Wings Of Fire: **Volume 4 (2026), No. 1**

Love is a Battlefield: Trauma & Relationships in A Farewell to Arms & Tender is the Night

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Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms *(1929) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's* Tender is the Night *(1934) are rarely discussed in relation to each other, but trauma and war intersect in both novels symbolically through the characters and their relationships, making their romances serve as metaphors for warfare.*

Beaumont, Cheyanne. 2026. "Love is a Battlefield: Trauma & Relationships in *A Farewell to Arms* & *Tender is the Nigh*t," Wings Of Fire. Volume 4, No. 1.

Though not frequently discussed in conjunction with one another, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (1934) share commonalities when put in conversation together. While *Tender* is not explicitly a war novel, it's a trauma-ridden narrative underscored by romance. While *Farewell* is considered a war novel, it's at times categorically a romance novel and also teeming with traumatic experience. When these novels are put into conversation, we see the way violence, trauma, and war motifs manifest in the characters' relationships. The arc of these relationships intersect with war and trauma, symbolically representing the disrupted and rapidly changing world after World War I, portraying a tension between expectations and reality, and illustrating the irrecoverable socio-cultural ruptures that took place due to the war. The rapidly evolving postwar world is described by Ann Douglas as permeated by "nervousness" (Douglas 200). The uncertainty of an era emerges in the conclusions of the novels that rely on the trauma and violence within the narratives to accentuate their post-war commentary. The characters, Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley of *Farewell*, and Dick Diver and Nicole Warren of *Tender*, embody the nature of the war and trauma through their relationships. Despite the novels being set in different times, both relationships in the novels serve as explorations of war where violence and trauma intersect, through their behavior and in their relationship from origins to demise, turning their relationships into a figurative battlefield where experiences and sentiments of the war are explored.

Some scholars assess Hemingway's style and *Farewell's* narration as complicating notions of gender where trauma intersects with typical gender roles. They contend that a disruption of gender roles occurs in *A Farewell To Arms* by contradicting the traditional assessment of Hemingway's prose as "masculine." Hemingway's prose is often perceived as enacting masculinity in itself, described by Peter Schwenger as "one sense of the masculine values he depicts: the restraint of emotions, the stiff upper lip, the macho hermeticism" (Herndl 40). According to Charles Hatten, Hemingway expresses the complexity of masculine restraint battling with the feminized desire to speak of trauma (ie, express emotion) through his prose, "mimic[ing] a masculine emotional reticence now understandable, amidst the redefinition of gender boundaries of the period" (Hatten 82). But Diane Herndl asserts that silent

stoicism after WWI is not necessarily a masculine virtue but can be seen as a traumatic response with epistemological roots in the suffering silence of female experience (Herndl 41). Frederic's narration, as expressive of gender ambiguity, is further complicated by the presence of trauma. To Herndl, Frederic is in another narrative paradox of simultaneously occupying the present and the past, echoing elements of shell shock that influence the complication of masculine reticence and feminized silence (Herndl 39). In the prose, there is a gendered and traumatic struggle of masculinity and femininity as a result of war experiences that is enacted in the psyches of *Farewell's* main characters.

Gender ambiguity as a dissonant response to trauma and war experience is a result of the instability of masculinity during the time of the war, which manifests as psychological dissonance. Hatten argues that Hemingway's portrayal of war shows the "discrepancy between the lived experience of war as an inadequate realization of masculine ideals and the apotheosis of war by a state that itself ominously overshadowed any individual male's autonomy" and argues that Hemingway's, "obsession with masculine identity is in part response to a chastened sense of the diminished degree of male autonomy in economic and political life" (Hatten 81). The incongruity of masculine expectations of war presented to those who served versus the experienced reality of it, in essence, created a masculine malady, both during the war and socio-culturally afterward, which is explored in *Tender is the Night*. The erosion of masculinity in *Farewell* is described by Herndl, wherein "masculinity itself becomes a self-inflicted wound" (Herndl 42). In other words, she argues that the construction of gender ultimately becomes oppressive to masculine identities. Herndl and Hatten argue that masculine performances were jeopardized because the reality of war was, in essence, anything but masculine: it was punctuated by technology and medicine in ways that disrupted traditional gender performances and killed masculine ideas of the hero (Herndl 42, Hatten 83). In her essay on *A Farewell To Arms*, Michelle Huang posits that the situational relevance of the war concurrently amplified the role of the feminine, as depicted in nurses such as Catherine Barkley, though wartime narratives (and even scholarship) remain dominated by a masculine perspective of war (Huang 201).

