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World War I Narratives and the American Peace Movement, 1920-1936

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WORLD WAR I NARRATIVES AND THE AMERICAN PEACE MOVEMENT, 1920-1936

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to conduct analyses of twelve American novels and one short story collection published between 1920 and 1936 and to demonstrate their effect in scripting cultural memory and in shaping public sentiment toward military intervention in the United States during that period. Specifically, these novels, all dealing directly with the First World War or its fallout/aftermath, provided a rhetorical framework within which pacifist, isolationist, and anti-militarist elements were ultimately able to influence legislation directly regarding the role America would play in the world’s conflicts until 1941. Furthermore, following years of official propaganda and press censorship and in the absence of any modern mass media, they represented for the post-war public nearly the sole outlet through which the experience of the war could be “accurately” or “authoritatively” rendered. As a result, American public feeling toward military intervention turned increasingly negative during the interwar period, mirroring in many ways the fictional works’ own bitter and disillusioned (if not outright horrified or defeated) tones. Highlighting the theories of Vincent J. Roscigno’s and William Danaher’s 2001 study on the “shaping” ability of music on the goals and aims of striking textile workers in the 1930s South, I will demonstrate a parallel effect of these selected American World War I novels during the 1920s and 1930s.
Civiliization in the United States, a massive collection of essays on American life, culture, education, and society edited by Harold Stearns, appeared in 1922. In its pages various authors, ranked among the elite intellectuals of the era, blasted the United States for its deficiencies and shortcomings in those areas listed. Stearns himself claimed in his introduction that “the most moving and pathetic fact in the social life of America to-day is emotional and aesthetic starvation” (vii), setting the tone for the remainder of the selections. Lewis Mumford, in the volume’s opening essay, “The City,” stated straight away: “In building our cities we deflowered a wilderness” (3). The “commercial city,” he added, has “neither fellowship nor social stability nor security” (5). Moreover: “There is nothing short of the Alkali Desert that compares with the desolateness of the common American industrial town. . . . So far we have de-humanized the population” (12-3). H.L. Mencken informed the reader in the succeeding essay that American senators and representatives “are, in the overwhelming main, shallow fellows, ignorant of the grave matters they deal with and too stupid to learn” (22). On top of that, they are willing to sacrifice anything – “dignity,” “honour,” “principle,” merely to “hold and have” the rewards of public office (27).

Intellectual and artistic life in America did not escape scorn; John Macy, in an essay on journalism, believed that there was “decadence in all countries . . . of the journalist as a professional man in an honourable craft” (39). Stearns himself felt that the “pioneer point of view” which dominated American values despised that which was “a liability to a community that can afford only assets” – hence the “intellectual” had no place in it (136). The “old terms” of American life still dictated the nation’s temper – “as if the purpose of making money in order to make more money were as important as the purpose of raising bread in order to support life” (138). Van Wyck Brooks condemned American literature in unambiguous terms, calling it full of “sterile bitterness, bright futility, a beginning without a future” (179). “The
whole temper of our society,” he wrote, is based on personal ambition and material gain – no other such environment is “deadlier to the poet, the artist, the writer” (185). “The sense of . . . failure is written all over our literature” (182). Brooks, like Stearns, refers to the “old hostility of the pioneers” that “still operates to prevent in the American mind the powerful, concentrated pursuit of any non-utilitarian way of life” (193). Frederick J.Hoffman makes special reference to *Civilization in the United States* in The 1920s:

>Civilization in the United States was a historical landmark of the post-World War I years, a curious document of disaffection, pointing to and reiterating the failure of culture, entertainment, family life, religion – of everything except science, and even it scored only a partial success in the survey of American life and institutions. (21)

The First World War is mentioned directly only twice in the entire collection, once in Garet Garrett’s essay on business and commerce, and once in H.W. van Loon’s piece on American historians. Yet, as Hoffman implies, the sentiments these writers describe as a whole were, in 1922, part of a growing sense of disillusionment that would swell throughout the 1920s, and quickly came to define public sentiment toward the Great War. This growing bitterness in the intellectual community ultimately, by the end of the decade, swelled into an outright pacifist or isolationist belief on the part of a majority of Americans. By the 1930s these sentiments would be codified in actual legislation keeping America out of foreign military involvement. “Sterile bitterness, “bright futility,” “aesthetic starvation,” the hollowness of “dignity” and “honour” – these phrases, and others nearly identical or bearing the connotation of defeat, cropped up frequently in the fiction of chroniclers of the Great War as early as 1920. The immediate post-war nationalism and war pride, though, coupled with an American public in nearly total ignorance of what had actually happened in the trenches in France, prevented a good deal of the literary discontent from finding wide public acceptance. Indeed, it may be one reason why the war was only alluded to or mentioned in passing in *Civilization in the United States*, even though its shadow lay over all the frustration and hopelessness about America that the authors felt. The “patriotic hysteria had peaked too recently,” in 1921, for instance, for the “antimilitary realism” of John Dos Passos’s novel *Three Soldiers*, published in September of that year, “to be palatable to very many” in America (Rosen 23). However, by 1929, the anticipation of the release of Ernest Hemingway’s novel *A Farewell to Arms*, and its subsequent sales and acclaim, despite the
fact that it was no less critical of the war and of concepts like “honor” and “dignity” than Dos Passos’s novel had been, indicated a vast change in public sentiment toward the conflict, and toward those who participated in what Stanley Cooperman characterizes as the “World War I literary protest” (World War I 77). Three Soldiers, and its author, were labeled by the New York Times as “slanderous,” “traitorous,” and cruelly unsympathetic toward those who had fought – and died – in the conflict (Rosen 23-4). A Farewell to Arms, on the other hand, became a Book-of-the-Month selection in 1930 and garnered only a small amount of criticism on the grounds of “antiwar sentiment,” which was almost totally ignored in any case (Fenstermaker 190).

It is undeniable – and well-documented – that politically, the United States in the 1920s was moving away from foreign involvement toward almost total military isolation in the global sphere. One need only look at the treaties, the speeches given by senators and presidents, the arms-reduction process, and the Neutrality Acts to see where the nation was heading. Distaste for what had happened in the Great War, a belief that it had been a monstrous error for America to become involved, and suspicion that U.S. intervention had been fueled by the desire of arms merchants to increase profits were common assumptions made by both the public at large and by intellectual and political figures (Rhodes 2,131,134; Rosen 75). A Gallup Poll taken in 1936, Norman Moss writes, “showed that a majority thought America’s entry into World War I was a mistake” (21).

The disillusion and angst felt toward war in general in the 1920s and 1930s among novelists, artists, and intellectuals have been similarly well-documented; but the impact the writers of the era – primarily those of the expatriate “Lost Generation” – had on shaping U.S. foreign policy and public opinion has been largely overlooked. In regard to shaping ideas about the physical realities of the war, Cooperman notes that “[w]hat ‘going over the top’ actually meant was a mystery to the vast majority of the American public, and it remained a mystery until returning veterans began writing books” (World War I 71). For all intents and purposes, in a world whose only widely-accessible mass media at the time were periodicals and literature, the novelists and journalists wrote the war for the American public. Books like Three Soldiers, Thomas Boyd’s Through the Wheat, E.E. Cummings’s The Enormous Room, and the works of Hemingway were essentially the only outlets through which non-participants could read the “truth” of the war. Their importance for this purpose was especially heightened given that, as Stuart Halsey Ross points out, the American press for the duration of the conflict was steeped
almost wholly in propaganda and censored reports from the front. That the majority of these books were stridently, even harshly, critical of the war effort and America’s role in it figured significantly in creating and sustaining a national mood of anti-war sentiment throughout most of the next two decades. The role that the narratives of World War I ultimately played in shaping national policy, manifested primarily by novels but also by editorials, essays, photographic records, and articles, is the focus of this study.

The American peace movement in the 1920s and 1930s, composed variously of lobbying groups and pacifist organizations such as the National Council for the Prevention of War and the American Peace Society, and other societal elements (politicians, intellectuals, artists) wishing to stem the tide of militarism and conflict, made huge strides in the interwar period. As Merle Curti writes, an “ever larger number of Americans . . . denounced the brutality and futility of the war,” and subsequently “guided a new peace movement which in the twenties and thirties gained a wider hearing than any earlier protest against war had won” (304). The 1921 Washington Disarmament Conference, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1927, and the Neutrality Acts of the mid-1930s could be counted as “official” victories for the movement during this time, as they all were aimed at the avoidance of military aggression or intervention (304). Curti acknowledges that “the reaction against the war to make the world safe for democracy, and against war in general, was promoted by a flood of literature, . . . which exposed the stupid dreariness, brutality, and agony of modern warfare” (269). This, added to Cooperman’s aforementioned definition of the period’s war literature as a “protest,” and Peter Jones’s assertion that “psychological and sociological considerations are of fundamental significance” in the war novel (4), opens the way for a clearer, more direct analysis of the novels themselves as shapers of anti-war sentiment and, indeed, of legislation itself. The American public in the 1920s relied on novels, memoirs, and on such other media as Laurence Stallings’s photographic journal *The First World War*, to “show” what the war had been like. Thus, the rising tide of anti-militarism in the 1920s that by the 1930s became actual U.S. policy was made possible by the “literary protest” waged by Dos Passos, Cummings, Hemingway, and their compatriots. *Three Soldiers, The Enormous Room*, and even the contents of *Civilization in the United States* can be read as opening salvoes in the attack upon the American values and policies which the authors believed had led to the country’s involvement in World War I.
Cooperman writes that cultural and artistic expression were viable means of enacting social change even at the turn of the century. “Protest and reform spilled over into literature,” he notes, indicating that Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and the works of Frank Norris “had all but written legislation” (*World War I* 6). While the war temporarily threw into doubt the Progressive-era belief that art could achieve social gains – and weakened the peace movement’s resolve considerably (Curti 304) – mass media’s potential use as a vehicle of protest came to the fore once again after 1918. The National Council for the Prevention of War “established a moving picture department,” and World Peaceways, a pacifist organization formed in 1931, bought space on billboards and in magazines such as *Liberty, Vogue, Vanity Fair*, and *The New Yorker* (274-5). The use of mass media as an outlet for social protest and of narrative itself as a framing device for the goals of a particular social movement are of special importance here. That Cummings, Dos Passos, Stallings, and Boyd did not belong to any specific pacifist organizations, and that Hemingway was essentially apolitical for his entire life, does not matter in an analysis of how their work, based as it was on participant-observation and evincing scorn and disgust on a number of levels, “framed” the nature of the war for a vast segment of the literate American populace.

Joseph Davis, editor of *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, writes that “social movements are dominated by stories and storytelling, and narrative goes to the heart of the very cultural and ideational processes” that sociologists address when looking at such movements (4). The emergence of social movements, their “internal dynamics,” and their effects on the public can all be framed through narrative (4). The “cultural elements” and “symbolic expressive aspects” that Davis finds crucial to understanding phenomena such as the peace movement (10) are represented by the novels under discussion here. “Stories do not just configure the past in light of the present and future,” he continues, “they also create experiences for and request certain responses from their audience” (12). This is the project of the World War I authors – configuring, in a provocative way, the “past experience” of the war for an audience that in turn reacted strongly: “Stories appeal to the intellect, . . . but also to emotion and imagination, to moral and aesthetic intuition, as well as to logical reasons” (19). The reader, in essence, “can feel involved in events and care about characters even when they are, in fact, very far from his or her own experience,” which is an obvious point of importance for the mobilization of public opinion (16). The gains made by peace advocates and pacifist groups in
the interwar period largely were dependent on public feeling. Albert Hindmarsh, for instance, notes that the 1927 Kellogg-Briand Pact, a treaty renouncing war on the part of all signatories, was described by President Herbert Hoover as “a means of rendering public opinion ‘tangible and effective’” (167-8). Curti states that the peace movement’s “largely symbolic” gains after World War I “had certainly contributed to the development of peace consciousness – to genuine and widespread opposition to war and the clamor for peace” (305). A poll taken in 1931, for instance, revealed, perhaps shockingly, that 16% of “representative college youth” wouldn’t take up arms “even if the country were invaded,” and 62% believed that a strong navy wouldn’t preserve peace if future hostilities broke out; it was clear “that there had been a marked growth in anti-war feeling in that segment of the population,” according to the polls (299). A New York Herald-Tribune poll taken in November of 1935 indicated that only 29% of the respondents favored U.S. involvement in peace-enforcing efforts such as those led by the League of Nations (300).

The role of literature – specifically, of fictional narratives, and to a lesser degree, non-fictional essays, and editorials – in engendering and sustaining this “peace consciousness” was crucial and far-reaching. “Expanding political opportunities” that open up for activists, protesters, and interest groups within a society, are “inseparable” from cultural processes and factors (McAdam 475). “Expanding cultural opportunities” – such as those provided by the publication and reception of the World War I novels – are likely to stimulate collective action and shifts in public sentiment (475). Cultural and expressive elements of social change, which literature represents, commonly exert an “indirect and mediated – rather than direct and unmediated – effect on political culture” (Tarrow 329-30). Thus it is not necessary, for instance, to demonstrate conclusively that the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact or the disarmament treaties of the 1920s and 1930s were inspired by readings of A Farewell to Arms or Three Soldiers. The shifts in sentiment at the lowest levels of action (such as changes in public opinion) that may be most susceptible to the messages of literary texts are, of course, far separated from actual government policy decisions. However, the dissemination of literature into a culture can “produce new or transformed symbols, frames of meaning, and ideologies that justify and dignify collective action . . . around which a following can be mobilized” (Tarrow 329-30). The introduction of Great War narratives into American society and thought, and their subsequent effects on peace consciousness, and later on isolationist sentiment, is a clear case in point.
Pacifism and isolationism became popular modes of thinking because the novels – which had “written” the war for a majority of the public – “dignified” such a mindset and justified the pursuit of pacifist aims for the United States.

Gary Fine further notes: “Without shared and communicated culture, sustained collective action is impossible” (230). Perhaps most pertinent to the discussion of the literature of World War I and the goals of the peace movement in the interwar years is Fine’s belief that “stories that help (or are believed to help) social movements alter their environment in desirable ways are likely to continue and are likely to be culturally central” (235, italics mine). The cultural “centrality” of Hemingway, Dos Passos, and the other authors of the period can be demonstrated with ease; what is more important is the manner in which they shaped and then fueled the peace consciousness of the era. The stories “continued” throughout the 1930s, even after America’s commitment to neutrality and to anti-militarism was an established fact of foreign policy. The arc of the World War I novels roughly parallels that of America’s isolationist period.

The “protest,” of course, need not be conscious or active on the part of the author (although one could certainly argue that authors like Dos Passos and Cummings were actively protesting in their work). “Narrative,” Fine states, “permits the expression of an implicit ideology that even the parties to the discourse may not fully realize is present” (239). Thus one need not be setting out explicitly to write a “protest” novel for it to have the social and cultural impact that Cooperman and others find (Hemingway, again, is a case in point). Storytelling can be, as Linda Hutcheon indicates, a way of “witnessing” or accessing shared trauma (21). The imperative to remember, the “responsibility not to forget” imperialism, conquest, atrocity, or victimization that she identifies as a common facet of most Holocaust narratives (19-20), applies equally to war stories that “access” a shared trauma. Frederick J. Hoffmann, for instance, indicates that Hemingway’s work, concerned as it is with the “symbolic wound” (at least in the case of Nick Adams), is “an early testimony to the powerful influence” of this separating trauma. Nick, as evidenced by the stories of In Our Time, is psychologically and emotionally divorced from his American past and from his Midwestern home by his wound, as, by extension, was Hemingway himself (89-91).

Vincent J. Roscigno and William Danaher have written on the effects of radio in facilitating and shaping group action. Specifically, they point to the importance of the political content of songs dealing with poor working conditions in the Southern textile industry in the
years 1929-1934. They state that, in terms of the shaping influence of radio, “the messages aired shaped workers’ sense of collective experience and political opportunity” (21). “Not only do these songs appeal to collective understanding and concerns,” they add, “but they also provide a framework through which such concerns are interpreted in a causal fashion” (39). The songs exerting the most influence on southern textile workers and providing an impetus for them to take action against their perceived oppression were written or performed by musicians who were themselves former textile workers (34). A parallel line of discussion using novels of the First World War published during the interwar period is readily suggested. Nearly all the novels under discussion were written by authors who were themselves veterans of the war in some capacity, whether through volunteer ambulance service or combat duty. The novels, under the lens of Davis’s and Fine’s theories, certainly exerted a shaping influence on the nation’s sense of collective experience and provided a framework for addressing and critiquing concerns about future war efforts.

Curti contextualizes the post-war literary and cultural response as a reaction against the misguided nationalism of the war years:

It was in response to this formidable development of navalism, militarism, and fascist-like tendencies which new agencies and techniques of propaganda fostered that the movement for the limitation or abolition of war took on an importance far greater than it had ever before enjoyed. It came to be more talked about, more sincerely considered by plain people, by leaders of opinion, and by the government itself than pioneers of peace a hundred or even fifty years earlier could have imagined in moods of the most unrestrained optimism. (268)

The opinions evident in Civilization in the United States are but one symptom of the post-intellectual anti-nationalism, and despite the fact that the authors make only brief mention of the conflict, the shadow of the war looms over their collective despair. Dissatisfaction with the policies and practices of American society and government, especially as they had been conducted during the war, contributed to the exodus of the writers who would become the next generation of pre-eminent American authors. This bitterness also fostered the development of America’s first anti-war literary works, and ultimately consolidated the establishment of a “pacifist” (isolationist) stance by the United States toward the rest of the world. The wholesale demonization of enemy soldiers and their culture, the rampant nationalism appearing in the press
and in film as well as in popular fiction, and the subsequent xenophobia that immediately followed the war (demonstrated most tangibly by the crackdown on communists) were the catalysts for the artists’ strikes at American culture. In turn, the novels were the catalyst for the public to develop the “peace consciousness” that would soon pressure the decision-making processes of American government.

A fuller discussion of American attitudes during the wartime era itself follows in the next chapter and will provide further insight into this reversal, which John Aldridge noted when he wrote that in the World War I novels of the Lost Generation, the “normal processes of war are in reverse, making courage insubordinate and cowardice the rule” (9). The novelists themselves, by and large, agreed with Harold Stearns, Lewis Mumford, H.L. Mencken, and others “that life in America was tawdry, cheap, colorless, and given over to the exclusive worship of wealth and machinery” (Aldridge 12). Indeed, those same materialistic values that the novelists so despised were what many of their novels indicted as the cause of America’s entry into the war. And by the end of the 1920s, the American populace had come to largely share that view as well, their opinions shaped by the only cultural outlet for the “truth” of the war available to them.

Measuring the concrete gains of anti-war interest groups and pacifist elements in the years 1920-1936 is largely a matter of examining events, treaties, and legislation. The withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Nicaragua in 1927, for example, and the end of America’s interventions there, is one such case (Rhodes 64). The aforementioned Kellogg-Briand Pact and the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s provide further instances. For the purposes of this study, “isolationism” and “pacifism” will be treated as equivalent terms. Both ideologies reflect, in varying degrees, anti-war sentiment, and, ultimately, their goal – to keep the United States out of foreign military ventures – is the same, although “pacifism” can be measured on a broader scale than simple American neutrality. The actual moves made to keep the country out of war will be read as a furthering of peace-consciousness, even if – like the Neutrality Acts or American refusal to join the League of Nations – they are based solely on American self-interest rather than on concern for the larger world community. The Kellogg-Briand Pact and its goal of “outlawry” of war, is ideologically far removed from the Neutrality Acts. Ultimately, though, their consequences for the United States’ military involvement are identical. All of these treaties and legislative acts will be examined in further detail in the following chapter.
John Dos Passos’s *One Man’s Initiation* (1920) is chronologically the first novel I will discuss; it appeared in October of that year, after the Palmer Raids and the crackdown on communism, at the dawn of Prohibition and on a tide of patriotic post-war fervor that was still quite strong. *The Big Money*, the final novel in Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy, was published in August of 1936 and forms the latter “bookend” of the body of work under examination. I believe *U.S.A.* to be the final major relevant work dealing with the conflict during the interwar period, and it appeared at a time when American isolationism was at its highest peak. Events and literary works before 1920 and after 1936 will be discussed, but only in relation to the response they provoked in the 1920s and 1930s, or in terms of the “debt,” if any, they may owe to the earlier novels. Many have characterized the “literary protest” of the World War I novelists as a virulent reaction against the earlier propaganda and nationalism. And in their creation of the first original body of American anti-war literature, they established a rough blueprint of sorts for later novelists, artists, and filmmakers to follow.

In light of the aggressive militarist posture America has maintained toward the rest of the world since the end of World War II, the interwar period and the cultural processes that affected the nation’s withdrawal from international military affairs are of special significance. A study of the novels that addressed America’s failure in the First World War and stressed, either explicitly or implicitly, the folly of allowing such a failure to occur again, is pivotal in understanding those processes. Social movements – such as the call for abolition of war or the move toward isolationism – are, as Fine and Davis point out, inseparable from changes in culture and in modes of expression. Why did the novels of World War I find such fertile ground for their vehement anti-war argument in the America of the 1920s and 1930s? The indications are that at first, the “soil” was harsh and barren. But even as *Three Soldiers* was being blasted by the *New York Times* in 1921, it was being lauded critically in other corners – in fact, by some of the very same writers (H.L. Mencken among them) who had contributed to *Civilization in the United States* (Sanders 357-60). This ambivalence makes sense in the context of the early 1920s, “as the nation vacillated between celebrating its part in Great War and retreating into a new era of isolationism” (Trout 15). The transition from patriotic and nationalistic fervor to withdrawal and disenchantment was relatively quick in the years following the war, and the novelists, critics, journalists, and editors who controlled the nation’s “access” to the war were prominent figures in facilitating that transition.
The representative novels I have chosen to examine from this period are by no means intended to constitute a comprehensive or exhaustive survey of the available texts on the subject. For an extensive, annotated listing of the novels published about World War I, across all nations, see Philip Hager’s *The Novels of World War I: An Annotated Bibliography*, an invaluable resource on the topic which I have made great use of and which will be referenced many times in this work. The novels I will discuss at length were those considered to have had either great popular success, and therefore have been disseminated to and read by a large segment of the literate public, or are fiercely strident in their anti-war, anti-militarist ideologies (these are by no means mutually exclusive classifications). They are also all books which have been “remembered” in the critical and scholarly literature as belonging, in varying degrees, to the “literary protest” that attended the war novels of the 1920s and 1930s. Fine’s dictum (making reference to the Spanish Civil War) that the enemy may, in the short term, have won all the battles but that, over time, “ballads can sometimes tip the balance in sedimented historical memory” (230) is especially relevant here. How these novels are encoded in our nation’s “historical memory,” how well they are perceived to represent the cultural realities of the time in which they were written, and how accurate they are in “providing” our understanding of America’s military withdrawal, all depend on scholarly and academic appraisal. Like the American population of the late teens, our culture in 2005 is cut off from the “reality” of the First World War as well as its social aftermath – historical memory, which novels and critics provide, is one of the few media through which we have access, however partial and limited, to that period.

The novels I will examine are: *One Man’s Initiation* (1920), *Three Soldiers* (1921), *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936), all by John Dos Passos; *The Enormous Room* (1922), by E.E. Cummings; *One of Ours* (1922), by Willa Cather; *Through the Wheat* (1923), by Thomas Boyd; *Plumes* (1924), by Laurence Stallings; *In Our Time* (short story collection,1925), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), all by Ernest Hemingway; *Soldiers’ Pay* (1926), by William Faulkner; and *Company K* (1933), by William March. As previously mentioned, other novels and assorted works of journalism and non-fiction from the period will be brought into the discussion as supplementary material where relevant. It should not be supposed that all novels written about World War I during this period shared the ideologies of the above-mentioned works; part of my overall discussion, though, will focus on
why those works have not retained the cultural “staying power” of those which do evince an anti-war stance. As Roscigno and Danaher have done in their study of textile worker’s songs, I will treat these fourteen fictional narratives as shaping devices through which the peace consciousness of the American people was furthered in the interwar period. Detailed readings of the texts will be employed to this end, focusing both on overt political and ideological sentiment as well as depiction of battle conditions as a “shock technique” to revolt or disgust readers. As Ross, Cooperman, and others point out, the reports from the front during the war were often “sanitized” to minimize harsh or especially gruesome details, so these narrative acts of “revelation” to readers are especially significant. Political and ideological sentiment can take the form of explicit statements by characters, perceived irony, sarcasm, or outright, plain assertions by the narrator, or in qualities as subtle as tone, atmosphere, and imagery. And certainly, portrayals of combat as hellish, grotesque, or senseless are in themselves ideological statements. Where necessary, biographical information about the authors and their roles or experiences in the conflict will be supplied.

Beyond an examination of the implications these works had for the interwar period, it is also important to examine why their effect has not been repeated in regard to subsequent American wars. The singular influence the literature of the time had affected military policy would not be seen again as the United States entrenched itself more firmly as a global power throughout the twentieth century. The proliferation of new media sources, which have greatly diminished, if not eliminated, the public’s reliance on printed text for access to world events, is certainly a factor in the decreased efficacy of literature in effecting social change or shaping cultural attitudes. The new faith in American military strength and its role in global security following World War II have contributed to the view of the anti-war novel as perhaps outmoded or even as “un-American” in some quarters. For these reasons, an understanding of the World War I literary protest’s unique success in fostering a genuine peace consciousness during a period where America declined to take a decisive, even hegemonic, role in world military affairs, can contribute to a greater overall understanding of the nation’s evolving attitudes toward its own military growth and the responsibilities and roles it must continually assume as a result.
CHAPTER 1
WARTIME PROPAGANDA AND THE ORIGINS OF BACKLASH

The lack of variety in media outlets in 1914 limited a literate American’s choice of perspective on the war in Europe. In the absence of television or radio reportage, newspapers and other print sources assumed a primacy in relaying news from the front as well as opinion on the unfolding events. From the beginning, interest in and sentiment regarding the war were abundant, resulting in the publication of a fantastic amount of war-related material in a relatively short period. Former president Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, published his opinions in a series of newspaper columns eventually collected in book form as America and the World War in 1915, scarcely a year after the conflict had begun. Clergymen, novelists, and university scholars were no less eager than Roosevelt to publish their often strident and uncompromising views, especially as it became obvious that American involvement in the war was forthcoming. The result was a massive body of literature that, in the years following the conflict, would foster disgust and revulsion on the part of the same literate population that had consumed it in the war years. The origins of the literary protest begin here.

America was, in Lewis Mumford’s words, a “relatively innocent world” in the years before 1914 (qtd. in Rochester 1). “The War” for many Americans in the summer of 1914 meant Mexico, not Europe; the “vagaries of European politics” and the “annual Balkan violence” were matters of public amusement, not of national security (13). American liberals still basked in the “common commitment to progress and peace” which the Progressive Era fostered (5) and “took comfort in their own country’s remoteness from the turmoil” (17). The availability of a large variety of periodicals, though, provided a voice for elements that did not favor keeping the European war at arm’s length. Stuart Halsey Ross points out that the American public, by the early teens, were a highly literate and educated people, due in large part to the great increase in newspaper circulation (2). The New York Times, as “America’s most prestigious and influential newspaper,” was almost immediately hostile to Germany and the Central Powers at the outbreak
of war, as were most of the other New York dailies (13, 15). What essentially came to dominate the “war agenda” in a large number of daily newspapers was the so-called “British version” of the war’s genesis – that Britain “went to war to defend ‘independent and perpetually neutral’ Belgium, that Germany was the undoubted aggressor,” and that the Central Powers grossly and continuously violated international law and humanitarian decency in their prosecution of the war (18). The very literacy of the American people, and their eagerness to read, was itself a sign of their ripeness for the more virulent propaganda that would come later, as print media became a primary vehicle for anti-German and pro-Allied sentiment.

The “pioneer point of view,” and its hold on the American psyche which Harold Stearns lamented, may in part have convinced the American public of the righteous nature of its “Crusade” in an essentially European war. Richard Slotkin writes in Regeneration Through Violence that the conquering of the North American continent, achieved through the wholesale slaughter of the indigenous population, drove the artistic and cultural imagination of the country for centuries afterward, and has repeatedly been romanticized and idealized in American drama, literature, and film. Frederick Jackson Turner, famous for the “Frontier Thesis” that addressed the role Americans would have to adopt in the lack of a wilderness to settle, hypothesized in 1910 that the nation would now have to turn its internal “pioneering” outward – to world politics, for instance. Having “a potential voice in the problems of Europe, Asia, and Africa” and focusing on “territorial acquisitions” were, to some degree, the “logical outcome of the nation’s march to the Pacific” (315). “The myth of the frontier,” James Coombs adds, “has been an integral part of the American imagination” (15). Citing “the American penchant for violent solutions, the belief in heroes ‘standing tall,’ the creation of ‘new frontiers,’” and present-day gun laws, Coombs argues that the “residue” of the frontier myth has driven American involvement in foreign wars up through Vietnam (15). Cooperman, too, theorizes that the study of American World War I novels can help in “understanding why Americans . . . embark on so many crusades, and why they so often manage to trip over their own feet in the process” (World War I viii). “American attitudes toward struggle,” Cooperman states – “whether or not shaped by the frontier imagination so necessary to this country’s cultural growth” – had always been ambiguous and imbued with naivete; American history documented the course of “what had been surely the most pugnacious peace-loving nation on Earth” (50).
The country’s long reticence toward involvement in European affairs – the war with Britain of 1812 notwithstanding – and its consistent willingness to, as Slotkin writes, violently force the American frontier itself and its inhabitants into submission, is one sign of this ambiguity. Curti, additionally, writes that America has since its inception essentially consolidated its sense of national unity through war. Furthermore, there has been a consistent pattern of “revulsion” following the conclusion of each war and a feeling of “renewed resolution” to prevent future wars (301). Writing in the 1930s, Curti was in an authoritative position to observe this phenomenon first-hand; the “revulsion” and “renewed resolution” were by that time pervasive in American politics.

Adding to the nation’s ambiguity about its sense of military “destiny” was the sense Curti notes of growing “imperialism and navalism” after the Spanish-American War (303), countered by the belief held by most Americans before 1917 that “the wisest policy for the United States was one of abstention from the politics, alliances, and wars of the Old World” (Smith x). The “imperialist assumptions” of Turner’s frontier thesis, though, embodying the “ideology of Manifest Destiny,” offers historical justification for expansion and the spread of American influence (Madsen 123). The United States had occasionally been petitioned by outside belligerents to mediate in foreign wars, but the Foreign Office “made it clear that it would reject any such suggestion” (Curti 174-5). Overt concerns about the implications of the extension of American power and influence – as well as the nation’s role in potential military interventions – were largely muted before World War I (179). The nation’s long-standing “hands-off” policy in European affairs would be tested, then broken by the conflict. Cooperman writes of the relative innocence of most Americans in their opinions of Europe in the years before the war, and how this attitude would, in turn, shape public sentiment in the 1920s and after. It was

. . . a naivete in which educated Americans viewed Europe as the united base of western civilization and uneducated Americans regarded it as a fascinating combination of immoral traditions and sexual sophistications, of proud aristocracy and colorful peasantry. And it is the quality of this naivete which sets up the dramatic process of disillusion and impact in the post-World War I novel. (55)

As a Crusade or “adventure,” the Great War offered unique opportunities to Americans intellectually, politically, and physically. In the absence of any further frontier to conquer, it presented a conflict with clear-cut “good guys” and “bad guys” (as the propaganda would have
one believe), with perceived implications about the future of democracy and culture, but without the explicit threat to national security that the “Old World” nations felt. The United States, additionally, found it easy to withdraw from the post-war politics and alliances Woodrow Wilson himself had a large part in articulating, leaving the job of sustaining the peace to the European belligerents. The “tide of disillusionment and isolationist sentiment” of the 1920s and 1930s (Smith xi) stemmed perhaps not from a sense of horror or shock at the loss of life but rather the desire to separate from the (European) ideologies which had made the war possible. The theme of political horror resonates throughout virtually all of the novels under discussion in this work. Like their European counterparts, American writers were equally appalled by the carnage of trench warfare and by the lethal advances in technology that the war exploited. Indeed, American combat losses in the 19-month duration of the country’s involvement totaled 53,402 dead and 205,690 wounded (Farwell 258), nearly as many (58,135 killed and over 300,000 wounded) as were sustained in the country’s decade-plus-long involvement in the Vietnam War (Fussell, “Obscenity” 653). These losses, though, pale in comparison to the war deaths suffered by France (over 1.7 million), Britain (over 1 million), Germany (over 2 million), or Russia (1.7 million), countries whose involvement was a matter of national survival (Keegan 421-3).

Because America’s losses in human terms were not nearly as staggering, the war literature of American novelists is much more likely to focus on ideological or political disenchantment. This ranges from a view of the war as detrimental to their desired pursuits (as with John Andrews in Three Soldiers or Troy Belknap of Edith Wharton’s The Marne) to as a vehicle through which businessmen and politicians advance their own financial agendas. This view is not entirely absent from European novels of the war; but in reading Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front (1928) or Greek author Stratis Myrivilis’s Life in the Tomb (1924), one is struck by the proliferation of graphic depictions of wounds, casualties, the power of weaponry, and the visceral, scatological details of the daily lives of soldiers in the trenches. The heavier toll on human life, and its inherent outrage, while not entirely divorced from outrage against its political causes, is far more the explicit focus in these works. There are violent, graphic details in the American novels as well, but in terms of scale, they are remarkably tame by comparison. It is not too far-fetched to say that this is yet one more symptom of the nation’s ambivalence towards violence in the face of ever-widening desire for adventure or expansion of influence. As John Limon states:
Americans did not have the seemingly endless trench experience that defined the English, French, and German memory of World War I. But when Americans did get a measure of the experience, they still saw in World War I basically a conflict of imagination and authority. The enemy is never the Boches (it is at least sometimes the Boches for English writers). The enemy is always the army, the police, and friendly governments. (89)

Ross argues that the press had itself “fomented” war with Spain in 1898, and that the U.S. educational system that was producing a literate population at the turn of the century “was also imbuing in students a narrow chauvinism” (2). These two influences would become pivotal in the drive for American intervention in Europe, as the school system was the embodiment, some believed, of “dangerous nationalistic prejudices” and “the means of disseminating them constantly to all the people” (qtd. in Ross 2). A view of “friendly governments” as the enemy was perhaps inevitable in this context. The extent of propaganda produced in the Allied countries that specifically demonized Germany and encouraged nationalist sacrifice – as well as professors and scholars who explicitly endorsed these aspects of the war effort – would in itself cause intellectual discord among many of the soldiers who would return to write about their experience. The indictment of the educational system is of particular interest here. Malcolm Cowley writes of his time at Harvard months before U.S. entry into the war:

During the winter of 1916-17 our professors stopped talking and the international republic of letters and began preaching patriotism. We ourselves prepared to change our uniforms of culture for military uniforms; but neither of these changes was so radical as it seemed. The patriotism urged upon us was not, like that of French peasants, a matter of saving one’s own fields from an invader. It was an abstract patriotism that concerned world democracy and the right to self-determination of small nations, but apparently had nothing to do with our daily lives at home, nothing to do with better schools, lower taxes, higherpay for factory hands (or professors) or restocking Elk Run with trout. (Exile’s Return36-7)

The rhetorical attack on Germany, spearheaded by novelists, journalists, scholars, clergymen, and other elements of the American intelligentsia, has been well documented, as has the disillusioning effect it had on the intellectuals and artists who would emerge after the war. It bears noting, though, that the intellectual and artistic community wielded significant power in
affecting foreign policy decisions as much before the war as after, and in this regard parallels the
effect newspaper reportage had on inciting America to declare war on Spain in 1898. As “war
fever” swept Europe in 1914, many peace societies and organizations were crippled in their
efforts (Curti 229). In the United States, not many peace organizations were aware of the threat
that pro-Allied propaganda posed to American neutrality (230).

