Platonic conception : post war experience in "The Great Gatsby" and "Farewell to Arms"

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Platonic Conception: Post War Experience in The Great Gatsby and Farewell To Arms

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the University

at Albany, State University

of New York

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences

Department of English

December 2014
Thesis Abstract

“Platonic Conception” explores the relationship that authors F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway had with World War I through their respective novels “The Great Gatsby” and “A Farewell to Arms.” The thesis’s author examines how the cultural impact of the war can be felt in five facets of both novels: the formative influences of the writers, their experiences with the War itself, their use of setting, their treatment of female characters, and how they render the War’s influence in a post-war world. Comparing the ways these two books treat the war leads Floss to argue that cultural impact of the war on America was the legacy of violence.

Floss’s analysis of “Gatsby” is based in the assertion that Fitzgerald emphasizes the setting of the novel as a place free from violence, only for the war itself to manifest at points in the narrative most informed by the war’s legacy. This theme of inescapable violence underlying American society is the foundation of the novel’s plots and characters. Likewise, Floss argues that Hemingway presents a clear distinction between the scenes on the Italian front and the scenes set outside the war to make the violence’s effect on the latter more noticeable. In particular, he argues that main character’s psychology in these different settings is the strongest indicator of World War I’s effects.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my readers Professor Jeffrey Berman and Professor Paul Stasi. I would also like to thank Professor James Lilley for his guidance and support. Likewise, without one Ms. Brenda Miller’s help, I would still be lost in the halls of the English department.

Thanks and thoughts also go to my father Fred, my mother Lauren, and my brother Jeff.
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Introduction

American identity as reflected in literature has rarely faced as significant a challenge to its own conception as the First World War. The enormity of the conflict defined American sensibilities for the rest of the century in ways small and large. The immediate effect was a complete restructuring of the American male identity. The root psychological, cultural, and spiritual effects of the war manifested themselves in the soldiers returning home from the war’s end and the cultural commentators who were not directly involved in the war. In the former category, one of the foremost examples would be author Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway’s bibliography is defined by the author’s lifelong struggle with mental illness, and his examination of the wartime experience is a common motif in his work. F. Scott Fitzgerald has proven to be a strong example of the latter category of commentators. His own experience with the war was relatively minimal, yet his work rivaled Hemingway’s in its assessment of the American cultural landscape.

Both men possessed character traits that reflected and contrasted each other. Both men struggled with alcohol, relationships, and their reputation. In spite of their similarities, the novels they wrote that most reflected World War I are very different. These novels are Fitzgerald’s 1925 *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway’s 1929 *A Farewell to Arms*. On a surface level, these two novels share similarities in plot, time periods, characters and themes. Both novels reflect periods of development in their author’s bibliography where their writing changed significantly to reflect the ramifications of the war on their personal development. Their author’s previous novels touched upon the war as subject matter. Speaking critically, *Gatsby* and *Farewell* are the most essential novels produced by the two men. Both of these novels offer a succinct approximation of the war
as an experience filtered through their respective authors. Outlining the elements these books have in common is essential to determining the all encompassing effect the war has had on the careers of these successful authors. Understanding the war’s influence on their psychology is essential to understanding their differences as writers.

Above all else, I wish to argue that war’s influence manifests in these novels the most strongly through their use of violence. *The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms* feature settings and characters affected by the brutality of the war. When violence erupts in the surroundings of Jay Gatsby and Frederic Henry, their occurrences are informed by several different factors. First among these influences are Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s development as authors and their own experiences with the war. Within the books themselves, violence affects the authors’ constructions of setting, character relationships, and the legacies of the war. I will explore each of these areas in relation to *The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms*. In doing so I will argue how the structural elements of these two novels serve identical purposes: their authors coming to terms with the violence of World War I in a post-war world.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Understanding who these authors were is necessary before exploring their writing decisions. Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896 to what was initially an upper middle class family. His family left his birthplace in Minnesota to live in Buffalo, New York. His parents, Mollie and Edward, largely kept him engaged in a Catholic education. His High School period was marked by a noted dearth of popularity amongst his peers, though his intelligence was observed by his teachers at the time. When he was a teenager, his father lost his job. This moment appeared to
have a large impact on the young Fitzgerald’s development, and would begin his fascination with class as a theme in his work (Introduction to *This Side to Paradise*, Sharon G. Carson, p. xxvi).

Fitzgerald matriculated at Princeton University. His time there was defined by various attempts to balance his coursework with his literary ambitions. In this regard he was rarely successful. By the time the World War I had broken out, he was on academic probation and resolved to drop out. He was already an author of several plays and short stories such as *Babes in the Woods* and *The Debutante*. Stationed at Montgomery, he met a young Zelda Sayre, with whom he immediately became infatuated. Before he could be deployed, the conflict in Europe had already died down. Upon his discharge, Fitzgerald began his endeavor to win Zelda’s hand in marriage by earning enough money to do so. He was often engaged in menial work as he was writing his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. By the time it was published, Fitzgerald’s life was changed by the ensuing reception.

Scott’s success enabled him to marry Zelda and achieve a level of celebrity rare to writers. The accolades thrown upon him by critics and fans had a complicated effect on both his personal and public life. *This Side of Paradise* helped define Fitzgerald’s authorial voice as being attuned to his specific generation. *Paradise* marked Fitzgerald’s fascination with the shallow workings of the upper class, the failure of “romantic” values and the search for spiritual fulfillment in a modern age. Amory’s narration was clearly based in autobiographical influences, and Fitzgerald’s perspective was enabled by the verbosity of his signature prose.

The reception of these elements impacted his third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in ways that can be observed from even a surface level. The narrator is an outsider whose description of the New York almost functions as ethnography of the 1920s culture. The titular character, Jay Gatsby himself, is a celebrity whose house functions as a focal point for other fictionalized versions of stars. The world of celebrity is effectively a cloak and dagger for Gatsby himself. At times, the
rumors circling him add to his mystique and it would seem he almost encourages them to continue to enhance his popularity. Ultimately, the celebrity status is more ephemeral than even his dreams, and his death in the climax of the book illustrates the author’s contempt for the increased notoriety represented in his first book’s success. When none of the people who gossiped about Gatsby or enjoyed his parties appear at the funeral, the book echoes the central theme of *Paradise* in being unable to reconcile life’s pleasures with the specter of violence of death.

*Paradise* directly approaches this conflict between war and civilian life by dividing its focus in two separate halves. The first half is defined by the youthful ambitions of its protagonist, Amory Blaine, as he grows up to receive a Princeton education. The second half takes place after Amory’s recruitment into the war. His experiences are largely defined by disappointment and failure. He attempts to eke out a living with his friends whilst falling into poverty and failing to realize his dreams. His attempts at achieving romance are similarly disappointing when compared to his experiences before he became a soldier. Though the action of the war is only alluded to, violence pervades the second half of *Paradise* more so than the first, a reflection of the philosophical ramifications of the conflict. Amory gets in fights, his latest lover tries to kill herself, and he ends the novel at graveyard for soldiers of the Civil War. Unlike *Gatsby*, the violence of the war in *Paradise* harms the spiritual self more than the physical self.

In spite of this difference, *Gatsby* also features violence contrasting the promises of society that tempt the hero (and reader). This violence is handled in a very different manner than in his previous novels, but is still linked in many ways to the experience of World War I. One of the essential parts of Gatsby’s story is his experience in the First World War. Like Amory (and the author) he meets the love of his life while stationed at an American post. He also fails to secure her hand initially because of his financial status. His involvement with organized crime proves
essential to securing his fortune, but this alone does not account for the sense of violence pervading Gatsby. While the character of Wolfshiem is constructed as menacing, the most ‘violent’ aspect of Gatsby’s life prior to the climax is the ongoing rumor that he in fact, “killed a man.” Initially suggested by shallow party guests, the rumor grows in power over the course of the book as we learn more about the main character.

As this rumor demonstrates, wartime violence is the center of *Gatsby* as a subject. Fitzgerald filters the war’s violence through the views of celebrity culture that thrived in its wake. Understanding the importance Fitzgerald places on the violence of World War I is only possible when the author’s own connections to the war are analyzed. Fitzgerald’s application of violence is unique to *Gatsby*, but his thematic treatment of the war is comparable to his peer, Ernest Hemingway.

**Ernest Hemingway**

Ernest Hemingway’s experiences in World War I were much more extensive than Fitzgerald’s, which his bibliography reflects. Many of his major novels deal with the war as a setting or an occurring theme. War is one of the central subjects of his first novel. It was one of the novels representing the foundation of the “Lost generation,” a term coined by Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s peer Gertrude Stein. Focusing on the exploits of Jake Barnes, the plot was based in the activities of a group of “ex-patriates” in the shadow of the war. Jake’s attraction to the heroine, Brett, is repeatedly undermined by a war injury that has made physical intimacy impossible. Like Fitzgerald’s *Paradise*, the central theme of *Sun* is the inability to rectify a life out of combat with the experiences during the war. The characters are aimless and wistful, and this
wistfulness eventually culminates in one of the characters, Robert Cohn, resorting to violence against his peers.

Violence great and small is a consistent theme through all of Hemingway’s work. The themes in *Sun*, however, are reflected differently in his wartime masterpiece *A Farewell to Arms*. Unlike in his previous endeavor, Hemingway places his characters in the midst of the chaos of the European theater. Romance again places a central role in the plot, but the war manifests its influence in the central relationship in an oblique manner. Frederic Henry slowly becomes enamored of Nurse Catherine whilst engaging in what is initially a primarily physical relationship. The book explores Frederic’s psyche during the course of the novel without having a narrator comment on his state of mind. His emotional attachment to Catherine and his sense of depression are only apparent through the severity of his narration and his actions. This approach to storytelling gives Hemingway more of an opportunity to explore a main character with a new sense of depth.

This depth is best displayed when Frederic’s mind turns to the war itself. His commentary works to disprove common notions about the nature of war, as his personal experience contrasts with his rank and professional reception. Instead, Frederic’s personal development comes during his time with Catherine. She is affected psychologically by the war when she initiates a relationship with Frederic. Her former lover was killed, and as such her affections towards Frederic are expressed in ways that force him to express himself and commit to life in a way that is antithetical to the attitude he has developed during wartime. This internal struggle culminates in a moment when his survival instinct enables him to escape a dangerous situation. In Book Three, he escapes being killed by the battle police by flinging himself into the river.

His will to live directly contradicts his duty as a soldier. Yet the shadow of war’s violence follows him home. This development is a result of Hemingway’s personal beliefs and how they
shape the novel as much as his experiences in Europe. Frederic embodies the behavior Hemingway feels is noble when confronted with violence. The author’s personal ideal of masculinity is linked to the emphasis he puts on constructing a sphere for the area of war. Violence and death are essential parts of the masculine sphere that Hemingway creates within *A Farewell to Arms*. The effort he puts into writing about battlefield and how it affects Frederic’s mentality is essential to understanding the destructive climax of the book in which Catherine dies giving birth. Reading *Farewell* is also important to understanding Hemingway’s body of work and its relationship with the subject of violence. *The Sun Also Rises* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* both use violence to varying degrees of thematic importance. Seeing Hemingway using his real encounter with violence as impetus for a fictional plot in *Farewell* gives us more insight into his relationship with the war than these other novels. Alongside Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*, Hemingway’s novel *Farewell to Arms* is the most psychological potent of the novels written in the late 1920’s.

The two books yield this potency because they represent an extension and improvement over the thematic infrastructure of their respective predecessors. The central characters carry the DNA of the former protagonists. Jay Gatsby is an evolution of Amory Blaine in much the same way Frederic Henry is of Jake Barnes. These similarities are not coincidental. Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s friendship during the decade both books were published was influential on their conception. The friendship held weight but was also fractured with tension because of the commonality of their formative influences. Scott Donaldson’s text *Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship* offers details of their history together through letters. Because Fitzgerald was not technically a veteran of the war in the same sense as Hemingway, the letters used by Donaldson rarely address the war directly. However, both men had several opinions on subject matter explored in *Gatsby* and *Farewell*, such as women, alcohol, and the
cultural differences between America and Europe. Their criticisms of each other’s work belie the connections these subjects have to the war in their novels.

