POTENT POTABLES: NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF ALCOHOL AS POWER IN
ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S NOVELS

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Mary Rosenberry

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Abstract

of

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In Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes casually defines “a good place,” as somewhere where “there’s a lot of liquor” (19). “A lot of liquor” flows through much of Hemingway’s fiction, and it always produces powerful results, whether it improves social relations and brings people together or exacerbates social rifts and endangers lives. Despite the prevalence of alcohol and its importance to the characters who drink, or refuse to drink, previous literary criticism has viewed alcohol monolithically. In his 1967 publication, “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes proposes a shift in literary criticism away from biographical analysis. Yet to this day, Ernest Hemingway’s fiction continues to be haunted by criticism that is fascinated, even obsessed with his biography, especially with regard to alcohol. Almost universally, critics connect the alcohol consumed in his fiction with the alcohol he consumed during his lifetime. This pervasive biographical lens has led many critics to draw limiting conclusions in which they equate Hemingway, the man, with his fictional protagonists, without taking into account their rich complexities and motivations for drinking. In
contrast, this thesis takes a cultural critical look at the role of alcohol in three of Hemingway’s novels: The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, and For Whom the Bell Tolls, looking, in particular, at alcohol and its consumption as a form of power, using Michel Foucault’s definition of power as fluid and productive, rather than static and limiting. Alcohol signals to the reader what personal, social, and cultural power is circulating within the novel’s setting. This project also draws on a variety of historical and medical texts to better understand the constantly changing role of alcohol in the United States and abroad during the twentieth century. By observing how alcohol functions in Hemingway’s fiction and examining the culture from which each novel sprang, readers can better understand how the novels helped to define a generation, even as the novels themselves were influenced by fluctuating cultural values.

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INTRODUCTION

Library shelves and Google searches reveal that there is no shortage of books, articles, and essays written about Ernest Hemingway and the books that he wrote. While not an overnight success, Hemingway saw more popular and critical success in his lifetime than most authors do. From Gertrude Stein’s evasive reviews early in his career to the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes in his later life, Hemingway’s written work garnered attention. So, too, did his larger-than-life persona. That persona and his penchants for drinking, bullfighting, and traveling the world made the author as famous in his own right as his popular fiction. Hemingway fans today can find at least seventeen memoirs written by those who knew him,¹ an array of biographies, at least one book about his fetishes, and one about his cats. A number of critics have focused their attention on Hemingway’s use of alcohol as well, but most have taken a biographical approach, in which critics focus on Hemingway’s own drinking habits, using them as evidence to draw conclusions about his fiction. This thesis attempts to open a new space for interpretations of alcohol within his long fiction, focusing on its role in three novels: *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Without attempting to disprove the work done by earlier critics, this thesis does offer a more dynamic perspective, using cultural studies to show that Hemingway’s treatment of alcohol is anything but simple.

In his 1967 publication, “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes suggests “the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture” (4). Barthes
rejects the biographical approach to literature, suggesting that texts do not come solely from an “author-god,” but rather from a variety of cultural sources. Drawing Barthes’ words into conversation with Hemingway’s, this thesis looks at alcohol and its consumption in these novels, while also considering the larger cultural and social contexts of the early twentieth century. Also considered are the power structures at play within the novels and in the surrounding contemporary culture. As Michel Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish*, power operates in a variety of seemingly commonplace ways. Rather than see power as a restrictive or limiting force, Foucault insists that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (194). Within each novel, alcohol acts as a tangible currency of power. Who purchases the alcohol, who drinks the alcohol, and how one behaves under the influence of alcohol all give clues to the reader what personal, social, and cultural power is circulating within the novel’s setting. Also considered are the constantly shifting popular attitudes toward alcohol during the first half of the twentieth century, a time when global conflicts, alcohol regulation, and a major shift in cultural mores changed the ways and the reasons that people drank. The shifting definitions of alcohol abuse and alcoholism are also considered, helping to illuminate the ways that alcohol has historically blurred the lines between morality and medicine, further explaining Hemingway’s portrayal of alcohol and those who consume it. Lastly, this thesis focuses on the effect that Hemingway’s fictional use of alcohol had on the culture of his reading public, both its detractors and its supporters.
The three novels considered here offer rich ground for the analysis and interpretation of alcohol. Although they differ greatly in plot and setting, all three feature alcohol prominently. While it is the purpose of this thesis to examine alcohol in its many diverse roles and call attention to its power as a dynamic force, several major themes emerge across the works, themes that often correlate with larger national and international influences. In all three novels, consuming alcohol has the ability to change social situations, often for the better, but sometimes for the worse. Characters often drink in an attempt to reduce fear or relieve anxiety, and while this is sometimes effective, it largely proves ineffective against larger forces such as death. In these works, alcohol is consumed as a matter of course, reflecting a number of cultural factors that are explored in more detail in Chapter 2. Lastly, while death and despair are prominent elements in the novels, the role of alcohol does not always contribute to widespread malaise. Often alcohol acts a form of self-expression and group solidarity, an insistent celebration of humanity and of life in troubling times.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes navigates the drinking cultures of France, Spain, and the American expatriate community. For him and for the other characters, alcohol is central to social interactions, whether in the cafes of Paris or in the lively streets of Pamplona. However, alcohol is not merely a passive backdrop for the action; it plays a vital role, influencing characters’ actions and changing their social standings, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. For Jake Barnes and perhaps even for readers, alcohol, the way it is consumed, and the way drinkers behave serve as a value system, perhaps the most reliable and visible value system in a post-war world, where
traditional religious morals have been abandoned. The effect of the novel on the reading public is also examined. While some readers were shocked by the prevalence of drunkenness and the perceived lack of values, the book resonated with many, particularly the young, who immediately began emulating the behavior of Jake Barnes and the other characters, from the way they talked to the way they drank. As Leo Lania writes in his biography of Hemingway, “No sooner was Hemingway’s early novel The Sun Also Rises published, than the youth of the ‘twenties chose him as their example and ideal . . . [speaking] like his leading characters and [assuming] their way of life – their outward behavior, melancholy nihilism, drinking and loving” (5). Although Paris was already a popular destination in 1926, when this novel was published, The Sun Also Rises acted as an impetus, leading many Americans to travel to Europe where, free from Prohibition, they too, could drink with the abandon of Jake and the other expatriates.

A Farewell to Arms, published just three years after The Sun Also Rises, is set during World War I and revisits that horrific conflict that greatly affected the culture and psyche of the 1920s. In the novel, Frederic Henry, an American on the Italian front, resides, drinks, and survives with his Italian comrades, and eventually escapes to the safety of Switzerland with his English lover. In both countries, Frederic Henry navigates a number of dangerous and tense situations, often using alcohol as a way of coping and building relationships, all with the threat of death very much at hand. While acknowledged less specifically than Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises, Frederic Henry also uses alcohol as a value system, and although consuming alcohol does sometimes serve to raise or lower one’s social status, here, its power is magnified with the higher
stakes of life and death. In several different instances, Frederic’s very life depends on his ability to trust others, and almost uniformly, those he trusts are drinkers, while those who most endanger and threaten his life and his relationship with Catherine are non-drinkers. Ultimately, however, despite alcohol’s ability to unite individuals in extremely extenuating circumstances, it cannot protect them from the sweeping force of death that stalks war-torn Europe. Although World War I is featured explicitly and more openly than it is in *The Sun Also Rises*, and Prohibition remains unmentioned (set, as it is, before the ratification of the Volstead Act), both affect the treatment of alcohol in the text. Some readers continued to be shocked with Hemingway’s frank treatment of sex and alcohol, but the novel resonated with the millions who bought the book, many of whom were all too familiar with the prevalent themes of fear and death and the subsequent use of alcohol to treat or defy those constant factors of modern life. In *A Farewell to Arms*, just as in *The Sun Also Rises*, alcohol is never just a static, passive choice of beverage. Rather, it is a powerful force that acts as a means of self-expression, group solidarity, and stubborn resistance against dehumanizing circumstances.

The last novel here considered, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, differs in that it was published in 1940, long after the sun had set on the 1920s. However, it too, features an American, Robert Jordan, living in Europe during difficult times. Set during the Spanish Civil War, the novel continues to show the powerful effect of alcohol during times of conflict and stress. Although World War I had faded into the past by the time the novel was published, the focus on death remains prominent. With Prohibition long over, characters continue to consume alcohol consistently, but here, the focus is less on
challenging the laws and morals of the conservative past, and more about resisting the always-present fear of death. Alcohol still has the power to improve social relations, but it also takes on more symbolic tones of ritual and communion. Perhaps because of its setting in Spain, characters consume wine and other alcoholic beverages almost uniformly as a group activity, rather than as an expression of rugged individualism and masculinity. Also, in this novel more than in the other two here examined, alcohol and its consumption are inextricably linked with both the celebration of life and the act of death. While alcohol marks moments of joyous life and indicates human civility in inhumane times, it also acts as an accompaniment to death, once again proving to be an ineffective shield against the inevitable violence of death. The reception of this novel differed as well. By 1940, readers were no longer so shocked by the open portrayal of sex and alcohol in literature. The novel became a bestseller; plenty of readers could relate to Robert Jordan’s simultaneous belief in the powerful and tangible effects of alcohol and disbelief in the corrupt ideologies of world powers and world religions.

The Inevitability of a Biographical Reading?: An Overview

The role of alcohol in the three novels mentioned above is rich, diverse, and powerful. Historically, however, alcohol has been almost uniformly derogated. Biographical interpretations of Hemingway’s fiction began as soon as his work was published. Some might argue that these connections are unavoidable; Hemingway, while living in Paris, traveled to Pamplona for the festival of San Fermín and in his first novel, Jake Barnes does the same. Hemingway spent a portion of World War I in Italy, was wounded, and recovered in a hospital in Milan, and in A Farewell to Arms Frederic
Henry does the same. In fact, a catalogue of Hemingway’s fictional characters shows that each of them enjoys some combination of Hemingway’s (in)famous hobbies, from drinking to bullfighting. Due in part to these similarities, there has been a long lasting theme in biographies and literary criticism to equate fact with fiction. Add to this equation, if you will, a further distinction between Hemingway the man and Hemingway the myth. For every remarkable feat that Hemingway accomplished, there were a dozen more apocryphal tales, repeated so often that they became canonized. For reasons unknown to anyone, one of the least reliable sources on Hemingway was Hemingway himself. He allowed, sometimes encouraged, others to believe inaccuracies or exaggerations of his already extraordinary life, perhaps making it easier for his fans to believe that he could somehow “be” his pantheon of travel-savvy and worldly-wise protagonists.

Biographies published as late as 1961, the year that Hemingway would later end his life, support a biographical reading of his fiction. Leo Lania, in *Hemingway: A Pictorial Biography*, states confidently, “The autobiographical nature of Hemingway’s novels and stories provides the key to their true meaning” (Lania 17). If Lania accepted a biographical link to Hemingway’s fiction as indispensible, he was certainly not alone. Michael Reynolds, Hemingway biographer and scholar, notes, “After he wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, most of his readers and more than one biographer assumed that all of his fiction was thinly veiled biography, which it almost never was” (*Hemingway, the Paris Years* 61). In his biographies and criticism, Reynolds painstakingly traces the departures between Hemingway’s life and his fiction, noting that what many readers took to be
evidence of Hemingway’s own life experience was more often a combination of his brilliant prose, careful research, and active imagination.

In the years following Hemingway’s death, as it became clear that his fiction would indeed stand the test of time, critics continued to find plenty to discuss, debate, celebrate, and vilify about the author’s life and about his fiction. Hemingway’s biography continues to fascinate scholars, but recent criticism more often seeks to differentiate between Hemingway the man, Hemingway the myth, and Hemingway’s fiction. And yet despite the vast body of criticism that already exists, one area has remained largely un-debated: that of alcohol. Of those critics who make alcohol their prime focus, the biographical reading has held on tenaciously. In *Alcohol and the Writer*, Donald Goodwin comments on Hemingway’s lasting fame as a drinker, and the widespread desire to emulate that aspect of his character, noting that, “Starting in the 1950’s, travel guides of Europe almost invariably included Ernest Hemingway in the index. . . . It is never explained why tourists should be interested in Hemingway’s favorite bars” (58). It may be a mystery to Goodwin why Hemingway’s fans connected with his reputation for heavy drink, but he admits, “tourists by the thousands and maybe millions have sought out the bars where Hemingway drank” (58). Goodwin’s coyness regarding “why tourists should be interested” in Hemingway’s watering holes is belied somewhat by the fact that he makes alcohol the focus of his own line of study. As fascinating as the totality of Hemingway’s life and fiction is, Goodwin limits his own scholarship to Hemingway’s relationship with alcohol, proving, intentionally or not, that the public has long found something powerful and irresistible about the Hemingway mythos regarding alcohol.
Goodwin, however, hardly mentions the role of alcohol in Hemingway’s fiction; his interests lie with the author and his drinks, rather than his work.

In *The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer*, Tom Dardis explores Hemingway’s fiction, and insists that it increasingly declines due to his alcohol consumption. His thesis is curious; on one hand, he declares that Hemingway had lost his ability to write well by the time he was thirty-eight (in 1937), but on the other hand, he admits that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* “was the most highly praised American novel of the century” (179), that the original manuscript of *The Garden of Eden* “demonstrates that Hemingway was still capable, at forty-seven of describing locales with unmatched power” (185), and that *A Moveable Feast* “compares favorably with the work he produced before 1940” (207). Dardis’s claim that alcohol led to a sharp decline in Hemingway’s fiction is somewhat undermined by his allowances for these three works. Furthermore, although Dardis sees “a boozy sentimentality” (192) running through *The Old Man and the Sea*, he credits the work with winning Hemingway the Nobel Prize.

Dardis also equates Hemingway the man with his fictional characters, saying that he is “virtually indistinguishable from [Robert] Jordan in many of *[For Whom the Bell Toll’s]* pages” (181). This interpretation, that fictional characters are stand-ins for the “real” Hemingway, is inherently limiting. To some extent there well may be a bit of the author in each and every character that he creates; it would be difficult to disprove this theory entirely, but equating the author with the protagonist reduces the scope of interpretation.

If literature is worth discussing, then it ought to be worthy of discussion in its own right, not merely because the author led a particularly interesting life or drank more than is
generally considered normal. For Dardis, the fact that Hemingway was a heavy drinker (he diagnoses the writer with alcoholism as well) is the key to understanding his fiction, as well as the ups and downs of his literary career. Of course it’s tantalizing for readers to play with hypotheticals: What if Hemingway hadn’t drunk quite so heavily? Would his fiction have been even more brilliant? Would he have killed himself sooner? Later? Never? Ultimately, of course, these questions are fruitless. What we have is the life of a complex man (often complicated by different versions of his biography) and his body of work. Alcohol certainly played a role in his life and fiction, but so did an uncountable number of other factors that are equally worth considering.

A third critic, Roger Forseth, discusses Hemingway and alcoholism in “Alcohol and the Writer: Some Biographical and Critical Issues (Hemingway).” His work is examined at greater length in Chapter 2, but his scholarship bears some similarity to Goodwin and Dardis. He spends a great deal of time discussing the nature of alcoholism and comparing it with biographical evidence of Hemingway’s drinking habits. There is nothing inherently problematic about Forseth’s discussion of the author’s biography until he begins linking it with fiction. Here, he states that in *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway’s treatment of the Basques is “duplicitous” because they consume wine from wineskins and because they offer to share their wine with Jake and Bill, Americans who are on vacation in Spain. For Forseth, the scene subliminally suggests, “‘It’s all right to drink; it’s part of their way of life and we are their guests’” (373). Forseth claims the scene could only have been written by “a dedicated drinker” (373). Can a literary critic make such a claim? Is it always “duplicitous” for a writer to depict a drinking scene without then showing the
negative effects of alcohol? While Forseth is eager to intimate that Hemingway’s “use of the Basques” promotes his own agenda of legitimizing heavy drinking, to some extent, his interpretation does the same thing; Forseth’s “use of the Basques” promotes his own anti-alcoholism views. He considers Hemingway’s drinking habits, but not those of the culture being discussed, effectively erasing and silencing a culture that, in fact, celebrated alcohol, but not drunkenness. Cultural attitudes towards alcohol are discussed more fully in Chapter 2, but according to *The International Handbook of Alcohol and Culture*, alcohol use is a “trait of Basque identity” (254). In fact, Jake and Bill could probably learn something about alcohol consumption from the Basques they meet. Instead, the Americans drink heavily, sometimes destructively. The most painful moments of the novel come soaked in alcohol and leave lingering regrets. If Hemingway does not show the Basques suffering dire hangovers or engaging in drunken fistfights (only the foreigners face such troubles), he may have had a better understanding of international drinking habits than Forseth gives him credit for. This is one minor example that shows the limits of using Hemingway’s biography as a master decoder for the role of alcohol in his fiction. The one-size-fits-all approach runs the risk of ignoring the influences that culture has on the text.

Of course readers and critics are not immune to the cultural influences of their own times, either. Goodwin, Dardis, and Forseth all share an intense focus on Hemingway’s biography and definitions of alcoholism. All three also wrote in the 1980s, an age which saw new methods of alcohol reform. After Cari Lightner was killed by a drunk driver in 1980, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was formed, an
organization that garnered lots of media attention in the 1980s and 1990s (Burns 291-293). In 1984 (due partially to MADD’s lobbying), then President Ronald Reagan signed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, making it illegal for anyone under the age of twenty-one to purchase alcohol (APIS). Alcoholics Anonymous, which had begun in the 1930s, continued to gain members throughout the century. Its fiftieth Anniversary Convention, in 1985, drew more than 45,000 members, which was twice the attendance of its 1980 convention (aa.org). The cultural climate of the 1980s renewed its focus on the dangers of alcoholism, and subsequently, criticism on Hemingway and alcohol in this period focuses on definitions of alcoholism as understood in the 1980s and reflects the tone of tragedy evoked by the rhetoric of AA and MADD.