The character of Catherine Barkley, while historically under-analyzed, further complicates notions of gender and trauma. Linda Patterson Miller has explained that some early feminist critics criticized Hemingway's depiction of Catherine's character, seeing her as shallow and as subscribing to the fate of "Hemingway women,"-- that is, reduced to being a vessel of marginalization and subjected to Hemingway's own misogyny, especially in the context of her death (Miller 5). However, some more recent scholars disagree with this analysis of Catherine's character in *Farewell*. Huang argues that it is more interesting to see Catherine's complexities of character in relation to her own duties (and her own traumas) as a war nurse; such a reading would be a "radical break" from earlier feminist readings that see Catherine only as representative of "Hemingway's fear and hostility toward women" which "can be resolved only by her death" (200). Anoud Ziad Al-Tarawneh and Abeer Alrawashdeh similarly reject the conventional framing of Hemingway as sexist or misogynist, arguing that, "Hemingway is neither a feminist nor a misogynist, especially in the way he puts male and female protagonists in the same mold and circumstances that made the readers sympathise with both of them in the same degree" (46). These positions are dependent on readings of Catherine as a woman serving in World War I and experiencing similar trauma to Frederic; they also rely on us seeing parallels between Frederic and Catherine that demonstrate the intersectionality of gender and trauma.

So we can see Catherine and Frederic in terms of their similarity to one another and their relationship's divergence from traditional gendered expectations. As Catherine and Frederic similarly experience psychological trauma from the war, they both rely on the same coping mechanisms, such as avoidance and silence (Al-Tarawneh & Alrawashdeh 38). Their romance itself functions as an anaesthetic: Al-Tarawneh and Alrawashdeh argue that, "the two of them use love as a means to repress hidden traumas that are not easy to repress without replacing them with romantic memories" (Al-Tarawneh & Alrawashdeh 38). But their relationship still undermines Frederic's masculinity as Catherine routinely assumes control of him in their sexual dynamic, blurring notions of masculine and feminine identities (Hatten 94). Hatten argues that, "[Catherine's] desire for transgressions of gender

boundaries is a crucial part of the couple's situation in the novel, and it anticipates postwar society's increased access to sexuality for women and the blurring of gender boundaries" (Hatten 95). *A Farewell to Arms* becomes more than a war novel defined by a romantic relationship, but a traumatic narrative illustrating the psychological, social, and cultural effects of the war, portraying the disastrous effects trauma has on people.

Unlike *A Farewell to Arms*, *Tender is the Night* is not typically regarded as a war novel, but it is suffused with remnants of the war in its motifs, language, and depiction of the war's socio-cultural impacts, which strongly affect the characters' identities. Critics such as Milton Stern and James Meredith attest that Fitzgerald's backdrop of the war in *Tender* is a deliberate metaphor that enacts concern over the war's impact on the psyche, not just of the individual, but as a wider, social and cultural phenomenon (Rennie 182). The war of *Tender* is spoken of in regards to the past, Dick lamenting that the war was how the world destroyed itself; he sees post-war reality as fractured and irrevocably damaged, and aligns himself with the ideologies of the past (Rennie 184). Stern describes the world after WWI as destabilized, a world lacking all the "old virtues and grace that blew up with World War I" (Stern 80). According to David Rennie, Dick's sentiments toward the past and pre-war ideologies position him as "long[ing] nostalgically for an era whose passing has left him in a world with which he feels out of sympathy" (Rennie 184). Dick's nostalgia is a result of post-war social upheaval, which effectively created disillusionment. Rennie says that Dick "looks back to the social cohesion and stability that he views as being upturned by modernity" (Rennie 185). Dick's language conflates war and the language of love, and in so doing relates romance to violence and trauma in its allusions to Nicole's sexual abuse (Von Cannon 47). The war functions then as a social marker for Dick's identification with past generations, exposing the fragility of his identity as it corresponds with outdated values.

