

The Wound in War Literature: An Image of Heroism

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From Homer and *Beowulf* to Shakespeare, the manifestation of the hero in literature corresponds with a celebration of the core values of the author's society. The image of the wound in war literature is emblematic of those values or the lack of those values. In antiquity, Homeric heroes embody the traditions of a warfaring society and culture. In medieval literature, Beowulf rids the Danes of their malevolent, monstrous enemy, Grendel, thus providing a service to society in exchange for wealth and honor. Shakespeare, in *Henry V*, examines heroism in the context of a chivalric, social hierarchy in which the rhetoric of King Harry's speeches emphasize the heroic ideal. This is not to say that these texts do not scrutinize the traditional role of the hero in society. In fact, the *Iliad*, in many ways, is a reexamination of heroic ideals. Achilles challenges the materialist motives of Agamemnon as the Argives wage war with the Trojans. *Beowulf*, also, recognizes the difficulty in living up to the heroic ideal when Beowulf himself is cautioned by the King of the Danes to show restraint in seeking glory. In *Henry V*, King Harry demonstrates the virtual artifice of heroism as he contorts heroic concepts to manipulate his followers. Regardless of the various challenges to heroism that this literature poses, however, there is a universal image in the literature of pre-modern warfare that implies the existence of a standard conceptualization of the hero as a person who embodies the values of a particular society. Throughout the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and *Henry V*, images of wounds proliferate and are manipulated to symbolize the idea of the heroic.

This traditional hero does not seem to apply to modern war.

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The individual modern soldier is just another cog in the war machine who views himself as altogether cut off from society's essential aims. In modern warfare there were no larger-than-life mythical representations of men such as there were in the *Iliad*. There were no fantastical enemy beasts as there were in *Beowulf*, and in contrast to the rhetorical brilliance of Shakespeare's King Harry, wartime propaganda came under severe scrutiny after World War I. The harsh realities of modern warfare — the larger theaters of operations, advancements in technology, and new types of wounds — contrasted strongly with traditional views of heroism in battle. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway specifically addresses this problem in the developing character of Frederick Henry, who as a consequence of his experience on the Italian front in World War I abandons the war effort altogether. *A Farewell to Arms* is a novel that challenges the traditional elements of heroism manifested in the thematic development of the pre-modern war literature like the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, or *Henry V*. But like this earlier type of war literature, *A Farewell to Arms* utilizes the image of the wound as a literary response to the issue of heroism in war. The wound is a common thread among all the mentioned texts. Regardless of the type of warfare, type of wounds, or degree of heroism in war, it is clear that wounds in all of these works symbolically correspond with the socially generated concept of the hero or with its modern adversary, the anti-hero. While pre-modern war literature celebrates the wound as a symbolic embodiment of socially approved heroic endeavors, Frederick Henry's wound in *A Farewell to Arms* takes on a biographical, psychological and symbolic significance that strives to contradict traditional heroism.

I

In Homer, there is a distinctive relationship between the concept of the heroic and warrior values. A good "warrior" is in essence a "hero" in the sense that in battle the warrior embodies the socially accepted values of the warrior class (Finely 121). The hero in the *Iliad* is characterized by a desire to acquire glory.

There is throughout the *Iliad* an obsessive compulsion among

the warriors to establish honor in relation to each other. One way of distinguishing between rank and battlefield success is in the acquisition of war spoils. The more “things” that one warrior can acquire in battle corresponds with the level of that warrior’s honor as it is perceived by others. The difference between Agamemnon’s rank as leader and chief and Achilles military prowess are leveled by who is able to gain more wealth in battle, the wealthiest being the most respected. When Agamemnon’s war prize Chryseis is taken and ransomed by the Trojans, Agamemnon says, “But fetch me another prize, and straight off to, / else I alone of the Argives go without my honor” (1. 37-39). When Agamemnon selects Achilles’ war prize Briseis for his own, Achilles distraught with shame cries, “my honor never equals yours” (1.193). The spirit of competition and social hierarchy implied in these passages suggests how honor and glory are estimated by social status and war spoils. While achieving glory in battle is the primary focus of the ancient warriors, it is not solely acquired by wealth. More important to the warrior culture was the ability to face death courageously and unflinchingly, and no amount of wealth was necessary to achieve this type of honor.

