CHAPTER - IV
HEMINGWAY'S WORLD - MEN AT WAR

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."¹

¹. Hemingway, Ernest - A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1948) PAGE X.
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. Badly wounded he had lost the illusion of personal immortality but along with it he had gained that other insight that men at war must have.

Hemingway recognised that war was essentially a state of mind, a condition of will and the emotions: The clash, dirt, fatigue are all a part of war but the ultimate meaning is emotional. He despised the people who supported war and the ambition, mismanagement and sense of personal glory that carried it along as much as he respected the soldiers at the front. He always espoused the cause of the lowly rifleman, and it was the enormous butcheries of 1916 that first made him realise this; The soldiers' highest purpose seemed to be "We are here to be killed." ²

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while the generals and statesmen far behind the enemy lines plotted and planned the slaughters and advanced their careers.

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 the 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." This very stress has been the fundamental theme of all his creative work. His letters have showed an interest and concentration on the frightening reality around him. ....

"... shells aren't bad except direct hits; you just take chances on the fragments of the bursts. But when there is a direct hit, your pals get spattered all over you; spattered is literal."  

4. Ibid.,
"You've got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it, "this dictum followed by Hemingway clearly confirms the truth evident in all his 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 peoples war against the Generals. By the time of the writing of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway's thinking had undergone a drastic change since his experiences in Italy. He still hated war but there was one thing that was worse than war and that was defeat. Wars have to be won and the people that made them got rid of and it had to be seen that they never occurred again. At the time of his writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls* the gloomy shadow of Fascism was lengthening over Europe and as the Republican cause gradually became "our cause", he absorbed the Partisan mind. And like always Hemingway had to be there where the action was, filming the documentary *The Spanish Earth*. Hemingway learnt a lot in Spain. He learnt that it was in war that men lived most fully. Soldiers had to stay constantly alert in wartime to avoid being dragged down by death.
The emotional intensity of living by death's dispensation became one of Hemingway's subjects after witnessing the wars of the century. In Spain he was astonished how people could behave in the face of death. Although most of his novels and sketches depict more cowardice than courage, his war reporting was peopled with men who suffered, but did not panic - there were no Nick Adams, Bonellos or Pablos.

For his readers though, the real Hemingway at war 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. Hemingway was careful to make it a very real sensation of war. But even more frightening than the sounds of battle was the dull silence that followed which spelt only one thing and that was death. And behind all the sensations of war was the sense of one's own potential death which perhaps is the central experience in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
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 and as an unexplored terrain for twentieth century writing but also as a setting for a great cross section of experience and one of the hardest subjects to write truly of. In his war writing Hemingway admitted the possibility of an incomplete rendering of experience. Consequently to avoid helping the enemy he had to censor himself 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."6

6. Hemingway, Ernest - ed. Men At War (Fontana 1966) PAGE 8
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.

Hemingway's fictional characters are soldiers, prize fighters, sportsmen, matadors. He was greatly occupied with death and violence and above all he was tormented by recurring visions of violent death—evident in much of his writing. His world was ultimately one at war with the individual.

The key to his obsession with violence can perhaps be traced back to the first story in his first book of short stories called *In Our Time*, a title derived from the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer: "Give Peace in Our Time, O Lord". The most conspicuous thing about this collection, however, is that there is no peace at all in the stories. Another aspect about this volume is the gradual development of the central figure of Nick Adams, from boyhood, adolescence to manhood and herein lies the subtle and tenuous link between the stories: *Indian Camp*, the first of these stories relates the incident of a doctor with his young
son for help, performing a Caesarian section operation—without anaesthesia and with a jack knife—on an Indian woman. In the meanwhile, her invalid husband unable to bear the tortured screams of his wife for two whole days, cuts his head off. In this story it is not so much the violence that is emphasised as the effect it has on the young Nick. He stands in the shadow of a bewildering violence. This psychological scarring is carried through during the six episodes of the collection *In Our Time*, ultimately in Nick going to the First War, being wounded and opting to desert—an episode enlarged considerably in *A Farewell to Arms*. The pattern of violence and death is set. The posture of youthful rebellion evident so much in his early writing, however, seems to have mellowed considerably by the time of his writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The hero is still a wounded psychologically battered man, but he has learnt a lot since the old days about how to live and function with his wounds, and he behaves well. He dies with a flourish, having done his duty proving to the world that life is worth living, yet there are causes great enough to die for. This symbolic