Scholars discuss the prominence of trauma in *Tender is the Night* and how it relates to war. Michael Von Cannon considers how Nicole's madness is consistent with post-WWI experience; her schizophrenia is representative of "the horrors of war" and associated with shell-shock (Von Cannon 47). Though Dick was a non-combatant, his experience of the war was still defined by a type of shell-shock, which he calls "non-combatant shell shock," wherein the drastic changes post-WWI and warlike experiences cause madness. Von Cannon credits Dick's lack of war service as part of the reason for his eventual decline. He insinuates that, as symbolically patriotic Dick is in his tether to the old world, he still "wants to incur losses, to become financially, physically, and emotionally bankrupt in the marital transaction" (Von Cannon 47). In this way, Dick is able to perform soldierhood and be implicated in a type of battle through his relationship with Nicole. Dick is also able to enact shell shock and stimulate a traumatic wound through his assumption of the role of Nicole's father in their relationship dynamic. Von Cannon says, "Dick determines to experience Nicole's warlike trauma as a perpetrator and victim of incest, thus allowing his wife to transfer her anger and resentment to him while he takes on the kind of physical and psychological disintegration that initially plagues her" (Von Canno 49). As a result, Dick is simultaneously associated with nationalist ideals of the pre-WWI through his enacted role as her father in their dynamic and with more a cosmopolitan world associated both with their lifestyle and the traumatic wound built from the transference of trauma; this, in effect, makes Dick "assume a schizophrenic split-personality" (Von Cannon 49).

Much scholarship on *Tender is the Night* sees Dick's masculinity and relationships as a source of trauma for him. Tiffany Joseph explains how trauma is a gendered experience in *Tender*, actualized especially through Dick's feminization across the narrative (Joseph 71). In identifying as shell-shocked, Dick feminizes himself by associating his psyche with trauma, a position that was perceived as weak in the postwar era (Joseph 71). Dick is also repeatedly emasculated and thus retraumatized in his relationship with Nicole, as they both represent the unstable gender roles post-WWI. Joseph explains, "Dick and Nicole are seen as symbols of a larger concern with gender in the postwar era; they represent both the trauma and the potential violence of gender expectations" (Joseph 73). Identifying Dick's trauma as a result of "his repeated failure to achieve the contemporary masculine ideal" (Joseph 72), such as his declining career and financial dependence on Nicole's father's money, makes his masculinity,

or its futility, effectively a wound. According to Joseph, it is salt in that wound that female characters can leverage elements of gender performance that Dick can't. Rosemary leverages femininity for professional success while Nicole leverages masculinity to eventually earn autonomy from Dick (Joseph 77). But Dick's gender performance fails. Joseph says, "Recognizing performativity does not seem to be enough to overcome gender's traumatic potential" (Joseph 78). Joseph concludes with the concept that Dick's traumatic experience of gender expectations results in a decline that mimics the behaviors of traumatized soldiers, like his alcoholism. The emasculation of Dick through his relationships results in his "defeat" as Nicole is liberated. Their relationship and its outcomes are further considered a metaphor of the evolving postwar world; Dick's romanticism of war, his gendered traumas, and his eventual defeat mean that "The war is over, the new world has won, and Dr. Richard Diver, American, is dead" (Stern 83). Symbolically, the war motifs, psychological instability, and trauma of *Tender is the Night* are enacted in the characters, complicating notions of gender and war through their portrayals.

The literature suggests the intersectionality of gender and trauma in the novels, but we can further see the relationships of the characters as enacting the war and post-war socio-cultural sentiments. In effect, their relationships are a symbolic battleground. The novels are permeated with war motifs as their relational outcomes represent post-war reality. By examining the origins and eventual deterioration of these relationships, we can investigate the complicated notions of trauma, gender, and romance in the novels. *A Farewell to Arms* and *Tender is the Night* don't outwardly appear to have much in common, yet they both intertwine war motifs and romance, which makes them interesting to discuss in the context of one another. While *Farewell* explicitly has soldiers and takes place during World War One, *Tender* symbolically creates soldiers through the trauma imbued in the narrative. Both novels are strewn with trauma and complicated gender dynamics in the main character's relationships, while as postwar novels they inevitably communicate postwar realities.