A universal characteristic of the Homeric heroes in the *Iliad* is that they appear god-like in battle. In this way, the ancient warrior transcends the mundane and becomes an archetype that other soldiers should attempt to emulate. This characterization of the war hero suggests, at times, a defiance of death and natural law that enables the warrior to face mortality head on and without fear. A heroic aspect of the warriors in the *Iliad* is that they strive for immortality while ultimately facing an inescapable mortality (Whitman 28). Achilles, for instance, must acknowledge the fate of an early death. Achilles’ mother Thetis says to him, “You’re doomed to a short life, my son, from all you say! / For hard on the heels of Hector’s death, your death / must come at once” (18. 111-113). However, this knowledge does not impede Achilles from performing god-like feats in battle. Homer describes him as a “god-sprung hero” who “leapt like a frenzied god, / his heart racing with slaughter” (21. 20-23). The Trojan warrior, Hector, also resolves to face death courageously in his determination to fight an offensive battle regardless of the risks. He says, “I’ve learned it all too well. To

stand up bravely, / always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers, / winning my father great glory, glory for myself" (6. 527-529). Ironically, for Hector, it is his insistence on fighting an offensive war that is ultimately his undoing and results in the fall of Troy. Lastly, Diomedes' ruthless attack on the Trojans and merciless participation in slaughter is an attempt to defy nature in that it leads to direct contact with the gods on the battlefield. In Book V, Diomedes becomes so enraptured with killing that he punctures the wrist of the goddess Aphrodite. Mythic divinity and epic mortality become juxtaposed in the image of the wound, which leads the goddess Dione to remark, "Doesn't the son of Tydeus know, down deep, / the man who fights the gods does not live long" (5. 465-466). Struggling to appear immortal, Diomedes disregards his own mortality, a mortality that Dione is quick to recognize and quick to affirm.

Homer relates in graphic detail the descriptions of wounds incurred in battle. While these images may suffice for action, adventure and pure entertainment, the gory reality of warfare as it is portrayed in the descriptions of wounds helps to emphasize mortality in a mythical and epic context. Wounds are ghastly and meticulously described, in contrast to the warriors' struggle to be like the gods in war. In the description of Aphrodite's wounding Homer writes, "Tydeus' offspring rushed her, lunging out, / thrusting his sharp spear at her soft, limp wrist / and the brazen point went slashing through her flesh" (5. 375-377). Later Homer says, "He gouged her just where the wristbone joins the palm /and immortal blood came flowing quickly from the goddess" (5.380-381). The attention to detail, the anatomical knowledge that Homer labored to illustrate is evidence to suggest the importance of the wound as in image in the text. The descriptions of Odysseus' victims are equally as detailed and terrifying. Odysseus, like Diomedes, participates in the slaughter of Trojans in a merciless and ruthless display of violence and destruction, a chaotic combination that contrasts with Homer's accurate anatomical description. Homer writes, "Odysseus caught him up under the bulging shield with a jabbing spear that split him from crotch to naval — / the man writhed in the dust, hands clutching the earth" (11.5).

Homer's description of wounds incurred in battle illustrate a

close relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of the wound. Fighting occurs as hand-to-hand combat, an experience that can almost be classified as a ritual. Before every kill the conqueror and the soon to be conquered must rendezvous; death and victory over death must come together. In avenging Patroclus' death, Achilles must "go and meet the murderer head-on" (18. 136). It is fair to imagine the warriors, both avenger and murderer, breathing together, sweating together, and looking into each other's eyes at the moment of death for one warrior and the moment of victory for the other. Homer writes that Achilles

...scanning his splendid body — where to pierce it best?
 The rest of his flesh seemed encased in armor,
 burnished, brazen
 ...but one spot lay exposed,
 where the collarbones lift the neckbone off the
 shoulders,
 the open throat, where the end of life comes quickest
 — there
 as Hector charged in fury brilliant Achilles drove his
 spear and the point
 went stabbing clean through the tender neck (22.370-
 380).

Recalling the cultural world of the warrior, close physical contact among warriors was a brush with death that distinguished the strong from the weak, the heroic from the non-heroic. As a literary device, the wound is a symbol of an honorable and courageous struggle for immortality in the face of death. The swift stroke and clean-cutting jabs of the spear, the vulnerable, pierced flesh of the victim is an affirmation of true heroism. Homer writes, "Ah for a young man / all looks fine and noble if he goes down in war / hacked to pieces under a slashing bronze blade — / he lies there dead...but whatever death lays bear / all wounds are marks of glory" (22.80).

