

## Hemingway's War Fiction and "The Best God-Damned God You Ever Knew"

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### Abstract Resumen

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*My God painted many wonderful pictures and wrote some very good books and fought Napoleon's rear-guard in the retreat from Moskova and fought on both sides at Gettysburg and did away with yellow fever and taught Picasso how to draw and sired Citation. He is the best god-damned God you ever knew. But I have never met him. I've seen a lot of his pictures though in the Prado and I read his books and his short stories every year. And I know the exact details of how he killed George Armstrong Custer, which nobody else knows, and my god when he played foot-ball was Jim Thorpe and when he pitched he was Walter Johnson and the ball looked as big as a small marble and it would kill you if it hit you. So my God never dusted anybody off ever.*

*Scottie's [F. Scott Fitzgerald] God, at the end was Irving Thalberg. A very nice guy. But your god shouldn't die on you so XXXXXXXXXXXX (cant spell fragily). (Baker, Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961 694. Sic throughout in a letter to Arthur Mizener)*

The "god-damned God" Ernest Hemingway writes of in this epigram is exemplified in Hemingway's soldier protagonists. Oxymoronic expressions such as this encapsulate the conceptualization of religiosity these characters express. The sharp juxtaposition of contrasting ideas of religiosity and profanity, high thought and banality creates an antithesis that, with the difficulty of the Modernist to accurately capture profundities with mutable words, works quite aptly in defining how these characters feel

about God and religion. Ernest Hemingway's three major war novels (*A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *Across the River and into the Trees*) will be discussed in chronological order, and the discussion will be augmented by commentary contemporary to Hemingway and to today. Hemingway stated the abilities of God (his God) in terms of great meaning to him, and the epigram of this study also displays a tongue-in-cheek tone due to the impossibility of relating a definition of God. In his 2002 book *Hemingway in His Own Country*, Robert E. Gajdusek calls this "Hemingway's unique religious belief," but the religiosity discussed below applies to Hemingway's soldiers are representatives of many real-world soldiers (82).

The "Doughboy's religion" will be discussed. There is much fiction and personal memoir that discussed the unique religious ethos of the soldier. In Hemingway's war fiction, the soldiers' military duty is forefronted (as it should be to the faithful soldier), and the religious elements of their nature are obscured almost to invisibility. Thus, while the mission of Frederic Henry, the protagonist of *A Farewell to Arms* (*AFTA*), is to eliminate Fascism from Italy, Robert Jordan's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (*FWBT*) to blow the bridge, and Robert Cantwell's *Across the River and into the Trees* (*ARIT*) to close his military career, the implicit actions and gestures of these soldiers exhibit a religiosity very important to themselves. It is a religiosity the soldiers cannot communicate due to their training and lack of religiously emotive tools.

Metaphor whose divine tenor is variously compared to such banal vehicles as racehorses, rear guard military detachments, and popular sports celebrities, and the use of "low" diction are apt because the conception of God to these soldiers (and, seemingly, to Hemingway) is one of a divine being able to be thought of in human, ordinary terms. The fact that these characters refer to God (and, at times, pray or talk to him) in common speech stems from their idea of God as a real entity--a friend, of sorts, who values deed over word--rather than a spectral ineffable only to be feared. The word "Christian," to many, invokes ideas of regular church worship in congress with others of similar denomination, piety (variously defined by religious leaders), and belief in God and Jesus Christ. Despite the latter ideal, this definition would be quite different for one who focuses on deed over word in a Modernistic mind-set. The essence of Christianity, to the characters under study, is a belief in Jesus and God; whether that is demonstrated with

others in a certain edifice or felt internally by a lone soldier on a hillside, that essence remains intact. Evaluation of true, essential Christianity is not to be made by anyone other than the individual who evaluating himself. Many, but certainly not all, still carry conceptualizations of what it is to be a Christian (or to be part of other large groups, such as being members of a nationality) based on the antediluvian beliefs of speaking of the divine in antiquated, elevated language (if He is spoken or written of at all); dictation of how to be religious by elite potentates; and the heavy importance placed on congregational prayer and statement of faith.

Noting the change in such notions Hemingway writes about, Benedict Anderson believes that notions of "nation" and "nationalism" only arose historically when three cultural conceptions "lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds" (Anderson 89).