Further critics discussed in more detail in the following chapters include Charles Norton and Carol Gelderman. Although they take very different approaches, both assume that the protagonists can be read as Hemingway himself. A handful of critics, like Reynolds,² hint at the powerful role of alcohol in Hemingway’s fiction, but only as a side note, a few sentences mentioning the wine consumed with meals or the effect of a particular drunken episode. The notable exception to this list of critics is Ashley Oliphant. In her 2007 dissertation, *Hemingway’s Mixed Drinks: An Examination of the Varied Representation of Alcohol Across the Author’s Canon*, she challenges the biographical read so prevalent in previous criticism. In many ways, this thesis builds upon the work begun by Oliphant. Perhaps in future years, further scholarship will be undertaken to further develop the research regarding the complicated intersections between alcohol, culture, and fiction.
Chapter 2

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS OF ALCOHOL

Subsequent chapters will explore the role of alcohol in three of Hemingway’s novels with specific references to larger cultural factors that affected the portrayal of alcohol within the fiction. Also examined are these factors with relation to the public’s reactions to each novel. Of course, it is impossible to fully capture and codify the “thousands sources of culture” that produce a text, but an acknowledgement of several cultural influences in play in the first half of the twentieth century are essential to understanding how and why alcohol produces power in Hemingway’s fiction. Of the three novels, two, The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms, were written and published in the 1920s. Of particular importance to these novels are the effects of World War I and Prohibition. For Whom the Bell Tolls, set in 1937 and published in 1940, continues to portray a culture inundated with violent death, raised on the chaos of World War I, caught up in Spain’s civil war, and anticipating World War II, which had already begun by the time the novel was published. All three novels and their individual treatment of alcohol reflected and affected social attitudes toward alcohol and shifting cultural and medical definitions of alcohol consumption and alcohol abuse. Because all three novels feature an American protagonist living abroad in Western Europe, both American and European notions of drink are considered where relevant. This chapter provides some cultural and historical context for the themes that are discussed in the
following chapters and attempts to make connections between various cultural factors and alcohol.

No such cultural factor looms as large as World War I. In fact, it would be difficult to overemphasize the effect that World War I had on twentieth century culture. On a global, political level, the entire map of Europe had changed; empires had fallen, and new borders and nations had emerged. On a personal level, bodies, minds, and ideals had shattered. Death tolls had stacked up in the millions. Physically, war survivors dealt with wounds and amputations, while mentally, they mourned the dead and suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, which was then only rudimentarily understood as shellshock. Deaths and wounds can be numbered; more difficult to measure is a shift of cultural consciousness. All three of the novels examined here contain references, both explicit and implicit, to this shift. In his history of the 1920s, *Only Yesterday*, Frederick Lewis Allen writes, “In France, two million [American] men had found themselves very close to filth and annihilation and very far from the moral code and its defenders . . . It was impossible for this generation to return unchanged when the ordeal was over” (81-82). The United States and millions of its citizens would think, act, and believe differently than they had before the war. The aftermath of the war and the changing cultural tides led F. Scott Fitzgerald’s to pen the lines in *This Side of Paradise*, “Here was a new generation . . . grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken” (330). It was this climate that T.S. Eliot expressed in his “The Hollow Men” which ends, “This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper” (97-98). No faith in God, no trust in men, no certain future, no reliable guide or goal to steer the
unstable present. This was the culture that World War I had left, which *The Sun Also Rises* reflects and influences, which *A Farewell to Arms* attempts to capture, and which *For Whom the Bell Tolls* provides an epilogue for. Any discussion of these novels, their characters, and their drinking habits cannot be productive without an acknowledgment of the far-reaching effects of war.

Part of the reason Hemingway’s texts gained both popularity and notoriety is for the heavy drinking that takes place in them. However, his hard-drinking characters do not exist in a vacuum anymore than the novels themselves do. Recent studies suggest that people with posttraumatic stress disorder show higher tendencies to binge drink or become dependent on alcohol. In all of the novels discussed here, many, even most, of the major characters have experienced trauma that could potentially cause PTSD. Although few discuss the horrors they have survived, each uses a combination of coping mechanisms to help them survive, including the consumption of alcohol. In *The Sun Also Rises*, World War I is referenced only in the most casual and understated ways, as when Jake Barnes imagines discussing the war with a prostitute and thinks, “We would probably have gone on and discussed the war and agreed that it was in reality a calamity for civilization, and perhaps would have been better avoided. I was bored enough” (24-25). Luckily for Jake, he is called away from this potentially “boring” conversation, but his mild understatement that the war “perhaps would have been better avoided” speaks volumes about his attitude toward the war that has left him physically impaired. As a topic of conversation, neither Jake nor any of the other characters discuss their war experiences at any great length, yet it is there, under the surface, on nearly every page
and subsequently in the drinks that fill the silence. Jake drinks heavily by today’s standards, but so do most of the characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. The same could be said for all three novels. All of the major drinkers have experienced some form of war-related trauma; none of them speak of it except in the most nominal of ways, but all of them consistently, casually, and quietly seek their next drink with the same understated intensity that they reduce their wartime experience to a single sentence or two.

Only long years after Armistice Day were studies conducted that showed that combat veterans are more likely than other veterans to binge drink. These correlations are relatively new; the veterans studied were survivors of the Vietnam War and later conflicts. While it seems likely that veterans of World War I (particularly combat veterans and those with undiagnosed PTSD) would share similar tendencies to drink heavily, it is difficult to prove this parallel with concrete statistics, due mainly to differing ideas about alcohol and alcohol abuse throughout the years. In *A History of Alcoholism*, Jean-Charles Sournia comments on the difficulty of tracking the effects of alcohol between 1850 and 1950, saying: “examination of the statistical evidence [doctors] gathered is complicated by ambiguities in the precise definition of alcoholism.” He also notes “[doctors’] failure to establish the exact nature of the relationship between alcohol intake and organic lesions” (51). From the nineteenth century well into the twentieth century, medical professionals throughout the Western world saw alcohol variously as toxic, nutritious, habit-forming, non-habit-forming, medicinal, or dangerous. *A Farewell to Arms*, set during World War I, depicts a variety of these conflicting viewpoints from medical professionals. Miss Van Campen, the superintendent of the American hospital in
Venice, forbids the consumption of alcohol, unless “the doctor prescribes it” (76), uniting two disparate views of alcohol commonly held at the time. On one hand, alcohol could be a dangerous, perhaps morally suspect substance, yet on the other hand, might be used as a medicine for the sick or wounded. Of two surgeons that examine Frederic Henry, one is a teetotaler while the other seems to be a heavy drinker, although neither gives his medical opinion on the subject. An Italian surgeon, Rinaldi, admits “Nothing is worse for you” (150), yet he continues to drink excessively, not for any medical reason, but as a coping mechanism. From his point of view, “the war is killing [him]” (146), and he can only enjoy himself when he is working, drinking, or fornicating. Lastly, a doctor in Switzerland approves, even recommends, that Catherine, who is pregnant, consume beer because it will be “good for [Catherine] and keep [the baby] small” (252). These vastly differing perspectives of alcohol, all presented in the same book, call into question those critics who see Hemingway’s works as a uniform apologia for excessive drinking.  

Rather, the various viewpoints reflect the times and the conflicting opinions about alcohol held by various medical professionals, and similarly, by the population at large. During World War I, alcohol was often seen as a valuable resource, a medical tool, as well as a booster of men’s spirits. In “Alcohol Use and Misuse Within the Military: A Review,” Edgar Jones and Nicola Fear report that “During World War One, alcohol was widely used as an initial treatment of shell shock” (166). Doctors and commanding officers did not treat alcohol as a threat to a vulnerable soldier’s physical and psychological health; for them it was a form of medicine to be prescribed to traumatized soldiers. Furthermore, “Because of the privations of trench warfare, most
combatant nations issued alcohol in some form to front-line troops” (Jones, Fear 167). According to Adam Zientek in "Wine and Blood: Alcohol, Morale, and Discipline in the French Army on the Western Front, 1914–1918,” French troops, for example, received “about .0625 L of 100 proof spirits and .75 L of wine per man per day” (v). These numbers are particularly instructive when considered alongside today’s definitions of “binge drinking” and “heavy drinking.” According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), “binge drinking” consists of about five drinks for men, consumed within 2 hours. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines “heavy drinking” as “drinking 5 or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days” (Substance Use Disorders). Furthermore, the NIAAA considers one drink to be 1.5oz of distilled spirits or 5oz of wine. Although it is unclear how each French soldier consumed his daily alcohol ration (In one sitting? Slowly throughout the day?), each man would have had roughly 6.5 drinks at his disposal each day, making all of them potential binge drinkers or heavy drinkers. These facts are essential to consider before readers or critics transpose modern knowledge of alcohol and alcohol abuse onto fictional, historical texts. What may be considered unhealthy levels of alcohol consumption today may well have been seen as normal in the 1910s and 1920s, particularly taking into account various European cultures, subsets of military culture, and the difficult living situations associated with war.

In the case of the French army, the alcohol was rationed with the reasoning that it would “foster a fighting spirit, raise morale and generate courage before attacks, and
create primary group identities among soldiers” (Zientek v). Although many believed that alcohol could produce these positive effects on soldiers, alcohol was also simply a typical beverage in day-to-day life. Prevailing attitudes in Europe saw alcohol as part of regular nutrition; in France and Italy, wine was consumed with meals as a matter of course. In *Alcohol in Italian Culture*, Mark Keller writes, “It could be said that for Italians drinking is a part of eating, even a form of eating, for wine is food” (Keller qtd. in Norton 310). In France, doctors and the public alike saw alcohol as “a pleasant addition to the diet” (Sournia 91). One French doctor even published a book in 1925 in which he claimed, “Alcohol is a dietary ingredient more important than sugar – it gives twice as much energy to the consumer” (Roger, Widal, Teissier qtd. in Sournia 91). In short, consuming alcohol was seen as a normal part of life. On a deeper, ideological level, many Europeans, particularly the French and the Italians, believed that alcohol could create a sense of camaraderie and increase bravery. These themes are reflected in all three novels, themes that Hemingway did not invent; if Hemingway’s protagonists sometimes drink in an attempt to make or maintain social connections or to feel courageous, they are certainly not the only ones, either in fiction or in life.

Although US troops were not issued an alcohol ration due to America’s prohibition on alcohol, American soldiers drank nonetheless, during and after the war. In *Spirits of America*, Eric Burns points out that Prohibition “did not . . . result in a more sober military force,” adding that “the ban was a large inconvenience, not an effective piece of legislation” (166). Once abroad, Americans had little trouble obtaining alcohol, and after the war was over, many stayed in or returned to Europe, for a variety of reasons
certainly, but one of those reasons was the affordable and free-flowing alcohol that could be consumed anytime, anywhere, but was causing such contention in the United States. Despite changing rhetoric in America that demonized alcohol and alcohol consumption, many Americans abroad during or after the war still saw alcohol consumption as their military allies did: a culturally acceptable way to cope with the horrors of war, as well as a “pleasant addition” to meals.

Meanwhile, back on American shores, the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919, and the passing of the Volstead Act to enforce it, meant that the production, transport, and sale of alcohol had become illegal actions. At the time, lawmakers and constituents rather took for granted “that when the Eighteenth Amendment [went] into effect, alcohol [would] be banished from the land” (Allen 11). The reality was much different. Alcohol never truly disappeared from the United States, despite the attempts of the highest levels of the federal government. The authority of the Volstead Act attempted to eliminate alcohol; instead, it merely changed the ways that alcohol produced power within society. Foucault might have been better able to predict the outcome. In his descriptions of power, he denies that power can ever truly suppress anything, declaring, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it conceals.’ In fact, power produces” (194). Foucault’s words help explain two aspects of Prohibition. On one hand, the government’s attempt to use power to “repress” and “censor” alcohol utterly failed. At the same time, alcohol, and the public’s relationship with it, continued to produce
power, often in unprecedented ways. Prohibition created new paradigms and new traditions, new discourses and new cultural norms. Alcohol began to function differently.

Some results of Prohibition should have been predictable: “Evasion of the law began immediately” (Allen 86). But others were less so, from the “bootlegger, the speakeasy, and a spirit of deliberate revolt” to “the increased popularity of distilled as against fermented liquors, the use of the hip-flask, the cocktail party, and the general transformation of drinking from a masculine prerogative to one shared by both sexes together” (Allen 86). The highest level of federal power attempted to ban alcohol; instead it only increased its proof. Literally, “prohibition had the effect of encouraging consumption of distilled drinks in place of beer” (Sournia 123); whereas at the start of Prohibition, beer made up 55% of alcohol consumed and spirits only 37%, that number climbed during the Volstead years until the consumption of spirits made up 75%.\(^5\) As Mark Lender and James Kirby outline in *Drinking in America: A History*, the price of the now illegal alcohol increased, meaning that “the middle classes and wealthier drinkers, who could best afford to imbibe at high prohibition prices, shifted their habits relatively little” (146), while only lower-income groups actually drank less. Figuratively, alcohol’s proof increased as its consumption became more of a status symbol, a way for the affluent to increase their social rank by offering guests deliciously forbidden cocktails. Although Lender and Martin insist that “there is little evidence to support the claim that women vastly increased their consumption of alcohol during the Volstead years” (144), a cultural and ideological shift was taking place. By gallons per capita, women may have been consuming the same, or less, but according to Allen, “A formidable barrier between
the sexes had broken down . . . men and women were drinking together” (95). While the
saloon had been a male-dominated space, the speakeasy and the cocktail party welcomed
both men and women. This trend can certainly be seen in The Sun Also Rises, where Brett
Ashley (as well as several other minor female characters) can be seen drinking in public
and private spaces in mixed company. To a lesser extent this is also seen in A Farewell to
Arms, and while Catherine Barkley is not a heavy drinker, she is certainly not opposed to
consuming alcohol in a variety of settings.

As America’s relationship with alcohol shifted and produced new truths, the temperance
movement became increasingly extreme. Robin Room explains this trend in “A
‘Reverence for Strong Drink’: The Lost Generation and the Elevation of Alcohol in
American Culture.” By the time that The Sun Also Rises was published in 1926,
“temperance had become a majority sentiment in the country at large, and a sentiment
associated by and large with conservative or reactionary political forces” (Room 541).
As a result, drinking alcohol became an all too common act of rebellion against
conservative political and moral forces. As Ashley Oliphant puts it, “For many
Americans restrictions on alcohol were seen as just one of many ways the country was
becoming increasingly intolerant of worldviews, lifestyles and artistic expressions that
varied from the mainstream” (67). If the temperance movement was becoming more rigid
in its conservative values, drinking became more and more associated with art and
expression. In The Thirsty Muse, Tom Dardis writes, “Once alcohol became forbidden,
many independent minds believed it was their moral duty to violate the law on every
possible occasion” (11). Either way, alcohol was still associated with morality; abstainers
saw alcohol as a moral threat, while drinkers saw it as a moral responsibility. Americans in Europe during and after the war drank, for all sorts of reasons, certainly, but many drank as a form of self-expression and freedom; some, no doubt, drank specifically because it was forbidden in their own country. In both *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* characters raise their glasses as a way of rejecting the moralistic aims of conservative teetotalers.

Any discussion of alcohol in Hemingway’s fiction is not complete without an acknowledgement of alcoholism and its shifting definitions in different time periods and places. Strictly speaking, it is not the intention of this paper to diagnose either Hemingway or the characters in novels as alcoholics. Other critics have already done just this, using modern definitions of alcoholism to do so. However, from a cultural critical perspective, it is relevant to explore how alcoholism was viewed and defined in the early twentieth century. To this day, alcoholism remains a difficult condition to diagnose and treat. According to Sournia, “Alcoholics are not ‘ill’ in the same way as those suffering, for example, from an infectious disease and they must be considered as a special patient group” (166). Despite decades of research and treatment, “There can be no therapeutic monopoly in cases of alcoholism, and all disciplines and influences must be harnessed to help those at risk” (Sournia 167). Still, while medical professionals may not agree on any one treatment for alcoholism, today there is a widespread recognition of alcoholism as a medical condition that requires professional treatment. In the years before, during, and after World War I, this was not the case:
In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, doctors were by no means unanimously agreed that alcohol was toxic and that it presented a danger to the human constitution. Consequently the public were not always convinced by medical pronouncements on the subject. (Sournia 90)

As mentioned earlier, alcohol and alcohol consumption came with a host of medical and cultural opinions and disagreements.

Between 1870 and 1920, the medical community in America began to study and treat chronic alcohol use as a disease. But despite this scientific approach, the majority of Americans and even doctors themselves had trouble separating morality from medicine. Sarah Tracy discusses this in *Alcoholism in America: From Reconstruction to Prohibition*, noting that at the turn of the century, “to a significant portion of the public, inebriety was a vicious disease in which the emphasis still fell on the immoral aspects of the inebriate’s drinking” (168). In the years leading up to Prohibition, the disease model of alcoholism gathered force in the medical community, but still, for many doctors, alcoholism was a kind of “medico-moral” condition, “one whose definition and treatment reflected a variety of contemporaneous concerns about social norms and values” (Tracy 45). On one hand, treatment centers had cropped up across America, where those struggling with drinking problems could get support; simultaneously, some of these treatments included moral, as well as health reform. One, The Jacoby Club, claimed to promote “a recovery from moral illness” and thus the first part of confronting the problem was “the formation of such a moral character as will resist disease” (Tracy 45). Despite these discrepancies, the medical community seemed to be on the right track
towards confronting alcoholism in a scientific way until Prohibition put an abrupt halt to
the movement. Tracy notes, “In retrospect, it seems odd that a half-century of research
and treatment on inebriety would be forgotten or dismissed. Yet this was the case when
the disease concept was resurrected in the modern alcoholism movement” (24). Not until
after Prohibition was repealed in 1933 did research regarding the disease model of
alcoholism resume in the United States.