With specific regard to university professors, the idea of “professional neutrality” was
abandoned early in the European conflict. Cowley’s anecdote notes as much, as the “preaching”
in his classes began prior to American entry. Jeffrey Walsh writes that, for the most part,
“American intellectuals in the early stages of the war experienced a sense of euphoria at the
prospects of a cause which seemed to enable them to transcend their own cultural isolation”
(American War Literature 13). George Blakey reports that the outright recruitment of history
professors and scholars to mobilize public morale, by “reading the experiences of the past into
present circumstances” in order to present a stronger case for taking America into a European
war, was one strategy pursued by the Wilson administration (2, 16). Frederick Jackson Turner
himself “proposed that professors make their classes and research seminars more relevant to war
issues” (Blakey 20). Yale professor George B. Adams addressed a “wildly cheering” crowd of
500 in March 1917, stating that neutrality on any level was impossible in the conflict and that the
United States was finished if England were defeated (11). Blakey states that Germany’s
aggression on the open seas and purported German espionage within America itself “drove
public sentiment increasingly toward intervention on the side of the Allies” (10). Harvard
professor William Roscoe Thayer, author of the unambiguously titled 1916 book Germany vs.
Civilization, declared that he “had been ready for war long before America’s entry” (12). The
aforementioned works by Teddy Roosevelt stridently condemned Germany as the aggressor in
the conflict and stressed preparedness and mobilization for war. Cowley remarked, in fact, that
the ambulance corps which he and so many other “gentleman volunteers” entered “were college-
extension courses for a generation of writers” (Exile’s Return38). The previous passage,
illustrating Cowley’s own college professors’ attitudes toward the war, provides a parallel in his
own characterization of the war experience; if his interest in the war was stoked by the speeches
of his professors, then the war as further “education” is an appropriate context for his
contemporaries and himself to place it in.
Dos Passos, too, was at Harvard, and also enlisted in the ambulance service, and was, like Cowley, “eager to get in action . . . before the whole thing goes belly up” (qtd. in Cowley 37). F. Scott Fitzgerald at Princeton, likewise, was sufficiently interested in the war to enlist, but saw no combat action. E.E. Cummings received a Harvard education and ended up in the same ambulance service as Dos Passos. Cowley, in fact, runs off a list of future literary figures who were involved in the ambulance corps: besides Dos Passos and Cummings, the volunteers included Ernest Hemingway, Harry Crosby, Sidney Howard, Louis Bromfield, Robert Hillyer, and Dashiell Hammett (38). This situation would be almost without parallel in the future wars of America – the voluntary, even enthusiastic, flocking of so large a body of highly educated and aesthetically inclined men to military engagement. The same argument cannot be made of the World War II generation of prominent writers; many of them bore no illusions – or enthusiasm – about what awaited them overseas in terms of deprivation, violence, destruction, and waste. Dos Passos, writing in 1945, remarked that “the brutalities of war and oppression came as less of a shock to people who grew up in the thirties than they did to Americans of my generation” (“Introduction,” 2). The “quiet afterglow of the nineteenth century,” he continued, bore no resemblance to the depression-era environment in which the World War II generation grew up, an environment where young people “drank in the brutalities of European politics with their breakfast coffee” (2).

The American “war for civilization” against the Huns – in the American cultural imagination, to save the most precious elements of Western art, intellect, and values – was, like the press agitation of 1898, an event largely precipitated by the rhetorical campaign against the Central Powers. Woodrow Wilson’s establishment of the Committee on Public Information shortly after the declaration of war in April of 1917 initiated the second “onslaught” of propaganda in the United States (Ross 3). There was much common ground shared by intellectuals, university academics, artists, and the clergy in terms of the dissemination and endorsement of anti-German sentiment. Cooperman describes the militarization of the religious community, which would ultimately cause “a revulsion against the assumptions and rhetoric of religion itself” (20):

American clergymen eagerly embraced the concept of Holy Cause, Jesus in khaki, and represented the war as a test of spiritual righteousness. God was confronting
the devil, and under the circumstances pacifism . . . was not only unpatriotic but
blasphemous. (18)

The “cultural isolation” of American intellectuals that Walsh describes and a yearning to
be involved with world-changing historical events is perhaps also one explanation for the fervid
involvement of the clergy in the anti-German rhetorical attack. Even liberal publications such as
New Republic, which after the war adopted a fiercely anti-militarist stance, framed the war as a
necessary struggle in terms of “democracy” versus “autocracy” (Rochester 42). Walter
Lippmann, one of many liberals who initially wanted U.S. intervention (35), hoped that the war
would end the imperialism, colonialism, and “adventurous nationalism which [had] torn the world
for three centuries” (qtd. in Rochester 43). Certainly, Walsh’s notion of American intellectuals
wanting to involve themselves in a “test” of ideas, and through such a cause to break out of the
cultural isolation they felt, applies equally to the future authors of the Lost Generation. Cowley,
Cummings, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, among others, reacted strongly to the prospects of such
a cause (as Cowley himself notes). The intellectual and artistic backlash against nationalism,
militarism, and propaganda following the war caused most historians by the early 1920s to regret
the work they had produced during the conflict (Blakey 145). It is best characterized as a deep
aversion to certain modes of writing and of values that are exemplified by the following works,
all published or disseminated between 1914 and 1918, that praise and validate America’s military
crusade in Europe. As a Dos Passos character remarks in One Man’s Initiation, addressing the
protagonist, Martin Howe: “Think, man, think of all the oceans of lies through all the ages that
must have been necessary to make this possible! Think of this new particular vintage of lies that
has been so industriously pumped out of the press and the pulpit. Doesn’t it stagger you?” (26-7)

After all the propaganda and nationalism, the fact that the post-war world offered at best a
fragile peace that the United States had no interest in helping to preserve was, as mentioned, a
focus of disgust and scorn for those writers who chronicled it and its aftermath. The promise of a
post-war world of universal peace was offered by Fredrick Jackson Turner in his address of 11
May 1918 at the dedication of the State Historical Building at the University of Minnesota
(published later as “Middle Western Pioneer Democracy”). Edith Wharton, in her 1918 novel
The Marne, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in Home Fires in France (1918), implied (or stated
outright) that American involvement in the war was necessary to the survival of democracy and
civilization. The latter two authors in particular were, as both Walsh and Cooperman point out,
representative of a generation of writers whose values and beliefs were to be supplanted by the new generation of the 1920s. The ideologies of the war novels of Dos Passos, Cummings, Stallings, and others are, in fact, almost diametrically opposed to the wartime writings of Wharton and Fisher. Fredrick Jackson Turner, with his propagandistic speech, produced a startling example of the work that Blakey states caused much professional embarrassment among scholars and academics in the years following the war.

Turner, in 1918 one of America’s most eminent and respected historians, explicitly identified in his dedication speech where his allegiances lay and who was to blame for the aggression in Europe. The struggle for “all that this nation has stood for, all the things in which it passionately believes,” was contextualized by Turner as both an extension of American frontier values to the “Old World” and as an example of how those values would guarantee triumph for the Allied cause (335, 344). “We are at war,” he proclaimed, “that the history of the United States, rich with the record of high human purposes, . . . may not become the lost and tragic story of a futile dream” (336). The “stricken nations across the Atlantic,” which Turner believed were fighting “for the continued existence of the type of society . . . which inspired the hopes of the pioneers” (335), were referred to as a means of citing American precedent and tradition and in turn as a springboard to action for the American people. Not incidentally, the audience of the speech, composed of Turner’s colleagues in the Historical Society, would, as much as the general public, be a prime target for the use of historical motives and rationales, as Blakey indicates.

Turner took the historical allusions and the connection between the Old World and America even further. He emphasized that America’s “past” and “future” were tied together, and that American destinies were intertwined with those of the European nations (339). The Red Cross, the YMCA, and various other organizations maintaining active roles in Europe during the war were used by Turner as examples of the “pioneer principle of association” and the “heritage of pioneer experience” (358). Using the rationales of historical tradition and ties to Europe (an association from which Germany is excluded outright) to secure solidarity with the Allies was only one facet of Turner’s speech, however; his opinions of German intent and military policy closely mirrored those of both Teddy Roosevelt and of the British propagandists:

There are two kinds of governmental discipline: that which proceeds from free choice, in the conviction that restraint of individual or class interests is necessary for the common good; and that which is imposed by a dominant class, upon a
subjected and helpless people. The latter is Prussian discipline, the discipline of a harsh, machine-like logical organization, based on the rule of military autocracy. It assumes that if you do not crush your opponent first he will crush you. . . . It is the discipline of a nation ruled by its General Staff, . . . attempting with remorseless logic to extend its operations to the destruction of freedom everywhere. . . . The Prussian discipline is the discipline of Thor, the War God, against the discipline of the White Christ. (356-7)

The indictment of Germany here is quite direct, and has much in common with what Cooperman describes in detailing the efforts of American clergyman to frame the war as a holy Crusade. Turner posited a Manichean struggle, in explicitly Christian terms, against a pagan enemy for whom there could be no quarter. The term “Prussianism” itself had increasingly become a synonym for aggression and violence by the late teens (Blakey 42). The “Prussian” or “Teutonic” spirit was in fact closely associated with “Scandinavian paganism” and “the cult of the Superman” in the Allied nations (Moore 313). Cooperman writes that the submarine, “that dramatic illustration of Prussian inhumanity, of skulking Teutonic cowardice,” was a very effective propaganda target in and of itself (World War I 15). British reprints in 1914 of editions of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil, billing the author as “The Mind that Caused the Great War,” exemplifies the degree to which anti-German sentiment was taken (Moore 311). Nietzsche, in particular, and German historian Heinrich von Treitschke “were invoked time and time again in the British press” as men whose writings had incited the war (310). George Santayana wrote scathingly of Germany’s “violation” of Belgium’s neutrality in his 1916 work Egotism in German Philosophy; John Dewey indicted Immanuel Kant as an intellectual catalyst for the war in German Philosophy and Politics in 1915 (327). The very titles of these books are indicators of the extent to which such ideas were publicly accepted and assimilated without much controversy.

As discussed earlier, the “triumphant endorsement of the war by religion” in America, wherein the enemy “was literally branded an inferior species,” is yet another indicator of the assimilation of militarist, anti-German ideals into almost all cultural sectors of the nation (Cooperman, World War I 20, 22). What Gregory Moore describes of the World War I years in Britain and the United States is essentially a wholesale trashing of German culture and thought based on the premise that it was obsessed with “the subordination of the physical body to the
rigid discipline of the State” (328). Turner’s speech, certainly, illustrates this mentality perfectly. Collectively, all these documents, speeches, books, articles, and various rhetorical items exemplify how, as Roscigno and Danaher state, media can articulate an identity for a population across wide geographical areas (42).

The post-war backlash against rhetoric that cast the United States as a militarist savior of sorts in part explains the mobilization of public sentiment and of foreign policy in a reverse direction. The “post-war disenchantment which turned idealism into a naïve anachronism” (Blakey 152) would cause a great deal of awkwardness for scholars and academics who had shed neutrality for what would be seen as a brand of warmongering. H.L. Mencken, for instance, in 1920 blasted the propaganda of historians during the war, stating that they had “prostituted their professional ethics” (qtd. in Blakey 127). The careers of many professors and scholars were largely untouched by their propaganda work, but as Blakey states, it did not fail to “stir up ample criticism, and . . . it created personal and professional embarrassment” (148).

In terms of literature, the backlash against propaganda in fiction and in scholarship helped prefigure the course of American fiction for the next two decades. As stated earlier, the work of writers such as Wharton and Fisher represented an outmoded style that had no relevance or place in the post-war world. Donald Pizer states that “the distinctive angle of vision of the 1920s American writer” dictated a social concern absent in the novels of the aforementioned two writers. “[I]t was,” Pizer continues, “the writer’s function to demolish the myths and end the silences shielding Americans from the truths of their own lives” (Introduction, ix). Pizer here explicitly suggests political intent and purpose to at least some of the World War I novels of the interwar period. The idea of narrative as a framing device for the mobilization of public sentiment, used so liberally during the war itself, would be equally important in the fostering of anti-war, anti-militarist feeling afterward. “The fighting sermon” of the pro-Allied clergymen existed alongside battle calls disguised within melodramatic fiction, as Cooperman explains:

Novel after novel, usually by lady authors such as Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, Irene Temple Bailey, or (unfortunately) Edith Wharton, seriously portrayed God-fearing boys boldly carrying the banners of Christian faith against a simian foe (World War I 20).

Wharton and Fisher seek not to tear down myths in their work but to strengthen the “shields” which made home-front patriotism so fervently embraced. Their novels, irrelevant as
they became in a few short years in the midst of the World War I literary protest, exemplify a spirit and a belief starkly opposed to the often bitter judgments of Dos Passos, Boyd, Cummings, and Stallings.

Wharton’s *The Marne* reinforces the commonly-accepted belief held in the Allied nations – and America especially – that French culture and civilization were at stake in the conflict, and that they needed, in Jeffrey Walsh’s description, American blood to “revitalize” their country (*American War Literature* 10). Wharton was the coordinator, in 1915, of an artistic symposium intended to raise funds for a “Franco-Belgian relief effort”; *The Book of the Homeless*, the product of that effort, included contributions from Santayana, William Dean Howells, and Henry James (82). *The Marne* was published in 1918, the same year that American forces were arriving in Europe in significant numbers (Keegan 411). Walsh notes that Wharton’s novel is one of “the clearest illustrations of the failure of American writers to grasp the reality of the war” (*American War Literature* 17). British authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, G.K. Chesterton, and Alfred Noyes were among those employed under Sir Gilbert Parker’s “program for the publishing industry” in Britain after 1914 to produce war-related literature, a move that helped, Cooperman states, to “prime the American literary pump” for similar efforts (35). It did not take Allied propagandists long to realize “that mass communication media – including fiction – could play a vital role in shaping American attitudes toward war and European involvement” (34). The works by Wharton and Fisher under discussion take a stridently pro-intervention stance and offer both explicit and implicit criticism of the American government’s neutrality (although by the time of their actual publication, the United States had entered the war).

Troy Belknap, the protagonist of *The Marne*, represents the same affluent upper-class demographic to which Wharton herself belonged. His ardent love of France and French culture, nurtured by summers abroad with his wealthy family, fuels his zeal to fight in Europe and his desire for the United States to enter the war at its outset (Hager 107). In fact, his first sentiment after hostilities commence in 1914 is that “war against his beautiful France” will disrupt the subsequent study abroad he has planned (*Marne* 8-9). After war is declared by Woodrow Wilson, Belknap’s high-society female friends back home in America ridicule him in the presence of several other young men in uniform about to sail to Europe, further frustrating him and building his compulsion to enlist, despite the worries of his parents (46-7). Ultimately, after managing to enlist, Belknap journeys overseas hoping to see combat; his aspirations are tempered with scorn.
for some of his fellow passengers, “too young for military service, or having, for some more or less valid reason, been exempted from it” (58).

Wharton’s use of an upper-class protagonist, one that an affluent audience could perhaps easily identify with, suggests a direct rhetorical appeal to that segment of the population. The threat to art and culture the war represents – a threat that must be repelled through combat – implies “upper-class” interests other volunteers or conscripts (such as those depicted in Three Soldiers) wouldn’t understand or care about. The interests of the rich, the novel asserts, are not removed from the struggle; the threat to vacations and studies abroad, the destruction or occupation of one’s favorite hotels and resorts, and the imperilment of other such luxuries, seem aimed at the literate middle- to upper-class population portrayed in the narrative. The dressing of the war in romantic and honorable terms, the condemnation of “the destroyers of France” (116) and the descriptions of German atrocities and crimes against hospital patients (13) are evocative of the propaganda common in speech and in the press of the time.

By the end of the novel, Belknap, wounded in the Second Battle of the Marne, retains his original enthusiasm, dreaming of medals, glory, a return to the battlefield, and a liberated France (128). One of the young women in Belknap’s social circle, who earlier had chided him for his lack of a khaki uniform, later addresses a YMCA hut full of enlisted men near the front in France, delivering a speech inspiring the men to remember what they are fighting for, to defend the honor and culture of Europe, and telling them that America supports what they are doing (96-100). The almost total involvement of Belknap’s upper-echelon social world – whether in combat duty, as volunteers, as nurses, as relief workers, or merely as voices of support for the war effort – underscores Wharton’s insistence that the rich, too, have legitimate interests in the outcome of the war, and must also mobilize to aid in the cause. Narratives, by encouraging “identification with the protagonist of the story,” in turn encourage a shared understanding of the “world” which the narrative reflects (Fine 236). And since fictional narratives permit the expression of implicit ideologies and social views “that even parties to the discourse may not fully realize [are] present” (239), they can operate as vehicles for propaganda that are not recognized immediately as such, or are accepted by an audience without critical reservation. Cooperman comments that Wharton, in The Marne, “combined gentility with bloodthirst, the mannerisms of the social novelist with the matter of a recruiting poster” (World War I 41),
Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s *Home Fires in France* follows a similar ideological thread as *The Marne*, although the appeal for home-front support is focused less on the affluent upper class, and thus its logic for supporting the Allied forces omits mention of spoiled vacations and favorite French resorts. While many of the book’s chapters are impressionistic accounts of life in wartime France, without much social comment, the chapter entitled “A Little Kansas Leaven” concerns the opinions of and reactions to the war in a small Kansas town. Ellen Boardman, an office manager at the town’s hardware wholesaler, debates the implications of the European hostilities in August 1914 with both her boss and with her cousin Maggie; from almost complete ignorance of Belgium’s location and significance, Ellen develops a strong distaste for the Germans and their intentions in violating Belgium’s neutrality. She reads the newspapers more and more intently each day, expressing joy, for instance, when England enters the war “to help France and Belgium” (136), and anger at the Germans for breaking their promise to Belgium: “They kept their promise and the Germans didn’t. It makes me mad! I wish to goodness our country would help them!” to which her cousin reacts with horror (136).

Ellen confesses to her employer that she is “sick” that the United States won’t enter the conflict (139); not long after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, she volunteers for relief work in France, answering her employer’s fears for her safety with an earnest, “‘That’s why I’m going’” (145). Upon her eventual return to her small-town life, she regales the citizens with stories which make them “aghast,” make them realize “that such things were happening to real men and women like themselves” (170). All of this takes place previous to American entry into the war; the townspeople’s attitude toward the conflict up to Ellen’s return has been one of indifference, but after she tells her story the town is galvanized into action. “Whatever the rest of the Union might decide to do, Marshallton, Kansas, had come into the war,” the story concludes (172). Like Wharton’s novel, this passage is targeted toward the literate, yet conceivably politically “naïve” part of the populace that might be easily swayed by atrocity stories or various other political outrages (the invasion of Belgium, for instance, which is repeatedly condemned in the narrative).

Other chapters, such as “A Honeymoon . . . Vive le Amerique!” retread accounts of German crimes and suggest appropriate moral reactions to them. The narrator’s accounts of villages “blown up” by the Germans, of “carefully and expertly murdered fruit-trees and vines, the ravaged gardens and fields,” and of villagers taken to forced labor camps (236-8), are, like the anecdotes related by Ellen in “A Little Kansas Leaven,” used as a backdrop for the efforts of
American relief workers eager to help France. “La Pharmacienne” relates the story of a town looted practically bare by German forces; in their advance, they “had robbed the church, had taken all the flour from the mill, all the contents of all the shops,” and everything from the pharmacies (271-2).

Fisher characterizes the Germans variously as possessed by “physical greed,” with “dirty foreheads streaked with perspiration, wrinkled like those of eating dogs,” and as “demons,” remarking repeatedly on their animal-like eating habits (277-8). There is an attempted rape and, endlessly reiterated, a catalogue of the indignities and deprivations the villagers must suffer while under German occupation. Cooperman writes that Fisher “dramatizes almost *in toto* the catalogue of Bryce atrocities” and, in order to “make possible a maximum communication with her audience,” draws upon images of grim suffering tempered by Christian perseverance, as in the style of such novels as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (*World War I* 37). Thus, like *The Marne, Home Fires in France* exemplifies Fine’s theory that narrative can shape political involvement and sentiment on a number of levels; the shared understanding of the “world” the narrative encourages is one that disdains pacifism and condemns American inaction while advocating American involvement on the side of the Allies in every possible capacity.

Linda Hutcheon suggests ways in which narratives can act as a negation or as an alternate definition of cultural modes of expression; the “‘imagined community’ of the nation is frequently based as much on shared ‘forgetting’ as on shared nostalgic ‘memory’” (10). The disgust for the kind of writing that the works of Wharton and Fisher represent is the starting point for a fuller discussion of how the kind of “forgetting” that Hutcheon describes – forgetting the nationalism, the propaganda, the alleged profiteering and questionable motives for U.S. intervention – was facilitated by the writings of the Lost Generation and their contemporaries. Hoffman states of the cultural mood of the post-war years:

> The most striking quality of the postwar intellectual was his attitude of refusal . . . of platitudes, of the middle class, . . . of desperate assurances of liberal tacticians, and finally refusal of the suggestion that the war had provided an opportunity for renewing tradition, reviving it, or changing it without destroying it. (32)

Hoffman also makes special reference to the publication of *Civilization in the United States*, identifying it as a possible harbinger of the more explicit anti-war sentiment to follow in the course of the decade:
Civilization in the United States was a historical landmark of the post-World War I years, a curious document of disaffection, pointing to and reiterating the failure of culture, entertainment, family life, religion – of everything except science, and even it scored only a partial success in the survey of American life and institutions. (21)

The elements most directly concerned with stopping the U.S. intervention and then protesting its prosecution were those groups that already were viewed with suspicion and hostility previous to the war, and afterward would be those that the prominent intellectuals and writers would identify and align themselves with. After the declaration of war in 1917, the Socialist Party assembled in St.Louis to denounce the conflict as imperialist and profit-driven (Curti 259). The Sedition Act allowed for the arrests of a number of Socialist party officials on charges of treason or conspiracy (260). The leaders of the International Workers of the World, in their denunciations of militarism and the war, “only convinced the ruling group and the patriots that pacifism and the subversive types of social radicalism were one and the same” (237). The overall mistrust of socialist, anarchist, and “subversive” elements continued for years after the war’s conclusion. The Palmer raids, the deportation of communists, and the Sacco/Vanzetti murder trial are examples of the nation’s troubled reaction to such issues; but Dos Passos, Stallings, Stearns, Lippmann, and Mumford, among others, actively involved themselves through their work in pursuit of remedying perceived social injustices in the 1920s. And the idea of expatriation became quite attractive, as previously mentioned (and even encouraged by the contributors to Civilization in the United States), to those artists, writers, and intellectuals who felt stifled by the repressive nature of such a society. Hence the departure for France of a writer like Hemingway, who although essentially uninvolved with social concerns, expressed his disapproval through flight.

Joseph Carter also expressed the cultural mood of the post-World War I years in terms quite similar to those articulated by the authors represented in Stearns’ book:

World War I, too, began the downfall of the modern middle-class Protestant ethic of the western world – an ethic that, based firmly on the morality of the dollar, puts on the middle class the onus of maintaining those standards of behavior deemed most acceptable for preserving the social fabric. (viii)

The post-war celebrations that swept America, which made returning soldiers “prisoners
of admiration, . . . cheered and forced to make speeches” (4-5) during parades and festivals had their more sober counterparts in Western Europe. The psychic and physical residues of the war tempered the sense of triumph in countries like Belgium and France; Passchendael, for instance, “was as desolate as the craters of the moon,” while Ypres, once home to stately houses over a thousand years old, “now was a vast ruin” – the rubble of streets and houses held no familiarity for returning residents displaced by the conflict (9). Germany was denied American aid for rebuilding and suffering from harshly punitive measures enacted by the terms of the armistice. The nation was especially hard hit economically, “because during the period of the armistice official American relief was cut off by the so-called Lodge Amendment” – a piece of legislation drawn up by Henry Cabot Lodge that “forbade the use of any Congressional appropriations for relief in enemy countries” (27). Carter concludes that the path to power for the dictators who would control most of Europe in the two decades following the armistice “was cleared largely by what the people of those countries went through in the terrible winter after the war” (28).

American soldiers, “prisoners of admiration” though they may have been, were disconcerted by the society that greeted them on their return. Many of them “had seen parts of the world with patterns of society utterly alien, different from what they had known whether they came from the industrial North or the farmlands of the Midwest or the caste-set South” (147). The intense fervor over socialism, communism, anarchism, and other subversive movements that culminated in 1919 and 1920 was accompanied in America by an equally fervent xenophobia, and the Volstead Act, ratified just at the time when many units were arriving back from Europe, would effectively outlaw legal alcohol sales for the next thirteen years. To explain the allure of expatriation to returning soldiers solely as a reaction to these changes in society would be an incomplete analysis, but it is worth noting that authors like Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Cummings couched much of their war fiction in an ideology that rejected the “puritanism” (to borrow Frederick Hoffman’s phrase) of American society, which had ostensibly not only justified the war, but was now the pervasive cultural norm.

America’s role in the war and the way the nation’s leaders had handled the post-war aftermath were objects of scorn to the public at large no less than they were to established intellectuals and political scientists. By the early 1920s, readers of publications such as Nation and New Republic were voicing disgust and concern over the motives of the United States in its entry into the war. In a letter to the editor published in the 5 June 1921 issue of New Republic,
William Salter of Cambridge, Massachusetts, wrote: “Americans were doubtless more disinterested and had cleaner hands upon entering the war, but had we ourselves done what we could for peace – and not rather some things that only prolonged, intensified, and embittered the strife?” He made reference to the profits made on arms sales (a topic fiercely addressed by Thomas Boyd), and further stated that America had “brought the war” on itself by encouraging U.S. citizens to travel on armed merchant vessels. The Versailles Treaty, he concluded, was responsible for the “present fearful demoralization and disintegration of large parts of Europe” (83). In the 28 September 1921 issue, Myron M. Johnson of Hartford, Connecticut wrote the editors, stating:

[America] is afraid to say that it will enforce the Versailles Treaty. . . . The treaty which the Senate will soon be called on to ratify gives to France no hope of security and to Germany no hope of a more moderate policy on the part of her conquerors. . . . Those who care anything about world peace should fight this latest product of American ‘statesmanship’ to the last ditch. (137)

The Nation, likewise, became in 1921 a forum for concern regarding America’s roles in European conflicts past and future. Articles, book reviews, and editorials focusing on war issues, thoughts on the Washington Disarmament Conference, and criticism of Warren G. Harding’s “normalcy by way of stability” plan for the nation appear throughout the issues of that year. “The Friendless Nations,” an unsigned editorial printed in the issue of 5 January 1921, voiced a concern that “[American] aggressions in the Caribbean have made every nation regard us with a suspicion, distrust, and dislike.” An unsigned editorial in the same issue praised the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Santo Domingo, saying it would promote “better relations” with America’s Latin American neighbors (2). “The Friendless Nations” went on to state that the Allied nations – England, France, Italy – “so far from any feeling of gratitude for us,” had evinced “only dislike or anger”(4). Overall, there was a pervasive feeling on the part of the editors that came close to calling for total isolationism, or at least military/political caution; quoting an American diplomat recently returned from France, they stated: “This period of our history would be a bad time for the United States to get into another war, for we have not a friend among the nations of the earth” (4). The Nation editors also encouraged readers to take action with any pacifist or anti-interventionist beliefs. In the 16 March 1921 issue, they stated in an unsigned editorial: “[W]e hope that every reader of The Nation who believes that disarmament is
the key to peace will take up his pen at once and make his views felt in Washington” (390). Such sentiments are echoed in One Man’s Initiation, as Martin Howe discusses the war with his French companions, one of whom questions, “‘And in America – they like the war?’”:

“They don’t know what it is. They are like children. They believe everything they are told, you see; they have had no experience in international affairs, like you Europeans. To me our entrance into the war is a tragedy. . . . Now we’re a military nation, an organized pirate like France and England and Germany.” (123-4)

A number of 1921 articles in the Nation, of which Arthur Warner’s “The Truth About the American Legion” in the 6 July issue is a representative example, protest the discrimination and hostility shown by “patriotic” entities toward Germans, communists, and other perceived radical or “enemy” groups. Warner details the objections by the American Legion “to the attempt to revive German opera in New York City, . . . while efforts to aid even German and Austrian children by American charity are resisted” (9). A full page advertisement placed in the 12 October issue by the New York Committee for Russian Relief, purporting to help feed “famine-stricken Russia,” condemned with a hypothetical example the assumed political vehemence of most affluent Americans: “The other day a rich man said he wouldn’t give a dollar of his money to help feed the Russians – ‘because they’re Bolsheviki – or something’” (433). While the views espoused in two periodicals in a single year are by no means indicative of pervasive, nationwide sentiment, they are nonetheless a sign that the mainstream press was, by the early 1920s, deeply concerned about the fallout from the war in terms of the xenophobia and strident nationalism it had produced.

Cooperman writes: “The concept of war as ‘part of the natural intercourse of the human race’ was one to which poets and novelists no less than generals assented prior to World War I, a concept which resulted in such disparate works as Tolstoy’s War and Peace and Crane’s Red Badge of Courage” (World War I 193). The idea of war as “a standard literary device” (193) – as a proving ground of sorts for human will and passion – gave way in the 1920s to a paradigm in which war was a subject of scrutiny in and of itself. The “political, military, and patriotic sloganeering so totally rejected by Fredrick Henry and other World War I protagonists” (197) is a large part of what the New Republic and Nation editors and contributors quoted above are also rejecting. Just as public dissatisfaction to the war and its political fallout was solidifying – if the editorials and letters are any indication – the literary protest gathered strength, fueled by the anti-
war vitriol of Dos Passos, Boyd, and Cummings in the early 1920s. The “torch” would be carried through the middle and later parts of the decade by Stallings, Hemingway, and Faulkner, but an examination and analysis of these first seminal works – and their public reception – will provide clearer insights into the ways in which the peace movement, in both a literary and political sense, gathered considerable strength by the end of the 1920s. By the time a massive-scale war loomed again on the horizon in the late 1930s, most Americans had no interest in their nation prosecuting a campaign of any kind against the Nazis. The genesis of the Neutrality Acts which made this hands-off philosophy the foreign policy of the United States are clearly seen in *Three Soldiers*, in *Plumes*, in *A Farewell to Arms*, and in *The Enormous Room*, among other works. It is with the earliest novels of John Dos Passos that the first “stirrings” of what was to come later in the decade can be glimpsed.
CHAPTER 2
JOHN DOS PASSOS AND THE “DAWN” OF THE PROTEST

John Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers* “was greeted by cries of outrage on its publication in 1921” (Pizer “Intro” ix). Writes Donald Pizer: “The war to end all wars and to save the West from the Huns,” he continues, “had ended with a glorious victory only three years earlier, and the United States was still basking in the euphoria generated by its late but decisive role in the conflict” (ix). Still, the America into which *Three Soldiers* was released was already distancing itself in policy, if not in popular sentiment, from the militarist fervor which had characterized the years of the war. The *Nation* editorial pages, for instance, approved strongly of the withdrawal of American troops from Santo Domingo in 1921 and called for readers to take up the disarmament cause, highlighting some of the more significant strides toward the isolationism and war-pessimism that would dominate the 1930s. Arthur Warner noted that, in Europe, “the ex-soldiers are found, generally with the progressive, not to say radical, forces” (7). Warner lamented the fact, also, that the American Legion had been involved in efforts to deny aid to German and Austrian children, and in opposing the revival of German opera in New York City (9). Sentiments such as these, which like *Three Soldiers* itself, might conceivably been considered near-traitorous in some quarters just three years previous, became increasingly pervasive throughout the early 1920s.

Although the cultural mood toward war was shifting on subtle levels even before *Three Soldiers* appeared in September of 1921, the general public and the literary “temper” continued to show all the signs of strident nationalism. Philip Hager notes that 111 novels about the war were published in 1919, many of which, like Irene Temple Bailey’s bestseller *The Tin Soldier*, could be dismissed as “overly sentimental popular melodrama” (68). In Hager’s judgment, moreover, the bulk of First World War novels in general were “often simply . . . an excuse to introduce either inept German spies who bungle their assignments or American secret service
operatives who never fail to uncover enemy plots and change the course of the war” (4), an analysis which extends beyond those novels such as The Marne, which were published during the war itself. The fact, though, that many of those novels have slipped into obscurity, if not virtual nonexistence, despite “bestseller” status, suggests that they were – and are – inappropriate narrative frames for the war years and the post-war era. That is, as Davis and Fine would argue, the narrative history of the war and its encoding in cultural memory were “written” more by the “protest” novels that began to appear in larger numbers after the publication of Three Soldiers than by the thinly-veiled propaganda of the earlier works.

That the attitudes of the more protest-oriented post-war writers were entrenched in the minds of the general public by the end of the 1920s is evident simply by looking at the strides made towards peace – or at least towards neutrality – by the U.S. government. Roscigno and Danaher identify “feelings of ‘groupness’ across a geographically dispersed population” that the perception of shared experience or belief, transmitted by all forms of media, can engender (42). This feeling of shared belief, which held firm among the Lost Generation authors, for instance (who dominated the American literary scene in the 1920s and 1930s), is important in understanding the cultural and political effects generated in aftermath of World War I. It can also to some degree explain why the United States abstained from European military affairs until the final month of 1941. The shared belief of the war authors was, by the end of the 1930s, shared by most of the American people, and by legislators in Congress. Dos Passos’ novel was the first work to make a loud, distasteful impact on the post-war feeling of euphoria, largely because its ideology was totally at odds with the prevailing beliefs about warfare that continued to be embraced by the public, and thus is a good starting point for a discussion of the literary influence on “peace consciousness.”

Paul Fussell writes in The Great War and Modern Memory that the boys who did the actual fighting in the war had been raised on a rhetoric found in the works of George Alfred Henry, the “male romances of Rider Haggard; the poems of Robert Bridges; and especially the Arthurian poems of Tennyson and the pseu-do-medieval romances of William Morris,” around which a culture of “quiet action, personal control, Christian self-abnegation,” and sacrifice had grown (21). As discussed earlier, the earliest American fiction produced about the war followed in this line of reasoning; it was, as Jeffrey Walsh writes, “imbued with the mystique of violence which vicariously [exalted] death in battle into an evident self-virtue” (American War Literature
Indeed, a review of *Three Soldiers* in the 26 October 1921 issue of the *Nation* (which will be explored more fully later) praised it as an attempt “to redress slightly the balance of truth and fiction which was hopelessly, idiotically disturbed by wartime magazines, papers, and books” (481). If nothing else, the review indicates that the perception of the novel, even at the time of its release, placed it in the vanguard of the reaction against earlier modes of writing that Hoffman, Cooperman, and others would write about decades later.

Robert Rosen writes that the response the novel initially provoked was “intense and highly polarized”; this was due partially to the aforementioned fact that “[p]atriotic hysteria had peaked too recently for Dos Passos’ antimilitary realism to be palatable to very many” (23). The *New York Times* launched an “assault” on *Three Soldiers* which included “two front page book reviews, three letters to the editor, and two additional articles,” in addition to editorials which condemned the book as “slanderous” (23). A 5 October 1921 review in the *Times*, written by Canadian war veteran Conigsby Dawson, titled “Insulting the Army,” lamented that “the only voice heard” in the novel was that “of complaint and petty recrimination,” and that the book was “a dastardly denial of the splendid chivalry which carried many a youth to a soldier’s death with the sure knowledge in his soul that he was a liberator” (qtd. in Sanders 357). Dos Passos’ own startled reaction to the hostility the novel had provoked was fueled by his worry that the hatreds formerly directed at the Germans were now being turned against other elements in American society (Rosen 24). Specifically, as Rosen argues, publications such as the *Times* gave the impression that Dos Passos had “sinned” by implying that those dissatisfied with the war and with army life were worthy of sympathy and had “real grievances”; the author’s “obligation,” in the esteem of the editors, should have been to praise the men who had fought the Germans. The *Times*, though, “either failed to understand this pacifist position, or did not want to give it a place in public discussion of the war” (24).

Dos Passos, traveling in the Middle East at the time of the novel’s publication, tried to respond to the criticism as best he could; but despite the initial negative publicity, *Three Soldiers* did eventually achieve critical popularity and financial success (24). The critical “turnaround,” was rapid, moreover, as evidenced by the *Nation* review that appeared scant weeks after those in the *Times*. But a brief look at Dos Passos’ military background, and the influences which impelled him to write so scathingly not just in *Three Soldiers* but essentially in the rest of his major work which followed, casts light on what serves as an archetypal example of wartime
“disillusion” that many other WWI authors followed. His first novel, *One Man’s Initiation*, published in 1920 by Allen and Unwin in London, is also a valuable resource to measure the young author’s disenchantment and developing sense of protest. The short novel is an effective “prologue” to *Three Soldiers*.

