

LITERATURE OF THE GREAT WAR AND ITS RELATION TO THE MODERN READER

by

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## Introduction

When presented under the guise of the standard historical narrative, World War I is often misunderstood. Most individuals only know that the worldwide conflict began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife. With this in mind, it is understandable that the modern-day individual may not have ample knowledge of the Great War and would not understand the social climate that erupted as a result. While literature is not a substitute for historical accounts, it can provide the modern-day reader with subsequent knowledge of what the world was like at the time of conflict. When read with the correct context and under the appropriate circumstances, World War I literature can provide the readers of today with adequate understanding of the global conflict.

This exploration will attempt to offer a critique historiography, as it will differ from the traditional histories of World War I and, in turn, consider an overlooked historical source in wartime fiction. It is for this reason that the texts to be analyzed in this portfolio include two Allied Powers and one Central Power: the United States and Great Britain on one hand, and Germany on the other. These nations have been chosen for this analysis in order to explain objectively their roles in the war and how they are reflected in the texts that were selected.

While it is generally understood that World War I began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, tension had been looming across Europe for quite some time prior to his death. Preceding the start of the war, there were several countries in Europe that served as allies to one another. There was, however, significant political instability in the Balkans that threatened to affect these alliances. Archduke Ferdinand was heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne when he and his wife Sophie were shot in Bosnia by a Serbian nationalist who wanted to end the Austro-Hungarian rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The assassination sparked an immense chain of reactions, as Austria-Hungary “blamed the Serbian government for the attack and hoped to use the incident as justification for settling the question of Serbian nationalism once and for all.”<sup>1</sup> With Russia on Serbia’s side, Austria-Hungary knew they needed a strong power behind them if they wished to declare war. When Kaiser Wilhelm II sent a *carte blanche* to Austria-Hungary (thereby pledging their allegiance), the dual monarchy sent an ultimatum to Serbia, knowing very well that they would not accept. Thus began the conflict of World War I.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Great War was the fact that there were so many innovations in military technology that had not yet been seen in history. Perhaps what World War I is most known for is its use of trench warfare – this was the first major conflict to use such a unique form of combat. Trench warfare had not been used prior to the start of World War I due to the fact that there was previously such an emphasis on hand-to-hand combat. With the development and use of the machine gun and its ability to take down numerous soldiers at one time “along with barbed wire and mines... movement across open land [became] both difficult and dangerous.”<sup>2</sup> With these innovations along with the implementation of chemical warfare and the British invention of the tank, trench warfare was born.

The trench styles of World War I differed depending on the country, but the general consensus is that the trenches were hardly ever comfortable. Paul Fussell notes in his text:

One can understand rats eating heartily [in the trenches]. It is harder to understand men doing so. The stench of rotten flesh was over everything, hardly repressed by the chloride of lime sprinkled on particularly offensive sites. Dead horses and dead men – and parts of

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Onion, Missy Sullivan, and Matt Mullen, “World War I,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, October 29, 2009), [https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history#section\\_9](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history#section_9).

<sup>2</sup> “Military Technology in World War I,” The Library of Congress, n.d., <https://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-rotogravures/articles-and-essays/military-technology-in-world-war-i/>.

both – were sometimes not buried for months and often simply became an element of parapets and trench walls. You could smell the front line miles before you could see it.<sup>3</sup>

Trench warfare was a bit contradictory, as it allowed for attacks to occur “safely” from a distance as opposed to hand-to-hand combat, but also allowed for attacks to become more brutal and gruesome with the use of more powerful weapons. Fighting in the trenches also slowed down the pace of combat significantly, which dragged out the war and made it feel ceaseless. Thus, soldiers were not mentally prepared for the carnage they were about to observe and experience firsthand. The transition to trench warfare is vital to one’s understanding of the Great War, as there were so many mental and physical effects illustrated in these novels that occurred directly as a result.

It is at this point in history that the term “shell shock” is introduced. Unlike the modern diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, many of the symptoms of shell shock seemed to be physical and are believed to be a direct result of the type of warfare that soldiers were seeing in the Great War. Interestingly enough, the term “was coined by the soldiers themselves. Symptoms included fatigue, tremor, confusion, nightmares, and impaired sight and hearing. It was often diagnosed when a soldier was unable to function, and no obvious cause could be identified.”<sup>4</sup> Throughout the war, psychologists struggled to assist soldiers in handling their shell shock and were constantly conducting research, attempting various treatments, and collaborating with one another.

The British army seemed to be suffering greatly from this ailment, so they “appointed Charles S. Meyers, a medically trained psychologist, as consulting psychologist to the British

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (OUP USA, 2013), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Jones, “Shell Shocked,” *Monitor on Psychology* (American Psychological Association, June 2012), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/shell-shocked>.

Expeditionary Force to offer opinions on cases of shell shock and gather data for a policy to address the burgeoning issue of psychiatric battle casualties.”<sup>5</sup> Myers determined that the symptoms he had been observing in the soldiers were not, in fact, physical, but more so psychological manifestations of repressed trauma. After teaming up with another psychologist named William McDougal, Meyers concluded that “a patient could only be cured if his memory were revived and integrated within his consciousness... While Meyers believed that he could treat individual patients, the greater problem was how to manage the mass psychiatric casualties that followed major offensives.”<sup>6</sup> As a result of Meyers’ study, specialized units were set up in order to aid soldiers who were suffering from shell shock. Due to the large number of soldiers who were affected, those units quickly became overwhelmed with patients.

While some of the texts comprising World War I literature may not directly identify soldiers’ complications as “shell shock,” the ailment is often prevalent. In some cases, it could even be argued that shell shock made the conflict just as difficult for the survivors as it was on the fallen. One must keep this in mind while reading World War I literature, as some novels may even go so far as to treat shell shock like an additional character, silently attacking soldiers and significantly affecting their everyday lives.

At the start of the war, several large powers were involved, including France, Russia, Great Britain, Belgium, and Serbia who geared up to oppose Austria-Hungary and Germany. The United States intended to stay neutral at the beginning of the war, as the conflict stemmed from the European countries and America did its best to avoid involvement. Throughout the war,

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<sup>5</sup> Edgar Jones, “Shell Shocked,” *Monitor on Psychology* (American Psychological Association, June 2012), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/shell-shocked>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

however, the “neutrality was tested and fiercely debated in the U.S.”<sup>7</sup> The United States had no direct involvement in the fighting until the Germans sunk the British ocean liner *Lusitania* and killed countless Americans in 1915. With so many lives lost, the citizens of the United States became irate. It wasn’t until 1917 when Germany began attacking American ships and started interfering in the U.S. relations with Mexico that the United States finally declared war on Germany. Thousands of American men were then drafted into the military while women and children attempted to hold down the fort at home.