While the mythic proportions of the *Iliad* allied heroism with the struggle for immortality, heroism, as it is discussed in *Beowulf*, is based primarily on the importance of what John Hill refers to as the medieval "economy of honor" (218). Indebted to the Danes from a previous service rendered, Beowulf perpetuates the cycle of reciprocity

by defending Hrothgar's kingdom from the awful Grendel. Beowulf says to the Danes upon arriving to their kingdom "Be good to us and tell us what to do: we have a great errand to the famous one, the king of the Danes" (*Beowulf* 30). In *Beowulf*, "heroism is extremely practical and socially useful" and is thought as "a real service" providing the opportunity "to attain glory before death" (Hill 218). Essentially, performing brave acts as a service to society perpetuates the economic system. Here a similarity might be drawn between *Beowulf* and the *Iliad* in the idea that the acquisition of war spoils corresponds with glory earned. However, Beowulf, unlike the Homeric heroes, does not struggle against mythic immortality; instead he celebrates temporal pleasures including gift-giving, feasting, and drinking. Good deeds are always rewarded. Beowulf says, "The lord of the Scyldings repaid me for that bloody combat with much plated gold, many treasures, after morning came and we sat down to the feast. There was song and mirth" (*Beowulf* 54).

If Beowulf lived at a time that prized the values of a gift-giving society, then the images of wounds in the literature of *Beowulf* certainly correspond with the achievement of honor as it is the end result of manifesting these values. The wound, in essence, is a physical manifestation of a service rendered. It is the warrior's calling card. For instance, the severed head of Grendel's mother entitles Beowulf to reap appropriate rewards. Beowulf says, "...in the war-hall I cut off the head of Grendel's mother with a mighty sword. Not without trouble I came from there alive. It was not my fate to die then, but the protector of earls again gave me many treasures" (*Beowulf* 54). To speak in metaphor, the wound is like a blank check. The severity of the wound is an estimation of the glory and the rewards of the warrior to be redeemed later. During the fight between Beowulf and Grendel it is written, "The awful monster had lived to feel pain in his body, a huge wound in his shoulder was exposed, his sinews sprang apart, his bone-locks broke. Glory in battle was given to Beowulf" (*Beowulf* 36). When it is written that "glory in battle was given to Beowulf" the text suggests that Beowulf is literally carving out honor for himself each time he inflicts wounds in the service of King Hrothgar. Like in the *Iliad*, Beowulf actively seeks this danger. Fighting occurs intimately between

warrior and, in Beowulf's case, beast. Beowulf recalls being "locked hand in hand" with the enemy (54). He refers to his battle with Grendel's mother as the "hand fight of warriors" (54). There is a sense that the individual initiative exerted by Beowulf will reap satisfactory rewards.

Six hundred years later, Shakespeare's *Henry V* focuses more acutely on a historical realism, abandoning mythic proportions and legendary battle scenes for a more critical approach to the justification of warfare. While wounds in *Henry V* have a literary objective similar to the images of wounds in the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*, namely as an affirmation of heroism in the context of fifteenth century chivalry, these images do not negate an undercurrent of dissension. King Harry is the character in the play that most represents the chivalric ideal; he uses wound imagery in his rhetorical speeches to proliferate the necessity of valor to justify death in battle. The commoners in the play represent a reconsideration of valor in battle and the role of the hero on the battlefield.

At the beginning of Act 2, King Harry has already declared war on France. The chorus captures the buzz of preparation as young men ready themselves for battle, "Now thrive the armourers, and honor that / Reign solely in the breast of everyman" (2. 3-4). There would seem to be a general air of excitement, but the next scene contradicts the chorus illustration of honor-seeking young soldiers. A group of commoners discuss their participation in the oncoming war. The commoner, Nim says, "I dare / not fight, but think I will wink and hold out mine iron" (2.1. 5-6). It is clear that the chorus' perception of the general opinion distorts from the actual reality. Nim is a soldier because the King has declared war. He does not want to die and, certainly, does not actively seek out glory in battle. He will do what he must to get by and hope for the best. Later, on the battlefield, the commoners' songs depict the true sentiment of the masses. Pistol says,

The plainsong is most just, for humours do abound.
Knocks go and come, God's vassals drop and die,
And sword and shield
In bloody field
Doth win immortal fame (3.2. 5-9).