The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Ummah Islam, and the rest. [...] Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all, death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them (ibid.)

The other two<sup>1</sup> are not exactly relevant to this discussion, but this first point speaks directly to the meetings of Paganism and Christianity (or a kind of "secular Christianity"<sup>2</sup>) the characters under study carry. The decline of the concept of privileged access to divine truth via a particular script-language afforded people the ability to imagine themselves part of a larger world of writers and readers of common languages. Anderson writes that the "imagined community" of Christendom, for example, was eroded by the overpowering of languages of the aristocracy and clergy by vernaculars of the public. Christianity survived and flourished, but the esoterics of rarefied and antiquated languages faded (but have not completely vanished<sup>3</sup>). This is how Ernest Hemingway wrote his soldiers' conception of Christianity, too. An intricately carved, highly decorative altar may or may not be as conducive to religious experience as a lonely military cot or hillside. The Spain Robert Jordan fights for is not merely a

geographic Spain but rather his idealization of "Spain" as a place of freedom exalting the individual rather than one of Fascist dictatorship exalting a certain race and a forced nationalism.

In the earliest novel of this study, recall Frederic Henry's earlier statement of the embarrassment he feels about the words sacred, glorious, sacrifice, and the expression "in vain" (*AFTA* 184). He concludes that "There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity" (*AFTA* 185). Henry thinks this after Gino uses the expression "in vain," and Henry notes that it Gino uses such phrases because he is a patriot. "Gino was a patriot, so he said things that separated us sometimes, but he was also a fine boy and I understood his being a patriot" (*ibid.*). Thus, Frederic Henry is not a patriot (supporter of Italy, *per se*), but rather a supporter of something else, something attached less to a certain country and attached more to a general moral ethos.<sup>4</sup> The March 29, 1918 *Stars and Stripes* has it this way: "The American doughboy has had his baptism of fire, but he has not yet been christened" (qtd in Mead 67). Hemingway, after receiving the Bronze Star for his short service at the front in 1944, wrote, "I was decorated with the Bronze Star, which was the highest piece of junk they could give a civilian and an irregular" (qtd in Whiting 271). It is not the medal but the soldier's own meaning of what he did; it is not the country but the national ideal; it is not the church but the personal meaning of religion--the integration into religion.

The first of the six ways in which Ernest Hemingway's soldiers experience religious integration to be discussed here is "The Best God-Damned God You Ever Knew."<sup>5</sup> In short, this is the social setting these American infantrymen (termed doughboys<sup>6</sup>) find themselves in that redefined religion for them. Definitions of "religion" and degrees of religiosity are interpreted differently by people of different religious backgrounds. The base camps, training ground, battlefield, trenches, and other uniquely war-time settings provided for a "religion" unique to many soldiers, and all protagonists of Hemingway's war fiction. These figures exercise a mixture of childhood religious upbringing and a religious spirit of camaraderie. Quite typically, their childhood religious upbringings are either omitted or have proven to be useless to the mature man. Therefore, these soldiers find a certain sacredness created by them in the society of their

fellow soldiers. War--the setting, the fear, the test--proves a very different state of living than the former home life of these soldiers, as with just about every soldier in fiction or reality.

In his Introduction to *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, T.S. Eliot writes, "The first important assertion is that no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion; according to the point of view of the observer, the culture will appear to be the product of the religion, or the religion the product of the culture" (13). It seems that no biographer, interviewer, or scholar who devotes significant time to Hemingway spares discussing religion in Hemingway's life or work. It also appears that Hemingway himself devoted much thought to religion. Citing one example of many, during mundane lunch conversation with Edward Stafford prior to which Mr. Stafford interviewed Hemingway about his craft, the discussion turned to the work of other writers. Mr. Stafford set down the conversation for *Writer's Digest* magazine. "My wife proposed and defended Graham Greene," Mr. Stafford writes, "whom Papa good naturedly thought was 'a jerk' because he 'traded on his religion' and was a convert. It was bad enough, he thought, for a woman to be converted, but for a man, it was unforgivable"<sup>7</sup> (Stafford 170).