The American novels used in this analysis will follow those American soldiers and their families as they navigate the unique and terrifying reality of the Great War. *A Son at the Front* (1922) by Edith Wharton, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway, and *Tender is the Night* (1934) by F. Scott Fitzgerald will be the American novels represented in this exploration.

Germany’s expedition to become the greatest world power by devouring nations like Russia and France ignited its path into World War I. While the cause of the Great War has been endlessly debated for over a century, many believe that the conflict started with Germany’s determination to become a superpower by crippling all other European countries. There are some historians who believe the fault in starting the war was shared by everyone, yet Michael Lind claims that:

The alliance of Russia, France, and Britain was defensive, provoked by Germany’s bellicose drive to become a global rather than merely regional power. There had been numerous Balkan wars in the preceding decades and the conflict between Austria and Serbia could have been confined to the Balkans, if Berlin had chosen that option. Instead,

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<sup>7</sup> “U.S. Participation in the Great War,” The Library of Congress, n.d., <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/united-states-participation-in-world-war-i/>.

Germany's rulers used Sarajevo as an excuse to do what it wanted to do anyway: convert itself into a "world power" by dominating Europe through war.<sup>8</sup>

Several historians agree with this understanding of the Great War's cause, as it is clear that Germany wanted to expand and did not necessarily care if that expansion was created by force. What is interesting, however, is the fact that the Germans truly believed the war would have a fast conclusion – many thought it would be over by Christmas of 1914.

The German novels that have been selected for this text reflect not only the swiftness in which the war began, but also the confusion and terror of the men who were drafted into the German army. Perhaps even more importantly, these works of literature also address the greater picture of the German economic landscape and how it was directly affected by Germany's defeat in the Great War. *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque, and *Wolf Among Wolves* (1937) by Hans Fallada will be the German novels analyzed in this exploration.

One of Britain's greatest strengths was its navy, which protected their trade relations with India and other large nations for several years. Britain did not have many problems with other nations in the beginning, but did have its eye on trade in Africa, which was largely controlled by France. While Britain was concerned about France, it also worried about Russia in that they were looking to gain control over the Dardanelles. "Russia had ports in the north, but these tended to freeze over in the winter. The problem was that the Dardanelles were owned by Turkey. Turkey and Russia had long been enemies. Britain supported Turkey against Russia."<sup>9</sup> Britain didn't

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Lind, "Germany's Superpower Quest Caused World War I," *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, June 30, 2014), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/germanys-superpower-quest-caused-world-war-i-10778>.

<sup>9</sup> The National Archives, "Why Did Britain Go to War?" *The National Archives* (The National Archives, January 27, 2004), <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g2/backgroundcs1.htm#:~:text=Britain%20joined%20the%20Triple%20Entente,and%20prevent%20a%20war%20happening>.

want Russian ships in the Mediterranean due to the fact that it was their main trade route to India, and because they were more concerned with Russia and France, Britain did not even see Germany coming.

Once Kaiser Wilhelm II took over in Germany, he began to build up the German armies – which forced Russia and France to do the same in preparation. It quickly became clear that Germany would be the largest threat to Britain’s army and trade after all, so Britain chose to join Russia and France, forming the Triple Entente. Despite the fact that they had been strengthening their army and joined forces with France and Russia, Britain did not want to get involved in the war. When German soldiers invaded Belgium and France, Britain did not have to respond – but for the sake of their trade and their alliance with France, Britain declared war on Germany and fought to save Belgium in 1914.

*Parade’s End* (1924) by Ford Maddox Ford, *Death of a Hero* (1929) by Richard Aldington, and *Birdsong* (1993) by Sebastian Faulks will be the British novels explored in this analysis. These novels will reflect the hesitation and unease of Great Britain as a whole as it entered into one of the most brutal conflicts the world had ever seen.

This portfolio will be divided into three major sections: “The Great War and American Literature” written for HIST 501 in Fall 2019, will be the first paper. It will explore the previously mentioned works written by Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wharton while attempting to delve into the historiography of those American authors in comparison to their characters and their perception of the Great War. The second paper in this exploration, titled, “British Novels and the Memory of War,” was written for HUM 560Q in Fall 2020 and will analyze the works of Faulks, Ford, and Aldington in order to provide a more well-rounded look into Britain’s role in the war and its citizens’ portrayals in literature. This paper will also discuss the difference in



memory and history and how they relate to one's understanding of past events. The final work for this portfolio is titled "German Wartime Literature and its Grip on the Modern Reader," written for HUM 599C in Fall 2021, and will include texts written by Remarque, Fallada, and Zweig. At the conclusion of the portfolio, the works of all three papers will be discussed in relation to one another and a broader comparison will be made using the texts to establish a greater understanding of the nations' roles in World War I.

## The Great War and American Literature

World War I was a conflict of massive proportions, and while the world had not seen such carnage prior, modern-day individuals may not understand the extent. There are several historical texts and passages that can provide these readers with knowledge of the Great War, but the amount of information can prove to be overwhelming to some. American novels written before, during, and after the war offer readers a multi-faceted look at what life was like when the world was on the verge of combat. One must consider, of course, the historiography of such texts, as the perspective that is offered will depend on which American novel is read. *A Son at the Front* (1922) by Edith Wharton, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway, and *Tender is the Night* (1934) by F. Scott Fitzgerald will be the focus of this analysis. Each of these novels will provide readers with stories that perfectly capture experiences that are directly pertinent to the worldwide conflict. These texts may not be a substitute for historical accounts, but they are successful in providing modern-day readers with a glimpse of what life was like for American soldiers and citizens during the Great War.