To which a young soldier boy replies, "Would I were in an alehouse in London. I would give all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety" (3.2. 10-11). The bitter irony and sardonic twists of the commoners' playful discussions and witty songs imply feelings of entrapment. Unlike the mythic heroes of the *Iliad*, these young men have no interest in facing death. Unlike Beowulf, these commoners care nothing for fame and wealth. Many would not fight at all except that King Harry has declared war, and not to fight would be treasonous to England.

Despite a keen desire for the warmth and comforts of peacetime, particularly the desire for such idling activities as drinking, the soldier boys are committed by duty to fight for England. Clearly, regardless of a hesitancy to fight, the commoners exhibit a fierce loyalty to England and its authority figures. The high regard of officers and captains is evidence of a general compliance with a system of social hierarchy. Men higher up the social ladder were viewed almost like the mighty warriors in the *Iliad*. Captain Fluellen describes the Duke of Exeter as "magnanimous as Agamemnon, and a man that I love and honor with my soul and my heart, and my duty" (3.6. 5-7). King Harry is shown to be much respected by his army. Pistol says, "The King's a bawcock and a heart-of-gold, / A lad of life, an imp of fame, / Of parents good, of fist most valiant. / I kiss his shoe..." (4.1. 45-48).

The speeches of King Harry inspire confidence in the heroic ideal. The rhetorical implication that becoming wounded in battle will render attractive consequences is one way that Harry is able to calm the initial fears of his soldiers. He says, "For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, / This day shall gentle his condition" (quoted in Meron 63). King Harry insinuates in this passage that any soldier who fights with him in battle and is consequently wounded will receive social benefits, particularly the possibility of social mobility, or in the words of Shakespeare, "shall gentle his condition" (Meron 63). In this same speech, King Harry uses the wound as a symbol of honor that will mark valiant soldiers for a lifetime. He says of the soldier wounded in battle, "...he will strip his sleeve and show his scars / and say, 'These wounds I had on Crispian's day.' / Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot, / But he'll remember, with advantages" (4.3. 47-50). The image is skillfully impressed upon

the soldier who might imagine rolling up his sleeves or envision the scar smoldered into his own flesh. The visual enticement of the wound image is a contrived device for persuading the masses. Similarly the images of wounds elsewhere throughout the play contribute to the idea of chivalrous warfare. Wounds are described as “honour-owing” (4.6. 9). They are also described as “a testament of noble-ending love” (4.6 27).

Regardless of the shifting definitions of the heroic ideal from mythic warrior and legendary gift-giver to rhetorical contrivance, the literary use of wound images in the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and *Henry V* has steadfastly been a symbol of glory and honor and the mark of heroism. This remains true for literature until the emergence of modern war, particularly World War I, after which Ernest Hemingway writes about the wounding of Frederick Henry. *A Farewell to Arms* illustrates many of the differences between the human involvement in pre-modern warfare and the reality of modern warfare. Hemingway’s use of wound imagery in this novel contrasts with the images of wounds in the texts we have already discussed.

II

In many ways Hemingway’s characterization of Frederick Henry reflects the climate and atmosphere of modern warfare. As a volunteer ambulance driver, Henry describes the restless days living in the village of Gorizia in Northern Italy and waiting for news from the front. In his free time Henry sits with friends in the brothels and cafes, taking in the beautiful scenery and drinking. Frederick recalls a winter scene: “I watched the snow falling, looking out of the window of the bawdy house, the house for officers, where I sat with a friend and two glasses drinking a bottle of Asti” (Hemingway 6). There is no recollection here of heroic battles to be fought or retribution to account for; Henry spends his time away from the front idling and indulging. This behavior seems to be in response to a feeling of detachment that distinguishes Henry from the heroes of pre-modern war literature. It is as if Henry is an observer in a war that he has little influence over. Henry says, “Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have

anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous than war in the movies” (Hemingway 37). It seems odd that Henry would feel nonchalant about his participation in the war, and yet this same “spectatorial attitude” marked the passage of many young volunteers from the United States to Europe (Cowley 38). Malcolm Cowley, a literary critic and former ambulance corps volunteer, observes the significance of Frederick Henry’s detachment. Alluding to the ambiguous “they,” Cowley describes the experience of being an ambulance driver in Europe during World War I: “They carried us to a foreign country....They fed and lodged us at the expense of a government in which we had no share. They made us more irresponsible than before: livelihood was not a problem; we had a minimum of choices to make; we could let the future take care of itself, feeling certain it would bear us into new adventures” (38). In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway expands on this attitude, creating within his protagonist’s realm of experience a detachment from the external world that is so intense as to render in Henry feelings of total uselessness. After returning from a vacation leave and just before he is wounded near Plava, Henry observes:

Everything seemed in good condition. It evidently made no difference whether I was there or not. I had imagined that the condition of the cars, whether, or not things were obtainable, the smooth functioning of the business of removing wounded and sick from the dressing stations . . . depended to a considerable extent on myself. Evidently it did not matter whether I was there or not (Hemingway 16).