To understand how comparable the effects of the war were on both men, we must evaluate *Gatsby* and *Farewell* within five specific contexts. Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s formative influences must be evaluated. Their experiences with World War I must be examined extensively. The settings, characters, and influences of the war on the plots in their books must be looked at from a psychological perspective. After doing so, we can understand the ways in which the war impacted two of the foremost American authors from the “Lost Generation”.

**Fitzgerald’s Formative Influences**

Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s novels all employ some level of autobiographical detail. *This Side of Paradise* is features several plot elements derived from his own experiences, such as his time at Princeton. *Tender Is the Night* consistently calls attention to the real relationships Fitzgerald had with his wife and Europe. *The Great Gatsby* would seem to be a deviation from the pattern suggested by the aforementioned two texts. While it certainly contains elements that invite comparison with those two novels, a surface level examination of the plot suggests less of an autobiographical context. The novel could be construed as a crime story, and the climax hinges on both vehicular homicide and a murder-suicide. The romantic nature of Gatsby’s back story further displaces readers from the world of reality.

This is noted within the text itself. When Nick Carraway hears Gatsby attempt to explain his past in Chapter Four, Nick notes that his stories evoke tropes of fictional adventures. The genre recalled is enough for Nick to have a general idea of comparison. Gatsby’s fiction is thus
linked to actual fiction. The “pulp” genre evokes an isolated vision of American ideals. Gatsby believes that the fictional archetypes in this genre can be replicated.

The character’s quixotic pursuit of these archetypes is thrown into relief by the character of Nick Carraway, the narrator. Nick works as Gatsby’s foil because he begins the novel by explaining his connection to real American history. Unlike Gatsby, Nick is open with his connection to his family and their place within actual American events. The portrait of Nick’s background is not especially flattering. The founder of his family arrived in America shortly before the American Civil War, and sent “a substitute” to the war in his place so he could build a successful family business. Even Nick’s stable background is predicated on violence and war, however distantly. Nick is at least honest about how American reality differs from the fictions it produces to reinforce a sense of “the self-made man” idea. He is certainly cognizant of and drawn to it to an extent. What is important is that Fitzgerald makes his “point-of-view” character someone who is not a participator in this mythology. He is a commentator and a conspirator, but at no point in the novel does he claim to be a “Son of God” in the sense that Gatsby thinks he is.

Such self-conceptions can also be found in Hemingway’s works. However, Jake Barnes and Frederic Henry’s self-conceptions as soldiers are reactions to the realities of war rather than abstract fictional ideas in American literature. Unlike Hemingway, Fitzgerald grounded his characters in distinctly American cultural concepts. A component of the “self-made man” myth is at least somewhat linked to a Midwestern occupation with Christianity. Nick believes as much when he notes in chapter 6 that Gatsby believes himself to be a “son of God” (Gatsby, pg92). Fitzgerald returns to this American conception of ethics several times in the book. Nick’s continued interaction with the atmosphere of New York is meant to emphasize his status as a “traditional Mid-Westerner”, and Fitzgerald’s sympathy with him resonates through the text. He is both “within and without” New York. The temptations that abound in the city are both alluring
and repelling to Nick. His commentary on the behavior of ancillary characters informs the moral tone of the work, yet he remains the most passive figure in the text. We can see a similar duality within Gatsby, whose dedication to Daisy is comparable to that of the Chivalric knights. Yet he also depends upon hosting bacchanal parties at his mansion in order to curry her favor. Like Nick, he is both removed from the “sin” around him and linked to it. This ambivalence brings the two characters together whilst isolating them from the rest of the cast.

Because of this ambivalence, Nick is passive towards much of the behavior he witnesses throughout the book. He judges certain actions, but only privately. It is when Gatsby apparently runs over Myrtle with his car that Nick raises his most vocal objection in the book. He reaches the limit of his ability to forgive until Gatsby confesses that Daisy was driving the car when Myrtle was struck. It is Tom and Daisy’s complicity in the murder of Gatsby and the suicide of Wilson that finally cause Nick to retreat from the city and everything it represents. Worth noting is Nick’s internal belief that Gatsby ultimately avails himself of his vision of Daisy before he is killed by Wilson. The establishment of this need for absolution within Gatsby and Nick’s relationship is most apparent during the latter half in which the specter of death visits the setting.

**Fitzgerald and the War**

Fitzgerald’s formative influences appear most brazenly when “death” impacts the novel’s plot. His treatment of death and violence is linked to the chief autobiographical detail he shares with Gatsby: a military career. Fitzgerald’s decision to approach Gatsby’s service within the story is one of the more subtle processes of the story. The first time Nick and Gatsby meet in the story proper is when the latter recognizes the former from the service. The camaraderie between the
two characters is established before Nick even learns Gatsby’s name and identifies him as the mysterious host at the center of the party.

This detail alone sets the foundation for the relationship between the two characters. Nick shares more in common with Gatsby than any other character. Yet the unraveling of Gatsby’s past forms the central tension of the novel itself. Nick does not call attention to his sense of affection for Gatsby. Sharing a military background proves to be enough for Nick to become interested before the mystery of his past becomes the focus of the plot and tests Nick’s assessment of him. War becomes the central force tying the two main characters together in *Gatsby*. Nick’s supposed reluctance to judge Gatsby throughout the novel can be read as an unspoken reinforcement of this camaraderie.

Although the experiences of World War I are not described in detail in *Gatsby*, they are still essential to the “class” commentary of the book. Tom Buchanan, the husband of Gatsby’s ostensible paramour, is largely defined by his “old money” elitism. In the context of the war, this means Tom was able to afford a chance to ignore the war effort. Consequently, he is a mouthpiece for the old values of pre-war America that Fitzgerald criticizes. His enmity with Gatsby increases when Gatsby attempts to reinitiate a relationship with his wife, Daisy. It is while Gatsby was drawn further into the war that Daisy decided to marry Tom instead. She makes note of the security he offers, but it is when Gatsby is most embroiled in the war that Daisy first betrays him.

Gatsby’s destitution after this betrayal is one of the more direct connections between Fitzgerald’s opinions concerning World War I and the world he creates. Despite serving his country, he is all but penniless when he returns home. When Wolfshiem later recounts his first meeting with Gatsby, he notes that all he had was his uniform. Gatsby’s army uniform is thus associated with social vulnerability. From that point on, Gatsby transforms himself through
Wolfshiem’s criminal empire, breaking the social laws of the country he defended to gain the rewards of its promises. Gatsby’s martyrdom develops while risking his life in the battlefield, only to become a victim of violence and corruption when he returns home. The violence inherent in American society is a reoccurring theme within Gatsby. Fitzgerald has Nick consider the meaning Gatsby takes from the “green light” across from Daisy’s house, motivating him towards his violent end, and if it inspired hope in the first European settlers, who themselves conquered the land. The Carraway clan itself only achieved success by paying someone else to stand in for them during the Civil War. Surviving violence, as Fitzgerald did without trying, is more essential to American success in Gatsby than the sense of values shared by the characters.

Gatsby: Setting

The setting of Gatsby is itself essential to the importance Fitzgerald places on the violence of the war. The framing of the “West Egg” and the “East Egg” suggests a battle between territories. The area between the city and the homes of the characters is referred to as the “Valley of Ashes.” The term ‘ashes’ immediately brings connotations of dread. The closest thing to a “God” figure within the story resides in this “death valley,” in the form of a billboard advertising an eye doctor. It is in this area that the violence of the war becomes most apparent. The character George Wilson resides here, fixing cars while his wife is courted by his customer Tom Buchanan behind his back. Like Gatsby, Wilson is vulnerable in a way that Tom is not because of his poverty. His wife is the first to be killed by the ongoing “war” between Gatsby and Tom. He is the one who takes up arms and pursues his wife’s killer. In many ways, Wilson’s demented reaction to his wife’s murder is an encapsulation of the violence underlying the characters of both Gatsby and Tom.
The violence in these two characters is not initially apparent. For instance, the actual battlefield of Europe is kept mysterious by Gatsby. He turns it into an adventure novel to entice the people he wishes to manipulate. Oxford, in turn, becomes something of an elusive fairy tale kingdom prize that makes the war seem more fulfilling than it actually was. Therefore, for Gatsby’s story to work, all of the characters need to believe in the pre-war myth of the American soldier. Even Nick, who actually has some established experience in the war, tries to reconcile his knowledge of the war with that of Gatsby’s description. Daisy is easily taken in by Gatsby’s false back story. Tom, who has had no war experience, reacts with skepticism and tries to deconstruct Gatsby’s past. The meta-textual story of Gatsby, then, is the deconstruction of the pre-war conception of the American soldier experience.

There are elements of deconstruction in Fitzgerald’s first novel as well. Reading *This Side of Paradise* is important to understand Fitzgerald’s decision to portray the “Soldier experience” as something to be deconstructed. The chapter in which Amory meets and falls in love with Rosalind was originally based on a romantic short story that ended on a more positive note. The addition of “The Debutante” to *Paradise* occurred after Fitzgerald’s own experience in the war. The story was then reshaped as the chapter in which Amory’s downfall occurs. Like Gatsby, his absence during the war and failure to gain money results in his rejection by the woman he loves. Fitzgerald’s personal evolution from short romantic stories to larger novels critical of romance was directly influenced by his time in army. Though he did not participate in the brutal fighting of the war, the experience is consistently stripped of any romantic pretense. The characters in *Gatsby* all react to the death of the “American soldier myth” in various ways. Gatsby’s death is far from the hero’s funeral befitting the glory of an American soldier. Tom is able to manipulate his way out of violence that Gatsby cannot again in the penultimate chapter. The characters enjoy
the luxury made possible by the sacrifices of soldiers like Gatsby while spreading derisive rumors about him.

_Gatsby_ ties the excess and enjoyments of the Post-War America to the results of the conflict. The most recent conflict of the First World War is a timely example of the battles on which the American social structure is made possible. Through the lens of violence, _Gatsby_ places these lively backgrounds under a sharper scrutiny. When Nick rejects Jordan Baker towards the end of the novel, he is rejecting the ignorance of the lives and sacrifices of soldiers whom the character’s life style represents. Gatsby himself is divorced from the proceedings of his world because he is devoted to a romantic fictional world of his own design. He wishes to retreat to the world where his expectations for service were met. Nick’s moral resignation towards the trappings of his New York environment reflects the author’s contempt for a country that has failed to recognize how dependent it is on the soldiers.

This handling of the “soldier” theme is explicitly different from Fitzgerald’s previous novel. His implementation of a soldier’s estrangement from society is linked to _Paradise’s_ success. If _Paradise_ helped establish Fitzgerald as the voice of a generation, then _Gatsby_ can be seen as a direct addressing of this moniker. The aimlessness and cynicism of Amory are reflected in almost every main character of _Gatsby_ sans Gatsby himself initially. Their hollow reaction to the camaraderie, discipline, and courage he exemplifies makes them lesser people in Nick’s eyes as well as the author’s.

_Gatsby: Characters_

Gatsby’s epitomizing of the characteristics Nick finds noble makes him a paean to the romantic war heroes of Fitzgerald’s pre-war youth. In his idealistic adherence to these virtues, he
almost fails to be a character completely. He is more of a mystery than a flesh and blood man. He becomes open about his past as a poverty stricken youth to Nick late in the novel when it appears the world has failed to appear as he wanted it. Gatsby’s entire characterization hinges on recapturing a moment from when he engaged in the war. His admirable qualities are revealed only piecemeal throughout the plot. As a result, he comes off as a mysterious crime lord figure initially before becoming a martyr for the men who served in the war and returned to a different world.

Fitzgerald’s portrait of Jay Gatsby is not, then, a deconstruction of the American pre-war romantic hero. Rather, Gatsby is in many ways a romanticized version of the American soldier. Fitzgerald’s own inexperience with the war as a subject is reflected in this romanticization. Where Hemingway strove for realism in his “soldier” characterization, Gatsby’s author turns his soldier character into a distant archetype. His idealization of Gatsby is in and of itself a tribute to a lost idealism following the events of the war.