While one of these novels was written soon after the conclusion of the First World War, it was clear that the effects of the conflict would remain long after it ceased. The horrors of the war lasted in the hearts and memories of everyone who was present at the time and are retold in these novels for current readers to experience that same sentiment. Randall Stevenson points this out in *Literature and the Great War*, stating:

A century later, the Great War is still remembered as a central influence on the emergence of the modern world... Jay Winter (Charles J. Stille Professor of History at Yale University) describes the settling of a “cloud of grief” over these years – a sense of recent mass death which left survivors as if “perched on a mountain of corpses.” The dead remained, Winter suggests, still “living among the living.” In the “private thoughts

and dreams” of the bereaved, in particular, they remained as vividly present as anyone who had survived.<sup>10</sup>

While everyone in the world was affected by the Great War, each text that was chosen for this analysis specifically because it was written by an American novelist and contains American characters.

In order to understand the American World War I novel, one must first understand the history and influence behind American writers in the early 1900s. Marietta Messmer explores the historiography of American novels, identifying the “first to move beyond a definition of America’s literary identity solely in contradistinction to its transatlantic/European heritage [as] Stanley Thomas Williams in his 1926 *The American Spirit in Letters*.”<sup>11</sup>

Messmer goes on to explain, stating, “Williams regrets that ‘as yet, American literature of the twentieth century seems to be largely national and, since the World War, iconoclastic. It has been in harmony with a trend towards an intense national consciousness that has been an outstanding characteristic of twentieth-century America... American writers, in the main, seem content to display the pettiness, the credulities, and the absurdities of Americans. They have declared their intention that American literature stand on its own feet.’”<sup>12</sup>

Based on this notion, both American characters and writers are unafraid of remaining true to themselves as well as their country. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Wharton all create characters that fit this exact mold, painting a much clearer picture of the average American in the early twentieth century. Taking a closer look at these authors and their characters will provide a clearer understanding of the collective American memory of World War I that is created, in part, by these novels.

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<sup>10</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 187.

<sup>11</sup> Marietta Messmer, “Twentieth-Century American Literary Historiography,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 3, no. 2 (January 2001), <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1123>, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Published in 1923, Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front* is the earliest of the three novels analyzed in this paper. The story takes place in Paris in 1914, and begins right before the French troops mobilize for World War I. The story opens with John Campton, an American painter who was born in France, and eagerly awaits his son's arrival in Paris for their vacation. Like John, his son George is an American who was born on French soil, technically making him a French citizen. When the novel begins, it is evident that France is on the brink of mobilizing for war, but John simply does not believe it. While all signs point to the outbreak of war, John tells everyone he knows that it will not come to fruition. Despite the fact that a worldwide conflict erupting in France would most likely affect his everyday life, John is more concerned about the life of his son and the possibility that he may be called upon to fight.

During the first night that George is staying in Paris, John takes a look at his belongings while he sleeps. On the table, John notices "a wrist-watch, his studs, a bundle of bank-notes; and beside these a thumbed and dirty red book, the size of a large pocket diary."<sup>13</sup> John is not sure of what it is, but upon further investigation, it is George's military book that he was obligated to carry with him due to the fact that he was less than 48 years old. The book stated that George was to report on the morning of the third day after mobilization, and John began to panic. He thinks to himself, "George might be going to leave... within forty-eight hours from that very moment!"<sup>14</sup> This seems to be the first moment in which John truly becomes aware of the very real possibility that George could have to serve.

It is not until he sees evidence of the mobilization for himself on the wall of a ministry that John finally comes to terms with reality. Wharton's overwhelming insistence on the

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<sup>13</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Son at the Front* (Charles Scribner, 1923), 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Campton family dynamic is what makes this novel compelling: for the first one hundred pages of the text, George is still in Paris with his father and has yet to report for military duty. The emphasis on family and its importance is what drives the novel, and, like Fitzgerald, Wharton utilizes the personal nature of the war to create a better understanding for readers of the war's influence. *A Son at the Front* is also a journey of self-discovery, as John Campton learns more about himself when his son is mobilized:

Campton had never before, at least consciously, thought of himself and the few things he cared for as part of the greater whole, component elements of the immense amazing spectacle. But the last four months had shown him man as a defenceless animal suddenly torn from his shell, stripped of all the interwoven tendrils of association, habit, background, daily ways and words, daily sights and sounds, and flung out of the human habitable world into naked ether, where nothing breathes or lives. That was what war did; that was why those who best understood it in all its farthest-reaching abomination willingly gave their lives to put an end to it.<sup>15</sup>

This realization from Campton gives the reader insight into the willingness for soldiers to enter war. While John does not initially understand why George has no desire to be discharged, it is with time and reflection that he finally comprehends. His realization, in turn, is translated to the reader.

Wharton's novel provides the reader with an emotionally driven understanding of war and its causes as well as its justifications. Not all soldiers were sent to war unwillingly, which Wharton reminds the reader. Given that the novel was published in 1923, a mere five years after the war came to an end, *A Son at the Front* is sure to re-open fresh emotional wounds. Randall Stevenson acknowledged the difference in words themselves in his *Literature and the Great War*, mentioning that there arose a "suspicion of grand abstractions and 'big words'[in] post-war

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<sup>15</sup> Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, 184.

writing in the work of non-combatants as well as those directly involved in the war... A character in Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front* (1923) considers that 'the meaning had evaporated out of lots of our old words.'"<sup>16</sup> Just as war changed the lives of individuals living at the time, it also somehow changed the words that authors chose to utilize in their novels. Wharton's decision to publish her novel so soon after the conclusion of the war bears this in mind.

In the present, it is fair to say that some words such as "democracy" and "pride" have become abstract over time. However, "the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant."<sup>17</sup> Wharton's novel certainly illustrates this, especially because it was written so quickly after the war. Hemingway, on the other hand, writing nearly eleven years later, marks, "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."<sup>18</sup> Writing in the past tense, it is unclear whether Hemingway's narrator is recounting the events that took place during the war. It is, however, evident that he was writing at a later time in which, similar to our own, these abstract terms were no longer reliable and permanent.

Published in 1928, *A Farewell to Arms* follows the endeavors of Frederic Henry, an American man enlisted in the Italian army. His perspective is unique due to the fact that he is not fighting with the American army, and he's also not a combat soldier – he is an ambulance driver

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<sup>16</sup> Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Charles Scribner, 1929).

and doesn't expect to see much action. Hemingway's novel takes place during the war, and from the very beginning, the reader is thrown into the life of an actively enlisted man. While the start of the novel appears as though it will simply be a wartime love story, *A Farewell to Arms* proves to be so much more than that.