Even the terminology of alcoholism shifted and changed throughout the years. As
Tracy points out, what was once called “intemperance” changed to “dipsomania,” then to
“inebriety,” until “alcoholism” became the most common word for an addiction to
alcohol. Each word came with its own connotations and implications. Intemperance was
the word most associated with morality; if temperance was the moral standard,
intemperance suggested deviation from the straight and narrow. Dipsomania came with
an overtone of insanity. Inebriety was the term most commonly used from 1870 to 1920,
but often in different and conflicting ways; some doctors used it to refer to the concept of
addiction as a disease, while many members of the general public used it as a synonym
for drunkenness. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, none of these terms appear, nor are they in
*The Sun Also Rises*, although interestingly, in earlier drafts, Brett Ashley’s absent
husband is referred to as a dipsomaniac, while Brett herself is specifically said not to be
an alcoholic. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the term alcoholism is uttered, but only by the most
unlikeable of characters. Each word carried its own web of connotations and could be
interpreted differently by different groups of people, which may be why they are largely
excluded from the texts. By and large, Hemingway’s novels are defined by what they
show, not by what is stated blatantly. As Oliphant puts it, “no Hemingway character ever says, ‘I think I might be an alcoholic’” (198). Instead, it is up to the reader to observe the drinks that characters consume and interpret what they signify. However, it is well worth taking into account the shifting definitions of alcoholism before drawing any conclusions. In the 1920s, many people saw alcoholics as moral reprobates, rather than as patients requiring medical help.

Despite decades of research and ongoing studies regarding addiction, many literary critics seem to reserve a tinge of moral judgment, either towards Hemingway’s alcohol consumption, his characters,’ or both. In “Alcohol and the Writer: Some Biographical and Critical Issues (Hemingway),” Roger Forseth discusses Hemingway’s biography as a drinker, one that was not always flattering to the author, and then goes on to discuss his portrayals of drinking in The Sun Also Rises and honestly asks, “Can we pardon Hemingway for writing well?” (378). For Forseth, Hemingway’s status as a drinker (he also diagnoses him as an alcoholic) seems to indicate some kind of sin and suggests that his ability to write beautifully about alcohol consumption requires readers to either “forgive” or alternatively condemn the author.

Of the major cultural influences explored so far, Prohibition and World War I affect The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms most visibly. By the time that For Whom the Bell Tolls was published in 1940, Prohibition was a thing of the past and its longest reaching effect was not widespread sobriety, but a general sense of ambivalence about the regulation of alcohol. The last bastions of the temperance movement continued to launch occasional measures against alcohol in the United States, but their efforts now
fell on deaf ears. The federal government relied on the revenue that legal, taxed alcohol produced to pull the nation out of depression. Many average Americans saw Prohibition as a failure. Between the economic crisis of the 1930s and the looming war in Europe, the population was disenchanted with temperance efforts. Lender and Martin point to the shifting social values in the US, suggesting that “increasing tolerance for individual freedom” and “a dramatic shift away from neorepublican reform goals” (172) spelled the end of power for the temperance movement which had long opposed national pluralism.

In other words, by 1940, alcohol was no longer a divisive substance in America, nor was drinking such an act of independence and rebellion. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, alcohol is still consumed regularly and steadily, but that consumption emphasizes group solidarity more than self-expression. Naturally, these legislative and cultural shifts changed the conversation towards alcohol abuse; alcohol was no longer demonized. According to Tracy, “the acceptance of alcohol as a normal part of American life meant that the individual drinker, not alcohol itself, was the determining factor in alcoholism” (279). This attitude is reflected in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, where most major characters drink and view alcohol positively, although they judge Pablo harshly for his selfish and excessive consumption.

Although World War I is not mentioned directly in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, its effect can be seen in the prevalence of death throughout the novel. Historically, World War I had set the stage for ongoing conflict in Europe. The Spanish Civil War ripped Spain apart from 1936 to 1939; by 1939 World War II had already begun. For those who grew up during World War I, global conflict and violent death had become the norm.
Perhaps because of this emphasis on death, as well as the influence of Spanish drinking culture, the consumption of alcohol in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is as much associated with life and community as it is with death. In the *International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture*, Juan Gamella discusses the role of alcohol in Spanish culture, noting, “Alcohol is associated with most public and private rites and celebrations, such as those concerning birth, marriage, and death, as well as the religious festivities . . . and with local fiestas, of which every village or neighborhood has its own” (254). Perhaps because of these two factors, war, with its inevitable consequence of death, and Spanish culture, the drinking in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* often takes on ritualistic tones. The American protagonist, Robert Jordan, drinks with his new Spanish compatriots, and this communal consumption reflects Spanish tradition, where, “In public rituals, drinking in common is an expression of group solidarity” (254). Understanding contemporary attitudes in America and in Spain are essential to interpreting the role of alcohol in this novel. America’s increasingly neutral attitude toward alcohol, combined with Spain’s widespread acceptance of alcohol as a necessary part of life and death help create the environment of drinking in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

War, Prohibition, and alcohol itself played a variety of roles in the early twentieth century. A lifetime could be spent studying any one of these factors; this brief overview only attempts to provide a framework for some of the most crucial cultural influences of Hemingway’s time. To fully understand the power of alcohol in these three novels involves some understanding of these major national and international conversations regarding war, alcohol, and cultural attitudes toward both.
Chapter 3

“GOOD DRUNKS” AND “BAD DRUNKS”: THE SUN ALSO RISES

In “Bulls, Balls, and Booze: The Sun Also Rises,” John Crowley states that “The Sun Also Rises is, in fact, a major example of the drunk narrative, in which alcoholism is inseparable from the modernist ethos of despair” (46). Crowley has a point in calling the novel a “drunk narrative,” since alcohol is mentioned, or consumed, on nearly every page. But to reduce the effect of alcohol to one theme—despair—limits the scope of the novel and the diversity of characters and their reasons for drinking in various situations and settings in the novel. True, darkness and despair are prevalent in The Sun Also Rises. Published in 1926, the novel shows the effects of World War I in the subtext of each character’s rootlessness and sometimes in his or her decision to drink. Yet the consumption of alcohol is not always an act of despair. Throughout the novel, the purchase or consumption of alcohol often increases a character’s status and social power, although in some circles and situations, it can have the opposite effect, reducing one’s social status. In the novel, Jake Barnes, an American living in Paris, travels to Pamplona during the festival of San Fermín with a group of fellow expatriates. There, he outlines his interpretation of the dynamic relationship between alcohol and those who consume it; he uses this relationship as a value system to determine others’ characters, saying, “Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Cohn was never drunk” (Hemingway 153). For Jake, alcohol can serve as either a positive force of social bonding, or its antithesis, a negative source of alienation and aggression. In other words,
Jake approves of alcohol consumption, even excessive alcohol consumption (he drinks consistently each day of the relatively short time span covered in the novel, as do his closest friends), but only insofar as it produces, or at least maintains, positive social interactions. Jake notes, “Mike was unpleasant after a certain point” (153), which makes him an undesirable drinking partner.

Although critics have been quick to interpret alcohol monolithically, as Crowley does, its sheer prevalence should tell readers that there is something worth observing. The most obvious place to observe alcohol as a producer of social status is when Jake, the narrator, explicitly states his opinions of “good drunks” and “bad drunks,” but he is certainly not alone in using alcohol as a social barometer for determining one’s likeability and trustworthiness. Brett’s relationship with Count Mippipopolous revolves around the purchase and consumption of alcohol. While never clearly stated, Brett spends time with the count, at least partially, because he continually buys her drinks. She outlines her plans with the count to Jake, saying, “[He is] going to drive me around and have breakfast in the Bois. Hampers. Got it all at Zelli’s. Dozen bottles of Mumm’s” (41). The purchase and the anticipation of consumption are central to their outing. Indeed, the sheer possession of alcohol seems to provide Brett and the Count with the pretext and justification for staying out all night, to be able to share a champagne breakfast in the park the next day. That day, after joining Jake at his flat, Brett cavalierly sends the count away, telling Jake, “Sent him for champagne. He loves to go for champagne” (62). For Brett, the count’s willingness and ability to consistently provide alcohol raises him in her social standing. She repeatedly tells Jake, “He’s quite one of us” (40), without being
specific as to why, although given the amount of alcohol she has consumed in the short
amount of time that she has made his acquaintance, it seems likely that his consistent
ability to provide alcohol, paired with his ability to behave well while under the
influence, have put him in Brett’s good graces. Alcohol improves, perhaps even produces
the relationship altogether; it is hard to imagine the count and Brett spending quite so
much time together without the adhesive quality of alcohol to unite them. While initially
this sort of relationship, structured almost exclusively around alcohol, may seem shallow,
it does not significantly stand out from the other relationships in the book. Although Brett
and Count Mippipopolous have just met, their use of alcohol mirrors patterns in other
relationships throughout the novel. With few exceptions, alcohol provides the focal point
of human connection.

The relationship is not entirely one-sided, however. Count Mippipopolous, like
Jake, recognizes and appreciates Brett’s status as a “good drunk,” which makes her a
desirable companion for him. Although the count, according to Brett, “knows hell’s own
amount about people” (40), he says of Brett, “she is the only lady I have ever known who
was as charming when she was drunk as when she was sober” (66). Brett is not bringing
anything monetarily to the relationship, but her prowess at being a “charming” drinker
works as kind of a social capital for her, raising her status with the count (and with many
other characters as well). Quantifying this “charming” characteristic is difficult. Crowley
dismisses Brett because she drinks excessively, saying she is “unwomanly” and
“[lacking] a proper sense of values” (56-57). However, neither Jake nor Count
Mippipopolous view her in such a way. When Jake refers to her as a “good drunk,” it is
some of his highest praise. Crowley’s treatment of Brett mirrors many of the (mostly male) critics who judge drunk women in literature more harshly than drunk men. Crowley’s gendered reading retains a touch of moral judgment; men get drunk and sleep around as well in this novel, but Brett alone is “[devious],” a kind of “Circe who leads men spellbound to their doom” (57). Feminist critics, on the other hand, are more likely to view Brett’s confident consumption and casual coupling as powerful assertions of feminine independence. In “Brett Ashley as New Woman in The Sun Also Rises” Wendy Martin notes that the novel ends with Jake and Brett “[toasting] each other with their ‘coldly beaded’ glasses . . . [acknowledging] each other as emotional equals while enjoying the civility of the bar” (80). Martin does not celebrate Brett’s drinking habit outright. Brett’s heavy consumption would be deemed unhealthy by today’s standards, and is linked to a troubled past and an uncertain future, but then again, so is Jake’s. Most characters struggle to interpret the changing world around them, and most of them use or abuse alcohol as they do so. Crowley may criticize Brett’s drinking, but it is her consumption and her subsequent knack for remaining “charming” that endears her with Jake, the count, and nearly every other character she comes into contact with. Whether others view her as a feminist heroine or a devious Circe, it is clear that her relationship with alcohol produces a kind of social power for her, just as the count’s ability to purchase alcohol for others improves his own social standing.

The count occupies what may be called a cameo role within the novel, but a careful reader will learn a great deal about Jake, Brett, and the larger social norms at play in the novel by examining his function. The count, although apparently infatuated with
Brett, nevertheless shows no sign of jealousy when she refuses to travel to Biarritz (or anywhere else) with him, nor when Brett tells him that she loves Jake. In this, he differs greatly from the other men in Brett’s retinue, all of whom experience some form of anxiety and heartache when she inevitably chooses to share her affections with someone else. Jake, Cohn, Mike, and Romero all suffer at some point because Brett’s actions differ from their desires, but the count’s philosophy, clearly stated, is that he “can enjoy everything” (67), something that the other characters seem to be trying to do, though less successfully than the count. Even though Count Mippipopolous claims to have survived “seven wars and four revolutions” (66), placing him in the same category as Jake and other veterans struggling to adjust to a post-war environment, he insists that he holds his “values” dearly, which renders him capable of enjoying life. The count does not expound greatly on these values, but his attitude is one of liberal tolerance. He still cares for Brett’s company after she’s made it clear that she does not intend to embark on a romantic tryst with him, and he greets Jake with comradely friendship, even when he’s relegated to “third wheel” status. The count’s self-actualization reflects an attitude of pluralism, one that was still controversial and actively opposed by the temperance movement on American shores. Count Mippipopolous, allegedly a Greek nobleman, has made his fortune (according to Brett) in the humble capitalistic venture of “sweetshops in the states” (40). Just what he is doing in Paris is unclear, but from his attitude, he seems to be comfortable with people of any nation and background; he is at home anywhere he can set himself down and enjoy himself, and of course his wealth helps him to do so.
Jake notes, “Food had an excellent place in the count’s values. So did wine” (68). In fact, every time the count appears, he is purchasing high quality alcohol for himself and for others. When he insists on purchasing a bottle of brandy that is over a hundred years old, Mippipopolous explains, “I get more value for my money in old brandy than in any other antiquities” (68). As Oliphant states, “The Count’s behavior with respect to alcohol in various scenes across the text is clearly impacted by the desire to spend wisely in order to gain the most benefit from the expenditure” (166). Unmentioned by Oliphant, however, is the extent to which the count achieves the most benefit. Jake presumably spends a great deal on alcohol as well but does not always receive the benefit that he wishes. In a drunken moment of philosophizing, Jake concludes, rather ironically, “The bill always came. That was one of the swell things you could count on” (153). For Jake, the arrival of the bill (literal or figurative) represents the inevitable consequence of enjoying oneself. The count on the other hand, does not separate the two experiences; for him both the purchase and the consumption of tangible products, like alcohol, provide him with enjoyment. His enjoyment adds value to already expensive products (like the brandy), while any lack of enjoyment decreases value of even the most conventionally valuable items.

Although it would be difficult to catalogue every single character’s reasons for drinking each drink, suffice it to say, they are various and ultimately, debatable at best. The count, by contrast, drinks solely for his own enjoyment, and differs from the other characters in that he succeeds; for him, alcohol never disappoints, because he keeps his expectations simple. The count, as Oliphant suggests, is still making an economic
exchange. Yes, the count is interested in “getting [his] money’s worth within the
economy of the novel” as Oliphant says (165). He sets more reasonable goals on what it
means to “get his money’s worth,” and he is notably more stable than most of the other
characters. Thus the count displays the power of alcohol, but also his dominance over it.
His values and expectations are clear; he simply seeks to enjoy high quality alcohol and
to share it with others. And he does. His purchase and consumption are ends to
themselves. In this way, he exemplifies two key themes in the novel. Alcohol produces
power, but ultimately it is up to individuals to wield that power. On the one hand, the
count uses his wealth to purchase alcohol for others and thus increases his social
standing. On the other hand, he controls his consumption of alcohol so that it does not
gain power over him. Most of the other characters in the novel drink to excess at some
point in the novel and lose control – over their feelings, their words, or simply over the
physical effects of alcohol when they binge, physically crave alcohol, or wake up hung-
over. The ability to control one’s relationship with alcohol leads to another aspect of the
count, largely unmentioned by literary critics. His utter reverence for fine drink puts him
in the camp of the connoisseur, who is traditionally esteemed within the Hemingway
canon. Romero is often identified as the only “pure” or admirable character in the novel,7
partially because he noticeably abstains from drinking for the sake of his art. Although
the count does not abstain, he never appears visibly drunk, and he resembles Romero in
his poise and self-respect. Pedro treats bullfighting as a noble art, even as a higher calling
or cause. Similarly, the count sees fine alcohol as a physical manifestation of his own
belief system; his purchase and consumption of alcohol demonstrates his values of simple
enjoyment. In his only didactic moment, the count lectures Brett for her irreverence
towards a bottle of fine champagne, when she drunkenly proposes a toast, saying, “You
don’t want to mix emotions up with a wine like that. You lose the taste” (66). Again, the
count demonstrates his understanding and connoisseurship of alcohol and its power.
While nearly everyone else in the novel, does mix alcohol with emotions, intentionally or
not, the count is worldly enough to acknowledge the potential for drunken scenes and to
avoid them himself. He adds, “All I want out of wines is to enjoy them” (66), politely
declining the prospect of amateur speechmaking and reinforcing the idea that for the
count, fine alcohol is a form of “aficion.”