wound has had a deep effect on Hemingway's fiction. The shock of physical sensation, the sudden severance from past experience and securities, the mystery and impersonality of its source, and the anger, fear and bewilderment are all part of the wounding. The wounding is "unreasonable", for the victim cannot understand why it has happened to him. It gives him a profound distrust of those who -- remote from the experience itself -- try to formulate explanations or assurances concerning it. They are obviously "faking", for they would clearly not talk of it at all if they had any actual experience of it and they would most certainly not talk of dignity, honour, glory and sacrifice, because these words are invariably betrayed when tested by the reality of experience. Explanations or descriptions become a betrayal of reality. Hemingway's writing seeks to avoid this betrayal painfully. In this painful scrupulousness is the model for working on language: where writing seeks to restore its actual distance from reality.

Conrad, whose patrimony Hemingway sought, enveloped his tales in flourishes of words. In a way,
he always seemed to know that the world he was
describing/writing upon was slipping away through
the word-whorls even before he completed his wri-
ting. In his feverish descriptions is the other
side of the attempt of the writer who knows the
problem of rendering the real. Hemingway works from
the opposite direction. The image is of a miner who
works hard for his seam of gold, panning it, the
traces on his calloused hands gleam. The history of
painful labour in extraction is immediately denied,
submerged in the reality of the process of writing,
the of which reader is unaware - the words stand alone:
the efforts of the writer at war with his tools -
words.

The spectre of the war haunts Hemingway's
earliest short stories; many of the Nick Adams sto-
ries, of In Our Time are given in terms of the author's
own experience with violence. The securities provided
by the family and the natural setting are never free
of the tortured sketches of war and violence. On the
other hand, these brief inter-chapters act as a sombre
reminder of the fact of war and as a supervisory deity
in the affairs of Nick Adams. Nothing can exorcize the
recurring nightmarish spirit.
The first character of Hemingway's creation provides the clue to the rest of his heroes: they are all moulded from the same clay - reappearing under different names and guises. In fact the similarity between Hemingway himself and his heroes has not gone unnoticed - a fact which has led many critics, particularly Philip Young, to delve into Hemingway's biographical history. 8

Yet it is the writer and not the man who is of primary interest to the reader, although the media has through the years made much of Hemingway as soldier, aficionado of the bullring and as big game hunter. Ultimately the Hemingway that emerges from the colour photographs and the magazines appears to be somewhat larger than life. Yet, in spite of it all, his technical achievement has been stupendous, particularly in view of what we regard today as the contemporary American style. But here we are so conditioned to his influence that we hardly ever notice it anymore. He brought to American writing an honesty and objectivity and purged it of sentimentality, literary embellishments and a superficial artfulness. He revitalised the art of dialogue writing. His influence, however, has been negative in the realm of 'popular literature' through no fault of his. The

8. Young, Philip - Ernest Hemingway (University of Minnesota Press 1964)
world he has evoked in his novels spawned a new generation of writers who seized some of his tricks — usually a mixture of violence and sex — and brought forth what we call today "the pulp novel". These writers of "the tough detective school", in particular, demonstrate what happens when the style and attitudes which have meaning in one novelist are taken over by others for whom the meaning is quite different.