The setting and tone of the novel are each very important to the overall meaning. Due to the fact that Hemingway is specific in his locations and days, it is relatively easy for the reader to pin down exactly when the story is taking place. While he never actually reveals what year it is, Hemingway provides the reader with context clues in order to uncover the details themselves. For example, in the beginning of the novel, the reader finds out that Catherine Barkley, the novel's love interest, was previously engaged to a soldier. When questioned about a stick she had, she said, "It belonged to a boy who was killed last year... He was a very nice boy. He was going to marry me and he was killed in the Somme."<sup>19</sup> Knowing that the Battle of the Somme took place in 1916, Hemingway gives the reader a hint that the novel begins in 1917.

Tone is important in *A Farewell to Arms* because at times it seems as though the story itself is a confessional, which makes the reader believe Frederic Henry is to be trusted. Throughout the novel, Henry is completely honest about how often he drinks, the women he's been with, and the sins that he has committed. One of the most shocking moments occurs in the middle of the novel when Henry attempts to give orders to two Italian sergeants. They believe they should run and avoid the Germans at all costs, but Henry orders them to stay and cut brush. They ignore him and start walking down the road. In a chilling account, Henry tells the reader, "I opened up my holster, took the pistol, aimed at the one who had talked the most, and fired. I

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<sup>19</sup> Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 18.

missed and they both started to run. I shot three times and dropped one.”<sup>20</sup> Henry does not kill the man, so an officer he is with walks over, cocks his pistol, and shoots him in the head twice.

This scene not only paints the picture of a credible narrator, one who is unafraid to recount the terrible things he has done - including killing a man enlisted in the same army - but it also portrays a real aspect of the war. In fact, friendly fire was so common in World War I that a “General Percin allege[d] that some 75,000 French soldiers lost their lives to friendly artillery fire in World War I.”<sup>21</sup> This, of course, is not the only example of friendly fire seen in Hemingway’s novel. Almost immediately afterwards, Henry and three Italian officers continue on their trek, and the same officer is shot down by what they believe to be Germans. However, upon further review, it appears as though it is the Italians who took his life.

Hemingway’s inclusion of friendly fire in his novel provides a chilling and difficult account of what occurred on the front. Readers who are unfamiliar with the war are able to identify just how tragic 1914-18 really was from reading *A Farewell to Arms*. The front, however, was not the only dangerous aspect of wartime, as Hemingway also gives readers a glimpse into how traumatic medical treatment can be. While there are scenes that depict the army hospitals and explain the process of how they work on the front, Hemingway also decides to delve into the horror that was everyday healthcare.

At the end of the novel, Catherine Barkley is going to have Frederic Henry’s child. The two rush to the hospital once she goes into labor, and Henry is told that he should go and get food while Catherine is induced. Throughout the process, Frederic is a little on edge because he

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<sup>20</sup> Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 218.

<sup>21</sup> Charles R. Shrader, *Amicide: The Problem of Friendly Fire in Modern War* (Library of Congress, 1982).



is not sure what will happen to Catherine. However, he neglects to think of the child, and once Catherine gives birth, the nurse informs him privately that the boy has died. Henry is instructed to go out and get food once more, and while he is out, a nurse from the hospital calls to tell him that Catherine has hemorrhaged and is in grave danger. She, too, dies.

Shell shock is a term that is very often associated with war, yet was not necessarily considered during World War I. At this time, psychological maladies were not really explored, but their effects were certainly evident. In Frederic Henry's case, his shell shock came from losing Catherine Barkley. In *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I*, Trevor Dodman writes:

In Frederic's case, Catherine's cesarean operation and hemorrhaging death demand his witness, both then and now. Her loss becomes a destabilizing point of conversion between his past and present. Difficult to stop, too "well remembered" to be countered by prosthetic thinking, Catherine's loss, her echoing voice and broken body, takes shape as a trauma narrative relentlessly imposing itself upon Frederic's ordinary narrative progression of events.<sup>22</sup>

Dodman argues that this event is so traumatic for Henry that Hemingway's entire novel should be considered a "trauma narrative." With that being said, the story Hemingway wrote is traumatic and upsetting, but it is an accurate depiction of what life was like, both during and after the war.

Published in 1934, *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald does not seem like a novel written about the war at first glance, but the presence of World War I is still strewn throughout its pages. The story follows Dick Diver, a psychologist who married his mental patient right after

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<sup>22</sup> Trevor Dodman, *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 263.

the war ended. Part of the story takes place in the French Riviera while another unfolds in Switzerland. The narrative jumps from present, to past, to future, and the characterization of Dick Diver shifts dramatically throughout.

The most obvious nod to the Great War takes place early on in the novel, where the main characters visit some of the trenches. Diver becomes excited at the idea of being in the trenches, and it is mentioned that he had not seen combat when he fought in the war. A parallel can be drawn to Fitzgerald, as he “served in the American army during the war, [but] the armistice arrived before he could make it to the battlefields of France. Biographers agree that his lack of combat duty lingered with him for the remainder of his life.”<sup>23</sup> It would not be such a foreign idea for Fitzgerald to utilize his characters in an autobiographical context, as he has been known to add aspects of himself in his novels. This logic may also be applied to Hemingway and Frederic Henry, as Hemingway himself was also an ambulance driver in the Great War, serving for the American Red Cross in Italy.<sup>24</sup>

While Fitzgerald does not say directly when the narrative takes place, he leaves the reader with hints, much like Hemingway did. He mentions that the characters “passed great funeral pyres of sorted duds, shells, bombs, grenades, equipment, helmets, bayonets, gun stocks and rotten leather, abandoned six years in the ground.”<sup>25</sup> This scene occurred during the “present” narrative, leading the reader to believe that it took place around 1924, six years after the war had ended. He continues to paint a more personal picture of the war and what it cost.

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<sup>23</sup> Dodman, *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I*, 173.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Putnam, “Hemingway on War and Its Aftermath,” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/hemingway.html>.

<sup>25</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (Charles Scribner, 1962), 73.

Some of the characters leave in a separate car, but Rosemary, a young actress, and Dick follow behind. They come across a young girl they had seen earlier in the day, who had come from Knoxville to leave a wreath on her brother's grave. They pull up alongside her and see that she is crying. With the wreath still in her hands, she says, "The War Department must have given me the wrong number," she whimpered. 'It had another name on it. I been lookin' for it since two o'clock, and there's so many graves.'"<sup>26</sup> In this very short interaction, Fitzgerald connects the reader to the girl and puts a metaphorical face to the horrors of World War I. While death tolls can be overwhelming, they are simple numbers. Once a loss is attributed to a family, one feels the impact a little deeper. Fitzgerald aims to invoke in the reader with the addition of the girl with the wreath. This small aspect of the text also attempts to paint a picture of the consequences of war that may not be so obvious to the modern reader – from a bureaucratic perspective, the death toll was so high that families often received the wrong serial numbers of their deceased loved ones.