The origins of both of the couples' relationships are inextricably linked to trauma. Frederic and Catherine meet as a result of WWI since they're both stationed in the same region of Italy. Their early interactions center around their unusual and traumatic experiences of being foreigners on a European warfront. They discuss the war while revealing the newly constructed complex psyches that have developed as a result of war exposure. Catherine is especially transparent in the ways her trauma has affected her, saying, "People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on. He didn't have a sabre cut. They blew him all to bits" (Hemingway 17). She reveals that her perceptions of the world are changed, chiefly through exposure to wartime violence. Frederic leans into performative masculinity and stoicism here by repeatedly revealing his lack of response: "I did not say anything" (Hemingway 16, 17). The interaction demonstrates gendered responses to trauma through a contrast in expressing vulnerability and silence, which Herndl identifies as a motif. Their camaraderie quickly evolves into romance. Due to the psychological strain of trauma and wartime, they rely on each other for romantic and sexual comfort as a distraction from the harrowing reality they're experiencing. In terms of the traumatic reality of the war, their relationship becomes a type of anesthetic by becoming an escape. As the narrative progresses, they increasingly rely on each other and their relationship to survive, an example of Al-Tarawneh & Alrawashdeh's emphasis on their interdependence for survival. Frederic, in some of his most challenging moments, relies on the image, even the mere idea of Catherine, to cope. After escaping the firing squad, he says, "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My god, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine. To-night maybe. No that was impossible. But to-morrow night, and a good meal and sheets and never going away again except together" (Hemingway 198). The coupling of Frederic and Catherine makes them a unit, their relationship's origin credited to the war. But the war also inevitably becomes enacted within the relationship, resulting in its demise.

The main couple in *Tender is the Night* is similarly brought together because of trauma. It is Nicole's experience of violent sexual trauma that places her in a clinic for psychiatric treatment, where Dick is invited to the clinic as a colleague by her doctor and meets her. From there, the two begin a correspondence. Dick, although not a soldier, was a military psychiatrist and wore a military uniform

that aligned him with soldierhood; similarly, Nicole's trauma and experiences with violence also correspond to post-war psychiatric trauma, as Michael Von Cannon notes. So though *Tender* is not literally set during World War I, we can, as Milton Stern argues, see the novel as having pervasive war motifs which manifest in Dick and Nicole as individuals prior to their relationship. These war motifs, however, extend through the duration of their relationship. Nicole occupies the role of traumatized soldier, while Dick, as her "mon capitaine," is in charge of her welfare as both her husband and personal doctor. Together as a unit, they navigate the landmine that is violent trauma and "shell-shock" symptoms, the erratic nature of reality and behavior post traumatic experience.

Both couples attempt to hold on to a sense of normalcy in terms of the traditions of the pre-war world as a means of ignoring their current traumatic reality. Frederic and Catherine attempt to erase the war by retreating to Switzerland. Their relationship dynamic attempts to model that of a "normal" family with a father in Frederic, a mother in Catherine, and an expectant child in "little Catherine." They completely isolate themselves from the violence they endured, seeking to occupy an idyllic place with no traces of their trauma. And though it works for a short while, such routes of escapism are limited. Eventually, their veneer of peace is punctuated by the inescapability of violence through a violent act that revives their trauma. The idea of the patriarchal nuclear family and other traditional structures as being a comfort to the traumatized psyche is also engaged in *Tender*. Dick and Nicole construct a family unit through their marriage and children to posit a sense of normalcy. They also consistently rely on camaraderie, travel, and various other superficialities to keep themselves occupied, whether that's through throwing "really bad parties" (Hemingway, 27) or making exorbitant purchases to cope. But for Dick and Nicole, the situation is worsened as the traditional family is inverted and falsified. Nicole and her money function as the patriarch of the family, while Dick assumes the role of caregiver, hostess, and matriarch in private. The public perceives the opposite, however, with Dick taking the masculine role and Nicole the feminine. Scholars like Joseph argue that these kinds of gender performances are damaging to the psyche due to their instability. Ultimately, these behaviors are distractions that attempt to conceal the trauma in their relationship. Such attempted escapism erodes as the reality of the trauma is inevitably exposed.