By contrast, Jake’s comment that “Cohn was never drunk” (153) is not merely an
observation; it is an indictment. Jake’s value system depends on observing others when
they drink. Thus, those who do not drink are outside of his value system and also outside
of his trust. Critics have often noted that in Hemingway’s fictional worlds, those who
don’t drink, or drink very little, are as unlikeable as those “bad drunks” like Mike.8
Crowley says, “Not drinking is never acceptable and scarcely imaginable to Hemingway
except for a man like Romero, who consciously chooses to abstain for the sake of his art”
(54). Crowley, of course, equates Hemingway with the fictional Jake Barnes, something
that many others have done; even Hemingway himself played with autobiographical
themes in earlier drafts (Jake was originally called “Hem”). Still, Jake Barnes is, and
should be considered, a fictional character, rather than an avatar for the author. That
aside, Crowley notes that within the world of The Sun Also Rises, abstaining is acceptable
if it is for “artistic and moral integrity” (54). The count helps to turn some of these
accepted Hemingway standards astray. Sheldon Norman Grebstein claims that “only Montoya and Romero” stand apart from the other characters because “they alone adhere consistently to their principles and conduct themselves with dignity” (167). Yet Count Mippipopolous, that seemingly trivial character, also adheres to his principles and conducts himself with dignity; only in his case, his principles do not demand eschewing alcohol. Rather, the consumption of alcohol is one of the values he holds to; his purchase of alcohol becomes an art form in itself. This is important insofar as other critics have insisted on seeing alcohol as a singular destructive force in *The Sun Also Rises*. Matt Djos, as we will see, reduces the entire novel to a cautionary tale against alcohol. John Crowley believes that alcohol always leads to despair. Count Mippipopolous shows the other side of alcohol. Within the novel, alcohol produces power, both negatively and positively. For the count, alcohol not only raises his social status, it also gives him genuine pleasure and enjoyment, and because he is an aficionado, it adds to his overall quality and purpose of life.

Most of the other characters in *The Sun Also Rises* have a more complicated relationship with alcohol than the count does. At various times, each character drinks for some purpose or with some intention outside of simple enjoyment and sometimes with implausible expectations of what the alcohol will do. Mike, when it is obvious that his fiancée is having an affair with Pedro Romero, says “I think I’ll stay rather drunk. This is all awfully amusing, but it’s not too pleasant. It’s not too pleasant for me” (205). This is just one example of a character seeking not only to drink, but to intentionally get drunk to mask or evade unpleasant emotions. All too often, when any of the characters places
undue expectations on alcohol, expecting it to “cure” some feeling, they are disappointed, and the alcohol is liable to produce power, emotionally, physically, or socially, often in unanticipated or unwanted ways, leading to or contributing to preexisting despair. Mike’s attempt to “stay drunk” as a coping mechanism is ineffective and is surely a factor when he suddenly loses his temper, knocking over a table in a café, “so that all the beers and the dish of shrimps went over in a crash” (210). Mike’s alcohol-induced outburst is directly at odds with the count’s civilized consumption. In an ironic twist, Mike’s avowal to “stay rather drunk” ends in a physical, violent rejection of the beer he has been consuming when he knocks it away “in a crash.” If his reason for drinking is “not too pleasant,” neither is its result. Shortly after, Jake finds Mike in bed, surrounded by empty bottles and “looking like a death mask of himself” (212). Although Mike seems to hope that alcohol will ease his emotions over Brett, ultimately it merely makes him more violent and no less emotional. When he finally sleeps (or passes out), his similarity to a “death mask” seems to imply that his rest is not peaceful, but is rather a symptom of his despair, which has not been mitigated, but rather compounded, by alcohol. But this is not always the case; alcohol does not always contribute to despair.

Alcoholic consumption leads to some of the most honest and authentic conversations in the novel. Jake’s talk with Brett in the taxi in Paris, Jake and Bill’s conversation on the banks of the Irati, and the final conversation between Jake and Brett in Madrid are all moments of honest communication, where in the midst of noise and chaos, two characters are capable of sharing their inner thoughts and feelings. For each of these moments, alcohol acts as the catalyst for pro-social bonding. Djos is skeptical of
these exchanges and warns readers that “the friendships are . . . red herrings” (73) in a novel that is really about the dangers of alcoholism. Narrowing down what a novel is about is something that literary critics rarely agree on, but when Djos earnestly states his hope that readers will have “seen enough . . . to discredit the friendships, the values, the drinking, and the lives of [the novel’s] characters” (73), he seems to want to discredit the novel altogether. Of course, if by Djos’s reasoning, readers must carefully guard their minds against any unhealthy representations of living, then they would have very little literature left to read. Djo’s limited reading identifies several key features of *The Sun Also Rises* but is too eager to blame them all on alcoholism, never asking why these characters might be acting the way they are. Jake is not the only character to use alcohol as a sounding board for others’ values; Count Mippipopolous is another character that gives readers valuable context for a world still dealing with the aftermath of war. While Djos is quick to diagnose Jake (and Brett, Mike, and nearly everyone else in the novel) with alcoholism, he does not mention the larger drinking culture surrounding the expatriates. Djos observes that the alcohol consumption in *The Sun Also Rises* “cannot even begin to resemble normalcy and is most certainly a substantive foundation for addiction and obsessive dependence” (66). Readers, especially twenty-first century readers, can probably agree with this statement. Jake and the others drink almost constantly, sometimes with deleterious effects. But they are not the only ones; Djos ignores the setting and the culture that surround these drinkers as steadfastly as he hammers home his diagnoses of alcoholism, a term that he uses statically, but that underwent scientific, medical, and cultural changes in definition in the 1920s. In *The
Alcoholic Republic, an American Tradition, W.J. Rorabaugh points out “drinking customs and habits were not random but reflective of a society’s fabric, tensions, and inner dynamics, and of the psychological sets of its people” (xii). Thus by studying the culture that surrounds Jake within the context of the novel and the effects of culture on the novel as a whole, readers gain a much more nuanced and informed interpretation of the power of alcohol. Three major factors influenced the role of alcohol in 1920s culture: the aftermath of World War I, Prohibition, and the changing definitions of alcoholism.

World War I is perhaps the most visible cultural factor affecting characters’ alcohol consumption, even though they avoid talking about it. Each character in The Sun Also Rises is a survivor of that devastating conflict. Some, like Jake, are veterans, while others, like Brett, have lost loved ones. All are dealing with the aftermath of fractured nations and ideals, and all are finding ways to survive in a world that is very different from the one they were born into. So Djos is not at all wrong in stating, “There is a great deal of fear here” (66). Indeed, fear is the status quo, both in the novel and in the larger culture of the 1920s. Although the war has literally emasculated Jake and affected every other character in some capacity, Djos ignores it as a factor for what he deems the characters’ “spiritual bankruptcy” (74). As Oliphant so winningly puts it,

Attempting to discuss the consumption of alcohol by characters in a fictional piece about world war or its effects without also considering the Lost Generation context is similar to trying to discuss a novel like Gone with the Wind without taking into account the impact of the Civil War. (61)
Yet Djos is not the only critic who has done just this (Carol Gelderman takes a similar approach), criticizing the volume of alcohol consumed by fictional characters without considering that they have just survived one of the most devastating conflicts in Western history.

So how, exactly, did World War I affect American drinking habits? To fully understand America’s relationship with alcohol, a look to the past illuminates several recurring patterns. Contrary to popular belief, America’s hardest drinking years did not occur during Prohibition or even in the twentieth century. Instead, Americans consumed the most alcohol between 1800-1830. These early years of nationhood were a “period of unprecedented and extremely rapid change” and Rorabaugh suggests, “the segments of society affected adversely, in one way or another, by these rapid changes were also the segments of society most attracted to alcohol” (145). The first decades of the twentieth century were also defined by rapid changes, and those who came of age during the war were certainly affected adversely, some physically, but nearly all mentally and ideologically. Rorabaugh adds, “Social scientists who have studied drinking in a variety of cultures have agreed with Donald Horton, who wrote in 1943 that the primary reason people drink is to relieve anxiety” (146). Perhaps it would be too simplistic to reduce the tangled web of cultural influences and personal reasons that lead the characters of The Sun Also Rises to drink to the overarching category of “anxiety.” Count Mippipopolous, for one, does not seem to drink to relieve anxiety. But many others have every reason to feel anxious and many of them drink heavily. Jake, having survived the war, has suffered an injury that leaves him impotent; Reynolds surmises his “testicles are intact and his
phallus is missing” (The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties 25). Brett has lost her “own true love” (46). Bill and Mike are veterans as is Harris, the British man that joins the fishing trip in Burguete. Each drinks for a variety of reasons, but anxiety is a constant underlying feature for all of them, sometimes running under the surface and sometimes becoming visible, either in words or in actions. Of course, using alcohol to relieve anxiety is not always effective. At times alcohol produces a calming effect, as when Jake and Bill consume rum punch and wine on their first night in Burguete and then spend the night in companionable silence, reading and smoking “in bed to keep warm” (116). At other times, alcohol only exacerbates the latent anxiety; each drinking incident is affected, not only by the drinker’s current attitudes and emotions, but also by the setting, the companionship, and other factors that may be too numerous and subtle to ever fully catalogue.

World War I has visible effects in other areas of the novel as well. Djos derides Jake’s reverence for the bullring, stating, “spectatorship automatically excludes involvement” (73) and accusing Jake of lacking the courage needed to face his own problems. Here, as elsewhere, Djos ignores the larger context. In the aftermath of the war that eviscerated the traditional morals of religion and chivalry alike, bullfighting gives Jake a sense of passion and community. It is precisely because the war has shattered his belief in nearly everything else that the novel’s outcome is so devastating. When Jake commits the heresy of facilitating a sexual encounter between Brett and Pedro Romero, an act tied up with the consumption of alcohol, he loses his place among the aficionados, leaving him more rootless and anxious than before. For Montoya, the brandy that Brett
and Romero consume is just as damning as the eventual consummation as the affair. When Montoya enters the room where Romero has joined Brett, Jake, and the rest, “He started to smile at [Jake], then he saw Pedro Romero with a big glass of cognac in his hand . . . at a table full of drunks” (180). Montoya leaves the room in silent disapproval, a signal that Jake has breached the code of afición. Similarly, Brett and Romero’s sexual relationship is marked by the “empty cognac glasses” that Jake sees after the two lovers have left together (190). Thus alcohol, while functioning as a powerful connecting force between Brett and Romero, also acts as a wedge, not only between Jake and his friend, Montoya, but in a larger sense, between Jake and his community of bullfighting aficionados, a connection that had helped to give him something to believe in in the wake of the war. If Brett and Romero are experiencing any romantic jitters, alcohol may relieve their anxiety, even as it presumably increases Jake’s. Thus Jake’s relationship with alcohol varies depending on the social situation. Although consuming alcohol with his friends is Jake’s preferred method for connecting with those he is close to, with Montoya, the alcohol that Jake invites Romero to drink (as well as the presence of his drunk friends) effectively ends their friendship. It is no surprise that having (once again) lost Brett to another man and having lost his place among the aficionados, Jake responds by drinking.

When Jake meets Brett in Madrid, he drinks heavily, consuming much more than Brett. They each consume three martinis, but Jake proceeds to drink at least “three bottles of rioja alta” with lunch (249) and orders two more, while Brett almost pleads, “don’t get drunk” (250). Certainly Jake is using alcohol as a coping mechanism, or perhaps as a
form of escapism, a form that is neither healthy nor safe, but neither is it simply a manifestation of an alcoholic’s physical need for alcohol. Careful readers will note, as Brett does, that Jake’s consumption in this scene is uncharacteristic, and thus indicative of a situational problem. While Djos would have readers blame the malaise present in the novel on alcoholism and alcoholism alone, a closer look reveals much more productive interpretations. Rorabaugh writes, “In particular, a high level of drunkenness is likely in cultures that are anxiety-ridden, structurally disintegrating, or incompetent in providing individuals with a sense of effectiveness” (246). Perhaps nothing could better describe the state of affairs of the 1920s and Jake’s personal life at the end of the novel as these terms. He is anxious, anxious because he has once again witnessed the woman he loves have an affair with another man, anxious because his physical impediment prevents her from committing to a relationship with him, anxious because he has broken ties with Montoya and effectively lost his status as an aficionado. Jake is anxious, but his anxiety hardly singles him out amongst a culture of war survivors. The entire culture is struggling to construct meaning out of the wreckage of a war-torn world. No wonder that alcohol and its consumption serve not only as a pastime but as a social value system and source of power within the novel.

Another major factor affecting the cultural environment of *The Sun Also Rises* is the USA’s prohibition on alcohol. The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* drink for a variety of reasons, but at least for the Americans, like Jake and Bill, drinking is a way of flouting the conservative values held by the temperance movement. It is no irony that Robin Room titles his article “A ‘Reverence for Strong Drink.’” A.J. Liebling explains,
“people whose youth did not coincide with the twenties never had our reverence for strong drink . . . for us it was a self-righteous pleasure . . . Drinking, we proved to ourselves our freedom as individuals and flouted Congress’” (qtd. in Room 543). For Jake and Bill, alcohol, and their ability to consume it, with or without the approval of others, produces a sense of autonomy and independence, factors that are worth considering when viewing alcohol as a commonly used antidote for anxiety. Of course alcohol produces physical effects, but its ideological effects are worth considering too. When they arrive at Burguete on a cold, blustery evening, Jake takes the initiative (at Bill’s suggestion) to order a hot rum punch, which involves first teaching the inn’s employee how to make it. After Bill declares, “There isn’t too much rum in that,” Jake again takes the initiative to go to the cupboard and add a “half-tumblerful into the pitcher” (116). These actions show that Jake’s ability to procure alcohol gives him a sense of autonomy. The alcohol itself acts as an impetus for Jake to take matters into his own hands. There is no question (for Jake) as to the morality of adding rum to the punch; for him, alcohol itself is a more reliable value system than the tired out norms of conservative Christianity, and as such, it is only right for him to get the full worth of the punch, both from a monetary standpoint (the punch will go on the inevitable bill) and from an ideological standpoint (readers imagine that Jake, no doubt, instructed the girl to put rather more rum into the punch than actually ended up there).

The alcohol itself acts as a literal and figurative source of power. There is its potency and its ability to “warm” the chilled men, as well as its symbolic power, which is in the hands of the establishment, until Jake forcibly, but perhaps discreetly, wrests it for
himself and Bill. For Jake, his actions not only give him a personal sense of authority, but also raise his social status in Bill’s eyes; Bill approves of his actions, although he is perhaps too shy (or fearful) to do them himself. The act also takes on political tones when Bill says, “Direct action . . . it beats legislation” (116), perhaps alluding to the faraway 18th Amendment still in effect back on American shores. When read this way, both Bill and Jake show readers that for them, the consumption of alcohol is not necessarily an act of desperation, but an act of resistance against American conservatism. Ironically, Djos identifies this, saying, “Jake and his friends are rebels,” but failing to recognize what they are rebelling against or why. He merely suggests that they are “obsessed with denying their connectedness with the normal order of things” (72). Michael Reynolds, however, acknowledges that drinking, for Jake, is an act of rebellion, not only against conservative morals, but also against American hypocrisy. In *The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties* Reynolds notes that “between 1925-30, about two million Americans – one out of every fifty-five – visited Europe” and adds that part of Europe’s allure was “the easy access to alcohol” (62). Many, even those who supported the temperance movement, were not above consuming alcohol in the more liberal climate of France or other European countries. While Americans may have sided with morality in the voting boxes, their actions abroad told a different story.

Jake’s use of alcohol as a form of rebellion is not uniquely American however. Paris, where the novel begins, and where Jake resides, had its own complicated history with legislation and alcohol, just the generation before. In “Barflies and Bohemians: Drink, Paris and Modernity,” Peter Nicholls notes, “the repression of the drinking
establishments of France in the 1850s and 1870s endowed both drink and its institutions
with an added political signification” (9). Although this repression was no longer in effect
by the time that The Sun Also Rises takes place, Room notes, “In reaction against this
policy, the number of cafes – and alcohol consumption levels – rose steeply in the
following years” (543). Legislators in the United States, perhaps, would have done well
to note the long-term effects of attempted restriction against alcohol in France, before
attempting their own experiments. Room adds that for French citizens, “drinking had
become a ritualized expression of the autonomy of oneself and one’s social group against
the claims of the state and of official morality” (543). Jake’s actions with regard to
alcohol not only show his political leanings as an American, but also his understanding of
his adopted country. The ease with which Jake navigates the cafes of Paris mark him as
an experienced resident. Although he himself may be an American consuming alcohol
abroad, he shows nothing but distaste for the crowds of American tourists that fill up
Madame Lecomte's restaurant, highlighting his own knowledge of Parisian cuisine and
culture by contrasting it with those who have only read about the site on the “American
Women's Club list” (82). Jake’s relationship with alcohol gives him a sense of autonomy
and of social connectedness. As an individual, his ability to purchase and consume
alcohol gives him a sense of power in a world that has otherwise disappointed him and
wounded him both physically and mentally. The ease with which he procures alcohol, no
matter what country he is in, raises his social status among his friends, while from a
larger, cultural perspective, his drinking unites him with the millions of others, both in
France and in the United States, who rejected governmental authority to continue drinking.

*The Sun Also Rises*, and particularly its portrayal of alcohol, is certainly a product of the 1920s. Each character’s complicated relationship with alcohol reflects upon a myriad of cultural influences, not all of which can be adequately discussed or understood here. However, the novel also affected its contemporary culture at large. In an overview of the much mythologized 1920s and its accompanying literature, John Aldridge reminds readers that “One does not know, for example, whether the literature created the fantasy or the fantasy found its embodiment in the literary life” (112). The relationship, of course, between culture and literature is never one-way. Much early criticism of the novel bemoaned its “lack of religious belief, and pervasive lack of sustaining values” (*The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties* 9). Although Hemingway was certainly not the first writer to feature the “new normal” of men and women drinking together and frankly engaging in sexual affairs with no hint of marriage proposals, “the older reading generation” still expected “a woman like Brett Ashley to be suitably punished for her promiscuity” (9). Reynolds writes, “The continuous drinking, occasional fornication, profane language . . . many found offensive” (9). Some lamented the “lack of plot and character development” (10). Not all criticism was negative however. Many admired the writing style, and the novel sold. The first printing of 5000 sold out, and Leonard Leff reports, “In America, the response to Scribners’ *The Sun Also Rises* was strong enough for a second printing of two thousand one month after publication, then a third printing of
two thousand one month later” (55). If not a bestseller, it was, at least, a seller, and “by 1927 . . . the plastic age had adopted *The Sun Also Rises* as ready reference” (63).