Hemingway's prose style is easily recognisable. For the most part it is colloquial, marked by a studied simplicity of fiction and sentence structure. The words used are spare and ring with a curious freshness. As Ford Maddox Ford remarked justifiably, the words "strike you, each one, as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook", for the effect is one of sharpness and clarity. Events are recorded with the utmost objectivity in the sequence they occurred and there is absolutely no intrusion of the omniscient narrator who provides nothing but the stimulus. The vision is sharply etched and the words are written as 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.
Hemingway had a very sensitive ear for personal accents and mannerisms which gave his dialogues a peculiar individuality bringing a particular character to life. This gift was all the more pronounced in his writing of the Spanish colloquial style which he used in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. In the colourful swearing words of Pilar, for instance ("Go and obscenity in the milk of thy cowardice" Pilar said to Pablo, "I know too much about thee and thy cowardice."

the language and the people are merged into one.

The Hemingway style, is however, particularly significant in relation to the content. The tightly controlled check on the mind of the hero and the tension in his life is clearly paralleled by the strictly disciplined sentences. The short staccato words seem as if they were echoes of the staccato bursts of the bullets in the battlefield. 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 figuratively 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"\(^\text{10}\)

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 tell us. It is the world we live in however much we might deny it:

In comparison with the "boy scout" spirit of the soldiers who went to the first war to save the world for democracy, the men who went to the second war seemed terribly aware. The illusions of courage, nobility, sacrifice and honour had all been lost to them that first

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10. Hemingway, Ernest - A Farewell to Arms (Granada)
time. Their lives had been spent in a world which had so far been in war with itself. Childhood was no longer - as it was for Hemingway - a memory of campfires and trout fishing in the Michigan woods. The generation of the twenties had found themselves lost in a world they had never made. "The generation of the forties could never be lost because the safe and ordered world had never been theirs." Quite suddenly the world was exploding into nothingness, and because the new war generation had no illusions they found themselves beyond disillusionment. Everywhere men were disappearing into uniform and hardly anyone knew when they left. There were no longer any parades or triumphant marches. The spectacle of death was neither touchingly poignant nor exciting. For a second time in a century, America was witness to the truth of war, but this time they saw it nakedly without illusion or romance.

11. Aldridge, J.W. - The Devil in the Fire (Harper and Row, 1972) PAGE 9
The absence of genuine technical innovation in the majority of the novels of the Second War is a direct result of a difference in the responses which the two generations were able to make to war. Whereas Hemingway, Dos Passos and Cummings were impelled to discover a fresh literary technique with which to present the sudden and awesome experience of war, the writers of the Second War were denied the means of technical discovery. Discovery of technique occurs only in moments of profound and new experience, when time worn methods of expressing seem irrelevant and inadequate. In other words technique is as much a product of fresh experience as fresh subject matter is the product of successful technique. But the truth of the Second War was that it was no longer a new experience; the emotions it aroused were old ones and it could be expressed in the old ways.

The works of the new war generation abound in examples in which Hemingway's war is fought all over again in a style synthetically Hemingway's. The Hemingway influence is an example of the extent
to which a set of literary mannerisms created out of the fresh experience of the war, has been transferred and adapted to almost an identical experience in the second. Hemingway's style has thrived because it is uniquely the language of wartime. The tightly controlled words expressing suffering and an intimate awareness of death has become almost synonymous with certain fixed responses to war, with the result that once a writer attempts to deal with war and his responses to it, he almost always presents them in Hemingway's terms. The surface resemblance is there, but the life is not. The life can belong only to Hemingway; for it is part of a world he created out of experience he felt for the first time when it was fresh and new and which he endowed with a meaning which was exclusively and intimately his own. The reason for this is that Hemingway, Cummings and Dos Passos felt intimately as individuals for the subject of war. In each case the emphasis was on the simple and concrete and the individual soldier rather than the masses. The evil of war was a personal affront, it could be concretely blamed and attacked. What sharpened their response to the horror of war was
the contrast between the two eras - the security and comfort of the past years and the abrupt awakening to the reality of the present. To the second generation writers the passage of time made the fact of war even more complex. But they were perhaps unaware that even as they grew in awareness, they would be more deeply affected by the futility of what they saw and their work would suffer a corresponding loss of power.