Like his contemporaries Hemingway, Cummings, Bromfield, Cowley, and Hillyer, Dos Passos was a volunteer ambulance-driver, serving with the Norton-Harjes organization under the Red Cross (Walsh, *American War Literature* 13). Prior to his service, he had lived briefly in an apartment on East 33rd Street in New York City, and there had observed rallies against American participation in the war, nearly getting himself arrested at a party in Greenwich Village and expressing vaguely socialist sentiments to his friends in the city (Ludington and Aaron 1245).

The spring of 1917 was rife with “opposing interpretations” of the war’s meaning for the United States; to Dos Passos, and to many socialists, the war was “no more than an attempt to stimulate markets and protect J.P. Morgan’s loans to the Allies” (Enniss 85). With these impressions in mind, Dos Passos sailed for France with his ambulance unit, comprised entirely of Harvard graduates, on 20 June 1917; after some training, he served at the Verdun front during the August French offensive (Ludington and Aaron 1246). In the midst of German shelling and poison gas attacks (much like his *One Man’s Initiation* protagonist Martin Howe) he had time to write a friend:

> The war is utter damn nonsense – a vast cancer fed by lies and self-seeking malignity on the part of those who don’t do the fighting . . . None of the poor devils whose mangled dirty bodies I take to the hospital in my ambulance really give a damn about any of the aims of this ridiculous affair. (qtd. in Ludington and Aaron 1246)

Some of Dos Passos’ letters were intercepted by Red Cross authorities who subsequently accused him of disloyalty; the material therein was, in some cases, “so critical to the bureaucracy that he was forced to resign” from the ambulance service and re-enlist in the regular U.S. army (Hughson 51). Before the incident leading to his resignation, he had begun work on a novel in collaboration with fellow ambulance-driver Robert Hillyer entitled “Seven Times Round the Walls of Jericho” (Ludington and Aaron 1246). The final section of the unfinished novel would become *One Man’s Initiation*, finished in 1919 and published the following year. Dos Passos spent the remainder of 1919, the year, in Rochester’s words, of rising “hatreds and irredentism”
in America (21), traveling throughout the Iberian peninsula, settling in Madrid at the end of the year to work on *Three Soldiers*.

Remarkably, though Dos Passos had passed the year of the Palmer Raids, the communist deportations, the dawn of a fervent xenophobia, and the U.S. failures at Versailles in Europe, his early work captures the mood of the disillusioned intellectuals chronicled by Cowley, Pizer, Rochester, Hoffman, and Cooperman, as well as in the pages of *Civilization in the United States*. In both *One Man’s Initiation* and *Three Soldiers* there is a wellspring of frustration with not merely the war or the army, but with American culture, the frontier mentality, the evils of capitalism, religious and ethnic propaganda, and the new puritanism, that demonstrates a marked hostility toward the nation that he had spent more than half of his life away from. What Dos Passos perceived in his war experience was that U.S. imperialism – economic and cultural as well as military – extended into Europe by the late teens and represented the worst kind of oppression. If, as one reviewer of *Three Soldiers* noted, the army serves in the novel as a “symbol of the means by which men attempt to crush their fellows” (Bishop 9), then the “means” in question included all those economic, social, and legal forces that Dos Passos saw embodied in the army, even in Europe, a logical outcome of the war-fervor he had witnessed in New York City in 1917. *One Man’s Initiation* lays out in a broad, plain fashion the frustration and anger felt by the American servicemen themselves; by the novel’s close, their fear is directed not toward the war as an abstract, inimical presence, but at the much more tangible entities and governments that have made the war possible.

To the extent that writers of the 1920s “wrote” the war for the American public, as Cooperman asserts, *One Man’s Initiation* is, Stephen Enniss states, “a novel that seeks to achieve a measure of authority that words have lost amid the rhetoric of the time” (86-7). The book is full of characters totally “conditioned” by Allied propaganda on one hand, and on the other Martin Howe and his compatriots, striving to fight against the “lies” that started the war. One facet of Dos Passos’ own fight against these perceived lies appears in the form of battlefield imagery. For example, the wounded soldiers Dos Passos describes in the book are, Enniss holds, “quite different from the wounded that wartime readers would have encountered in Red Cross loan drive posters, in magazine fiction of the day, or in the pages of their Sunday supplements” (91). Also no characters are equivalent to, for instance, a Troy Belknap, who at the conclusion of *The Marne* still dreams of glory in battle and victory for France while recovering from bullet wounds.
in a military hospital. The “wounded” of One Man’s Initiation, in fact, prefigure the wounded that would appear in later World War I novels such as Plumes, Soldier’s Pay, A Farewell to Arms, and Dalton Trumbo’s 1939 novel Johnny Got His Gun. Soon after arriving in France, Martin is subjected to a particularly vivid and arresting sight at a street café:

As he stared in front of him two figures crossed his field of vision. A woman swathed in black crepe was helping a soldier to a seat at the next table. He found himself staring in a face, a face that still had some of the chubbiness of boyhood. Between the pale-brown frightened eyes, where the nose should have been, was a triangular black patch that ended in some mechanical contrivance with shiny little black metal rods that took the place of the jaw. He could not take his eyes from the soldier’s eyes, that were like those of a hurt animal, full of meek dismay. (OMI 20)

The theme of the wounded soldier trying to adjust to a civilian world that is not always sympathetic is central to Plumes, to Soldier's Pay, and even to a lesser, more subtle degree, short stories such as Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home” or “Big Two-Hearted River.” The post-World War I novels, in fact, are the first works of fiction in American literature to address this theme. Graphic depictions of wounds, of mutilation, or dismemberment, are in fact wholly absent from The Marne, Home Fires in France, or any number of lesser works written during the war itself. Although Cooperman holds that the plight of the wounded veteran and “the detailed analysis of home-front ignorance, atrocity propaganda, political causes, economic duplicity, and ideological suppression” did not become part of the literary protest until after 1923 (World War I 98), both One Man’s Initiation and Three Soldiers explicitly discuss propaganda, post-war re-entry into society, and home-front ignorance in a way that clearly prefigures the later works. Pizer and Walsh, too, note the powerful influence that Dos Passos exerted on later novels of protest. One Man’s Initiation can be examined specifically in the respects through which it treats wound imagery, anti-war, anti-propaganda sentiment, and the plight of the soldier to establish it as a seminal, early protest work. Its lesser impact in terms of sales and visibility to American audiences, though, prevent it from attaining the status of Three Soldiers, which, as mentioned, was one of the more controversial novels of the early 1920s.

One Man’s Initiation, however, does contain valuable insights regarding aspects of American combat/ambulance experience, and in particular to how Dos Passos would refine and sharpen those insights to fashion a provocative rhetorical weapon with his next work. The
critique of home-front ignorance and naivete begins almost immediately in the novel, as Martin Howe encounters a young woman on the deck of the ship en route to France, one who is coming across “to do her bit”:

“What are you going to do?”

“Something in Paris. I don’t know just what, but I’ll certainly make myself useful somehow. . . . Oh, if only I was a man, I’d have shouldered my gun the first day; indeed I would.”

“But the issues were hardly . . . defined then,” ventured Martin.

“They didn’t need to be. I hate those brutes. I’ve always hated the Germans, their language, their country, everything about them. And now that they’ve done such frightful things . . .” (OMI 13)

There follows a discussion of atrocity stories, in which the young woman states that all Germans left alive after the war “ought to be chloroformed,” and that Martin is “just playing into their hands” if he doubts the veracity of any of the accounts from Europe (14). Later, below-decks, Martin overhears conversations which hold that the “immoral” French people will be “regenerated” through American assistance (15). Unlike The Marne, for instance, where a character like the young woman Martin meets would be a paragon of proper wartime decorum, here she is held up to implicit scorn, a view which becomes increasingly evident as the story progresses. Later, mutinies among the troops and the larcenies committed by American soldiers against French villagers are casually discussed (29-30). Higgins, a fellow ambulance-driver, is scorned and ridiculed for believing “that the Bible was written in God’s own handwriting and that the newspapers tell the truth” (38). Martin’s friend and colleague Tom Randolph, asserts: “It makes me sick at ma stomach, Howe, to talk to those Hun-hatin’ women, if they’re male or female” (39). When Martin tells a woman a story an English soldier relates about the killing of a German prisoner, the response is: “Oh, the dirty Germans! What things they’ve done!” the woman answered mechanically (61).

Other implicit and explicit criticism of atrocity propaganda and home-front war-fervor abounds. At a café while on leave, among like-minded friends and indulging in Chartreuse and copious amounts of food, Martin and his comrades idealize the war’s end:

No, they had been saying, it could not go on; some day amid the rending crash of shells and the whine of shrapnel fragments, people everywhere, in all uniforms, in
trenches, packed in camions, in stretchers, in hospitals, crowded behind guns, . . . would jump to their feet and burst out laughing at the solemn inanity, at the stupid, vicious pomposity of what they were doing. Laughter would untune the sky. It would be a new progress of Bacchus. (56)

The war’s end is visualized more somberly back at the front, where a disgruntled French soldier scoffs, “‘After the war?’ He spat savagely on the first step of the dugout. ‘They learn to get on without you’” (99). Of course, the later works by Stallings, Faulkner, and Hemingway would treat with great detail the civilian world which has passed by and forgotten the veterans, almost immediately after the armistice.

Martin’s “initiation” can, in a protest-oriented sense, be read in the context of two passages near the novel’s close, where the war-idealism and naivete are finally, symbolically cleansed from him entirely. One comes when he is attempting to rescue a German prisoner from a bombardment. The sensory assault, in which light, sound, and tactile feeling overload Martin’s perception, finds him soaked in the other man’s blood as he drags the limp form toward the relative safety of a nearby dugout:

Sweat dripped from Martin’s face, on the man’s face, and he felt the arm-muscles and the ribs pressed against his body as he clutched the wounded man tightly to him in the effort of carrying him towards the dugout. The effort gave Martin a strange contentment. It was as if his body were taking part in the agony of this man’s body. At last they were washed out, all the hatreds, all the lies, in blood and sweat. (114)

The suggestion of any kid of camaraderie or compassion felt toward Germans is antithetical to the war-sentiments espoused by the young woman on the boat, by any number of politicians, or by the characters of The Marne and Home Fires in France. In this sense, Martin’s act is the supreme negation of all the atrocity propaganda. To a country where demonic portrayals of Germans were commonplace, Dos Passos injected a deliberately provocative scene which establishes that “[n]othing was left but the quiet friendliness of beings alike in every part, eternally alike” (OMI 114). The anti-German propaganda in the Allied countries was fueled largely by the earlier-discussed idea that Germans weren’t like other Western peoples, physiologically as much as in ideology or intellect. Enniss writes that the novel essentially
reverses the Allied atrocity accounts – it is the Allies who kill helpless, unarmed, and wounded Germans (92).

Scorn toward and negation of wartime propaganda measures the novel’s value in explicitly political and ideological terms; the crowning moment of rhetorical negation is the long conversation on militarism, communism, post-war life, and methods of protest that occurs near the novel’s end (OMI 122-36). Michael Clark reports that this chapter’s explicit purpose is to reveal Dos Passos’ “severe distrust of an idealist solution to the complex problems of the modern world” – hence, when Martin’s French comrades are killed, “[t]heir deaths serve as an ironic commentary on each of their intentions to improve society. . . . Even the best-intentioned idealism has the possibility of misleading its followers by giving them a false sense of power and hope” (72). Despite Martin’s ideals and his friends’ high-flown “solutions” to the violence, the war negates any such gestures from having any tangible results. Dos Passos suggests that in the face of such overwhelming carnage, masked behind a bellicose, flag-waving rhetoric, the combatants themselves are powerless to effect any change. The public on the home-fronts does not and cannot know what really happens in battle because of the lack of media and communications technology; the duty of the war-writer, as Dos Passos conceives it here and as Coopeman suggests, is to perform the vital function of “writing” the truth of combat.

The wound imagery that Dos Passos utilizes is a political attack with more subtle value. The author is “not interested in sanitized and neatly bandaged wounds” (Enniss 92), and hence the gruesome depictions of gory injuries serve to reinforce Hoffman’s sense that to Howe, the war is “obviously absurd” (78). The camaraderie felt by Martin toward the German he rescues from the artillery strike, the sense that both their bloods, their bodies are “alike,” and the imagery of mangled bodies reminiscent of undifferentiated meat piled in heaps, imply what the political discussions at the story’s end hint at and what Martin and his friends wistfully imagine in the Paris cafes. The war must end – it is absurd, in the face of all the destruction and carnage, to think that it will not. The following descriptions are typical of the novel’s blunt, unspectacular manner of violence, unadorned by explanation or overt emotion:

Martin found himself looking into the lean, sensitive face, stained a little with blood about the mouth, of the wounded man. His eyes followed along the shapeless bundles of blood-flecked uniform till they suddenly turned away. Where the middle of the man had been, where had been the curved belly and the genitals, where the thighs had joined with a strong swerving of muscles to the trunk, was a
depression, a hollow pool of blood, that glinted a little in the cold diffusion of grey light from the west. (*OMI* 37-8)

Or this later incident, in which Martin is attending to a wounded soldier coming back in his ambulance:

It is pitch dark in the car, except when the glare of a gun from near the road gives him a momentary view of the man’s head, a mass of bandages from which a little bit of blood-soaked beard sticks out, and of his lean body tossing on the stretcher with every jolt of the car. . . . The man’s breath comes with a bubbling sound, now and then mingling with an articulate groan. (90)

Their effort is in vain, though, as the hospital orderly informs them: “‘Needn’t have troubled to have brought him,’ said the hospital orderly, as blood dripped fast from the stretcher, black in the light of the lantern. ‘He’s pretty near dead now. He won’t last long’” (91). The chapter ends there. Contemplating his own mortality, and the easy susceptibility of his flesh to wounding, Martin muses:

It gave him pleasure to feel the smooth, firm modeling of his arm through his sleeve. And how would that feel when it was dead, when a steel splinter had gone through it? A momentary stench of putrefaction filled his nostrils, making his stomach clench with nausea. (74)

The landscape itself appears as a wounded, diseased wasteland, of which human beings are just another squalid element:

He was crossing in his mind the four hundred and five metres to the first Boche listening post. . . . The other day he had been there, and had clambered up the oily clay where the boyau had caved in, and from the level of the ground had looked for an anxious minute or two at the tangle of trenches and pitted gangrened soil in the direction of the German outposts. And all along these random gashes in the mucky clay were men, feet and legs huge from clotting after clotting of clay, men with greyish-green faces scarred by lines of strain and fear and boredom as the hillside was scarred out of all semblance by the trenches and the shell-holes. (35-6)

This perception of the countryside is likewise a component of Martin’s “initiation” as much as the political, aesthetic, and visceral revulsion. The scene of the blasted no-man’s land
contrasts with an earlier scene where the unspoiled French landscape flows past through a train window: “[O]utside, slipping by, blue-green fields, and poplars stalking out of the morning mist, and long drifts of poppies. Scarlet poppies, and cornflowers, and white daisies, and the red-tiled roofs and white walls of cottages, all against a background of glaucous green fields and hedges” (18).

All the elements of the later protest novels are present in One Man’s Initiation. Unceremonious, graphic images of violence and destruction, a feeling of pervasive absurdity, a sense of shared experience with the enemy soldiers that outweighs national loyalty, and outright anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist sentiment are the “girders” that support these novels’ strident anti-militarist ideologies. To the extent that they served to foster peace consciousness among the American populace by the end of the 1920s, they all owe something to One Man’s Initiation, and subsequently to Three Soldiers, which as Hoffman asserts, was unequaled in the decade in its harsh indictments: “No post-war novel expressed so fully its author’s hatred of the army and the war as did Three Soldiers” (80). The focus largely shifts away from the battlefield in Dos Passos’ second novel to encompass both army training camp and the post-war “peace” leading up to Versailles and the general strikes in Paris. Far more than any other novel of the 1920s, Three Soldiers helped script the public sentiment and action that would result in the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Bonus Army’s protest outside the Capitol, and the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s.

The idea of the U.S. Army as a life-negating entity that alienates the individual from himself, Michael Clark suggests, pervades the novel in the form of images and chapter titles that suggest “the machine and the inorganic” (87). Nor is Clark alone among more contemporary critics who identify this theme. Lois Hughson notes the motif of “[soldiers] losing their individuality in the shared experience larger than any of them” (50), and Jeffrey Walsh adds that readers of the novel encountered “for the first time in American fiction a radical note of protest against the army’s bureaucratic and hierarchical organization” (American War Literature 77). Martin Howe’s sense of absurdity at the mechanized slaughter of the Western front is realized far more perniciously and harshly in Three Soldiers. The chapter titles Clark alludes to – “Making the Mould,” “The Metal Cools,” “Machines,” “Rust,” and “Under the Wheels” – describe a wartime world producing soldiers in something like an assembly-line industrial plant. The fight against this mentality is embodied in John Andrews, the highly-educated classical musician who
receives much of the narrative attention, and whose experiences most closely mirror Dos Passos’
own.

Andrews in many ways represents the prototypical Lost Generation protagonist, a forerunner of Nick Adams, Frederick Henry, Donald Mahon, and Richard Plume. His fight to maintain his individuality, his striving to produce art out of his wartime trauma, and his rebellion against the perceived lies and bureaucratic oppression of Allied government agencies, are among the ways in which the novel manifests a “protest” agenda. Three Soldiers does not, like One Man’s Initiation, utilize gory combat imagery as a primary ideological vehicle. The abstract issues that Martin Howe and his like-minded compatriots discuss at the end of the earlier novel are given center stage. The critiques of propaganda, of motives for entering the war, and of the competence of the Allied leadership, assume far more explicit importance. In this regard, the novel functions as a cultural blueprint of sorts. As Fine notes, stories that are “believed to help” social movements make significant gains are likely to be “culturally central” (235), and can encourage a shared understanding of the world through identification with the characters (236).

Three Soldiers, by encouraging identification with the protagonist, encourages, in turn, a common perception of the “world” outside the narrative. That the story was culturally central to the 1920s is beyond dispute. That the majority of readers and critics (including many veterans), after most of the initial fervor had subsided, identified and sympathized with John Andrews and his struggles, is evidence of its continuing relevance in how American attitudes toward the war were scripted by the novel. In Fine’s words, “over time, [narratives] can sometimes tip the balance in sedimented historical memory” even if “bullets” win in the short term (230). In the case of Three Soldiers, the reversal of balance was surprisingly quick and overwhelming.

The two “other” soldiers of the novel, “Chris” Chrisfield and Dan Fuselli, are intended to represent a cross-section of the American Expeditionary Force, to represent, Clark writes, “the diverse American experience” in the war (76). Although their characters are not developed nearly to the extent that Andrews’ is, they evolve, through the course of their wartime experiences, into representations of the military life’s dehumanizing force. Their struggles to adapt to their new culture are manifested by Chrisfield’s violent, murderous rebellion and by Fuselli’s obsequious and ultimately doomed efforts to rise in the military ranks. Andrews’ choice, desertion, is chronicled in the most detail, but all three men are emblems of how, as John Peale Bishop stated in his Vanity Fair review, the Army becomes a humanity-crushing machine hostile to the individual. All three men’s experiences, in terms of their encounters with propaganda, anti-war
sentiment, combat, insubordination, and the army machine in general, are important, but the crux of the novel’s protest revolves around two major incidents: Chrisfield’s murder of Sergeant Anderson, his commanding officer, and Andrews’ surrender to military police at the end of the novel following his experience in a labor battalion. Additionally, a look at the soldiers’ reactions to the above-mentioned aspects of the war illustrates to a degree the perception of “shared experience” so vital to Fine’s and Davis’ readings of socially motivational texts.

Dos Passos characterizes Fuselli initially in terms of his urban background, reminiscing about nights spent in his native San Francisco neighborhood up until his enlistment (TS 6), and of his longing to impress Mabe, his girlfriend back home (8). Increasingly, though, his single-minded ambition to “get in good” with his commanding officers dominates his character, and every action Fuselli takes, however undignified, is an attempt to win promotion. His obsession with being appointed to a corporalship displays his desire to assimilate, as do his thoughts of impressing his girlfriend with heroic combat deeds:

He thought of Mabe. He wished he were in a combatant service; he wanted to fight, fight. He pictured himself shooting dozens of men in green uniforms, and the thought of Mabe reading about it in the papers. He’d have to try to get into a combatant service. No, he couldn’t stay in the medics. . . . Fuselli was thinking of the good chance he had of getting to be corporal. (61)

Fuselli, though, is undone by his fear of battle; this leads him, at the last minute before his unit embarks by train for the front, to transfer to a medical company needing someone with optical experience (106). Previously, nightmares of violent death have haunted him, both in the American camp, on the transport over, and while stationed in France, intermittently undermining his outward bravado. Later in the novel, still a private on “permanent” kitchen duty, after a court-martial for picking up a venereal disease, he reasons, “Hell, I got in wrong, I suppose” when asked to explain his lack of promotion (283).

Chrisfield, the uneducated “Indiana boy” with a near-homicidal temper and a “boyish face” bearing eyes “contracted with anger” (16), is spit out by the Army machine following his murder of a superior officer. The first impressions he gives to Andrews on their earliest acquaintance foreshadow his fate:

“But Ah was juss going to tell you Ah nearly did kill a guy once. . . . Ah was pretty drunk at the time. . . . Hell, Ah doan even know what it was about, but Ah
got to quarrelin’ with a feller Ah’d been right smart friends with. Then he laid off an’ hit me in the jaw. Ah doan know what I done next, but before Ah knowed it Ah had a hold of a shuckin’ knife an’ was slashin’ at him with it. . . . It took four of ‘em to hold me down an’ git it away from me.” (21)

Repeated incidents of insubordination towards Sergeant Anderson (whom he also tries to stab during a fight), as well as an unprovoked attack on a fellow soldier (140) culminate in the murder of Anderson during the confusion of a battle. Such a portrayal of an American soldier – violent, insubordinate, obsessed with revenge against fellow soldiers – would itself have been unimaginable in wartime fiction, let alone casting him as a sympathetic character victimized by the Army. Derision of officers and of the rationales for the war are themselves central themes in *Three Soldiers*. In this regard, the novel moves beyond the war-criticism and anti-propaganda rhetoric of *One Man’s Initiation* to indict more specifically the agencies Dos Passos holds responsible for the slaughter and oppression inherent in the war. Chrisfield – naïve, rustic, having little understanding of politics or military discipline – functions as a perfect “dupe” of the sort Martin Howe and his friends believe the American populace to be, a receptacle for atrocity stories, nationalism, and military servility.

The Army officers and the “Y” men, on the other hand, revel in their authority and the surety of their beliefs. When a “Y” man witnesses soldiers of Chrisfield’s unit rooting baby birds out of their nests, his comment, “‘An American soldier being deliberately cruel. I never would’ve believed it’” (149), seems bitter and ironic given all that has preceded it in the narrative. The “Y” men are purveyors of propaganda and nationalism, too, as demonstrated by and early scene where a violent anti-German song is recited previous to a staged atrocity film shown at a training camp (18). The film itself incites the men’s tempers to a fervent pitch, calculated to produce outrage and animosity:

But the movie had begun again, unfolding scenes of soldiers in spiked helmets marching into Belgian cities full of little milk carts drawn by dogs and old women in peasant costume. There were hisses and catcalls when a German flag was seen, and as the troops were pictured advancing, bayonetting the civilians in wide Dutch pants, the old women with starched caps, the soldiers packed into the stuffy Y.M.C.A. hut shouted oaths at them. Andrews felt blind hatred stirring like something that had a life of its own in the young men about him. . . . He glanced
at the faces round him. They were all intent and flushed, glinting with sweat in the heat of the room. (20)

As they depart the “Y” hut, the soldiers make vicious comments: “I never raped a woman in my life, but by God I’m going to. I’d give a lot to rape some of those goddam German women,” “I hate ‘em too,’ came another voice, ‘men, women, children and unborn children. They’re either jackasses or full of the lust for power like their rulers are, to let themselves be governed by a bunch of warlords like that’” (20).

Andrews later calls a “Y” man out on his beliefs while he and Chrisfield are bathing in countryside pond:

“D’you call serving your country slavery, my friend?” The “Y” man, who had been roaming among the bathers, . . . sat down on the grass beside Andrews.

“You’re goddam right I do.”

“You’ll get into trouble, my boy, if you talk that way,” said the “Y” man in a cautious voice.

“Well, what is your definition of slavery?”

“You must remember that you are a voluntary worker in the cause of democracy. . . . You’re doing this so that your children will be able to live a peaceful . . .”

“Ever shot a man?”

“No. . . . No, of course not. I’d have enlisted, really I would. Only my eyes are weak.”

“I guess so,” said Andrews under his breath. (143)

The “jingoistic sanctimony” of “Y” men in the novel, Robert Rosen notes, is particularly despicable to Andrews (15). It is also a “Y” man, aided by a visiting reverend, who continues to preach anti-German sentiment to the patients of an Army hospital where Andrews is recovering from a shrapnel wound:

“. . . I am sorry to say, boys, that the Germans have not undergone the change of heart for which we had hoped. . . . How grave a disappointment it must be to our great President, who had exerted himself to bring the German people to reason, to make them understand the horror that they alone have brought deliberately upon the world! Alas! Far from it. Indeed, they have attempted with insidious propaganda to undermine the morale of our troops.” (TS 201)
Andrews’ hatred for saluting officers, for receiving their derision and criticism, for submitting to their orders, and the humiliation it all causes pervades the novel almost from beginning to end. It is Chrisfield’s personal enmity toward Anderson, though, that provides the basis for the novel’s most shocking sequence, in terms of what would stun a 1921 audience still immersed largely in that post-war “euphoria” Pizer describes. Chrisfield, roaming the woods in the aftermath of a battle, discovers Anderson – now a lieutenant – wounded and lying against a tree:

“First you was a corporal, then you was a sergeant, and now you’re a lieutenant,” said Chrisfield slowly.

“Youl’d better tell me where Colonel Evans is. . . . You must know. . . . He’s up the road somewhere,” said Anderson, struggling to his feet. Chrisfield walked away without answering. A cold hand was round the grenade in his pocket. . . . Suddenly he found he had pressed the spring of the grenade. He struggled to pull it out of his pocket. . . . Then a warm joy went through him. He had thrown it.

(172-3)

Anderson is killed by the grenade, and Chrisfield spends the remainder of the novel, up to and including the time of his eventual desertion, haunted by the act and by the possible discovery of his crime. The killing of one’s own officers, which occurs also in Soldier’s Pay and in A Farewell to Arms, increasingly comes to symbolize frustration and absurdity in the American World War I novel, evincing a more outwardly violent expression of the hatred and scorn felt for the discipline, the propaganda, and the rationales for the war itself.

Andrews own hatred for Army discipline culminates in the form of a humiliating arrest while in the French countryside after the armistice. Technically on leave from his “school detachment” at the Sorbonne in Paris, he has forgotten his leave papers and is arrested by a military policeman, who takes him back to police headquarters. There, he is taunted and ridiculed by the arresting officer and other MP, for whom he buys cognac in the hopes of gaining favor with them (330-4). When a lieutenant arrives, Andrews tries desperately to explain his situation and receives a violent reply:

“I’m in the Sorbonne Detachment, Lieutenant, stationed in Paris.”

“Don’t you know enough to salute?” said the officer, looking him up and down.

“One of you men teach him how to salute,” he said slowly.

(172-3)
Handsome made a step towards Andrews and hit him with his fist between the eyes. There was a flash of light and the room swung round, and there was a splitting crash as his head hit the floor. . . . The fist hit him in the same place, blinding him, the three figures and the bright oblong of the window swung round. . . . “Git up,” snarled a voice.

He got to his feet, faint light came through the streaming tears in his eyes. His forehead flamed as if hot coals were being pressed against it.

“Prisoner, attention!” shouted the officer’s voice. “March!” (334-5)

Andrews is sentenced to work in a garbage crew, from which he escapes, and spends the remainder of the story fleeing military police until he is captured. As he hears MPs ascending the stairs to his room, the phrase “One of you men teach him how to salute” echoes through his mind; he goes for a pistol he believes is in his nightstand, but the landlady who has turned him in has confiscated it (407). The tone of utter defeat which suffuses this final scene, underscored by the pages of Andrews’ unfinished musical composition fluttering across the floor, suggests, again, the crushing of will and of individuality by the Army.

Imagery of collective will, of assimilation, and of humans as “machinery” abound in Three Soldiers; they are not limited solely to the personal struggles of Chrisfield and Andrews. The overall picture that emerges – of overzealous officers, disgruntled and indifferent soldiers, and a generally fractured American force – fits perfectly with the portrait Byron Farwell provides in Over There, his history of the AEF, of the world’s “16th-ranked military”:

When the war began, the American army, thanks to a lack of interest by its people and the parsimony of its government, had not even a single division; many of its soldiers had never seen even an entire division in one place. It lacked not only enlisted men, but the officers and noncommissioned officers to train them. It was badly in need of arms and equipment, but American industries lacked the skills to produce in quantity the materials for a modern European war. It was awareness of these facts that initially led Germany to discount any threat of American entry into the war.(19)

Even by the conflict’s end, Farwell notes, the American Army “retained all the marks of a hastily put together, partially trained, amateur affair, poor in everything except enthusiasm” (19). Poorly equipped, poorly trained, and regarded as naïve and provincial by their European allies,
the American forces in Europe, Dos Passos suggests, had no idea how to efficiently (or
humanely) execute their war aims. Images of unappetizing, bland food, bored soldiers and
officers, and forced conformity pervade the novel’s early scenes of training camp. The ferocity
with which an officer criticizes Andrews’ poor grooming efforts indicates Dos Passos’ sense of
American military life’s absurdity:

The officer addressed Andrews directly, speaking fast and loud.
“How long have you been in the army?”
“One week, sir.”
“Don’t you know you have to be clean and shaved and ready for inspection every
Saturday morning at nine?”
“I was cleaning the barracks, sir.”
“To teach you not to answer back when officer addresses you. . . .” The
officer spaced his words carefully, lingering on them. As he spoke he glanced out
of the corner of his eye at his superior and noticed that the major was frowning
slightly. His tone changed ever so slightly. “If this ever occurs again you may be
sure that disciplinary action will be taken. Attention there!” (17-8)

Never are there scenes of men receiving combat training, survival skills training, rifle
practice, orienteering, or instruction in any of the abilities commonly associated with infantry
schooling. Always, the novel emphasizes the absurd importance placed on mundane, trivial
duties, proper grooming, and impressing one’s superiors. The officers’ feelings of self-
importance and their perceived conceit are complemented by allusions – and explicit portrayals –
of their incompetence, as in this scene during a German assault:

Down the lane in a patch of sunlight he saw a figure, towards which he hurried. It
was a young man with red hair and a pink-and-white face. By a gold bar on his
shirt Chrisfield saw that he was a lieutenant. He had no coat or hat and there was
greenish slime all over the front of his clothes as if he had lain on his belly in a
mud puddle. . . . He followed the lieutenant, who walked so fast he had difficulty
keeping up, splashing recklessly through the puddles.
“Where’s the artillery? That’s what I want to know,” cried the lieutenant, stopping
in his tracks and running a hand through his hair. “Where the hell’s the artillery?”
He looked at Chrisfield savagely out of green eyes. “No use advancing without artillery.” He started walking faster than ever. (169)

Presently the battle intensifies, and later on Chrisfield and another fleeing soldier encounter the lieutenant, sprawled against the side of the house, his legs “a mass of blood and torn cloth. He was shouting in a shrill delirious voice that followed them out along the open road. ‘Where’s the artillery? That’s what I want to know; where’s the artillery?’” (170) There is a conspicuous absence in *Three Soldiers* of officers performing any acts of bravery or heroism in battle. Often they are depicted as being even more out-of-touch and confused than the enlisted men, and only seem to be sure of themselves when giving routine orders in the safety of non-combat zones (i.e., the training camps or the military police headquarters).

The “Three Other Soldiers” who reviewed the novel for the *Nation* noted how it criticized the “Prussianism” of the American officers (480). This point is key in understanding its impact on war-consciousness at the time, since the term “Prussianism” itself signified qualities and attributes that were practically anti-Christian, as Frederick Jackson Turner’s May 1918 speech revealed. The reviewers went on to say: “Hardly a doughboy was able to like as many as half of his officers,” and that the novel illustrated the failure of the Army to utilize the patriotic enthusiasm of its recruits (480). Commenting on Andrews as a character, they state that his beliefs and truths were “not for those coarser souls who may have enjoyed the war and who now declare that Mr. Dos Passos has insulted the AEF” (480). This last is clearly a response to the *New York Times* reviews denigrating the book and the supposed anti-patriotism of its author. To Cooperman, Andrews “represents an authentic historical type, a sensibility in which the United States provided one extremely fruitful ground for the Great Crusade because pride in gesture was simply one more manifestation of the naivete which enabled the Crusade to take shape” (*WWI* 178-9).

Cooperman’s analysis, some forty-five years after the initial reviews, only reiterates what the “Three Other Soldiers” apprehended at the time of the novel’s publication; that Andrews was in fact an “authentic historical type,” and representative of the majority of the American soldiers who had served in France. Cooperman describes *Three Soldiers* essentially as a “cultural diagnosis” performed on twentieth-century civilization (“John Dos Passos” 23); in this regard the book begins the process of “writing the war” for what can easily be characterized as a misinformed public that “had for so long been fed a diet of propaganda pastels relating to clean-
cut American ‘boys’ sent to save La Belle France” (27). This judgment anticipates the common view, widespread by the end of the 1920s, that the war had been a mistake for America, that most of the American servicemen did not ultimately accept the moral imperative of the “Great Crusade,” and that the country’s military fervor had merely resulted in the loss of over 50,000 American lives. As the novel, and others that subsequently appeared, wrote the story of the war for the American public, they also “wrote” the attitudes of isolationism and military withdrawal that would eventually become actual policy.

Veterans’ opinions were not the only voices of praise for Three Soldiers. By the end of the year, F.Scott Fitzgerald, Hunter Stagg, H.L. Mencken, and the aforementioned review by John Peale Bishop were all heaping admiration on both novel and author (Sanders 357-60). The tide was clearly turning, as Cooperman explains of the early 1920s, no less so in foreign relations than in purely aesthetic responses to militarism. The demobilization of the army was proceeding rapidly. Farwell notes that the “pulse of the people was not hard to find” in America after the war, and that General Pershing’s testimony to Congress urging universal military training “was as popular as a plague” (287-8). The Washington Disarmament Conference, the withdrawal of American troops from Caribbean nations, and the stridently pro-disarmament, anti-interventionist editorials of the Nation and New Republic highlighted 1921. And Three Soldiers was merely in the vanguard of anti-war stories; within the next two years, a flood of World War I novels all evincing the same scorn and anti-war sentiment would appear on the American literary scene. Most, too, shared the distrust of American officers, government, and war motives that Dos Passos so boldly preached. The “Three Other Soldiers,” perhaps sensing what was forthcoming, concluded their review with this sentence: “Not all has yet been told” (481).
CHAPTER 3
NEW VOICES: CUMMINGS, BOYD, CATHER

Samuel Hynes’ introduction to the 1999 Penguin edition of The Enormous Room shares much in common with Donald Pizer’s previously-cited introduction to Signet’s 1997 edition of Three Soldiers. Hynes brands as “expedient lies” the “big words” that had defined the American rationale for war in 1917, among them “Glory,” “Honor,” “The War that Would End War,” and “The Saving of Civilization” (vii). He also points out that when E.E. Cummings’ narrative was published in 1922, “the books that would refute those lies” had yet to be written (vii). And like Dos Passos’ novel, The Enormous Room was praised by the author’s literary contemporaries – Robert Graves, for instance, lauded its “historical truth” (qtd. in Hynes vii). It also, as Hynes points out, doesn’t focus primarily on combat scenes, like Three Soldiers, but nevertheless is a poignant war story:

If it isn’t about war as it is fought, it is about the power that war places in the hands of those who command – the power to inflict their wills upon the powerless souls whom they command. Armies work that way in wartime – so do prisons and concentration camps. (viii)

Hynes’ introduction, importantly, establishes The Enormous Room within the lexicon of “culturally central” texts that would define anti-war sentiment in the 1920s and 1930s, but more than that, it also explains the way that, by the late twentieth century, the history and cultural memory of the war had been “emplotted” in the public consciousness (to use Davis’ phrase). In making a connection between politics and the battlefield, moreover, a reader comes to understand that scenes of combat and heroism are not the predominant modes of description for American accounts of this war. As previously stated, battle imagery is primarily used to revolt and to inculcate a sense of revulsion or despair in these works, and “heroism” as such is often shown to be a flawed, pointless folly. Increasingly, throughout the early and mid-1920s, these concepts of
war were emplotted in the American public mind, as legislation that could reasonably be defined as “anti-war” was drafted, year after year.