Henry seems to make no dent in the war effort. In fact, the daily functioning of the corps seems to carry on without any regard for his absence. It is also important to recognize that a change is taking place within Henry, a gradual disillusionment. He had, at one point, considered himself to be an integral and irreplaceable member of the corps. He says that he had “imagined...the smooth functioning of the business...depended to a considerable extent on myself” (16). Now, however, after going away from his post and reentering the arena of war, the issue of futility begins to and will perpetually haunt Henry

throughout the novel. A break from traditional ways of thinking has occurred that will serve to dismantle any concept of heroic or meaningful action that Henry may have previously held. Later in the novel, Henry will come to the conclusion that “Abstract words such as glory, honor courage, or hallow were obscene...” (Hemingway 185). For Henry, the meaninglessness of these abstractions is a result of what he had witnessed on the front. He says, “I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it” (Hemingway 185). The estimation of human life in this passage is a bitter and morose correlation to the lack of heroism in war. Dead soldiers are likened to spoiled meat: useless and unproductive. Steeped in death and the wounded, Henry is exposed to the atrocities of modern warfare at first hand. In his crisp recollections of wartime experiences, wounds are reoccurring images that effectively express the meaninglessness, futility and lack of heroism that abounds in *A Farewell to Arms*.

There is much description in *A Farewell to Arms* of the various wounds incurred in battle. World War I wounds are strikingly different from other wounds examined in this paper. When Henry first meets Catherine, for instance, she relates how her fiancé was killed in the war. She says, “He didn’t have a saber cut. They blew him all to bits” (Hemingway 20). Hemingway’s choice of words is disparaging. Nowhere in pre-modern war literature is someone blown “to bits.” This would have been physically impossible due to the type of weaponry available in the ancient, pre-modern world. Most likely, a grenade or mortar shell hit Catherine’s fiancé. It is possible that he did not even see his assailant. At least that is what the unknown “they” suggests. It would seem that the technological violence nurtured by advancements in the development of weapons changed the arena of war. At the very least, Hemingway uses the issue of weapons technology to distort the traditional definition of the hero. There was no longer a need to meet the enemy face-to-face when technology enabled an assailant to launch a grenade from yards away or handle a machine gun from a guarded position. The heroic concept of the brave individual who asserts courage in the face of death is destroyed by the instantaneous death or

unexpected wounding of the soldier from a launched weapon.

The detail involved in the descriptions of wounds in *A Farewell to Arms* suggests a harsh realism that undercuts the illusory implications of heroism. Late in the novel, Henry runs into an American-Italian on his convalescence leave in Milan. Ettore Moretti was wounded three times in battle, on the shoulder, on the leg, and on the foot. His wounds are not the badges of glory and honor that mark the heroes of the past, however. Moretti describes his foot wound in nauseating detail: "There's dead bone in my foot that stinks right now. Every morning I take new pieces out and it stinks all the time" (Hemingway 122). The reality of the modern wound does not seem to attribute to the crisp, clean ideals of valor and honor. There is something putrid and unforgivable about Moretti's wounds: a stench that never goes away, bones that will not stop chipping. There is similar attention to detail in the description of Frederick Henry's wound. The report is clinical and abrupt. A doctor notes, "Multiple superficial wounds of the left and right thigh and the left and right knee and right foot. Profound wounds of right knee and foot. Lacerations of the scalp...with possible fracture of the skull. Incurred in the line of duty" (Hemingway 59). The description seems to mirror the keen detail that Homer gives to the description of wounds in the *Iliad*, except that the doctor's report lacks the expression of onslaught of rage, passion, and the fury of the warrior of which the wounds in the *Iliad* are emblematic. Neither is Henry's wound like the wounds suffered on Crispian's day in *Henry V* that represent more than torn flesh and are symbolic badges of honor. The details of Frederick Henry's wound do not imply anymore information than there is visually available, nor do they suggest an inkling of heroism.