Malcolm Cowley reported that all the women at Smith College were “modeling themselves after Lady Brett” while “hundreds of bright young men from the Middle West were trying to be Hemingway heroes” (qtd. in Leff 63). Ironically, of course, one of the most common condemnations of the novel was that there *was* no hero of the novel, but the young people of the United States nevertheless identified, or tried to identify, with the hard-drinking, tough-talking, and deeply wounded Jake Barnes. Reynolds prefers to identify him as “a prototype for the antihero, the modernist man whose greatest virtue is that he manages to survive” (7). Readers could identify with that survivalist’s spirit; Americans who had survived the war now had to continue to exist in a world that looked very different from the one they had lived in as children. Alcohol, of course, was one coping mechanism that both fictional and factual survivors sometimes used, one that *The Sun Also Rises* certainly did not invent, although the novel did help to publicize it. Room notes, “‘the lost generation’ became a transmitter of cultural values concerning drinking to the larger American culture” (544). Perhaps most ironically, given the novel’s treatment of mass American tourism in Europe, was the way *The Sun Also Rises* helped swell the numbers of middle-class Americans heading overseas. In Tony Allan’s *Americans in Paris*, he credits the novel for “[putting] the finishing touches” on the Lost Generation’s “unintentional publicity campaign” (95). He adds, “by the late twenties it seemed as though no college student’s education was complete without a spell of hard drinking in the Montparnasse cafes” (95). These very tourists are the ones decried by
Jake Barnes, yet this fictional character inspired countless numbers of Americans to emulate his style.
Chapter 4

“OUR OLD WHITE CAPRI”: *AFAREWELL TO ARMS*

While many critics have at least mentioned alcohol with regard to the *The Sun Also Rises*, it is surprising how few have dealt with the theme in *A Farewell to Arms*. Ashley Oliphant identifies the novel as “saturated fiction,” which she defines as “those texts that are inundated with drinking moments” (44). The novel, set in Italy and Switzerland during World War I, certainly contains many “drinking moments,” but these have garnered much less attention than the even more heavily saturated novel that preceded it. In “The Alcoholic Content of *A Farewell to Arms*,” Charles Norton points out that, “104 pages out of a total of 342 printed pages bear some reference to alcohol” (309). Perhaps most surprisingly, Norton, writing in 1973, notes that, “very little has been written about [alcohol’s] significance in the work” (309). Since then, relatively little has been added to the existing criticism regarding alcohol. Still, Oliphant’s work notwithstanding, the critics who do mention alcohol tend to fall into the alcohol-as-biography pattern established with *The Sun Also Rises*; many also attach some negative stigma to drinking. Carol Gelderman, for one, attempts to simplify the novel to “a novel centered around drink and drinking” and reduces the love story to “the romance of Frederic with all that goes into his oral cavity” (12-13). For Gelderman, the presence of alcohol seems ineffably distasteful, and ultimately, her condemnation comes back to the author when she claims that “all Hemingway heroes . . . [are] very much like the author” (14). Norton takes a more thoughtful approach, examining a variety of the functions of
alcohol within the novel while also exploring various cultural factors that affected drinking habits. Although his criticism is more thorough, like Gelderman, Norton takes a biographical interpretation for granted; he assumes “that it is Hemingway who speaks through the first person narrator of this work” and concludes “we can believe that what we read are [Hemingway’s] personal judgments regarding those wines and other beverages which he mentions” (310). To some extent, Norton may be correct; Hemingway may well have chosen to write about the types of alcohol that he himself preferred. But Roland Barthes would argue for further reading and interpretation. According to Barthes, “We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions” (4). Those who equate Hemingway’s fictional representation of alcohol with his own consumption and see his protagonists as avatars for the author limit their understanding of the novel. By opening up these interpretations to better understand cultural factors, readers can enter into the limitless realm of “many dimensions.” In *A Farewell to Arms*, as in *The Sun Also Rises*, alcohol does not play a single role, but rather is a dynamic, productive force and a form of power.

Frederic Henry, the protagonist of *A Farewell to Arms*, is an American expatriate who has volunteered to drive ambulances for the Italian army. Like Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, Frederic Henry uses alcohol, not only by imbibing it, but by making judgments about others based on their consumption. Although he does not state this as explicitly as Jake does when he comments on “good drunks” and “bad drunks,” Frederic is drawn to those who can drink, while those who abstain from drinking are socially, even
morally, suspect. This is most notable in the contrast between the house doctor and Dr. Valentini, both of whom examine Frederic’s knee. The house doctor’s inability to successfully probe the shrapnel out of Frederic’s knee, followed by his consultation with two similarly, even comically, incompetent doctors, seems to have already made Frederic suspicious of his ability, but when he is alone with him, Frederic offers him a drink, perhaps as a further test of his trustworthiness and ability. The house doctor refuses categorically, saying, “No thank you. I never drink alcohol” (86). By contrast, Dr. Valentini, who will later successfully operate on Frederic’s knee, responds eagerly, “A drink? Certainly. I will have ten drinks. Where are they?” (86). Norton comments on this contrast as well, noting that the consumption of alcohol becomes a “ritual of brotherhood among believers” (313), adding religious connotations to what is already, for Frederic, a serious matter for medical, as well as personal, reasons. While the house doctor must consult with other doctors and ultimately recommends that Frederic delay his surgery for six months, Dr. Valentini is capable of making decisions and acting quickly. Thus, alcohol serves as an indicator, not only of trustworthiness, but also of decisive action. Frederic Henry’s use of alcohol as a test of character has very real repercussions, and most of the time his litmus test of fellow drinkers proves effective. The fact that drinkers act as the saviors in this novel protests the idea that the temperance movement was painting of the evils of alcohol. Throughout the novel, Frederic’s life depends on his ability to act quickly and on his ability to trust others to act quickly; those who help him the most tend to be drinkers.
In another instance, Frederic offers a drink to Mr. Meyers, whom he already knows to be a crooked gambler, and the answer is similar to the house doctor’s: “No thanks. I never drink” (114). Gelderman ignores the possible validity of the connection between alcohol and trustworthiness. When she mentions Mr. and Mrs. Meyers, she merely says, “they do not drink; they are described as ‘a strange lot’” (13). She fails to mention Mr. Meyers’ insider knowledge that connotes at least a tacit acceptance of, if not an overt participation in, fixing races. Oliphant also takes Gelderman to task for making non-text-based assumptions, saying, “Gelderman is erroneous in asserting Mrs. Meyers is an abstainer; the text does not support this assertion because nothing is said of her alcoholic intake” (177). Ironically, Gelderman’s underlying grievance seems to be with what she perceives to be Hemingway’s misogyny, yet she fails to acknowledge Mrs. Meyers as an independent agent who bets separately (albeit un成功fully) from her husband and may, consequently, have different attitudes toward alcohol. Just like the house doctor, who hedges on reaching a conclusive treatment plan for Frederic’s knee, Mr. Meyers’s character is marked by his hesitation and unwillingness to give tips. Frederic “[hates] to ask him because sometimes he did not answer, and always you could see it hurt him to tell you” (111). Mr. Meyers’s status as a non-drinker marks him as an acquaintance rather than a member of the “brotherhood” that Norton mentions. While Frederic and his closest compatriots act quickly and often selflessly for one another, at times Mr. Meyers chooses inaction (“sometimes he did not answer”) in the place of action. Lastly, amongst the nurses at the hospital where Frederic is recovering, Catherine, Miss Gage,¹⁰ and Miss Ferguson¹¹ all imbibe, not heavily, but occasionally, while the
decidedly unsympathetic Miss Van Campen does not. Miss Gage and Miss Ferguson both facilitate Frederic’s relationship with Catherine at some point, making them trustworthy co-conspirators, while Miss Van Campen is a decided threat to Frederic and Catherine’s relationship. Although Miss Gage is somewhat of a minor character, she is capable of quick, selfless action. After Miss Van Campen has discovered empty bottles of liquor in Frederic’s room, Miss Gage “packed the bottles in the rucksack” and “started for the door” (127). Without considering her own job security, she swiftly decides to smuggle the bottles to the porter. Although she is unsuccessful, her quick action marks her as one of Frederic’s comrades. In these examples, alcohol functions as a form of power, marking one’s trustworthiness and ability to act, but amongst non-drinkers, like Miss Van Campen, consuming alcohol can be a risky practice. Alcohol then, functions powerfully, but not always statically.

For Frederic, those who drink are automatically more likely to be trusted, yet drinking is not, in and of itself, a safe activity. It is precisely because Frederic has been drinking in the hospital, which Miss Van Campen disapproves of, that he loses his leave and must return to the front. As in *The Sun Also Rises*, alcohol has the power to influence one’s social status, but in *A Farewell to Arms*, the stakes are noticeably higher. While the characters of *The Sun Also Rises* are still dealing with the very serious effects of World War I, in *A Farewell to Arms*, the war is a matter of life or death for Frederic. It is telling that Miss Van Campen, the noted non-drinker, has an active role in sending Frederic back into dangerous territory, where he narrowly escapes with his life, whereas, as Norton points out, once Frederic deserts, “the one who saves Lt. Henry from arrest, the only one
who stands between his escape to peace and return to certain death is the barman” (313). Therefore, alcohol not only produces powerful connotations of trustworthiness and capability, but literally acts as a harbinger of either life or death. If drinking alcohol nearly gets Frederic killed, (because Miss Van Campen’s discovery of his alcohol consumption sends him back to the frontlines), it is also Frederic’s consumption (as is implied by his friendship with the barman) that effectively saves him. Alcohol, then, does not produce power uniformly. Rather, its power depends on the combination of social opinions and cultural values in which it is consumed and viewed. The role of alcohol, which remains for Frederic a universal test of trustworthiness, changes in different circles and settings. With Dr. Valentini and with Catherine, Miss Gage, and Miss Ferguson, alcohol serves to unite disparate individuals, but with Miss Van Campen, alcohol is the most palpable dividing wedge and source of conflict between the two.

For Frederic Henry, as for Jake Barnes, World War I has a major influence on his consumption of alcohol. Most of the factors of fear and anxiety that influence the characters of The Sun Also Rises are at play in A Farewell to Arms. While in Italy, the ability to obtain and drink alcohol not only unites Frederic with the other troops, it gives him a sense of power in situations that are ultimately out of his control. For Frederic, alcohol is a powerful force that can change a social dynamic, creating a sense of communion that may not have been there before. Early in the novel when he is at the mess, he notes, “I drank wine because we were not all brothers unless I drank a little” (32). In this case, he drinks with a specific purpose in mind, a purpose that seems to be met by the wine he drinks. Linda Underhill and Jeanne Nakjavani, who have noted that
the meals consumed in the novel frequently act as signals of the “prevailing mood of the adventure,” add that it is important for Hemingway’s expatriate characters to consume local food with the local people. Thus when Frederic drinks wine with his fellow men he is also, “[absorbing] the native culture through the food” (115). This is highlighted by Frederic’s word choice. He does not, for example, use a simile to say that he wants to feel like brothers. Rather, he uses definite language. They are brothers, but in this case, only if he drinks. By drinking the Italian wine with his comrades, he truly becomes a brother, in a Communion-like act of transubstantiation. Oliphant suggests that Frederic “endures” the wine merely “for the sake of perpetuating the party mood” (125), which may be partially his intention, but there are also other factors at stake. In the context of the Italian war front, it is not only emotionally advantageous for Frederic to feel camaraderie with the Italian soldiers, it is also an act of self-protection. Although he is inherently an outsider because he is American, consuming alcohol with the others creates a socially acceptable way to bond. In multiple instances throughout the novel, Frederic’s very life depends on his ability to trust the relationships he has made, often with those who do not share his nationality.

Frederic proves his own trustworthiness when he risks his life just to acquire food for the other ambulance drivers during an attack. Just before the attack, Frederic and the four Italian ambulance drivers have been engaged in a debate regarding the war. Although Frederic disagrees with the other men on almost every point, he continues to treat them with civility and respect and insists on obtaining food for them. It is only because of his persistence that Frederic is able to acquire a simple meal from the major,
and only his commitment to see his “brothers” fed that he ventures back to the dugout, after the major suggests that he “‘better stay here’” (45). Once there, Frederic and the four Italians share the food and wine communally, as equals. In this case, their wine consumption has nothing to do with celebrating. Underhill and Nakjavani suggest that the haste and the desperation of the meal “[prefigure] the shelling which will, in a few short moments, kill one of them and wound Henry” (119). This may be true, but the meal also echoes the previous meal at the mess, when Frederic drinks specifically because it makes him a “brother.” At the first meal, Frederic’s drinking could be seen as enjoyable or optional. Even Oliphant suggests he may be drinking to promote a “party mood.” But Frederic’s commitment to the brotherhood, promoted by communal consumption, is proved by the second meal, in which he puts others first, despite the danger.

Oliphant notes another important aspect of this scene: Frederic takes on the role of caretaker, a traditionally female responsibility. As Oliphant notes, “the wine consumed has nothing to do with setting a party mood, escaping a dreadful reality or proving one’s manhood” (105). This is important insofar as some critics have reduced alcohol consumption in Hemingway’s fiction to a kind of competition of machismo, often with undertones of homophobia or misogyny. Sometimes this is the case, but as Oliphant points out, the scene, “brings to the fore an aspect of Hemingway’s portrayal of masculine behavior that often goes unacknowledged” (106), that is, the wine and the food that the men consume together not only highlight Frederic’s role as a tender caretaker, but in this case, the wine produces powerful connotations of equality and trustworthiness among men of different nationalities and ideologies, challenging notions of rugged
individualism that are sometimes associated with masculinity, especially masculinity as presented by Ernest Hemingway. At times, communal obligation takes precedence over one’s own interests. Here, as in other places in the novel, alcohol produces power, this time in the sense of communal strength, but it cannot prevent death, as ultimately, both wine and brotherhood fail to protect the men from the shell that blasts through the meager protection of the dugout.

Although most of the examples examined so far have shown the positive power of drinking, Frederic’s relationship with alcohol is not simple. The same night that Frederic drinks in the mess to become brothers with his comrades, the major challenges Frederic to a drinking contest against another soldier, and although Frederic initially refuses, his pride seems to get the better of him as he declares, “Let the best man win” (34). Here, although the men are drinking together, the focus shifts; they are no longer consuming in a communal sense, but rather as competitive individuals, each trying to prove his own dominance. Frederic drinks the “red wine in mugs” eagerly, until he suddenly remembers his rendezvous with Catherine. Although earlier in the evening, alcohol produces a sense of connection with the Italian men, now his consumption plays a part in preventing him from seeing Catherine. As he leaves the villa, after being unable to see her, he realizes, “I felt lonely and empty. I had treated seeing Catherine very lightly, I had gotten somewhat drunk and had nearly forgotten to come but when I could not see her there I was feeling lonely and hollow” (35 italics mine). The repetition of the word “lonely,” acting as bookends around the word “drunk,” highlights another aspect of alcohol: Frederic has consumed excessively and carelessly, and as a result not only feels remorseful, but alone
and isolated as well. Far from creating feelings of unity, drinking as a display of dominance undermines his ability to socially bond with Catherine. Drinking frequently produces positive effects for Frederic, but this does not mean he can imbibe without consequences. For Frederic, as for most people, he must be aware of a variety of social and institutional norms that are sometimes at odds with one another. Engaging in a drinking contest may gain him some notoriety among the soldiers, but it acts against him in his relationship with Catherine. This is also the moment when Frederic seems to lose control; his temporary, alcohol-induced single-mindedness causes him to forget what else is at stake. When Frederic can keep his alcohol consumption under control, it is likely to produce pro-social effects, but when he loses control, the opposite occurs; he feels lonely and isolated. These contrasts are important because they show that alcohol does not always function in the same way, or even in entirely predictable ways. Gelderman maintains that the descriptions of “eating and drinking (mostly drinking)” make the novel “repetitious and boring” (13), but readers willing to look more closely will see that the role of alcohol is nothing if not complex and dynamic. Frederic, as well as the reader, must navigate a web of different social and cultural contexts to understand how alcohol produces power in various situations. Although in this case his consumption contributes to a division between Frederic and Catherine, later their mutual consumption brings them closer together.