This idealization of the character affects Fitzgerald’s treatment of those around Gatsby. Even if the war itself is not reflected in the character’s actions or behavior, the concept of the war is what turns Daisy into a concept for Gatsby within the story. Her characterization within the story confines her to a space shared by the other female characters. Her role outside of motivating Gatsby and providing impetus for the conflict between Tom and Gatsby is to be a moral arbiter for postwar values. Her betrayal of Gatsby is not even seen as much as it is implied. Her culpability in the deaths of Myrtle, Wilson and Gatsby is an important plot of the finale. Instead of living up to Gatsby’s prewar expectations, she brings him into another cycle of tragic violence. Her symbolic value represents the false idea of an America that is both free from violence and worth whatever violence is needed to attain it. When Gatsby is killed, she summarily disappears.
Daisy’s husband, Tom Buchanan, represents a number of contradicting facets. He is specifically noted to be a collegiate friend of Nick who did not participate in the war. He is essentially removed from the violence that defines Gatsby’s back story. However, he is immediately described as a physical, almost brutish figure by Nick in the first chapter. His muscles contrast with his “effeminate” clothing and are associated with violence. It is a “cruel” body in Nick’s words. This contrast informs the rest of his actions. He is unafraid of slapping Myrtle in a way that does her bodily harm, but is openly shaken by her corpse. He repeatedly references the violent undoing of social mores, yet essentially aids a member of the lower class in his intended homicide of a wealthy billionaire.

Tom can be seen as a member of the moneyed class who desires violence for its own ends yet is content to let others get hurt in place of its members. Tom reaps the benefits of Gatsby’s sacrifices twice over in the timeline of the story. His implicit feud with Gatsby extends beyond trying to keep Daisy from rekindling her romance with him. His need to assassinate Gatsby’s character seems independent of his need to keep Daisy away from him. Tom’s chief victory over Gatsby in Chapter 7 occurs when he implies that Gatsby’s criminal activities are extreme to the point of murder. The implication alone appears to isolate Daisy from Gatsby. His distaste for violence supposedly comes from his conservative appreciation for societal stasis. However, his continual invocation of the sacrosanct nature of society’s law and order is shown to be hypocritical. Unlike Nick, Tom refuses to recognize the country’s foundation on war, violence, and by extension, murder.

Nick himself is tied to Gatsby through the war, but he also inhabits the same privileged sphere that Tom does. Although he shares his former college friend’s tendency towards moralization, he is not as openly judgmental. This duality gives the story a sense of thematic cohesion. In the early chapters, Nick tries to focus his energies on describing the characters and
their fallacies around him. In the latter half of the story, Nick begins ignoring the other aspects of
the story to focus on Gatsby and chronicle his story. Fitzgerald makes Nick as passive to the plot
as much as he makes Gatsby essential to it. Nick refrains from casting much judgment on any of
the characters (sans Wolfshiem, reflective of the author’s anti-Semitism) until it is implied that
Gatsby “killed a man.” Fitzgerald lets the fact that Nick can even identify that look on a man’s face
go unremarked upon. Indeed, Nick seems more sensitive to the sinister aspects of New York than
the rest of the characters. His trust in Gatsby ultimately proves to be correct, but he alone reacts
with a sense of grief towards Gatsby. Even Gatsby’s father seems to have retreated mentally to
the time when he was a boy.

Fitzgerald’s attachment to Nick as a character is evident in the final scene of the book. In
contrast to Gatsby, who remains frozen in a period of time, Nick reiterates a broad historical point
of view that takes the country’s history into account. It is difficult to take Fitzgerald’s voice out of
the writing behind Nick as he contemplates the transcendent meaning behind the landscape of
the novel. Suddenly Gatsby’s relatively contained plot is meant to take on a context within the
novel itself that applies to American history. Granted Nick himself is turning Gatsby into an
archetype, but the novel never refutes him. If anything, his conversation with Gatsby’s father only
substantiates his conception of Gatsby as a figure of misplaced nobility.

His sympathies have pivoted from the “lost generation” of civilians who live to inhabit the
world after the Great War to the specific soldiers who died defending ideas that these civilians
scorn. This reflects a growing maturity on the author’s part, but it also represents a more critical
attitude towards his established audience. He already explored the idea of pre-romantic values
losing their resonance over time in previous works. In his exploration of this theme in Gatsby,
these values are treated favorably, and the cynicism the main characters made fashionable in
Paradise is treated unfavorably.
Nick’s background in the military alone doesn’t grant him the moral authority to ruminate on America’s destiny. Fitzgerald makes him aware of the necessity of conflict and the soldiers that die for it. His contrast with the other characters also gives him credibility in the role of the moral arbiter. Daisy’s relationship with Gatsby is undercut by failure to be accountable for the violence she causes. Tom desires comfort, security, and prestige but is unprepared to make any genuine sacrifice for these things that someone else can’t make for him. He decries the downfall of American values but does nothing to prevent it outside of his self-interest. Gatsby’s own internal monologue can’t allow himself to possess the self-awareness necessary to understand the death of his own dreams. If he did, he would simply be a new iteration of Amory.

If Amory was Fitzgerald’s death knell for the romanticization of the American soldier, then Nick is memorialization of the soldier as an archetype. Gatsby himself does not exist outside of this archetype. Instead of making Gatsby a dynamic character, Fitzgerald bases the narrative in discovering how fervently Gatsby is defined by this romantic self-conception. The entire novel is a paean to a pre-war archetype of soldiers who have been destroyed by the ensuing culture of the 20’s. Fitzgerald himself was aware of his status as a “contributor” to this culture, and his increased mythologizing of the war in his third novel warrants inspection.

**Gatsby: The War**

Despite said increase in mythologizing the World War I, the violence of the war is something Fitzgerald himself knows only off hand. The most documented moment of his service was when he met Zelda Fitzgerald. The most shocking moments of *Gatsby* nevertheless contain acts of violence that were largely absent from *This Side of Paradise*. These moments are heavily contrasted with the lives of privilege and safety most of the characters enjoy. The female
characters in *Gatsby* are the most removed from the war in terms of setting and station, and thus are most associated with said privilege and safety. *Gatsby* ties its moments of violence to women in ways that call attention to his treatment of female characters.

Of the three main female characters, Myrtle Wilson is the one who suffers violence the most. She is distanced from the protection and prestige Daisy and Jordan enjoy by her economic status, which is in large part dependent on the misfortunes of her husband and the favors she receives as Tom’s mistress. Her treatment by Fitzgerald outside of this designation is exceptionally cruel even by the standards of the story. She is implicitly tied to the imagery of a dog when Tom himself buys a dog for her, then later hitting her when she literally barks out his wife’s name. After it is implied that her husband beat her, she is run over by Daisy driving Tom’s car. The description of Myrtle’s death is the most violent scene of *Gatsby* and Fitzgerald’s body of work as a whole. Myrtle’s body is so vividly detailed that Fitzgerald’s publisher actually debated with the author himself over whether or not the scene should be changed. Fitzgerald was adamant that the scene was kept as he originally wrote it, particularly the lines about Myrtle’s “empathetic breast” swaying lifelessly after the accident. The impact of the language used to describe Myrtle’s evisceration by the cold, inhuman machine Daisy is driving was intended by the author himself.

The violence Myrtle suffers is so brutal that it makes the absence of the actual brutality of World War I in the book more noticeable. Specific descriptions of wartime violence do not appear in the narrative of *Gatsby*. This does not mean that Fitzgerald has removed the violence that defined WWI from the book. He has implemented it into a setting that is not defined by violence. The novel itself tries to explore what rouses characters to violence in a society that supposedly values peace. *Gatsby* is motivated to violence in both the army and possibly Wolfsheim’s organization because he wants to earn enough money to achieve his vision of himself living with wealth and Daisy. Tom is motivated to (relatively less damaging) violence when his mistress
bothers him about his wife. Wilson is motivated to what Nick designates a “holocaust” of violence when his own wife is murdered before his eyes. All of these actions are linked in motivation to a female character. Daisy herself appears to murder Myrtle completely by accident, though she takes no responsibility for her actions.

While Fitzgerald’s commentary about the class system in America is a large part of the book, this commentary is part of a larger criticism attempts to make about the war itself. Much of this criticism is made towards the continued division between the lifestyles of Americans based on their economic status even after the massive amount of violence and death in the war itself. The text of Gatsby is cognizant that war has not impacted the widespread classism of American society. That being said, World War I is referenced through echoes of the dehumanizing violence which, even if not experienced firsthand, was so widely reported that produced an impact on widespread American culture.

This is clearest in the final chapter, which focuses largely on Gatsby’s death and the reaction of other characters to it. Although not as much time is given to the reactions toward George Wilson’s death, what little we gather suggests that the world of the book has treated the deaths of these two men in a similar fashion. George is written off as “deranged” and “a madman.” While these titles do have some weight given what we witness George do in his final moments, they nevertheless obscure the rest of his personality and history as a human being. Gatsby too is reduced to a few adjectives that largely erase whatever else he was in life according to Nick. In death these two men, despite their histories with each other, are treated in very much the same fashion. Their characters and accomplishments are attacked and ignored.

Tom narrowly avoids death at the hands of a psychotic Wilson by directing him towards Gatsby, but his reaction the latter’s death is to avoid responsibility and pursue materialistic activities instead while ignoring Nick’s admonishments. In this passage (Gatsby pg153), we can
see Fitzgerald attempting to criticize the reaction of a country to the reality of the war. This is reflected in the structure of the story proper, as Nick opens the story by discussing his family’s profitable relationship with the tragedy of the Civil War. The classism of the country thrives best when it profits those who do not participate in the war the most. It undermines the supposed values of sacrifice and equality when the national reaction to widespread death is to promote and celebrate the rampant materialism that benefits a select portion of America.

The critical opinion of writers such as Richard Lehan and Tony McAdams of Gatsby being a story about class differences and social injustice is a sound one. I am not arguing against this. What I am arguing is that there is a lack of commentary that takes into account how essential the First World War was as a phenomenon to this aspect of novel, let alone the novel as a whole. While Fitzgerald does not have firsthand experience with the war, Gatsby nevertheless features violence not out of place in a war story. Fitzgerald’s thesis appears to be that, regardless of the dedication and ideals that go into making the “American soldier,” the violence and death of war will resurge and claim said soldiers over and over again.

Again, I would like to call attention to Fitzgerald’s use of the word “Holocaust” when framing the act of mechanized, senseless violence. The latter portion of chapter 8 in which Nick abandons his first hand narration to relate what occurred is singular from the rest of the book. Until this point, Nick’s description of actions that he was not experiencing first hand was limited to relating Gatsby’s questionable descriptions of his own past to the audience. He briefly allows Jordan Baker to narrate her experiences with Daisy in order to complete Gatsby’s story, but otherwise the narration is mostly Nick’s past tense point of view.

1 Lehan, Richard. "F. Scott Fitzgerald and Romantic Destiny." Twentieth Century Literature 2
The scene in *Gatsby* that tries the hardest to replicate the experience of the war from the perspective of the soldier is the climactic scene of Chapter 8. When Nick tries to recall the time, the narration switches to multiple second hand accounts of a psychotic George Wilson carrying a gun trying to locate his wife’s killer. Given the autobiographical connections that critics associate with Nick and Fitzgerald, one would expect more pieces analyzing the particular framing of this portion of chapter 8. The closest the action of *Gatsby*’s plot gets to replicate the battlefield experience of the war not only takes Nick out of the action, but undermines his role as the narrator. Like the author, he is removed from the actual combat experiences of the war but is aware of their brutality. At the time of writing *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald was cognizant of the philosophical and political implications of the conflict, even if he did not fight in the conflict itself. The impact of this awareness on *The Great Gatsby* was unavoidable. Fitzgerald understood that the American culture during the first half of the 1920’s was as much a reaction to factors produced by the war. He was aware that the war was unpopular and impacted America’s relationship with the rest of the world in a significant way. He is aware that those who have returned from the war were not only largely denied salaries, but often suffered psychologically as a result of their experiences.

Fitzgerald’s consciousness of these factors is something I feel impacted his decision to write Gatsby’s death the way he did. Thematically, having Gatsby’s demise recall the war is necessary. He and George possess beliefs and qualities that make them both seem anachronistic within the setting of the novel. Their final deaths are thus characterized by senselessness, ruthlessness, and the passing of an era. Both men’s lives are ruined by the actions of the upper class. Both men seek to take their love interests away with them to an idealized location. Both express a faith in God that Nick’s narration of events openly undermines. Nick describes Gatsby as seeing himself as a “Son of God,” while George looks to the billboard outside his residence as a
symbol of God’s omniscience. Neither of these traits saves them from dying in the last passages of the eighth chapter.