Many scholars and teachers of literature have termed the Hemingway protagonist a pagan. According to the *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, a pagan is "one who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods" (10<sup>th</sup> edition). This would seem to define these characters, as they do express an outward Laodicean attitude toward religion and seek the sensual pleasures of sex and alcohol. However, this paganism does not exclude them from being Christian. Returning to Reverend Barton, a sermon he gave on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1912 (it is difficult to verify, but there is a strong likelihood that young Ernest Hemingway was in attendance) titled "Religion in Relation to Righteousness" develops up this seemingly contradictory definition of paganism:

Paganism has produced some noble men. I hope to meet in heaven a great many men who on earth were pagans, but whose love of goodness, and whose faithfulness to the best revelation of God they had, made them followers of the essential and eternal Christ. They were Christian though

they never heard of Christ. [The pagan's code of] ethics [. . .] depends on Him. (Barton, "Religion in Relation to Righteousness" 12)

Barton's sentiment regarding Christian paganism is not unique. Nine years after Barton's sermon on the nobility of some pagans, Max Brod wrote,

Doing away with allegories: Christianity, having entered the world opposing paganism, discovered--and not by accident, but following lawful reactions--within itself stronger and stronger affinities to paganism, and ended up by forming with the latter a mixture of ideas and feelings, a mixture which is now [c. 1921] being used everywhere in Europe and America, in private and in public. This Christian-pagan amalgamation--the final link in Christian development--dominates today's world in such exclusiveness as no *Weltanschauung* has ever formed. (Brod 231)

Brod assumes that the world circa 1921 witnessed the "final link in Christian development," an idea every generation feels to some extent.<sup>8</sup> In this aspect, every generation is not exactly correct; Christianity, as history has proven, changes temporally and geographically, but development continues now as it will in the future. Despite Brod's eschatological thought, he rightly leads thought into questioning both the degree of paganism in Christianity during the temporal context in which Ernest Hemingway wrote, and the definitions of Christianity and paganism might have changed before and during that era.

These words of Barton and Brod really get to the heart of the Hemingway war protagonist. He is a man of strong, good moral ethics but whose revelation of God is perhaps unlike that of his predecessors. The soldier's God is not a divine being limited to the theoretical, unreal world of Genesis; his God is the down-to-earth Being of Ecclesiastes who works in the background while man finds his truth in human experience. Their revelation is not the brilliant flashes seen with Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4) or Abraham and the three travelers (Genesis 18:1-19:1). Their revelation is more along the lines told in the book of Romans:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because

that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (*KJV*, Romans 1:18-21)

In *A Farewell to Arms*, there are several indications that Frederic Henry wants to believe (to be *croyant*, as the Count Greffi terms it) but cannot. This failure at attaining a religious experience is not because he cannot due to the futility and unjustness he has experienced; it is because he does not know how to believe.

While playing billiards with the Count, Henry says, "I don't know about the soul." "Poor boy. We none of us know about the soul. Are you *Croyant*?" [asks the Count] "At night." Count Greffi smiled and turned the glass with his fingers. "I had expected to become more devout as I grow older but somehow I haven't," he said. "It is a great pity."

(*AFTA* 261)

And, one page later, before the Count and Henry exit:

"[. . .] And I hope you will live forever." [says Henry] "Thank you. I have. And if you ever become devout pray for me if I am dead. I am asking several of my friends to do that. I had expected to become devout myself but it has not come." [says Count Greffi] I thought he smiled sadly but I could not tell. He was so old and his face was very wrinkled, so that a smile used so many lines that all gradations were lost. "I might become very devout," I said. "Anyway, I will pray for you." "I had always expected to become devout. All my family died very devout. But somehow it does not come." (*AFTA* 262-263)

Henry's esteem for Count Greffi is very high; his narrative voice praises his "beautiful manners" (254), a trait regarded highly throughout Hemingway's fiction. Hemingway scholar Robert Gajdusek terms Greffi "an avatar of male integrity"

(Gajdusek, "A Farewell" 28). Greffi was a freelance soldier a generation before Henry, and Henry also admired Greffi's physical condition and lifestyle. Before the billiards game begins, Henry and the barman go fishing. The barman equates himself with Count Greffi in that both are too old for military service. Henry's esteem for the elder Greffi and their similar histories indicate that the younger character is on the path of becoming much like the older character.

