway's tendency to re-invent, to exaggerate his own past and his own exploits—and perhaps as well to a tendency on the part of some early critics to fail to distinguish between the Hemingway fictional protagonist and their own creator—only recently has an accurate record of Hemingway's experiences in the First World War begun to emerge. The author of A Farewell to Arms is reported to have told Malcolm Cowley in 1948:

"In the First War I was hurt very badly in the body, mind and spirit and also morally. The true gen is I was hurt bad all the way through and I was truly spooked at the end."\(^1^6\) Despite his tendency to exaggerate and mislead critics, it is now evident that Hemingway suffered physically and very probably emotionally as a result of his experiences on the Piave and in Milan during 1918. However, the difficulty remains in determining the exact nature of those wounds and how precisely they were acquired.

One thing that is strikingly evident about Hemingway’s war experience in Italy during the summer of 1918 is that it was distressingly brief. Distressing for both Hemingway and those critics who insisted that the experiences of Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms were based on the author’s own in Italy. Hemingway arrived in Italy in June, 1918 and spent a short period of two weeks or so driving an ambulance in the Dolomites near Schio—a region so far removed from actual combat that it was known as the “Schio Country Club”. Unhappy with this non-combative and safe duty, he transferred to a Red Cross canteen at Fossalta, a village on the Piave river. There while in the trenches on July 8, 1918, most accounts agreed, he was struck by a mortar shell while handing out chocolates, cigarettes and other equally prosaic items to Italian troops. This incident effectively terminated Hemingway’s direct experience of Great War combat. However, the wounding also carries a certain amount of heroic myth, or at least uncertainty.

Numerous accounts have the badly wounded Hemingway lifting an equally badly wounded Italian soldier on his back and making his way to a first aid station. Whether in fact he did so seems to be questionable. The fact that he was decorated by the Italian government has been used to support the account of the wounded Italian; however, Robert W. Lewis observes in “Hemingway in Italy: Making it Up” that unlike other Red Cross workers who were honoured for acts of valour by the Italians “…..Hemingway’s experience was not written up and not immediately recognised by the decorations that were commonly if not casually awarded to the

Hemingway, in fact, did not receive his citations until long after the event, the silver medal of military valour in 1920 and as Robert Lewis notes, there was little unusual about the two military awards the young man did receive ".....the silver medal was awarded to all soldiers who were wounded, and the war cross.....to all who were engaged in action in the war....."\(^{19}\)

One of the central problems in separating biographical fact from invented experience in the case of Ernest Hemingway during the war and immediately after is the author's tendency "to spin yarns". Michael Reynolds, in his The Young Hemingway, refers to this as Hemingway's ability to modify his experience to fit the moment. "In 1919, the age demanded heroes, and if his experiences did not quite fit the mould, then Hemingway would expand a bit here and there until it did fit."\(^{20}\)

What this strongly resembles, as often noted, is the experience of Krebs in Hemingway's Soldier's Home. In order to be listened to, Krebs has to lie: his lies were quite unimportant and consisted in attributing to himself things other men had done, seen or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers.\(^{21}\)

What the incident did do without any doubt was propel the almost twenty year old Hemingway into a Milan hospital and involve him in a romance with nurse Agnes Von Kurowsky. Von Kurowsky has been assumed by many critics to be the model for Catherine Barkley of A Farewell to Arms, but several critics, including Reynolds, suggest Catherine is a composite containing elements of other women in

\(^{19}\) Ibid, Page 224
\(^{20}\) Reynolds, Michael S. – The Young Hemingway (New York, 1986) Page 52
\(^{21}\) Hemingway, Ernest – The Short Stories (New York, 1966) Page 146
addition to Agnes, such as Hemingway's first wife Hadley Richardson and his second wife Pauline Pfeiffer. The generally accepted view has been that Von Kurowsky was a reluctant participant in this affair. But, by early March 1919, all semblance of a romance was over.

Thus Hemingway in his nine month tour of the war in Italy, only six days of which were spent under what might properly be called combat conditions, experienced two shattering woundings, one physical and one emotional. At least to some extent they would appear in his fictions in different guises. If experience does indeed teach, then Italy for Ernest Hemingway had proven a highly instructive tour of duty, as Michael Reynolds has observed:

"From the Italian war he brought back a pistol and a bottle of kummel shaped like a bear: authentic trophies. In his damaged leg he still carried bits of metal, equally authentic. If the war had not been so glorious as advertised, its true experience was still instructional: the whore in the government brothels who teased him for blushing; the taste of grappa; the faces of men bleeding to death; the sound of incoming artillery; the blue eyes of a nurse; the smell of his own blood; the way dead bodies bloated in the sun. In less than a year he had become a charter member of modern times."\(^{22}\)

And Reynolds might have added that for the next decade, Ernest Hemingway would use those experiences in several short stories and one fine novel that very much helped to define the period between the World Wars.

In the opening pages of the novel, Frederick Henry is the archetype of the all American young man – a nice guy. Like many others of his age and generation, he is insensitive to the suffering of others, slightly selfish and above all totally ridicules the possibility of his own death.

"Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything
to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me than war in the movies."23 He
has a vague ill-defined idealism common in the American youth in the twenties. He
is, in other words, a perfectly normal young man, a normalcy which becomes a basis
for satire. Henry at the beginning of the novel is egoistical and selfish. His
perceptions are limited and detached. But his greatest fault, however, is his general
lack of awareness. In his characterisation of Frederick Henry it is interesting to note
that Hemingway actually depicts himself as he was in 1918. He maintains an ironic
distance from his character, a distance which is not without a touch of regret and
ridicule.

Early in the novel, the scene of the war is set in a manner reminiscent of "a
quaint Italian operatta".24 Priest baiting in the officers' mess is juxtaposed with the
bawdy activities of the Villa Rosa while the war progresses like a game – the Italian
infantry moving up and down, capturing and surrendering the same territory and the
Austrian artillery bombarding Henry's station not seriously "but only a little in a
military way".25

Henry's perception of the outside world is abstract and dreamlike and
parallels the emptiness within himself. His insensitivity is heightened in his feelings
for Catherine, particularly in the context of her recent bereavement. It is the priest
from Ambruzzi, however, who perceives Henry's latent capacity for commitment.
But at this time he drowns himself in a world of sensations "in the smoke of cafes

23 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 31
24 Benson, Jackson J. – Hemingway: The Writer's Art of Self Defence (University of Minnesota Press,
1969) Page 84
25 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 8
and nights when the room whirled knowing that this was all and all …… and not caring. 26 It is again the priest who perceives that even after being wounded Henry has not acquired a consciousness of the reality of the war, “still even wounded …. You do not see it. I can tell.” 27 Henry does not perceive the terrifying irrationality of the war, the nature of the irrational violence which leaves no room for the preservation of the individual and his dignity. Henry’s even casual commitment to the war has robbed him of his ability to love as well as his ability to react as an individual. The war has nothing to do with the victor or the vanquished. Yet Henry seeks a purpose behind the war, an order behind the chaos till suddenly the incident at the bridge allows the truth to dawn on him.

War in the novel not only becomes a fact of life but acquires a metaphorical meaning as well. It becomes a symbol of mass-man, the bureaucracy, the propaganda and above all the indifference. Individual dignity is destroyed at the altar of general submission, and it is this aspect which becomes even more terrifying than the violence unleashed.

It is not that Henry is impervious to the irrationality of the war, but at the beginning the impact of it is negligible to his insensitive mind. He does wonder a great deal about what is going on and what will happen in the end. His general stance of commitment, even though perfunctory, is radically different from the driver Passini.

“…..There is nothing worse than war”. (Passini) “Defeat is worse”. (Henry replied) 28

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26 Ibid, Page 14
27 Ibid, page 55
28 Ibid, Page 40
Passini of course has a deeper understanding of the war, an understanding which
dawns only when he is met by the chaos at the bridge. But it is at the time of his
wounding that the first lesson of the war is learnt by Henry. “My knee wasn’t there.
My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin.” There are, however, several
absurdities linked with his wounding. Firstly Henry and his comrades are not
soldiers; Henry is wounded not while in combat, but in the mundane act of eating
cheese. And the tragedy is that it is Passini who so abhors war who is killed. These
ironic contrasts raise questions: what sort of game is war? What are the rules? And
who dictates them? The effect of the wounding of Henry and its psychological
implications are, however, not explicitly stated in this novel, but for Hemingway
himself this must have had very deep emotional implications, for this motif appears
in a much later novel Across the River and Into the Trees. Here we have Col.
Cantwell, a much wounded older man than Henry but having gone through the same
war and the same initial wounding.

“Finally he did get hit properly and for good. No one of his other wounds
had ever done to him what the first big one did. I suppose that it is just the loss of
immortality. Well, in a way, that is quite a lot to lose.”