The American war novel after 1921 would increasingly be conceived of less as a visceral story of trial and test, of depicting war as a proving ground for men’s strengths and passions – as in *Red Badge of Courage*, for instance – than as a cry of outrage against the test itself. Cooperman notes that Crane’s ethic of “manhood-through-confrontation” had no symbolic meaning for soldiers who saw the Western Front (*World War I* 218). The idea of war as a “standard literary device” more or less ended in American literature after World War I, with novels scrutinizing “war” as a concept in and of itself (195). Power politics, propaganda, oppression by military culture, and open rebellion were themes absent from American war literature before *Three Soldiers*, but that would, by the end of 1923, be commonplace in books written by returning veterans. Cooperman states:

> After 1923, . . . these areas of protest combine with a fuller statement of economic or political disillusion; along with the plight of the [wounded veteran], there begins the detailed analysis of home-front ignorance, atrocity propaganda, political causes, economic duplicity, and ideological suppression. (*World War I* 98)

Three novels published in 1922 and 1923 – *The Enormous Room*, Willa Cather’s *One of Ours*, and Thomas Boyd’s *Through the Wheat* – signal in advance this shift in sensibility. Dos Passos’ novels were both set in France; Cather’s novel, though, is at least partially set in the American heartland, and examines in depth the manipulations, via the print media, of home-front beliefs and opinions about the war. Cummings’ story, equally, is a tale of political and ideological disfranchisement, and *Through the Wheat* uses graphic battlefield imagery and derision of officers to make strident ideological statements. Cummings’ and Boyd’s novels can be analyzed within their explicit “Lost Generation” contexts, as far as their treatment of war aims and their protagonists’ ideologies are concerned. Cather’s novel, however, presents a much different challenge to the critic looking for similar themes and messages. For Cather, generally thought of as belonging to that previous literary generation with the “Miss Whartons” who had validated America’s war effort, acceptance as a war novelist came much easier due to her established reputation; *One of Ours* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1923. But, despite criticisms from Cooperman and others, who see the book as emblematic of the same war-ideology as that evinced by Wharton, *One of Ours* actually engages in strident critiques of
propaganda and anti-German discrimination, and depicts the war as a doomed crusade for at least one impressionable, misguided youth. In this sense, it has much in common with both *The Enormous Room* and *Through the Wheat*.

*The Enormous Room* uses its rhetorical style as much as imagery or dialogue to point out the war’s absurdity. In Cummings’ novel, this absurdity is manifested in the actions and consequences Hynes discusses in the introduction – ultimately resulting, for Cummings and his fellow inmates, in a pervasive denial of freedom and individuality. Cummings’ modernist prose, which echoes the contemporary developments of Cubism, Dadaism, and Futurism in other artistic genres, evokes what Walsh describes as “non-representational presentation of character” and evinces, on the author’s part, “relentless artistic experimentation” (“Painful Process” 42).

The former quality gives the novel an impressionistic quality, a non-traditional, sometimes non-chronological, mode of character description and plot that in some ways prefigures the fragmented “protest” narratives of the Vietnam conflict that would appear over fifty years later. Cummings’ “relentless artistic experimentation,” paralleling other such movements of the time, suggests that the war, and incarceration, cannot adequately be detailed with “traditional” narration. In this sense, the novel represents the backlash against the “sentimental fiction” written during the war itself. As the postwar literary protest intensified in the early 1920s, Cooperman writes, there was a growing feeling that the “young men” of the generation “were not only ‘tired’ of the thought of death, but were also tired of the Miss Whartons” (118). *Three Soldiers*, as discussed previously, was a spectacular early negation of novels like Wharton’s *The Marne*; *The Enormous Room* continues this trend, adding a stylistic negation on top of the already strident anti-war rhetoric. Hoffman notes that, because of Cummings – and additionally because of Hemingway, Boyd, and Dos Passos – “fundamental changes took place in the formation of the postwar attitude toward those who continued to live and to believe ‘conventionally’” (87).

*The Enormous Room* advances its protest agenda largely through descriptions of perceived oppression, injustice, and corruption on the part of prison and military officials. Cummings’ eponymous narrator is stationed (like so many of his famous contemporaries) with the Red Cross/Norton-Harjes ambulance corps in France. Three months through his six-month stint, Cummings and his friend (known as “B.”) are detained, questioned, and ultimately set to *La Ferte Mace*, a sort of “interim prison” where detainees not yet convicted of anything are quarantined for indefinite duration. The narrator’s lack of respect for his superiors, his
indifference toward the Allied mission, and his general disaffection with his job are revealed early on:

[T]he lively satisfaction which we might be suspected of having derived from the accomplishment of a task so important in the saving of civilization from the clutches of Prussian tyranny was in some degree inhibited, unhappily, by a complete absence of cordial relations between the man whom fate had placed [in command of us] and ourselves. (ER 3)

Later, while under interrogation for allegedly disloyal statements made in his friend B.’s correspondence, Cummings’ French questioners ask him about his feelings toward the war in general and his opinions of the Germans in particular:

With a supremely disagreeable expression on his immaculate face the victorious minister of security pressed his victim with regained assurance: “But you are doubtless aware of the atrocities committed by the boches?”

“I have read about them,” I replied cheerfully.

“You do not believe?”

“Ca se peut.”

“And if they are so, which of course they are . . . you do not detest the Germans?”

“Oh, in that case of course anyone must detest them,” I averted with perfect politeness. (15-6)

Trying unsuccessfully to elicit at least some measure of general hatred toward the Germans, Cummings’ captors send him on a journey by foot and rail, accompanied by B. and various police officials, to the prison in the south. The remainder of the novel essentially is concerned with the day-to-day activities of the prison inmates and Cummings’ interactions with them (the “enormous room” of the title refers to the massive chamber where all male prisoners are quartered). Through intimate portraits of the various fellow inmates, the narrator consciously evokes a sense of outrage and absurdity at the circumstances which have landed them all there. The idiotic guards and administrators, upon whom relentless scorn and ridicule are heaped, are depicted as little more than stooges of the French government and its equally idiotic war aims. Many of the prisoners, in fact, have no definite idea as to why they have been imprisoned. Cummings learns that the prison is technically a “co-educational receiving station whither were sent from various parts of France a) males suspected of espionnage and b) females of a well-
known type *qui se trouvaient dans la zone des armées*” (63). He ascertains, through conversations with other prisoners, that finding such “qualified” inmates is not hard: “in the case of the men,” the narrator comments, “any foreigner would do, provided his country was neutral (e.g., Holland)” (63).

The reasons for incarceration largely form most of the novel’s protest agenda. Through the experiences, not just of B. and himself, but of the various other inmates, the narrator derides – at times sarcastically – the Allied war effort. Monsieur Auguste, a former munitions worker, has been arrested simply because he is Russian (89). The “Schoolmaster” and his hypothetical story of arrest provide an opportunity for the narrator’s more directly scornful attacks on the French government:

> Of what hideous crime was this being suspected? By some mistake he had three moustaches, two of them being eyebrows. He used to teach school in Alsace-Lorraine, and his sister is there. . . . Did he, by any chance, tell the children that there are such monstrous things as peace and goodwill . . . a corrupter of youth, no doubt . . . he is altogether incapable of anger, wholly timid and tintinnabulous. . . . Yes, probably the Schoolmaster was a notorious seditionist. The all-wise French government has its ways, which, like the ways of God, are wonderful. (90)

“Emile the Bum,” another of Cummings’ prison acquaintances, likewise offers the narrator an avenue through which to ridicule the government:

> Not a tremendously harmful individual, one would say . . . and why did the French government need him behind lock and key, I wonder? It was his fatal eloquence, doubtless, which betrayed him to the clutches of *La Misere*. Gendarmes . . . do not stand for any misleading information on the price of potatoes – since it is their duty and their privilege to resent all that is seditious to the Government, and since The Government includes the Minister of Agriculture (or something), and since the Minister of Something includes, of course, potatoes, and that means that no one is at liberty to in any way (however slightly or insinuatingly) insult a potato. I bet Emile the Bum insulted two potatoes. (91)

As mentioned, the word choice and arrangement reflects the sense of absurdity and scorn Cummings perceives in the prison environment and the regulations controlling it. Walsh, who identifies *The Enormous Room* as one of the novels providing for the 1920s “the most complete
rationalization of its postwar attitudes” (qtd. in American War Literature 41), also comments that Cummings’ novel lay the groundwork rhetorically for later war novels such as Catch-22 or Slaughterhouse Five. The link between modernist style and ideology in The Enormous Room, Walsh asserts, emphasizes war “as manic incoherence whose illogic demand[s] a formal enactment commensurate to its madness; language and form must be shaped in new and seemingly disruptive ways” (American War Literature 45-6). John Aldridge writes that for writers like Dos Passos, Cummings, and Hemingway, “the bitterness, the monumental disbelief which the war had taught was the only tradition” (14). And as negation “spread through the writing of the Twenties like a prairie fire” (19), styles such as Cummings’, aligned as it was with bitterness and contempt, also became more firmly established among the literary milieu. The currents of pacifism and isolationism, which between the wars “often went hand in glove” (Rhodes 131), were on the rise as well. It is important not to forget the parallel emergence of these two cultural threads – anti-war literature and political retreat from militarism – in the 1920s. There is a distinct perception in the novels that while young men fight the nation’s wars, the wars themselves “are precipitated by the flaws and failures of the generation in power” (Jones 12). This is especially true of The Enormous Room, as it invokes a “flawed” or distorted linguistic style to drive home the anti-militarist, anti-authority message it espouses.

A final note, for the time being, on The Enormous Room involves its publishing history. Hynes comments in the introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel that the original 1922 publication:

> was prepared for publication without the author’s participation or approval; a number of the [character portraits] were omitted, and some passages in French were translated into English. Cummings’ response when he saw bound copies was that “it be immediately suppressed, thrown in a shitoir,” or completely corrected, regardless of cost. Neither was done. (xix)

This suggests that the 1922 edition, to some degree at least, might not fully reflect its author’s ideological aims in addition to his more obvious creative ones. The subsequent editions of The Enormous Room, published in 1928 and 1934, offer restorations of the French passages and additional material excluded from the original. The 1999 Penguin uses the 1934 Modern Library edition, with Hynes commenting:
[T]he Modern Library edition is clearly preferable, and I have used it as the copy for this edition. I have corrected a few typographical errors, but I have not altered Cummings’ sometimes errant spellings of French place names; he wrote them as he heard them, and his mis-hearings are part of his American-in-France experience. (xix)

Two points arise regarding the publication history. One is that the book, in its unexpurgated form, for whatever reason, was deemed unsuitable for American audiences in 1922, with the novel being so radically altered that the author disowned it, for all intents and purposes. The other is that, by 1934, the political, social, and artistic climate in the U.S. had shifted so much to a general feeling of anti-militarism that the book was (possibly) deemed “safe” to release in its original form. Other factors were more than likely involved in the editorial decisions; but the reception and controversy that greeted Three Soldiers only a year previous might well have made some publishers squeamish about releasing similarly anti-military works. Hynes explicitly ties the novel to the “innocents abroad” themes which, as Cooperman, Walsh, Trout, Cowley, and Hoffman (to name a few) point out, permeate so much of Lost Generation writing. In 1922, though, The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, “The Waste Land,” and any number of other modernist works of disillusion and/or expatriate experience had yet to be published (or, in the case of “The Waste Land,” absorbed into the cultural consciousness). The years from 1923 on, as Cooperman indicates, would see an explosion of such issues explored in literary works, further pointing to how, as a social movement, peace-consciousness began to gain momentum in the realm of artistic expression. The publication history of The Enormous Room is an interesting case-in-point, if one assumes that ideological reasons were at least part of the cause of its “paring down” for the 1922 release.

Thomas Boyd’s 1923 novel Through the Wheat is, stylistically at least, on an opposite pole from the vivid language-play of The Enormous Room. In rhetorical and artistic terms, it shares much with Three Soldiers and One Man’s Initiation (and The Enormous Room as well, although being an almost entirely combat-centered novel, the ideological similarities between the two are not as apparent). Boyd, who signed up with the Marines at a Chicago recruiting station in May of 1917, barely a month after the American declaration of war on Germany, was, according to Edwin Simmons, “attracted by the Marine Corps’ promise of being ‘The First to Fight’” (v). Thus the author already fulfills the role described by Davis as the “victim advocate” (like Dos
Passos, Stallings, and Hemingway), and in his initial enthusiasm and subsequent disillusion, resembles an archetypal Lost Generation protagonist himself. He arrived in France in early 1918 and fought in the major offensives of the AEF later that year; as Simmons writes, most of the novel is autobiographical, at times giving character names identical to those of real Marines with whom Boyd served. Simmons, notably, also comments on the commonality of doughboys’ and Marines’ contempt for officers, at least in Boyd’s wartime experience (ix). Like One Man’s Initiation, Three Soldiers, and The Enormous Room, Through the Wheat directs much of its ideological firepower at commanding officers, military police, and, essentially, all those in positions of authority. The novel serves as a perfect case in point for Jones’ argument that in American World War I fiction, the enemy is “always” the Allies.

Boyd, following the war, was encouraged by F. Scott Fitzgerald (a patron of Boyd’s St. Paul bookstore) to write about his wartime experiences, and Through the Wheat was published by Scribner’s in April 1923 (xiii). The book’s critical reception indicated at least that the furor over Three Soldiers not even two years earlier would not be repeated with this work, despite its equally passionate denunciations of the military (and its rawer, more visceral mode of narration). Boyd, also, despite producing a number of literary works following Through the Wheat, drifted more and more into radical politics as the decade wore on, aligning himself explicitly with the Communist party by the 1930s, a boundary John Dos Passos never crossed. Boyd, in fact, ran for governor of Vermont on the Communist ticket in 1934 (xiv). In light of the severe Communist repressions of the early 1920s, such a stance would have been unimaginable for a successful author at the time Through the Wheat was published, even less so at the time Three Soldiers appeared. But the lack of controversy over the novel’s content suggested that even by 1923, the “Dos Passos” paradigm of the war was taking root among the literate public. Anti-war sentiment, so clearly expressed in the pages of New Republic and the Nation, and demonstrated in the American troop withdrawals from the Caribbean and Central America and the Washington Disarmament Conference, was more or less tolerated (and even encouraged) in the literary world (although, as in the case of Edith Wharton, there were still literary “holdouts” at this time who validated all that had been done in the liberation of Europe).

Through the Wheat delivers liberal doses of anti-authoritarian dialogue almost immediately and, likewise, shows the effects of propaganda conditioning on the soldiers. Additionally, Boyd quickly establishes the vicious tone that dominates the novel’s action. Private
William Hicks, the novel’s protagonist, and his unit are instructed to take part in a training drill early in the novel where bayonet-fighting skills are honed:

Sergeant Harriman, the nostrils of his stubby nose flaming with zeal, began his instructions. “All right, you men. Now you want to forget that these are sacks of straw. They are dirty Huns – Huns that raped the Belgians, Huns that would have come over and raped our women if we hadn’t got into the war. Now, men, I want to see some action, I want to see some hate when you stick these dirty Huns. I want to see how hard you can grunt.” (14)

The men are explicitly instructed to aim for the crotch – “in the crotch, mind you,” Harriman emphasizes – and are given remarks of praise for ferocity and “killing” – for ”really and frightfully” stabbing the dummies (15-6). Hicks, for the most part, remains aloof from and indifferent to the zealous spirit of hate the officers try to instill in the men; his development as a character is in fact a gradual progression toward numbness and complete indifference by the novel’s close. He thinks to himself at one point that “[p]ossibly for an hour during his whole life he had hated the German army” (231), pointing explicitly to the failure of the Allied propaganda machine to make much of a difference in the hearts and minds of soldiers. This kind of apathy toward the Central Powers and their alleged brutalities is, of course, the polar opposite of what Wharton’s and Fisher’s doughboy characters display, and likewise manifests a reaction against the kind of propaganda espoused by the girl Martin Howe meets on the ship deck in One Man’s Initiation.

The details of Hicks’ life previous to the war are vague and sketched in the roughest, briefest detail. In this regard he resembles Henry Fleming of The Red Badge of Courage, in that his life before combat is secondary to the life and the persona he assumes during military service. Jones, in fact, mentions the “direct influence” of Stephen Crane’s novel on Boyd’s, but adds that Through the Wheat politicizes its respective war by showing ambition, bureaucracy, and dreams of glory on the part of officers, qualities that are absent from Crane’s story (9). After joining the Marines at a recruiting office in Cincinnati, lured by the sergeant’s promise of action and the ribbons he “professionally wore” (TTW 2), Hicks finds himself (like Andrews of Three Soldiers) largely filling his days with menial labor and repetitive, exhausting drills (such as the aforementioned dummy-stabbing exercise). He has grown up on a farm in Ohio, and his thoughts (like those of another Three Soldiers protagonist, Chrisfield) frequently drift to reveries of farms,
fields, meadows, and the countryside in general. When recalling his enlistment, Hicks remembers his mother’s reaction to the news:

Dear old mother. How she had cried when he told her that he had enlisted and was to be sent almost immediately to France. “But, mother, you were such a good patriot before I enlisted, and now you don’t want me to go. What kind of patriotism is that?” he remembered having asked her. (101-2)

Beyond these details, the reader is given almost nothing of William Hicks’ previous life, and his life as detailed in the novel is one of almost continual and increasing negation. Towards the end of the book, as the time for a major offensive grows near, he ruminates on the chances of escaping:

Hicks had not recovered from his despondency. His stomach felt as if he had swallowed a stone every time reference was made to the attack. He had done about enough in this war, he thought, wondering vaguely whether there were no chance of escape. . . Disgusting! And no letters from home, no change of scene, no clean clothing, nothing but the hopelessness of routine, the bullying of petty officers, the prospect of the front. (223-4)

Eventually, as the novel closes, and Hicks has already witnessed the deaths of most of his compatriots within the platoon, he rises from cover during a heated battle, oblivious to the sounds, “the bullets, the barbed wire, the dead, . . . the living. The soul of Hicks was numb” (266). He is already believed to be crazy by the other men, as his erratic behavior in the last quarter or so of the story indicates. Cooperman conceives of Hicks’ decline as a series of “successive stages,” incorporating the familiar Lost Generation curve of “expectation, hope, disillusion, impact, lethargy, and withdrawal” (World War I 163).

Hicks, as mentioned, shares much in common with Andrews, Chrisfield, and other Lost Generation protagonists (in his “numb” declaration of a separate peace, he prefigures Frederick Henry of A Farewell to Arms), as well as anticipating, for instance, Paul Baumer of Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front. The overall note of disillusion, negation, and disgust embodied by the character of Hicks is reinforced and reiterated by the novel’s imagery and dialogue, much of which focus on a harshly anti-military rhetoric. Cooperman identifies an “intersection” of two major literary reactions to World War I in Boyd’s novel: “rhetorical indictment on one hand, and benumbed negation on the other” (World War I 165).
The lambasting of officers and authority figures is almost relentless in the novel, generally following what are perceived by the enlisted men to be pointless orders, drills, or ill-conceived attacks that result in massive casualties. In Jones’ words, the officers generally “are characterized as ambitious, ruthless men, bent primarily on furthering their own careers” (10) – very similar in this regard to officer characterizations in Three Soldiers. There are also numerous incidents of shell-shock and refusal to fight, eventually even on Hicks’ part, and these displays are met not with scorn or accusations of cowardice, but as natural responses to the battle environment. Narrative judgments occur occasionally as well, as in this scene involving the killing of a German soldier:

They were nearing a clump of bushes when a young German stepped out. . . . His hands were high above his head, as high as their frightened nerves would permit them to be. At the sight of them an uncouth, illiterate taterdemalion from the south of Illinois snarled half-animal like, raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired directly at the prisoner. A look of surprise, utter unbelief, came over the man’s face as he dropped heavily to the ground. “Damn ye, that’l larn ye ta stay hum.” The fellow, his thin evil face grimaced with hatred, walked over and spat expertly a stream of tobacco juice at the already dead body. (179-80)

The use of such explicitly pejorative adjectives such as “evil,” “illiterate,” and “uncouth” matter a great deal here, as the word “evil,” in particular, is never once used to describe the actions or appearances of any German soldiers. The American soldiers, though, and officers in particular, are cursed to their face and in private, are called German spies, show little or no morale or faith in the war effort, and generally receive the large part of Boyd’s derision. Hicks, at one point, becomes “nauseated” after hearing a fellow private say: “Well, there won’t be any wars after this one, anyway. This is the war to end war. After we lick them Boches everything will be all right” (41-2). The “nauseating” effect of sentiments like this – which would be explored more fully later in the decade by Ernest Hemingway – indicates, again, a sea change in attitudes toward militarism and toward the Allied mission itself, not even five years following the war’s end. The patronage of such a literary icon as F.Scott Fitzgerald, as well as the favorable reviews the novel received, are evidence of this.

Perhaps one of the most provocative ways in which the novel advances its anti-war agenda is through the use of graphic battle imagery. There are far too many examples to mention,
as violence overshadows the narrative virtually from beginning to end, but the cumulative effect such scenes have on Hicks and his spiraling attitude of apathy and numbness can be shown in several key scenes. One such event follows an attack of the evening before:

At a place where another path crossed, an ammunition wagon stood. The bodies of four horses lay dead on the ground, their bodies mutilated by pieces of flying shell. The dead horses were a squeamish sight, lying there with large reproachful eyes and slender necks that seemed to have been broken. Their stomachs were inflated as if they had eaten too much clover. Hicks grew more depressed, his own stomach wanted to describe a parabola inside of him. (233)

Hicks, already, is separated from his platoon, lagging behind while they are engaged in a fierce battle; after witnessing the dead horses, his nausea and distaste threatens to overpower him and he contemplates, again, abandoning all sense of duty in order to simply withdraw from the war. Earlier, during a battle in which a German plane shot and injured the “observer” stationed in a reconnaissance balloon, the fascinated attention of most of the platoon was focused on the sight; it “offered no titillations for Hicks,” however (212). The repeated imagery of dead bodies, of military spectacle, or of gruesome injuries eventually elicits not outrage or stiffening of morale from Hicks, but rather a sickness or indifference that, by the novel’s end, has given way to absolute disassociation from the environment around him – “apathy replaces horror,” as Cooperman posits, “and combat creates a numb sense of absolute fatality rather than exhilaration” (World War I 164). Hicks himself shows not much concern for his own injuries, such as gas-burns suffered during a particularly intense battle; even the “dump-heap of bodies, limbs of trees, legs and arms independent of their bodies, and pieces of equipment” that the platoon’s encampment has become after the bombardment is just another viscerally appalling sight that has become commonplace (TTW 157). Jones states that this “ironic clash of style and diction with scenes of death and putrefaction is continuous, adding steadily to the final impact” of the book (10).

Reviews of Through the Wheat from 1923 indicate, as mentioned, that Boyd’s pernicious anti-military rhetoric was itself commonplace, worthy of little or no mention in overall assessments of the novel. An unnamed reviewer in the July 1923 issue of Booklist remarked that the book was written “with simplicity, with no attempt to analyze or moralize, and conveys a strong sense of reality” (318). The New York Times Book Review, in its 29 April 1923 review,
referred to it as the “least partisan and most brilliant of doughboy reminisces,” and said further that the novel was “no more an indictment of war than war is itself” (14). F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote a review for the *New York Evening Post* of 26 May 1923, comparing it with Joseph Conrad’s “Youth,” and after much praise of the book, added cryptically: “I suppose that the United States Marines were the best body of troops that fought in the war” (qtd. in Simmons xiii). Perhaps the most telling thoughts came from the anonymous *New York Times Book Review* piece, which noted that Hicks does not “lose himself” or “become neurotic” (14). It is impossible to believe that any competent reviewer could have so misread the final portions of *Through The Wheat*; a comparison with the thoughts of later critics and scholars reveals what this sentiment is more indicative of. Nowhere in these aforementioned reviews – or any others – are the kind of criticisms (or praise, for that matter) that Dos Passos received just over a year earlier for *Three Soldiers*. Simmons mentions that one critic, J.W. Crawford of the *Literary Review*, levels the criticism that Hicks’ character is rather undefined (xiii) – but this is an issue of *craft*, not of subject matter or ideology.

Clearly, the mood had changed on the literary and intellectual scene, and in a relatively short time. Disillusion, anti-war rhetoric, or the derision of officers were not the polarized topics they had been in the autumn of 1921; Hicks’ reaction to combat stress is then not so much read as “neurosis” or loss of nerve, but as a normal, natural human reaction, just like the shell-shock episodes of other soldiers in the novel. Hoffman, some forty-five years later, takes note of Boyd’s professed hatred for financiers, munitions-makers, and others who he believed had profited from the war (82).Coupled with his stridently radical political biography, this antipathy might make *Through the Wheat* seem even more explicitly agenda-laden than Dos Passos’ novels. A decade after its publication, Hoffman writes, Boyd’s view of the conflict and its causes “was to dominate the leftist interpretation of World War I” (82). Not only does this demonstrate a correlation between literary expression and political/public sentiment, it also shows, to some degree, how the novel helped prefigure those sentiments.

Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* is an interesting narrative both of combat and the home front. Claude Wheeler, the novel’s idealistic young protagonist, could be Martin Howe, John Andrews, or William Hicks; readers see in the early portions of the novel his intellectual yearnings and his ideological conditioning through newspaper reports of fighting in Europe. Edith Wharton’s *A Son at the Front*, published in 1923, hearkens back to her earlier work *The Marne* in its fervent
Cather and Wharton were each other’s contemporaries far more than they were contemporaries of Dos Passos, Hemingway, or Cummings, and their two war novels of the 1920s have often been given similar readings (Cooperman, for instance, claims Cather does nothing more than reiterate and reify the earlier war myths and propaganda).

Claude, growing up on a Nebraska farm, yearns continually for something greater, some all-encompassing purpose in life, which he has been unable to find in farming, in religion, or in marriage (his devout wife, for instance, departs for China on missionary work and all contact between her and Claude is more or less finished at that point). His college education only furthers his desire, his curiosity, his search for a place in the universe – much like Cowley, Dos Passos, or any number of authors of the 1920s who fought in the war. Cather’s novel, through Claude’s fascination with newspaper reports of advances, retreats, and war strategies in France, exposes the emptiness of the rhetoric attached to such reports, and the mistaken impression they leave on young men like Claude. Claude’s own father in law says, tellingly, when referring to the impending marriage between Claude and his daughter: “You’ll find out that pretty nearly everything you believe about life – about marriage especially – is lies. I don’t know why people prefer to live in that sort of a world, but they do” (OOO 125). Given what follows – Claude’s naïve ideas about marriage, his enlistment, the newspaper reports and propaganda – it is difficult not to read the novel as a Cummings-esque disavowal of the “expedient lies” of war that The Enormous Room tears down, according to Hynes. Cooperman’s criticisms of the novel as antithetical to the “protest” agenda of the Lost Generation authors revolve around his assertion that it shares more with the wartime novels of obvious pro-Allied bias. One of Ours, like Wharton’s The Marne, features a sensitive protagonist determined to defend the honor and culture of France, and analyzes Claude in quick strokes: “From the time he arrives in France until the very moment of his own death Claude defends the war, quickens to violence and signs of violence, and resents and delay or interference with the purge by blood” (World War I 135).

The novel as a whole, he adds, “is valuable not so much as a treatment of war, but rather as an examination of particular psychological needs which helped fashion the bold journey into war” (136-7). Furthermore, it “must be understood in terms of the nineteenth-century environment from which the Great Crusade developed” (129). Cooperman’s first two assertions are essentially true. His alignment of Cather’s literary agenda with that of Wharton and others
who justified the war (those born of the “nineteenth-century environment”) is, however, off the mark. What it ignores is that a large number of the other Lost Generation protagonists—Andrews, Howe, Hicks, Cummings, Richard Plume of Plumes—also initially hastened to the war under similar circumstances and imbued with the same idealism. Since Claude is killed, the ideological “end point” of his journey through the war, had he survived, remains unknown. Cather deliberately deploys the motifs of newspaper propaganda, home-front reaction to German-American citizens once war is declared, and misguided, doomed idealism in an attempt to expose the lies that have made the war possible and driven impressionable young men like Claude to the Western Front. Cather casts her protagonist as the victim of a grand deception. John Rohr kemper adds that Cooperman’s analysis—that One of Ours is “one more example of a naïve homefront novel”—misses the mark. Cather, he insists, “quite clearly sees, from her homefront vantage, the brutality and waste of the war” (22). The novel makes use of the “easy assumption” of American popular folklore that sophisticated, worldly Europe offered exotic pleasures to the “young American rube off to see ‘gay Paree’” in order “to paint a grim picture” of American pretensions” (28).

Cather portrays her protagonist as an anachronistic young man whose aptitudes and interests are ill-suited to his environment (the back cover summary of the Vintage Classics edition of the novel describes him as “an idealist without an ideal to cling to”). He finds school at the “struggling denominational college on the outskirts of the state capital” extremely unsatisfying and yearns to be enrolled at the state university (OOO 22). His mother feels his restlessness stems from the fact that he “had not yet found his Saviour,” but Claude himself perceives that “his energy, instead of accomplishing something, was spent in resisting unalterable conditions, and in unavailing efforts to subdue his own nature” (86). As a result of attending a Christian school, he has “dismissed all Christian theology as something too full of evasions and sophistries to be reasoned about” (44). His social world consists of his religious mother, his brothers, who seem resigned to accepting the roles their community offers them, his farming-obsessed father, and various servants and neighbors and young women, none of whom strike Claude as particularly worldly or stimulating. When he courts and marries Enid Royce, his disillusionment with his surroundings deepens, as she devotes the large part of her loyalty and strength to missionary work. As a character, Claude is representative of Rohr kemper’s general demographic description of most American soldiers—they “tended to come from comfortable,
middle-class homes and had been raised on a diet of pious idealism and patriotic optimism” (20). When war breaks out in Europe, Claude fervently embraces the “ideals” that the Allied defense of France and Belgium represents. That Cather ultimately shows this zeal to be a misplaced, false idealism validates the novel’s protest leanings and reinforces Cather’s critique of propaganda and war-fervor. Almost immediately Claude is sucked into the daily dramas of troop movements and sieges, battles, and retreats, poring over newspaper reports and commiserating with his “Bohemian” friend, Ernest Havel, about war-politics and European history and geography.

The Havel family’s presence in the novel, along with the numerous German-American families who inhabit Claude Wheeler’s small Nebraska hometown, offer an opportunity for Cather to explore ideas of ethnic loyalty and prejudice alongside her broader indictment of the war effort. Claude’s opinion of German society in general is shaken by the war even before American entry:

He had always been taught that the German people were pre-eminent in the virtues Americans most admire; a month ago he would have said they had all the ideals a decent American boy would fight for. The invasion of Belgium was contradictory to the German character as he knew it in his friends and neighbors. (OOO 136-7)

And later, discussing the war with his mother:

“The world simply made a mistake about the Germans all along. It’s as if we invited a neighbor over here and showed him our cattle and barns, and all the time he was planning how he would come at night and club us in our beds.” Mrs.Wheeler passed her hand over her brow. “Yet we have had so many German neighbors, and never one that wasn’t kind and helpful.”

“I know it. Everything Mrs.Erlich ever told me about Germany made me want to go there. And the people who sing all those beautiful songs about women and children went into Belgian villages and –”

“Don’t, Claude, his mother put out her hands as if to push the words back. (140)

Claude’s friend Ernest even scoffs at Claude’s idealistic attitude toward the war. Ernest mentions that all of his cousins and nephews have probably been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army, and that they’d have no choice but to commit the atrocities the newspapers allege. When Claude replies that he’d sooner desert such an army, Ernest answers: “You
Americans brag like little boys; you would and you wouldn’t! I tell you, nobody’s will has anything to do with this. It is the harvest of all that has been planted’” (136). Mrs.Voigt, the German restaurant-owner whom Claude has known since early childhood, suffers persecution from local boys who call her a spy and a traitor. Claude, in a somewhat contradictory rhetorical posture, defends her from their abuse while asserting that “‘[t]here’s only one army in the world that wants men who’ll bully old women’” (200), a clear reference to the German military. Truths as such have no effect on Claude’s ideological focus and his passion to defend France. Ernest, for instance, tells Claude that if he (hypothetically) were to desert the Austro-Hungarian army, his relatives would be persecuted or imprisoned. Claude merely shrugs and answers that his relatives could fend for themselves in such an event. To his ironclad belief, there is no excuse whatever for the horrific episodes described in the newspapers; his convictions, though, are based entirely on abstractions and media accounts, whereas Ernest and Mrs.Voigt (who has her own memories of the Franco-Prussian war) have the credibility of first-hand knowledge.

The indictment of newspaper propaganda in the formation of Claude’s misguided passions, and the provinciality of the community itself, make the suspicions cast on German-Americans and Eastern Europeans in the novel seem absurd and reckless. For instance, Claude’s father witnesses a hearing in town where two local German-American residents are being tried on charges of “disloyalty”:

Mr.Yoeder, a witness declared, had said he hoped the United States would go to Hell, now that it had been bought over by England. When the witness had remarked to him that if the Kaiser were shot it would end the war, Yoeder replied that charity begins at home, and he wished someone would put a bullet in the President. (197)

After hearing additional charges against another resident, which involve the accused party’s alleged elation at the prospect of an American defeat in Europe and his repeated playing of Die Wacht am Rheim on a trombone, Mr.Wheeler “slapped his knee with a loud guffaw, and a titter ran through the courtroom” (196). Mr.Yoeder laments to the court: “‘I thought this was a country where a man could speak his mind’” (197). The entire proceeding ends with no convictions or penalties save small fines, and the general mood of the narrative’s portrayals of disloyalty charges on these grounds is one of ridicule and irrelevance. Claude, on leave before shipping out to France, walks over to visit the Yoeders; while en route, he thinks of an old song:
[He] recited a long German rhyme which told how Spain was the maiden’s head, the Pyrenees her lace ruff, Germany her heart and bosom, England and Italy were two arms, and Russia, though it looked big, was only a hoopskirt. This rhyme would probably be considered dangerous propaganda now! (208)

Cooperman’s criticism of the novel – which essentially holds that it falls into the “Edith Wharton” camp of war literature – doesn’t account for this key difference. Nowhere in Wharton’s novels are the Germans humanized, shown to have any redeeming qualities, or even introduced as characters except as shadowy figures in an opposing trench or as abstract, demonic presences in newspaper accounts. Nor is their culture or their art praised in the least. In *The Marne*, the Germans represent everything Moore details in his accounts of wartime repression and propaganda, or Turner in his Historical Association speech – that they possess only the meanest, cruelest, and most warlike of virtues, bereft of all “civilized” qualities. This is clearly not the case in Cather’s novel. Claude’s own anti-German leanings clearly are ambivalent and apply mainly to the German army. He is obviously conflicted about his feelings toward German culture and German civilians. He does not, as Cooperman claims, cast away or abandon his German-American friends in pursuit of his “idealization” (133); indeed, Ernest, and the Yoeders and Mrs.Voigt remain on friendly terms with him right up until his departure for France. Trout writes:

In depicting the paranoid hostility directed against immigrants like Gus Yoeder or Mrs.Voigt, Cather exposes the dark side of the crusader mentality that her imagery so often celebrates. Written during the Red Scare, *One of Ours* unsparringy reveals a potential at home for the brutality and atavism that Claude perceives within his demonized enemy. (60)

Read in this light, the novel is a cautionary tale, highlighting the dangers of the “crusader mentality” in addition to the currents of intolerance and xenophobia that accompany them at the homefront. *One of Ours*, Trout asserts, far from reviving the patriotic rhetoric of propaganda posters from 1914-1918, “emerges as an expansive examination of then-recent history and the cultural myths used by Americans to understand it” (10). In fact, he holds, the “divergent, even diametrically opposed readings that *One of Ours* has accommodated during its critical history suggest that the novel is far more modernist than most critics have assumed,” and it “neither glorifies American participation in the Great War nor consistently satirizes martial idealism” (7).
Rohrkemper praises the novel’s modernist style through its use of deliberate juxtapositions. While he agrees with Cooperman that Cather, “a full generation older” than the Lost Generation authors of World War I, “is a writer whose work has roots in the regional realism of the late nineteenth century,” he adds that she is a writer who prefigures “the emerging modernism of the twentieth” (21). The aforementioned juxtapositions within Claude’s own ideology – defending his German-American friends while lambasting the German character in general – offer one such example.