The demise of the relationships in *Farewell* and *Tender* are incited by violent acts that evoke the traumas the relationships are founded on and expose the traumatized reality of the world they attempted to erase. The traumas are retriggered in different ways and at different points across both novels, but both rely on blood and death, as extensions of war motifs, to symbolically represent the violence of war and its traumatic effects. Catherine's childbirth at the end of *Farewell* is harrowing, violent, and graphic. The scene parallels aspects of Frederic's injury from earlier in the novel, as it's in the hospital and inevitably requires surgery that he authorizes. The role of the soldier shifts from Frederic to Catherine in this scene. Wearing a hospital gown as her soldier's uniform, Catherine has to fight the battle of childbirth. The circumstances surrounding the birth also mimic explicit wartime experience. Hemingway relies on the ambiguity of the word "gas" to create symbolism in what Frederic administers to Catherine in the hospital. Gas simultaneously alludes both to the nitrous oxide that Catherine is receiving as an anesthetic and to the atrocity of mustard gas used to kill in World War I. As she struggles and encounters great pains, Catherine relies on the gas. She says, ostensibly in reference to whether or not she will actually give birth, "I try as hard as I can. I push it down but it goes away. There it comes. Give it to me" (Hemingway 271). But here, the language of "pushing it down" could also refer to how they've tried to ignore their traumatic experiences. Yet, they always come back and are often painful, as it is represented in Catherine's birth scene. The trauma of the war in this scene intensifies as Frederic is forced to make a decision about how to proceed with the birth, and he chooses a cesarean; to try and cut it out of her.

Frederic electing Catherine for a cesarean-section is a graphic and violent choice that is itself traumatic. Hemingway only alludes to its bloody reality in moments where Frederic refers to the gore of "skinned rabbit" (Hemingway 276) of the child and how he observed the doctor "sew up" Catherine, saying "The incision looked very long" (Hemingway 277). The conclusion of the birth scene is that the

child--their son and their romance personified--is dead. Symbolically, the death of their son could relate to the sheer number of young soldiers who were killed in the war, many of whom weren't yet adults. Blood follows the cesarean as Catherine suffers hemorrhages until she also dies. The moment is tainted by death and blood, rupturing any idyllic ideas of the world they tried to nurture by escaping the war. Instead, Frederic is left alone and retraumatized by the hospital and the violence of the moment. This results in him completely shutting down, not desiring to speak to anyone and wanting isolation. It is a melancholic, macabre ending that elucidates symbolic commentary about the post-war social and cultural climate.

Similarly, Dick and Nicole's relationship in *Tender* deteriorates due to a violent and retraumatizing act, one also characterized by death and blood. The scene relies on the existence and acknowledgment of Nicole's prior trauma as graphic and violent in order to work. After Jules Peterson is murdered by an anonymous assailant on Rosemary's bed, Dick righteously plays the role of a hero. He springs into action and uses his connections to clean up the mess. Dick skillfully handles the dead body of Peterson. It's explained that he "held it so that further hemorrhages from the wound would flow into the man's clothes" (Fitzgerald 110). Peterson's blood stains his clothes and Rosemary's bed. Dick enlists Nicole's help in the clean-up effort to protect Rosemary's reputation. Fitzgerald writes, "Quickly Dick and Nicole exchanged bundles across the corridor" (Fitzgerald 110). Dick passes the bloodied bedsheets from Rosemary's room to Nicole. Rosemary, the underage girl, and Dick, the older man, are replaying aspects of Nicole's sexual assault by her father. This association is what distresses Nicole; she says, "I want it to be over" before she suffers a mental breakdown, as the moment retriggers her.