The biographical element that links Hemingway's own experiences in World War I to the fictionalized experiences of Frederick Henry is a dimension lacking in the earlier war literature. Neither Homer, nor the writer of *Beowulf*, nor Shakespeare fought in the battles they describe. Hemingway volunteered for the Red Cross ambulance service in June 1918. That July he was wounded by a trench mortar. Shrapnel blew up in his right leg. He was hit a second time, in the right leg, by an Austrian machine-gunner on his way to the dressing station. Hemingway

was sent to recuperate at a hospital in Milan. Frederick Henry is also a volunteer ambulance driver who is wounded by a trench mortar and is sent to recuperate in Milan. The similarities speak for themselves. Hemingway used his own autobiographical war experiences as source material for his fiction.

However, Michael Reynolds, in his book *Hemingway's First War*, argues that an important heroic element is missing from Hemingway's fictionalized wounding of Frederick Henry that does not correspond to the biography (170). Both Hemingway and Henry are awarded the Italian silver medal for bravery in action. But as Reynolds shrewdly emphasizes, Hemingway was able to carry another wounded man on his shoulders to the dressing station while incurring the second of his two wounds, while "Henry is blown up in the mountains while eating cold spaghetti and cheese" (170). The biographical source is adapted to suit the writer's purpose in creating the fiction. In other words, Frederick Henry's wounding is more a literary invention than it is a truthful recollection. The reality of the wounding on the Italian front was for Hemingway source material from which he could extract, retrospectively, an original, more bleak and anti-heroic vision of the war.

Henry's wound alludes as much to biographical occurrences as it does to psychological processes. Malcolm Cowley defends the position that the wound Hemingway suffered on the Italian front in the July of 1918 was a memory for Hemingway that "returned obsessively in his fiction" (224). The wound is what gave Hemingway's fiction a so-called "haunted" quality and inspired Cowley to make the precarious alliance between Hemingway and writers like Melville and Poe, writers who, Cowley believes, "dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world" (224). If Hemingway's fictional wound is a literary device through which he can express the bleak realities of modern warfare, it similarly makes sense to think of Henry's wound as a symbol that writers like Poe, in his psychological thrillers, might have used to manifest the mental processes or "inner world" of his characters. There does seem to be a suggestion of psychological processes at work in the fiction, particularly in Henry's repetition and recollection of war wounds throughout the novel. In addition to the wounding and death of Catherine's fiancé,

Ettore Moretti's chipped foot bone and the recollection of Henry's wounds, there is also a description of a hemorrhaging man who is stacked above Henry in the ambulance on the way to a field hospital. Henry is subjected to a continuing stream of blood from above until the nameless, faceless man bleeds to death. Henry recalls:

The stream kept on. In the dark I could not see where it came from the canvas overhead....After a while the stream from the stretcher above lessened and started to drip again and I heard and felt the canvas move as the man on the stretcher settled more comfortably.

"How is he?" the Englishman called back. "We're almost up."

"He's dead I think," I said (Hemingway 61).

One Hemingway critic draws comparisons between the occurrence of the images of wounds in Hemingway's fiction and a psychological process that Sigmund Freud has coined "repetition-compulsion" (Young 54). The consistent repetition of unwanted or terrifying experiences is a type of recollection that goes beyond a healthy mental filtration of experience. This compulsion to recall painful memories disregards what Freud calls the "pleasure principle" (quoted in Young 165).

War was not a pleasurable experience for Henry. It has already been shown how his character at the beginning of the novel was moving toward disillusionment and a reexamination of his purpose in the ambulance corps. But there is also the issue of the psychological repercussions of being wounded in the war. Certainly, the obsessive recollection of his and others' wounds suggests an intrinsic struggle with the meaning of wounds. Also, the traumatic experience of being wounded is unlike any other wounding mentioned in the previous texts of Homer, *Beowulf*, or Shakespeare. The wounding of Frederick Henry has been called by one critic a "trauma upon the psyche" (Eby 224). Another critic has written, "the woundings of Hemingway and his hero certainly bear all the marks of traumatic experience" (Young 167). Literally defined, a trauma is described as "a bodily injury" or "mental shock" (Webster 694). Frederick Henry is bodily injured but it is his recollection of the injury that suggests a more profound mental, perhaps spiritual, involvement in the experience. Henry remembers becoming

disembodied. He recalls the moment of death and then a gradual receding back to life. He says:

There was a flash, as when a blast furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind. I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back. I breathed and was back (Hemingway 54).