“Juxtaposed against the strafed European countryside,” Rohrkemper adds, “was a remembered land of one’s youth, an idyllic America, an early twentieth-century manifestation of the New Eden” (20). With this Edenic imagery in mind, Rohrkemper goes on to define what could be conceived of as the novel’s protest agenda:

Perhaps for Cather the war clarifies the falseness of the Edenic myth. Thus, she uses what seems to be the sharp contrast between Claude’s mother’s Midwest and the France of Catholicism, Voltaire, and, of course, the war, to suggest that they are, in fact, not on different planes of experience, but part of a continuous and fluid whole. . . . The map of France on Mrs.Wheeler’s wall does not chart some radical difference between one place and another; rather it maps the continuity of human aspirations and suffering, our hopes and frustrations, whether we sit at night watching an artillery barrage in France or a first snow dusting the Nebraska farmland. (23)

To Rohrkemper, this use of juxtapositions to demonstrate similarity or suggest parallels aligns One of Ours with the work of Dos Passos and Hemingway, especially as demonstrated by the former’s use of contrasts in style, narration, and imagery in the U.S.A. trilogy, and with Hemingway’s employment of “radically different images in order to suggest their continuity” (26, 28). Like Trout, Rohrkemper insists that One of Ours shares, albeit more subtly perhaps, the anti-war, anti-propaganda ideology of Cummings, Boyd, Dos Passos, and the other World War I protest authors.

Trout’s analysis, published in 2002, notes the harsh reception and review of Cather’s novel, which lasted well into the 1960s, with Cooperman’s assessment “the most damning of all” (4). Hemingway, H.L. Mencken, and Sinclair Lewis all blasted the novel in the 1920s as “distorted” and “fanciful” (qtd. in Trout 3-4). Hemingway, in fact, went so far in his 1923 novel
The Torrents of Spring to attack Cather by name, sneering at “this American Willa Cather who wrote a book . . . where all the last part . . . was taken from the action of Birth of a Nation” (qtd. in Cooperman, World War I 136). The scholarly treatments of One of Ours, though, began to shift in the 1970s toward a more favorable reading of its author’s ideological stance. David Stock, for example, wrote in 1975 that the novel “represented a sophisticated, even cunning piece of ‘satire’ aimed at both the shallow values of contemporary Middle America and the militaristic delusions of its protagonist” (qtd. in Trout 4).

Feminist readings of the novel in the 1980s asserted that Claude’s naivete was not Cather’s (Trout 5). The irony of the ending, in which Claude dies a “heroic” death while going over the top, has also been emphasized in more recent criticism; such readings “hinge on the assumption that throughout the text Claude serves as an ironic center of consciousness,” evincing “misjudgments and romantic excesses” (5). There is, certainly, a discrepancy between Claude’s fervor and the more sober-minded assessments of the war by his parents and some of his friends – not to mention the resigned opinion of his father-in-law that most people prefer to live in a “world of lies.” Claude’s own mother wants no part of the glory or heroism associated with death in battle, and the novel’s close points directly to the disillusion felt by so many returning veterans (and authors). This is, of course, the disillusion that Claude himself was denied due to his death in combat, although his mother speculates on what “might have been”:

When she can see nothing that has come of it all but evil, she reads Claude’s letters over again and reassures herself; for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. Never a doubt stained his bright faith. . . . She would have dreaded the awakening, – she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. One by one the heroes of that war, the men of dazzling soldiership, leave prematurely the world they have come back to. . . . When Claude’s mother hears of these things, she shudders and presses her hands tight over her breast, as if she had him there. She feels as if God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end. For as she reads, she thinks those [others] were all so like him; they were the ones who had hoped extravagantly, – who in order to do what they did had to hope extravagantly, and to believe passionately. And they found they had hoped and believed too much. (OOO 370)
Claude has been “saved” from despair and disillusion, to his mother’s mind. Not so very much separates Claude Wheeler from the “numb” William Hicks of *Through the Wheat*. Only death, it can be surmised, has “saved” him from the dissipation and numbing of those who survived the actual battles. To Trout, overall, the novel “simultaneously conveys the attractions of military conflict (especially for a now frontierless America) and its dehumanizing barbarity” (7). The era in which *One of Ours* was written, as with all the novels previously discussed, was a period of cultural ambivalence, “as the nation vacillated between celebrating its part in the Great War and retreating into a new era of isolationism” (5). The nation’s “frenetic effort to memorialize the Great War,” Trout indicates, “perhaps derived less from confidence and conviction than from bewilderment and doubt” (17-8). That bewilderment, of course, deepened into a shared sense of pessimism by the end of the 1920s; it was, moreover, the pessimism already felt early in the decade by the authors writing the war novels. Echoing the themes explored by Frederick Jackson Turner and Richard Slotkin, Trout emphasizes that *One of Ours* reverberates with American themes at the time [of] the closing of the West (and the corresponding search for a new frontier) and the formulation, amid the dawn of the mass-media age, of a truly monolithic national culture. . . . Claude’s story, we never forget, is an American story redolent of American martial mythology . . . and the commemorative iconography that adorned unit histories and war memorials from the 1920s. (147)

If Cather was unable to transcend the “stigma” attached to the old generation of writers by the new young authors emerging from the war, Edith Wharton merely reinforced that distaste with the publication of *A Son at the Front* in 1923. Reiterating Hager’s assertion that, in general, the bulk of the novels produced about the war were fairly shallow, if not propagandistic, it is notable that Wharton’s novel is one of the last of this type produced by an author of literary note. Unlike *One of Ours*, *A Son at the Front* has not “survived” relative to Wharton’s other work, nor has it been much remarked upon in critical or scholarly circles, except to point out its faults and biases. Wharton could still, in 1923, “repeat every political and military cliché” (Cooperman, *World War I* 97) in her story of a famous American painter residing in France who eventually comes to accept and praise his son’s enlistment in the French army. John Campton, were it not for his son’s war-fervor and military service, would be able “to think of the war as he might have thought of any other war: objectively, intellectually, dispassionately, as of history in the making”
(Son 113). As a portrait of – and criticism of – neutrality, Wharton suggests through Campton’s shift in attitude that the American government was tardy in coming to the aid of an embattled continent:

It was not that [Campton] had any doubt as to the rights and wrongs of the case. The painfully preserved equilibrium of the neutrals made a pitiful show now that the monstrous facts of the first weeks were known: Germany’s diplomatic perfidy, her savagery in the field, her premeditated and systematized terrorizing of the civil populations. Nothing could efface what had been done in Belgium and Luxembourg, the burning of Louvain, the bombardment of Rheims. (113)

The novel closes with the announcement of American entry into the war, the death of Campton’s son in battle, and the artist’s subsequent work on a monument honoring his dead son. Campton “evolves” from a dispassionate, indifferent onlooker into a passionate supporter of the Allied cause, spending most of his spare time with fresh American recruits arriving in France and following news of the war. He has not fallen into disillusion or doubt, as Mrs.Wheeler does following her son’s death, but emerges from his trauma with a renewed sense of the justice and necessity of the conflict. The “evil,” the “desolating disappointment,” the “suffering” that Mrs.Wheeler perceives in the war effort, and the lies that Claude’s father-in-law believes people prefer to believe in, are attributed by Wharton solely to the German forces. They are never explored as inherent in the war itself. A Son at the Front represents, in many ways, the “last gasp” of the old literary order.

The “lies,” of course, “were not washed away immediately with the signing of the armistice” (Cooperman, World War I 97) and, as Trout indicates, the nation was still deeply divided over how to remember or memorialize the war. Hence, a vehemently anti-war work such as Through the Wheat could be published in the same year as A Son at the Front and neither would receive any special notice or comment (in a political sense). Authors might either “earnestly wave the banner of the Lusitania,” as Wharton did (Cooperman, World War I 28), or portray the war as a numbing, demoralizing force that victimized Allies and Central Powers alike. Within a very few years, though, the pendulum of public sentiment would swing sharply to the side of Dos Passos, Cummings, and Boyd, and the literature itself both facilitated and reflected this swing.
CHAPTER 4

“NOT PATRIOTS”: STALLINGS, HEMINGWAY, FAULKNER

The following passage ends Laurence Stallings’ 1924 novel *Plumes*:

Dickie was puzzled by the marble hole in the ground.
“What’s that for?” he asked Gary.
“A grave.”
“What’s a grave for?”
“For a soldier to sleep in.”
“Why doesn’t he sleep in his bed?” Dickie was puzzled.
“General won’t let him,” Gary said solemnly.
Dickie scrutinized the dark face above him to make sure there was no insincerity in the answer. He studied the marble receptacle.
“What’s a general?” he said finally.
“A man,” said Gary, “who makes little boys sleep in graves.”
Dickie was frightened. His lip trembled. He looked about to where Richard and Esme sat above him. “I’ll ask Esme,” he said, “not to let a general get me.”
(*Plumes* 347-8)

Richard Plume, the wounded and disaffected protagonist of *Plumes*, learns as chilling a lesson during the book’s final scene at Arlington National Cemetery as his young son Dickie does. Gary, Richard’s co-worker and ideological sympathizer, has also been wounded in the war. A good portion of the novel is devoted to criticisms of the government’s treatment of wounded veterans, in addition to general anti-war philosophies; Stallings’ book represents one of the strongest examples of Cooperman’s thesis that the post-1923 war novel broadened and intensified the anti-militarist themes present in the earlier works of the decade. The character of Gary, in particular, embodies some of the most virulent hatred of militarism found in literature. According to Hager, he is “the spokesman of some of the bitterest and most devastating cursing
of war imaginable,” symbolizing “a single-minded indictment of war and of the mistaken patriotism that gives it unthinking support” (169).

The isolationist stance that America was adopting throughout the 1920s stood at odds with world events occurring in that decade. Around the time that Plumes was published, in particular, incidents that shook the international community’s confidence in the post-war peace broke out in many corners of the world. The League of Nations, which the United States wanted no part of, drew up the Treaty of Mutual Assistance in September 1923, a document that provided for the use of sanctions by member nations against “aggressor” states (Hindmarsh 116). America, uninvolved in the League, was not party to these treaties (although the later Neutrality Acts would attempt to forbid trade with or travel to any nation involved in a conflict with another country). Italy’s attacks on Corfu in 1923, the Greco-Bulgarian “incidents” of 1925, and the conflict between Bolivia and Paraguay, interestingly, did not meet the League’s definition of “war” and thus were not sanctionable by the League (127-8). The League itself was reluctant to use sanctions, apparently, or even the threat of sanctions; and, according to Hindmarsh, was almost completely toothless given the total lack of U.S. interest in international policing (129). The League’s Secretary General, Sir James Eric Drummond, reported in 1927 that U.S. non-involvement in possible sanctions or blockades greatly diminished their efficacy (163). Also, in 1927, the United States participated, with Britain and Japan, in the Geneva Disarmament Conference, designed to further the process of reducing naval forces started at the 1921 Washington Conference; though deemed a “failure” due to the growing rivalries between European naval powers (France and Italy declined to attend), the effort attests to further American efforts toward peace and reconciliation (Rhodes 68-9).

By the early 1930s, Hindmarsh reports, the “virtual conquest of some 200,000 square miles of foreign territory” by various aggressor nations had occurred, “but there [had] been no interruption of technical peace” (3). American refusal to join the League of Nations resulted in increasing pressure on Washington by the peace movement (Curti 304). Ironically, the preservation of American peace was the ultimate result of the isolationist policies pursued by the United States, despite the perceptions of some elements in the peace movement that the nation’s foreign policy merely looked the other way while conflicts raged unchecked around the world. The Washington Disarmament Conference in 1921, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1927, and the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s all could be interpreted as efforts made toward the maintenance of
peace and normalcy for America, despite the ideological differences among them (most notably visible in the idealistic nature of the first two events, and the calculated pragmatism of the Neutrality Acts). What fueled the acts of legislation directly aimed at keeping America out of armed conflict was the growing belief that World War I had been a colossal, absurd tragedy and that it had been a mistake for America to enter the war. And again, in the mid-1920s, the novelists and artistic intelligentsia were the most visible elements in the vanguard of anti-war sentiment.

Discussing these developments in “peace consciousness” is important in relation to *Plumes*, as it incorporates and comments on political and military events of the early 1920s, but they also help to highlight the emergence and popularity of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, two authors vastly more renowned and remembered than Stallings. Hemingway’s early work, espousing an existential stance of cynicism and withdrawal, is an excellent mirror of the neutrality and isolationism that would dominate American foreign relations until 1941. Jake Barnes of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and Nick Adams of *In Our Time* (1925) are prototype isolationists in many ways; like Richard Plume, they are also wounded veterans. Faulkner’s Donald Mahon, the pilot whose war injuries have severely disfigured him, makes *Soldiers’ Pay* (1926) an equally compelling testimony. All four characters feel, to some degree, alienated from and rejected by the societies they went to war for. That Jake Barnes’ service was not with the AEF is a relatively minor point, especially to a readership already conditioned by narratives of disgust, disillusion, and governmental betrayal. In addition, a number of Jake’s friends are American, nearly all have suffered some degree of loss associated with the war, and his expatriation can be read in terms of a voluntary dissociation from American policy. All four of these books explore issues that would, by 1932, boil over into outright protest in the form of the Bonus Army’s march on the Capitol in Washington.

The life and early career of Laurence Stallings provides one of the most pointed autobiographical “lenses” through which to view his literary output (perhaps more so than even Hemingway), and, like the life story of Thomas Boyd, shows that authors of fiction are not necessarily static actors in the peace movement. As previously mentioned, even a seemingly apolitical writer such as Hemingway is a participant in the furthering of peace consciousness, by Davis’ definition; certainly by 1929, the year *A Farewell to Arms* appeared, Hemingway’s reputation as the de facto spokesman for the Lost Generation associated his work in the public
mind with the forces of pacifism and anti-militarism. But Stallings occupies a position much like that of Dos Passos or Boyd, on the opposite end of the political spectrum from Hemingway or Faulkner. The war would always be Stallings’ creative fuel, both in fiction and in endeavors such as the pictoral history *The First World War*, published in 1933, and his ideological beliefs were, in the case of that work and of *Plumes*, readily apparent even to a casual reader. The characters of *Plumes*, ironically, lambaste the U.S. government for not joining the League of Nations, even though American non-involvement with the League technically went a long way toward assuring American non-participation in future foreign wars.

In the preface to her biography of Stallings, Joan Brittain notes that he, like so many other veteran World War I writers, entered the conflict “as a naïve youth . . . ill-equipped for the bloody confrontation.” Although a rising literary star in the 1920s and 1930s, praised by Malcolm Cowley and Archibald MacLeish, and a collaborator with Ernest Hemingway, Stallings is a relatively obscure figure in literature; Brittain comments that even *Plumes*, his most distinctive work, is not well-known to students of American literature. Part of this, she states, is “because Stallings never allowed *Plumes* to be reprinted after 1925 and we wonder if a writer ever tried more deliberately to kill a book of such obvious merit” (Preface). Brittain likens Stallings’ career-long fascination with and hatred of war to “Ahab’s pursuit of the white whale” (17). Given the bitterness, disdain, and frustration of the various characters of *Plumes* toward war, the government, and specific political figures, the novel’s roman a clef qualities perhaps mirror Stallings’ own ambivalence to his feelings on the war. Richard Plume, the story’s protagonist, reflects Stallings’ own combat and post-war experiences in a number of overt ways.

Like Plume, Stallings came from a “militaristic” community in Georgia that celebrated its Civil War heritage and heroes (Brittain 18-9). After joining the Marine Reserves in May of 1917, he reached France in time to participate in the fighting at Chateau-Thierry in June of 1918, where he was wounded in the right leg on the last day of the battle at Belleau Wood (20). Returning home to recover from his injuries, Stallings suffered “a bad fall on ice” and the wounded leg was amputated in 1922; he began writing *Plumes* at this time, recuperating at Walter Reed Hospital (21).

The rest of Stallings’ life was spent in the pursuit of answers to the causes of and motives for war, often, as with *Plumes*, couched in the context of his own war experience. He eventually settled in New York and began writing a column for the New York *World*; by the early 1930s he was more deeply involved artistically and intellectually with the Lost Generation community,
who shared many of his bitter views toward the war. He met Ernest Hemingway in 1932 and wrote the screenplay for the film version of *Farewell to Arms* (Brittain 24). Like Hemingway, Brittain states, Stallings “responded in the novel form with disillusionment about the war, just as each, in his own way, had to cope with a war-created trauma in re-adjusting to life” (27). The parallels with Hemingway’s early work are apparent in comparisons between Richard Plume and, for instance, Jake Barnes or Nick Adams, even if the latter two do not embrace political activism the way Plume eventually does.

Stallings’ pictorial history of the conflict, *The First World War*, appeared in 1933 to considerable acclaim. Walter Lippmann believed it had “the effect of a great work of art” (qtd. in Brittain 81). The book’s five-part structure, like the five major chapters of *Plumes*, reflected Stallings’ own view of the war’s progress. He would later write:

> We entered the tragedy at the beginning of the fifth act, like off-stage soldiers in a play; and we entered singing. Woodrow Wilson had given us our simple theme: Kaiser Bill was a villain; and we marched to make the world safe for democracy.

(qtd. in Brittain 81)

Interestingly, *The First World War* contains an “epilogue” of post-war events which include a photograph of a 1920 execution of those convicted of treason, four photographs of “leaders of 1933” – Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Kemal Pasha, and two double page collages including statistics on the military forces of various world nations. News headlines such as “Japan Wrecks League Efforts,” “Roosevelt Warns World to End War, Cut Arms,” “Japanese Buy $8,000,000 Arms,” and photographs of troops drilling in Japan and Germany are also featured. The epilogue, in short, depicts “the preparation for World War II” (Brittain 81). It is not surprising, given Stallings’ ideological stance, so closely aligned with that of Boyd and Dos Passos, that frustration and bitterness were detected in the pictorial history by some critics. Cowley, for instance, cited himself, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and others as those who “fought in vain” (and that it was time to openly admit it) and felt the book wasn’t truthful enough (qtd. in Brittain 84). The explicit photographs of dead soldiers, of war refugees, of wounded, of cemeteries, of what Stallings considered all aspects of the war experience, were too explicitly political for some. Novelist Mary Lee wrote, in a review of the book for the *Saturday Review*, that she felt the book was prejudiced, and that “the men who arranged these pictures were
disillusioned men. The captions explain the steps in their disillusionment and not the pictures” (qtd. in Brittain 83).

The debate that arose in the literary and intellectual community over *The First World War* was much like the earlier controversy over *Three Soldiers*, with the exception that voices such as Mary Lee’s were in the overwhelming minority. By 1933, the authors who had been radicals and unknowns – Cowley, Hemingway, and MacLeish among them – had established themselves as de facto leaders of the literary world, and their views on the war were becoming dominant in American society. The case of Stallings’ pictorial history, a personally significant, if still historically obscure, landmark in his career, indicates the degree to which narrative can shape the goals and direction of a social movement. The fact that it elicited intellectual debate at a time when such issues as those detailed in the epilogue’s “headlines” were being treated with indifference and non-involvement by U.S. policy makers indicates the degree to which the Lost Generation war-ideology had “captured” American culture. Thus, like the other works under discussion, *The First World War* not only framed the issues at hand for the peace movement and provided a visual and graphic forum to broadcast them to the public, but it also helped write the narrative history of the period for future generations (at least where anti-war sentiment is concerned).

*Plumes*, though, displays in a quite explicit fashion reminiscent of *Three Soldiers* or *The Enormous Room* the blossoming of disillusion and contempt. Richard Plume and Stallings share enough qualities and biographical similarities that the novel can almost be read as an evolution of the author’s own voyage from enthusiasm to despair. In this respect, it “emplots” the history of the doughboy as many other Lost Generation narratives did, locating and recording the despondency and alienation of returning (and wounded) veterans in a specific chronological frame. An examination of the novel itself reveals that it also lays out a clear agenda for the wounded veteran and attempts repeatedly to evoke sympathy from – even sicken – the reader with descriptions of Richard’s wound, the criminality of the American war effort, and the corruption of ideas such as “patriotism” in the name of greed and opportunism.

The wound is of special interest here. As Brittain writes, it is “the most predominant symbol of the work,” and this symbolism appears not just in the form of a wounded soldier or the metaphorical “wounded nation,” but in the wounds “inherent in . . . participation in life” (41). Richard Plume is descended from a long line of veterans whose service in the American military
defines the family’s heritage. Richard, though, through his own experience and through his interaction with other veterans, eventually comes to see his pride in that heritage as foolish at best and dangerous at worst. There is also more than a suggestion in the narrative that “this” war is fundamentally different from the earlier American wars and negates any concept of glory, honor, or sacrifice. This last point, of course, finds a great deal of currency in the novels of every author under discussion.

To begin to tackle the anti-war themes present in *Plumes* is an enormous task, given the amount of protest material appearing on nearly every page. Richard Plume, the protagonist whose wound so closely resembles Stallings’ own, is a prototype of the wounded, disaffected soldier that would appear in Hemingway and Faulkner, and would be a lightning rod for anti-militarist sentiment in American public life no less than in fiction. The sense of “personal violation” that Cooperman notes in narratives of returning soldiers, but particularly in *Plumes* and *Soldiers’ Pay* (*World War I* 72, 73), takes multiple forms in Stallings’ novel. Most compellingly, the novel suggests that the war has destroyed any hope for a happy family life for Richard, his wife Esme, and their infant son. Or, rather, it is Richard’s misguided decision to go to war, out of a sense of loyalty to an outdated familial heritage, that dooms them. Richard symbolizes the militant enthusiasm and patriotic fervor of the nation (specifically of the youths whose combat experiences soured them on military adventurism), and his subsequent disillusion and heartbreak are equally representative of American public sentiment following the war. Characters such as the aforementioned Gary, a repository of so much anti-government, anti-military bile, aid Richard in this general progression toward existential despair. For himself, Richard wants nothing; he is more than willing to suffer alone. The novel makes its real ideological impact when examining the effects Richard’s disaffection, engendered by a duplicitous government (embodied by Woodrow Wilson), has on the fortunes of his young family and how Esme, in particular, sacrifices the better part of her youth and ability to cater to Richard’s growing sense of physical and political helplessness.

In fact, although the family’s perception of Richard is that of a “helpless victim of forces beyond his control” (*Plumes* 87), implicating the government and the army, Esme also implicitly holds Richard responsible for their misfortune, as he made the decision to go to war, and furthermore, refuses to return to their hometown. Richard’s refusal is based on his strident conviction that to go home a crippled veteran and tell war-stories by the hearth (as the town
expects him to do), would be a perpetuation of the myths of heroism that led to his own failures. His recuperation at Walter Reed, his acceptance of a low-paying laboratory job that subjects his leg to constant pain and discomfort, and his adamant denial of the easy way out that a professorship and status as a “wounded hero” at home would bring, all seem part of an agenda of self-torture and abnegation. Gary only helps fuel these self-destructive thoughts with anti-government vitriol and assurances that Richard’s sacrifice has, in fact, been in vain.

Several key passages highlight the novel’s ideological essence and its overt attempts to evoke a strong reaction from the reader, likely one of an explicitly political nature. Some of the book’s more metaphoric anti-war statements (such as repeated scenes of children picking up spent shell casings) poignantly deliver startling doses of open propaganda. Gary and Richard (and, for the most part, Esme and Richard’s son Dickie) are cast as actors in the peace movement not only as it is represented in the novel, but allegorically for all disaffected veterans and their families in 1920s America. Given this agenda, Stallings here manifests an open intention to “emplot” the work firmly in the continuum of anti-war thought that, as Cooperman and others hold, was a fairly recent development in American literature in the early twentieth century (if not in intellectual thought in general). *Plumes* openly advocates the idea that the war is the ruination of the family, is antithetical to love and to parenthood, and that Richard’s and Esme’s lives have been devastated by Richard’s decision to go to war (and explicitly the government’s decision to enter the war).

The façade of nationalist enthusiasm is set up by the scene in which Richard departs his hometown. The motifs of militant Christianity, a sense of family duty to fight, and the “romance” of going away to war are prevalent:

> They were singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” and Richard was almost running as he moved up the aisle. [Esme] arose to join her husband. He was such a child. He was so thin. She loved him.
> Richard was going to war. His colleagues wished that they might troop down to the little yellow station, but they were kindly men, and hated a woman’s tears. A wife, they knew, wept when a soldier left for the wars. (54)

The first “chinks” in the armor of this façade, though, appear briefly afterward as Richard is actually stepping on the train:
Each wanted to shout things they would not say. “What an ass I’m making of myself!” Richard wanted to shout . . . . “And what a brute I am to leave you pregnant with a prospect of fifty-seven dollars a month if I’m killed. And what a fool I am to risk my own precious neck.” Esme seized his arm. Her heart was begging her mind to get out of the way. “You left me,” his heart was pumping, “at the end of six months of perfect happiness to rush off to shoot at people who have never harmed us. You get the glory. I bear the child. If you leave me here by myself you’ve lost something, and you can never bring it back.” (57)

These dread thoughts are realized after the war, when Richard’s fall on an icy sidewalk results in the amputation of his injured leg:

He flung her away from him. “Get away. Get away. Don’t you understand the sight of you suffering again for me. . . . I can’t bear for you to grieve again. I’ve broken that knee joint. Job’s gone. Hope’s gone. I’m gone. You were a fool ever to marry a man imbecile enough to rush to war.” (236)

Soon after follows a reverie while Richard is recovering at Walter Reed, in which he re-experiences the battle where his leg was wounded. Lying amid his dead and dying unit, in a shell-torn wasteland, he makes his explicit realizations of folly, and repudiates all the wartime propaganda he had been initially soaked in:

Who thought shock so terrific? That damned musketry school at Gondrecourt where they said a rifle strikes a two-ton blow. Why, by God, this was no play-school to estimate two-ton blows. This was it. This was It, and IT had got him. Who cared about Belgium and the Lusitania? To hell with the Lusitania. Richard Plume, center of the universe, life stolen from him. Stolen, by God, by all those scoundrels who were not there upon the ground with him. The God-damned scoundrelly orators were not there – were not with him. They’d piece-meal his stolen life among them. The low, calculating scoundrels. . . . Esme. He had given her up, and back home thousands of loose-lipped seriously drooling sons-of-bitches were talking pompously of supreme sacrifices made pompously. What a fool to have given her up for them. He had known it a year ago on the transport in the back of his mind. Others had tossed their lives away. Hadn’t given their hearts
up. Oh, the millions of them back home who were not there on the ground with eight or ten in their legs from a point-blank burst of a light Maxim. (243-4)

The ones “back home” included those authors who were soon artistically discredited in terms of their war representations – among them Edith Wharton and Dorothy Canfield Fisher. It is possible to view _Plumes_, though now obscure and largely unremembered, as a direct call to action, if not activism, against those “scoundrels” that Stallings himself (and Thomas Boyd, whom Stallings greatly admired) held responsible for the war. The novel’s latter scenes, involving Plume in a great deal of activism to secure veterans’ pensions and benefits, starkly portray an uncaring bureaucracy disconnected from the everyday sufferings of men like Plume and their families.

Richard first becomes associated with the veterans’ movement through Meyer, a former “guest” of Mitchell Palmer’s during the war for his anti-interventionist activism (273). Meyer publishes, out of his house on Vermont Avenue, a magazine entitled _The Wounded Doughboy_, which advocates on every level benefits and pensions for veterans. Richard’s own appraisal of the magazine’s content (and the opinions of its staff), is initially positive and mirrors his own thoughts; for instance, that “[c]riticism of the Veterans’ Bureau usually ended in a tumbling tower of profanity” (291). Further, in describing the magazine’s offices and their location, in close proximity to the Veterans’ Bureau:

This high, wide building, alone in Washington sheer of architectural gimcracks, looked from broad, factory windows across LaFayette Square to the White House. All at the _Wounded Doughboy_ held grievances against the men behind these windows, which they doubtless would hold until death. Guests came and went from Meyer’s doss-house, gaining Washington by every exigency of travel, infuriated by some district board of veteran survey and determined, with the American’s natural antagonism to bureaucracy, upon settling matters personally, even if a fight was necessary. (291)

Although many of the veterans rooming at Meyer’s house believe him to be “the squarest guy [they] ever met” (292), Gary’s opinions of Meyer’s crusading and altruism clash with Richard’s:

Gary, who came rarely now, said that Meyer was crazy.

“Not so,” said Richard.
“Oh, yes he is. Any man who continually risks his happiness for another is mad. One can succumb once to the crusading idea but twice is insanity. The only man worth while is the one who withdraws altogether from the stupidity and ignorance about him.” (307-8)

Much like the earlier portions, this final section of the book enters into a discourse about the post-war situation in America and suggests, if nothing else, the subtle presence of disharmony and anti-militarism among veterans. Ernest Hemingway’s story “Soldier’s Home” explores this idea as well, suggesting the difficulties that forced re-assimilation into civilian society has on the soldier – especially, if as in the case of Hemingway’s protagonist Harold Krebs, the influence of family encourages him to forget the war as a fundamental and permanently life-altering event, and to view it instead as a bygone phase of life. The difference in Stallings’ work, and the one which makes it a strident narrative of “victim advocacy,” is that with Gary’s and Richard’s debates about the value of sacrifice, the novel foreshadows – perhaps even anticipates – the isolationist philosophy that would gain a stranglehold on American foreign policy by the 1930s. The concept of “succumbing to the crusading idea” is starkly represented by the negative view of American entry into World War I that predominated by the end of the 1920s. The Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, after all, reflected the very widespread belief that “U.S. participation in World War I had been a mistake and that in particular the ‘Merchants of Death’ – munitions manufacturers – had influenced the decision for war” (Valone 71). A 1936 Gallup Poll merely confirmed this fact in the opinions of its representative sample – a majority of the respondents felt that American entry into the war had been unwarranted and erroneous (Moss 21). Americans, one can conclude, had responded to the “depiction of the war as a pointless sacrifice” (22).

The preceding information can offer one reason why Plumes is such an obscure novel today, and to some degree it has much in common with the short-lived popularity of books like The Marne or A Son at the Front. To a reader in the post-World War II decades, the book is anachronistic; it addresses itself very specifically to a certain period and a certain mindset, and explores issues that were mooted by the aftermath of World War II. In its vigorous assertion of a pro-veteran, anti-militarist ideology, it may have helped set the agenda for its times, but failed to find intellectual currency outside of the interwar years. This, however, to Davis and Fine, would indicate exactly why a book like Plumes is such a strong representative element of the time’s
protest culture and why it tells the “story” of anti-war sentiment in the 1920s and 1930s for future readers. If, as Fine writes, narratives can encourage a shared understanding of the world through identification with the events and characters depicted in the narrative (236), then Stallings’ novel indeed serves almost as a call to arms for dispossessed, wounded veterans “forgotten” by the government they went to war to defend. The explicit references in *Plumes* to, among other events, the Washington Disarmament Conference and the inaugural address of Warren G. Harding, and the bitterness provoked by each in the minds and hearts of the veteran characters, solidify it as such. Outside of the very narrow post-war context in which these events are depicted, any ideological meaning is irrelevant.

The work of Ernest Hemingway, in contrast, addresses itself only tangentially to the politics that Stallings so deeply immerses his characters in. While the war does overshadow the lives of his protagonists in his earliest works – the story collection *In Our Time* and the novel *The Sun Also Rises* – the imagery of battle is only glimpsed and political fallout from the war, or reasons for American intervention, are not discussed not. This is especially the case in *The Sun Also Rises*; even in the stories of *In Our Time*, combat is depicted only fleetingly, in quick sketches that separate the longer stories, and the fallout from the conflict is almost wholly internalized by the characters. Beyond an existential numbing (that does, however implicitly, suggest larger cultural themes), Hemingway’s characters proceed through their post-war lives bereft of few tangible effects from the war that they discuss at length. Certainly no blame is placed on specific government agencies for any casualties, wounds, or disillusionment suffered in the conflict. The two books, then, rather than functioning as narratives intent on mobilizing public sentiment, act more as records of collective memory, and script the narrative history of the 1920s in a way that remembers the events of the war and its aftermath through subtle allusion and inference.

Hemingway looms prominently as a public figure in the collective memory of the 1920s as much as his work or any of his more famous protagonists; certainly in this regard he is the most culturally significant of the authors under discussion. His storied life apart from his work has attained a legendary status, and one of the more notable aspects of his very public persona has been his virtually apolitical stance toward war. Naturally, this is not to say (or assume) a total lack of concern or involvement in these issues after World War I; he, along with Dos Passos, British novelist George Orwell, and others, were deeply committed both artistically and
journalistically to the Spanish Civil War, and Hemingway covered the latter days of World War II, including the liberation of Paris, as a journalist. Sean Hemingway notes, Ernest Hemingway believed “danger, courage, physical exertion, suffering, uncertainty, chance, friction, resolution, staunchness and firmness” to be the “salient elements of war” (xix), and notes Hemingway’s accomplishments as an observer and reporter “of the physical and psychological impact of war and its aftermath” (xx). This is in almost direct opposition to the work of a Laurence Stallings, for instance, who while portraying physical and psychological stress as inevitable outcomes of war, added political bitterness as another seemingly inevitable result. Hemingway, on the other hand, avoided placing blame for the physical or psychic hardships on any political entity or government. The belief that “courage,” “staunchness,” or “firmness” were “salient elements of war” might very well have been met with hostility by Thomas Boyd, Laurence Stallings, E.E. Cummings, or John Dos Passos. The impact of the war, as portrayed by Hemingway, is very self-limiting and does not extend beyond the fractured lives of the individuals involved. However, most interestingly, this in itself constitutes a political statement in that Hemingway’s oft-celebrated idea of nada (which marks the lives of both Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises and Frederick Henry of the later A Farewell to Arms) in fact expresses the kind of withdrawal that the United States would collectively embrace in the two decades following World War I.

Hemingway’s initial introduction to war followed the familiar path of most of the authors who were his contemporaries. Eager in 1917 to get overseas to see the action in Europe, he decided the “Home Guard” unit of the 7th Missouri Infantry was “not enough” and eventually joined up, in May of 1918, with a Red Cross ambulance unit assigned to the Italian front (S.Hemingway xx). He had been at the front, stationed at Schio, scarcely three weeks after arriving on 24 June when he was wounded by shrapnel from an exploding artillery shell. Immediately following his injury, he was credited with carrying a wounded Italian soldier to safety and would later be awarded the Silver Medal of Valor and the Croce di Guerra (xx-xxi). He recovered from his wounds in an Italian hospital, and when he returned home to Oak Park, IL, in 1919, he was “heralded as a hero and the first American to be wounded at the Italian front” (xxi).