While there are more underlying themes in *Tender is the Night*, the historical connotation that lurks beneath the surface is intended to evoke a response. Alan Trachtenberg writes of the novel:

*Tender is the Night* creates, with the reader's collaboration, a perspective unrelentingly historical. The reader's work is to assemble the materials of the novel into a fictive history which once attained, is surely one of the most remarkably illuminating experiences in American literature.

Fitzgerald intended this novel to be analyzed by the reader, allowing them to identify with the characters and experience more than just a fictional story. He wants readers to truly understand

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<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 73.

the history behind the prose, and when that understanding is achieved, readers have a newfound memory and consideration as to how the war affected the individual as well as the world.

The writing of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wharton serves to remember and encase the emotions, themes, hardships, and environment of American citizens involved in World War I. The American involvement in the war was complicated, and the confusion and unease of American citizens is prevalent in each of these novels. In fact, “many believed that the United States had intervened in a war in which American interests had not been at stake.”<sup>27</sup> These texts not only illustrate that national perplexity, but provide a significant memory for those readers who were not present at the time of war. While they are not a substitution for historical sources, they aid in expressing the emotional toll that World War I took on American people, as well as the European soil on which it was fought.

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<sup>27</sup> Warren Cohen, *The American Revisionists: The Lessons of Intervention in World War I* (Chicago and London, 1967).

### British Novels and the Memory of War

There are several texts and perceptions that provide important retellings of the events that took place during World War I, but each one will paint a picture that is different than the last. For those who were not present during this time, the extensive collection of sources on the subject can be overwhelming and, sometimes, contradictory. British novels written before, during, and after the war offer readers a multi-faceted look at what life was like when the world was on the verge of combat. Like any other genre, however, the perspective that is offered depends on which British novel is read. *Parade's End* (1924) by Ford Maddox Ford, *Death of a Hero* (1929) by Richard Aldington, and *Birdsong* (1993) by Sebastian Faulks will be the focus of this analysis. While the messages in each of these novels may be different, they are all composed of experiences that are pertinent to the worldwide conflict and provide their modern-day readers with a glimpse of what life was like for England and its citizens during the Great War.

Each British war novel investigated in this analysis provides its audience with a different perspective than the rest, which is fitting, because the perspectives on the war as it was occurring were also incredibly different. As Randall Stevenson remarks in *Literature & The Great War*:

Attitudes of the war were obviously further diversified simply by differences in outlook, temperament, or experience among individuals involved. As H.M. Tomlinson suggests in *All Our Yesterdays*, “the Great War was almost as many different wars as there were men who were in it.”<sup>28</sup>

Stevenson and Tomlinson both point out in this instance that there was no “collective experience” shared by the soldiers in World War I. There was, however, a “melting pot” of backgrounds and occurrences that attributed to the soldiers involved in the conflict, many of

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<sup>28</sup> Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, 197. Stevenson is quoting H.M. Tomlinson, *All Our Yesterdays* (Kessinger Publishing Company, 2005).

which have been captured in these novels. Each text that was chosen for this analysis was written by a British novelist and encapsulates the stories of British characters.

In order to better understand these texts, one must also comprehend the difference between memory and history as they relate to novels of a historical nature. The lines may appear blurred at times, but Peter Sexias, Dan Fromowitz, and Petra Hill explain the difference in their article “History, Memory, and Learning to Teach”:

An easy dichotomy can be drawn: memory is the construction of the past which is immediately available, deeply held, profoundly meaningful, and therefore impervious to critique History is the product of evidence-based investigation, rational dialogue, and dispassionate scholarship. Memory is the product of direct experience; history is the product of questioning, inquiry, and critique.<sup>29</sup>

There are, of course, certain instances in which the above claim can be problematic, as certain nods to historical events such as racist monuments representing the American Civil War could become “impervious to critique” on the grounds that they are tokens of memory, not history. One must take this assertion with a grain of salt. While the modern-day reader may not have the “direct experience” in World War I that the article refers to, they directly experience the stories of the characters portrayed in these novels. Therefore, a certain recollection of the texts and their stories is formed between all readers, essentially creating a collective memory of the war and its experiences through the pages of British literature.

It is worth mentioning that each of the novels examined in this analysis begin their stories before World War I erupts. While some of the texts focus more on warfare and trauma experienced by the British soldiers, there are some interesting aspects of British society that can be explored as well. One of the more noteworthy traits of early twentieth century Britain is the

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Sexias, Dan Fromowitz, and Petra Hill, “History, Memory and Learning to Teach,” *Understanding History*, pp. 116-134, [https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203340929\\_chapter\\_8](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203340929_chapter_8).

fact that the nation was not a complete democracy until 1918, the same year the Great War ended. Along with the realization of complete democracy, Britain introduced voting rights for women aged 30 or older. When Britain entered the war, it “did so in the name of 19th century liberal values – the rights of small nations and the rule of law. What justified these claims, which became the touchstone of British propaganda, was Germany’s invasion of Belgium, as its army bypassed France’s eastern defences by swinging round them to the north.”<sup>30</sup> In a way, World War I gave England the push that it needed in order to make significant changes in both its government and its society, but interestingly enough, not in many of its territories. When considering the role that the British government played in its citizens’ everyday lives, certain characters and occurrences in the texts make a bit more sense, specifically when understanding the function of some of the women as well as the noticeable French presence mentioned in some of these novels.

Published in 1993, *Birdsong* does not seem like a novel written about the war at first glance, but rather, a retelling of a dramatic love triangle. The story begins in France in 1910, where Englishman Stephen Wraysford is sent by his employer to observe the company of René Azaire. Wraysford spends a significant amount of time in Amiens with Azaire and ends up living in the family home with René, his wife Isabelle, and the two children. Over the course of his stay there, Stephen begins to develop a relationship with Isabelle, which does not remain a secret for long. After discovering that Azaire is abusive towards Isabelle, Stephen decides to ask her to return to London with him. One night, Isabelle reveals their relationship to René, and she and Stephen leave on the train for England. After being in London with Stephen for a little while,

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<sup>30</sup> Hew Strachan, “History - British History in Depth: Overview: Britain and World War One, 1901 - 1918,” BBC (BBC, 2011), [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwone/overview\\_britain\\_ww1\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/overview_britain_ww1_01.shtml).