Nicole's traumatized reaction to the bloodied sheets incites the demise of their relationship as Nicole associates Dick with her predatory father. In her breakdown, she shouts, "It's you–" (Fitzgerald 122) to Dick, implicating him as a presumed assaulter of children and simultaneously as the figure of her father. This leads Dick to deteriorate, losing the battle for power in their relationship. Dick becomes an alcoholic and eventually develops a fragile psyche, questioning his own identity and behaviors. In the Italian jail he ponders if he is such a predator in regards to being presumed to be a criminal who raped a young girl. To an uninterested audience and himself, Dick muses, "Maybe I did–" (Fitzgerald 235), exhibiting symptoms of a deteriorating psyche and a slipping grip on reality. As for Nicole, the deterioration of their relationship results in her eventual freedom and triumph. As trauma permeated their relationship's formation, its elements provoked trauma that resulted in its demise. The separate outcomes of Dick and Nicole as they split allude to a larger socio-cultural commentary on the post-war era as enacted through them.

A Farewell to Arms and *Tender is the Night* ultimately conclude with open-ended commentary about the post-war future. In contrast to the picturesque and idealized version of life Frederic and Catherine try to have in Switzerland, the reality after the retriggering traumatic event is grievous. Frederic and Catherine's repeated efforts to shield themself from trauma and violence are futile. As Catherine says during the birth, "I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now." Frederic replies, "Everybody is that way," (Hemingway 275). Their dialogue alludes to the fractured nature of the world post-war. Further, the result of their "idyllic" love affair, which is their stillborn son, symbolizes complex feelings about the future. Describing his son's body as a "skinned rabbit" suggests a hunting motif; it evokes the predatory nature of war preying on the young and helpless. The fact that the child is stillborn can be interpreted as meaning that subsequent generations will be "wounded" from the war's disruptive effects. Generations born to replace those lost will inevitably feel the effects of the war even though they did not physically go through it; they are potentially produced to go to slaughter for another war like the expendable game symbolized in the rabbit.

Tender similarly enacts post-war socio-cultural commentary through its characters, especially Dick. The inverted gender roles of Nicole and Dick express the drastically changed social and cultural realities of the post-war world. After Nicole's liberated freedom and triumph that results in her and

Dick's divorce, Dick retreats to the U.S. like a soldier returning home after a loss. He's fully traumatized in terms of emasculation and has built up dependency on alcohol to cope with his experiences. Submersed in his habits, Dick perpetuates cycles of trauma. As Nicole says of Dick's life post-marriage, he was "much admired by the ladies" and "became entangled with a girl who worked in a grocery store" (Fitzgerald 315). The allusion is that Dick keeps getting "entangled" with girls and is enacting cycles of patriarchal abuse through his symbolic association with her father and his connection to the old world. Dick portrays the struggle of the old world versus "current" time post-war. His inability to change or adapt results in him becoming the recurring cause of trauma in a younger generation. It stems from his time abroad, as both a figurative soldier and a traumatized individual. He symbolizes the demise of the inflexible, because the new world requires one to change and accept the new world order. Those who embrace the post-war world, like Nicole, will thrive unburdened by the traumatic past.

Though *A Farewell to Arms* and *Tender is the Night* are two novels that would appear to have little in common, their main relationships and their reliance on trauma motifs invite us to put them into conversation. The scholarly literature on the novels touches on their complicated aspects: gendered trauma, the parallelism between characters, and the impact of war and wounds on identity. But scholarship seldom discusses the two novels together or how the relationships themselves convey war motifs. This paper examines how the traumatic wounds from war, as literal in *Farewell* or as figurative in *Tender*, are portrayed in the relationships of the novels from their origins to their ends. The result is a beginning interrogation of the comparisons that exist in the novels, especially in the shared ways trauma manifests after the fact. The open-endedness of both of the novels' endings encourages larger socio-cultural connections between the narratives and post-war sentiments. They express a dark realism and a concern for the ruptured world and what the future may hold. Trauma and war intersect in the novels symbolically through the characters and their relationships, making their romances serve as metaphors for warfare through what they symbolically represent.

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