Henry’s subsequent sojourn at the hospital in Milan is the beginning of a
doomed love story. As his relationship with Catherine deepens his links with the war
gradually grow more tenuous. Ultimately he reaches a point where he cannot bear to
read news of the war – the only words he can read are the baseball scores. In ironic

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29 Ibid, Page 45
30 Hemingway, Ernest – Across the River and Into the Trees (Scribners, 1950) Page 33
contrast to Henry and his growing despair is the super patriot Ettore swept away by the glamour of the wounds and the medals.

“He’s got five medals and, oh boy, aren’t they great for making the girls think you’re fine. But wound stripes are better.”

On his return to the front Henry is met with a shock. The situation has degenerated drastically. The Austrian offensive has depleted his comrades both physically and psychologically. The mood is summed up aptly by the major when he says that Henry was lucky to have got hit when he did. The priest still prays, but there is no conviction in his prayers. He has seen too much death to believe in hope. But it is in Henry’s encounter with Renaldi, the surgeon that the reality of the war is brought to sharpest focus. Renaldi does not think – he operates like a machine. He has been driven by the demands made on him by his profession to a point beyond physical and emotional endurance. He is a man at the brink of hysteria.

But it is the battle police at the bridge who symbolise the ultimate irrationality of the war game.

“They were all young men and they were saving their country.” They shoot everyone they question and neither the questions nor the shootings have any significance. Henry is faced here with two alternatives. On the one hand is the false rhetoric of victory, courage and honour and on the other the reality of terror cowardice and death. The incomprehensible reality of the defeated Italians shooting their own officers becomes a symbol for the loss of all reason, and quite suddenly a rational alternative does present itself. From disillusioned acceptance he chooses a
way out and swims across the river to freedom. But the knowledge that Frederick Henry acquires does not make *A Farewell to Arms* an initiation story. Neither Henry nor Catherine expresses any ideals that have been besmirched by the war. The only object lesson is contained in the words “That was what you did. You died.”

*A Farewell to Arms* is aptly a study in isolation set against the backdrop of war. Although Frederick Henry is not the hero in the conventional sense, he emerges as the central character in the novel as it defines his progress from group participation to total isolation which in reality is the main action of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel in the fall of 1915, Henry is part of a contingent of ambulance drivers in the Italian Second Army – a key link in the defences of the Italian front which is an extension of the Western front in France. Italy, in turn is part of an alliance which places Henry at the end of a long chain of command. But at the end of the novel, Henry is bereft of country, family and friend – he is totally alone.

It is with his wounding that Henry’s movement into isolation first begins. His wounds separate him both physically and psychologically from his comrades. His convalescence at the hospital separates him physically from his friends at the front while his wounds give an added dimension to his experience of the war unknown to his friends who have not been wounded. In Book II, his growing isolation with Catherine gives the couple a separate identity removed from the mass identity of the war. As their relationship deepens all the props that sustain Western civilisation fail to sustain them. The family, the military and the state fail to support Frederick and Catherine in the face of the *nada* that surrounds them. Organised religion has no meaning and comfort for the couple; in the pouring rain in Milan,
Catherine refuses to take shelter in the church for she says the church will not do lovers any good. At the brink of death in the hospital she refuses to seek solace in God.

Troop mutinies and references to a “separate peace” coupled with the soldiers’ criticism and frustration give evidence of the bankruptcy of the military. The soldier’s uniform which had earlier provided comfort gradually becomes a hollow symbol for Henry.

When the retreat begins Henry is part of the second army. Soon after he leaves Gorizia his ambulances are separated from the main body of the retreat. Bogged down in the mud, the ambulances have to be deserted and Henry and his co-drivers have to make the journey on foot towards the bridge head. When one driver is killed and the other deserts, Henry is left alone to face the battle police at the bridge. Thus during the retreat, one sees the movement into isolation acted out in the narrative. Here in Book III, the key chapter of the novel, Hemingway has epitomised the progress into isolation which is the central movement of the novel. In the last pages of the novel the journey to isolation is brought to its final culmination at Stresa. Here the lovers have abandoned the last of their friends and acquaintances as well as their allegiance to duty. They are in Switzerland, significantly a neutral country. Here in another country they are totally alienated from everyone and everything familiar. And when Catherine dies in childbirth in Lausanne, doctors fail just as earlier in the midst of war the priest had failed to sustain the individual in the face of death. Bereft of wife and child, Frederick Henry has no hope, no belief, no person to turn to. He is the truly isolated man.
It is significant that Hemingway had written *A Farewell to Arms* in retrospect, and in this context his theme of growing isolation becomes even more meaningful. He had viewed the period between the writing of *A Farewell to Arms* with the eyes of a practising journalist. As Philip Young remarks:

“Something in the evolution of Frederick Henry from complicity in the war to bitterness and escape has made him seem, though always himself, a little larger than that too. Complicity, bitterness and escape, a whole country could read its experiences .... When historians of various kinds epitomised the temper of the twenties and a reason for it, the adventures of that lieutenant come almost invariably to mind.”

As early as 1922, Hemingway had begun to formulate a method of dealing with reality. In a feature story for the Toronto Daily Star, “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, he told how depressing it was to return to the scene of battles he had taken part in, for the country was so changed that it ruined the memory. It would have been better to visit a battle site he had not known. “Go to someone else’s front if you want to. There your imagination will help you out and you may be able to picture the things that happened.”

In a 1935 *Esquire* article Hemingway gave a somewhat fuller statement on the point:

“Good writing is true writing. If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it truly would be.....Imagination is one thing beside honesty that a good writer must have, the more he learns from experience the more truly he can imagine. If he gets so he can imagine truly enough people will think that things he relate all really happened and that he is just reporting.”

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33 Hemingway, Ernest – “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, *Toronto Daily Star* (July 22, 1922) Page 7
In 1948 when he wrote his own introduction for an illustrated edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway made no pretense of having experienced the historical events of the novel first hand.

"I remember living in the book and making up what happened in it everyday. Making the country and the people and the things that happened I was happier than I had ever been....Finding you were able to make something up; to create truly enough so that it made you happy to read it."^35

And in 1958, when he was interviewed by the *Paris Review*, Hemingway restated his position with the same simplicity he had used in 1922.

"Q: Have you ever described any type of situation of which you had no personal knowledge?

A: That is a strange question .... A writer, if he is any good, does not describe. He invents or makes out of his knowledge personal and impersonal."^36

Over a thirty six year span, Hemingway's attitude towards his profession remained constant on the point of "making it up". Yet no one ever took him seriously for he had been typed as an autobiographic writer when he published *The Sun Also Rises*. His statements about invented action on the basis of knowledge "personal and impersonal" appeared either simple-minded or some sort of ruse. They were neither.

In his terse disciplinary sketches written in 1922-23, Hemingway had already developed an objective style that treated the experience of others as his own. From the beginning Hemingway felt free to use second hand sources. After Hemingway showered Stephen Crane with praise in his introduction to *Men at War* critics began

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^35 Hemingway, Ernest – *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribner, New York, 1948) Page vii-viii
to notice thematic and structural similarities between *The Red Badge of Courage* and *A Farewell to Arms*. What was carefully ignored by the critics was the reason why Hemingway said he admired Crane's novel:

“Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* before he had seen any war. But he had read contemporary accounts, had heard the old soldiers, they were not so old then, talk, and above all he had seen Mathew Brady's wonderful photographs. Creating his story out of this material he wrote that great boys dream of war that was to be truer to how war is than any war the boy who wrote it would ever live to see.”  

Hemingway's praise was neither for Crane's structure nor for his theme: the praise is for technique and verity. Crane's research methods that Hemingway chose to praise - reading histories, talking to veterans, and looking at pictures - were the same methods that Hemingway used in *A Farewell to Arms*.

As early as 1922, Hemingway had already done sufficient historical reading to pose as an expert on a war in which he had served only briefly and that he later admitted he did not understand. In his 1922 visit to Schio, Hemingway realized a truth that he passed on to his readers and that he remembered when he tried to make fictional sense of his own war experience.

“Don't go back to visit the old front. If you have pictures in your head of something that happened in the night in the mud at Paschendaele, or if the first wave working up the slope of Vimy, do not try and go back and verify them. It is no good. The front is different from the way it used to be .... Go to someone else's front if you want to. There your imagination will help you out and you may be able to picture the things that happened.... The past was as dead as a busted victrola record. Chasing yesterdays is a bum show.”

If he functions in the realist/naturalist tradition, a writer is always chasing yesterdays. In writing *A Farewell to Arms*, however, Hemingway went back to someone else's front and recreated the experience from books, maps, and first hand

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39 Hemingway, Ernest - “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, *Toronto Daily Star* (July 22, 1922) Page 7
sources. It is his only novel set on a terrain of with which he did not have personal experience; in it, his imagination, aided by military histories, has created the Austro-Italian front of 1915-17 more vividly than any other writer.

Hemingway, the public man, may have been just as much of a romantic as some readers would see him, and many of his plots may have smelled of the museums, as Gertrude Stein thought. But as an artist, Hemingway was able to approach his material in those early years with an objectivity that never allowed personal experience or friendships to interfere with his fictions. Like most twentieth century innovators, he found himself his own best subject, but to mistake his art for his biography is to mistake illusion for reality.