At the close of Chapter 35, Greffi states to Henry, "We will walk up stairs together" (*AFTA* 263). Their upward progression can be contrasted with the Duke and his guest in Robert Browning's 1842 poem "My Last Duchess." After relating the clues of the sanguine disposal of his last duchess to his guest (who has come asking his daughter's hand in marriage), they descend the stairs together. The implication in this poem and in *A Farewell To Arms* is that a comity has been borne, symbolized by the mutual change in status (Ritual Studies would call this "incorporation" into a new phase). The mention of Greffi's family, however, implies a generational change in this progression. Greffi's family died devout but Greffi, at the age of 94, will, in all likelihood, not die devout. Henry, aged in the generation after Greffi (or more like the generation after that), is not excluded from attaining a state of devotion because, as is evidenced in Greffi's lineage, there is a generational shift regarding notions such as religious devotion.<sup>9</sup>

These men hold the belief that God is within all natural creations, and glorify Him, give thanksgiving, and avoid vanity and foolishness to the best of their human ability. Back to the hillside at the end of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the injured Robert Jordan thinks it odd that his broken leg does not hurt. "It truly doesn't hurt at all" (*FWBT* 468). He is not afraid of the death he will soon be entering. The Bible phrases this situation in the first book of Corinthians thusly:

So when the corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (*King James Version*, I Corinthians 15:54-55)

This is part of Jordan's integration in faith; his apparent paganism is really an enactment of the Christian ideals of charity, love, and other aspects developed later in this

discussion. Jordan's feeling of integration alleviates his suffering because, following the trajectory as set forth in scripture, he knows his nascent spiritual strength has changed him and moved him to victory through Jesus Christ.

Samuel T. Coleridge<sup>10</sup> viewed morality in terms the Hemingway war protagonist would understand. In his *Aids to Reflection*, he defines the roles of state and church and notes their relationship:

It is the State itself in its intensest federal union; yet at the same moment the Guardian and Representative of all personal Individuality. For the Church is the Shrine of morality; and in Morality alone the citizen asserts and reclaims his personal independence, his integrity. Our outward acts are efficient, and most often possible, only by coalition. As an efficient power, the agent, is but a fraction of unity: he becomes an integer only in the recognition and performance of the Moral Law. (Coleridge 196, emphasis in original)

Thus, state government and administrative bodies cannot provide all the unity a person needs. The church (and the affiliated scripture and dogma) cannot provide complete integrity either. There must be a three-way dynamic involving these two factions and a willing participant or integrant.

One must "omnipotently" circumspect writer for a just study; one cannot fairly speculate as to the writer's awareness to aspects imbedded in his or her work or of his or her psychology without extremely intimate and, ultimately, inaccessible knowledge of that writer's thoughts. However, one can look to the climate and environment in which the writer lived and worked, garnering material sufficient to arrive at modest conclusions regarding why a writer might have written as he or she did. Turning to verifiable historical and biographical elements that likely acted on Hemingway, the derivative and avant-position he and his work occupied, and the relevant effects of Hemingway and his writing are important aspects to study to this end.

The conception of being a Christian Hemingway defined in a letter to his mother (a regular church-goer and apt representative of the era preceding that of the Hemingway protagonist) when Ernest was 18 years old (dated 16 January 1918 from Kansas City)

provides an estimation of religiosity relevant to both Ernest Hemingway and his war protagonists throughout the rest of his life.

Don't worry or cry or fret about my not being a good Christian. I am just as much as ever and pray every night and believe just as hard so cheer up! Just because I'm a *cheerful* Christian ought not to bother you. The reason I don't go to church on Sunday is because always I have to work till 1 a.m. [. . .]. You know I don't rave about religion but am as sincere a Christian as I can be. [. . .] We [Ernest and a friend from Michigan] both believe in God and Jesus Christ and have hopes for a hereafter and creeds don't matter. (Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters* 4).

It is highly probable he wrote this letter to assuage his mother that her boy is not consorting too freely with the objects of his dirt-digging reportage, but the sentiments expressed seem to resound into the *données* in which many of his characters are written. Hemingway's journalism at this time frequently concerned prostitutes, criminals, and corrupt politicians—characters his mother surely thought to harbor ideals quite antithetical to those in Christianity.