Fitzgerald has Nick infer that Gatsby’s dreams finally die a metaphorical death before he himself dies a literal death. Aside from the stylistic motifs of the fall settling in on Gatsby’s pool during the events, this scene receives more contextual meaning as a result. Gatsby’s personal stagnation since World War I reflects a kind of death or at least damage done to the character. However, Fitzgerald links this stagnation to his integrity and to Daisy more than he does to the events of the war itself. The decision to have his self-belief waver finally before his death is ironic. His adherence to pre-war romanticism that Fitzgerald highlights fervently survives the war, but it does not survive the environment that produced the war. The apathy and cynicism of the world after the war simply finish the job that the war itself failed to do. Of course, we as the audience do not know personally if Gatsby’s dreams did die before he did. This is an inference by Nick, the outsider. Fitzgerald doesn’t make it his place to question the values of soldiers who actually died fighting for some sense of ideal. In a novel that is characterized by its acerbic attitude towards an entire generation, this is the most respectful decision that Fitzgerald makes.

This is where Fitzgerald the author and man differ most critically from Hemingway the author and man. By the time of the publication of Gatsby, he doesn’t just idealize the subject of the American soldier; he elevates into an archetype. The only psychological insight it offers regarding post-war mentality is that of Fitzgerald himself.

**Hemingway’s Formative Influences**

If F. Scott Fitzgerald’s mentality was a key part of his novels’ insights, Hemingway’s mentality influenced his writing style to a point where it became intertwined with his plots. Like
his compatriot, Hemingway’s childhood is often analyzed alongside his work. Donaldson spends an entire chapter writing about his adversarial relationship with his mother. Grace Hemingway famously took to dressing him like a daughter and treating him as such. This resulted in young Ernest being dressed in feminine clothes. He would later write about these events as an adult, indicating how profoundly this impacted him. His resentment of his mother also continued well into adulthood. His distaste for her would only increase after his father’s suicide. Donaldson feels that Hemingway found a distinctly masculine freedom in the war from his mother’s influence.

Ernest’s high school career also serves as a strong contrast to Fitzgerald’s. Where the latter was never popular and rarely a good student, Hemingway was always involved in sports teams and took to his English classes well. His aspirations towards being a writer were encouraged from a young age, though primarily towards journalism. Regardless, his literary aspirations were not enough to compel him to go to college. His parents, while reasonably supportive, grew resentful towards him and began to ask him to define himself as a “real man.” One of Grace Hemingway’s letters admonished him for “spending all your earnings lavishly and wastefully on luxuries for yourself.” If young Fitzgerald was overtly thrifty and introverted, young Ernest was impulsive and boisterous.

Regardless, he signed on to become an ambulance driver in Italy in 1918. The violence he encountered was so immediate and encompassing that it changed him outwardly and inwardly from then on. Five weeks after he arrived in Italy, he was critically wounded at Fossalta di Piave by a mortar bomb. He was eighteen years old. According to the author, his youthful illusion of immortality faded instantly when he found himself struggling to move with shrapnel in his body. He survived and received an award the Italian military for gallantry under fire.

While recovering at a makeshift Hospital in Milan, Ernest met the first woman to capture his heart: Agnes von Kurowsky, a nurse from New York City who had joined the effort sometime
before Ernest did. While Agnes was seven years older than he was, the two nevertheless had an intense emotional relationship. Ernest tried to marry her, but Agnes ultimately rebuked him before the wedding. She apparently felt their relationship was better off platonically. The young Hemingway was deeply affected by this rejection for years. Their relationship functioned as the primary influence in his letter “A Very Short Story.” In the first few months, he wrote about the event in ways that portrayed him as both a worldly lover scorned and an innocent victim crushed by a betrayal. Even after marrying his first wife four years later, Hemingway was fixated on his first love. Alternately hating and admiring her, he once wrote that he resolved to leave his wife if Agnes agreed to meet with him again.

Agnes is a character in many of Hemingway’s novels. Though no character bears her name she does inhabit the world of Hemingway’s literature in much the same way Zelda Fitzgerald inhabited her husband’s. She plays a key part in marking the evolution of Hemingway’s storytelling abilities. One of his first short stories centers on a nameless soldier narrator whose relationship with a nurse ends when she grows dissatisfied with his absence from Europe. The final version of the story reflects Hemingway’s feelings at their most primal. It also establishes two themes drawn from spheres of experiences that struck Hemingway around the same time: wartime violence and romantic disillusionment. *The Sun Also Rises* relegated the war to background context and based its plot in the interactions among the protagonist, his ex-lover, and his rivals for her affection.

*A Farewell to Arms* differentiates itself from its predecessor by allowing these two subject matters to interact directly. The protagonist, Frederic Henry, is wounded physically by the war and then emotionally by his experiences with Nurse Catherine Barkley. Hemingway transcends the autobiographical elements of the story by linking the two wounding elements within the book
through his characters. Frederic is haunted by the war and its violence beyond the battlefield. His experiences poison his attempts to build a life after surviving the conflict.

**Hemingway and the War**

Hemingway’s service overseas was limited to being an ambulance driver, yet he was nevertheless frequently exposed to life-threatening violence that had a great impact on his life. Prior to entering the war, Hemingway often engaged in physical sports such as boxing that tested physical endurance. Boxing resurfaces in *The Sun Also Rises* as the favored activity of Robert Cohn, the only non-veteran male character from America. He is derided for his romanticism and naiveté as much as for his Jewish identity. Armed combat has eclipsed boxing in Hemingway’s value system by the time he had written *The Sun Also Rises*, and by the time he had written *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, he had returned to Europe as a reporter during the Spanish Civil War. Already an established author, Hemingway’s return to the battlefield represented a major career and personal choice for himself. A greater political awareness than *Farewell’s* is reflected in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* that manifests itself in the plot proper. Hemingway’s soldier hero remains powerless before the violence of war, but this time the violence itself is no longer an amorphous, all-encompassing antagonist. Hemingway smartly assigns names and reasons to the conflict in *For Whom* that gives the novel a stronger connection to the contemporary world while retaining tropes favored by him.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* occupies a space in Hemingway’s canon that is less personal despite its obvious influence taken from the author’s own experiences. Conversely, *The Sun Also Rises* is a novel by a victim of war who tries to make war a sub-textual force more than a direct force for his main characters to discuss. It’s in *A Farewell to Arms* that we witness Hemingway
describe the theater of World War I in his fiction directly. Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway doesn’t create a character that fights battles the author cannot claim to have experienced. What Hemingway can and does replicate is the constant awareness of human mortality that defines the experience.

In *The Young Hemingway*, Michael Reynolds offers a portrait of Oak Park, the town that Hemingway grew up in and returned to after the war. Reynolds defines the town as a place that soon embraced the war as America’s neutrality began to wane. Theodore Roosevelt was noted to be an influence on the masculine culture to which Hemingway sought to belong. Hemingway’s grandfather was noted to have fought in the Spanish Civil War. Reynolds make a point of underlining how much the community viewed Ernest’s generation as “soft” before participating in World War I. When Hemingway returned, the world had changed almost as much as he had. Reynolds notes this in his discussion of Hemingway’s fixation on his uniform, particularly his boots. “The soldier” is at this point a conscious archetype for Hemingway when he has returned home, opening doors for him at home that would not have been open otherwise.

This new treatment would be the impetus for Hemingway’s choice of subversion in *Farewell to Arms*: the glory of the soldier. What isn’t culled directly from Hemingway’s real life experiences is generally designed to showcase how fragile the life of a soldier like Frederic (or Hemingway) logically is. Like Hemingway, Frederic gains a commendation for a surviving an explosion, but his reaction to it is telling. His character is largely unmoved by this honor, telling the first person to ask about it that he was blown up “while eating cheese”. (*Farewell*, pg 63)

Later, Frederic and Catherine discuss heroes in chapter XIX, wherein Frederic resolves to achieve the rank in which they are both “admitted to better restaurants.” (*Farewell*, pg 125) Being a soldier in Hemingway’s world means simultaneously being essential to the advancement of national victory and utterly powerless before the machinations of war itself. As Reynolds’s
autobiography indicates, Hemingway’s experiences in the war left him with a cynical evaluation of wartime heroism.

This was also a response to Oak Park’s culture, which consumed tales of local heroism with aplomb. By Reynolds’s account, “Oak Park was not disappointed by its sons. They proved themselves, in the words of Roosevelt, to be made of the right stuff. If the newspaper had questioned their softness before the war began, it now detailed each heroic act.” (Reynolds, p. 55). In this myopic atmosphere, Hemingway’s pursuit and subsequent deconstruction of wartime glory make sense as subjects for his fiction. Oak Park represented a piece of Americana where the global ramifications of the First World War were condensed into a microcosm of isolated patriotism. Already a bastion of conservative values before the war, the town Hemingway returned to glorified sacrifice in inverted proportion to its actual meaning or truth.

“War stories as well as medals proliferated,” writes Reynolds. “It was not enough to have been a myopic Red Cross ambulance driver blown up while distributing chocolate. Pressured by his peers and local expectations, Ernest Hemingway kept right on inventing his fantasy war, the war he would have fought if only he had been given the chance. When the Memorial Committee of Oak Park and River Forest sent out its questionnaire to returning veterans, Hemingway promoted himself to First Lieutenant in the Italian Army.” [Reynolds pg55]

Hemingway’s “fantasy” is then linked to Frederic Henry’s character. He inhabits the role in combat a younger Hemingway wished he had inhabited when he received his medal. Like Hemingway’s real uniform, Frederic becomes a symbolic placeholder of what the war was to the man and what informed the experience. Reynolds notes this when he describes Hemingway’s homecoming and the young man’s invitation to his high school to give a lecture on the experience. “Warming to his audience, he displayed his war-shredded uniform, adding new details to his heroic deeds under fire,” Reynolds recalls. “One man near him whose leg had been
shattered was crying openly, calling his mother’s name. Lieutenant Hemingway told him with characteristic Yankee repression to ‘Shut up with that noise’. Waiting for the stretcher bearers to arrive, “he threw away his revolver, the temptation to finish the job was so acute.’….Red Cross men, delivering chocolate, were not issued revolvers, but it gave such a authentic note to the story. The pain had been true, real and deep; now the audience knew, from the fictive revolver, just how deep.” [Reynolds, pg56]

Reynolds himself notes that there are resonant themes from these speeches that manifest themselves in A Farewell to Arms. “Here, early in his myth making, suicide was a recurring idea. A decade later in A Farewell to Arms, Passini, his life blood draining from where his leg had been blown away, would scream: “Oh mama mia, mama Mia... Oh Jesus shoot me Christ shoot me... Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Oh Jesus lovely Mary stop it.” At Hemingway’s own wounding this probably did not happen; it was a fiction from the life he was creating.” (Reynolds, pg57) Hemingway recognized the values held by his old community, and these preconceptions would form the code over Frederic’s head that his mind would defy.

Reynolds argues that Hemingway’s characters did inhabit these pre-war values. According to him, “The words may have become obscene to Frederic Henry during the war, but only the words. The values – loyalty, nobility, honor – did not lose their currency. Add love. Add courage. Add self-reliance. And above all else, add duty.” (Reynolds, p. 54). I wouldn’t argue with the basic sentiment of Reynolds’s claim. World War I did not turn Hemingway into a fatalist, even if fatalism is a theme in Farewell to Arms. His treatment of Robert Jordan suggests that the character is the epitome of the value system in which he believes in. However, Robert Jordan is more of a clear cut hero according to Hemingway’s code. Frederic Henry is an unwitting martyr to these values within the scope of war. If Frederic believes in these values, he knows the people in charge of the war effort do not.
His cynical attitude is justified when Hemingway allows political chicanery to define the action late in the novel, when the Italian government that had awarded Frederic his medal earlier becomes the greatest threat to his life for reasons over which he has no control. Hemingway’s commentary focuses on how little hope the characters on the front have under their own government. His writing would maintain this attitude in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but the context of a different war shows how Hemingway treats human government within his stories.