To read any of Hemingway's fiction as biography is always dangerous, but to read *A Farewell to Arms* in this manner is to misread the book. It is no longer possible to say of Hemingway: he simply went out and lived his experiences, thought about them, and then wrote them down like the good reporter he has been since his training at seventeen. *A Farewell to Arms* is, in part, a researched novel, and eventually one must ask what sources Hemingway used to write of places he had not seen and battles he had not fought.

In 1920, Hemingway wrote a feature for the *Toronto Star Weekly* entitled “How to be Popular in Peace though a Slacker in War”, which indicates one direction of source study. “buy or borrow a good history of the war. Study it carefully...... .” There is evidence to indicate that Hemingway did just this type of reading during the twenties and that this reading became the background for *A Farewell to Arms*. 
Besides histories of the war Hemingway also had access to newspaper accounts, as well as his own feature stories written after the war. When the Caporetto retreat took place, Hemingway had just begun work as a cub reporter on the Kansas City Star. The Star carried the Italian story on the front page during the last week in October and into November 1917. One is also reminded of Frederick Henry continually reading newspapers to stay informed about the front. Beyond a general knowledge of the Italian war, it is impossible to say that Hemingway used the newspaper story. However, he did incorporate into the novel portions from his own newspaper feature stories that he wrote after the war for the Toronto Star.

Besides secondary written sources, Hemingway also had access to friends and acquaintances who knew about Caporetto. Although such sources could not have provided the kind of accuracy found in the novel, Hemingway must have learnt more from such sources than commonly supposed.

History, newspaper stories, first and second-hand experiences, these are the primary sources for A Farewell to Arms. With the exception of personal experiences, these are the same sources that Stephen Crane had available to him when he wrote his researched war novel The Red Badge of Courage. Like Crane, Hemingway also had his picture books. While he was in Italy he collected postcard photographs of the battle zones. This scrap book was with him in Paris when he began the novel and was very likely with him when he finished it.40

In addition to finding source material in historical non-fiction, Hemingway used two other printed sources when he wrote A Farewell to Arms: his own

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40 Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway’s First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 139
newspaper feature stories from the twenties and Stendhal’s *The Charter House of Parma*. Robert O. Stephens in *Hemingway’s Non Fiction* has already established Hemingway’s use of his journalism in his novel. One particular Toronto Star article, however, is worth examining which seems to be the genesis of the opening chapter of *A Farewell to Arms*.

“It was the same road that the battalirais mardied alraig through the white dust of 1916 .... They were good troops in those days and they marched through the dust of the early summer ..... It was the same old road that some of the same old brigades marched along through the dust in June 1918 ....Their best men were dead on the rocky carso....and in all the places that men died that nobody ever heard about. In 1918 they didn’t march with the ardour that they did in 1916.”

In the article, Hemingway describes the dusty road from his vantage point in a hotel at Schio, with the road running past his window. As Stephen points out this is the same sort of vantage point that Frederick Henry uses when he begins to narrate the classic opening pages of *A Farewell to Arms*.

The other printed source material for his novel, Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma* is a book that Hemingway periodically recommended to young writers.

“The best account of actual human beings behaving during a world shaking event is Stendhal’s picture of young Fabrizio at the battle of Waterloo. That account is more like war and less like the nonsense written about it than any other writing could possibly be......You will have seen a small piece of war as closely and as clearly as Stendhal......It is the classic account of routed army.”

As in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Book Three, the Caporetto retreat presents a limited view of military disaster, but the action that is seen epitomises the whole. The reader has taken part in the retreat from Caporetto. Frederick’s experience, like Fabrizio’s is with a routed army. And like Stendhal, Hemingway could have written of victories, but he chose to write of defeat; aside from the brief

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41 Hemingway, Ernest – A Veteran Visits Old Front, *Toronto Daily Star* (July 22, 1922) Page 7
action at Plava, *A Farewell to Arms* presents no immediate military action except the retreat.

Hemingway, however, found more in Stendhal’s narrative than he indicated in his introduction. A close comparison of the experiences of Fabrizio and Frederick indicates that Hemingway probably supplemented his historical reading with Stendhal’s fiction when he came to write of the retreat from Caporetto. Both Frederick and Fabrizio are foreigners fighting gratuitously in another country. Both men are involved in a crucial battle that turns into a rout of their forces. Both men become separated from their command and choose to follow side roads into because the main roads have become jammed with both soldiers and civilians. Both men eat off the land during their retreat; both are taken for spies, and both escape the neutral ground of Switzerland. When specific passages in *The Charterhouse of Parma* are compared with others in *A Farewell to Arms*, the similarities become even stronger. There is the matter of accent and speech betraying both Fabrizio and Frederick. Fabrizio speaks French with an Italian accent which makes his companions suspect him of being a spy. Frederick Henry speaks Italian with an accent that makes the military police at the Tagliamento suspect him of being a German infiltrator. Such infiltrators were an historical fact, but Hemingway must have been reminded of Fabrizio’s difficulties when he wrote Book Three.

Hemingway need not have used the fictional experiences of Fabrizio when he wrote of Frederick Henry, but the parallels seem too strong for coincidence. Hemingway has said that in his early career he thought of himself as writing in competition with great authors of the past. “In *A Farewell to Arms*, he seems to have
written his Caporetto retreat in direct competition with Stendhal, and in *Men at War* he has invited the comparison by reprinting the two sections in juxtaposition.\(^{43}\)

Besides Stendhal, Hemingway had Stephen Crane before him as the model for a researched war novel. Aside from the thematic similarities between Crane's novel and Hemingway's there is one particular scene in *A Farewell to Arms* in which Hemingway modernises parts of Crane's Chapter 12, in which Henry Fleming receives his head wound.

Fleming, having deserted his position under fire, wanders the back roads behind the front lines, until he tries to stop another panicky deserter, who strikes Fleming's forehead with his rifle butt. Ironically this becomes Fleming's "Red Badge of Courage". Because of his head wound, Fleming is accepted by his comrades when he returns to his regiment.

In Chapter 7 of *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederick Henry discovers a would-be deserter on a dusty road behind the front lines in the Gorizia sector. The soldier, an Italian-American, has aggravated an old rupture in order to get out of the war. Frederick, in sympathy with the soldier advises him "You get out and fall down by the road and get a bump on your head and I'll pick you up on our way back and take you to a hospital."\(^{44}\) But when Frederick returns the enlisted man's own ambulance has found him and is returning him to duty: "He shook his head at me. His helmet was off and his forehead was bleeding below the hairline. His nose was skinned and there was dust on the bloody patch and dust in his hair."\(^{45}\) Like Fleming, the soldier

\(^{43}\) Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway’s First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 158
\(^{44}\) Hemingway, Ernest – *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribners, 1948) Page 35
\(^{45}\) Ibid, Page 36
has his “bloody patch” and like Fleming he returns to his regiment. But whereas Fleming was taken to be a brave man because of his “Red Badge” the Italian soldier is not mistaken for something he is not. As Hemingway indicated in other parts of the novel, the courage to face the enemy or the lack of it is of no particular value in this war. The very brave are among the first to die. Those who are not brave are killed also, “but there will be no special hurry”. Here Hemingway is not so much using Crane as a source as he is paying an oblique kind of homage to a writer whom he admired and from whom he learnt something about writing.

The most immediate biographic source of information which are almost impossible to document, are the personal memoirs of the nurses and soldiers whom Hemingway met in Milan during his recuperation. In addition to hospital personnel and soldiers, there were numerous chance acquaintances, any one of whom may have had war stories to tell Hemingway. More identifiable sources who contributed to the novel are the ambulance drivers who served with Hemingway. Three quarter of the Red Cross drivers were former Norton-Harjes drivers from France.

The importance of this historical background to A Farewell to Arms can be measured in the mood of the novel, particularly in Frederick Henry’s war weariness. Hemingway himself was at the front something less than a month during which time he saw little real action. After he was blown up on July 8, 1918 his letters home show no revulsion or weariness, for in fact he had not had time to develop such an attitude. Frederick Henry’s attitude towards the war is on the other hand, both spectatorial and war weary; he, in fact, is more like the Norton-Harjes in his attitude than he is like the young Hemingway. After the war, as a young reporter, Hemingway became more cynical about European affairs. When he came to write of
Frederick Henry, he was able to combine his own past war cynicism with the war weariness he had seen among his fellow drivers.

Although Hemingway relied heavily on secondary material as sources for the writing of the novel, it would be incorrect to argue that there was no use of autobiographic experiences. Hemingway scholars have already established the main co-relations between Hemingway's life and the novel, but these co-relations appear slender. Both Hemingway and Frederick were blown up by trench mortar shells in Italy during World War I. Both men recuperated in a Milan hospital, where each established a relationship with a nurse. Once in Switzerland, Frederick sticks to a terrain he knew from experience. Familiar as the Hemingway biography has become, however, there are surprising gaps in the information available. For example, relatively little is known about Hemingway's period of recuperation in the Milan hospital.