It was not until 1948, however, when Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* appeared that the general public fully accepted the new war literature. It had a certain brute force which it shared with James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*. No novel since Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* contains a more vivid or terrifyingly acute picture of the actual conditions of war time as does Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Certainly it is no accident that Mailer feels something very close to idolatory for Hemingway, for Hemingway's appeal stems from just that part of his nature which has caused him to become Mailer's instructor in the jungle warfare of modern existence.
Just as Mailer looks backwards at Hemingway, so also Hemingway seeks in Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage for both thematic and structural inspiration. 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 to note similarities between The Red Badge of Courage and A Farewell to Arms. 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 the writing of A Farewell to Arms, but Crane's account of the war becomes doubly significant because he had never seen any war. Another classic to which Hemingway is heavily indebted is Stendhal's The Charterhouse of Parma. When Hemingway edited Men At War, he chose to include Stendhal's account of young Fabrizio at Waterloo. In this Introduction he writes:

"The best account of actual human beings
behaving during a world shaking event is Stendhal's picture of young Fabrizio at Waterloo. Once you have read it, you will have been at the battle of Waterloo, and nothing can ever take that experience from you.\textsuperscript{12}

Hemingway had said that in his early career he thought of himself as writing in competition with the great authors of the past. In \textit{A Farewell to Arms} he seems to have written his Caporetto retreat in direct competition with Stendhal. In fact as if asking for comparison, Hemingway placed his own work juxtaposed between those of Crane and Stendhal.

Hemingway had Stephen Crane before him as the model for writing a researched war novel. Aside from the thematic similarities between the earlier and the later novel, there is one particular scene in \textit{A Farewell to Arms} which sharply evokes memories of the earlier novel, Henry Fleming, Crane's protagonist.

\textsuperscript{12} Hemingway, Ernest ed., \textit{- Men At War} (Fontana, 1966) PAGE, 13
deserts his post; on the other hand he tries to stop a potential deserter. In the ensuing scuffle, Fleming is wounded in the head which ironically becomes his "red badge of courage", because of which he is accepted back into the regiment. This scene is sharply recalled in Chapter Seven of *A Farewell to Arms* where Frederick Henry offers to help a deserter, but inspite of the wounds and the "bloody patch" on his head, the deserter is recognized for what he is and never mistaken to be a hero as it happens in the earlier novel. As Hemingway indicates in other parts of the novel, the courage to face the enemy or the lack of it is of no particular value in wartime. 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 Cassa as a source as he is paying an oblique tribute to a writer whom he admired and from whom he learned something about writing.

The second generation war writers have seen so much death and destruction that they seem to be frozen in a helpless attitude of horror. "They are all indignant novels, but the protest implicit in them is almost always merely implicit". 13

The evil of war is so overpowering that they seem to cancel out all possibility of change—a possibility which must underlie all truly effective novels of protest. There is no single tangible enemy that had once overcome the Hemingway hero. The new generation novelists have been wounded by the shock of too much reality and of talents that have exceeded their capacity to express the full meaning of that shock.

The retreat from Caporetto and Frederick Henry walking out alone into the rain at the end of *A Farewell to Arms* brings to an end far more than an army and a war romance. They mark the end of a whole way of thinking, feeling and writing about war. Hemingway was fortunate enough to record that end to give it a certain tragic grandeur. But since then there have been too many wars and too many deaths, until now the meaning has been lost and the grandeur long faded. The magnificent tragedy of the First War and the sad but intensely excited young men who volunteered for it have given way to old young men who lived for it a second time and wrote of it
in tones of muffled anger and a deepening sense of futility. This distance cannot solely be measured in terms of war experience. The war served merely to crystallize the differences in their attitudes which stretched back to their childhoods and which had already formed them when the war began.