While Henry's description of being hit by a mortar shell sounds detailed and technical there is, in this passage, a subtle suggestion of a most profound experience. The retraction ("I felt myself rush bodily out") and contraction ("I felt myself slide back") that takes place in the flow of the recollection is suggestive of being trapped in an ambiguous middle place between life and death, a place in which Henry "floated" before returning to his body. Also, the repetitive use of prepositions to indicate places of being such as "out" and "back" are strikingly nondescript for a writer who has henceforth shown an obsessive attention to detail. Henry says "I felt myself rush bodily out and out and out" but he does not indicate where he goes. He also says, "I felt myself slide back. I breathed and was back" but his audience can only assume that he means back into his body and therefore back to life. Perhaps this repetition suggests a compulsive desire to express what cannot ultimately be expressed. It would then seem that Frederick Henry's wound is a psychologically traumatic experience that Henry must struggle to make sense of through recollection.

For Hemingway, being wounded in the war, and later adapting his experience for his fiction, produced a suitable outlet for expressing new views on war and its effect on the individual. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the wound is an image associated with psychological trauma, a harsh, often undesirable, reality, and heroic disillusionment. This "modern wound" is in sharp contrast to the wounds immortalized in pre-modern war literature. Despite the degrees to which heroism is

discussed, reexamined, or contrived in ancient, medieval, and renaissance texts, the wound is a universal image of heroic affirmation. What accounts for the change in the significance and meaning of the wound as a symbol in literature would require a lengthy discourse on the origins and the emergence of modern thought. Stanley Cooperman in his book *World War I and the American Novel* suggests that the advanced technology of modern weapons fostered atrocities that “deprived death of any ‘moment of truth’” and denied the existence of heroism (186). For the soldiers that lined the trenches and died by the thousands, surprise air raids and death by gas must have seemed inhuman, irrational, and meaningless. And to survive with a wound from World War I may have been anything but glorious. The amputations of limbs due to wounds incurred from shrapnel and grenades left many men physically disabled, perhaps confined to wheelchairs, for the rest of their lives. Gas was first used in World War I, and its effects were ghastly. Gas attacks are what inspired Wilfred Owen to write “Dulci et Decorum Est,” the well-known antiwar poem. Owen describes in graphic detail the physical deterioration of gas victims in an attempt to debunk what he considers to be fraudulent war propaganda. He writes about “the old Lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori” (27-28). Owen takes a classical dictum and contradicts its meaning. Hemingway, like Owen, inverts the traditional symbolic meaning of the wound in his war novel. Both writers were products of a new type of war, a modern war that urged a redefinition of traditional values and necessitated new meanings. The image of the wound in *A Farewell to Arms* is an example of the reinvention of traditional literary devices in the literature of war as a response to the modern age. In Homer, wounds savagely inflicted signify, like medals, honor gained. In Beowulf, also, any detailed description of wounds is generally followed by an account of the hero’s glory. And in Shakespeare, wounds are actually recruitment devices inspiring a fellowship of brotherhood and an allegiance to an elite group. The wounds in these texts are both visible signs of heroism that remind everyone of the hero’s status and meaningful, symbolic outcomes of viable violence. By viable violence I mean brutality that can be understood as justified, where the end result seems to justify the means, at least in the terms of the specific society. This social understanding

that war can be meaningful is very different from what some soldiers, at least in a literary sense, experienced in more recent wars. Hemingway's emphasis on the psychological trauma of the individual at war in modern times involves an awareness that a disconnection exists between the older, outdated symbolic meaning of inflicted and incurred wounds on the battlefield and a present-day justification of violence. What is it that makes an earlier culture's savagery more personally acceptable than the savagery that exists in a more modern era? The answer lies in understanding the evolution of violence and brutality. Modern warfare is both strategic and random in a way that does not mirror the chaos of a primordial instinct for violence and survival, man against beast, man against man, brother for brother. The instruments of destruction in modern warfare are as mechanical and calculated as they are unpredictable. A grenade that is thrown haphazardly by an unknown soldier may be the unconfirmed death of another faceless soldier. Modern warfare could be, as a non-human force, compared to the physical universe in its cold, indifferent workings on the human condition. The wound, therefore, becomes the soldier's terrible reminder that the universe does not necessarily produce meaningful experiences. Cut off from any meaningful worldview, violence becomes unjustifiable.

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