On the basis of the Carlos Baker biography, it seems reasonable that Hemingway based the experiences of Catherine Barkley on those of three women: Agnes Von Kurowsky, Hadley Richardson and Pauline Pfeiffer. Agnes the Red Cross nurse in Milan seems to dominate Book II; Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's first wife contributes heavily to the idyllic winter at Montreaux. Pauline Pfeiffer, the second wife, contributed her Caesarian operation, which took place while Hemingway was writing the first draft of the novel. While these points may be obvious they still need consideration, for they represent a central point in Hemingway's art of fiction. He never allowed reality to interfere with his fiction, and in the early years he did not allow his personal experience to dictate his work as
an artist. When art and autobiography were at odds, he would change the remembered experience to fit the needs of his writing.

The most obvious example of Hemingway’s use of his personal experience can be seen in the wounding of Frederick Henry. Hemingway was blown up while distributing chocolate at a forward listening post along the Piave river. Suffering severe shrapnel wounds in his right leg, he managed to carry a wounded soldier back to the dressing station. While doing so he was machine gunned by the Austrians receiving another wound on his leg. For his action under fire Hemingway was awarded Italy’s second highest decoration, the silver medal. By comparison, Frederick Henry is blown up in the mountains while eating cold spaghetti and cheese. He is not in the front lines, nor does he behave heroically after being wounded. When he recovers consciousness, Frederick is unable to move. Besides suffering stoically, he does nothing that can be called commendable. Hemingway emphasises this point when Rinaldi visits Frederick at the field hospital.

“‘You will be decorated. They want to get you the medalia de’argento but perhaps they can get only the bronze.’”

“What for?”

“Because you are gravely wounded. They say if you prove you did any heroic act you can get the silver. Otherwise it will be the bronze. Tell me exactly what happened. Did you do any heroic act?”

“No”, I said. “I was blown up while we were eating cheese.”

“Be serious. You must have done something heroic either before or after. Remember carefully.”

“I did not.”
“Didn’t you carry anybody on your back? Gardini says you carried several people on your back but the medical officer at the front post declares it is impossible. He had to sign the proposition for the citation.”

“I didn’t carry anybody. I couldn’t move.”46

For Frederick to have acted as Hemingway acted under the same circumstances would clearly be out of character. Here Hemingway is not just debunking his own silver medal; he is changing his experience to fit the needs of his fiction. By having Rinaldi suggest to Frederick that he may have acted heroically emphasises the non-heroic nature of Frederick and draws special attention to the absurdity of being blown up, while eating cheese.

Hemingway’s use of his own experience in this example is the pattern he follows throughout the novel. Although there are several other incidents in the novel that find their source in own experience, they follow the pattern established above. That is, Hemingway will use settings and people from his own experience whenever he can, but he never allows his own experience to interfere with his fiction and he never brings real people into his fiction whole. In the same manner he was able to pick up second hand stories, newspaper accounts, as well as histories and historical fiction, and use them all to his own purpose.

Eventually his search for meaning took Hemingway beyond his own experience in the war. From Stendhal’s Charterhouse and Crane’s Red Badge he learned the fictional importance of disaster. Through his historical reading he discovered that the key to the war in Italy was the disaster at Caporetto. At the

46 Ibid, Page 63
military level, Caporetto was the obvious conclusion to the two bloody years of Cadorna’s mountain campaign. Moreover, Caporetto influenced or motivated everything that came after it on the battlefield. It defined the battle lines of 1918 and it coloured the entire Italian war effort. It was as if recapturing the land brought back the national honour that had been lost at Caporetto. To write about the war in Italy Hemingway discovered he could not avoid Caporetto.

One of the reasons A Farewell to Arms was banned in Italy for so many years was its accurate assessment of the causes for the breakdown of morale that allowed Caporetto to take place. Hemingway embodies in his narrative the same points that the British historian G.M.Trevalyan, who witnessed the retreat, later isolated as direct causes of the disaster. Trevalyan listed the causes as socialist activity on the home front, a food shortage at the front lines, enemy propaganda and ineffectual leadership.47

The socialist rancour against the war is a covert presence throughout the novel. Two of Frederick’s ambulance drivers Piani and Bonello – are socialists who are proud of their beliefs.48 Hemingway’s fictional portrayal of socialist unrest is an accurate reflection of the conditions in Italy in the fall of 1917. This socialist dissension on the home front was instrumental in lowering troop morale all along the fighting front. Hemingway indicates this loss of morale in the conversation between Frederick and the priest when Frederick returns to the front in Book 3. The priest says that he does not see how the fighting can go on much longer and hopes that it will stop on both sides. When Frederick says he does not think it will end that

48 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 208
way the priest responds: "I suppose not. It is too much to expect. But when I see the changes in men I do not think it can go on." The changes to which the priest refers include the general lowering of morale, which the socialist turmoil encouraged.

Another factor which led to the breakdown of troop morale was the food shortage at the front during 1917. Once more Hemingway demonstrates his careful research when Frederick and Gino discuss the food shortage the night before the attack at Caporetto. Frederick – "has the food really been short?" Gino – "I myself have never had enough to eat.....Something is wrong somewhere. There should be plenty of food..., It is very bad for the soldiers to be without food."

The socialist unrest and the food shortage were capitalised upon by the Austro-German propaganda. Propaganda leaflets which were delivered by shell burst and dropped from airplanes were apparently most effective among the troops of Caporetto. Particularly insidious was the propaganda plea for peace which argued that it took two armies to fight a war. If only both sides would lay down their arms, there would be no war. This false hope for peace is used by Hemingway in the conversation between Frederick and the priest the night before he goes up on the Bainsizza, but is more explicitly stated in the earlier conversation between Frederick and his ambulance team moments before he was wounded.

Passini argues: "War is not won by victory..... Did you see all the far mountains today? Do you think we could take them all too? Only if the Austrians stop fighting. One side must stop fighting. Why don’t we stop fighting? If they come

49 Ibid, Page 178
50 Ibid, page 184
down to Italy they will get tired and go away. They have their own country. But no, instead there is a war.” Passini’s sentiments are an accurate reflection of both the socialist complaints and the enemy propaganda.

The general unrest in the army was compounded by the poor quality of Second Army leadership both during the attack at Caporetto and the subsequent retreat. Proper leadership could have salvaged the situation and prevented the total breakthrough that occurred. In Frederick’s own words: “There was no need to confuse our retreat. The size of the army and the fewness of the roads did that. Nobody gave any orders.”

To a certain extent, Frederick Henry’s own leadership during the retreat reflects microcosmically the general breakdown in the Second Army command. When he leaves Gorizia, Frederick is charged with the delivery of three ambulances and his three enlisted men – Aymo, Bonello and Piani – to the far side of the Tagliamento. En route his three ambulances become hopelessly mired in the mud of side roads chosen by Frederick. Of the two sergeants picked up by Frederick en route one is shot deserting and the other deserts successfully. Aymo is killed by his own Italian rear guard. Bonello deserts to the advancing enemy. Frederick reaches the Tagliamento with only Piani. As a record of leadership under pressure, Frederick’s performance epitomizes the general performance of the Italian Second Army during the actual retreat.

These several points where the novel and historical circumstances coincide are preliminary to the examination of the retreat itself, but they show that

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51 Ibid, Page 50-51
52 Ibid, Page 216
Hemingway had a total grasp of the military, political and social situation that resulted in the debacle at Caporetto. In fact, Frederick’s understanding of his situation is probably more comprehensive than one could reasonably expect of a man caught up in a retreat. All the causes of the disaster are present in the novel, but they were by no means so clear before the historian had analysed the event. Frederick possesses knowledge that one gains after the event. But no matter how accurate Hemingway is in the matter of socialist revolt, food shortage, propaganda and poor leadership, it is in the concrete details – the people, the places and how the weather was – that Hemingway’s historical accuracy must be tested.

In Book III of A Farewell to Arms Frederick Henry joins his ambulance detachment on the Bainsizza plateau on October 23, 1917, the day before the Austro-German offensive began at Caporetto. As the attack begins on the morning of October 24, Frederick narrates the conditions. “The wind rose in the night and at 3 o’clock in the morning with the rain coming in sheets there was a bombardment and the Croatians came over across the mountain meadows....between the gusts of wind and rain we could hear the sound of a great bombardment far to the north.”

Although most authorities agree that the attack began at 2 a.m. rather than at 3 a.m., Hemingway’s accuracy is still rather remarkable for either fiction or history. A Contemporary Account of a Military Operations in Italy by James E. Edmonds referred to by Reynolds in Hemingway’s First War describes the actual weather conditions remarkably similar to Hemingway’s own. Even to the point where the rain shifts to snow.