Hemingway’s fate for Robert Jordan in *For Whom* supports Reynolds’s assertion about his value system. However, Robert Jordan is allowed a dignity that escapes Frederic Henry. Frederic almost loses his life eating cheese, hides on the floor of a train with other undocumented passengers, and escapes execution for the government he served by swimming up a river. His retirement with Catherine is ruined when she has his stillborn baby and dies. These misfortunes form the spine of the story in *Farewell to Arms*. His fantasy version of the wartime experience doesn’t culminate in his being rejected by his fantasy woman, which Catherine certainly is. It culminates in the defining aspect of the war and his inhabiting of said war infecting someone outside the experience.

Hemingway’s exploration of the “post-war” mentality in *The Sun Also Rises* touched upon his characteristic use of psychology. The plot in *A Farewell to Arms* takes this exploration to its logical conclusion in by detailing the thoughts and fears of a man on the front lines. By giving external impetus to Frederic’s emotional detachment, Hemingway’s employment of first person narration gives him license to let his actions speak for themselves.
Farewell: Setting

Hemingway’s narration was also enhanced through the appeal of tourism. Both Frederic and his author share an appreciation for the landscape of Europe. At times, the dialogue seems to indicate that it is a point of distraction for the character. Describing the setting of *Farewell to Arms* is one of the most blatantly autobiographical elements of the novel. Frederic’s journey is Hemingway’s, and his appreciation for the landscape is evident in both text and the narrative it supports. Even forgoing the iconic hospital in Milan, it’s the river in Italy in which Frederic escapes his imminent death and achieves symbolic rebirth. The section of the book in which Frederic escapes towards Switzerland emphasizes that the character is safest when he is removed from his fellow man.

The rest of the narrative indicates that this detail was intentional. The plot is divided between the frontlines and the “safe zone” areas separated from danger. The hospital in Milan and the town in Switzerland in which Frederic recuperates with Catherine function as different spheres of influence. These “safe” spaces give Frederic the chance and reasoning to discuss his feelings about the conflict itself. Frederic’s time in the hospital is marked until his recovery sends him back to the field of combat. His time in Switzerland gives us a picture of Frederic in a place undefined by war, making the conclusion more of a contrast. Hemingway informs both of these zones with Catherine’s presence, making her character separate from the war. Hemingway informs her station as a distinctly feminine one, disregarding his own real life role in driving ambulances and delivering chocolate. Frederic’s grim fulfillment of war contrasts with both Catherine’s job and her personality. He falls in love with her, against his better judgment.

This love is contrasted with the platonic friendships Frederic cultivates on the war front. If Catherine has a masculine foil, it is certainly Rinaldi. Frederic’s companion is given some flexibility
Relative to the two leads in that he inhabits both the sphere of war and sphere of recovery. Ultimately, Hemingway makes his role as a soldier supersede his role as a companion. His presence is appreciated by Frederic, but certainly does not impact him as much as Catherine’s presence does. A key scene written in book three calls attention to Hemingway’s effort in distinguishing the roles of soldiers from those outside the battlefield. In a coy imitation of sexual teasing, Rinaldi asks Frederic to “remove his pants” so they may see the extent to which the hospitals operated on the wound.

“Rinaldi sat on the floor and bent the knee gently back and forth. He ran the finger along the scar; put his thumbs together over the kneecap and rocked the knee gently with his fingers.

‘Is that all the articulation you have?’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s a crime to send you back. They ought to get complete articulation.’

‘It’s a lot better than it was. It was as stiff as a board.’

Rinaldi bent it more. I watched his hands. He had fine surgeon’s hands. I looked at the top of his head, his hair shiny and parted smoothly. He bent the knee too far.

‘Ouch!’ I said.

‘You ought to have more treatment on it with the machines,’ Rinaldi said.’” (Farewell, pg. 167)

Rinaldi’s lines suggest that both intimacy and healing, two of Catherine’s foremost abilities in the novel, are impossible to achieve without pain in the masculine sphere of war. It also foreshadows the role machines play in Catherine’s painful demise. Rinaldi’s homoerotic faux-intimacy illustrates how much Frederic behaves differently around Catherine, and how much of an emotional risk their relationship is to him. His scenes with Rinaldi and other troops are
characterized by sparse dialogue that prioritizes survival and disdains thinking about the cause of the war. Outside of the “war” sphere, Catherine’s conversations with Frederic encourage him to be more open emotionally with her and discuss his life outside of being a soldier.

The discrepancies between these two spheres are reflected in Hemingway’s prose. In Book Three, Frederic’s mentality takes full control of the narration. The only characters he interacts with on a regular basis are Aymo, Bonello, and Piani, who are almost an extension of himself. They each represent foils to his qualities as a soldier. Piani reflects his instincts as a scavenger. Bonello reflects his latent womanizing qualities. Aymo is the closest approximation of Frederic’s philosophical side. All of them die by the time Book Three comes to a close. Frederic’s relationship with them does not extend beyond a basic male camaraderie and professional respect.

Book Three and Books Four through Five center on two different spheres of influence respectively. Book Three focuses on the “soldier/war” sphere. Book Four subsequently deals with the “civilian” sphere where he reunites with Catherine in Switzerland. Hemingway consciously constructs parallel endings between these two sections. In both of these sections, Frederic is left with as the only “survivor” of his unit. In Book Three, Frederic survives the destruction of his Italian infantry unit. In Book Five, he is left the only surviving member of the makeshift “family” unit he wished to construct with Catherine and their child. Hemingway does not choose to articulate Frederic’s thought process regarding the deaths of his fellow soldiers. His survival instinct manifests itself in the chapter and a half in which he describes his journey towards Switzerland. When Catherine dies towards the end of Book Five, the physical terror and guilt become distinctly mental in description.

The symmetry between these setting “spaces” in the novel shows that Hemingway has constructed a relationship between the worlds of war and peace. Even though these twin settings
are kept apart, one cannot exist without the other. In the middle of Book Three, Frederic dreams about being with Catherine before he is woken up by the other soldiers. When he reaches Switzerland in Book Four, he is consistently interrogated about the actions of the Italian and Austrian armies. The duality of *Farewell to Arms*, seen in these two segments, is therefore central to the book’s thematic exploration of the war-time mentality. Frederic’s challenges fighting for his life are shown to be equal in some measure to the emotional turbulence of living a civilian life in the shadow of the war.

**Farewell: Characters**

In Earl Rovit’s and Gerry Brenner’s journal “Ernest Hemingway: Revised Edition”, Frederic’s misfortune as a character seem to be thematically essential to *A Farewell to Arms*. The authors argue that the key to the novel’s structure “must lie in the lesson that the total experience has taught to Frederic Henry. It is his story that he tells in his own voice; the meanings sunk in the texture of the story can only be the meanings that he has recognized as salient in his experience because they offer him pragmatic hypotheses on what life is and, more important, who he is” (Rovit, p. 81). I find that the two critics are fundamentally wrong about Frederic’s experience. He is all too aware of who he is and what his place is in society at the beginning of the novel and at its end. This does not make him a static character. His interactions with Catherine force him to focus on something outside of the violence that characterizes war.

Frederic himself is not an inherently violent person, though he certainly is capable of violence. His reaction when he shoots the engineer isn’t motivated by hatred. The war has dulled a part of him into a sense of pragmatism. In spite of this, Hemingway portrays him as more thoughtful than the soldiers in his unit. He actively aids the two young women and ensures they
are both safe, and forbids Aymo from stealing any more than they need from one of the houses. His central reaction to the war is a sustained fatalism that never undercuts his survival instinct. Whatever the war has done to Frederic’s personality, it is already in effect by the time we meet the character. We never experience a scene in which we understand Frederic before the war. Structurally, this decision adds more weight to the loss he experiences at the end of Book Five when Catherine dies. Whatever he has already lost of himself before becoming part of the Italian Army, he finally loses the capacity to hope when he witnesses Catherine die.

Frederic’s behavior in books Four and Five of Farewell to Arms show a character that is unable to enjoy any of the rewards of his work. His time in the war show him focused on the landscape and accomplishing the tasks at hand. When he is in Switzerland with Catherine, a consistent sense of ennui and pessimism makes it difficult to enjoy his life as an ex-soldier in love. The war does indeed inhabit a part of Frederic. When he tries shadowboxing, he can hardly bear to look at his reflection in the mirror. His speech in which he decries the ways in which the world breaks down “the good people” indicates the mentality that has followed him from the war.

It is not the mentality alone that Frederic brings from the frontline. He shares with Catherine both alcohol and physical labor. His attempts at sharing these interests with her also have him concerned that it is affecting her role as the mother of his unborn child. His capacity for physical pain, however, is something that he cannot share with her. Again, Hemingway constructs parallels between what occurs in the “war” sphere and “civilian” sphere. Frederic’s surgery early in the book is clearly similar in concept to the medical attention Catherine receives when she undergoes labor. Like her lover, Catherine is “wounded” by an outside force. The force in question is their unborn child.

Trevor Dodman writes about the importance of these surgeries in his article “Going All to Pieces: A Farewell to Arms as Trauma Narrative.” Specifically, Dodman argues that A Farewell to
Arms” challenges us to reconsider the mind/body dualism that keeps the wounds of the body separate from the wounds of the mind.” The author notes that “Frederic’s narration- of his body, his memory, his wounds- destabilizes such distinctions in an effort to hold together a broken past that remains, in the present, a nexus of uncertainty and contestation” (Dodman, pg250). I agree with Dodman’s assessment of trauma and its place in the narrative. However, he largely displaces Catherine’s physical trauma in relation to Frederic’s. “Catherine’s loss,” he writes, “takes shape as a trauma narrative relentlessly imposing itself on Frederic’s ordinary narrative progression of events” (Dodman, p.263). This ignores her reaction to physical trauma and how it is similar to Frederic’s.

Catherine’s reaction to her wounding is to cry for anesthesia to cope. Frederic’s coping substance is alcohol. Alcohol, in fact, is one of the few presences in the novel that transcends both the war chapters and civilian chapters. Hemingway’s real life history with alcohol is tied to some degree with his experiences in the war. One of the first notes he sent home to his family after being wounded is a picture he drew of himself saying he needed a drink. (Reynolds, pg56) Frederic himself relies on it both on the front line and in the cafes he frequents with Catherine. Catherine herself comments on it, as does Ferguson. Frederic comes under fire for his drinking within the novel, and given Hemingway’s own background with alcohol this is not surprising. What is surprising is his distrust of medical anesthesia in the story designed to ease a patient’s pain.

Of the few times that Catherine “breaks character” in her relationship with Frederic, her cries for more of the anesthetic gas during her birthing procedure best signifies how Frederic’s presence in the war has affected her. Mentally she has done her best to reinforce herself as an ideal mate for Frederic. She is no stranger to the concept of wartime death, so her aggressive inhabitation of the “role” she consciously creates for Frederic is in itself a point of distraction.
When she is physically “wounded” by Frederic’s child, she vacillates between her saintly composure and begging for anesthesia. I believe that this is the most sympathetic moment Catherine receives as a character from her author.

Up until this point, we have seen only two other characters in comparable amounts of pain. Both Frederic and an unnamed soldier are horribly wounded by the same mortar shell towards the end of Book One. The unnamed soldier goes so far as to beg for death. While he apparently dies, Frederic shows his character when he is offered anesthesia in the next book. His refusal of it can be interpreted as a representation of two aspects. The first would be Frederic’s stoicism, a common interpretation that takes Hemingway’s “code” into account. Frederic’s acceptance of the pain inflicted on him is, in his own way, a reflection of his honor. His physical acceptance of the casual horror of war mirrors his mental acceptance, which is repeated throughout the novel. Unlike his wounded Italian comrade, Frederic does ask for relief from his suicide. Hemingway’s nascent fear of taking his own life like his father is an obvious influence. A second interpretation would be his mistrust of the technology used to operate on him. Hemingway’s love of the natural world is balanced by a mistrust of the ways in which humankind tries to avoid it. His character’s pursuits always include embracing the world for what it is. The synthetic shrapnel and synthetic healing agents both represent pieces of the world. When the latter emerges in Catherine, it simply represents an extension of a world Frederic cannot exist in completely.