The story of Hemingway’s subsequent expatriation and exploits are well-documented in American history and criticism, and formed the bases for much of his fictional and non-fictional work. For the purposes of this study, however, it is his wartime experience and writing that
merits the bulk of the attention. Of course, the subject of expatriation is central to *The Sun Also Rises*, and one way of understanding the postwar intellectual temperament is to examine the trend of flight to Europe, so popular among the disfranchised artists and writers. *In Our Time*, which saw an initial (small) European printing in 1924 (as *in our time* and containing solely the inter-chapter vignettes) and was released in the United States the following year, only hints at escape or expatriation. Indeed, as a social record of “collective memory” of the war and of the 1920s, it makes its impact largely through apolitical, de-nationalized ideas of disenchantment and ennui. Neither Nick Adams, protagonist of many of the stories, nor Harold Krebs of “Soldier’s Home,” is much of an artist or a social activist. But their “protests,” while not explicitly couched in the ideology of national disavowal or betrayal (as with Dos Passos’ Andrews and Howe, Stallings’ Plume, Boyd’s Hicks, or Cummings’ eponymous narrator), imply a breaking away from the militarist philosophies that so many Americans also reacted against in the perceived disaster that World War I was to the nation. Jeffrey Walsh writes that, for Hemingway, “[W]ar as a fictional pattern has considerable symbolic potential to represent social reality. . . . He wanted the war made new in fiction so that it was more authentically represented, defamiliarized and shorn of its heroic virtue and glamour” (“Emblematical” 45).

A common theme among the authors under discussion is their quite explicit literary protest against older forms of narrative representation. For Hemingway this involves a primarily individual focus. The “disruptive social character of war” and its “violation of individual sensibility,” noted by Walsh (“Emblematical” 47), locate the impact of the conflict primarily in the haunted lives of Nick and Krebs, not in larger political structures or the course of world events. As Walsh states, “Hemingway’s war [stories] . . . are devoid of the resistance subculture of soldiers in a community of shared interests” (57).

The shorter vignettes, too, offer surprisingly brief and fragmented pictures of the war. From an artistic standpoint, they render the conflict itself as disjointed, disorganized, frantic, and rhetorically hollow. In fact, to Walsh, the omissions of significant detail go a far way in establishing the work’s overall vision of the war:

*The soldiers’ movements are presented to the reader as though frozen, static, in atemporal stasis. . . . Death in war is both defamiliarized and removed from any propensity to affirm the martial or epic strain of human conduct. What the passages achieve is to break decisively with tightly-knit illusionism; the reader, on*
the other hand, is offered fugitive, unco-ordinated impressions of random machine warfare. (“Emblematical” 47)

Rohrkemper adds that Hemingway, like Cather, juxtaposes the radically different landscapes of the Midwest with the war-torn landscape of Europe to emphasize this randomness and fragmentation (28). While Rohrkemper notes that this occurs largely in the continuous reading of the longer stories (and especially the earlier ones in the book, which depict the Midwest, for Nick, as an “Edenic” landscape) and the vignettes collectively, there are sudden and noticeable juxtapositions within the vignettes themselves.

Several, in particular, are of especial interest here. “Chapter VI” depicts Nick and his fellow troops (presumably Italian, based on names and the Austrian enemy) in a town ravaged by battle. It opens in media res: “Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street. Both legs stuck out awkwardly. He had been hit in the spine” (IOT 63). The imagery that follows, detailing Nick’s perception of the rubble, ruined houses, furniture, and corpses dotting the street, is likewise unadorned by much narrative comment: “Two Austrian dead lay in the rubble in the shade of the house. Up the street were other dead” (63). The closest Hemingway comes in these stories to any kind of overt political statement occurs here:

Nick turned his head carefully and looked at Rinaldi. “Senta Rinaldi. Senta. You and me we’ve made a separate peace.” Rinaldi lay still in the sun breathing with difficulty. “Not patriots.” Nick turned his head carefully away smiling sweatily. Rinaldi was a disappointing audience. (63)

The idea of a “separate peace” and of war involvement unmotivated by patriotism is the central theme of A Farewell to Arms. However, here, encompassed in a short paragraph, is summarized all the feeling of the wounded Richard Plume’s novel-length story. Nick’s injury, one assumes, is not as serious as Plume’s, as he is later skiing, hiking, and fishing after his recovery; but the trajectory of their paths in the war is strikingly similar. The much-derided notion of “patriotism” in Plumes perhaps receives equal derision in Nick’s stories, simply by virtue of its going unmentioned save for this single disavowal. Sean Hemingway writes that the vignette is Nick’s “[statement] that he is psychologically, as well as physically, ready to stop fighting, and is expressing the disillusionment that can come with being wounded in war” (xxix).
Nick’s studied, if brief, philosophical rumination contrasts starkly with the chaos and death occurring around him.

The “unco-ordinated impressions of random machine warfare” that Walsh identifies in the book act equally well to portray combat shorn of its rhetorically honorable façade. Chapter VII depicts an artillery barrage “knocking [a] trench to pieces” and an unnamed soldier hunkered down, praying for deliverance from the assault:

[H]e lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you’ll only keep me from getting killed I’ll do anything you say. I believe in you and I’ll tell everyone that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. (IOT 67)

The lower-case spellings of “jesus” and “christ” in this passage reflect a not-too-subtle indictment of those names’ rhetorical importance, especially in comparison to the capitalized “I”, which conversely seems to exalt the primacy of the individual. To compound the attack upon organized systems of belief or ideologies, which the religious names in this vignette represent, the story ends with the protagonist’s own dismissal of his battlefield conversion: “The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rosa about Jesus. And he never told anybody” (67). Walsh concludes, that for Hemingway (and this applies not only to In Our Time but to The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms), “[s]ystems, doctrines, social organisations provide no fortress for the lonely soldier” (“Emblematical” 50). It is this striking juxtaposition – “jesus” with “Jesus,” terror with leisure – that emphasizes the lack of real conviction, of real belief, that so many recruits enlisted with.

Rohrkemper’s brief synopsis of In Our Time as a whole indicates the degree to which Hemingway intended to show the prevalence of violence, especially random violence, and lack of real belief, in the aftermath of the war:

[I]t is a unified work exploring Hemingway’s “time,” ranging from American cities and towns to foreign battlefields, from the hunting camps and trout streams of northern Michigan to the bull rings of Spain, juxtaposing these locations through a series of alternating short stories and shorter vignettes. (26)

The book is “unified,” in many ways, by theme as well as by character. One longer story of particular interest, though, is “at the very center of the book both literally and figuratively” (Rohrkemper 26), and features a Nick Adams-like protagonist named Harold Krebs, who is a
returning veteran. The placement of the story is key in Rohrkemper’s analysis, as critics “have argued persuasively that Hemingway carefully and systematically ordered the stories and vignettes . . . and thereby created a structural unity” (26). This centrality, then, is thematically expressed by the story in the sense that, in depicting (or suggesting) battlefield trauma and a subsequent return to the Midwestern “Eden,” it “directly links the homefront and the battlefront, the two geographic and psychic markers which recur throughout In Our Time” (26). “Soldier’s Home,” set on the “home front” of the immediate postwar Midwest, also affords a view of civilian, non-combatant impressions of the war, of the soldiers, and of their expectations for returning veterans (as is the case with Faulkner’s Soldiers’ Pay).

Krebs enters the war from a Methodist college, and Hemingway’s early description of a photograph depicting him standing among his fraternity brothers emphasizes themes of conformity; they are all “wearing exactly the same height and style collar” (IOT 69). A description of another photo immediately subsequent to this, showing Krebs and a fellow soldier standing with two German girls on the Rhine suggests discontinuity, subtle trauma perhaps, a break with the earlier identity. “Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture” (69). Rohrkemper points out the shift in prepositions alone in the juxtaposition of the two pictures – from “among” with his fraternity brothers to simply “with” the German girls, for instance – indicates alienation and “apartness” (27). Krebs’ return to his Oklahoma hometown is, in many ways, similarly uneventful, drab, and without special fanfare or beauty, a direct contrast to the heroes’ welcomes received by draftees returning earlier:

By the time Krebs returned to his hometown in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late. The men from the town who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return. There had been a great deal of hysteria. Now the reaction had set in. People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over. (IOT 69)

Krebs sinks into a routine which suggests disinterest with all aspects of his hometown, which he notes has changed without him during the war. Hemingway leaves only the barest hints of any battle shock or traumatic event in Krebs’ service; the aforementioned pictures are one instance, and another is the mention of battle sites such as St.Mihiel, Belleau Wood, and
Soissons, where the Marines saw heavy fighting. Mostly his disillusion takes the form of alienation from home and family and revulsion at their rituals and small-talk. Again, not much of “politics” or ideology per se is explicitly discussed.

Krebs’ revulsion stems mainly from the lies he feels compelled to tell when relating his war experiences or in adhering to family norms that are now alien to him; for Walsh, Krebs “is oppressed by the atrocity stories that have come to replace the actuality of the war in the civilian mind” (“Emblematical” 47). One particularly revealing instance of this, a conversation between Krebs and his mother, contains explicit elements of religious antipathy:

“God has some work for everyone to do,” his mother said. “There are no idle hands in His Kingdom.”
“I’m not in His Kingdom,” Krebs said.
“We’re all of us in His Kingdom.”
Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always. (IOT 75).

Soon after, his mother berates him for his lack of ambition and lack of interest in socializing. Krebs then reaches a breaking point:

“Is that all?” Krebs said.
“Yes. Don’t you love your mother, dear boy?”
“No,” Krebs said.
His mother looked at him across the table. Her eyes were shiny. She started crying.
“I don’t love anybody,” Krebs said.
It wasn’t any good. He couldn’t tell her, he couldn’t make her see it. It was silly to have said it. He had only hurt her. (75-6)

After poorly smoothing things over with his mother, Krebs ruminates on his course of action, which will include a departure from his hometown:

He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had touched him. He had felt sorry for his mother and she hadn’t made him lie. He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it. There would be one more scene maybe before he got away. He would not go down to his father’s office. He would miss that one. (76-7)
Donald Pizer holds that Krebs’ avowal to leave home symbolizes expatriation; the story implies “that Krebs will continue the process of self-exile he begins by leaving for Kansas City and will return to Europe, where human relationships are ‘simpler’ in that they lack the ‘consequences’ imposed upon them by an American middle-class value system” (Expatriate 5). The conventions of “exaggeration and untruth that war needs had imposed on accounts of combat” and his community’s “work, money, and religion ethic” lead him to “opt out” (3-4). In this sense, Krebs is much like Richard Plume, who declines to take a comfortable teaching job in his hometown, where he will be expected to tell lurid war stories around his hearth or on the verandah. Hemingway’s word choices in the story’s final paragraph reflect a theme of escape – “got away,” for instance, instead of “left.” Like Plume (an “expatriate” of sorts), or Hemingway’s own Jake Barnes or even Nick Adams, in a sense, or Dos Passos’ Andrews, Krebs is defined as a character by Pizer’s definition of the expatriate mentality: “The world one has been bred in is perceived to suffer from intolerable inadequacies and limitations; another world seems to be free of these failings and to offer a more fruitful way of life” (1, italics mine).

“Soldier’s Home” relates a wartime experience shorn of glory, honor, or notions of patriotism. In its bleak perspective on the changes war has wrought in the mind of the protagonist, the story offers a bit of collective postwar memory that also narrates the lives of all other alienated, shell-shocked, or wounded veterans. The continuing narrative of Nick Adams, likewise, emplots a portion of this “story” in the collective cultural consciousness. There are more than subtle hints in Nick’s actions following his “separate peace” that he will follow a path similar to that of Krebs. The alienation and separation, not just from the political and military circumstances of the war, but from social interaction in general, are even more profound in “Cross-Country Snow” and “Big Two-Hearted River.” In the latter, especially, images of destruction are juxtaposed with those of slow regeneration to suggest the figurative healing of Nick’s psychological wounds; in the former story, his physical wound is discussed far more lightly.

“Cross-Country Snow” is set in the Swiss Alps and opens with the very solitary, introspective thrill of Nick skiing down the mountainside:

The rush and the sudden swoop as he dropped down a steep undulation in the mountain side plucked Nick’s mind out and left him only the wonderful flying, dropping sensation in his body. He rose to a slight up-run and then the snow
seemed to drop out from under him as he went down, faster and faster in a rush
down the last, long steep slope. (*IOT* 107)

The reader discovers later that Nick’s battle wound prevents him from fully taking
advantage of all that skiing has to offer (108); it is also revealed, over drinks with his skiing
buddy, that he is somewhat troubled about his imminent return to the United States and what
awaits him there (111). But the lavish imagery with which Hemingway describes skiing (as he
does with fishing in “Big Two-Hearted River”), using far more detail than in describing battles,
or even the precise nature of Nick’s injury, emphasizes its vitality and, importantly, marks out an
place of tranquility for his protagonist. While skiing (and later, fishing), Nick can escape to a
purer state of aesthetic and psychological satisfaction. Returning to the United States, or openly
confronting his presumed war trauma, are topics of extreme ambiguity for him, as one can
assume he will encounter a homecoming similar to that of Krebs.

The “fruits” of Nick’s return are explored in the concluding longer stories of *In Our Time*,
“Big Two-Hearted River (I and II).” A reunion with family and home is not depicted; nor is the
presence of a hero’s welcome, or of “Helen,” the pregnant woman to whom Nick alluded in
“Cross Country Snow” (*IOT* 111). Instead, the reader catches up with Nick alone, in the middle
of an ominously depopulated wilderness:

The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber.

. . . There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country. The
thirteen saloons that had lined the one street of Seney had left not a trace. The
foundation of the Mansion House hotel stuck up above the ground. The stone was
chipped and split by the fire. It was all that was left of the town of Seney. Even the
surface had been burned off the ground. (133)

Proceeding alone, into the forest, where the grasshoppers are black and the burnt hillsides
stretch ahead, Nick encounters landscapes and animals bearing metaphoric significance to his
time at war. The grasshoppers, which are “not the big grasshoppers” but “just ordinary hoppers,”
have turned black “from living in the burned-over land” (135-6). This reinforces not only Nick’s
“ordinary” status (suggesting he is one of many), but parallels the psychic crippling of living in
the “burned-over land” of a devastated Europe. The initial descriptions of the lost town of Seney
themselves parallel descriptions in Cather, in Dos Passos, in Boyd, and in the later Hemingway
himself of bombed train stations, forests, and villages razed by artillery fire, and pock-marked
battlefields. The imagery of the front in *Three Soldiers*, especially, suggests a giant forge or hellish furnace; from afar, it looks to Andrews like “a stove full of glowing embers. The hillside that sloped away from them was full of crashing detonations and yellow tongues of flame” (*TS* 165). In drawing on this established mode of description, Hemingway places Nick’s experience within the collective narrative of the World War I veteran.

Motifs of solitude and introspection dominate these final two stories. Nick establishes camp, catches grasshoppers for bait, fishes, eats, and holds conversations with himself in the forest. Many of these activities are described in exhaustive detail. Speech is completely absent from Part II of the story; in Part I there is Nick commenting twice on his camp and its amenities, one instance of which occurs when he is cooking canned food: “‘I’ve got a right to eat this stuff, if I’m willing to carry it,’ Nick said. His voice sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again” (*IOT* 139). This passage contains a tone bordering on lonely isolation. This is echoed in Part II when the narrator states of Nick that he “did not like to fish with other men in the river. Unless they were of your party, they spoiled it” (149). Despite the absence of communication with other humans, the mood shifts in Part II to suggest regeneration, an emergence from psychic trauma parallel to the emergence from the burned-over section of woods earlier in the narrative. Nick, in many ways, “finds himself” through the ritual of fishing and camping, and the final line of Part II implies he is going to be OK, even if the process of healing is a long and arduous one: “There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp” (156). Earlier, his thoughts on fishing the swamp reflected apprehension, in a manner that, like the imagery of the razed town, evoke loneliness and isolation:

Nick did not want to go in [the swamp] now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today. (155)

The story’s final line, though, keeps alive the hope that the “swamp” will be fished someday.
Sean Hemingway, writing in April of 2003 during the U.S.-led war against Iraq, commented that “the awful contrasts between peace and war in Hemingway’s first book . . . are as relevant today as they were shockingly modern in 1925” (xxxiv). The stories themselves have outlived their acute historical relevance and have come to stand for a particular experience in a situation that was peculiar to U.S. history at the time. In this way they achieve the “emplotment” in the American cultural consciousness that Davis defines as the marker of socially significant or mobilizing narratives. Certainly the narrative of the shell-shocked or battle-weary veteran is never irrelevant in a society that, since the end of the interwar isolationist period, has maintained an aggressive military posture toward the rest of the world. Hemingway’s next published work, the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, is even more culturally central in promoting immediate peace consciousness within its own time and in acting as an extension of the “returning veteran” narrative so prevalent in the collective memory of the 1920s.

Reviews of *In Our Time* tended to focus less on the book’s war-related themes than on its style and its author’s take on the “sheer unfeeling barbarity of life,” as one reviewer claimed in the 25 November 1925 issue of *New Republic* (Rosenfeld 22). Attention was given, though, in the *New Republic* review, to Hemingway’s treatment of the “adjustment to life . . . demanded even more intensely” since the war (23). With *The Sun Also Rises*, though, many critics – both Hemingway’s contemporaries and later scholars – felt that the author had defined the postwar generation in a singularly unique way. Hoffman, in the 1960s, writes that *The Sun Also Rises* is “a perceptive portrayal of the human condition within the rigorous limits of circumstances which the postwar world had imposed” (106). For Hoffman, *The Sun Also Rises* is “the” World War I novel of the 1920s. The “continuous statement of rejection” Hoffman finds in so much literature of the decade (99) finds its most strident expression in Hemingway’s novel, continuing with Jake Barnes the trend begun with Nick Adams in *In Our Time*. That the war appears not at all in the novel in terms of physical combat, and is only alluded to briefly and vaguely in conversation or interior thought, is a strong comment on the book’s powers of “rejection.” For Jake Barnes, war memories are not the stuff of conversation or braggadocio, and in this he shares traits with Richard Plume. But the trauma of the war – the nature of his injuries, the psychic damage – is rarely confronted directly with others, and even is kept hidden from his own emotional consciousness most times. It is difficult to imagine a more powerful statement of disavowal or rejection, and the war thus dominates *The Sun Also Rises* by its very absence.
At its most basic level, the first-person narrative follows Jake Barnes and his friends, mainly American expatriates living in Paris and Europeans he has met during the war, as they indulge hedonistically in food, drink, travel, and brief sexual liaisons. Jake, however, has been rendered impotent by a war injury, which he describes with only veiled bitterness and despair:

- Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian. In the Italian hospital we were going to form a society. It had a funny name in Italian. . . . That was where the liaison colonel came to visit me. That was funny. That was about the first funny thing. I was all bandaged up. But they had told him about it. Then he made that wonderful speech. “You, a foreigner, an Englishman” (any foreigner was an Englishman) “have given more than your life.” What a speech! I would like to have it illuminated to hang in the office. He never laughed. He was putting himself in my place, I guess. “Che mala fortuna! Che mala fortuna!” (SAR 38-9)

Jake’s desire for his close friend Lady Brett Ashley is thus continually thwarted by the impossibility of complete physical intimacy. Like Plume, or Krebs, or Nick, whose characters suggest a kind of spiritual or psychological emasculation, Jake’s interactions with other humans are at times constricted by his condition and he finds bases for camaraderie in the shared interests of drinking, travel, and food (and later in the story, bullfighting). The novel suggests an overtly spiritual agony on Jake’s part as well, manifested by ambiguous visits to various churches (102-3, 212). Jake achieves perhaps an even more poignant impact for readers beyond the 1920s because his fortunes are not bedeviled by any government agency or sense of betrayal by “the system,” as with Plume. By disassociating his character from any of these chronologically specific events and misfortunes (i.e., the Washington Disarmament Conference, President Wilson’s farewell address), Hemingway creates a protagonist whose military disillusion regarding a highly specific series of events shows itself in the form of existential and intensely personal frustrations.

Unlike Krebs or Nick, though, Jake has a milieu of friends who mutually reinforce each others’ attitudes and give their behaviors validation. Brett’s statement to Jake, for instance, that the wealthy Count Mippopopolous is “one of us” (after he displays arrow wounds and talks of the “seven wars and four revolutions” he has seen) affirms the set of shared values their friends are all assumed to hold (66-7). These values, of course, revolve around indulgence and an
almost-paranoiac avoidance of political/war-talk. Through Jake’s perceptions and travels from one bar or restaurant to another, the imagery and rhetoric of the novel escalate gradually from symbols of disillusion and emptiness to suggestions of physical violence and waste. Often, despite his social atmosphere, these are private, introspective allegories; although popular and well-liked, there is more than a hint that Jake is ultimately as alone and disaffected as Nick or Krebs.

The narrative abounds with Jake’s detached, melancholy observations and private musings. There are empty barges (48), crying episodes (39), friends of Jake’s who don’t eat but drink continuously (79), “broken walls of old houses torn down” along the river (82), the appearance of a cockroach crawling into “an awfully clean hotel” (97), and numerous other images that suggest decay or, at least, decadence. Possibly the strongest link between Jake and Nick occurs when Jake and his friend Bill are traveling through the mountains on their way to a fishing spot, and Jake observes the landscape:

Down below there were grassy plains and clear streams, and then we crossed a stream and went through a gloomy little village, and started to climb again. We climbed up and crossed another high Col and turned along it, and the road ran down to the right, and we saw a whole new range of mountains off to the south, all brown and baked-looking and furrowed in strange shapes. (99)

This passage parallels Nick’s journey in “Big Two-Hearted River” through the burnt village and the scorched countryside to the greener pastures of the river and the woods. Later in The Sun Also Rises, as the party continues through the hilly, rapidly changing terrain, is this similar observation:

Up here the country was quite barren and the hills were rocky and hard-baked clay furrowed by the rain.
We came around a curve into a town, and on both sides opened out a sudden green valley. A stream went through the centre of the town and fields of grapes touched the houses. (111)

Nick’s trek from barren and sterile ground to fertile and thriving is solitary, in the middle of uninhabited forest; Jake’s nature is more social and the town, in addition to the fertile greenery of the stream and valley, represents a destination as “safe” and comforting as the deep woods are to Nick.
In conversations with both Bill and with Harris, an Englishman they meet on their fishing expedition, Jake reveals glimpses of the emptiness. Bill at one point berates Jake’s expatriation:

“'You’re an expatriate. You’ve lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see. You hang around cafes.'

“It sounds like a swell life,” I said. “When do I work?”

“You don’t work. One group claims women support you. Another group claims you’re impotent.”

“No,” I said. “I just had an accident.”

“Never mention that,” Bill said. “That’s the sort of thing that can’t be spoken of. That’s what you ought to work up into a mystery. Like Henry’s bicycle.” (120)

Indeed, this passage represents one of the few times the nature of Jake’s injury is explicitly brought into view. And then, quickly, it is shuffled away, not to be “spoken of.” The whole ensemble of the lifestyle Jake has adopted in France appears aimed at the repression of this fact and the various outlets he utilizes to this end – drink, fishing, conversation – serve to obscure his war memories. Harris, the Englishman, comments only that he hasn’t “had much fun since the war” in reference to his own possible disillusion (134).

It is during this time that Jake’s spiritual emptiness is also examined. While “technically” a Catholic, as he informs Bill (129), Jake makes several ambiguous trips to churches, ostensibly to confess or offer prayers but leaving still confused as to the nature of his belief and his own commitment to it (102-3, 154, 212). The final time, when he visits the church with Brett, the trip is short-lived, as she becomes anxious, nervous, and feels out-of-place. Jake himself admits to Bill that he doesn’t know what “technically” being a Catholic means (129). These passages and conflicts represent a more conscious exploration of what Hemingway hints at in “Soldier’s Home” and Chapter VII of In Our Time. In doing so, he comments further on the hollowness of religious rhetoric as it related to the war effort, although again in a far more subtle manner than does Dos Passos in Three Soldiers, for instance.

Hemingway’s evocations of battle and violence are likewise far more implicit than those found in Dos Passos or Boyd. In The Sun Also Rises, these take the form of images that metaphorically suggest combat or physical trauma to Jake. As the narrative progresses, this
implied death imagery becomes more pervasive. An early example occurs when Bill and Jake arrive at the inn to begin their fishing expedition: “I sat at one of the tables and looked at the pictures on the wall. There was one panel of rabbits, dead, one of pheasants, also dead, and one panel of dead ducks. The panels were all dark and smoky looking” (116). The possibilities for reading the variety of game represented in these death-paintings abound – different nationalities, or branches of the military, for instance. But the point the reader takes away in terms of recording a part of narrative history is that the war did not kill just “ducks,” or just “rabbits,” but afflicted a whole spectrum of peoples.

It is when the party arrives at the fiesta in Pamplona, though, and the preparations for the bullfights begin, that the battle/violence allegories become more explicit. Jake describes to Bill the specifics of the unloading of bulls at the corrals:

“it’s pretty good,” I said. ‘They let the bulls out of the cages one at a time, and they have steers in the corral to receive them and keep them from fighting, and the bulls tear in at the steers and the steers run around like old maids trying to quiet them down.”
“Do they ever gore the steers?”
“Sure. Sometimes they go right after them and kill them.”
“Can’t the steers do anything?”
“No. They’re trying to make friends.” (138)

The implications of the “friendly” steers suffering from unprovoked violence at the horns of the bulls – or even, by extension, those unseen, unknown humans who unleash them – can be read many ways. The steers – pacific, unused to violence, trying to “make friends” – cannot survive in the realm of the bulls, who are warlike and maniacal in their violence. The pagentry of the bullfight and its associated rituals and gaudiness, which mask a savage violence, recalls the “show” that many Lost Generation authors felt World War I to be in their haste to get overseas. A “steer” like Dan Fuselli of Three Soldiers, for instance, trying to make friends and advance in the ranks of the Army while seeing Europe, is broken psychologically by the war, his fear of combat, and by the rigid, ruthless military bureaucracy.

The comparison of the bullfight to human conflict is made again when at the fight itself, as Jake describes the action to Brett:
A man shouted from behind one of the boxes and slapped his hat against the planks, and the bull, before he reached the steer, turned, gathered himself, and charged where the man had been, trying to reach behind the planks with a half-dozen quick, searching drives with the right horn.

“My God, isn’t he beautiful?” Brett said. We were looking right down on him. “Look how he knows to use his horns,” I said. “He’s got a left and a right just like a boxer.” (143-4)

The violent imagery of dead steers that follows, a discussion of isolation as correlated with dangerous behavior, and Brett’s initiation into the world of bullfighting, are concluded with a dinner that evokes tense memories for Jake:

It was like certain dinners I remember from the war. There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people. (150)

“Ignored tension,” a feeling of helplessness, and a “disgusted feeling,” washed away in alcoholic consumption, summarize in this passage all the post-war hopelessness – and symbolic impotence, even, in the context of The Sun Also Rises – the Lost Generation felt America was mired in. The way out, then, for Hemingway, was not through Stallings- or Dos Passos-style political bombast, but was instead found in a quest to heal through introspection and indulgence. Certainly both Jake and Nick take this way out, with varying degrees of “balance” between the two. Jake alleviates his feelings of disgust around the seemingly “nice people” through alcohol – there is scarcely a scene in the novel where he is completely sober around them (save, of course, for the pivotal scene at the book’s close where Brett begs him not to get drunk). Nick, whom Hemingway does not characterize as a hedonist of this sort, finds more security and healing power in the isolation of the forest.

As the fiesta continues, Jake’s accounts of the trip alternately reflect battle memories and explicit evocations of the idea of social memoir. The depiction of rockets bursting above the square, the “gray ball of smoke” hanging above the theater, the “bright flash” of subsequent rockets and the pervasive smoke and throngs of people rushing in from all directions, is a fairly deliberate use of military imagery, backed by the “hollow drums” and “shrill” fifes reminiscent of the martial traditions of earlier times (157). William Adair points out how, on an even more
implicit level, “subtle allusions to the pre-story past . . . as they are found in café scenes, café names, and food” imply war trauma or war-obsession with Jake (“Cafes” 128). Places named by Jake for possible excursions – Alsace, Bruges, the Ardennes – were in fact among the early sites of conflict in the 1914 Battle of the Frontiers (128). A café in Pamplona, Adair points out, resembles “a battleship stripped for action” (132). The prostitute Jake courts at a café early in the novel is named Georgette; “Operation Georgette” was the code-name of the follow-up German offensive at the Somme in 1916 (129). Jake also attends a news conference at the Quai d’Orsay, the site of the Paris Peace Conference (129), and the Crillon, one of Jake’s favorite watering holes, is where many of the Allied delegation stayed during the Paris Peace Conference – Lloyd George and Field Marshal Haig also met there in November of 1917 to discuss Caporetto (129). These subtle allusions all manifest Fine’s theory of cultural memory and narrative, which holds that “[n]arrative permits the expression of an ideology that even the parties to the discourse may not fully realize is present” (239, italics mine). Certainly the same point could be made about Hemingway’s works in general and their wholly implicit political orientation.

Concerning the management of battlefield confusion and terror into coherent and acceptable channels, the story evokes a desire to “narrate” these experiences in Jake’s perceptions of the fiesta. Jake relates the young bullfighter Romero’s fight to Brett “so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle with unexplained horrors” (171) – a very conscious metaphor for organizing the unexplained carnage of warfare into “definite” goals and ideals. And late at night, reading a book by Turgenev, Jake connects the author’s works with his own recorded memories:

I think that now, reading it in the oversensitized state of my mind after too much brandy, I would remember it somewhere, and afterward it would seem as though it had really happened to me. I would always have it. That was another good thing you paid for and then had. (153)

Jake (and Hemingway, by extension) is commenting here on the power of narrative to connect disparate individuals through a sense of shared experience. As remembered and recorded by scholars, critics, and other veterans, the “Lost Generation” experience, for instance, connected individuals through providing an idea of shared disillusion and betrayal. The same is true for all the works under discussion here. As Davis writes, social history and collective cultural memory are largely scripted through this sense of common experience, and The Sun Also Rises functions
equally importantly as a memoir of the 1920s as it does for the wounded or disillusioned veteran. The book’s widespread critical acceptance underscores the equal acceptance of its anti-war (or, more accurately perhaps, “anti-idealist”) agenda. It met with none of the political controversy that plagued *Three Soldiers* only five years earlier; if nothing else, this further demonstrates the degree to which the “new mentality” was taking root in the American culture at large.

Allen Tate, for instance, in a review written for the 15 December 1926 issue of the *Nation*, spoke of how the book and its author would be “talked about, praised, perhaps imitated” (642). An unnamed reviewer in the 31 October 1926 issue of the *New York Times Book Review* commented on the “complete absence of reticences of the war generation” and their “aimless conversation among themselves” (“Marital Tragedy” 7). Further, the reviewer believed that *The Sun Also Rises* would be “unquestionably one of the events of an unusually rich year in literature” (7). In fact, most of the initial reviews of *The Sun Also Rises* focused more on the sexual relations between the characters, their morals and “reticences,” and Hemingway’s style itself than its portrayal of the war.¹ This absence of direct treatment of its war-related themes is in itself important. Of course, the war does not feature explicitly in the novel as an immediate presence, as with *Through the Wheat* or *Three Soldiers*, but beyond that, there is almost a sense through the reviews that the anti-militarist agenda is secondary; that such themes are already commonplace and not worth commenting on at length. Jake has been wounded; of course he should be disillusioned and unpatriotic, and the war should have killed his sense of idealism. That such sentiments of disillusion would be an accepted part of the post-war literary scene testifies to the success of these narratives at scripting those moods into the cultural fabric of 1920s America.

The publication, in the same year as *The Sun Also Rises*, of William Faulkner’s first novel *Soldiers’ Pay*, offered a complementary “home-front” depiction of the themes Hemingway had addressed in a European setting. Donald Mahon, the disfigured, dying aviator of the novel, shot down in France, represents certainly a far more visceral and immediate reminder of war’s ravages than does Jake; and in addition, Mahon is nearly insensible, having lost most of his conscious memory and ability to socially interact with others in the aftermath of his injury. While Jake finds security among a warm, receptive, and outwardly understanding social cohort, Mahon is a disturbing oddity in his hometown, a “freak” anomaly largely shunned as a human being by his

¹ For most of the references to unspecified reviews of *The Sun Also Rises*, I am indebted to Audre Hanneman’s *Ernest Hemingway: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967)
fiancée and most of the townspeople. The 1961 Signet Classic edition of the book, in fact, confirms this in its cover summary:

Donald Mahon came back from the front disfigured and almost blind . . . back to a town that wanted to forget the war . . . back to a frivolous fiancée who cherished his handsome face and his manly vigor . . . William Faulkner vividly depicts the effects of Mahon’s return on those whose lives are linked to his: his father, overcome with grief; his fiancée, who turns to other men; the sweetheart he has forgotten.

There is more than a suggestion throughout the book that Mahon and the people close to him would have been much better off had he died in combat. As a half-living reminder of the horrors of war, though, Mahon cannot be memorialized, buried, or lauded, and any “glory” he may have achieved as an aviator is greatly diminished. He is a character similar to Richard Plume, but as with Hemingway’s protagonists, his overtly political bitterness is silenced, and again, this is a statement in itself. The bitterness and disaffection generated by Mahon’s presence is disseminated among his friends and family. Joe Gilligan, the enlisted man who meets Mahon on a train of returning veterans, decides to aid him in his journey to his Georgia home when it becomes evident that he is too severely wounded and disoriented to continue alone. Mrs. Powers, a war widow on the train with the two men, discovers that Mahon is slowly going blind as well (SP 27). Before long, Mahon’s vocal utterances are attenuated to the point of near-incoherence. Mrs. Powers and Gilligan assume (correctly) revulsion and misunderstanding on the part of those to whom Mahon is returning, and, determined to let him “die in peace,” they attempt to help him assimilate back into his hometown environment for his final days (31).

Their joint act of altruism is based in the shared belief that only Gilligan, who has seen war and understands sacrifice, and Mrs. Powers, who has lost a husband to combat, can “help” Mahon and prepare his family for his return. Gilligan’s fears – that Mahon’s attractive fiancée will reject him and that the townspeople will view him as a freak – suggest that the homefront doesn’t want to understand, and doesn’t care; that, as with Krebs’ Midwestern hometown in “Soldier’s Home,” the war is the stuff of history books and glorified stories. Passages detailing this disjunction abound throughout the novel and underscore the harsh contrasts between the perception of war and the actuality of conflict, especially in a society not inundated by electronic mass media and therefore “cut off,” in a sense, from the war’s visceral reality.
Perhaps one of the most poignant episodes in this vein occurs when Mrs. Powers and Gilligan escort Donald to a local dance, where, seated in the car and viewing from a distance, the former two note how returning veterans are treated at the gathering:

“Look at them, Joe,” Mrs. Powers said, “sitting there like lost souls waiting to get into hell.”

. . . “They don’t look like they’re sitting to me,” Gilligan answered with enthusiasm.

. . . “No, no, I mean those ex-soldiers there. Look at them. Sitting here, talking their army French, kidding themselves. Why did they come, Joe? . . . I know them. I have seen their sort at the canteen too often, acting just that way: poor kind dull boys going to war, and because they were going girls were nice to them. But now there is no war for them to go to. And look how the girls treat them.”

(136)

Gilligan subsequently enters the dance-hall, and contemplates the veterans’ situation as he mingle with the crowd:

He was offered and accepted a cigarette and he perched among them while they talked loudly, drowning the intimation of dancers they could not emulate, of girls who once waited upon their favors and who now ignored them – the hang-over of warfare in a society tired of warfare. Puzzled and lost, poor devils. Once Society drank war; but now Society seemed to have found something else for a beverage . . . (137)

The “hang-over” that the recent post-war America suffers from (the novel is set in the spring of 1919) has intensified by 1926, when the United States was indeed “tired of warfare,” thanks in large part to Faulkner’s own artistic contemporaries. This theme, in fact, extends across all the works detailed in this chapter; Plume, Nick, and Jake, no less than Mahon or Gilligan, feel rejected and alienated by a “tired” society. The manifestations of this alienation result in outright protest/activism (Plume), expatriation (Jake), voluntary isolation (Nick), or, in Mahon’s case, a symbolic near-catatonia – certainly with this final example one finds the most profound representation of withdrawal from the “offending” culture. Cooperman states that Soldiers’ Pay “comment[s] upon a world which labored mightily only to produce [Mahon], a vacuum so
impotent that all life forces – those of protest and affirmation alike – are dissipated” (*World War I* 159).