53 Ibid, Page 186
It is worth noting that the weather on October 25, the night of the retreat, was warm and almost sunny. And although the atmosphere of Hemingway’s retreat was saturated with rain, he makes no reference to the weather on the 25th. The entire day is foreshortened rather noticeably to achieve intensity, for Hemingway, throughout the retreat, selects carefully those portions which best suit his artistic purpose. It did not suit his purpose to have October 25 warm and sunny. However, critics have made more of the October rains than they perhaps will bear. Carlos Baker has firmly established Hemingway’s symbolic use of the rain in *A Farewell to Arms* and Philip Young calls Hemingway’s use of rain the “old pathetic fallacy put to new use….Good and bad weather go along with good and bad moods and events. It is not just that, like everyone, the characters respond emotionally to conditions of atmosphere, light and so on, but there is a correspondence between these things and their fate. They win when it is sunny and lose in the rain”. The critics’ point seems to be that Hemingway has arranged the rain to suit his artistic purpose, that he turns it off and on like some stage prop. What most critics overlook are those portions of the retreat when it is not raining for it suits their critical purpose to see the entire retreat under a steady downpour. A close examination of the rain during the retreat shows, however, that Hemingway was following a rather exact timetable provided by the battle accounts. “Not once during Book III of *A Farewell to Arms* does fictional rain fall when actual rain did not.”

The historical facts of the weather conditions during the retreat matched Hemingway’s fictional account in every respect. This is further testified in Robert

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54 Young, Philip – *Hemingway : A Reconsideration* (Rhinehart, 1966) Page 92
De C. Ward’s article “Weather Controls Over the Fighting in the Italian War Zone” as quoted in Reynold’s Hemingway’s First War. The rain fell intermittently through the entire retreat with the exception of two times: the day of October 25 and the afternoon of October 27 — and this is how it is in both history and fiction. Hemingway may have learned about rain during retreats from reporting the rain drenched retreat in Greece, but to have followed so accurate a timetable of the Italian conditions required more than analogous knowledge; it required something like an accurate history book.

If the fictional rain of A Farewell to Arms follows an accurate historical timetable, Frederick’s movements during the retreat are equally synchronised with the military history. From the morning of October 24 when the attack begins, Frederick and history are marching to the same drum. When Frederick takes his ambulances down off the Bainsizza plateau in the early morning of October 25 (page 188) he is following the evacuation timetable set up by Gen. Cadorna. “The Commander Supremo ordered the Second Army command to withdraw the Bainsizza forces onto the line of main resistance and if necessary to re-cross the Isonzo.” Frederick’s fictional experience is similar to the actual difficulties experienced by a British ambulance unit at Cormous trying to evacuate to the Tagliamento. Frederick describes the first day of the retreat:

“The retreat was orderly, wet and sullen. In the night, going slowly along the crowded roads we passed troops marching under the rain. There was no more disorder than in an advance.”

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56 Villari, Luigi – The War on the Italian Front quoted in Michael Reynold’s Hemingway’s First War
57 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 188
It is a slow and cumbersome thirty six hour journey of a distance of about twenty five kilometres. Villari refers to the same conditions in his historical account of what really happened.

Hemingway’s use of historical fact is so oblique as to be almost unrecognisable. In fact his history is consistently understated throughout the novel. In the opening section the reader is not told what year or which war or what river. In Book III the accuracy of the historical detail is always subordinate to action and theme. The accuracy is inherent in the story, but it never distracts the reader or gets in the way of the author.

As Hemingway says in his Paris Review interview:

“I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show. If a writer omits something because he does not know then there is a hole in the story.”58

In A Farewell to Arms Hemingway has left a good deal out and the iceberg is strengthened by his omissions. Beneath the surface of the novel, history unobtrusively supports the exposed surface. The particularity of Hemingway’s use of details alone should put to rest any arguments that he used the Greek retreat as the basis of his fiction. However, his description of the retreat goes beyond the setting to portray the mood and physical circumstances of the Caporetto retreat with equal accuracy.

Frederick’s detachment of ambulances becomes the epitome of the general experience. His Italian drivers pick up stragglers – two virgins and two sergeants –

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representing the two components of the retreat - the refugees and the soldiers. Like his real counterparts, Frederick finds his way clogged by the refugees who jammed the roads. German photographs of the Udine-Codroipo road taken in the wake of the retreating Italians testify to the correspondence between the fictional and the actual. In addition to the clogged roads and the absence of road control, the actual retreat was under the intermittent threat of air attacks. As the weather cleared, enemy planes were able to harass the barely mobile line.

Another aspect of the retreat that Frederick accurately observes is the widespread looting that took place after the civilian population had left their homes. In Hemingway’s fictive version, Frederick and his men find food in abandoned farms. On the night of the 27th Frederick, Piani and Bonello spent the night in an abandoned farmhouse outside Udine. “There were ashes of a fire on the big open hearth. The pots hung over the ashes but they were empty. I looked around but I could not find anything to eat.”

Hemingway needed to know little of retreats to have imagined that such looting as this took place, and his accuracy does not indicate that he researched this point. However, his use of looting is one more point in a pattern of accuracy that goes beyond hearsay or superficial knowledge and that shows a thorough historical understanding of the conditions prevalent during this particular retreat.

There is the point of the rear guard, for example. Hemingway is accurate in both the time and position of the rear guard that Frederick encounters outside

59 Hemingway, Ernest - A Farewell to Arms, Page 215
Udine. It is ironic that Aymo should be killed by his own troops, just as it is ironic that the only killing that Frederick sees during the retreat is Italians killing other Italians. The enemy is a presence more felt than seen, and no contact is ever made with them. The lack of road control, the air attacks, the looting and the food shortage, the rear guard - these are all the characteristics which could have been found in the annals of any mass retreat. There was, however, one aspect of the Caporetto retreat to which the Italian government was particularly sensitive and which Hemingway portrayed with accuracy: the breakdown in discipline which led to Frederick’s desertion. During the actual retreat a German field officer, Irwin Rommel was at one point surrounded by armed Italian soldiers outside of Cividale who wanted to surrender. An Italian officer who resisted the will of his troops, was shot down by his own men. Poor leadership during the crisis had apparently destroyed the faith of many enlisted men in their officers, their will to fight had been seriously eroded.

This loss of will is graphically portrayed in the gradual dissolution of Frederick’s group. With the breakdown in the Second Army’s will to fight, such desertions were not uncommon.

To labour what must be obvious, Hemingway’s narrator is witness to the disintegration of the Second Army at exactly the right time and place. Frederick has watched his men desert; he has seen the roads unguarded, the bridges unblown, the orders ungiven. Between Udine and the Tagliamento he is caught up in the panic of the retreat and the mindlessness of war.

\(^{60}\) Reynolds, Michael – Hemingway’s First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 132
“They throw away their rifles,” Piani said, “They take them off and drop them down while they are marching. Then they shout.”

“They ought to keep their rifles.”

“They think if they throw away their rifles they can’t make them fight.”

In the dark and the rain, making our way along the side of the road I could see that many of the troops still had their rifles. They stuck up above their capes.

“What brigade are you?” an officer called out.

“Regata di Pace!” someone shouted. “Peace brigade!”

These deserters both real and fictional were rounded up at the Codroipo bridge. The deserters were reorganised by the military police and only those who refused to cooperate were shot. Included in the actual executions were suspected German infiltrators and officers who were not with their troops.

At the bridgehead Frederick’s experience once more epitomises the general condition. First he is an officer who is not with his command, and such officers are being shot summarily. Moreover, Frederick is not an Italian; he speaks with an accent and he is in an Italian uniform which qualifies him as a German infiltrator in the eyes of the battle police. Thus Frederick’s fictional experience becomes more and more a synthesis of the actual group experience in the retreat from Caporetto.

Accuracy here is so fine that it goes beyond realism, but it is an accuracy that lies below the surface of the novel, supporting the visible iceberg. The obvious conclusion is that Hemingway used secondary source material in writing the novel and this is not the popular portrait of the artist we have always been given.

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61 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 219-220
For decades, critics have maintained that the experiences of Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* were based upon Hemingway’s experiences in Italy during the Great War. It wasn’t until critics such as Charles Fenton in his *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway* (1954) revealed just how limited Hemingway’s participation was, that a more accurate understanding of the techniques employed in the novel began to appear. Closer examination of the text, such as that of Michael Reynolds in *Hemingway’s First War*, revealed that while Hemingway did employ some autobiographical incidents and persons in *A Farewell to Arms* he also researched the historic record. Thus he managed to carefully provide accurate and often minute details on events occurring in Italy from 1915 to 1917 in which Frederick Henry takes part.

Michael Reynolds has demonstrated that the details in *A Farewell to Arms* are accurate in terms of geography, often focussing on minute geographic details. Historical details too seem specific – such as the placement and action of Italian armies, the facts of the Caporetto retreat and even the weather. Robert W. Lewis carries this examination of the novel’s factual accuracy further when he argues that a principal source for the novel’s accuracy is British historian G. M. Trevalyan’s *Scenes from Italy’s Wars* (1919) and notes that there are parallels between the history and the fiction.