Frederic and Catherine’s romance is largely defined by their feeling that they are alone, united with each other against the world. In many ways, alcohol helps them maintain this perceived barrier, distancing the pair from the terrifying world around them.
Anomalously, Gelderman declares Catherine a “non-drinker” and excoriates Frederic for “not [realizing] she doesn’t drink, especially since that is all he does do” (13). Although Catherine does sometimes refuse alcohol, especially hard alcohol, she is certainly not a “non-drinker”; she and Frederic frequently consume alcohol together. It’s unclear what Gelderman bases her assumption on; it is possible that her own notions of alcohol and masculinity may influence her reading. She suggests that “for revenge, perhaps” Hemingway makes Catherine “a non-person (13) as well. But Catherine makes her own choices throughout the novel, about alcohol as well as about her own future. Within the novel’s portrayal of World War I, falling in love and maintaining meaningful relationships are unlikely, almost impossible acts. Before meeting one another, Frederic declares, “I don’t love” (62), while Catherine, having already lost one fiancé to the war, appears “probably a little crazy” (26). In meeting one another, falling in love, and maintaining that relationship throughout the course of the novel, all in the midst of wartime chaos, Catherine and Frederic are fighting almost impossible odds. It is no wonder then that both of them frequently refer to their unity in terms of defense and offense. Catherine says, “There’s only us two and in the world there’s all the rest of them” (121), and later in the novel, Frederic describes their relationship by saying, “We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others” (216). In many ways, of course, the world at large does try to draw the two apart. Catherine must hide her pregnancy, Frederic faces death multiple times, and their wild flight to Switzerland succeeds only after a series of close calls. In the face of all these challenges, the two consume alcohol together as a way of reinforcing their close bond.
Long before consummating his love affair with Catherine, Frederic fantasizes about the two of them going to a hotel together in Milan where, “we would drink the capri and the door locked and it hot and only a sheet and the whole night” (32). Within his fantasy, both the consumption of the white wine and the ability to lock out the rest of the world are important aspects of his relationship with Catherine. Later, they have the ability to live this fantasy when they rent a hotel room for a few hours before Frederic returns to the front. Although initially Catherine reacts negatively to the room and Frederic worries, “I had not thought it would be like this” (133), the mood of the scene shifts after they have eaten and drunk together: “After we had eaten we felt fine . . . We were very hungry and the meal was good and we drank a bottle of Capri and a bottle of St. Estephe” (134). The act of consuming together helps them to feel close to one another and “in a little time the room felt like our own home” (134). Deprived as they are of any real home or security, consuming alcohol, particularly the capri, which they have drunk together in restaurants and in the hospital, produces a metaphorical home for them to retreat into, together. Once they have safely reached Switzerland, Catherine wants to “try and make the [hotel] room look . . . like our home” and then muses, “Maybe we can get some of our old white capri” (265). Norton has suggested that Frederic’s knowledge and passion for alcohol make him “almost a connoisseur” and notes that various drinks serve various purposes (310). In the case of capri, it becomes the wine, “suggested for the love tryst” (311). Throughout the novel, capri is the beverage of choice for their romantic and sexual relations, but perhaps more importantly, it also produces a sense of security, unity, and home for the lovers, despite the danger and anxiety of war that constantly surround
them. Having the power to purchase and consume alcohol reinforces their relationship, although ultimately it is not enough of a barrier to prevent Catherine’s death, proving the limitations even of that powerful substance.

Although set during World War I, *A Farewell to Arms* was published in 1929, when Prohibition was still in effect in America. Drinking alcohol is less of a consistent act of rebellion for Frederic Henry than it is for Jake Barnes, but there are still underlying themes of a power struggle between those who would ban alcohol and those who would consume alcohol. In both Italy and Switzerland, Frederic Henry drinks freely, even copiously, often in the company of others, sometimes alone, but normally without any serious opposition from others. It is only when he arrives at the American hospital in Milan, which Norton calls “a symbolic America” (312), that he encounters hostility towards alcohol. When he meets Miss Van Campen, the first question he asks her is, “Can I have wine with the meals?” to which she responds, “Only if the doctor prescribes it” (76), reminding readers that at the time, many people, even medical professionals, considered alcohol to have medicinal properties. Miss Van Campen may disapprove of alcohol on a personal level, but she holds to the rather old-fashioned (even at the time) idea that alcohol might be prescribed by a doctor.

Frederic, however, wastes no time in flouting Miss Van Campen’s restrictions. Norton compares him to a bootlegger saying, “Lt. Henry’s answer, and therefore Hemingway’s, to this act of prohibition in the hospital (and in America) was to smuggle in, or bootleg under the snooty nose of Miss Van Campen, a supply of real stuff” (312). Norton points out that the solution is “temporary” and “not a good one at that,” but
Although Frederic’s consumption in the hospital is short-lived, it is important for several cultural reasons. Miss Van Campen’s restriction on alcohol mirrors several aspects of the temperance movement. Not only is she female (women, particularly those in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, played a large role in the temperance movement), she also holds other conservative values. Frederic and Catherine must hide their sexual relationship from Miss Van Campen, although the others in the hospital seem to approve or at least accept it. Miss Van Campen also displays racist values, just as the temperance movement did. Upon first arriving at the hospital, Frederic notes, “She seemed to think it was disgraceful that I was with the Italians” (76). The temperance movement, which had always relied on xenophobic rhetoric, became increasingly racist in the 1920s as Prohibition lost popularity: “More and more temperance voices lashed out at all signs of national disunity and railed at the rising tide of what they perceived as social chaos in the form of rampant pluralism” (Lender, Martin 161). Perhaps what saves the tenuous situation is the fact that “[Miss Van Campen] thought Catherine came from very good people and that prejudiced her in her favor finally” (103). Miss Van Campen’s classist biases are clear as well; the consumption of alcohol reflects poorly on one’s character, while having a good family suggests superiority.

Within the context of the 1920s, Frederic’s decision to drink despite Miss Van Campen’s ban not only becomes an act of rebellion against her conservative ideals, but also shows his cosmopolitanism and his openness to cultural pluralism. Throughout the novel, Frederic eats and drinks as the local people do, never at a loss of what to order or how to consume. He can “[help] himself to wine from the grass-covered gallon flask . . .
[pulling] the neck of the flask down with the forefinger and [holding the glass] with the same hand” (6) with the same ease that he can sip fine champagne and play billiards with a member of Italy’s nobility, “sipping the wine between shots, speaking in Italian” (225). While Miss Van Campen (unsuccessfully) attempts to enforce conservative American values on foreign soils, Frederic demonstrates a savvier and more liberal worldview. For both Miss Van Campen and for Frederic, alcohol acts as a source of power. Although Miss Van Campen attempts to regulate that power by restriction, Frederic uses alcohol as a way of expressing his own independence and understanding of the world.

Another way that *A Farewell to Arms* differs from *The Sun Also Rises* and many of Hemingway’s other works is in its use of the word “alcoholism.” Miss Van Campen accuses Frederic of “producing jaundice with alcoholism” (125), using what is now a medical term referring to addiction, but which then had moral implications. Her on-the-spot diagnosis of alcoholism is tinged with personal judgment. Having already engaged in a battle of ideals and wills with Frederic, when she discovers a collection of empty bottles, Miss Van Campen certainly seems angered on subjective, rather than medical grounds, as evidenced when she discovers the “bottle shaped like a bear” that “[enrages] her particularly” (125). Although she is a medical professional, Miss Van Campen equates Frederic’s alcohol consumption with his morals, instead of taking an objective, stance about the possibility of alcohol abuse. As Tracy notes, for many people in the early twentieth century, “alcoholism became a routine way to describe habitual drunkenness” (41), rather than what it has come to mean today: a diagnosis of addiction. Her use of the word “alcoholism” may add another layer to the interpretation of Miss Van
Campen as a metonym for the temperance movement. While previously the word “inebriety” had been commonly used, “alcoholism” fit neatly with the WCTU’s and Scientific Temperance Instruction’s depiction of alcohol as a universally corrupting poison” (Tracy 41). There is no mention of treatment for Frederic’s “alcoholism” and instead Miss Van Campen sends him back to the front, where, if he were an addict, he would presumably continue to drink until the alcohol or the enemy killed him.

Miss Campen uses the vocabulary of the temperance movement, and although the novel’s setting is pre-Prohibition, her attitude reflects that of the increasing rigidity of the temperance movement in the 1920s, when the novel was written. By then, Prohibition was losing popularity, and “drys became increasingly hostile toward the alcoholic . . . Alcoholics (and drinkers in general) became convenient scapegoats for temperance frustrations” (Lender, Martin 160). Frederic certainly seems to be a scapegoat for Miss Van Campen’s frustrations; the hospital is far from full, and there are plenty of rooms and staff to continue treating him. When Frederic returns to the front, Rinaldi (a surgeon), examines his knee and declares, “It’s a crime to send you back . . . you ought to have more treatment” (146). Miss Van Camp places her own sentiments towards alcohol and towards Frederic ahead of his health and well-being. Similarly, in the wake of the Volstead Act, “Alcoholism was no longer considered an illness and proposals were advanced for the exile of those with drink problems to the Aleutian Islands” (Sournia 122). Exiling alcoholics seems absurd by today’s standards, yet Miss Van Campen’s insistence that Frederic lose his leave and return to the front, without addressing his medical needs, echoes those extreme sentiments.
While the word “alcoholism” is rarely used in Hemingway’s canon, it is interesting that when it appears, it is spoken only by a decidedly unsympathetic character. Frederic himself never utters the word, preferring to make Miss Van Campen repeat it by asking, “With what?” to which she responds, “With alcoholism. You heard me say it” (125). Gelderman suggests, “When a nurse calls him an alcoholic, [Frederic] and his friends make fun of her for thinking such an insane thing” (13). Oliphant, on the other hand, suggests that the exchange is “painful” for Frederic (86). Gelderman’s claim is inaccurate; although Frederic responds to Miss Van Campen with ironic humor, no scene occurs in which “he and his friends make fun of her for thinking such an insane thing.” Instead, his friend Miss Gage scolds him for his jocular tone, saying, “You’re a fool” (126). Oliphant may be closer to the truth; the event is painful insofar as Frederic must leave Catherine and return to the war, but there is no indication that Frederic ever regrets either his drinking habits or his words to Miss Van Campen. As Oliphant notes, Frederic does try to reduce his drinking once he returns to the front, but he is not, as she puts it, “a changed man truly striving to reduce his intake” (86). On the night of his departure (before he is seen conscientiously refusing drinks at the front), he and Catherine consume the bottles of capri and St. Estephe previously mentioned, and Frederic notes, “I drank most of it” (134). For American readers still dealing with Prohibition, Frederic’s consumption and then his declaration that “wine is a grand thing” (135) just pages after his altercation with Miss Van Campen might be read as a further message: while the American temperance attempted to demonize drink and drinkers alike, drinkers continued to lift their glasses, making their own choices in spite of others’ disapproval.
Although Frederic is indeed a heavy drinker, it is unclear whether the jaundice has been caused by his alcohol consumption or not. What is more certain is that Frederic’s jaundice could not have been intentionally brought on as a way to avoid returning to the frontlines (as Miss Van Campen suspects). Jaundice itself can be a symptom of several conditions, only one of which is caused by alcohol. Miss Van Campen seems to suggest that he has alcoholic hepatitis, “the hallmark of [which] is jaundice” (Morgan 97).

Timothy R. Morgan, MD, writing in 2007, outlines the causes of the disease; Frederic would have had to have consumed “60–80 g of ethanol per day (equivalent to 5–8 drinks of alcohol) . . . daily for decades in order to be at risk of developing alcoholic hepatitis or alcoholic cirrhosis” (Morgan 97 italics mine). Although the novel never specifies how old Frederic is, he seems to be a young man, perhaps too young to have been drinking heavily “for decades.” Given the amount of time required to produce jaundice from alcoholism, Frederic would have had to start drinking heavily long before the start of World War I; Miss Van Campen’s diagnosis of “self-inflicted jaundice” (126) seems unlikely. To throw further doubt on her pronouncement, Morgan notes, “only approximately 25% of people drinking this amount of alcohol ever develop significant liver disease” (97). Therefore, if Frederick were attempting to produce jaundice, he picked a very unreliable (and extremely dangerous) method. Miss Van Campen’s diagnosis is almost certainly wrong for other reasons. If Frederic does have alcoholic hepatitis, if it is left untreated, and if he continues to drink, he will almost certainly die within a year.\footnote{13} However, he would also be a very sick man, not someone who swims
through a cold river, rows across a lake, and practices boxing, all while continuing to imbibe.

Still, Morgan writes with almost a hundred years of medical knowledge to his advantage. Medical journals from the World War I era show less certainty regarding the possible causes of jaundice, yet even then alcohol was by no means thought to be the only (or even the most common) cause of jaundice. In 1915, British doctor S. Moritz published an article entitled “Epidemic Jaundice in War Time” in which he comments on the large numbers of men who contract jaundice during times of war. At the time, the cause was still unknown, but he speculates, “The infection seems to be due, therefore, rather to a virus or organism which develops in the soil during the decay of organic matter (excrements and dead bodies) and which is either swallowed or inhaled” (602). The symptoms that Moritz outlines match Frederic’s: a sudden onset, a low mortality rate, and normally a full recovery. Today, the infection is called viral hepatitis. By 1922, doctors had discovered another cause of jaundice: contact with trinitrotoluene (more commonly known as TNT). That year, Humphry Rolleston wrote, “During the war 100,000 persons in [Great Britain] worked in trinitrotoluene, and among them 404 cases of toxic jaundice were reported” (1056). Whether Frederic developed his jaundice from TNT, readers may never know; however, it seems much more likely that he developed viral jaundice or toxic jaundice, which were both somewhat common in World War I, rather than the alcoholism that Miss Van Campen diagnoses him with and which would have taken years to produce jaundice.
These medical details serve the purpose of affecting a reader’s interpretation of Frederic’s subsequent relationship with alcohol and with others. Oliphant heralds Frederic’s bout with jaundice as evidence of a character facing the consequences of his consumption, but this is only partially true. It is true that drinking alcohol could exacerbate his jaundice and its underlying cause, as evidenced when Frederic, “drank some brandy but the brandy did not taste good” (124). In fact, it makes him feel sicker. However, once recovered, Frederic could, and does, return to his normal drinking habits. This calls into question critical interpretations of his reunion with Rinaldi, where he repeatedly refuses drinks, using his recent illness as a reason. Oliphant sees Frederic at this point as a man “[facing] the physical and emotional consequences of his drinking” (87), but he does not seem to be facing those consequences when he consumes the better part of two bottles of wine with Catherine before this scene, nor does he worry about his health during or after the retreat. Frederic’s apparent change in drinking that takes place in Chapter 25 may have non-medical explanations. Throughout the chapter, he highlights that a great change has taken place for him. He sees a “British Red Cross ambulance” driver but “[does] not know him.” He “[walks] to our villa” but “it [does] not feel like a homecoming” (144). For Frederic, and thus for the reader, everything has changed. Having been wounded and having fallen in love with Catherine, Frederic has experienced a major shift in ideology. The army that he once believed in enough to volunteer for has come very close to executing him; his Italian “brother” Aymo has been killed by his own panicked countrymen. He is a changed man, less because he has had jaundice, than because everything that he once believed in (or failed to believe in) has changed. The
change is evident throughout his time at Bainsizza, but alcohol produces the most noticeable transformation. Where once drinking was an act of brotherhood that was deeply important to Frederic, now it seems to hold no appeal. Rinaldi suggests that they “both get drunk and be cheerful” but Frederic refuses, blaming the jaundice and saying, “I can’t get drunk” (147). As the reader knows however, Frederic drinks before and after this scene; his statement “I can’t get drunk” can be interpreted better through Rinaldi’s words: Frederic can get drunk, but he can no longer “get drunk and be cheerful,” at least not while he is involuntarily separated from Catherine.

Frederic can no longer wash away the horrors of war with alcohol, can no longer reminisce with Rinaldi over hangovers and harlots, can, in short, no longer participate in the Italian army with any semblance of conviction. Here, as before, alcohol produces a powerful effect; Frederic’s refusal to drink signals to Rinaldi that he has changed greatly. By contrast, Rinaldi’s frenzied consumption and his announcement, “You’re dry and you’re empty and there’s nothing else” (152) signals how badly the war, and subsequently his physical and mental health, have declined. Rinaldi thinks he has syphilis, probably a result of sleeping with prostitutes, and he admits that drinking is “bad for [his] work” (149). However, he believes that these activities are the only things he can enjoy in the midst of a brutal war. Alcohol, then, acts as a touchstone for Frederic in these scenes. Frederic has experienced an alternative life with Catherine, full of purpose and meaning; Rinaldi’s experience shows what kind of a future he can expect if he continues to live (and perhaps die) at the front. Frederic’s refusal of alcohol is less a refusal of a drink and more of a refusal of a way of life. No longer will he be content to placate
himself with whores and liquor; he must find a way to get back to Catherine. Ultimately, of course, Frederic can refuse drinks, can even desert from the army, but cannot escape the dangers of the world. Catherine’s eventual death highlights the limitations of man and the choices he makes.

According to Norton, “three things, war, sex, and alcohol, dominated much of the social, political, and literary thought of Americans during the years between 1914 and 1929” (309). *A Farewell to Arms* certainly delivers all three of these things, which led to publisher Charles Scribner and editor Max Perkins deeming the novel “difficult” to publish. Only after omissions of profanity and cuts to more explicit passages was the book able to be serialized in *Scribner’s Magazine* and subsequently published in book form. Still, despite these cuts, war, sex, and alcohol remain. Despite, or more probably because of this content, the novel appealed to the American masses, men and women alike. If the content of the novel shocked readers, they were not too shocked to read it, and they used their pocketbooks to give further power to the fictional alcohol whose factual counterpart was still illegal. As Leff puts it, it was a novel “for the vulgus, the common people” (118). Even more popular than *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms* would become a bestseller in the USA, selling 70,000 copies by the beginning of 1930, a number that would rise to 1,383,000 over the next 30 years (*Hemingway’s First War* 81).

Critical reception was largely, though certainly not universally, positive. In “What Is Dirt?,” published the same year as the novel, Robert Herrick declared the book “garbage” not least because of its presentation of “vomiting due to drunkenness” (260). Herrick
equates a drunken man with “swine,” highlighting the still (for many) current attitude that heavy consumption of alcohol reflected poorly on the character of the drinker.

The war, sex, and alcohol may have been shocking for some, like Herrick, but the *Atlantic Monthly* declared it would appeal to “younger readers and broad-minded older ones” (Leff 119), highlighting the generational shift in morals and ideals that was well underway in America by 1929. Those who had come of age during World War I were not likely to clutch their pearls over a bottle of capri consumed by two unmarried lovers in a seedy hotel room. On the contrary, Malcolm Cowley praised the book, and Frederick Henry in particular, for evoking the true feeling of the millions who would come to be known as the “Lost Generation.” Cowley identifies the feeling of rootlessness as a key indication of the Lost Generation, caused not only by the devastation of the war itself, but also by Prohibition: “Our own nation had passed the Prohibition Amendment as if to publish a bill of separation between itself and ourselves; it wasn’t our country any longer” (Cowley 31). For Cowley, as for Hemingway’s characters, and for many of the Lost Generation at large, the consumption of alcohol was wrapped up in a sense of identity, an identity that had been increasingly frayed and disjointed by the turbulent atmosphere of the 1920s.