Hemingway's first war novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, is about an American lieutenant named Frederic Henry serving with the Italian ambulance corps during World War I. The Great War—its baffling beginnings and purpose, temporal setting, cultural significance, and outcomes—effected American literary society and Ernest Hemingway enormously. It signaled a significant turning point in American history. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Lt. Henry muses, "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glory, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. [. . .] Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates" (185). This was the sentiment of many artists considering war and its effects. War quickly loses its romance when the reality of weaponry's deadly force is revealed before a soldier's eyes.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert Jordan thinks, "I wish Grandfather were here instead of me. Well, maybe we will all be together by tomorrow night. If there should be any such damn fool business as a hereafter, and I'm sure there isn't, he thought, I would certainly like to talk to him" (*FWBT* 338). The afterlife is questioned (but not

totally denied), and hackneyed creeds are mocked and thought to be impotent (excepting certain moments of prayer or recitation of literature).

Certainly, all combatants, civilians, and war writers (journalists and fiction writers) did not carry this unromantic view of either World War I or the Spanish Civil War. In fact, many personal narratives (letters home, diaries, etc. . .) are written in quite a romantic tone. Leslie Buswell served with the American Ambulance Field Service in France during World War I. His journal was recorded in *With the American Ambulance Field Service: Personal Letters of a Driver at the Front*, a short collection of journal entries "printed only for private distribution." Here is an excerpt of Buswell's entry for June 28, 1926: "I had to go to Auberge St. Pierre at about two o'clock this morning. This road is in full view of the Germans and much bombarded, and shrapnel burst close by, which reminded me that a lovely moonlight night with trees and hills and valleys dimly shaping themselves can be other than romantic" (Buswell). Similarly romantic in tone, William Yorke Stevenson, another American ambulance driver at the front in France, writes, for October 22, 1916,

The Boches dropped a number of shells on La Chalade Poste when I was there yesterday morning. A pane of glass above me, hit by an 'eclat,' fell on my head while I sat outside writing a letter. I don't know whether it is lucky or not to have that happen. For a moment I felt as if I were in one of those kaleidoscopes of childhood's happy days. About a bucketful of colored glass came scattering all around. It is like getting religion thrust upon one, so to speak. (Stevenson)

This was (or is) not the predominant conception of war, however. Robert Graves'<sup>11</sup> excellent autobiography *Good-Bye to All That* (1930) exemplifies much of the general feelings about The Great War. Death was a reality.

Once when I came home on leave from the war, I spent about a week of my ten days walking about on these hills to restore my sanity. I tried to do the same after I was wounded, but by that time the immediate horror of death was too strong for the indifference of the hills to relieve it. (Graves 47)

Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), notes the stark distinction between the placid pre-war sentiment and the sharp terrors felt when war became a reality. "The contrast between before and after here will remind us of the relation between, say, the golden summer of 1914 and the appalling December of that year" (Fussell 5). Philip Larkin, when considering pre-war days in relation to time after that December, writes in his poem "XCMXIV,"

Never such innocence,  
 Never before or since,  
 As changed itself to past  
 Without a word--the men  
 Leaving the gardens tidy,  
 The thousands of marriages  
 Lasting a little while longer:  
 Never such innocence again. (Larkin 28)

Society carried into this new era the language and ideas it was accustomed to and felt comfortable with. Much of the same diction and connotation used in discussing Christian crusades of times past was used in this new, motivation-less pursuit. As with most European/American expeditions (from 11<sup>th</sup> Century Crusades to the great Westward movement in the United States to the Gulf War), divine backing (or at least presence as adjudicator) was assumed by many.

One example of many is found in Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928).<sup>12</sup> Blunden noted, "The eastern sky that evening was all too brilliant with British rockets, appealing for artillery assistance. Westward, over blue hills, the sunset was all seraphim and cherubim" (Blunden 238). Thus, artillery fire is glorified in terms similar to Francis Scott Key's "Star Spangled Banner"<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, battle gave Blunden this faith-strong impression after he had already seen much warfare. The above quote appears in his war autobiography immediately after one bombing near Saint Eloi ("A steady bombardment with big shells began, and luckily most of them fell a few yards short, but the mental torture [. . .] was severe" (237-238)) and shortly before another near Ypres ("When we left this camp of disastered 1917, to be merged again in the slow amputation of Passchendaele, there was no singing. I think there were tears on some cheeks" (240).