“While Hemingway’s characters, dialogue and some action seem to be his own invention, the general action, including the geography and timing parallels Trevalyan’s.”

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Hemingway demonstrated in *A Farewell to Arms* that there is more than one way to reproduce fact accurately in fiction: that the only source of fictional versimilitude need not be direct participation and the tradition of the eyewitness. But that historical research and the use of the experience of others can effectively be employed to accomplish the same ends.

By turning the outside resources, Hemingway expanded the concept of the World War I novel beyond the narrow witness and testimony limitations of writers such as Thomas Boyd (*Through the Wheat*) and he also correctly sensed that by 1929 descriptions of war's carnage and battle scenes had already been done to excess. That year saw the publication of two of the most popular and enduring war novels — *A Farewell to Arms* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Critics have maintained that one reason for this appearance of carefully written and lasting novels of the Great War by those like Hemingway and Remarque, who experienced the war as participants, was that the intervening decade allowed them to come to terms with the psychological wounds caused by the conflict and the writing itself was therapeutic. However, there was another socio-political factor at work. A.F. Bance in his "All Quiet on the Western Front: A Bestseller in Context" argues that:

"In 1928 nearly all nations ..... renounced war through the Kellog-Briand Peace Pact. Anti war sentiments soon reached a climax. At the same time, there was a .... renewal of interest in the Great War. The public was ready to read about it and writers to respond."63

How much of the success of *A Farewell to Arms* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* may be attributed to the increase in anti war sentiment occasioned by Kellog-Briand

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is a matter of conjecture. Yet it is apparent that some of the initial popularity of the better World War I novels, and renewed interest in the Great War itself, must be attributed to this ill-fated attempt to end war.

The novels with which the newly interested public found itself faced with in 1929 and soon after were far different from the narratives of witness and testimony such as those of John Dos Passos and Thomas Boyd. Novels such as A Farewell to Arms, although still employing factual recreations of the Great War experience, are polished works of fiction, exhibiting control over narrative techniques and often a considerable degree of innovation.

Hemingway intentionally muted descriptions of carnage, understating them as he often understated the potentially garish in his fiction. "There was always this temptation to slip into the over written prose of the popular war novel. Consciously aware of the pitfall, Hemingway wrote a note to himself .... and then circled it for emphasis: watch out for this." Reynolds also notes that Hemingway rewrote sections of the novel to reduce the overwrought use of physical description such as was often found in earlier war novels. It is this concern for the novel as craft that typifies A Farewell to Arms and helps in making it more than another narrative about the First World War.

The strength of Hemingway's novels is perhaps best explained by noting that in spirit and in method they are closer to the pure lyric than to any other form and that they systematically exclude whatever threatens to interfere with the illusion of

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64 Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 59
life beheld under the aspect of a single, dominant all-pervasive mood or state of mind. They attempt to sustain perfectly a single emotion: they begin with it and end with it, and any scenes, thoughts or stylistic elements that might tend to weaken the dominant emotion are ruthlessly rejected. Consequently Hemingway’s art has both the virtues and the limitations of lyricism: maximum intensity on the one hand, extremely limited range on the other.

The narrative of A Farewell to Arms articulates a modernist vision of collapse: as did Gide, Kafka and Eliot. Hemingway structured his work upon a dislocation of sensibility. It is always there informing every scene of the novel, lying beneath every descriptive passage and every bit of characterisation, but it seldom shows, or it shows, at most, but a tiny part of itself, like the iceberg that Hemingway often took to be the apt image of his art. Frederick Henry, his most celebrated hero, embodies the manner in which settled ways of living are overturned by rootlessness and disaffiliation that can be held in check only by dint of the severest, most unremitting self-control. When it does show itself clearly, this inner violence, as in Chapter 34 of A Farewell to Arms, is expressed in this way:

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 everyone and afterwards 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 the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. 65

The world’s malevolence is taken for granted in Hemingway’s novels. The artistic problem Hemingway faced was to find the correlatives of his bitterness –

65 Hemingway Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 178
objects adequate to the emotion, techniques capable of rendering it as purely as possible. The careful selection of a dominant image and its reiteration through whole paragraphs and pages and chapters, so that the image presently becomes symbol, conveying both the central meaning and the central emotion becomes Hemingway’s inflexible method. Ideally when the writing is purist, every sentence will reveal the central meaning and emotion. Everything will be converted into a symbol of the emotion. Character becomes in one sense unimportant. Characters exist for the sake of the emotion. It is thus no fair criticism to say that Hemingway created no memorable characters; the truth is that his novels necessarily reject such people. The action too must obviously become, as nearly as possible, simple and intellectually uncomplicated. And action involving much intellectual debate, analysis, repartee or a multiplication of points of view is clearly antithetical to the spirit of Hemingway’s bardic novels. Hemingway is always reluctant to introduce actions that do not feed the dominant emotion and in consequence his characteristic way of structuring the action of his novels is to employ a simple qualitative shift or oscillation between despair and happiness. In *A Farewell to Arms* they are from the front to the hospital, to the front, to Switzerland: disgust and bitterness, followed by short respite, then back to disgust and bitterness again. Brief scenes in which characters are represented as enjoying food and drink or a lovely view or a simple physical comfort exist chiefly to heighten the sense of despair and bitterness; the interludes of normal pleasure are inevitably short-lived. Every meal, every sight, every sound thus comes to one as to a man about to be executed. That is one reason the descriptions of food and drink always seem so preternaturally vivid in Hemingway.
Frederick Henry has the pattern of his life severely disrupted; he experiences initial comradeship with his Italian war brothers as an ambulance driver and finds love with Catherine Barkley, but other forces act centrifugally: after having received serious wounds, he re-enters battle, is confronted by treachery and betrayal at Caporetto, deserts to make a separate peace and finally loses both his surrogate wife and his child. Events compel him to rely upon his primal instincts, to live empirically and to be suspicious of abstract formulations of all kinds. The arena of war teaches him that fatherhood, marriage and the potentialities of family life are like his son strangled at birth. In such a world of loss and angst where war, alienation and death move deterministically at the core of existence, no institution either public or private can provide shelter against the larger social and cultural upheavals. The artist, faced with disintegration, mimes through his art responses to disorder: Hemingway needed to devise a fictive method to transmit his awareness of war being at the epicentre of contemporary life. This dominant state of mind – the sense of death, defeat, failure, nothingness, emptiness – is chiefly conveyed by the image of the rain (with all its tonal associates, mist, wet, damp, river, fog), by images and epithets of desolation (chiefly bare, thin, small, and fallen leaves) and by images of impurity and corruption (chiefly dust, mud, dirt, and disease). "Hemingway's method of working with images is surprisingly uniform. Perhaps, the best analogy is found in the choice in the musical key and the elaborate harmonisation of notes always referring to the tonic."66 Another way of describing the method is to think of a painter working tiny patches of a dominant colour over

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his entire canvas. Hemingway himself perhaps had both analogies in mind when he said in the Lilian Ross interview that he had "learned how to make a landscape from Mr. Paul Cezanne and mentioned in the same context, his imagination of Bach counterpoint in the first chapter of A Farewell to Arms. The images are repeated so frequently that they begin to toll like bells in the mind. Virtually every sentence says death, despair, failure, emptiness, because every sentence contains an image or symbol associated with the dominant state of mind.

The novel begins with this state of mind and it is established so firmly through the repetition of central symbols, that any emotion other than bitterness and despair may thereafter intrude only with difficulty. The typical procedure as in lyric poetry, is to intensify the dominant emotion by means of a simple contrast of images. Thus the images of purity and vitality introduced in the second sentence of the novel are contrasted throughout the chapter with the images of dirt and desolation.

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and the leaves, stirred by the breeze falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves. 67

Purity has been defiled, the life force has been thwarted and defeated. The leaves are "powdered" by dust; the trunks too are dusty; the leaves fall early; and the empty road, bare and white except for the fallen leaves, becomes a perfect mirror of inner desolation. This desolation is reinforced by the dominant symbol of the rain;

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67 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 1
not life-giving rain causing the leaves to grow, but autumnal rain causing them to fall, a rain associated with darkness, mud, and death:

There was fighting for that mountain too, but it was not successful, and in the fall when the rains came the leaves all fell from the chestnut trees and the branches were bare and the trunks were black with rain. The vineyards were thin and bare branched too and all the country wet and brown and dead with the autumn. There were mists over the river and clouds on the mountain and the trucks splashed mud on the road and the troops were muddy and wet in their capes; their rifles were wet. 68

The sense of failure and impotence is also reinforced by the studious avoidance of action verbs. Almost invariably Hemingway employs the words “to be”, and the expletives “there were” and “there was” occur ten times in the twenty one sentences of the chapter. The repetitions give a sense of endless sameness and weariness: abandon hope, all ye who enter here.