Possibly the most virulent example of the offense Mahon’s society takes to his presence occurs when his young fiancee witnesses his facial injuries for the first time. After she leaves Mahon’s house screaming, her younger brother implores her to share gruesome details of the wound. Their mother reprimands him, but then asks her daughter the exact same question (66-7). Although Cecily (the fiancee) does eventually give thought to marrying Mahon regardless, her mother stridently urges her to reconsider: “‘You fool, you idiot, marrying a blind man, a man with nothing, practically dead’” (179). This rhetoric is analogous to the more subtle rejection Krebs perceives in his hometown, also bored and weary of returning heroes, where the citizens want nothing more of parades and veterans and view war service as no more or less noble than any other vocation. Mahon is, for Cecily’s mother, not a war hero; he is merely a crippled, dying, blind man.

Mrs. Powers, too, is haunted by the fate of her husband, whose inglorious death in Europe came at the hands of his own men, shot in the face by an American soldier during an assault on their trench (124). Imagery of the circumstances of her husband’s death recurs to her throughout the novel, and although the incident is portrayed – as in *Three Soldiers* or *Through the Wheat* – as an entirely representative occurrence, Mrs. Powers, who had spent all of three days with her husband before his departure for France, views it as “a joke amusing no one” (26). The “casually and impersonally” direct way she had been informed of his death, additionally, suggests that the War Department viewed it also as an entirely representative occurrence, as no further mention is made in the novel of the fate of the soldier who killed Powers. The reader is thus left with the impression – already a cohesive belief by the late 1920s – that entry into the war had been a mistake, and those who fought in it were fools or dupes in the minds of all but fellow veterans. Far from being romantic or glorious, the war saw the deaths of American soldiers at the hands of fellow American soldiers, and with Mahon, the lionized, mythic figure of the combat aviator was shown to be no less susceptible to war’s brutality. He is, in effect, the figure at the center of the book’s “cycle of impotence” (Cooperman, *World War I* 162).

For Faulkner, though, the initial romance of the war – and specifically of the war in the air – proved as attractive as it had to the other authors of his time. Robert Harrison notes that by the early years of World War I
[the airplane] had grown from a dangerous toy into a weapon of war. Yet to the
general public an aura of romance still clung to the flying machine. Death in the
air seemed somehow a finer, cleaner thing than death in the trenches. . . . None
of this was lost on Bill Faulkner. (22)

By offering the respective fates of Powers and Mahon to the reader, Faulkner connects
their experiences in a way that effaces that “aura of romance” surrounding air combat and
equates the two men’s ultimate deaths. Faulkner had been attracted initially by the glamour of the
Royal Air Force and the idea of “combat in the clouds” (Blotner 60), and he enlisted in the spring
of 1918 at the RAF Recruiting Office in New York City (Harrison 23). His military career,
however, lasted exactly 179 days, as the training program for cadets at the Recruits’ Depot in
Toronto ended with the signing of the armistice (25-6). While he never got to fly during the war,
he toured Europe in the mid-1920s, and while visiting battle sites and talking with veterans, he
was able to gather material and knowledge for Soldiers’ Pay and for several short stories in order
to cash in on the “phenomenal vogue of World War I flying stories in the late 1920s” (28). He
also adopted the “brittle cynicism” toward the war which, Harrison notes, “was the accepted pose
to strike, in America as well as in Europe” (28). Soldiers’ Pay can thus be read as a narrative not
of “victim advocacy,” as with Plumes, but more as a script of collective social memory, as with
Hemingway. But Faulkner, like Stallings, emphasizes the presence of the wounded veteran as a
blight, as an anomaly that both the government and the civilian homefront would prefer to be
swept out of sight – a tangible, visceral reminder of the war’s physical costs.

The reviews of Soldiers’ Pay emphasized, if unconsciously, this link to earlier “returning
veteran” narratives. Lawrence Morris, writing in New Republic, pointed out how the characters
“yearn over their demoded purposes and despair of finding new ones,” and the novel’s overall
lament for a world where veterans are “shelved by sleek-haired youngsters, who have new dances
and are bored by veterans with wooden legs” (148). The speed at which the home-town
community “recovers” from war is also a central theme of “Soldier’s Home,” but is emphasized
at greater length by Faulkner, especially as it dwells on the almost total abandonment of Mahon
by his hometown and his reliance on two near-strangers for care. Walsh reiterates this idea:
“Soldiers’ Pay infers an element of vicariousness in its narrative development, American society
being indicted for first cultivating a taste for war and later rejecting the outcome of its action”
(American War Literature 88).
The five protagonists discussed here share the common feelings of emptiness, impotence, and helplessness. The “lesson” learned by Richard Plume at the end of *Plumes* – symbolized by the gaping, empty grave awaiting the next generation of soldiers – took hold in the population at large. The 2 June 1926 edition of *New Republic* commented on the “special situation” of the United States, its desire to “reduce [their] land forces to a minimum” and the offer to extend military reductions to certain classes of naval ships at the Geneva Conference on armament limitation (“This Week” 43). The narrative of the wounded, abandoned veteran, etched so firmly into the overall historical narrative of the 1920s themselves, heralded the literary and political developments of the next decade, with America’s “special situation” barring the nation from involvement of any kind – economic or military – with belligerent nations. By the 1930s, with fascism and Nazism rising in Europe and Japan’s imperial ambitions threatening the Pacific Rim, American authors would produce novels reiterating the stances of the 1920s – that war was a tragic, terrible waste and was not worth the human or financial costs. The entrenched belief that U.S. entry into World War I had been fueled by capitalist greed led naturally into the widespread skepticism about involvement in a second European war, and this belief was firmly entrenched in the fiction of the period as well.
The following “Editorial Statement” regarding the Kellogg-Briand Pact appeared in the 9 October 1929 edition of *New Republic*:

At the time of its proposal, when we advocated its adoption, we pointed out clearly that it was merely a beginning, and that its effect would be determined by the way in which it was implemented. We have not now abandoned our former general attitude of approval, but have expressed the opinion that “in the present crisis, the Kellogg Pact alone cannot outlaw war. If the anti-war pact is used to supplement League machinery, it will serve the cause of peace. If it is used by the United States to stultify League action, this pact may do incalculable harm.”

These remarks applied to the specific situation of possible League intervention in the Russo-Chinese dispute. The *New Republic* will do its best, according to its own lights, to encourage improvement of both instruments, but it does not believe the United States made any mistake in declining to join the League in 1920, although it has little sympathy with most of the motives of the pure isolationists.

(209)

Earlier that year, Ernest Hemingway’s publisher, Charles Scribner’s and Sons, had issued a statement in regard to its serialized publication of Hemingway’s new novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, in *Scribner’s Magazine*: “Mr. Hemingway set out neither to write a moral tract nor a thesis of any sort. His book is no more anti-war propaganda than are the Kellogg Treaties” (qtd.in Fenstermaker 190). As John Fenstermaker reports, “Scribner’s did not blink; serialization of the novel did not cease” (190).

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, a treaty calling for the “outlawry” of war, was signed by American and French representatives in August 1927 and, by the end of 1928, had been signed
by 62 nations (Valone 68). As a milestone in the pacifist/isolationist movement, it represents a significant step forward for the furthering of peace consciousness, and the implicit comparison made by the *Scribner’s* editors between the treaty and *A Farewell to Arms* – that neither were “anti-war propaganda” – demonstrates the degree to which anti-militarist sentiment had in fact been internalized by most of the American public. The publication of *Three Soldiers* eight years earlier had, as discussed, sparked an avalanche of criticism and backlash. *A Farewell to Arms*, in many ways no less an “anti-war” novel, “was reprinted five times in its first two months and became a Book-of-the-Month selection; sales by February 14, 1930, surpassed 79,000” (Fenstermaker 190).

The Kellogg-Briand Pact was drawn up by Secretary of State James Kellogg, and, in principle, “promised to forsake war as an instrument of foreign policy” (Moss 10). It was “[h]ailed by pacifists as the triumph of conciliation, arbitration, and the rule of law,” and “the outlawry movement expressed the near-isolationist hope of the 1920s that war would just go away, without the inconvenience and cost of binding obligations” (Rhodes 71). By the late 1920s and early 1930s, that “triumph” meant that the United States would stand on the sidelines during a decade of international aggression. During the ten years leading up to World War II, the “anti-war” message – whether in the name of pacifism or neutrality-isolationism – was hammered home to the American public repeatedly, both by the literary community and, in tones increasingly reminiscent of the war authors’ own early vehemence, American legislators themselves. According to Norman Moss, Americans had by the 1930s responded to the “depiction of the war as a pointless sacrifice” (22), regardless of whether those depictions were scripted by authors or politicians.

The “constant airing” of Senate subcommittee investigators into “the links between big financiers, weapons dealers, and America’s entry into the war” beginning in 1934, for instance, greatly affected public sentiment toward World War I (22). In some respects, these investigations represented the fruition of some of the greatest hopes of authors such as Boyd or Dos Passos, whose characters implied such links repeatedly. The Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, passed between 1935-37, reflected the widespread belief that “U.S. participation in World War I had been a mistake, and that in particular the ‘Merchants of Death’ – munitions manufacturers – had influenced the decision for war” (Valone 71). This very allegation had in fact been the subject of an article published in the March 1934 issue of *Fortune*, and sparked the Nye Committee
Congressional hearings on the links between the munitions industry and World War I participation (Rhodes 131).

The Neutrality Acts also included provisions for trade embargoes against nations involved in wars, and specifically the sale of weapons or ammunition to any belligerent nation (Valone 72). No American vessel could carry passengers to any nation involved in a war (73). U.S. Representative Louis Ludlow tried during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration to introduce a 22nd Amendment to the Constitution that would have required “a national referendum before the United States could go to war” (74). The incredible isolationist influence in the Congress during the 1930s was stoked by a fear of U.S. involvement in the managing the increasing international crises throughout the world (Rhodes 136-7). In March of 1936, FDR “received the ‘People’s Mandate to End War Committee’ at the White House”; the group’s explicit goals were to “reduce arms through a ‘world treaty’ and to bring about world peace through mutual acceptance of the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the rule of law” (139). Headed by Mt.Holyoke Collge president Mary Woolley, the group had gathered a million signatures on a petition “advocating an end to war” (139).

Roosevelt’s address of 3 September 1939, at the outset of hostilities in Europe, reflected the depth of antipathy toward conflict in the United States, as America’s World War I allies were swept into another deadly conflagration:

“This Nation will remain a Neutral nation. . . . I have seen war and . . . I hate war. . . . I hope the United States will keep out of this war. I believe that it will. And I give you assurance and reassurance that every effort of your government will be directed toward that end. As long as it remains within my power to prevent, there will be no black-out of peace in the United States.” (qtd. in Valone 78)

The classification of American neutrality as “peace” in Roosevelt’s speech recalls the failure of an earlier administration to join the League of Nations which would, in part, spark a literary and intellectual backlash against American warmongering. The aim of many of the 1920s novelists had been to condemn the hypocrisy of politicians who spoke of a crusade for democracy but then showed no interest in maintaining that crusade in the war’s aftermath. The difference by 1939, when Roosevelt’s use of the word “peace” to define a state of affairs where armed conflict was raging throughout most of the world (and would soon visit America itself),
was that there was no distinction between ideals and practical policy. As Rhodes states, “Between the wars isolationism and pacifism often went hand in glove” (131). “Peace” was defined for most of the public not in terms of global stability or justice, but by the degree to which the United States distanced itself from military entanglements. The hopes of the novelists, even if only expressed unconsciously through fiction, had succeeded brilliantly. The public disgust toward war was inculcated by the novels of the previous decade, which as Cooperman states, scripted the story of the war for a nation largely devoid of reliable mass media.

*A Farewell to Arms*, the literary “bridge” between the two decades, expressed for many readers the values that had been gradually shaped during the past ten years, and the ideology that would dominate the foreign policy of the 1930s. Although this was likely not Hemingway’s intent – as stated by his publisher during the novel’s serialization – the encoding of anti-war sentiment occurring on even such a subtle level reflects the degree to which it had been assimilated into the national mind. And the sentiment in *Farewell to Arms* is, by the standards of the early 1920s, far from “subtle” in its criticism of the war and its championing (like *Three Soldiers*) of individual happiness over collective cause. Throughout the novel the war is called “stupid” and “crazy,” its combatants “afraid” and ignorant, its rhetoric “hollow,” and the only sane decision regarding it is to make a “separate peace” and live for oneself.

Frederick Henry, the narrator and an American serving as a lieutenant in the Italian ambulance corps, is stationed on the northern front near the Isonzo river valley when the novel opens, in the summer of 1916. He bears witness to American entry into the war, the early offensives of 1917, and the retreat from Caporetto before declaring his personal “armistice” to the war. In the latter third of the novel, not much is related of the war’s progress – Henry reads the papers but avoids reading about the war. It “seemed as far away as the football games of someone else’s college” (*FTA* 291). Metaphorically, his act of desertion – symbolized, for instance, by tearing the stripes off his uniform – speaks clearly to the book’s American audience, for the betrayal Lt. Henry suffers at the hands of his own side mirrors not merely the disgust or disillusion, but the actual *deception* the public felt its government had engaged in when taking the country into war.

Lt. Henry, though, is never characterized as a man with strong convictions or moral stances. His life at the front among his Italian colleagues is marked by feelings of pervasive emptiness and disillusion prior even to his desertion:
I had gone to no such place but to the smoke of cafes and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring. Suddenly to care very much and to sleep to wake with it sometimes morning and all that had been there gone and everything sharp and hard and clear and sometimes a dispute about the cost. (13)

He speaks, also, of how operating at a post near the front gives the drivers a “false feeling of soldiering” (17); of how he has never loved anyone (19); and how after he meets Catherine Barkley he experiences feeling “lonely and hollow” in her absence (41). One particularly revealing instance of his early emptiness and longing occurs when Catherine is questioning him about prostitutes he has frequented previously:

“You’re just mine. That’s true and you’ve never belonged to anyone else. But I don’t care if you have. I’m not afraid of them. But don’t tell me about them. When a man stays with a girl does she say how much it costs?”

“I don’t know.”

“Of course not. Does she say she loves him? Tell me that. I want to know that.”

“Yes. If he wants her to.”

“Does he say he loves her? Tell me please. It’s important.”

“He does if he wants to.”

“But you never did? Really?”

“No.”

“Not really. Tell me the truth.”

“No,” I lied. (105)

Catherine becomes Lt. Henry’s whole world, his only conviction and only cause, far more so than his previously hedonistic but empty life or the war itself had been. The descriptions of the landscape when she is with him, compared to those offered during the return to the front, exemplify this, in a way reminiscent of the “landscape symbolism” of The Sun Also Rises. On their trip out to San Siro, Henry describes “villas with iron fences and green vegetable gardens with dust on the leaves,” “rich green farms with their irrigation ditches,” and “the mountains to
the north” (128). Later, when driving up toward the Isonzo front, the “trees were all bare and the road was muddy,” “[t]he mulberry trees were bare and the fields were brown,” dead leaves cover the road, and “many more houses had been hit” by shelling (163). The choice of individual happiness over nationalism – of reading about battles as though they were far-away sporting events, for instance – allegorically represents a progression toward personal isolationism, if not pacifism. Lt.Henry’s move away – his “farewell” – to the war is accompanied by a farewell to his shallow existence. The later, “post-war” images of the Swiss forests and the mountains, for instance, evoke the richness of the San Siro countryside, not the dreariness and the “dead” imagery of the front. One of the novel’s most significant renunciations of false rhetoric and action occurs when Henry arrives at Bainsizza in preparation for the mountain offensive against the Austrians:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (184-5)

Henry’s love for Catherine becomes “concrete” through her pregnancy, a definite, tangible presence that binds them, whereas the war is sustained only through a belief in the abstract and “obscene.” This point is made repeatedly by many characters, either through their words or their actions. During the violent confusion of the retreat from Caporetto, for example, one of the drivers deserts Henry and the remnants of the unit to surrender to the advancing Germans. Piani, another driver, explains the logic of this decision to Henry: “‘He went away, Tenente,’ he said. ‘He wanted to be taken prisoner.’ I did not say anything. ‘He was afraid we would get killed.’ I held the bottle of wine and did not say anything. ‘You see we don’t believe in the war anyway, Tenente’” (217). Before Henry’s wounding by a mortar shell falling on their
dugout, he and the other drivers engage in a conversation about the war’s progress and its sustainability:

“I believe we should get the war over,” I said. “It would not finish it if one side stopped fighting. It would only be worse if we stopped fighting.”

“It could not be worse,” Passini said respectfully. “There is nothing worse than war.”

“Defeat is worse.”

“I do not believe it,” Passini said respectfully. “What is defeat? You go home?”

(49-50)

These sentiments run directly counter to the idealistic fervor that surrounded American entry into the conflict and characterized the war as a Manichean struggle against an almost-subhuman enemy. Henry makes attempts to address the drivers’ beliefs by insisting that the war must be prosecuted to the end:

“I think you do not know anything about being conquered and so you think it is not bad.”

“Tenente,” Passini said. “We understand you let us talk. Listen. There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance cannot even realize at all how bad it is. When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who never realize. There are people who are afraid of their officers. It is with them the war is made.”

“I know it is bad but we must finish it.”

“It doesn’t finish. There is no finish to a war. . . . We think. We read. We are not peasants. We are mechanics. But even the peasants know better than to believe in a war. Everybody hates this war.” (50-1)

When Henry himself no longer believes in the war, he is in a way lauded; his friend Simmons remarks: “‘I always knew you had good sense’” (241). Henry has in essence come around to the majority way of thinking. Issues such as cowardice or dishonor never enter the discourse about opposition to the war, whereas in *Three Soldiers*, for instance, such dialogue predominated. But if Hemingway’s novel – and its reception – differed from Dos Passos’ in one regard, it is quite similar to *One Man’s Initiation* and *Three Soldiers* in another. The fearsome qualities of the new weaponry of this war – and the horrific wounds it can inflict – comprise a
part of its ideological statement. Henry’s early descriptions of the shorn, wasted countryside evoke scenes from *One Man’s Initiation*:

The forest of oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone. The forest had been green in the summer when we had come into the town but now there were stumps and broken trunks and the ground torn up. . . . The snow slanted across the wind, the ground was covered, the stumps of trees projected, there was snow on the guns and there were paths in the snow going back to the latrines behind trenches. (6)

Coupled with the imagery of “sudden interiors of houses that had lost a wall through shelling, with plaster and rubble in their gardens and sometimes in the street” (6), this depiction of a war-torn, trench-dotted landscape recalls Martin Howe’s impression of no-man’s land on the Western Front (*OMI* 36), or even *Through the Wheat* protagonist William Hicks’ perceptions of the same (*TTW* 21). Hemingway’s depictions of battle wounds are equally reminiscent:

It was Passini and when I touched him he screamed. His legs were toward me and I saw in the dark and the light that they were both smashed above the knee. One leg was gone and the other was held by tendons and part of the trouser and the stump twitched and jerked as though it were not connected. (*FTA* 55)

Compared with Dos Passos’ description of a soldier with his lower torso blown away (*OMI* 37), Hemingway’s account is frenetic and adrenaline-fueled rather than contemplative (although this is accounted for partially by the fact that Passini’s wound occurs during the midst of a fierce battle). The gruesome injuries and destruction of the countryside are no longer grotesque objects in and of themselves by the time of *Farewell to Arms*, but they do merit narrative attention from the author, especially within the context of a war cause that the narrator ultimately rejects. When Henry arrives in preparation for the offensive near Caporetto, he and another driver discuss the new artillery the Austrians have moved into place:

I would recognize them because of their flat trajectory. You heard the report and then the shriek commenced almost instantly. They usually fired two guns at once, one right after the other, and the fragments from the burst were enormous. He showed me one, a smoothly jagged piece of metal over a foot long. It looked like babbitting metal.
“I don’t suppose they are so effective,” Gino said. “But they scare me. They all sound as though they came directly for you. There is the boom, then instantly the shriek and the burst. What’s the use of not being wounded if they scare you to death?” (FTA 182)

The idea of creating fear, terror, and uncertainty – and of not knowing when or where death will strike – is another common theme of World War I writing; the “faceless” and impersonal way that Catherine’s former fiancee was killed on the Somme exemplifies this as well (20). Aymo’s death during the retreat – the result of a bullet fired by an unseen, faceless assassin – is another instance (213-4). With the exception of Henry’s execution of an Italian “deserter” during the Caporetto retreat (204), there is no face-to-face, up-close killing in the novel. Even the roadside executions being performed at the bridge where Henry makes a desperate escape are performed in near-darkness, under spurious charges, and are narrated with more than a hint of sarcasm and a sense of betrayal (222-5). The unseen hemorrhages that ultimately kill Catherine following her labor are perceived by Henry as a freak occurrence, happening with no warning and with little time to emotionally prepare (329-31). The “violation” represented by technological warfare, Cooperman writes, is a “vital aspect” not only of *Farewell to Arms*, “but in the literary career of Hemingway himself” (*World War I* 184). The “threat to existence, virility, and love” that Henry perceives in the industrialized aspects of the war (175) is suffered fully by another Hemingway protagonist, Jake Barnes, who struggles to maintain these aspects of his identity in his post-war life.

Protest culture itself is embodied throughout the novel, not simply metaphorically or through individual choices, but explicitly through relation of events and conversations, some of which have already been discussed. The mention of riots against the war in Turin following a series of particularly crippling losses is one example (FTA 133), as is the British major’s assertion that the Allies “were all cooked but we were all right as long as we did not know it. . . . The thing was not to recognize it” (133-4). This latter claim speaks directly to the hollowness of war rhetoric and propaganda; the “shielding” of combat’s true nature behind the empty words Henry will eventually come to repudiate in action.

Other familiar elements of 1920s war novels are reprised; the near-continuous mocking of the priest in Henry’s ambulance company, for instance, echoes the derision and contempt shown the “Y” men in *Three Soldiers*. Hoffman points out that the priest is “rarely taken seriously, his
remarks are not quite like the patriotic phrases of the battle police,” but they embarrass and bore Henry (92). The linking of religious fervor with the “Crusade” rhetoric of the Great War itself became a frequent target of post-war intellectuals and authors – was, in fact, regarded by “soldiers and civilians alike” as an interchangeable aspect of the war (Cooperman, *World War I* 25-6); hence the less-than-flattering portrayals in Hemingway and Dos Passos. Thomas Boyd’s portrayal of Hicks as a “protagonist of alienation,” Cooperman writes, “points directly . . . in some ways to Frederick Henry himself” (241). Pizer ties *Farewell to Arms* to “Soldier’s Home” and *Three Soldiers* for the same reasons – all three protagonists are “disgusted by the convention of ‘exaggeration’ and ‘untruth’ that war needs had imposed” on everyday behavior (*Expatriate* 3-4). To Stewart, *Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises* best epitomized the “tragic effects of World War I” (372).

The cultural centrality of *A Farewell to Arms* is undeniable, as is the fact that it has emerged, along with its author, to symbolize the postwar mentality for at least two generations of readers. Jeffrey Walsh underlines this dominant theme in cultural memory by pointing out how, through Lt. Henry’s dismissal of the “rhetoric of patriotism,” Hemingway “by proxy claims a separateness from one shabby element of American vernacular culture, the bowdlerized gunpowder and glory orthodoxy of American letters that had infiltrated the popular imagination of war” (“Emblematical” 46). “The portraiture of war in *A Farewell to Arms*,” he continues, “mimes the collapse of institutions which prove fragile under attack” (49). The movements of the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in the Neutrality Acts, indicate the way in which the institutions themselves “mimed” the collapses depicted in the novel; the “instinct for intergenerational consciousness dramatizes the novel’s aura of betrayal; the separate peace, the farewell to arms, the pacifist trajectory toward neutralism and a counter-cultural awareness” pervade the narrative (50). In this sense the novel is remembered – has been encoded or “emplotted,” to use Davis’ term – as a blueprint of sorts for the isolationist agenda of the 1930s.

Hemingway’s own contemporaries and reviewers of the novel noted its aura of “authenticity,” if not the book’s larger political implications. In a review for the 9 October 1929 issue of *New Republic*, T.S. Matthews claimed that “a fresh report from a point of view as original as Hemingway’s is an addition to experience” (211), and noted explicitly that Hemingway held “a prominent place among American writers” (208). This measure of the author’s cultural “stature” is important in measuring the response of the culture into which the
work is disseminated and the degree to which it will be encoded into the artistic/historical “narrative” of the period itself. As discussed previously, Hemingway’s presence is nearly inseparable from this aspect of 1920s culture, and thus the ideologies of his works are equally inseparable from the cultural record. “One finds traces of his influence almost everywhere,” Malcolm Cowley wrote in a 6 October 1929 New York Herald-Tribune review of *Farewell to Arms* (“Not Yet” 1). Cowley himself traces the arc of the postwar novels and their authors; the “typical American war novels, beginning with *Three Soldiers* and perhaps not ending with this present volume,” were written by men who in 1917 were young, “patriotic” ambulance drivers who are still yet not “demobilized” from the war (1). Hemingway’s own mode of narration in the novel, he indicates, operates “as from a great distance or by the military observer of a neutral power” (6). Hemingway, with this work, Cowley feels, “has even begun to discuss ideas,” and that he has “expressed, better than any other writer, the limited viewpoint of his contemporaries, of the generation which was formed by the war and which is still incompletely demobilized” (1). *A Farewell to Arms* heralds the arrival of a decade where “ideas,” rather than emotions, would be more and more the focus of much literature, reflecting Cooperman’s own assessment of the broadening and politicizing of war novel themes by the mid-1920s.

The fiction of “ideas” and modes of representation was probably best represented in the 1930s by Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* trilogy. The three novels comprising the series – *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932) and *The Big Money* (1936) – will here be considered as one volume (*USA*), and while only *1919* deals at length with the Great War itself, the previous and latter novels document much of the politics and history surrounding the event’s genesis and its aftermath. The varied narratives follow over a dozen characters through the first thirty years of the 20th century, interspersing “chapters” of standard third-person narration with “Newsreels” announcing garbled or incomplete news headlines, song lyrics, and transcribed speeches, “Camera Eye” sections written in stream-of-consciousness first person, and unconventional biographical sketches of some of the era’s prominent leaders and cultural figures. Collectively, the juxtapositions of narrative modes, images, and media blurbs reinforce (especially in the case of *1919*) the attitudes which *A Farewell to Arms* had already confirmed as the “correct” ones to assume regarding the war. Dos Passos’ shift in approach from his earlier fiction broadens the base of his critique and captures not just the isolated experience of individuals in a single geographic theater, but the mood and experience of a larger culture, both in Europe and on the homefront.
The same heated criticisms of militarism are present, though, and while the overall social spectrum of the work far overwhelms that of *Three Soldiers* or *One Man’s Initiation*, the rhetorical attacks have narrowed from abstract social forces (capitalists, military leadership, propaganda) to specific businessmen, public figures, and authors in the biographies. In addition, Dos Passos’ earlier critiques of propaganda and nationalism are comprehensively extended to the particulars of civilian life and the militarist fervor of the American home front. Ideas of socialist revolution, depictions of anti-German (and anti-pacifist) paranoia, and the “escape” offered by expatriation likewise receive attention (and implicit commendation in some instances). Again, although of basically the same tenor as *Three Soldiers* in its views of the war and American intervention, the novels were not controversial in their time. Published during the Nye Committee hearings and the passage of the Neutrality Acts, Dos Passos’ works of the 1930s reflect, rather than challenge or attempt to re-shape, the predominant ideologies of the time regarding foreign conflict.

The “portraits” of such figures as Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Woodrow Wilson, and Eugene Debs, for instance, either indict or condone their views on the war and thus offer an implicit judgment on that individual’s life, at least partly on that basis. Carnegie, for example, who “believed in oil; believed in steel; always saved his money / whenever he had a million dollars he invested it,” is sarcastically derided as someone who “gave millions for peace . . . always / except in time of war” (*USA* 231). J.P. Morgan and his heirs, likewise, are portrayed as capitalists exploiting already horrible situations:

(Wars and panics on the stock exchange,
machinegunfire and arson,
bankruptcies, warloans,
starvation, lice, cholera and typhus,
good growing weather for the House of Morgan.) (648)

The rhetoric of the time surrounding the “Merchants of Death,” the perceived culpability of tycoons in the 1917 decision for war, and the general distrust of big business is reflected in these portraits. Henry Ford is later depicted as withdrawn in fear and distrust from the corporate empire he has created with his automobiles (813-4) William Randolph Hearst’s attempts to precipitate foreign wars, his “hissing dirty names at the defenders of civil liberties for the workingman,” and his praise of the “blood and bludgeon rule” of Adolf Hitler effectively brand
him “a spent Caesar . . . never man enough to cross the Rubicon” (1169). Woodrow Wilson’s hypocrisy in entering the war despite his campaign promises is exposed at length in his portrait, which also links him explicitly to the business interests and their war aims:

Five months after his reelection on the slogan *He kept us out of war*, Wilson pushed the Armed Ship Bill through congress and declared that a state of war existed between the United States and the Central Powers; . . . Wilson became the state (war is the health of the state), Washington his Versailles, manned the socialized government with dollar a year men out of the great corporations and ran the big parade / of men munitions groceries mules and trucks to France. . . . If you objected to making the world safe for cost plus democracy you went to jail with Debs. . . . In Europe they knew what gas smelt like and the sweet sick stench of bodies buried too shallow and the grey look of starved children; they read in the papers that Meester Veelson was for peace and freedom and canned goods and butter and sugar; . . . La France heroique was there with the speeches, the singing schoolchildren, the mayors in their red sashes. (Did Meester Veelson see the gendarmes at Brest beating back the demonstration of dockyard workers who came to meet him with red flags?) (567-8)

Later, Dos Passos details Wilson’s trip through Seattle, and the silent greeting he received from I.W.W. members during a parade “after all the other blocks of handclapping and patriotic cheers” (571). This passage follows the statement: “He strained every nerve of his body and brain, every agency of the government he had under his control; (if anybody disagreed he was a crook or a red; no pardon for Debs)” (570-1). Wilson is consistently portrayed as an enemy of the lower-class, of working men, of peace, of freedom, and embodies, in this portrait, oppression, capitalism, and war. The failure of his idealism – no U.S. entry into the League of Nations – underscores the critique and Wilson’s overall futility as a leader. The meeting of Allied leaders at the Paris Peace Conference evokes – in parts almost verbatim – the earlier cynicism toward the estate of J.P. Morgan:

Clemenceau,
Lloyd George,
Woodrow Wilson.
Three old men shuffling the pack,
dealing out the cards:
the Rhineland, Danzig, the Polish corridor, the Ruhr, self determination of small
countries, the Saar, League of Nations, mandates, the Mespot, Freedom of the Seas,
Transjordania, Shantung, Fiume and the Island of Yap:
machine gun fire and arson
starvation, lice, cholera, typhus;
oil was trumps. (570)

The effect of such passages is to implicitly equate national leaders and business interests,
particularly in the apparently cavalier way in which territorial possessions are “dealt” out, as in
the manner of a card game, for the greatest possible economic gain. By contrast, men such as Bill
Haywood, Thorstein Veblen, Joe Hill, Wesley Everest, and Eugene Debs are lauded as cultural
heroes, tragic figures ground down by the establishment politicians and ostensibly war-
mongering capitalists. The biography of Debs, in particular, emphasizes the revolutionary aspects
of his anti-war protest (31). Dos Passos describes Debs’ abandonment by his former supporters
as symptomatic of the ways in which he has been “tainted” by his opposition to the war: “but
they were afraid of him as if he had contracted a social disease, syphilis or leprosy, and thought it
was too bad, / but on account of the flag / and prosperity / and making the world safe for
democracy, / they were afraid to be with him,” (32). The “bogy of a socialist president” that
might have scared the ruling class and America’s industrialists, Dos Passos suggests, was
nullified by Debs’ own anti-war views, which too many people were scared to associate
themselves with.

But perhaps the most striking commentary on the aims and outcome of the war appear in
the “Unknown Solider” sketch that closes 1919. Dos Passos indicts all the cultural and economic
prejudices that made the war possible in the first place and that now sought, at the war’s end, to
maximize their own gain (or at least to put the best possible appearance on the American role in
the conflict):

Whereas the Congress of the United States by a concurrent resolution adopted on
the 4th day of March last authorized the Secretary of War to cause to be brought to
the United States the body of an American
who was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe
wholostthislifeduringtheworldwarandwhoseidentityhasnotbeenestablished for burial inthememorialampitheatreofthe nationalcemetryatarlington-virginia. (756)

This rather schizophrenic introduction to the intent of the Congress precedes a pointed critique of the “methods” used to select a suitable “unknown”:

enie menie minie moe plenty other pine boxes stacked up there containing what they’d scraped up of Richard Roe and other person or persons unknown. Only one can go. How did they pick John Doe?

Make sure he ain’t a dinge, boys,
make sure he ain’t a guinea or a kike,
how can you tell a guy’s a hundredpercent when all you’ve got’s a gunnysack full of bones, bronze buttons stamped with the screaming eagle and a pair of roll puttees? (756)

The gory descriptions of the hypothetical “death” of John Doe and his subsequent “packaging” for delivery home (“The blood ran into the ground, the blood oozed out of the cracked skull and were licked up by the trenchrats, the belly swelled and raised a generation of bluebottle flies”) form a vivid contrast when juxtaposed with the formal “greeting” and the pageantry of the reception at Arlington:

and Mr.Harding prayed to God and the diplomats and the generals and the admirals and the brasshats and the politicians and the handsomely dressed ladies out of the society column of the Washington Times stood up solemn and thought how beautiful sad Old Glory God’s Country it was to have the bugler play taps and the three volleys made their ears ring (760)

In fact, these very sort of juxtapositions and abrupt contrasts comprise a large part of the trilogy’s ideological attack. In the Newsreel sections, for instance, images and words contrasting the bombast and idealism of public figures are often placed against grotesque or violent episodes to indicate the hypocrisy underneath the rhetoric. These often indictment not just the U.S./Allied effort in World War I, but involvement in Mexico, Russia, and in the use of deadly force against striking workers in America itself, forming a broad critique of militarism in general that extends beyond the particular circumstances of the Great War. A sample of Newsreel material offers the following “passages”:
to such a task we dedicate our lives
and our fortunes, everything that we are,
and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know
that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her
blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth
and happiness and the peace that she has treasured. God
helping her she can do no other

. . .

TRAITORS BEWARE
four men in Evanston fined for killing birds
WILSON WILL FORCE DRAFT (303)

The juxtaposition here of idealism and pragmatism (and the hypocrisy of fining men for
killing birds at the eve of a bloody war) underscores the belief that the rhetoric, again, does not
match the reality. The Newsreel which opens 1919 states, in part:

when they return home what will our war veterans think of the American who
babbles about some vague new order, while dabbling in the sand of shoal water?
From his weak folly they who have lived through the spectacle will recall the vast
No Man’s Land of Europe reeking with murder and the lust of rapine, aflame with
the fires of revolution (363)

The irony here is that Dos Passos, and many of his contemporaries who had also served in
the war would soon make up that very intellectual class who would “babble about some new
world order” – just as the characters of One Man’s Initiation, Three Soldiers, and U.S.A. had.

Newsreel XXIII is worth quoting at length for its rhetoric of patriotism aligned with the
imagery and brief headlines of chaos and corruption:

If you don’t like your Uncle Sammy
If you don’t like the red white and blue
Smiles of patriotic Essex County will be concentrated and recorded at Branch
Brook Park, Newark, N.J., tomorrow afternoon. Bands will play while a vast
throng marches happily to the rhythm of wartime anthems and airs. Mothers of the
nation’s sons will be there; wives, many of them carrying babes born after their
fathers sailed for the front, will occupy a place in Essex County’s graphic pageant;

...  