Did *A Farewell to Arms* affect Americans’ consumption of alcohol? It would be difficult, perhaps impossible at this point, to prove a correlation of this sort. Yet the novel reinforced ideals regarding alcohol already at play in the USA and brought new interpretations to drink and drinkers. Within the world of *A Farewell to Arms*, alcohol produces power in a variety of ways, not least of which is as a coping mechanism and as
a way to maintain human bonds in difficult times. Despite being widely hailed as a love story, the novel, “[retains] the focus on death and fear” (Leff 150). Death and fear run alongside and intertwine, often inseparably, with the more marketable themes of “war, sex, and alcohol.” Frederic uses alcohol to cope and to function, as a war survivor and as a lover; alcohol, in turn, produces a variety of results, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Readers throughout the twentieth century have read the novel, as entertainment certainly, but also as a guide, an interpretation not only of World War I, but of human nature in all times of conflict and tumultuous change. In “The Great Themes in Hemingway,” Frederic Svoboda writes that the novel helped teach readers “to bear the burdens that they expected to have to bear” (170). It is up to the readers, both then and now, to interpret how the novel’s representation of war, sex, and alcohol continue (or cease) to be relevant to their own understanding of the world.
Chapter 5

“IT CURES EVERYTHING”: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Although For Whom the Bell Tolls was published in 1940, long after the heady days of the 1920s, the novel is examined here, partially to provide a contrast to the other two novels examined, but also to explore the continuity of alcohol’s ongoing functionality as a form of power in Hemingway’s novels. The novel, set in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, portrays an American who, in an attempt to live a full life in just three days, finds meaning in the alcohol he consumes, the girl he loves, and the bridge he must blow up. Prohibition, which is such a key factor to understanding the role of alcohol in The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms, no longer holds sway here. However, World War I, also a thing of the past, maintains a subtle role; on a global level, World War I and the Spanish Civil War would be stepping-stones to World War II; the climate of tension and conflict in Europe had not ended with the Armistice. As Frederic Svoboda notes, the Spanish Civil War is often “characterized as representing democracy’s last chance to oppose European fascism so as to avert World War II, so the stakes are very high, as Jordan recognizes” (163). On a more personal level, the protagonist, Robert Jordan (and many readers of the novel) had grown up during or immediately after that devastating conflict. The deep focus on death that runs through the novel is a product not only of the war’s being fought in the novel, but also of the larger cultural climate. That cultural climate also informs the role of alcohol, which is central to the most compassionate and vibrant moments of the novel, but which also indicates the
inevitability of death. In the wake of Prohibition, the fierce ideological conflict between the wets and the drys lost its currency; there was less of a stigma against consumers of alcohol, and accordingly, within the novel, consuming is less of an act of rebellion than it is in the novels of the 1920’s. That being said, many of the themes of alcohol as power remain; the acquisition and consumption of alcohol has the ability to raise or lower characters’ social status, to mark those who are trustworthy from those who are not, and to work as a barrier against the terrors of the world. Most prevalent in this novel is the way that alcohol dynamically connects characters to life and to one another, even though it fails to protect them from death and sometimes even acts as a final death rite. Alcohol’s power in this novel is akin to other forms of manmade power; its relevance ends in the face of death’s omnipotence.

There is even less criticism dealing with the role of alcohol in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* than there is for *A Farewell to Arms*, which is somewhat curious since “wine” is mentioned no fewer than 134 times (“absinthe” and “whiskey” make noticeable appearances as well). Still, of the critics who do comment on the alcohol in this novel, some stick to the biographical approach. Dardis declares that Hemingway is “virtually indistinguishable from Jordan in many of the book’s pages” (181). Others, like Patrick Cheney in “Hemingway and Christian Epic: The Bible in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,” focus on the symbolic elements of alcohol. Cheney notes that the omnipresent wine hearkens back to the Last Supper, in which Jesus accepts both betrayal and his own death with the cup of wine that becomes his blood. Oliphant does not discuss the novel, although arguably, it fits her description of “saturated fiction,” that is: “The majority of
the characters . . . are drinkers (some of them heavy drinkers), and the act of consumption pervades the narrative, both in the characters’ dialogue with each other and in the author’s crafting of narrative details” (44). In fact, interpreting the power of alcohol is fairly straightforward in this novel because of how explicitly it is discussed by the characters. Most noticeably, wine produces a potent form of communion both literally (as drinkers share one wineskin or one bowl) and figuratively (as drinkers share a common cause). While at times the wine consumed takes on traditional Judeo-Christian symbolism of death and sacrifice, the novel largely subverts this analogy by failing to provide any hope of resurrection. Consuming alcohol together may unite these “disciples” of Spanish democracy together, but it cannot prevent nor reverse the ultimate ending: death. Furthermore, despite its ability to produce unity, alcohol is also closely related to hierarchy and leadership.

Robert Jordan, who is a member of the International Brigades, joins a group of guerilla fighters behind enemy lines and must waste no time in gaining their trust. He does this first by offering cigarettes to the men, and in turn the group drinks together for the first time after “they all [touch] cup edges” (24). They drink several cups of wine together before eating, another communal act. Anselmo explains, “there are no plates” and “they [all eat] out of the platter, not speaking, as is the Spanish custom” (26). Linda Underhill and Jeanne Nakjavani call attention to this scene, saying, “Thus Jordan is initiated into the customs of the group, drinking their wine, eating authentic peasant food, sharing in their struggle” (121). Eating and drinking together is a powerful way for the members of the band to indicate their mutual cooperation. However, Robert is still not
fully initiated into the group. When he enters the cave for dinner, he asks, “Is there wine?” and Pablo, the leader of the group responds negatively, “There is little left” (54). It is a tense moment, but Robert, rather than concede the point or cause a visible conflict, responds by pulling out his own flask of absinthe. In turn, he says of his absinthe, “There is little left or I would offer some to thee” (55). In this scene alcohol serves as a very visible form of power. The leader of the guerrilla group may believe he controls the wine and thus the situation, but Robert Jordan asserts his own autonomy and independence by proving that he can supply his own alcohol, one that is in itself, stronger and stranger than the native Spanish wine. Robert adds further authority to the alcohol, and thus to himself, when he describes the liquid as “medicine” (55). This definition may draw skepticism from modern readers, especially those who know that, in high doses, wormwood (an ingredient in “the real absinthe”) can be toxic to humans, but his choice of words endows the substance with formidable, mystical overtones.

With his use of the word “medicine,” Robert Jordan invokes his grandfather’s legend and history with Native American culture. The word “medicine” has come to be used as the translation, not only for healing substances and practices, but also for a variety of mystical traditions and talismans of some Native American tribes. The grandfather that Robert Jordan so admires fought against the Sioux, a culture that had a complex belief in supernatural “medicine,” including war medicine, which was meant to give a warrior bravery and to keep him safe in battle. Although war medicine took many shapes and forms, the Sioux war bonnet was often considered to be a source of power and bravery. According to Hassrick, “while all bonnets were not wotawes [or
... medicine], the power of the eagle endowed any bonnet with a certain protective quality (86). Later in the novel, in the nerve-wracking hours when he wonders if the attack will be called off, Robert muses in an internal monologue:

    Do you remember the cabinet in your father’s office with the arrowheads spread out on a shelf, and the eagle feathers of the war bonnets that hung on the wall, their plumes slanting, the smoked buckskin smell of the leggings and the shirts and the feel of the beaded moccasins? . . . Remember something like that. (362-363)

There are multiple layers of interpretation to this memory. On one hand, Robert’s vivid memory of the objects acts as a sort of “medicine” for him to concentrate on prior to a very dangerous undertaking. He seems to believe that focusing on these talismans will be of use to him, thinking to himself, “Remember something concrete and practical” (363). The underlying irony, of course, is that the war bonnets, which could be worn only by warriors who had distinguished themselves with acts of bravery, had apparently failed to protect the Sioux men who wore them, and thus they have ended up in “the cabinet in [Robert’s] father’s office” (362). The medicine, whether it’s the memory or the war bonnets themselves, can produce power, perhaps bravery, but it cannot stop death.

Robert’s description of the absinthe as “medicine” implies not merely healing effects, but also mystical overtones of protection. He uses the same word to describe the superstition of spitting into the gorge that he observes the sentries practicing (an indication that he may intend the mystical Native American meaning of the word when he describes absinthe). In a rhetorical dance between the practical and the supernatural, he muses, “I’ll
have to take me a spit in that gorge too . . . No. It can’t be very powerful medicine. It
can’t work. I’ll have to prove it doesn’t work” (466). Robert may wax eloquent about the
effects of absinthe (later in the novel he refers to it as “the giant killer”), and the green
“medicine” may even increase his clout in the social struggle in the cave, but it cannot
save him anymore than spitting saves the sentries or war bonnets save the Sioux warriors;
for them, as for Robert Jordan, violent death trumps faith in external devices.

Robert’s simultaneous belief and disbelief seems to acknowledge both the power
and the shortcomings of alcohol and other forms of “medicine.” On the one hand, he
seems to want to be fiercely practical; he is methodical in nearly all of his actions,
whether he is wiring a bridge or making a bed of spruce boughs. He denies believing that
Pilar read an omen in his palm, even when his death is imminent, thinking to himself,
“Do you believe that crap? No” (503). On the other hand, he has been idealistic enough to
join the International Brigades in a country that is not his own merely because he is
ideologically opposed to fascism; he is innocent enough to fall in love with a teenager in
one day. His internal soliloquy on absinthe displays this duality:

one cup of [absinthe] took the place of the evening papers, of all the old evenings
in cafes, of all chestnut trees that would be in bloom now in the month, of the
great slow horses of the outer boulevards, of book shops, of kiosques, and of
galleries, of the Parc Montsouris . . . and of being able to read and relax in the
evening; of all the things he had enjoyed and forgotten and that came back to him
when he had tasted that opaque, bitter, tongue-numbing, brain-warming, stomach-
warming, idea-changing liquid alchemy. (55)
The power of the substance is clear. The absinthe produces a series of memories of Paris so vivid they seem akin to mystical visions for Robert Jordan. Simultaneously, the alcohol also provides very real physical effects to his tongue, brain, and stomach. The soliloquy highlights his nostalgia, a wish, perhaps to believe in the past. Although his memory evokes his intellectual, rational side, with concrete images of bookshops and reading, his attitude towards absinthe is reverent, almost spiritual; if he cannot put store in Pilar’s palm reading, he can at least believe in the influence of absinthe, perhaps as much for its quasi-mysticism as for its tangibility.

Peter Nicholls, in “Barflies and Bohemians: Drink, Paris and Modernity,” suggests that absinthe itself implies a dichotomy in Parisian culture because it “[combined] the elitist with the democratic, the association of non-conformist intelligentsia with the threatening masses” (16). A generation before America attempted its “Noble Experiment” with Prohibition, Paris had its own struggle with the regulation of alcohol. Even though wine had been a socially acceptable beverage among Parisians for centuries, the rise of hard alcohol at the end of the nineteenth century led to serious opposition towards drinking. Nicholls reports, “The most serious undermining of this tradition of social wine drinking can be attributed largely to one particular distilled spirit: absinthe” (11). Although drinking in cafes and cabarets had become a part of the city, “the consumption of alcohol, and especially absinthe, had begun to increase, sparking a conservative backlash” (12). Just as would happen in America years later, the conservative opponents of alcohol only succeeded in uniting and empowering disparate groups of drinkers: the avant-garde artists and the urban working class. Robert Jordan, as
a professor, belongs to a relatively small number of the academic elite, yet he also desires to be democratic. He is one of the “masses,” united with peasants, fighting against fascism. This dichotomy, as well as his internal struggles between rationality and mysticism, is suggested all by his drink of choice: absinthe. Nicholls suggests that his memory of Paris is, after all, “an imagined Paris” (absinthe was banned in Paris in 1915, presumably before Robert Jordan would have been there), but nevertheless absinthe works as “a metonym of all that Paris seemed to stand for” (16) in the early 1900s.

Despite his logical brain, Robert Jordan declares, “[Wormwood’s] supposed to rot your brain out but I don’t believe it. It only changes the ideas” (55). While wormwood may not “rot” one’s brain outright, by 1937, when the novel is set, a highly educated American would probably have known of the inherent risks of heavily imbibing any alcoholic substance, particularly one with such a high proof as absinthe, particularly one that contains wormwood, which is safe in small amounts, but toxic in heavy doses.

Robert Jordan’s stance on absinthe reflects his attitudes towards “medicine” in general and thus towards life and death. As Nicholls says, “[Drink] provided a mode of, for want of a better phrase, ironic transcendence: a transcendence both artificial and temporary and that is known to be so” (18). Thus it is that Robert can believe, at least wish to believe, that absinthe “cures everything” (55), even while he denies believing in the “crap” of palm reading. He remembers Sioux war bonnets with intense focus and reverence while he denies the “medicine” of spitting in the gorge. So too does he deal with his own death; as he lies alone with a broken leg, he triumphantly remembers that he has his flask with him, perhaps anticipating that “transcendence both artificial and
temporary,” only to realize, with an ironic grimace, “the flask was not there” (503). He may have reserved doubts about communism and religion, but he reflects, “I guess I’d counted on [the flask]” (503). Rogal notes that absinthe may harbor darker connotations than transcendence however, noting that “Etymologically, ‘wormwood’ comes from the *apsinthos*, meaning ‘absinthe,’ and in the Bible wormwood/absinthe is a symbol of sin, divine punishment, and disaster” and adds that biblically, the “one who drinks the bitter draught accepts the bitterness of life, even death itself” (180). Whether Robert Jordan’s drink of choice represents his acceptance of death or not, it is clear that for all his skepticism, alcohol produces very real power; it renders physical and emotional changes in its consumer, calls up a rich background of cultural and historical significance, and thus to some extent, perhaps deserves the mystical weight that Robert Jordan endows it with. In the post-World War I environment he has come of age in, he trusts in that substance that he can see, smell, and taste more than religion or political ideology. Yet even that trust falls short in the face of death. Robert Jordan may believe in absinthe and alcohol all he likes, but ultimately, he must taste the figurative cup of death without drinking from the literal cup of “giant killer” again.

Early in the novel, three days before Robert Jordan faces death, however, the role of alcohol is still in play as he navigates the social order of the guerilla group. Having produced the absinthe and pronounced it “medicine,” he has asserted his independence, though not his dominance over Pablo. In the cave, it is Pilar who challenges Pablo’s right to lead the group. After Pablo has ceded leadership, Pilar announces pointedly, “There is wine enough for all,” underscoring both her newly obtained power and the unifying
potential of communal consumption. Robert drinks the wine and the members of the group listen eagerly to his plan to blow up the bridge. Only Pablo “[sits] by himself with a cup of wine” (62). Throughout the novel, wine is consumed before, during, or after major events, nearly always emphasizing the group, rather than the individual. Cheney sees Jordan’s consumption of wine as a biblically symbolic acceptance of suffering; before his death, Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane, first asking that the metaphorical cup of suffering be taken from him, then accepting his fate. Jordan, however, does not drink from his literal cup alone. Normally, the wine is served in a stone bowl; each person dips his or her cup into it at will. The communal nature of consumption seems to be simultaneously a nod to and a departure from the traditional Christian Eucharist. In a sense the drinkers share a common belief system; they all oppose fascism. But while biblically the last supper suggests both Christ’s death and his resurrection, in the world of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, communal wine drinking does not come with this hope. Christ’s sacrifice comes with the promise that others may live, and while El Sordo, his men, Anselmo, and Robert Jordan all sacrifice their lives, their deaths are ultimately arbitrary. Essentially, it is a freak snowstorm that seals El Sordo’s fate, for Robert Jordan, his horse’s unlucky fall. Both have the scant consolation of being able to kill a few of the enemy while they lie dying, but their deaths are not necessary for the survival of the others. Anselmo’s death, caused by stray shrapnel from the makeshift bomb that he helped to wire into place, might be dubbed as “friendly fire” and is accidental. Drinking unites individuals in the brevity of life, but death puts an end to life and ideals alike.
The act of drinking is synonymous with community and trust, and although there are no rules about how much a person is allowed, nobody takes more than their share, with the exception of Pablo. Although other characters may drink alone, they only do so when completing a task for the sake of the group. Only Pablo is seen to be drinking alone, a telltale sign that he does not have the group’s best interests at heart. At one point Pablo even brags about his solitary consumption; while the others have been braving the elements, making preparations to blow up the bridge, Pablo has been drinking from the goatskin of wine. He announces, “I drank from the belly-button to the chest today . . . it’s a day’s work” (240). With such clear indications of self-serving behavior, it is a surprise to no one, not to Robert Jordan, and not to the reader, when Pablo betrays the group. Biblically, Pablo’s selfishness has a precedent in the behavior of early Christians in Corinth. In I Corinthians 11, Paul chastises those who use Communion to get drunk, without waiting for the others to eat and drink. Here too, though, the Biblical allusion is bastardized by the lack of salvation. After betraying the group by stealing Robert’s demolition material, Pablo returns in time to aid the guerilla group; it is a seeming moment of conversion and salvation. In this salvation, however, Pablo continues to drink and murder. Upon returning to the cave, he asks for a drink, and although he ensures the mission’s success by returning, he does so by intentionally sacrificing five unwitting recruits, knowing that their horses will be useful for his own ends. In a typically ironic twist, Jordan compares him to the biblical Paul, or rather Saul, thinking, “I didn’t think you had experienced any complete conversion on the road to Tarsus, old Pablo” (425). As Cheney concludes, these nods to the Bible may add gravitas, but not any true sense of
divinity. The novel “celebrates a religion of man” (Cheney 189), and subsequently, while alcohol frequently takes on powerful religious or mystical significance, death is the only true constant, the ultimate end regardless of one’s behaviors or beliefs.