T.S.Eliot in The Wasteland sharing a similar vision of crisis explored the crisis through various poetic strategies. If man is envisioned as a hunted and shackled animal then the artist searches for the aesthetic that enacts such restrictions. A Farewell to Arms shares kinship with such modernist artefacts as The Wasteland principally through the presentation of Frederick Henry’s consciousness which is communicated through a series of restricted language codes. Unlike E.E Cummings who, writing of war in the enormous room, explores language in copious verbal innovations Hemingway’s aesthetics functions antithetically; it implodes language and restricts both lexicon and dialogue.

The realist strain in A Farewell to Arms inheres chiefly in its authentic accounts of war on the Austrian front. Hemingway’s study of war which took him imaginatively to Crane and Stendhal and to military textbooks ensured that his

68 Ibid, Page 2
combat descriptions were precise and expert. The novelist also constructed his story with a view to its accessibility; the narrative evolves sequentially without time shifts or complex stream of consciousness devices. Clearly any claim that A Farewell to Arms is shaped by modernist influences needs to be justified on different terms from a novel say by Joyce or Woolf. David Lodge has drawn attention to modernist and realist fusions in Hemingway's fiction when discussing the novelist's language resources. Lodge attributes Hemingway's search for a language properly faithful to the instantaneous of experience partly to the influence of Gertrude Stein.

This was largely the basis of her influence on subsequent writers like Hemingway who saw that the artful use of repetition, with slight variation, both lexical and grammatical, combined happily with an imitation of casual vernacular speech; it was thus possible to be a realist and a Modernist. 69

Another major influence upon Hemingway derived from the artistic impulse underlying Imagism. Natan Zach has noted the suitability of imagism as an artistic creed in the First World War situation.

...the outbreak of the First World War seemed to vindicate imagism as a philosophy of style. The hardness which the movement required for its modern medium suddenly became the common experience of a generation on both sides of the trenches. The "softness" of late nineteenth century aestheticism itself a reaction from a hardened world, was now being superseded by a state of mind in tune with an even harsher reality. 70

Given the premises of Imagism, Gertrude Stein's interest in sentence structure, and his own experience, Hemingway presumably experimented until he felt equipped with adequate formal procedures. Such a proposition does not take account of Hemingway's sensibility, which suggests a predisposition towards "toughness" of language.

The movement of A Farewell to Arms both linguistically and structurally is reductive and its hero conducts himself in an increasingly solipsistic manner. Upon this

70 Ibid - Natan Zach, Imagism and Vorticism, Page 239
persona the novelist imposes formal and lexical restraints, including the first person narrative method, the coded language of love and war brotherhood, a concern with language and speculative thought, Henry's preference for the tactile and the sensory, instead of the intellectual: all of these trajectories point to a masculine consciousness taking refuge against the encroachment of war.  

The reaction against idealism in the years following the war produced or accentuated a flight from all abstraction. It was felt that the object, the thing experienced-in-itself stated boldly and without rhetorical flourish, would recreate truth to an extent, far beyond even the idealism and abstraction of protest. There is a close relationship between Hemingway's cinematic tautness and Ezra Pound's ideogram, a direct line leads from both to the reaction against World War I abstraction and sentiment -- a reaction made classic in Frederick Henry's famous words.

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometime standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that was slapped up by bill posters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or halo were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the number of regiments and the dates.

When Frederick Henry expressed his disillusionment with the ideals the war claimed to promote and jumped into the river and deserted, his actions epitomised the contemporary feeling of a whole nation. Edmund Wilson says at the end of Axel's Castle:

When the prodigious concerted effort of the war had ended only in impoverishment and exhaustion for all its European peoples concerned, and in a general feeling of hopelessness about politics, about all attempts to organise men into social units -- armies, parties and nations -- in the service of some common ideal, for the

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72 Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 133
accomplishment of some common purpose, the western mind became particularly
hospitable to a literature indifferent to action and unconcerned with the group.\footnote{73}

Many writers began to identify themselves with James Joyce’s hero Stephen
Dedalus in his \textit{A Portrait of An Artist as a Young Man} in his proud revolt against
church and family and in his dream of forging “in the smithy of my soul the
uncreated conscience of my race”. This last was a social purpose, since many of the
American exiles like Joyce were patriots. These exiles had a purpose in the sense
that they wanted to expunge the language of what they often called “the big words”.
To comprehend the purpose behind this, one must realise that the horrifying reality
of the war was often camouflaged behind grandiose words and sentiments in a
verbal effort to mislead the people.

This revolt against big words and lofty sentiments took shape in a fresh new
prose style of the post war generation, which distrusted any words which begged for
an emotional response. Disgusted with the false sentiments of wartime, this
generation was trying to write of simple things simply. This search for “clean
words” became the most distinguishing facet of the post war generation.

Although there is no doubt that a reaction against the rhetoric of the crusade
powerfully affected Hemingway’s style this “verbal skepticism” explains the
particular quality of that style only partially. As Stanley Cooperman suggests, for
Hemingway, style is dependant on the mystic of ritual, even art itself. For this reason
Hemingway’s language conveys that peculiar sense of caution, wariness and
deliberation which so belies its own realistic surface.

Hemingway’s protagonist, with his sense of manhood shattered by
technological rape (“I was blown up while we were eating cheese”) turns towards

\footnote{73 Wilson, Edmund – \textit{Axel’s Castle} (Fontana, 1969) Page 226}
his “lovely cool goddess” because there is nothing else. Deprived of that initiative so essential to Hemingway’s concept of virility, unable to ritualise his role in the war so as to act rather than be acted upon, threatened with the horror of male passivity, Frederick Henry is reduced to the “worship” Rinaldi so ironically defines. Action and violence once simple, have become complex and would master Frederick Henry rather than be mastered by him. For this reason, Catherine does indeed become “sacred”. Only through her mirror-surface, her renunciation of self, can Henry once again take comfort from the reflection of his own face.

Only a love-object, in other words, an erotic shadow shaped by passivity can return Frederick Henry the initiative essential to his manhood. Catherine offers to become “whatever you want” – and this is what the war, what voluntary violence should have been and was not. From the moment that action and violence intrude upon Frederick Henry’s will, from the moment that they cease to exist merely by virtue of his consent (as they do exist in Hemingway’s later work by the virtue of the bull fighter’s consent, or the hunter’s or the fisherman’s), his relationship with Catherine becomes far more vital than a “chess game”. Catherine who is simply there at his disposal, permits him his masculine role, but when she asserts her own individuality by the very act of dying, there is nothing left of manhood at all.

Frederick Henry takes his final walk into the rain as a sort of Jake Barnes who in The Sun Also Rises stares blankly at the mirror of his own impotence. The hyena of passivity (The Snows of Kilimanjaro) – always a nightmare for Hemingway – reduces Frederick Henry to a spiritual castrado.

Essential to this emasculation is the inability to handle any quality of “otherness” except in terms of ritualisation. The other, whether animate, or
inanimate, - is tolerable only in so far as it can be manipulated, controlled as one controls the trout line, the hunt, the bull fight or the female. Even death, provided it can be arranged and patterned, may serve as an exercise in virility; only when death refuses to be patterned, when action becomes its own perpetuator, does flight into other areas of experience become an involuntary and undignified imperative. There is no question of “will” among those soldiers grovelling and “choking through the whole attack” in Champs de’Honneur (written while the war experience was still all too fresh in Hemingway’s mind). What Frederick J. Hoffman sees as the “violation” or “traumatic shock” of technological war is a vital aspect not only in the relationship between Frederick Henry and Catherine, but in the literary career of Hemingway himself.**

Unpatterned, unritualised and other, the war intrudes upon Frederick Henry. It is not skepticism that underlies ritual, but fear – fear of the unknown or the unmanageable. In the bull ring men can defeat death even while dying because they surround it with form: the initiative, in a very real sense remains theirs. “As a bulwark against passivity, ritual – whether in the temple, the bedroom, the arena, or the battlefield – has been one of humanity’s basic psychological needs, and it is in this sense that Hemingway so carefully, indeed so compulsively arranges and limits experience.”75 Technological warfare eliminated the battlefield as a resource for ritual. The loss of initiative represented by technological violence and the attempt to regain this initiative through the bedroom or the arena are basic elements in A

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74 Hoffman, Frederick J. – The Twenties (New York, 1949) Page 57
Farewell to Arms and Hemingway's later work. The war itself, certainly represents a break in the continuum from natural violence in the north (Michigan) woods (the Nick Adam stories) to ritualised violence in the bull ring; it is the one area that cannot be mastered through the asertion of will, and for this reason it threatens rather than fulfils what Alfred Kazin calls "the individual's fierce unassailable pride in his pride – virility itself". For pride is impossible when no choice is offered, when the initiative is stolen, and Hemingway tends to avoid rather than confront any experience where initiative becomes external. Confrontation, indeed, is the theme of Hemingway's work only in a special and very limited sense: his protagonists attempt to confront death in terms of ritual or they refuse to confront it at all.