MOBS PLUNDER CITIES  
NEWSPAPERMAN LEADS THROUGH BARRAGE

it was a pitiful sight at dusk every evening when the whole population evacuated the city, going to sleep in the fields until daylight. Old women and tiny children, cripples drawn in carts or wheeled in barrows men carrying chairs bring those too feeble and too old to walk

JERSEY TROOPS TAKE WOMAN GUNNERS

the trouble had its origin with the demand of the marine workers for an eight hour day

*If you don’t like the stars in Old Glory
Then go back to your land across the sea
To the land from which you came
Whatever be its name

G.O.P. LEADER ACCUSED OF DRAFT FRAUDS

*If you don’t like the red white and blue
Then don’t act like the cur in the story
Don’t bite the hand that’s feeding you* (450)

And later in the narrative:

REBEL SAILORS DEFY ALLIES

... after a long conference with a secretary of war and the secretary of state

President Wilson returned to the White House this afternoon apparently highly pleased that events are steadily pursuing the course which he had felt they would take (510)

The sense of “disconnect” between the political leadership and the actual conditions at the front (and in the conflict as a whole) is a common theme among all the novels discussed here. At the very least there is a suggestion of ignorance or apathy (as with this example), if not outright accusations of criminality and incompetence. The direct opposition of leadership to anti-war movements and “socialist” protesters is documented as well:
The display of the red flag in our thoroughfares seems to be emblematic of unbridled licence and an insignia for lawhating and anarchy, like the black flag it represents everything that is repulsive (510)

the socialrevolutionaries are the agents of Denekine, Kolchak, and the Allied Imperial Armies. I was one of the organizers of the Soldiers, Sailors and Workmen’s council in Seattle. There is the same sentiment in this meeting that appeared at our first meeting in Seattle when 5000 men in uniform attended. EX-

KAISER SPENDS HOURS IN WRITING. Speaking broadly their choice is between revolutionary socialism and anarchy. England already has plunged into socialism, France hesitates, Belgium is gone, Italy is going, while Lenine’s shadow grows stronger and stronger over the conference. . . . masses still don’t know how the war started, how it was conducted, or how it ended, declared Maximillian Harden. The war ministry was stormed by demonstrators who dragged out Herr Neuring and threw him into the Elbe where he was shot and killed as he attempted to swim to the bank

VICIOUS PRACTICES RESPONSIBLE FOR HIGH LIVING COST, WILSON TELLS CONGRESS (714)

The leaderships of the various nations – not just Allied but German and Russian as well – are indicted here. But it is in the realm of anti-German propaganda during the war itself where the “conditioning” of the American public and the culpability of its leaders are perhaps most stridently condemned in the novels:

several different stories have come to me well authenticated concerning the depth of Hindenburg’s brutality; the details are too horrible for print. They relate to outraged womanhood and girlhood, suicide and blood of the innocent that wet the feet of Hindenburg (420)

Such inflammatory rhetoric – centering around alleged “atrocities,” the “rape of Belgium,” and the like – had by the time of the publication of The 42nd Parallel already been dismissed and derided in much of the artistic, intellectual, and political circles. In the character-based narratives of U.S.A., though, Dos Passos depicts the paranoia-inducing effects of such indoctrination on the populace at large, to an even greater degree than in his previous novels. Representing a range of careers and socioeconomic positions, all the main characters in the
narrative threads are affected by the war in Europe to some degree. Most of them, further, are touched in some way or influenced by anti-German propaganda, and evidence of this mindset in much of the population is dispersed throughout the three novels. Miss Eliza Felton, an illustrator of children’s books on the way over to France to drive a truck, “was bitter against the Huns on account of Rheims and Louvain and the poor little Belgian babies with their hands cut off” (473). Joe Williams, a merchant sailor, is accused of being “a dirty ‘un spy” by the British captain of his ship and is temporarily imprisoned in England on the basis of that suspicion, despite his assertions of American citizenship (387-96). Subsequent to his release, he becomes involved in a bar fight and in his sentencing is chastised by the British magistrate, who feels the Americans “ought to be fighting shoulder to shoulder with their brothers, Englishmen of their own blood . . . to defend plucky little Belgium against the invading huns who were raping women and sinking peaceful merchantmen” (399). Joe is perhaps the character most explicitly victimized by the anti-German paranoia; he also survives two torpedo attacks by German U-boats and is castigated by his own wife, cheating on him with commissioned officers and enlisted men, for being “yellow” and a “slacker” for not enlisting (502). His own sister, Janey, inundates him with rhetoric of the “barbarous” Germans and the Lusitania while Joe is on shore leave (297).

Dick Savage, a character who, like John Andrews, closely resembles Dos Passos (college-educated and an ambulance driver), actively rebels against the propaganda in his correspondence (like the author himself), and writes to the wife of a clergyman at home:

“I don’t believe in Christianity anymore and can’t argue from that standpoint, but you do, or at least Edwin does, and he ought to realize that in urging young men to go into this cockeyed lunatic asylum of war he’s doing everything he can to undermine all the principles and ideals he most believes in. As the young fellow we had that talk with in Genoa that night said, it’s not on the level, it’s a dirty goldbrick game put over by governments and politicians for their own selfish interests, it’s crooked from A-Z. If it wasn’t for the censorship I could tell you things that would make you vomit.” (529)

Savage eventually lands in some trouble for his letters, as did Dos Passos himself, but by 1932, the attack against this propaganda and the laying bare of the “war to end war” banner was understood and accepted. This passage with Savage’s letter reflects a facet of the war years that had since been incorporated into the period’s cultural history. Unlike with Dos Passos’ own
letters, or with the then-inflammatory characterizations in *Three Soldiers*, Savage’s response to the war (and to the religious rhetoric surrounding it) is, in the period of the Nye Commission, the Bonus Army, and the Neutrality Acts, a wholly representative attitude. His investigation by his superiors for alleged “seditious utterances” marks him for the reader as a victim, rather than as a bad element or a “slacker.” In fact, the overzealous captain who confronts Savage soon after this incident, bawling to him that “any man who was still a pacifist after the President’s declaration of war was a moron or what was worse a degenerate and that he was going to see to it that [Savage] would be sent back to the States” (537) is portrayed as a buffoon and a clown, mirroring the depictions of aggressive officers that ten years earlier had been so incendiary to many readers in *Three Soldiers*. Cooperman notes of Savage’s experience throughout the *U.S.A.* novels that “the most militant militants” are invariably “among the rear-echelon patriots; it is they who are most shocked by his ‘cowardly’ letters expressing doubts about the war” (*World War I* 93).

The media is no less vulnerable to this sort of ideological “policing”; UP reporter Jerry Burnham complains “how his work disgusted him, how a correspondent couldn’t get to see anything anymore, how he had three or four censorships on his neck all the time and had to send out prepared stuff that was all a pack of dirty lies every word of it” (*USA* 544). When his lunch companion recommends that he ought to write a book after the war “and really tell the truth about it” (544), she is prefiguring – or describing outright – the postwar agenda for writers like Dos Passos, Cummings, and Boyd. In a sense, this scene scripts the social history of the post-war writer in France – frustrated, suffocated, only needing an uncensored outlet to write the “truth” of the conflict for an ignorant or misinformed public. The autobiographical elements in *U.S.A.* are every bit as prevalent as in Dos Passos’ earlier works, but here the characters speak for an entire social milieu rather than one man’s own thwarted aesthetic sensibility (at root, the conflicts of Martin Howe in *One Man’s Initiation* and John Andrews in *Three Soldiers*). The “inevitable corollary of the Crusade’s ideological basis,” Cooperman writes, was “national preoccupation, almost paranoia, regarding the evils of pacifism, socialism, anarchism, and what [President] Wilson called ‘hyphenated Americanism’” (*World War I* 94). It is this pervasive paranoia which *U.S.A.* most vividly records, not merely in the clandestine conversations of enlisted men and ambulance drivers, but in a far more cross-sectional sample of the populace. Given the massive, ambitious scope of *U.S.A.*, and the attendant explicit aim of recording cultural memory of the era, Dos Passos’ protagonists appear the sympathetic victims of their culture and of the period’s
militarism. The homefront cultures of the Allied nations, which were only glimpsed or hinted at in the earlier works, emerge in *U.S.A.* as overtly poisonous and stifling for those who attempt to breach its confines – Richard Savage, Jerry Burnham, and Joe Williams all eventually capitulate to their influence in various ways by the trilogy’s close.

A trait shared by *Three Soldiers* and *U.S.A.* is “the faith in protest itself as a means of revelation and corrective action” (Cooperman, *World War I* 180). The “corrective action,” though, had largely been instilled in the public mind by the mid- to late 1930s; hence the buffoonery of ideologue civilian officers and the sympathetic portrayals of those on the outskirts of that value system. *1919*, specifically, “suggests that the United States entered the war solely to fatten the armament industry’s profits and to ensure the security of American banker’s loans in Europe,” Rosen claims (82). Even as the novel was published and received, the Nye Committee hearings were taking action on that very front, and thus, using Davis’ and Fine’s theories, the novel’s anti-militarist, pro-activist/rebellion themes become themselves a form of social engagement and reform. The “dire need to confront social issues” resonates throughout *U.S.A.*, writes Michael Clark (123). Such a reading finds its validation not in the explicit “protests” of John Andrews, but more subtly through a depiction of “war culture” as pathological and insincere. Michael Bradbury claims that novels, “themselves socio-cultural creations,” are naturally “imbued with the meanings and structures of a civilization” (193), and that in *U.S.A.*, the internal, cultural “war” between two factions comes to the surface:

Thus the war could be seen as Wilson’s moral crusade in defense of civilization and democracy; it could also be seen as the great betrayal, an entry into European corruptions, a Morgan-financed struggle to protect capital and stave off revolution. . . . It was this . . . range of mixed feelings, portraying the war both as opportunity and betrayal, which generated the contradictions and uncertainties [in the trilogy].” (202-3)

The novels’ “bleak vision of nearly universal defeat,” Rosen writes, “demands radical social change” (86). Many of the characters, in addition to the defeatism found in earlier protagonists like Boyd’s Hicks or Dos Passos’ Fuselli, are active social radicals: the Industrial Workers of the World, for instance, are praised and valorized through the character of Mac, and the labor activist Ben Compton’s “unrelenting opposition” to the war leads to his incarceration
(88). These are, though, only the most explicit examples; the victimization of ordinary citizens by war-fervor is, as discussed, far more commonly-noted.

A novel sharing narrative similarities with *U.S.A.*, even in its sense of “defeat,” is William March’s *Company K*, published in 1933 in the midst of the *U.S.A.* releases. March’s novel, though, employs a far wider range of individual “voices,” narrating in first-person the experiences of dozens of soldiers deployed in France in 1918. March himself was the holder of a Distinguished Service Cross and his book is, to Cooperman, “no less bitter” than *The Enormous Room* in its exposition of hypocrisy and the hollowness of war rhetoric (*World War I* 228).

March, as an author, falls into the same category of “victim advocate” as most of the Lost Generation writers. While perhaps not directly encouraging activism or ideology, *Company K* laments the beliefs and values of the society that entered and prosecuted the war and finds no reason to hope that conditions or mindsets will change even after the war’s conclusion. March’s protagonists share many similarities with Richard Plume, with Donald Mahon, and with Hemingway’s characters, and his route to the war was similar to that followed by many of his fellow war writers. Like Laurence Stallings, March was born and raised in the small-town South, enlisted in the Marines in 1917, and was wounded repeatedly during his service (William March v). *Company K* is commonly noted – by Pizer, Cooperman, Walsh, and others – as one of the seminal war texts of the era, as much so as *Three Soldiers* or *The Enormous Room*. It combines narrative and plot strategies from *U.S.A.*, *Three Soldiers*, *Soldiers’ Pay*, and Plumes, forming a curious amalgam of the dominant anti-militarist themes that dominated war literature in the 1930s.

*Company K* utilizes 116 separate first-person narratives to tell the story outlined in the very first narrative thread by Private Joseph Delaney, reminiscing in his post-war suburban life. Of the book that he hopes to soon complete:

> Then I think: “This book started out to be a record of my own company, but I do not want it to be that, now. I want it to be a record of every company in every army. If its cast and its overtones are American, that is only because the American scene is the one that I know. With different names and different settings, the men of whom I have written could, as easily, be French, German, English or Russian for that matter.” (*CK* 2)
Company K inclines itself almost from the outset toward an explicitly pacifist ideology. Following a discussion with his wife on the morality of shooting enemy prisoners (aligned with the pacifist agenda), Delaney comments on the preternatural way in which the grass over an especially bloody battleground comes up “greener and more luxuriant,” and offers a philosophical addendum:

I repeated my thoughts to my wife, but she said it was not difficult to understand about battlefields: The blood of the men killed on the field, and the bodies buried there, fertilize the ground and stimulate the growth of vegetation. That was all quite natural, she said.

But I could not agree with this, too-simple, explanation: To me it has always seemed that God is so sickened with other men, and their unending cruelty to each other, that he covers the place where they have been as quickly as possible. (4)

This effusive despair regarding human nature, which resonates throughout the novel in the various narrative strands, casts American war involvement in the most sinister light, more so than perhaps even Plumes, which was more specifically political. In fact, Company K suggests that the story Delaney yearns to write is at its core not simply an American one; it is the story of all the soldiers of all the belligerent nations. Thus March, at the outset, frames the narrative not merely as an epistle of despair looking to place social and political blame, but as a more general anti-militarist statement, in the vein of All Quiet on the Western Front or of Dalton Trumbo’s Johnny Got His Gun. The fragmentary episodes described by the book’s multiple narrators repeatedly imply that war taints or destroys value at all levels of human interaction, in much the same manner that Plumes asserts the war’s destructive effects on familial love and happiness.

Company K contains the familiar elements of the earlier novels – the indictments of anti-German propaganda, the shunning of wounded veterans, the contrasting landscapes of green valleys and fields and the pitted, scarred no-man’s land – but, to a greater degree than in previous works, focuses on the human viciousness and acts of brutality that are war’s primary accomplishment.

Indictment of religion as complicit in the war effort occurs as well. Private Archie Lemon’s narrative relates a fiery sermon on the trans-Atlantic transport in which the chaplain “asked God to give our hearts courage, and our arms strength, to strike down our adversaries. He said we were not soldiers, in the accepted sense of the word: We were crusaders who had
dedicated our lives and our souls to our country and to our God that the things we revere and hold sacred, might not perish” (9). Private Edward Romano, during a sleep-deprived reverie in the trenches, hallucinates the figure of Christ coming toward him and engages in a half-dreamt dialogue:

I raised my rifle to kill him, but when I saw it was Christ, I lowered it again.

“Would you have hurt me?” he asked sadly. I said yes, and began to curse: “You ought to be ashamed of yourself to let this go on! –You ought to be ashamed! . . .”

But he lifted his arms to the sodden field, to the tangled wire, to the charred trees like teeth in a fleshless jaw. “Tell me what to do,” he said. “Tell me what to do, if you know!” (28)

The battlefield conditions are described in visceral detail, with men shivering, cold, covered with vermin, unbathed, and a nausea-inducing stench in the trenches (29). Private Jacob Geller relates a story of finding a dead German with “a hole in his chest as big as your fist,” and eating the blood-soaked bread they find in his knapsack (30-1). After a particularly intense artillery barrage, Lieutenant Thomas Jewett describes its effects on three of his men: “[A]nd when I reached the clump, the first objects I saw were the bodies of Alden, Geers, and Carroll huddled together, their faces torn away, the tops of their heads caved in. Lying across a fallen tree, his body ripped from belly to chin, was Sergeant Prado, while Leslie Jourdan stood upright looking down at his hand, from which the fingers had been shot away” (34-5). None of these violent depictions introduces any particularly original element into the genre, so to speak, but they are representative of the relentless imagery of shredded bodies, bayonet wounds, poison-gas victims, and severed limbs that propel the various narratives. More so than any of the other novels under discussion (with the possible exception of Through the Wheat), Company K largely shuns philosophical or aesthetic protest in favor of tangible, horrific details of combat and its physical aftermath. Romano’s hallucination of Christ can be placed in this classification as well.

The philosophical condemnations, where they do occur, are universal in scope, not restricted, as with some of the other World War I novels, to the specific actions of Allied armies or governments. Private Colin Urquhart reminisces:

I have no theories and no remedies to offer. All I know, surely, is that there should be a law, in the name of humanity, making mandatory the execution of every soldier who has served on the front and managed to escape death there. The
passage of such a law is impossible, of course: for Christian people who pray in their churches for the destruction of their enemies, and glorify the barbarity of their soldiers in bronze – those very people would call the measure cruel and uncivilized, and rush to the polls to defeat it. (178)

Private Sylvester Keith, “sullen and resentful” at his war service, organizes a “Society for the Prevention of War” in his hometown, thinking “that if people were made to understand the senseless horror of war, and could be shown the brutal and stupid facts, they would refuse to kill each other when a roomful of politicians decided for them that their honor had been violated” (158). The irony of Keith’s efforts becomes clear, when, after horrifying the members of his group with stories of liquid fire and gas attacks, they join a newly-organized National Guard unit in the town “to protect their country from the horrors [he] had described” (158). Cooperman notes, among other critiques of immediate post-war life in America in the novel, the surprise evinced by many returning soldiers that “after a military career of fraud and bootlicking,” they could still be lauded as heroes (World War I 159).

Warmongering politicians are lampooned in manner of Dos Passos’ unflattering portraits in U.S.A. Lieutenant James Fairbrother, elected in post-war life to Congress, rails in his acceptance speech about “cowards and milksops” and “pacifist propagandists” and warns of other nations’ jealousy of the United States:

Why do you think Italy is training an army and preaching militarism? Open your eyes and look around you! Look at Japan! They’re ready to spring at our throats at the drop of a hat! And England hates us! I repeat it, my friends: Our “cousins over the sea” hate us! . . . Germany is not to be ignored, either. –How short-sighted we were to let them get on their feet again. –And France hasn’t any love for us: anybody who saw her attitude toward our own soldier boys – your sons and mine, gentlemen – knows that! (CK 179)

Company K evokes Plumes and Soldiers’ Pay in the tale of Private Walter Webster, who has been grotesquely wounded in the face. His fiancee’s mother begs him to break the engagement, and subtly reveals the distance between war-rhetoric and war-reality: “‘It was different when war was declared, and the band was playing in Jackson Park and there were pretty girls dressed in nurses’ uniforms urging the men to enlist and fight for their country’” (156). Although Webster has “changed,” and despite his “present appearance,” his fiancee will still
marry him, even though her mother considers Webster “selfish” and “inconsiderate” for refusing to end the engagement (156-7). The night of the wedding, alone for the first time with his new wife in their hotel room, he is met with disgust and revulsion: “If you touch me, I’ll vomit” (157).

The range of experiences covered in this short novel strike all the chords that politicians were echoing in Congressional investigations and in the drafting of legislature. It is representative, not only of the hardened mentality of anti-militarism suffusing America at the time, but of the more strident ways in which war involvement in general, and not just World War I, would be scrutinized in art and culture, although World War I, naturally, provided the most accessible, horrific experience to frame such a philosophy. Such a novel could not have been published in 1921, when Three Soldiers launched the first real “salvo” in the literary protest, and was met with such scorn and shock. Company K takes Dos Passos’ more narrowly focused target – the military hierarchy and its symbiotic dependence on propaganda and war-fervor – and indicts that merely as one more despicable element fueling a war-machine equally dependent on American ignorance, bloodlust, and ideals of religious sacrifice. In this sense it goes far beyond what Dos Passos intended with his early novel, but March’s work found far more fertile soil for its harshly anti-war rhetoric.

Randall Stewart, writing in 1945, pointed out that the literary scene of the 1920s was rife with “indictments of America,” citing An American Tragedy, Arrowsmith, and Main Street as representative examples (373). This criticism of America, though, “became more serious, more bitter, and more brutal” during the Depression (374), and the war novels of the 1930s strongly reflect this anger. The “wreckage of war and the mounting criticism of American economic and social life” were constantly, intimately connected themes in interwar literature (375). The Sun Also Rises and Farewell to Arms, he wrote, best captured the war’s tragedy, with the latter novel displaying how “the war deprived its victims of high aims and ideals” (372, italics mine). The concept of soldier-as-victim, emerging as a theme in the war novel, attempted to engender peace consciousness through more strident criticisms of the social forces behind war, and U.S.A. and Company K represent the pinnacle of what had begun in the early 1920s.

U.S.A., especially, discredits the ability or desire of humans (and their media, as the Newsreels demonstrate) to make sense of war or to do much but either despair its existence or re-frame the conflict through socialist revolution (a theme absent from Company K). Stewart
characterizes the characters in *U.S.A.* as a “fictional gallery of human automatons” (378). Bradbury adds that *U.S.A.* “is indeed a very 30s history” (205). In this sense, post-economic crash, at the end of prohibition, the 1920s are viewed “as the nadir, the discredited decade, dominated by commercialism and materialism” (205). The Newsreels and biographical sketches bear this out in the later teens – the war years – as well, achieving that perception of “mixed feelings” and betrayal through their sudden juxtapositions of rhetoric and reality.

But the 1920s were a success for the post-war writers, in ways they were perhaps not consciously aware of. Certainly the expatriates of the Lost Generation had, at least temporarily, turned their backs on American culture and all it entailed; Dos Passos, decrying the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti and the ideological split in the nation their trial had exposed, spent most of the decade out of the country. The “script” the various authors had written for the war, however, would bear fruit by the end of the 1920s. Despite the decade’s alleged materialism and commercialism, which may in part have led to the onset of the Depression, the anti-war movement flourished on a number of levels, both in the minds of the avowed pacifists and idealistic “abolitionists,” and of the more practical-minded isolationists. The United States would remain, despite Lend-Lease and other covert economic aid to European belligerents forbidden by the Neutrality Acts, at technical peace until December of 1941. Stewart, writing less than four years after U.S. entry into the Second World War, appears to lament the effect of the inter-war writers on national consciousness and the pacifist movement by the time of Pearl Harbor:

A generation of readers had gone to school to the pessimists. Some of the more articulate war patriots felt that we had been betrayed by our writers, that they had committed a kind of spiritual sabotage and had been guilty of a profound and insidious treason. (382)

As a result, Stewart suggested, “many felt that we were spiritually unprepared for the conflict” that followed Pearl Harbor, and wondered if “perhaps the authors were the voice of the age rather than its creator” (382). Although one writer’s interpretation, these comments indicate the demonstrable effect the war writers had on public and intellectual life, an effect noticed not long after the end of American isolationism. Stewart is wrong, however, to posit a either-or function of these works; the literary “sabotage” he mentions both represents a deliberately-engineered triumph for the peace movement, and reflects – emplots – the cultural mood of the era in the narrative of American history.
CONCLUSION
WAR FICTION IN THE WAKE OF THE PROTEST

The impact of the war novels in the near-two decade period ending World War I is unique and likely will never be duplicated. Much of their initial effect derived from the absence of any other mass media able to reliably “tell the story” of the war while it was happening or in its immediate aftermath. As Roscigno and Danaher’s study of “radio insurgency” in the South during the late 1920s and early 1930s demonstrates, the times themselves, and the “protest atmosphere,” had much to do with public reception of politicized art, music, and literature. Textile workers in Southern states felt themselves abused, exploited, and oppressed by mill owners, and the “victim advocates” – those disgruntled workers who expressed their frustration through music – helped, through their songs, to shape “workers’ sense of collective experience and political opportunity” (21). “Media,” the authors assert, “can be more directly influential when it shapes prospective movement participants’ perceptions of political opportunity” (26). The novels written by former soldiers and ambulance drivers, likewise, provided a “framework” through which a disparate set of circumstances and experiences could be collectively defined and reacted against. The fact that media can, additionally, “shape the collective experience and feelings of ‘groupness’ across a geographically dispersed population” (42) was not lost on many of the politicians and peace activists who could sense the “opportunity” presented to them by the reception of these narratives.

Davis reads narratives as “cultural scripts that supply guidelines for understanding and action, or as performances that create as well as comment on prior experience” (11, italics mine). Any understanding of the scope of the peace movement, isolationist sentiment, or the goals of anti-militarist activists and intellectuals, is incomplete without an examination of the myriad narratives that collectively form that “story” during the interwar years.
The war novels published in the wake of World War II, while full of much of the same despair, sense of oppression, and critique of leadership, were never construed as *protest* novels in the same way the earlier ones were, according to Cooperman, and this is another important factor in examining their lack of direct sociopolitical impact. The view, for instance, that the Second World War was “a necessary global conflict” resulted in a general reaction toward “anti-war bias” in fiction (*World War I* 195). Hemingway, Cooperman notes, “assented” to World War II, “and without illusions,” evincing the same “political, military, and patriotic sloganeering so totally rejected by Frederick Henry and other World War I protagonists” (196). The ideology of a novel such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* makes plain the belief that a “separate peace” in the fight against fascism was “unforgivable,” Cooperman suggests, and Hemingway’s own involvement in anti-fascist efforts in Spain bolsters this claim (207). Historians, who thirty years earlier had been on the academic forefront of anti-German propaganda, did not repeat this work for the Second World War; as Blakey writes, “the manner of American involvement in the war” didn’t require any kind of justification (150-1).

The “liberal” intellectuals and authors who had railed against the U.S. war effort in the 1920s came to believe by 1940 the country was faced with “the grim realities of an intractable world” (Rochester 148). Richard Neibuhr pointed out that morals and reason were ineffective against bombs, tanks, and flamethrowers (qtd. in Rochester 147). Walter Mills, an ardent pacifist who had written a pointed, critical work on U.S. intervention in World War I, *The Road to War* (1935), “became an outspoken supporter of intervention in 1940,” believing by then “that wars were inevitable,” and in fact “the deepest expression of our social life” (qtd. in Rochester 148). Dos Passos’ later works clearly reflect his gradual drift to the right, and by the 1960s he was fervently supporting Barry Goldwater’s run for the U.S. presidency and the invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam War (Rosen).

This feeling – of the impossibility of pacifism or conscientious objection – was, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, general to most of the American public. The despair, revulsion, and anger, “factors which prevented action on the part of young men during the 1930s,” as fascism threatened, had also induced “a skepticism as to the necessities for war, no matter how loudly these necessities were urged” (Cooperman, *World War I* 222-3). Novels such as *Company K* evince such a broad distaste for combat, divorced from specific circumstance. “Only as it became clear,” Cooperman writes, that there was legitimate, unambiguous cause to fight fascism, “were
young men willing or able to stand and ‘confront’ it” (223). And unlike the young men of a
generation previous, the new recruits in 1941 “had few illusions” about the nature of modern
combat (221).

The writers who would emerge from World War II had “nothing specific to rebel against,
whether a false cause or technology” (224). While the “negation” of World War I writers had
been, in Cooperman’s analysis, “active, corrective, and for the most part socially directed” (234),
the World War II aesthetic stance was largely “conservative” in “corrective and active” terms
(235). The preoccupation of post-World War II art and literature, moreover, “is with
metaphysical awareness rather than with social protest,” Cooperman claims (231). In describing
the initial critical and popular reception of Three Soldiers, he writes: “With American readers
still fog-bound by the war sentimentality of the Great Crusade, the reaction to [the novel] is
hardly surprising”– the new generation of young soldiers, though, “had been suffering from
‘ideological battle fatigue’ long before they donned their uniforms” (239). Hence, while a novel
like Slaughterhouse Five or Catch-22 could be generally described as “anti-war,” there is not a
corresponding sense that the novel is an active protest against the specific circumstances that
produced the writing. “The protest, the agony, the bitterness” of Boyd, of a younger Dos Passos,
or a Cummings, while “aesthetically no less than historically authentic” (242), outlived their
ability to produce an explosive effect on the reading public or, by extension, on the wills of
policy-makers at the national level.

The lack of revolt against the technology of warfare – tanks, airplanes, machine guns, and
long-range artillery were commonplace “items” of combat by World War II – illuminates another
dimension of the World War I literary protest’s uniqueness. The technology of media, as well,
developed rapidly after World War I, and by the time of the Vietnam conflict in the late 1960s,
there was little need for authors to “write” the truth of the war, as had been the case in the early
1920s. Media technology made possible a partial effacement of the barriers between event and
reportage, barriers which in World War I were considerable. The censorship of front-line reports,
or the tailoring of articles to suit propagandistic ends, was greatly facilitated by the reliance on
print media to tell the story of the conflict during the war itself. Sebastian Faulks, in his
introduction to The Vintage Book of War Fiction, addresses the ways in which both battlefield
and media technology have diluted the public impact of war fiction, and questions the potential
of the novel to explore what he describes as a “video game” war such as those conducted in the
Persian Gulf in 1991 or Kosovo in 1999 (xiv). The first responses to the September 11, 2001 attacks and other aspects of the war on terror, he notes, were from film and other visual media, with the captured images of the September 11 attacks themselves achieving the status of a published “text” virtually immediately through public inundation via television and online news sources (xiv-xv). “As for the air and ground war in Afghanistan itself,” he notes, “it seems too remote and too specialized – not just professional soldiers, but specialized units within their forces – to have a wider human response” (xv). James Coombs illuminates some aspects of the recent dominance of visual media – and film in particular – in assuming its more assertive role in the public mind:

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, it seems clear that the mass media, including the movies, are more an arena of ideological conflict and confusion than a mere conduit of agreed-upon values. . . . [Films] mitigate against ideological conformity and support. (11)

He adds: “We speak of ‘movie-made America’ and witness a former ‘matinee idol’ of old Hollywood become President” (3). As opposed to operating purely as entertainment – a “conduit of agreed-upon values” – “the movies become a contributing source in the ongoing conduct of national social and political discourse” (4). Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud write in their introduction to From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film that the interdependence of fiction and documentary modes of representation were “already emerging during World War II,” and that this relationship has “become more pervasive with the shift to extensive television reportage” (3). Faulks writes:

It is possible to envisage on the ground in bombed Belgrade or mutilated Kosovo the dramatically complex circumstances that might give rise to fiction in due course, but you feel it would be certain to come from those countries and not from the ranks of the arm’s-length NATO air forces. Perhaps that is unfair. The story of a troubled pilot who has inadvertently bombed the refugees he is meant to help, attacked the liberation army who are his allies or destroyed the embassy of a non-engaged enemy country is not without potential. (xiv)

Faulks, though, speaks of “potential” and of speculative possibilities. Fiction itself, he implies, has lost its primacy as a medium for cultural transmission in regard to war reportage.
The situations of the soldiers themselves in the latter years of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first also contribute to the decline of socially-motivated war fiction. In the absence of a draft or compulsory military service, the armed forces themselves have evolved into an entity far different than what they were in 1918, or even in the late 1960s. Richard Posner, writing in 2003, states: “There is no draft; the army is a career like any other” (27). The practical realities of social and financial life in twenty-first century America make the compulsory service of the World War I or Vietnam eras implausible – the imposition of a draft “would deprive the economy of a significant slice of its productive labor” (28). Holger Klein describes in his introduction to *The First World War in Fiction* the unique presence of so many intellectuals and artists in military service in the war years – literally, “thousands of established and potential writers were directly engaged in fighting,” and their work can be described as the response of “civilians who had temporarily been turned into soldiers” (2-3). Such is generally not perceived to be the case in the twenty-first century, when the military as a career, or at least as a means to a more lucrative career, is more attractive to a different milieu. The “rehabilitation” of the armed forces post-Vietnam, accomplished by job-training type promotions such as the Army’s successful “Be All You Can Be” campaign, “helped to change the negative image the public had of the military as a result of the Vietnam fiasco” (Posner 29). The scenario of prominent writers and intellectuals leaving their established or potential careers to enlist in wartime military service is difficult to envision, as is the mass enlistment of, for instance, professional athletes, which did occur during World War II. There is no longer the perception of “civilians who had temporarily been turned into soldiers,” Posner suggests; rather, the military is seen more and more as a career path in itself.

The lack of perceived purpose, respect from the leadership, or personal dignity that characterized many a World War I veteran’s experience plausibly would result in the flourishing of a negative, derisive narrative culture around that experience. The post-Vietnam literary and film scenes reflect this also. Dittmar’s and Michaud’s reading of Vietnam-related film, in part, posits: “That internal conflicts among American soldiers . . . lead to violence and death suggests the depths of societal division and the lack of a clear sense of purpose about the war” (5), an assertion no less true of the post-World War I literature and its “suggestions” about societal perceptions of the conflict. The majority of literature and film dealing with post-Vietnam conflicts does not attack the *military* environment as such, in the manner of *Three Soldiers*,

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Company K, or Through the Wheat (or Stanley Kubrick’s 1987 film Full Metal Jacket). Rather, as depicted in films such as Ridley Scott’s Black Hawk Down (2001), camaraderie, mutual instinct to survive, and physical and mental “toughness” under duress are emphasized plot elements. Any critique of the military’s role in the conflict (in this case 1993 Somalia), of the war’s validity, or American motives for intervention, are minute in comparison and appear as necessary components of mise en scene rather than as provocative ideological statements in their own right.

The “assimilation” of war protest into the culture at large – and not simply into the intellectual/literary community – is one reason why dissent in recent war film often appears as narrative “window dressing,” as in Black Hawk Down. James Baldwin writes of the protest novel, in his critique of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin:

The “protest” novel, so far from being disturbing, is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene, ramifying that framework we believe to be so necessary. Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely esconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. . . . “As long as such books are being published,” an American liberal once said to me, “everything will be all right.” (Notes 19)

Baldwin also wrote in a later article that the post-WWII “American way of looking on the world, as a place to be corrected, and in which innocence is inexplicably lost,” shared little in common with the literature the previous war had produced (“As Much Truth” 1). He draws the comparison thus: “In 1917, we had no enemies; 1941 marks our reluctant discovery – which again, we have not faced – that we had enemies everywhere” (38). Baldwin’s assertion plainly justifies – or suggests the necessity of – an actively interventionist policy on the part of the United States, an agenda unlikely to be swayed by “anti-war” literature, which had by the 1950s and 1960s become that “accepted and comforting aspect” of American cultural life. “By the time of World War II,” he continues, “evil had entered the American Eden, and it had come to stay. . . . The loneliness of those cities described in Dos Passos is greater now than it has ever been before” (38). The language Baldwin uses evokes despair, hopelessness, and a sense of peril,
but no corresponding belief that language alone – or, by extension, art in general – can bridge the troubled waters.

The military circumstances that produced the protest culture – the ideologies surrounding the 1917 intervention – are also not likely to reoccur. The belief that World War I had, for America, been “a deviation from a normal pattern of international affairs,” as Rhodes documents (2), is one completely alien to the foreign policies of post-World War II American leadership. American intervention and military involvement across the global spectrum has exploded since 1945, and shows little signs of slackening since the end of the Cold War. Protest culture in America has itself been so thoroughly assimilated that it, too, as much as the novel, is a comforting and familiar response to international policies. For instance, The jailing of a public figure of Eugene Debs’ stature, which did occur during World War I, would be inconceivable in 2005 America, as would a relentless campaign of malicious propaganda or the incarceration of conscientious objectors. The social forces dialectically opposed to such measures are too ingrained in the cultural fabric to allow their criminalization, at least on the scale that such actions were deemed criminal during World War I.

Davis states that many social movements tend “to rely on cultural and symbolic forms of resistance at least as often as more conventional political activism” (7), and that “all cultural elements, all symbolic, expressive aspects of movements, can be related to narrative and illuminated by its study” (10). Perhaps most importantly, he writes: “Movements come to imagine and know themselves in the stories they tell about themselves” (25). The “implicit ideology” permitted in narrative functions on levels that the creators themselves may not be aware of (Fine 239). Thus the testimony of the Nye Committee hearings, the text of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Washington Disarmament Conference, the Bonus Army’s protest at the National Mall, or Three Soldiers all serve an ideological narrative function in the minds of the “actors” in the peace movement; they are all “part of the story,” so to speak. The overwhelming success of this movement, though localized to the twenty years following World War I, testifies to the strength of the “story” being collectively told by Dos Passos, Hemingway, Cummings, Boyd, Cather, Stallings, Faulkner, and the statesmen, protesters, lobbyists, pacifist organizations, and treaties of the period. It is impossible to separate any of these narrative elements from the public and political furthering of peace consciousness when scripting the cultural and social history of interwar neutrality, whether defined as pacifism, “normalcy,” or isolationism. The overall
achievement – U.S. non-involvement in military endeavors – was the accomplishment of the sum of these stories.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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