



Research Article

A Study of Hemingway's Fiction on PTSD: From Traumatic Battlefield to Psychological Recovery

Madhu Gupta ^{1*}, Dr. Savita Ahuja ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, NIILM University, Haryana, India

² Supervisor, Department of English, NIILM University, Haryana, India

Corresponding Author: * Madhu Gupta

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21158823>

Abstract

This paper explores the depiction of trauma and psychological recovery in the fiction of Ernest Hemingway and the experiences that current psychology recognises as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Hemingway's major works such as *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, are discussed as he expresses the emotional effects of war, violence, loss, and disillusionment. Although the term PTSD was not used during Hemingway's time, the symptoms manifested by his characters are consistent with modern clinical descriptions, such as emotional numbness, intrusive memories, anxiety, alienation, and the struggle to reintegrate into normal life. Hemingway's fiction gives a subtle insight into psychological suffering and, at the same time, emphasizes resilience and the possibility of recovery through human connection, purposeful action, and personal endurance. By examining Hemingway's work through the perspective of modern trauma studies, this study highlights how his writing continues to be highly relevant to contemporary conversations about mental health, war, and the enduring impacts of trauma and conflict.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 08-05-2026
- Accepted: 28-06-2026
- Published: 30-06-2026
- IJCRM:5(3); 2026: 1335-1337
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Gupta M, Ahuja S. A study of Hemingway's fiction on PTSD: from traumatic battlefield to psychological recovery. *Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip*. 2026;5(3):1335-1337.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Ernest Hemingway, PTSD, trauma, war fiction, psychological healing, resilience, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway is most known for his spare language and his powerful depictions of war, loss, and human endurance. His ambulance driving experiences in the First World War profoundly influenced his writing and his understanding of suffering and survival. While the psychological term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not coined until decades after Hemingway finished his great works, many of his characters display behaviours and emotional struggles that parallel what is today called PTSD. This paper examines the presentation of the mental consequences of trauma and the challenging journey of psychological healing in Hemingway's fiction. Hemingway shows us trauma not as a temporary disruption, but as a permanent state that changes the way a person relates to memory, identity, and society. At the same time, his works suggest that recovery is not a complete obliteration of pain, but a process of learning to live with wounds that may never completely disappear. This study analyses selected novels and short stories, and explores Hemingway's contribution to modern understandings of trauma and mental health.

Trauma in Hemingway's War Fiction

Hemingway belonged to a generation deeply scarred by the devastation of the First World War. The war destroyed all the old ideas of heroism, of progress and of national glory. Hemingway's fiction rarely romanticizes war. Rather, it is represented as chaotic, destructive and psychologically damaging. Modern trauma theory holds that traumatic events can exceed a person's capacity to process events, resulting in lasting psychological effects. Common symptoms include flashbacks, hypervigilance, emotional numbness and avoiding reminders related to the trauma. He does not use clinical language, but Hemingway's stories often show characters who are dealing with these same problems. His spare writing style, frequently characterized by understatement and omission, mirrors the struggle many trauma survivors face in putting into words painful experiences.

Trauma in A Farewell to Arms

A Farewell to Arms is one of Hemingway's more straightforward depictions of the trauma of war. The protagonist, Frederic Henry, is an ambulance driver in World War I who witnesses violence, death, and destruction on a daily basis. His injury at the front marks a physical and psychological turning point. Frederic's responses to war indicate symptoms of PTSD. He often shows signs of emotional detachment, which is a normal survival mechanism for people who have been traumatized. He does not wear his heart on his sleeve but buries it in a few short comments and disjointed musings. The savage retreat of Caporetto deepens his disillusionment and mistrust. The chaos of the retreat opens a world where normal moral structures have broken down, and individuals have to fight to survive. The novel also explores the effects of trauma on intimate relationships. Frederic's love for Catherine Barkley offers him a refuge from the violence that surrounds him. Even this bond, however, does not entirely shield him from psychological pain. The tragic ending reaffirms Hemingway's belief that trauma and loss are part of

the human condition. Recovery here does not mean to forget the past, but to continue living in spite of the pain that does not go away.

The Sun Also Rises and the Scars of the Lost Generation

Rather than depicting combat directly, *The Sun Also Rises* explores how the trauma of war continues to shape and haunt the lives of its characters long after the fighting has ended. The narrator is Jake Barnes, who has a war wound that has changed his body and his self-perception. His injury is symbolic of the broader psychological damage suffered by the so called Lost Generation. Jake exhibits some of the traits linked to traumatic stress. He's isolated, finds it hard to form intimate relationships and often uses travel, drinking and socialising as a distraction. These behaviours may be understood as attempts to manage emotional pain and to avoid dealing with unresolved trauma. The characters' anxious journey from Paris to Spain is a search for meaning in a world that seems no longer stable, no longer coherent. But the novel also proposes forms of resilience, alongside the pervasive sense of loss. Jake stays connected to friends, notices the beauty that surrounds him, and participates in life even when contentment seems out of reach. What resilience Hemingway had, not to conquer suffering but to stay where he belonged in spite of it.