This dependence upon ritual and the consequent horror when the impossibility of ritualising reduces the individual to passivity, indicates that Hemingway's preoccupation with death is something far removed from existential confrontation. Firstly, this is because technological violence in World War I deprived death of any "moment of truth" whatsoever; secondly a World War I protagonist like Frederick Henry "blown while we were eating cheese" becomes a refugee from precisely that form of obliteration, of nada he no longer can master.

Critics like Philip Young, John Atkins, Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, and others have read a consistency into Hemingway's attitude towards violence, and this is perhaps one reason why a commentator like John Killinger writing in 1960 (Hemingway and the Dead Gods, Lexington KY, 1960) could actually define Nick Adams and Frederick Henry as existential heroes. But the post World War II
existential demands for total involvement despite absurdity (indeed, within absurdity) can no longer be equated with Hemingway’s ritual escape than Nick Adams’ (In Our Time) hunting or fishing in the north woods can be equated with the industrialised slaughter of World War I. Nick went to war as though he were casting for trout; he found another genre of experience (or anti-experience) altogether.

Hemingway’s ritual of death, possible only outside rather than within modern war, is escape rather than confrontation; when the ritual is not possible there is no confrontation at all. Hemingway’s ritual is both formal and abstract, and so represents a retreat from rather than acceptance of existential absurdity. This is the real meaning of World War I experience - death without ritual – and it explains why Hemingway afterward was successful in only those areas where ritual became possible: the bull fight, the safari, the fishing trip.

Many critics have failed to realise, or remember, the enormous difference for Hemingway between World War I death and the death which either preceded it (death in the woods) or followed it (ritual death in the bull ring). John Killinger, indeed sees no difference at all:

In the blinding flash of a shell, in the icy-burning impact of a bullet, in the dangerous vicinity of a wounded lion, in the contact of a bull’s horn, in that ill-defined twilight between life and imminent death where time and place are irrelevant questions, man faces his freedom.  

But Frederick Henry knows better. There was neither “choice” nor “freedom” for him, no reason for medals or even talk; he was “eating cheese” ; he was totally – almost obscenely – done to; he was, as Frederick Hoffman remarks, “violated”; his experience was emasculatory because passive. “Soldiers never do die

77 Killinger, John – Hemingway and the Dead Gods (Lexington, KY, 1960) Page 18
well”, Hemingway tells us in *Champs de’Honneur* and his entire career as a writer was in a vital sense a search for those areas where a man can at least maintain the illusion of making love to death rather than being violated by it. The question is one of manhood itself, of initiative, and on this question the war experience is simply ruled out because it becomes unmanageable. There is nothing one can do with technological warfare but make a “separate peace” against it. And this is precisely Frederick Henry’s sole course of action. For when nobody follows the rules, a man is under no obligation to play the game, indeed when the game threatens to play the man, there is no alternative but flight.

The very fact that flight is possible, however, points up the difference between Hemingway and existentialism. Despite all his talk about death, Hemingway was concerned less with death than with the masculine role, which for him was always active, as the feminine was always passive. This is one reason why his protagonists, if they are unable to ritualise death, if they are acted upon (as Frederick Henry is acted upon), are faced with the ultimate horror: emasculation. In the works of Hemingway, death is less a threat to a man’s existence than to his *cojones* (masculinity) and for this reason he can speak of “dying well” or “dying badly”, while admitting that soldiers as contrasted to bull fighters or fishermen, “never do die well” since they are tossed on their backs to receive rather than give the final blow. Only when a man is passive in his death does “nada” itself become obscene (the jackal laughs at the hunter when the hunter is dying in bed – *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*). For existentialism, on the other hand, death is always obscene, and the problem is not one of “dying well” (which is an existentialist contradiction in terms) but rather, given the inescapable and inevitable obscenity of
death – in the bull ring or anywhere else – one of living well. And this is the major
difference between Hemingway’s nada - an emasculatory horror born of the World
War I impact – and the nothingness of Sartre. Where the post World War II
existentialist insists that there is no “exit” from the final and obscene absurdity,
Hemingway depends wholly upon ritualised action for precisely just such an escape.
And when ritual fails, the individual is doomed along with his manhood. Initiative
must be regained at all costs, and the demand for initiative is a clue not only to the
central drama of *A Farewell to Arms* but to the life - and the death – of Hemingway
himself.

When Hemingway wrote the introduction to his 1948 edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, he used the occasion to explain why he had spent so much of his creative
energy writing about war.

Some people say: why is the man so preoccupied and obsessed with war and now
since 1933, perhaps it is clear why a writer should be interested in the constant,
bullying, murderous, slovenly crime of war. Having been to too many of them I am
sure that I am prejudiced, and I hope that I am prejudiced. But it is the constant belief
of the writer of this book that wars are fought by the finest people that there are ......
but they are made, provoked and initiated by straight economic rivalries and by swine
that stand to profit by them. 78

That he was present at the wars and had a right to be, he frequently certified.
In the 1942 introduction to *Men at War* he presented as his credentials not only that
he had taken part in World War I and had been wounded, but that he had passed
through the initiation of war, which is the key to understanding much of the
century’s experience.

Hemingway recognised that war was essentially a state of mind, a condition
of will and the emotions. The clash, dirt and fatigue are all a part of war, but the

78 Hemingway, Ernest – *A Farewell to Arms* (New York, 1948), Page x
ultimate meaning is emotional. The soldier's highest purpose seemed to be - "we are here to be killed".\textsuperscript{79}

Hemingway's war writing was enriched by his being able to witness the wars of the century which gave them an emotional pattern mirrored in his own experience. His characterisation of different wars derived from his different responses to them. In 1918 he was consciously shaping himself and his attitudes. "I learnt about people," he said of this period, "under stress and before and after it."\textsuperscript{80}
This very stress has been the fundamental theme of all his creative writing.

His personal involvement in the Spanish Civil War was far greater than in the first war. This war was motivated by idealism. Consistent with his predilection for the underdog it became for him the people's war against the generals'. By the time of the writing of \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} Hemingway's thinking had undergone a drastic change. He still hated war, but as the gloomy shadow of fascism was lengthening over Europe, the republican cause gradually became "our cause".

The emotional intensity of living by death's dispensation became one of Hemingway's subjects after witnessing the wars of the century. For his readers though the real Hemingway was not so much a reporter and interpreter, as much as a writer who rendered the experience of war truly and intensely. This is what all his newspaper editors wanted from him - an intensity of experience with which he had enlivened his fiction. The sights and sounds of battle and more particularly the shattering sound of exploding bombs was the new experience the world had to learn.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{79} Cowley, Malcolm - \textit{The Second Flowering} (Andre Deutsch, 1973) Page 7
\textsuperscript{80} Fenton, Charles - \textit{The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway} (New American Library, 1961) Page 60
\end{flushright}
For Hemingway these were not merely soldiers' wars but writers' wars as well. The problem was not only to "experience" but to "express the experience" in an effort to write history ungarbled. When he wrote in *Green Hills of Africa* that war was the best school for writers, he recognised it not only as a major subject but as an unexplored terrain for twentieth century writing and one of the hardest subjects to write truly of. In his war reporting, Hemingway admitted the possibility of an incomplete rendering of experience. Consequently to avoid helping the enemy he had to censor his war reporting or accept external censorship. After the war all could be told, but emotion recollected in tranquility was quite another thing. In *Men at War* Hemingway writes:

> If during war conditions are such that a writer cannot publish the truth because its publication would do harm to the state, he should write and not publish. 81

Hemingway chose to write – and publish – a reconstructed view in his war reports, to sacrifice a completeness of vision for the intensity and immediacy of experience. He saved the fictional critiques for afterwards. His world was ultimately one at war with the individual. The spectre of the war haunts Hemingway's earliest short stories: many of the Nick Adams stories of *In Our Time* are given in terms of the author's own experience of violence. The security provided by the family and the natural setting are never free from the tortured sketches of war and violence. And it is from these images that Hemingway's distinctive prose style emerges.

He brought to American writing honesty and objectivity and purged it of sentimentality, literary embellishments and a superficial artfulness. He revitalised the art of dialogue writing. His vision is sharply etched and his words are written as

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81 Hemingway, Ernest (ed.) – *Men at War* (Fontana, 1966) Page 8
though held tightly in check. The effect is one of understatement and irony particularly effective when the subject is, as is often the case, violence and pain. The tightly controlled check on the mind of the hero and the tension in his life is clearly paralleled by the disciplined sentences. The prose is tense because the atmosphere is tense.

The atmosphere is ultimately one where the world is at war – war either literal as armed conflict or figurative as marked everywhere with violence and pain, whether real or potential. This is a world peopled with strong, violent men whose morality is succinctly summed up as "what is moral is what you feel good after".

Happiness is nothing but an interlude in their lives – pleasure seized in haste. It is ultimately an extremely narrow world. Yet one is compelled to recognise it as a very real world as the history of the past decades tells us. It is the world we live in, however much we might deny it.

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