Catherine herself is a character over whom critics are divided over. Essential as she is to the story, several authors maintain that she is not much more than a passive feminine presence. In “The Crisis of Masculinity, Reified Desire, and Catherine Barkley in A Farewell to Arms”, Charles Hatten writes about the discrepancies in critical opinion surrounding the character. “The tradition of critical response to Catherine Barkley,” writes Hatten, “is organized around conflicting poles.
Since the book’s original reception, some critics have claimed that Barkley’s character is vitiated because she is an embodiment of male sexual fantasy. But Ernest Lockridge and Joyce Wexler, among others, have recently tried to rehabilitate Barkley, arguing that her effort to recuperate from the trauma of her fiancé’s death through the ritualistic role-playing with which she initiates the romance with Frederic Henry shows her as subtly being the “prime mover” in the love story, and that her perseverance and loyalty in their love offer Henri an alternative version of heroism to the failure of the potential for heroism in war that he experiences.” (Hatten, p.76) Fitzgerald himself criticized Catherine’s creation, telling Hemingway that he did not always “listen to women” in his writing, rather choosing to listen to himself. In Hemingway’s Women: A Reassessment, Linda Miller argues that Hemingway does allow his female characters a degree of strength and agency. “In Hemingway’s fiction overall,” she writes, “he did listen to women and he allowed them the strength to be themselves- complicated and contradictory as they may be – as we all are. By and large the women in his fiction are feminine, intuitive, realistic, direct, quiet, and principled.” (Miller, p.8).

I am more inclined to agree with F. Scott Fitzgerald than Ernest Lockridge, Joyce Wexler, and Linda Miller in this regard. Catherine’s character is sympathetic. However, she only becomes sympathetic in ways that are informed by the author’s personal experiences. Her grief over losing a lover to war is a factor that ties her, however tangentially, to the experiences of the war. She herself becomes a martyr to the influences of war when she dies giving birth to Frederic’s child. The sympathy afforded to her that is separate from her being a passive ‘playmate’ for Frederic is the same sympathy given to Frederic himself. Both physical and mental anguish are forces that are conveyed to her through her interactions with Frederic. Otherwise, she exists as a character who personifies the promise of a life after war. Her attempt to move on from her own tragedy is as symbolic for her new lover as it is for her.
If Frederic’s relationship with Rinaldi ties them both to the “war” sphere, then Catherine’s relationship with fellow nurse Ferguson bears similar weight in regards to the “civilian” sphere. As a character, Ferguson largely exists separate from the sphere of wartime violence that defines Catherine’s past and Frederic’s existence. However, like her partner Ferguson tests how much Frederic is able to adapt to a stable, mannered life outside of the battlefield. She is largely unsympathetic to the coping habits Frederic has developed in response to his fatalistic outlook. However, she herself is not rendered without sympathy, from both Frederic and Hemingway. Fern Kory, who dedicates a whole essay to the character titled “A Second Look at Helen Ferguson in A Farewell to Arms,” takes note of this aspect. “The new maturity that results from Frederic’s experience,” she writes, “which is largely seen in an increased sensitivity to others, leads him to consider that he doesn’t know much about Ferguson, as we’ve seen. He then immediately begins to recall incidents from his acquaintance with Ferguson which not only exemplify Ferguson’s protective ‘goodness’ to Catherine, but which also provide evidence that there was, as there always is with real people, something more to be known about her.” [Kory, pg23]

Kory’s observation touches upon an essential question: what is the purpose of Ferguson in the scheme of Farewell’s plot? She subtly reinforces the lack of understanding the civilian world offers Frederic/Hemingway and the realities of war he embodies. Her frustration with his inability to take care of himself subtly echoes the tone of letters from Ernest’s real life mother, both anxious towards her son to be self-sufficient and oblivious to how his wartime experiences affected him. However, her pessimism echoes Frederic’s own anxiety. Both characters care for Catherine in their own way. If Hemingway’s capacity for grief is reflected in Catherine’s back story, his wartime fatalism finds it root in the civilian sphere through Ferguson. Her tearful premonitions about the couple’s future prove to be prescient. Even if Ferguson is removed from the violence

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that defines Frederic’s experience, her reaction to his character is essential to establishing how little sympathy the world offers him when he attempts to leave the masculine “war” sphere.

**Farewell: The War**

Like in *Gatsby*, World War I is defined in the novel of *Farewell to Arms* by the after effects of violence. Unlike Fitzgerald’s novel, Hemingway writes about the violence from a first person perspective before returning his main character to the world outside of the conflict. Frederic’s narration focuses on survival when he is on patrol, all the while keeping the reader aware of the danger to his life. When Hemingway has Frederic go to Milan or Switzerland, most of the dialogue is focused on the war and his role in it. His relationship with Catherine is the only area in which his mind can focus on something other than the nature of war.

Hemingway’s narration in Frederic’s mind makes the psychology of the character the focal point for the war’s effects. In turn, character criticism tends to focus on what goes unsaid by Frederic when he is attempting to reconcile his fears with his hopes. The time spent with Catherine is essential for understanding how much of the war Hemingway has him carry.

But outside of character psychology, the war informs the narrative in structural ways that tie the characters themselves to themes of loss and fear. In “Hemingway: The Writer as Artist”, author Carlos Baker argues that the dynamics of *Farewell* are influenced by familiar tragedy, but itself resists tragic definitions. “The position occupied by *A Farewell to Arms* among Hemingway’s tragic writings may be suggested by the fact that he once referred to the story of Lieutenant Frederick (sic) Henry and Catharine Barkley as his *Romeo and Juliet,*” writes Baker. “The most obvious parallel is that Henry and Catherine, like their Elizabeth prototypes might be seen as star-
crossed lovers. Hemingway might also have been thinking of how rapidly Romeo and Juliet, whose affair has begun as a mere flirtation, pass over into the status of relatively mature lovers. In the third place, he may have meant to imply that his own lovers, caught in the tragic pattern of the war on the Austrian-Italian front, are not far different from the young victims of the Montague-Capulet family feud.” [Baker, pg98-99]

Baker’s argument that Hemingway consciously patterned *Farewell’s* narrative after *Romeo and Juliet* does have merit. However, I do not think any allusion within the story to Shakespeare’s tragedy is meant to be taken so directly. As sincerely rendered as Frederic and Catherine’s romance is, I do not feel that the characters are “star-crossed” lovers in the definition inspired by Shakespeare. The forces that destroy their relationship are forces that the characters inhabit to a degree beyond the archetypes defined by Shakespeare.

As Baker’s essay continues, his reasoning further conflicts with how Hemingway has the war inform Frederic and Catherine. “Neither in *Romeo and Juliet* nor in *A Farewell to Arms* is the catastrophe a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation,” he writes. “Catherine’s bodily structure, which precludes a normal delivery for her baby, is an unfortunate biological accident...The student of esthetics, recognizing another kind of logic in art than that of mathematical cause and effect, may however conclude that Catherine’s death, like that of Juliet, shows a kind of artistic inevitability. Except by a large indirection, the war does not kill Catherine any more than the Veronese feud kills Juliet. But in the emotional experience of the novel, Catherine’s dying is directly associated and interwoven with the whole tragic pattern of fatigue and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom, of which the war itself the broad social manifestation.” [Baker, pg99]

Here Baker touches upon an essential event in the novel, correctly assesses its impetus and then incorrectly ascribes it within the narrative itself. More than the ‘emotional experience,’
the war does kill Catherine. What separates Frederic from Romeo in this instance is that the cruelty of the war kills his lover through him. War and fighting and survival are painstakingly shown to be a part of Frederic’s very essence as a character. Even his relationship with Catherine is started out of a cool wartime pragmatism shared by his comrade at arms Rinaldi. Any argument that *Farewell to Arms* contains the DNA of tragedy must first acknowledge Frederic’s chief potential “fatal flaw”: his incapacity for hope. Both his internal narration and dialogue show he himself knows on some level that his growing infatuation with Catherine is doomed on some level in spite of himself.

He knows this because he and Hemingway know that he inhabits the role of a soldier. Both author and character have little illusion about the essential job functions of this role. When stripped of medals and talk of honor, Frederic’s job as a soldier is the same as that of many participants of the front lines in World War I: to halt the advance of enemy forces by taking lives. While human ingenuity may alter the course of battle (as it does for Frederic), the men who make up the allied forces are especially trained to murder their fellow men. *Farewell to Arms* is cognizant of the conflict between the nationalistic fervor providing the “glorious” context of battle and the prevailing moral doctrines religious and secular that is championed as essential to a nation’s character. This philosophical awareness is what I feel is behind Hemingway’s decision to have Catherine die producing Frederic’s child. Even if the character is meant to be a noble figure, his capacity as a “destructor” is something that follows him beyond the war.

Frederic may be noble in Hemingway’s eyes, but the war in which he demonstrates his nobility is not portrayed positively. Frederic outthinks and survives his foes, but the job function he inherits from his superiors is contingent on destruction and destruction alone. He is not paid to survive or heal unless such actions lead to the demoralization and/or demise of the soldiers he is fighting. This is what makes religion, represented by the priest Frederic meets in the first half of
the novel, such a problematic presence for the character. Both Hemingway and Frederic admire certain aspects of religion, as shown in the portrayal of the priest character, but the author cannot bring himself to commit to the idea of a benevolent God who makes human life something sacred and cherished. To do so would mean submitting to the idea that Frederic’s role as a soldier and whatever purpose derived thereof would be based in unforgivable sin, and the possibility is simply too much guilt and weight to burden the character with.

Having been an ambulance driver in the midst of horrific violence, Hemingway himself is all too aware of the conflicting codes of conduct encouraged by the army as an organization, training nurses to save lives and young men to destroy them. Hemingway himself has no doubt wrestled with the philosophical culpability of his role within the service. The internal contradictions the author experienced inhabit the novel by dividing the roles of nursing and soldiering between the two main characters. Hemingway’s inability to rectify the violence encouraged by the war and Christian doctrine of human brotherhood manifests itself in Farewell’s finale. For Hemingway, being a soldier is the unambiguous culmination of masculine identity that he admires. To inhabit this identity, Frederic pays a terrible cost. Contrary to Baker’s article, the emotional experience of the war does not directly nor indirectly result in Catherine’s physical death. Instead, Frederic’s identity as a masculine avatar of the inherent “destructiveness” of war is so potent; it literally infects his sexual potency (like Jake Barnes from The Sun Also Rises).

The act of conceiving a child intentionally implies some level of respect for the nature of human life. Frederic’s interest in the child, even after it is born, is largely absent. He is mostly concerned with his love, who heals him emotionally and physically takes care of him on a level both romantic and maternal. Because Frederic’s identity is tied to the destruction of human life, his sperm itself becomes so toxic within the world of the novel that Catherine is not so much impregnated by it as she is poisoned. Catharine herself is an avatar of both the hope to survive
outside the battlefield and the feminized gender roles of wife and mother. Had Catherine survived, Hemingway would be granting his creation a victory to whatever part of him identifies with what she represents. Even if the forces the two characters stand for are equal and tied together on some metaphysical level to Hemingway, his code martyr Frederic is conceded victory. Even when a character who is informed by war falls in love with a character who is informed by pacifism’s promise, war as a concept must defeat its opposition. To do so would imply that the author values compassion and peacetime security over his commitment to a masculine code.

As a result, both Frederic and Catherine are made martyrs to the value system Hemingway developed after the war, rather than tragic heroes who unjustly crushed by the violence that Frederic himself is complicit in. *Were Farewell to Arms* written consciously as a tragedy, it would be easier to assert that the war turned Hemingway into a nihilist. To do so means ignoring how essential the man’s code of ethics is to the development of the novel’s setting, characters and narrative conflict. In observing how Hemingway (and Fitzgerald) implements the values developed in the war’s aftermath, we as readers can better understand in what ways the war influenced these same values.

**Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s Soldiers**

The “soldier characters” are among the strongest arbiters of these values. Jay Gatsby and Frederic Henry both explore the same idea in two different ways. Both characters carry the violence of the war with them as they leave the battlefields of war behind. Nevertheless, both authors approach this essential violence in different ways. While neither paints a hopeful picture for the veterans, Fitzgerald spends most of the novel undermining the notion that violence isn’t part of American life even in peacetime. The seeds of violence are alluded to on the first page of
Gatsby. The idea of a peaceable American society that rewards those who defend it is treated as no more than an idea. Similarly, the rumor of violent deeds follows Gatsby in spite of his efforts to redefine his past. Proof of his service is ultimately the lynchpin of his plan to secure a future with Daisy. Fitzgerald renders his end in a manner that directly evokes the brutal nature of wartime violence.