This part of “the Doughboy’s religion”—the maintenance of faith in the face of despair—is found in Hemingway’s war fiction, too. But the Hemingway protagonist modifies Blunden’s unending faith in two major ways: first, Hemingway’s characters have uncertain religious stances to begin with, and, second, they find their religion in nontraditional ways and places. Keeping in mind Blunden’s<sup>14</sup> divine perspective on a sunset near the front, note the distinction Second Lieutenant William Henry Ratcliffe makes in a letter home from France (written June, 1916--about one month before being killed in action):

I was reading a story in one of the magazines that you sent out which was trying to prove that this war had a good effect on men’s minds and made them more religious that they were before. [. . .] What is there out here to raise a man’s mind out of the rut? [. . .] Everywhere the work of God is spoiled by the hand of man. One looks at a sunset and for a moment thinks that that at least is un-sophisticated, but an aeroplane flies across, and puff! puff! and the whole scene is spoilt by clouds of schrapnel smoke! (Ratcliffe 224-225)

Ratcliffe knows the image of which Blunden writes, but it is a fleeting image, roughly smudged by the presence of war. As evidenced in the full body of the letter home, Ratcliffe’s words are full of commiseration and pity (he pleads for a break to worship the Sabbath); Ratcliffe also falls into irony to mask his spiritual nadir (“there was a church parade this morning but it was cancelled, but may come off later in the day, and so I have been throwing bombs this morning”) (Ratcliffe 224).

Reginald Francis Foster, a World War I military cleric, wrote of this generational shift accentuated by the stresses of war:

One of the “generation of the lost,” I was neither content to join older folk in their memories of what they considered was a happier, saner and better organised world, nor could I share younger people’s insatiable lust for pleasure. [. . .] Statistics prove that by 1930 the Church could legitimately claim but ten per cent--this is a liberal estimate--of the population of the 40-odd millions of inhabitants of this country [England].<sup>15</sup> What of the remaining 36,000,000-odd? Many of them, if asked, would have said they

were Christians. but they did not profess allegiance to any Church. Organised Christianity was moribund. Yet the Churches were still respected. Why? Undoubtedly because the majority of people still had a respect for religion, even though they could not subscribe to the doctrines that institutional religion taught. (Foster, *Separate Star* 260-261)

This relatively new religion Foster writes of is exhibited in Hemingway's military characters. They respect older religiosity and base their self-formed, non-institutional religion on it.

Another important aspect to understand of the Doughboy's religion is the idea of temporal specificity. The religion of Hemingway's soldiers and many real soldiers in the war is certainly not limited to daily, congregational worship. Nor is it limited to dire prayers for God to stop a fallen comrade's bleeding or to stop the pain of a dozen pieces of shrapnel in the gut. The religion Hemingway's main characters carry is a melange of both; they carry it with them always, but it only becomes evident at certain times (like Lt. Henry admitting that he is a believer at night). While having sex for the last time with Maria (what she termed *la gloria*), Robert Jordan's mind drifts into thoughts that the immediate moment is all that matters. "Oh, now, now, now, the only now, and above all now, and there is no other now but thou now and now is thy prophet" (*FWBT* 379). Maria says, "It is that I am thankful too to have been another time in *la gloria*" (*ibid.*).

These quotes are in reference to the sex act, but the same notion applies to religious unity, too. For example, Sanjukta Dasgupta writes, in his essay "From Darkness to Light: A Discovery of Faith in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,

No longer rootless and alone, but integrated with a noble past and with a sense of togetherness with others, the Hemingway protagonist here [in the love between Jordan and Maria] seeks emancipation from the evils of the time-bound reality in order to breathe afresh in an atmosphere of timeless freedom and immortality. (71-72).

What Jordan and Maria perceive as religious feeling is religion. They, and other of the Hemingway characters under study, find no use for taxonomies regarding when one should or should not have feelings perceived as religious.