For Whom the Bell Tolls: Trauma, Courage and The Human Connection

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the psychological strains of warfare are examined through the experience of Robert Jordan in the Spanish Civil War. Jordan is always in danger, morally ambivalent and conscious of his own mortality. The novel examines the effects of long-term exposure to violence on people and communities. Jordan's reflections are characterized by anxiety, anticipatory grief and emotional strain. He knows death can come at any time, but he pushes through with his mission. This mix of fear and determination is an example of Hemingway's complex idea of bravery. Courage doesn't undo trauma; it exists alongside vulnerability. A major theme of the novel is the importance of human connection as a source of psychological strength. Jordan's relationship with Maria and the guerrilla group provides meaning and emotional support in the midst of the chaos of war. Contemporary mental health research often recognizes social connection as a protective factor against trauma recovery, and Hemingway's narrative foreshadows this recognition, demonstrating how social relationships help people survive extreme circumstances.

Hemingway's View on Psychological Healing

Hemingway does not provide easy answers to the problem of trauma. His characters seldom get over themselves, and the past continues to haunt them. His fiction, though, points to a number of ways to psychological recovery.

Acceptance of the reality

Hemingway's characters often learn that denial is a game that cannot be lost. "Recovery begins when one confronts the truth about one's experiences; however painful the truth may be."

Human-to-human relationships

Love, friendship and solidarity are key to characters coping with suffering. Relationships cannot erase trauma, but they can offer comfort, meaning and belonging.

Deliberate action

Many of Hemingway's characters find stability in work, obligation or personal commitment. Engaging in meaningful activity helps them keep a sense of identity in the aftermath of traumatic experiences.

Endurance and durability

Hemingway's most significant contribution is perhaps his preoccupation with endurance. His famous notion that a person can be "destroyed but not defeated" is a statement of his belief in the ability of humans to go on even when suffering cannot be fully defeated.

Relevance to Contemporary Mental Health Discourse

Hemingway's presentation of trauma remains relevant because it describes the complexities of psychological suffering in terms that remain relatable to contemporary readers. PTSD is now recognized as a serious mental health condition that can affect veterans, survivors of violence, victims of disasters and many others who have experienced overwhelming events. There are many aspects of Hemingway's fiction that correspond to our modern understanding of PTSD. First, his works recognize the fact that trauma can linger long after the initial event has passed. Second, they show the effects of trauma on relationships, self-image and day-to-day functioning. Third, they stress that recovery is usually gradual and partial, rather than sudden and complete. At the same time, Hemingway's fiction provides a hopeful view. His stories are about resilience, connection and purpose, and show that even with psychological scars people can still live meaningful lives. This message is particularly timely in today's mental health discussions, which are increasingly focused not only on symptoms and diagnosis, but also recovery, support and post-traumatic growth.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Trauma, survival and psychological recovery are deeply explored in Ernest Hemingway's fiction. Hemingway, through the characters of Frederic Henry, Jake Barnes, and Robert Jordan, shows both the lasting emotional effects of war and violence, and the human capacity to endure. Even though he wrote before PTSD was formally recognized, his narratives anticipated many insights that modern psychology has since developed about traumatic stress and recovery. In Hemingway's work, trauma is not just a personal issue, but a profoundly human one that shapes our identities, relationships, and perceptions of the world. His fiction remains a valuable addition to the ongoing conversation about mental health, with a mixture of candid depictions of pain and a fierce faith in the power of resilience. At a time when we are more aware of the psychological effects of trauma, Hemingway is still a great writer who can help us understand the damage to the mind and the chances of healing

REFERENCES

1. Hemingway E. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner; 1995.
2. Hemingway E. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. New York: Scribner; 1995.
3. Hemingway E. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner; 2006.
4. Hemingway E. *In Our Time*. New York: Scribner; 1996.
5. Hemingway E. *Men Without Women*. New York: Scribner; 2002.
6. Caruth C. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, History, and Narrative*. Baltimore (MD): Johns Hopkins University Press; 1996.
7. Herman JL. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books; 1997.
8. Meyers J. *Hemingway: A Life Story*. New York: Da Capo Press; 1999.
9. Young P. *Ernest Hemingway: A Reassessment*. University Park (PA): Pennsylvania State University Press; 1966

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–Non-Commercial–No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. This license permits sharing and redistribution of the article in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and source. No modifications, adaptations, or derivative works are permitted under this license.

About the Corresponding Author

Madhu Gupta is a Research Scholar in the Department of English at NIILM University, Haryana, India. Her research interests include English literature, comparative literature, literary criticism, cultural studies, and contemporary literary theory. She is actively engaged in academic research and contributes to advancing scholarship through interdisciplinary and innovative literary studies.