Hemingway’s Frederic isn’t simply followed by violence. Surviving the war consumes him to the point of restlessness when he has physically escaped it. Whereas Fitzgerald treats Gatsby as a removed figure of interest for the protagonist to analyze alongside the reader, Frederic’s first person narration keeps the reader aware of his character at all times. He doesn’t consistently think of new ways to kill his fellow man. Hemingway does not make Frederic a psychopath. Instead, his attitude is generally depressed. He does not try to capitalize on any good will or honor conferred to him during his service. He impersonally deflects the notions that there is anymore glory to be taken from war than merely surviving it.

Key then to both these characters and the novels they inhabit is their attitude towards pre-existing concepts of war. Gatsby not only believes in the idea of glorious war, his actions show that he needs other characters to embrace these ideals. His role in the story is to manipulate other characters into believing he has achieved what was promised to him by his country for his service. Nick believes that the means which make up this reward: social clout, financial success, the hand of Daisy, is all ultimately unworthy of him.

Hemingway also makes his soldier incompatible with civilian life. Frederic tries to recreate himself to a far lesser degree than Jay Gatsby. At most, he contemplates growing a beard to satisfy Catherine. Farewell to Arms doesn’t make the conflict between being a soldier and a civilian an external force. Frederic is caught thinking about his comrades on the front lines by Catherine in Book Five. His narration does not articulate his concern for the people he knew in his
unit, and as soon as Catherine brings it up, he tries to change the subject. The restlessness of his actions is noted, but they are used to build the description of the narrative. The essential conflict between Frederic’s life as a soldier and his future off the field is kept largely internal by Hemingway.

The differences between the two soldiers can be traced to their conceptions as protagonists. Fitzgerald gives Gatsby a strong level of agency and control over the setting when the plot starts. However, Gatsby’s agency does not come from being a soldier. His criminal employer Meyer Wolfsheim notes that when he first returned from the war he didn’t have a penny to his name. Gatsby’s psychology as a soldier is driven by a romantic sense of entitlement. His identity is subsumed and buried by his drive to achieve his ideals in the states. The use of his medal, apparently authentic, to secure his fellow veteran’s trust, marks an interesting point in Fitzgerald’s depiction of the war experience. Gatsby’s extraordinary valor is informed by this medal more than his superficial charm, which is on display when he is talking to Nick. He consciously decides to parlay evidence of his more noble conduct on the battlefield to secure social standing. Nick closes the novel with admiration of Gatsby for his adherence to his own ideals. It would seem that Gatsby himself has little respect for his past actions as a “war hero” outside of their use in securing material and social gain.

Frederic Henry also has little use for war medals, as they symbolize a form of valor in which he himself no longer believes. He acknowledges what little agency he has outside of his relationship with Catherine. This mentality contrasts with Gatsby, who attempts to hone his agency on securing the hand of Daisy. On a surface level, both of these characters grapple with disillusionment. Gatsby consciously attempts to secure his reward for serving his country honorably. In doing so, he uses his reputable service as a soldier to construct his magnificent lie. Gatsby realizes that the fantasy life he desires is based in falsity. In his eyes, whatever truth there
was behind his wartime bravery is worth parlaying for the fantasy of the American Dream. To Nick (and Fitzgerald) the essence of the tragedy behind Gatsby’s character is his exchange of real moral character for an ideal that cannot overcome the corruption needed to attain it.

Psychologically, the displacement of value in Gatsby’s service suggests that Fitzgerald views World War I as explicitly linked to the 1920’s society of the novel. The conflict that helps create Gatsby does not directly reward him but it does influence the society in which he thrives. The trappings of this society function in their own way as an anesthesia. When Nick confronts Tom about his culpability in Gatsby’s death, Tom denies his guilt. The hint of violence in Gatsby’s past in Chapter 7 is enough to dissuade Daisy from taking him a lover. These examples illustrate that Fitzgerald recognizes the inherent horror of violence and the reluctance to confront it as part of their world.

Frederic Henry is also admirable by his author’s standards. Unlike Gatsby, he feels no compulsion to shape the fiction of the war as a valorous event. He does not need to either. Both he and Catherine have contempt for terms of honor in a profession defined by carnage. He does place his hope in an ideal fantasy life of sorts, with Catherine. This too dies, leaving him broken. Hemingway allows violence to infect Frederic’s personhood, where Fitzgerald allows a mythic violence to emerge in Gatsby’s environment.

**Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s Women**

The points of infection in both of these works emerge in the female characters. I mentioned previously that Zelda Faye and Agnes von Kurowsky were tremendous influences in Fitzgerald’s and Hemingway’s respective works. Their autobiographical significance extends beyond the plots of *The Great Gatsby* and *Farewell to Arms*. Both books give the female lead a
connection to the hero that makes them significant within the context of the war. The two authors subvert the trope of the “girl back home.” Daisy is married to a man who had nothing to do with the war, but Gatsby feels she must love him regardless. The key to his fantasy life is securing her companionship. He not only wants her affection but he also wants her to renounce any affection for her actual husband. She not only disillusiones him but also plays a key role in his demise and fails to pay her respects to him afterwards. Hemingway has Catherine attempt to fulfill a specific role for Frederic. She is closer to the action of war than Daisy, having a dead lover of whom Frederic remains jealous. Their relationship after Frederic escapes is partially defined by her need to cultivate his mentality into a recognizable synchronicity with hers. His personality ultimately proves resistant, and his attempts to reproduce with her ends up killing her.

Daisy and Catherine are removed from the war sphere and its violence. They are written to be characters and symbols of life after being a soldier. As characters, they fail to save the heroes from their own experiences and let them down. They also reaffirm the decidedly masculine virtue the authors imbue these heroes with. One of the things I find most interesting about the way Fitzgerald and Hemingway construct these women is that they are both cognizant of the feminine tropes afforded to them as women. Daisy was already in the practice of courting men going to war near the camp Gatsby trained in. Catherine comments on these “war tropes” as much as she tries to inhabit them. Her experiences with her former lover have made her experienced in the fiction of war. She understands the romantic mythology of war is not always an accurate representation of reality. Nevertheless, she holds onto her relationship with Frederic by presenting herself as the ideal peacetime lover for Frederic to return to. Part of this is to motivate Frederic himself to survive his experiences.

Despite their acknowledgement of these fictions, neither Daisy nor Catherine emerges as a character that is strong enough to sustain them completely. Daisy appears taken enough with
Gatsby in the second third of Fitzgerald’s novel when he reemerges in her life. In the last third of the novel, this attachment is weakened to a breaking point when Tom insinuates that Gatsby’s criminal activities may have included murdering someone. When Gatsby’s face and subsequent reaction seem to validate Tom’s accusation, Daisy “draws into herself” and ultimately decides to return to Tom. In the same chapter, Daisy initiates one of the most violent set pieces of the novel. Afterwards, she essentially disappears from the rest of the book as a character. Fitzgerald betrays an inability to create a female character that is responsible for the kind of violence highly reported on the front lines of Europe. Not only does he leave it ambiguous as to how much control Daisy had over the car at the time of Myrtle’s death, he also has Gatsby vouch to take the blame. Tellingly, Gatsby’s mind is not focused on the violence Daisy perpetuated on another woman. When Nick finds him outside of Daisy’s house, he is more concerned with the possibility of Tom being violent towards her. In the aftermath of Gatsby’s own death, Daisy’s absence is most noted.

Catherine has a similar reaction to the violence Frederic in which finds identity. Her composure cracks in the middle of giving birth to their child. Hemingway has written Catherine as especially attached to Frederic, but her relationship with him is predicated on him changing his habits and thus parts of his identity. She wants to domesticate him and tamper aspects of his character that make him dissimilar to her. On page 299, she expresses a desire for Frederic’s hair to “grow a little longer” so she could cut hers so they’d “be just alike…” (Farewell) There is no doubt some of Hemingway’s mother in Catherine’s behavior. When she must give birth to his child, she is confronted with a distinctly female pain in Hemingway’s eyes that is comparable to the pain endured by the male soldiers. When faced with the reality of this violence, she is unable to maintain the fiction consistently. Her dialogue switches between loving candor and frantic pleas for anesthetic. The pain of war that Frederic endured and endowed on others is too much
for her character to bear. She fails as a nurse and a mother, two distinctly feminine roles within the context of *Farewell to Arms*. She not only fails to bring life to the seed of a soldier, she herself succumbs to this pain and is in turned killed by the seed itself.

Neither of these female characters can confront the violence endured by their paramours. They cannot bear the threat of pain or mortality, and they cannot bear the responsibility of taking another life. Daisy disappears after running over Myrtle. Catherine is in such a delusional stupor after giving birth that she cannot perceive that her son was inadvertently strangled by her own umbilical cord. In their reactions, they wound the men who try to love them.

Daisy and Catherine bear their own pain, but their authors seem largely unsympathetic to their confinement in their gendered roles. Daisy is aloof and listless, and her life with the adulterous Tom does not make her happy. Nick is unmoved by either her cynicism or her husband’s behavior. Catherine’s back story is painful enough for both Frederic and Hemingway to recognize its effect on her psychology. I would say that Hemingway’s portrayal of Catherine is slightly less harsh than Fitzgerald’s rendering of female characters. Hemingway’s sympathy proves to be tentative when she reunites with Frederic in book four. He is forced to hide his restlessness and depression when living with Catherine. Her dialogue with him combines the flirtation of a lover with the doting of a maternal figure. For Frederic, maintaining his relationship with Catherine partly means submitting to being smothered and mothered by her emotionally.

The relationship between Gatsby and Daisy drives the plot of *The Great Gatsby*. I also won’t deny that Frederic and Catherine’s romance forms the narrative spine of *A Farewell to Arms*. Even with this mind, I would say that neither offers the characters involved equal levels of depth. Fitzgerald’s disappointment with Zelda colors the portrait of Daisy when the latter fails to pay homage to Gatsby’s life in the book’s conclusion. Catherine is more intelligent than Daisy in
comprehending what aspects of war give Frederic’s life meaning. This intelligence does not protect her from her fate, and it is Frederic’s burden as a survivor that he must carry alone.

**Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s Country**

Even after comparing their characters, *The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms* seem to share little in common in their treatment of setting. Fitzgerald sets his novel in the shadow of World War I and keeps the action largely in New York City. Frederic Henry’s adventures fluctuate between Italy and Switzerland. Yet dismissing commonality between these elements would be ignoring key differences in how both men write about similar subjects.

By virtue of narrative device and prose, Fitzgerald offers a less insular view of the setting than Hemingway. Histories are often ascribed to setting as they are to character. Everything from the Valley of Ashes to the restaurant Wolfsheim eats in is framed in back story. American history begins and ends the novel. The mythic history of America “held aloft on the promise of a fairy’s wing” motivates Gatsby, but the fractiousness inherent in American social fabric disrupts his fiction as it often does: violently.

For Hemingway, the country’s history plays little immediate importance to his protagonist. He is committed to surviving the war and distracting himself from fatalistic thought patterns. The cause of the war and the histories of the people who fight it do not cross his mind. He is simply an American soldier fighting in a foreign land. The most information we receive about Italy from a cultural standpoint is from Rinaldi. Hemingway doesn’t pretend to understand Italy to the extent that he knows Oak Park. Instead of hindering the book, this absence of historical context enhances Frederic’s plight. He could be fighting any war anywhere, and the logistics or rationale behind the war would be just as alien to him. He isn’t as valuable as a
general. The most useful adaption to his environment is learning enough of the local language to speak to his comrades.

Hemingway’s own perspective means that the novel is still specifically a World War I story. Where he differs from Fitzgerald is the way he integrates the theme of danger into the setting. Both *Gatsby* and *Farewell* feature soldiers who leave a setting of violence and mortality and come to a domesticated “peaceful” setting. Gatsby returns to America where he pursues a criminal life to build his wealth and his fictionalized self. Frederic escapes Italy and arrives in Switzerland to plan a future with Catherine. As both of these stories end in a horrific act of violence, neither haven proves to be entirely safe from the specter of wartime violence.

Fitzgerald, whose experience with said violence was relatively minimal, nevertheless uses this ‘specter’ for a different purpose than his peer Hemingway. *Gatsby* indicts the narrative of the country in which the book itself is set. Fitzgerald disarms the reader by having the first two-thirds of the present day plot be relatively free of violence. The ending is heavily foreshadowed through allusions to the specific history of the America Gatsby lives with. Almost everything in the carefree atmosphere of the city has an element of violence in the past. Nick’s family found prosperity in the American Civil War. Tom Buchanan’s suit highlights the implicit “cruelty” of his body. Gatsby’s benign persona is dogged by rumors that “he killed a man.” Wolfsheim recounts the death of an associate outside the restaurant he eats at with Gatsby and Nick.