Carol Gelderman reserves special judgment for Robert Jordan because of his “steady tippling” (13), but his consumption does not stand out from other characters’ in this novel. As mentioned, he primarily drinks with others, which may even be read as a necessary, or at least, advantageous approach to his work. Being a lone, foreign man with just three days to ingratiate himself with a band of wary Spaniards who must help him carry out an inherently dangerous task at great risk to themselves, consuming alcohol together is a quick and culturally acceptable way for him to show that he is part of their group. However, even Gelderman’s vitriol toward Hemingway’s fictional drinkers does not match that of the characters’ within the novel. The most notable drunkard in The Sun Also Rises, Harvey Stone, is treated somewhat humorously. Rinaldi, in A Farewell to Arms, sympathetically. In contrast, Pablo, the biggest drinker in For Whom the Bell Tolls, is untrustworthy, dangerous, and universally disliked. Robert Jordan may be fighting the fascist army, but Pablo is the villain of the novel. His treacherous nature is thoroughly tied up with his drinking, and both Pilar and Robert equate his drunkenness with animalistic behavior. Robert refers to him as “swine” multiple times and extends the metaphor to mentally exclaim, “damn your bloody, red pig-eyes and your swine-bristly swines-end of a face” (196). Pilar, ironically, compares the man to a wineskin whose “plug has been drawn and the wine has all run out of the skin” (99). Her metaphor, of course, paints him as a goat, or rather a goatskin, but notably, she seems to equate wine
itself with courage and resolution. Almost paradoxically, Pablo is less of a man at least partially because he consumes too much wine – in a very real way he is full of booze - but she explains his uselessness in terms of emptiness, a figurative lack of wine. This paradox highlights Pilar’s attitude towards alcohol; she sees nothing wrong with the substance in and of itself. She even tends to see alcohol in a generally positive light (as when she remembers the white wine that she consumed in Valencia with a former lover); in this metaphor she equates wine with courage and manliness. Many references are made throughout the novel to what Pablo used to be. As he has increased his literal intake, his figurative “wine” has disappeared, and he is now just a husk, as useless and lifeless as an empty wineskin. This is the constant theme of the novel: the interplay between life and death. Wine and other forms of alcohol are both powerful markers of life and omens of impending death.

While extreme drunkenness is associated with animalistic behavior, at other times in the novel, alcohol has a deeply humanizing effect. Apart from the wine, which, when consumed communally, produces feelings of cooperation and teamwork, El Sordo, the leader of another band of guerillas, offers Robert Jordan whiskey. Here, alcohol is an example of genteel civility in the midst of inhumane chaos. Robert is at first incredulous, “You have whiskey?” (155). The presence of whiskey is not a mere accident; El Sordo says, “Heard last night comes English dynamiter. Good. Very happy. Get whiskey. For you” (156). Without having met Robert Jordan, El Sordo has made certain to obtain a rare, and probably expensive, liquor to greet the stranger with, all while behind enemy lines and in constant danger. El Sordo, as well as nearly every other guerilla is in a
perpetual state of worry. His life, as well as his country is at stake, yet he takes time and
trouble to obtain whiskey for an American, signaling to Robert Jordan that even in
desperate times the Spanish are civilized and open-minded. However, El Sordo does not
merely offer Robert Jordan a drink. Later on, he delivers the whole bottle to the cave for
Robert. As Robert drinks the whiskey, he muses on the meaningfulness of the gift,
thinking,

the true thoughtfulness of thinking the visitor would like it and then bringing it
down for him to enjoy when you yourself were engaged in something where there
was every reason to think of no one else but yourself and of nothing but the matter
at hand. (223)

El Sordo’s act is not only civilized, it is selfless and recalls Frederic Henry’s action in A
Farewell to Arms, in which he risks life and limb to acquire food for his fellow
ambulance drivers. In both cases, the act is a reminder to the giver, as well as the
receiver, that there is an underlying humanity between them, despite the desperate times
and situations. Alcohol, then, is both an indication of life and a harbinger of death.
Frederic Henry lives long enough to share a swallow of wine and a bite of pasta with
Passini, before he is killed. El Sordo brings Robert Jordan the whiskey, when he himself
will be killed the next day. On the advent of his death, El Sordo and his doomed men
drink wine together one last time, and El Sordo insists, “Let all take it” (335) before he
will drink. The passing of alcohol can be seen as a reminder of life itself, perhaps even of
hope for the future; one man must die, but another will live to drink another day.
If the whiskey has a humanizing effect, it is contrasted in yet another scene in the cave with Pablo’s drunken consumption of wine. While Robert, Anselmo, and Fernando eat, drink, and speak politely about American customs, Pablo continues to drink alone, heckling Robert Jordan and using uncouth language. Although it is suggested multiple times that Pablo may be acting more drunk than he really is, his poor behavior takes place while he is drinking alone, and whether he is acting or genuinely drunk, his actions flout the unspoken rules, not only regarding alcohol, but regarding common decency. The contrast in the production of power is clear. El Sordo’s gift of whiskey produces a sense of civility, while Pablo’s heavy consumption does just the opposite; throughout the chapter, nearly everyone present in the cave treats him with animosity and disrespect. However, alcohol may be producing a third effect here. If Pablo is truly acting drunker than he feels, then alcohol is producing a kind of screen for him to hide behind, while he sounds the atmosphere to see where he stands with the group.

In *Time* magazine’s review of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, written the year it was published, 1940, there are three full paragraphs dedicated to the mythos of Hemingway before the book itself is mentioned. One sentence in particular speaks to his fiction’s effect on readers: “‘The lost generation’ quickly turned [Hemingway’s] books into bestsellers, tried to talk like Hemingway characters as they sipped raw alcohol in speakeasies, tried to write Hemingway stories in garrets and penthouses” (94). That the review identifies the way that readers imitated fictional characters’ habits, even before it mentions writing, or the novel being reviewed, indicates the diverse power of alcohol in Hemingway’s fiction, for his readers as well as his characters. Clearly, his works feature
alcohol in a way that people responded to. The review makes no mention of the role of alcohol in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but notes that Hemingway has an “apparent obsession with killing” and that “the dominant experience of this age is violent death” (94). Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to put those two ideas together. Death is certainly present throughout the novel, and frequently drinking becomes a part of death, either overtly, or subtly.

If Cheney is to be believed, absinthe carries etymological connotations of death. More blatantly, while badly wounded and anticipating death, Robert Jordan looks forward to drinking alcohol, for its pain-killing abilities, certainly, but also, presumably, for its emotional comfort. The omnipresence of wine has its own undertones of Holy Communion and thus of Christ’s blood. Characters drink to avoid death or at least to avoid thinking about death; they drink when they are wounded, and if they must die, they hope to drink when they do. Ironically of course, those who live long enough may hasten their deaths by their own consumption, but few will live long enough to enjoy the privilege of regret. Readers in America may not have been facing death as imminently as Robert Jordan does, but clearly the novel resonated with the public on a wide scale. Although Dardis declares that by 1937, Hemingway “has lost his extraordinary capacity to render experience in a language that remains fresh” (177) and blames his alcohol consumption, he admits, “No serious work of fiction in this century made as strong an initial impression on the reading public as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*” (178). He adds, “It was the book that everyone read and almost everyone liked, highbrows and lowbrows alike” (178). Rogal enthusiastically declares it, “the Hemingway novel that, with or
without its quantities or varieties of food and drink, stands firm as the writer’s most significant contribution to the literary history of his nation” (172). *The New York Times* review is even more effusive than *Time*’s, calling the storyline “superb,” the author “the master,” and the novel “his finest.” Although Leff’s praise is more qualified, suggesting that Hemingway’s celebrity status sold more books than the prose itself, the American public read the prose all the same. Between the death and the booze, they found something to relate to.

Published 19 years after Armistice Day, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was read by Americans even as World War II was tearing Europe apart for the second time. As *Time* notes, readers in 1940 were all too familiar with violent death. With this in mind, perhaps it is not surprising that readers were no longer shocked by the portrayal of drinking, even destructive drinking, in fiction. Although alcohol plays a variety of roles in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, perhaps its most notable production of power is the way it creates a feeling of normalcy. For eating, making love, even dying, alcohol offers Robert Jordan a sense of connection to life, either to the past with his memories of Paris in times of peace, to his present as he attempts to live a complete life in just three days, and perhaps to a future where someday men and women may drink in peace without fear of violent death.
As Roland Barthes says in “The Death of the Author,” “[The text] is a space of many dimensions” (4). In the texts examined here, only a handful of dimensions have been considered, and yet even this limited study opens up new space for analysis and interpretation. By considering the ways that alcohol produces power in Hemingway’s novels, readers can better understand characters, their desires and their actions, and the surrounding culture that influences them. According to Michel Foucault, “[Power] produces reality” (194), and in many ways, the alcohol in Hemingway’s fiction and the way that his characters interact with it, give careful readers the ability to understand and interpret the reality of the world that the characters live in. Neither the characters examined here nor the novels themselves sprang entirely from Hemingway’s brain or life experiences. The wider culture of the twentieth century, with its wars, its regulations, and its changing attitudes toward alcohol all had effects on the fictional world as much as on the real world. Although this thesis explores the multi-dimensional aspect of alcohol in three of Hemingway’s novels, it does not, and could not, consider the thousands of influences and aspects that fully affect that complex substance. Only three novels have been examined here, and although certain patterns have emerged, it stands to reason that with further study, new conclusions may be reached regarding the dynamic role of alcohol. Not only are there other novels and many short stories to consider, there is room
for future studies to examine, for example, cultural effects on alcohol and gender or alcohol and economics, themes that have only been briefly mentioned here.

Hemingway’s enduring fiction is a testament not only to his own time, but to subsequent generations as well. As Reynolds says, how readers react to his works “tells us a good deal about our values” (*The Sun Also Rises, a Novel of the Twenties*) 7. In his discussion of *The Sun Also Rises*, he notes, “If we do not approve of Brett’s behavior, that tells us something about our own moral position” (8). The same can be said with regard to alcohol. The popularity of Hemingway’s work in his lifetime and the subsequent trend among readers of adopting his characters’ habits of drink, dress, and speech sometimes tell us more than the critical reviews. In the 1920s and beyond, readers in America and abroad found something deeply relatable in these flawed characters and their drinking habits. Ashley Oliphant concludes *Hemingway’s Mixed Drinks* by suggesting that “his characters often drink excessively . . . [but] they are not fulfilled; their souls are not there anymore” (197), but this conclusion seems inherently limiting. In short, “soulless” characters would be difficult characters to like, challenging for publishers to market, and unworthy of readers’ emulation. Given the ongoing popularity of Hemingway’s fiction, in fact, the opposite seems more believable: readers relate to these troubled characters precisely because they *have* souls, souls that cry out against the crushing weight of personal injury, lost love, and the threat of violent death. Jake Barnes, of *The Sun Also Rises*, is capable of being a good friend to Brett, coming to her aid in Madrid after his disastrous fall from grace with the aficionados in Pamplona - and despite the deep pain that he feels over her casual affairs. He may get rip-roaring drunk in
Madrid, and yet his sheer presence with Brett reinforces, not his soullessness, but his kindness and humanity. The drinks they share bring them together physically and emotionally, even if Brett will never commit to a relationship with Jake. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry proves that even a man who “[doesn’t] love” (62), and whose social life revolves around prostitutes and drinking with the Italian army, is capable of change, falling in love and maintaining a committed relationship with Catherine. The drinks he consumes point less to his inhumanity than to the inhumane world that makes love seem so impossible. Robert Jordan, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, although skeptical about religion, gypsy mysticism, and even the ideology of the Communists that he serves under, nevertheless maintains enough youthful hope and innocence to believe in love at first sight, absinthe, and his grandfather’s legacy, even in the face of death. That these, and other Hemingway characters, drink - some of them in desperate, unhealthy amounts - points not to their inhumanity, but to their search for an alternative to the life that has wounded and threatened them. Oliphant seems to imply that all of Hemingway’s drinking characters are alcoholics, and that alcoholics must have no souls. But, as has been explored in the previous chapters, alcohol often promotes powerful feelings of humanity, of human connection, and even of love, all during times of impossible odds. Nevertheless, the novels should not be read as a universal apologia for drinking and drunkenness. In each novel there are instances when a character’s anger, despair, or violence is exacerbated by his or her consumption of alcohol.

Furthermore, while we now know that excessive consumption leads to negative physical effects, definitions of “excessive” consumption have greatly changed. What
strikes us today as problematic drinking may have been viewed as normal or moderate consumption, especially in many Western European nations, where all three novels are set. As Reynolds notes, if Hemingway’s characters “drink too much too often, do not place the blame on Hemingway; he did not create the moral climate” (62). Rather, we, the readers do. If we, as many critics have done, see fictional characters’ consumption as morally suspect, without considering the cultural and personal factors leading them to drink, the social climate that may normalize their drinking, and the limited resources available for those who may well have been addicted, then we are merely highlighting our own moral biases, not necessarily shedding light on the texts themselves.

In "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and The Sun Also Rises" John Aldridge suggests that “The result [of] Hemingway’s fiction is not a realistic reflection of a world but the literal manufacture of a world, piece by piece, out of the most meticulously chosen and crafted materials” (123). This may not be entirely true, since Hemingway’s fiction does reflect some aspects of his wider culture, yet Aldridge has a point. The construction of his fictional worlds and the role of alcohol within it gave readers an impression of reality that resonated with them. In turn, the “manufactured” world had a very real effect on the readers’ world; Hemingway’s readers began to follow in the fictional footsteps of his protagonists, whether it meant traveling to Paris to drink in cafes, drinking a bottle of capri, or waxing eloquent on the effects of absinthe. In our own time period, studying the nature of alcohol in fiction also helps readers understand alcohol and its relationship to power structures in their own lives. Trends in criticism
from each generation reflect a variety of cultural factors that influenced those who read and write about literature.

Early criticism reflected either a moral horror at the portrayal of drinking and drunkenness (as seen in Robert Herrick’s “What is Dirt?”) or effusive praise for the realistic representation of alcohol and the reasons people have for drinking (like Cowley’s review of *A Farewell to Arms*), trends that reflect the polarizing effect of alcohol in America throughout the Prohibition years. Those in favor of temperance saw alcohol as a genuine source of evil and ruin, while “wets” steadfastly held on to the perceived benefits of booze. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most critics discussing Hemingway and alcohol retained a biographical interpretation, although with different conclusions about the role of alcohol. Charles Norton, after admirably calling attention to several cultural factors that influence the role of alcohol in *A Farewell to Arms*, concludes his “The Alcoholic Content of *A Farewell to Arms*” somewhat vaguely, saying, “Attention to the alcoholic content of the [the] work is important to a proper interpretation of its meaning in many of its finer points” (313). On the other hand, Carol Gelderman, in "Hemingway's Drinking Fixation," reserves an unspecified, but palpable, distaste for the prevalence of alcohol both in Hemingway’s life and in his fiction, proving that alcohol continued to be a divisive force, even into the second half of the twentieth century. With the rise of Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1980s, criticism took on new tones of self-assured knowledge. Tom Dardis (*The Thirsty Muse*), Roger Forseth (“Alcohol and the Writer: Some Biographical and Critical Issues”), and Donald Goodwin (*Alcohol and the Writer*) all cite a number of psychological and psychiatric medical texts,
most of which were published in the 1980s as well. Michael Reynolds, who has written multiple books about Hemingway, some of which were published in the 1980s, stands in contrast to these authors, in that he has long argued against the purely biographical reading of Hemingway’s fiction. Although alcohol has never been his main focus, he continually draws attention to the wider cultural factors that influenced the fiction. In the twenty-first century, with the exception of Ashley Oliphant, few critics have challenged existing criticism on alcohol. However, with the rise of cultural criticism, it seems inevitable that Hemingway’s timeless fiction will be taken up by a new generation of careful readers eager to better understand the complex role of that powerful substance. The power of alcohol, in fiction, as in life, is all too real to ignore. This thesis has only taken a sip from the potent depths of alcohol in Hemingway’s novels.

1 See Forseth 372.
2 As well as Cheney, Nakjavani and Underhill, and Rogal.
3 See Miller 85-86.
4 See Forseth and Gelderman.
5 See Lender, Martin 146.
6 See Tracy 20, 27, 37, 39.
7 Critics as diverse as Crowley and Wagner-Martin (among others) both identify him as such. See Crowley 54 and Wagner-Martin 16.
8 Gelderman and Norton note this, among others. Crowley and Oliphant, however, draw distinctions between non-drinkers that abstain for the “right” reasons and “wrong” reasons.
9 According to Lender, Martin 46, Rorabaugh 8.
10 Miss Gage offers to drink with Frederic (see 78) and later does (95).
11 Miss Ferguson accompanies Frederic and Catherine to dinner, where alcohol is probably consumed (see 102); she becomes “quite cheerful” after consuming white wine (223).
12 See Bier, Crowley, Forseth.
13 See Morgan 98.
14 This is due to the compound thujone.
15 In common use though somewhat inaccurate, see Posthumus 141.
16 For more on Sioux medicine practices, see Densmore and Hassrick.
Works Cited