Isabelle decides that she is not as happy as she anticipated she would be, and she decides to leave without providing any notice or explanation.

*Birdsong* focuses heavily on the love between Stephen and Isabelle in the beginning, but the horror of World War I is a subtext nonetheless. While the text is widely considered to be a love story more than anything else, after the first few chapters it quickly erupts into a very descriptive firsthand account of fighting in the trenches. As the story progresses, it shifts into the year 1914, when Stephen is still heartbroken by Isabelle's sudden departure. When the Great War erupted, Wraysford sees the worldwide conflict as a welcomed distraction from the pain he was experiencing, and he decided to enlist in the British army. Once Stephen was thrown into the violent reality that was trench warfare, everything in the text seemed to change.

There are several aspects of World War I that separate it from any other major conflict in history that came before it. While the Great War was the first worldwide battle of its kind, there were also numerous technological advances that changed confrontation, as the world knew it, forever. In the past, wars were mainly fought with hand-to-hand combat, but The Great War

popularized the use of the machine gun – capable of bringing down row after row of soldiers from a distance on the battlefield... The British introduced tanks in 1916; they were used with airplanes and artillery to advance the front. The advent of chemical warfare added to the soldiers' perils.<sup>31</sup>

With the introduction of many different technological weapons, soldiers like Stephen Wraysford were utterly astounded by what they faced on the battlefield.

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<sup>31</sup> "Military Technology in World War I : Articles & Essays : Newspaper Pictorials: World War I Rotogravures, 1914-1919 : Digital Collections : Library of Congress," The Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-rotogravures/articles-and-essays/military-technology-in-world-war-i/>.



The horrors of war became even more terrible than the soldiers originally anticipated, and the trauma that occurred as a result was overwhelming. When Stephen was fighting in France in 1916, he had a conversation with Michael Weir, the commanding officer of the miners in Stephen's company. Wraysford said to Weir:

No one in England knows what this is like. If they could see the way these men live they would not believe their eyes. This is not a war, this is an exploration of how far men can be degraded. I am deeply curious to see how much further it can be taken; I want to know. I believe that it has barely started. I believe that far worse things than we have seen will be authorized and will be carried out by millions of boys and men like my Tipper and your Firebrace. There is no depth to which they can't be driven.<sup>32</sup>

This passage not only expresses Wraysford's strange detachment from the brutalization of the war, but also the fact that soldiers are capable of far worse than he ever thought possible.

Wraysford's words illustrate just how devastating the Great War actually was for the men who fought in it, and what is even more important is that he believed that British citizens back home would not understand what happened on French soil. While present-day readers are unaware of the horrors of this war, Faulks includes passages like the one above in order to place readers in the same position as the British citizens in 1916 that were completely ignorant to the realities of the Great War. While *Birdsong* is a fictional account, it is incredibly beneficial for readers to understand the severity of World War I by comprehending the text.

World War I literature also touches on a very important topic that historians continue to discuss: post-traumatic stress disorder and shell shock for soldiers. While this type of warfare was entirely new for everyone, its effects were long-term for many of the soldiers who fought. Stephen Wraysford's granddaughter sought to find out more about who he was, and found his

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<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (Hutchinson, 2018), 145.

old journal. Reading the journal in England in 1978, Elizabeth was able to understand more of what her grandfather went through. He writes:

I do not know what I have done to live in this existence. I do not know what any of us did to tilt the world into this unnatural orbit. We came here only for a few months. No child or future generation will ever know what this was like. They will never understand. When it is over we will go quietly among the living and we will not tell them. We will talk and sleep and go about our business like human beings. We will seal what we have seen in the silence of our hearts and no words will reach us.<sup>33</sup>

Stephen's mention of "only a few months" was the general opinion of everyone involved in the Great War – while it began in July 1914, all soldiers and citizens thought the conflict would be over before Christmas. This, of course, was not the case, as the war lasted for four long years. Wraysford also refers to himself and his fellow soldiers as though they are not living human beings, and the reader gets the impression that these men are hollow shells damned to walk among the living when they return from the war. This sentiment was shared among many of the soldiers who returned from war – they were never the same after experiencing and seeing what they did in the trenches.

The notion of shell shock was not necessarily something to be discussed in Britain in the early 1900s, and as far as the army was concerned, the ailment was nonexistent. Ford Maddox Ford's *Parade's End*, however, perfectly illustrates the "nervousness" of the soldiers that returned from war and the effects they experienced, as well as the civilians that welcomed them home.

Ford's novel is essentially a tetralogy; separated into four novels in sequential order. The first novel in the sequence is titled *Some Do Not...*, which essentially alludes to the fact that the story's protagonist, Christopher Tietjens, and its heroine Valentine Wannop, do not submit to

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<sup>33</sup> Faulks, *Birdsong*, 403.

their desires like almost every other character in the story does. The first novel takes place right before the eruption of World War I and establishes the unstable foundation on which Christopher and Valentine find their relationship. Tietjens is married to Sylvia, who leaves him to stay with her mother before the novel begins. Ford establishes the emotional capacity – or lack thereof – of Christopher Tietjens early on in the novel in order for readers to understand his mentality prior to his involvement in the war. Ford writes, “For the basis of Christopher Tietjens’ emotional existence was a complete taciturnity – at any rate as to his emotions. As Tietjens saw the world, you didn’t ‘talk.’ Perhaps you didn’t even think about how you felt.”<sup>34</sup> This passage allows readers to understand how Tietjens dealt with emotions as an English gentleman before even experiencing the horror of the Great War as a soldier.

As a member of the English gentry, Christopher Tietjens offers a different perspective from the average British citizen during World War I. When Tietjens spoke with his brother Mark about the situation with his wife and the fact that there were lies being spread against him, Mark insisted that Christopher did not fully assert his role in society. He said:

“You treat these south country swine with the contempt that they deserve. They’re incapable of understanding the motives of a gentleman. If you live among dogs they’ll think you’ve the motives of a dog. What other motives can they give you?” He added: “I thought you’d been buried so long under their muck that you were as mucky as they!”<sup>35</sup>

Ford includes this in the first novel to convey the social status of both Tietjens and his wife’s family. While this is stated before Christopher enters the war, it is included in order for the reader to see the type of person he was expected to be in British society before the outbreak of the Great War.