Compare the consistent history of violence and benefitting of violence that permeates the country with Gatsby’s story to Nick in chapter four. Nick himself notes it seems cribbed from the pulpy adventurism of magazine stories. The American imagination and knack for self-conception embodied by Gatsby is shown to white-wash its own history of violent trauma, whether received or inflicted. For Fitzgerald, World War I represented the latest contradiction to American myths of
innocence and self-invention. In Gatsby’s story, he comes to the conclusion that America’s history is made of these contradictions.

*Farewell to Arms* doesn’t culminate in any such conclusions. Unlike Fitzgerald, Hemingway seems to go out of his way to separate settings based in violence from the settings in which the characters can live relatively peaceful lives. If anything, the violent nature of life as a soldier brings a new context to Hemingway’s decision to make Frederic an American. Frederic’s profession has him bond with his Italian comrades in ways that emphasize their masculine commonalities as soldiers. He discusses courting and alcohol and sports with Rinaldi in ways that are distinct from Catherine, a fellow native English speaker. Several times during his tour of duty, Frederic is reminded several times that he is not native to the land in which he fights. This does not stop him from forming an almost familial bond with the men in his he meets in the war. Relying on each other to survive creates a bond that transcends cultural differences, Hemingway seems to say. Mortality is a universal aspect of existence. One of the novel’s greatest ironies is that Frederic maintains peaceful relationships with foreign soldiers in the midst of a war against a different foreign army.

Another great irony in *Farewell to Arms* is that Frederic feels more like a foreigner living a peaceful existence with Catherine in Switzerland. When he is not fighting for his life with his unit, he feels adrift. His mind turns to the battle field because his experience as a soldier is something that he carries with him. For Fitzgerald, Gatsby cannot escape the violence of war because similar violence is interwoven into the history and thus social strata of the country he returns to. Hemingway has Frederic plagued by the violence of war because it is interwoven into his identity as a male soldier. The experience of war is something that is carried with him beyond the borders of any country. Both books use the country to show how little reprieve is possible for the characters who have fought in the war.
Conclusion

The generation of American writers Fitzgerald and Hemingway belonged to was not entirely informed by the cultural results of the war. The now fabled “lost generation” created art that addressed other social phenomena emerging within the nation’s borders. Even so, I find it difficult to ignore the impact of the war on the careers of these two men, even if their various publications did not focus solely on war-related subject matter. *The Great Gatsby* did not turn Fitzgerald into a commercial success that cemented his place in the cultural hegemony of the twenties. That honor belonged to *This Side of Paradise: A Farewell to Arms* isn’t cited as the book Hemingway defined a generation by writing. *The Sun Also Rises* is that novel. But *Gatsby* and *Farewell* are both extensions of the themes explored in their predecessors. The war had become something else in the public’s mind when the two men published these novels. The death tolls and the trauma narratives of the veterans who survived changed the opinions of the public. The defining characteristic of the war was no longer glory. It was brutality. *Gatsby* and *Farewell* seized on this perception and made brutality an integral element of their respective plots.

Especially noteworthy is how differently Fitzgerald and Hemingway handle what is fundamentally the same idea. Scott Donaldson’s *Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald* already makes note of how contrasting their personalities are. Fitzgerald’s effete social climber is an odd companion for the masculine sportsman Hemingway styled himself as. In turn, Jay Gatsby’s benign idealist would have little in common with the laconic realist in Frederic Henry. These differences are largely traceable to the dearth of wartime experience Fitzgerald possessed compared to Hemingway, who himself had only driven ambulances in the war.

Downplaying the involvement of these two men in the European theater does nothing to undermine the impact they had on the postwar conception of World War I itself. They both made
their characters aware of the romantic fiction of the war. Gatsby and Frederic try to inhabit the fantasized role of the heroic American soldier, albeit reluctantly in Frederic’s case. Inhabiting these tropes proves fatal when their respective romances with “girls back home” are interrupted by the violence they survived. The authors both realize that they must build the stories of their new century on the ruins of the last century’s mythology.

This makes their use of violence fitting in my opinion. More than disillusionment, violence and death are not just parts of the character’s lives in the books. These forces are a part of the characters themselves. Whatever heroism and valor they displayed in Europe is counterbalanced by their authors’ insistence on their culpability in an essential function of being soldier: killing enemy troops. Gatsby and Frederic are unique creations in that they must both carry the stigma of murder along with the pride conferred through their medals. Before *Gatsby* concludes, the eponymous character’s struggle with the yellow car accidentally leads to yet more death. Similarly, Frederic is unable to foresee his impregnation of Catherine killing her and the baby.

Neither Fitzgerald nor Hemingway had been reported to have taken any lives during their “service”. Despite this, both men recognized a key facet of surviving World War I. Going hand in hand with pride, another feeling dominated the new “war” narrative crafted out of the ashes of the First Great War’s advertisements. This feeling was guilt.

Carlos Baker’s text examines the literary subtext of most of Hemingway’s bibliography. He provides an analysis of each story for at least a chapter each. Baker places a great deal of emphasis on the meaning he finds within the choices of wordplay constructed by Hemingway. In these exchanges, Baker deduces a deeper level of meaning and psychological realism afforded to the character. Each of these chapters analyzes the construction of Hemingway’s technique and characterization. Symbolism is also expanded upon within the context of the novel and Hemingway’s own personal philosophy.

Baker’s book does its best to frame Hemingway’s work within a clearly defined code and belief system. His chapter on “A Farewell to Arms” titled “The Mountain and The Plain” posits a theory that the experience of the war has influenced the aesthetics of the book, specifically influencing the mood and meaning towards tragedy. I would like to use Baker’s analysis in my own reading of “Farewell”, as I too believe that Hemingway’s psychology is an important component of Frederic’s characterization.

Trevor Dodman’s article about psychological trauma in *A Farewell to Arms* is a character piece about the main character, Frederic Henry. Dodman argues that Hemingway uses the narration to create a tension between Frederic’s mentality and the physical reality of what he is experiencing. Describing the tension as part of “mind/body dualism”, the author explores the ways in which Hemingway’s real trauma is reflected in the writing of *A Farewell to Arms* and its plot. Among the points discussed are the meanings in inherent in the scenes about surgery, and how Catherine Barkley’s character is a reflection of the disparity in Frederic’s own experience.

Dodman’s article offers a critical perspective that contains arguments I agree with in my thesis as well as arguments I find contention with. The psychological worth of the autobiographical connection between Hemingway and Frederic is the core of Dodman’s piece, and the relationship between Frederic’s narration and the physical trauma he experiences in the story is just as key to my argument about how deeply Hemingway’s service in Italy impacted his writing. His summary of Catherine’s role in the book however is largely explored in relation to Frederic’s mentality, which I feel dismisses the importance Hemingway has given her as an embodiment of the world outside the war.


Scott Donaldson’s book examines the literary careers and behaviors of both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Their relationship is examined through a detailed review of their letters and notes during their time publishing. Both of their private lives are heavily scrutinized and
compared by Donaldson. The author makes a number of observations about the relationship of the authors over the course of the book. He sees an initial sense of admiration between the two men that slowly turns curdles into professional rivalry. Hemingway and Fitzgerald both had a unique relationship with Max Scribner. Their approach towards the subject matter of war and American culture were noted to be similar, but they were each critical of each other in specific ways.

Donaldson’s contention about their mutual influence is based largely in reviewing physical evidence of their correspondence. His conclusions about their friendship and how it reflected their differences is something I would like to touch upon in my thesis. Chapters 3, 4 and 8 in particular touch upon the similar influences in their lives and the ways in which their literature reflected the time period. However, my thesis would concretely explore the ways in which World War I in particular represented a horizon for the careers of both men, strongly influencing their respective careers as well as their personal behavior in general.


This book chronicles F. Scott Fitzgerald’s earliest written short fiction. Among them are stories that include concepts which would be revisited in later works by Fitzgerald. Some of the works, such as “Jemina, the Mountain Girl” and “Tarquin of Cheapside” reflect the undercurrent of light social humor that grew more understated as his career continued. His play, “The Debutante”, reflects an earlier draft of a key chapter in his novel “This Side of Paradise”. The differences
between the two iterations reflect a great maturation on the part of the author. The version of the scene in “Paradise” is much longer and less happy, as one of the characters is drafted into the war.

This example in particular is one of the most direct ways that show how Fitzgerald’s fiction has been changed by the War. I would like to touch upon the ways in which the phenomena of the war changed the focus in Fitzgerald’s writing. The short stories not only reflect the gradual change in his writing ambition, they showcase how his treatment of elements he would write about in stories such as “Gatsby”, including wealth and romance, changed in the interim.


Charles Hatten’s article takes into account the numerous critical opinions on the Catherine Barkley character in *A Farewell to Arms*. Using these opinions as jumping off points, Hatten argues that Barkley actually deviates from the binary extremes in interpretation that posit her as a heroic
foil for Frederic or a subservient fantasy woman. To prove this, Hatten explores how Hemingway’s prose could capture the difficulty of expressing sexual desire in the world he has constructed.

The question of how Catherine relates to the rest of the novel is key to my interpretation of the war’s presence in it. Hatten’s citation of other critics demonstrates how polarizing the character has appeared to Hemingway’s critics. I propose that Catherine deviates from these opinions in a way similar to Hatten’s argument, though we ultimately disagree on what her presence means relative to the portrait of war in *Farewell to Arms*.


Lehan’s article analyzes the works of Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* included, alongside the sociological texts of his time. Among these texts is *The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler. Lehan analyzes the contexts of Spengler’s work and their focus on the cultural shifts in European societies between Enlightenment and Romanticism. Lehan then argues about the ways in which specific characters represent different viewpoints from these works and the way their actions reflect Fitzgerald’s own opinions.

Lehan is an example of the critics who see the relationships between characters such as Tom, Gatsby and Daisy as reflective of sociological texts and themes. His argument that Gatsby reflects
a “Spenglerian” destiny in opposition with Tom’s “enlightenment” modernism is contention I wish to argue against with my thesis. In spite of the evidence he presents that suggest Fitzgerald being influenced by Spengler, I wish to contend that Gatsby and Tom’s allegorical aspects have more to do with the country’s reaction to wartime violence rather than abstract conceptions from Romantic and Enlightenment eras.


Tony McAdams frames Fitzgerald’s novel in the context of business ethics. Key to his article is the analysis of characters and how their behavior reflects ethical trends and theory in American life. McAdams argues about that Gatsby and Tom’s rivalry is indicative of real concerns about wealth distribution in America, citing Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and actual data studies. McAdams ties the “American Dream” theme explored in Gatsby to these trends and argues that the text showcases the concept’s fading power.

McAdams is another example of a critic who places Gatsby in a primarily class related context, arguing about that the novel is largely about the relation of wealth to American culture and morality. I cite McAdams not to dismiss his claims, but to contend that my thesis about the cultural influence of World War I’s brutality does not necessarily undermine the role that class criticism plays in Gatsby. Gatsby and Tom’s respective social dynamics are just as influenced by the War as Fitzgerald’s societal commentary and McAdams offers criticism that I feel obscures this argument.
Reynolds explores the youth of Ernest Hemingway and how the writer’s personality was shaped by the events of this period. He writes about the influence of Ernest’s parents and extended family, and uses multiple first and second hand accounts to write about the culture of Oak Park, his home town. His writing shows Hemingway’s neighborhood as a conservative place that instilled him with masculine values, encouraging many in his high school to join the war effort. The effects of Hemingway’s service in Italy are also catalogued by Reynolds, who offers an empathetic portrait of the man as someone who was deeply changed by these experiences.

*The Young Hemingway* offers valuable accounts of Hemingway’s early development and how World War I impacted him psychologically alongside his pre-war formative influences. Reynolds accounts of Hemingway’s interactions with Oak Park’s community before and after war are sources I cite to show how the masculine ideal of Frederic Henry had been molded. Hemingway’s behavior in these accounts is an example of his conscious idealization of masculinity and how essential his experiences in Italy are to this process.