An intriguing aspect of American literary history is its preoccupation with war literature. This obsession seems to have derived partly from the manner in which the American continent itself gave expression to some aspects of human character. Lewis Mumford has developed the argument that America provided an outlet for man's basic desire to return to nature and that once freed of the fetters of European Civilization, the settler quickly succumbed to the hunting instinct and since warfare is a specialized form of the hunt it is no wonder that the two should hold a special interest for the new world.14

"There is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and liked it, never care for anything else thereafter". 15 One sees the duality of hunting and warfare presented with special clarity in a work like Hemingway's In Our Time, where scenes from the wilderness counterpoints scenes of war, or in Mailer's Why Are We in Vietnam where the question posed by title is explored in the context of an Alaskan big game hunt.

War literature is also reminiscent of the masculinity of pioneering life and its fictional terrain is almost always limited to that peculiar all-male world governed by strictly masculine interests, attitudes and values. All these factors combined have produced an almost poignant treatment of the soldier by the American novelist, Mailer, for example, harks back constantly to his army days when life was both dangerous and morally simplified. His later novels typically revolve around the adventures of a soldier or ex-soldier wandering stupefied through the horrors

of civilian life. Like a latter day Hemingway he obsessively raises the question of how he will react in moments of danger.

It has been seen that the attitudes towards warfare and the military establishment expressed in American war novels do tend to vary from those found in the war novels of other countries. Perhaps the most important single divergence lies in the fact that it is the enlisted man not the officer who is almost always the protagonist in the American novel. There is also the basic sense of alienation from war as an institution. Fundamental to almost all of these works is the idea that war is not an integral part of life. The fictional European soldier complains about the discomforts and stupidities of war but not about its endemic quality or the hierarchical structure of the military organization itself; to him war is part of life and the military organization has strong analogies with the social structure he knew as a civilian. For the American, however, war is an aberration that he hopes may be permanently ended, the authoritarian military organization is an insult to his most cherished concepts of liberty and individuality.
Finally there is the question of which direction the American war novel is likely to take in the future. It has been argued that the novel as a genre is not suited to the treatment of the theme of war. Bernard Bergonzi has said:

"The novel ....... is not an easy form in which to accommodate heroic figures, its natural bias is so much to the realistic, the typical, the ordinary, that the presence of any figure of conspicuous stature and virtue is liable to create ironic tensions".16

Yet in America, there exists a special interest in "the realistic, the typical, the ordinary", which may allow American novelists to deal successfully with the theme of war without necessarily evoking the heroic image, besides the ironic tensions themselves can become the basis for a considerable body of literature. One must also consider the way the younger generation in the Western world sought to manufacture a

set of heroes in the sixties. Consistent coverage of the battlefield by television and other media has helped to destroy popular belief in the hero-figure, insofar as the hero was traditionally a soldier. One now sees the phenomenon of a younger generation that takes revolutionary figures, notably Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh and makes them into heroes. This desire to reestablish the hero as part of the national mythos could conceivably become the basis of a literature about the minor wars of the nuclear age.

Whatever new direction the war novel may take in the United States it seems safe to predict its continuing importance and popularity. The theme of "men at war" itself is indestructible and the events of our time revolve as never before around the questions of peace and war. In such a situation one may subscribe to Joseph Remenyi's statement:

"(Great War literature) helps to retain one's sense of value that ridicules absolute indifference or absolute futility. Man is shown as an agent of his own
will, or as a puppet of forces which he cannot control in his tireless integrity and in his selfish pettiness (It) touches the innermost existence of man, and defies the nothingness of human life with an expression of actions and aims which are organically attached to the will to live and the will to die. 17

Peace in our Time was Hemingway's plea at the very beginning, but it has turned out to be an ironic and ambiguous prophecy.

17. Remenyi, Joseph - The Psychology of War Literature, Sewanee Review LII, PAGE 147