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<sup>34</sup> Ford Maddox Ford, *Parade's End* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1950), 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

In the second novel, titled *No More Parades*, the reader finds Tietjens in France with the British army, enveloped in the air of the Great War. While he is not on the front lines at this point in the text, Tietjens still grapples with his role in the British army. When Tietjens speaks with Captain Mackenzie, he struggles to relate with him after thinking about his previous divorce leave:

It had occurred to him that it was a military duty to bother himself about the mental equilibrium of this member of the lower classes. So he talked... any old talk, wearisomely, to keep his mind employed! Captain Mackenzie was an officer of His Majesty the King: the property, body and soul, of His Majesty and His Majesty's War Office. It was Tietjen's duty to preserve this fellow as it was his duty to prevent deterioration in any other place of the King's property.<sup>36</sup>

Tietjens relates his work in the army directly to the protection of the British King, as many other English soldiers did. The blind loyalty and guard of the King pushed many of the men to continue to fight, and in Tietjens' case, it pushed him to attempt to emotionally connect with his fellow soldiers that needed it, despite their class differences.

Early on in the novel, Ford states that "It has been remarked that the peculiarly English habit of self-suppression in matters of the emotions puts the Englishman at a great disadvantage in moments of unusual stress."<sup>37</sup> This, of course, sets the stage for the discussion about Tietjens' emotions and those of Englishmen as a whole. As Trevor Dodman writes:

The questions that dogged the shell shocked were not merely about being "unmanned" by the war – for in the terms of the day the emotive man who cracks under the pressure has most certainly been unmanned. Shell shocked men also faced questions about their capacity as broken men to recover, and, perhaps most damagingly of all, about whether or not they had been "whole" men to begin with. Ford's tetralogy stands both as a critique of the cultural codes of masculinity that encourage and enforce "silence," even in the face of suffering, and of the British at large who turn away from the wounded veterans in their midst.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ford, *Parade's End*, 305.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>38</sup> Dodman, *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I*, 53.

Ford utilizes Christopher Tietjens and his lack of emotive expression as a representation of every British man, regardless of class, during this time in history. The character of Tietjens himself serves as an accurate depiction of what British culture was like at the time of World War I and allows for readers to understand the severity of what the Great War did to these men not only on a physical level, but on a very deep emotional level as well. Ford's novel serves as a commentary on British culture and permits present-day readers to fully comprehend the downfall of not only the English culture as it stood, but the mental capacity of their soldiers as well.

Published in 1929, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* is considered to be one of the great British antiwar novels of its time. The story follows George Winterbourne, a soldier enlisted in the British Expeditionary Army who fights during the Great War in France. While it is not necessarily a nonfiction account, the novel is said to be based on Aldington's own experiences while fighting on the Western Front. The story is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator (that many believe to be Aldington himself) who served with Winterbourne and learned of his death in the war, but wanted to further understand what happened to him. George Winterbourne was very much like Christopher Tietjens in that he was not very expressive and often felt overwhelmed by the war and its horrors. The narrator mentions that he believes Winterbourne deliberately exposed himself to German fire during the conflict due to the fact that he no longer wanted to live.

When he was younger, George Winterbourne had a difficult relationship with his family because his father was incredibly religious, and his mother was an attention-seeking woman. When George's older brother married a woman simply to spite his mother, George received all of his mother's overwhelming love and affection. His mother thought it was significant that she had been with twenty-two men and was quite proud of that fact. When George grew older, he

married a woman named Elizabeth, but they did not have a typical marriage – they each lived their own separate lives, and the marriage was merely a formality. Each was free to sleep with whomever they wanted to be with.

George was drafted as soon as the Great War began, and he was immediately sent to France. He was very seriously affected by the horror and brutality of the war around him, and Winterbourne consistently thought about his own death. The narrator writes:

I think that George committed suicide in that last battle of the war. I don't mean shot himself, but it was so easy for a company commander to stand up when an enemy machine-gun was traversing... But by November '18 poor old George was whacked, whacked to the wide. He was a bit off his head, as nearly all the troops were after six months in the line. Since Arras (April '17) he had lived on his nerves, and when I saw him at the Divisional Rest Camp in October '18 he struck me as a man who was done for, used up... He was so horribly afraid of being afraid.<sup>39</sup>

Aldington's illustration of George and his fear of being afraid rang true for so many British soldiers, as it clearly did for Tietjens in Ford's text as well. The expectation that British society placed on these men and soldiers made it so much more difficult to fight in such a horrific war, and Aldington attempted to express the struggle that these men faced by encompassing all of their fears into that of George Winterbourne.

Each of these three novels also includes significant language about the romantic relationships that each of the main characters went through. There may be a connection in the fact that none of the men mentioned in the novels had "successful" relationships, and often struggled to express themselves emotionally. This perhaps increased the severe shell-shock that many of the British soldiers experienced and added to the extreme emotional toll that the war took on them. While *Death of a Hero* may have delved a bit deeper into the emotional state of its characters than the other two novels had, there is something to be said for the fact that all

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (Dundurn, 2014), 10-11.

information was being relayed by a third party. In other words, the narrator, similarly to the other British soldiers in these texts, attempted to refrain from expressing his emotions on his own behalf by telling the story of a lost friend instead.

The writing of Faulks, Ford, and Aldington serves to immortalize and encase the emotions, themes, hardships, and environment of British citizens and soldiers involved in World War I. Their accounts inform readers about the vulgarity of the Great War and the hardships that were experienced as a result.

### German Wartime Literature and its Grip on the Modern Reader

While there are countless texts that offer important retellings of the events that followed up to and took place during World War I, each will provide a different illustration than the last. For the modern-day reader who was not present during the Great War, the extensive collection of sources at hand can be overwhelming, and, at times, even contradictory. Many of the stories that are told are dependent on the author's country of origin – and whether or not that country emerged victorious. Perhaps it is more difficult as a country on the losing side of the coin to portray the trials and tribulations of the first World War. German novels that were written before, during, and after this time can offer modern readers a glimpse into what life was like when the world was at war.