The religion Hemingway's war protagonists felt was closer to Second Lieutenant Ratcliffe's than to Edmund Blunden's. The practical side of religion, rather than the theoretical side, is what the Hemingway protagonist finds appealing. I do not intend hard miracles here; what I mean is utility rather than abstract conjecture. Turning to the 1920 book *The Doughboy's Religion and Other Aspects of Our Day*, by Ben Lindsey and Harvey Higgins, this distinction is made clear by a W.W.I soldier: "When I went into the trenches I could see for myself. Here was true Christianity in action, before the face of death, under circumstances that made any preaching, however eloquent, seem tawdry" (Higgins 9). This goes not for just Hemingway but for many modernists. In *Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900* (1928), Gorham Munson writes,

And the Younger Generation, that of Ernest Hemingway, Glenway Westcott, E.E. Cummings, Kenneth Burke, Yvor Winters, Allen Tate, and others still less known, is again in recoil to some degree, this time from the Middle Generation [that of Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and others]. The general attitudes of these younger writers are unformed and show at present a mingling of romantic, neoclassical, and religious strains. (Munson 3)

In a review discussing this exact passage, Michael Williams also notes that Hemingway is part of a "literary movement now begun by these younger men who are going back to the humanistic tradition for their philosophy" (Williams, Michael 221).

This is the discreet religion of Hemingway's war protagonists. Richard Cantwell, in Hemingway's last war novel, *ARIT*, goes to great lengths to engage in the solitary ritual of offering the earth blood, money, and *merde*. There is no authorial or character commentary about the "monument" Cantwell builds on the spot where he was blown up in the First World War, but it carries the significance of a formal religious sacrament. A sacrament is a rite held to be a means of divine grace or a sign of spiritual reality; that is exactly how Cantwell views his rite out the outskirts of Fossalta. "It's fine now, he thought. It has merde, money, blood; look how that grass grows; and the iron's in the earth along with Gino's leg, both of Randolpho's legs, and my right kneecap. It's a wonderful monument. It has everything" (*ARIT* 18-19).

The physicality of battle makes writing about it hard, and Hemingway's physical religion is a perfect fit. Survival on the front means physical attenuation as much as mental acuity. Thus, the practical, physical-based nature of religion in Hemingway's war fiction is certainly not a denial of spirituality; it is merely part of a *weltanschauung* in which pragmatism and practicality are vital. Abstracts are confusing, subjective, and unreliable, but concreteness and truth can be found in two places—via T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative" or deeply within the self (in a form which cannot be uttered by mere words, these two manners of handling such unfathomables as religion do have some overlap).

The doughboy's religion is defined heuristically by occasion and experience. This religiosity is anchored by Christian ideals of the past, and driven by realities of the present and fears of the future. Deliberate action or deliberate inaction defines the man as well as the spirituality. Calling the supreme Christian holy figure "the best god-damned God you ever knew" is honesty and sincerity, not blasphemy. Ben Stoltzfus is correct when he states, "Hemingway was not a pious man. Proud yes, competitive yes, but not particularly religious in the Christian sense" (42). He was not pious because "pious" denotes conspicuous religiosity and connotes hypocrisy (as per *Webster's* dictionary and common parlance). Hemingway's war fiction, however, shows his interest in religion and a reverence not in the conventional sense but honest nonetheless.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres [...]. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable" (Anderson 89).

<sup>2</sup> In *Religion and our Divided Denominations* (Harvard UP, 1945), Willard L. Sperry writes of such oxymoronic notions in not negative but rather objective terms. "There is still in our people (post-World War II Americans) as a whole a residual feeling for religion, and much of that temper which *The Soldier in Arms* of the last war called the 'inarticulate religion' of the average man" (Sperry 11).

<sup>3</sup> Sperry, in a discussion related to these antiquated and unpractical religious notions, writes, "One of the most baffling phenomena of American life is the survival in the extreme orthodox churches of the elder and more disparaging doctrines of man, which are given lip service Sunday by Sunday, while the business of the other six days is nominally conducted upon the supposition that man can make something of himself" (Sperry 16).

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<sup>4</sup> In interchapter VI in *In Our Time*, Hemingway writes of this notion of patriotism, "'Senta Rinaldo; Senta. You and me we've made a separate peace.' Rinaldi lay still in the sun, breathing with difficulty. 'We're not patriots'" (*IOT* 81).

<sup>5</sup> Again, the others to follow are Christian Manliness, Ritual, Love, Nature, and Solitude.

<sup>6</sup> A thorough study of where that term came from may be found in the "Enter the Doughboy's" chapter of *The Doughboys: America and the First World War* (New York: Overlook, 2000) by Gary Mead.

<sup>7</sup> It is believed that Hemingway was not opposed to Greene's conversion to Catholicism in 1926, as Hemingway too converted (also, he was supposedly baptized in 1918 after being wounded in Italy). Hemingway's comment was made somewhat in jest, but, as Hemingway scholar William Thomas Hill notes, "there may be some irony in Hemingway's comment, but probably not. My guess would be that Hemingway objected to Greene's tendency to use Catholic themes throughout his work (esp., *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *The End of the Affair*)" (E-mail to the author. 28 Dec. 2000). Hemingway used Catholic themes profusely throughout his work, so the meaning of Hemingway's comment is unclear. The example is used as one of many to evidence religious thought in Hemingway biographically.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in 1930 English theologian Lionel S. Thornton finds that "Christendom will have arrived" when the material and "supernatural" resources of the masses are converged to "the point of mutual reinforcement" ("The Meaning of Christian Sociology," 20 July 1930, MS Papers, L.S. Thornton Papers, Papers of Community of Resurrection, deposit 8. Quoted in Phillips, Paul 38). In 1945, Willard L. Sperry writes that the solution to this disunity (in particular American denominational conflicts) is not yet in sight" (Sperry 25) while noting that his [c. 1945] is an era "for which there is no precedent in our history" (Sperry 3).

<sup>9</sup> This is elaborated in *FWBT*. Thinking outside the gypsy cave, Robert Jordan's musings fall to his grandfather, who served in the American Civil War. In like manner, Jordan is serving in the Spanish Civil War. Jordan's grandfather is extolled in ways akin to Greffi's good manners (maintaining weapons, bravery on the battlefield), but the father was the one who cowardly killed himself. Jordan notes the chasmic problem of generations ("It's a shame there is such a jump in time between ones like us" [. . .] "I wish the timelag wasn't so long so that I could have learned from him what the other one never had to teach me" (*FWBT* 338).

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Baker makes further thematic connections between Coleridge and Hemingway in "Hemingway's Empirical Imagination" (in *Individual and Community: Variations on a Theme in American Fiction*. Ed. Baldwin, Kenneth H. and David K. Kirby. Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 1975). Baker states that Hemingway's style frequently serves as a model of Coleridge's maxim that "Art would or should be the abridgment of nature" (Baker 97).

<sup>11</sup> Hemingway parodies Graves' poem "Strong Beer" with his own poem entitled "Robert Graves" (1922).

<sup>12</sup> See Fussell 53-55 for more on romantic war imagery.

<sup>13</sup> Written in 1814 to celebrate Ft. McHenry's survival of British shelling as "In Defense of Fort M'Henry," the musical version (declared the United States' national anthem by Congress in 1931) was based on a British song ("The American Experience: Music").

<sup>14</sup> Note must be made here of an unfinished essay Hemingway began titled "On Cathedrals." In the essay, Hemingway writes, "Certainly there has never been a line written that was worth a damn about a cathedral, and I [indecipherable] include that predecessor of Edward Blunden, Wm. Henry Adams' Unitarian observations which are only excelled in their quality of deadening the glory of an object by the catholic journalism of [indecipherable] Hilaire Belloc or the fancy writing of that sloppy brained convert Huysmans" (Hemingway, "On Cathedrals"). Despite incorrect names for both Henry (Brooks) Adams and

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Edmund Blunden, the named authors did write on cathedrals (Adams with *Mont-Saint-Michael and Charters* (1913), Belloc in *Europe and the Faith* (1920), and Huysmans with *La Cathédrale* (1898). He writes that Jews can write in cathedrals, but Christians (himself included) cannot.

<sup>15</sup> Foster writes of his native England, but his sentiment is relevant to Hemingway (the American) and his overseas American military men in the same manner that Jeffrey Walsh writes that “The principal affirmation of [Robert] Jordan’s life, perhaps the major product of his ‘integration,’ is one related to the cultural status of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as a fictional transposition of American values to the Iberian Peninsula” (Walsh, *American War Literature: 1914 to Vietnam* 101). Also, to allay some problems in equating English and American war sentiments, David Craig and Michael Egan in *Extreme Situations* writes, “The Americans had been embroiled in the First World War only in a small way and there is no concerted literature of description and protest to match the English, although there is a fine small group of novels which show people caught up physically in the war while their main feelings lay elsewhere: Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers* and sequences from *Nineteen Nineteen*, Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*” (26).

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