One must consider the fact that the offered perspective may be different depending on the specific text that is read, and the author's background must also be considered when examining these works. *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque, and *Wolf Among Wolves* (1937) by Hans Fallada will be the focus of this analysis. Despite the fact that the perspectives of these texts may be different, they all offer illustrations that are pertinent to the worldwide conflict and allow for modern readers to get a better understanding of what living in war-ridden Germany was like at that time.

Much like everything else, the nature of literature changed dramatically with the emergence of the first World War. Novels used to be light-hearted works of fiction that allowed for readers to fully immerse themselves into wondrous worlds that would help them to forget reality. During the Great War, however, it was very difficult to open a book and forget what was going on around you. The horrors of the war “revealed the frivolous nature of sheer entertainment and opened questions about life and death, purpose and direction, justice,



patriotism, love, and sacrifice... [literature illustrated] bitter remembrances and cynical outlooks of a generation who now knew pain and suffering on a massive scale.”<sup>40</sup> While some texts attempted to distract their readers from the terror occurring outside, many of them were graphic in nature, allowing for the reality of war to truly set in for readers. World War I authors understood the unique nature of the Great War and chose to illustrate its horrors, as it was different from any war that had come before it.

From a historical perspective, World War I was incredibly influential on several countries and affected many different nations for decades after its conclusion. In fact, Talbot C. Imlay claims that “The Bolshevik Revolution, the growth of fascist and Nazi movements, the accelerated emergence of the United States as a leading great power, the economic depression of the 1930s... and other developments all have their roots in the tempest of war during 1914-18.”<sup>41</sup> While historians and critics continue to argue about the cause of the worldwide conflict, several scholars believe that Germany played a vital role in sparking the flame. In her text *The Origins of the First World War*, Annika Mombauer asserts that Germany essentially started the Great War and, in a way, was its own worst enemy throughout the conflict. Mombauer does warn her readers throughout the text that accounts may be manipulated by professional historians and governments, especially if the content is “too uncomfortable or reflect[s] too badly on the present.”<sup>42</sup> One must always keep this warning in mind when analyzing historical texts – even if those texts happen to be novels – as there will almost always be some sort of subjective undertones based on the author’s beliefs, or even the beliefs of their country as a whole.

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<sup>40</sup> Anne-Marie Pope, “World War I Literature,” The Historical Association, June 6, 2011, <https://www.history.org.uk/student/resource/4511/world-war-1-literature>.

<sup>41</sup> Talbot C. Imlay, “The Origins of the First World War,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): pp. 1253-1271.

<sup>42</sup> Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (Routledge, 2014), 223.

Following this warning, Mombauer goes on to mention the reasons why she believes Germany is responsible for the start of World War I. She attributes much of the cause to Helmuth von Moltke, who was

Convinced that a European war was inevitable and that Germany and its ally, Austria-Hungary, were growing weaker relative to Russia, France, and Britain... [he] concluded that the sooner a conflict came the better – a view he expressed with mounting insistence from 1912. Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Moltke seized upon the resulting crisis to bring about a preventative European war before it was too late for Germany.<sup>43</sup>

There have been several additional accounts that blame the German staff for their poor preparation and attribute the start of the war to their mishandling of the situation. Mombauer's text seems to assert this claim, and as we delve deeper into this analysis, it will soon become clear that some of the novels being investigated in this exploration will also illustrate poor execution on behalf of the German military staff.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, published in 1929, is considered a classic novel for many reasons, perhaps the most important of which being that it was burned by the Nazi party for its representation of German soldiers after Adolf Hitler took power in Germany. The novel is narrated by 19-year-old Paul, who decides to fight in the German army on the French front after his teacher persuades him and some of his classmates to enlist.

In the epigraph of the text, Remarque explicitly tells the reader that the book is “to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it.” He goes on to say that the text “will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.”<sup>44</sup> This small excerpt is incredibly important, as it explains to the reader from the very

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<sup>43</sup> Imlay, “The Origins of the First World War,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): pp. 1253-1271.

<sup>44</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Random House Publishing Group, 1987).

beginning that Remarque is uninterested in taking sides regarding the war. This statement also asserts that, while this is a story, the incidents that took place during this time period were anything but fictitious. The events of World War I were terrifyingly real to those individuals that experienced them firsthand, and Remarque specifically goes out of his way to illustrate that in his text before the story even takes place - setting the stage for the modern observer to fully understand the severity (and accuracy) of what they are about to read.

Along with the trench warfare of the Great War came gruesome hand-to-hand combat and nightmarish deaths. Young men like Paul had never seen anything like it, and while their elders hadn't necessarily experienced it either, many men like Paul felt completely betrayed by the individuals who persuaded them to enlist. After a very short amount of time at the front, the young soldiers realize that they must now rely on themselves and each other if they have any hope of making it out alive - they no longer believe in the generation that encouraged them to fight, especially when those individuals were not experiencing the horror themselves.

Remarque's 19-year-old narrator writes:

We came to realize – first with astonishment, then bitterness, and finally with indifference – that intellect apparently wasn't the most important thing... not ideas, but the system; not freedom, but drill. We had joined up with enthusiasm and with good will; but they did everything to knock that out of us.<sup>45</sup>

Like several other World War I novels, *All Quiet on the Western Front* touches on the severe psychological effects that the Great War had on the soldiers involved.

Ironically enough, despite the fact that the Great War did technically present “winners” and “losers,” the severity of physical and psychological violence that was produced on both sides was catastrophic. The literature and poetry that was produced as a result of the conflict was tragically beautiful, and yet, as Paul Fussell mentions in his text *The Great War and Modern*

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<sup>45</sup> Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 138.

*Memory*, it seems as though it is impossible to fully romanticize the events that took place – even in fictional texts.

Once more, it is illustrated that the German army was its own worst enemy, as Fussell writes, “during May and June the Germans advanced to great effect near the rivers Lys and Marne. But unwittingly they were engaged in demonstrating the most ironic point of all, namely, that successful attack ruins troops. In this way it is just like defeat... it is the war that wins.”<sup>46</sup> Fussell’s assertion illustrates that while the German military certainly made some fundamental mistakes when it came to war strategies, everyone involved in the war was going to lose. The Great War encapsulated some of the most violent and tragic warfare that the world had ever seen, and some authors, like Remarque, decided to utilize its extreme violence in their texts in order to launch a more political agenda.

Described as one of the most extreme pacifists in German literature, Remarque is believed by some critics to have utilized *All Quiet on the Western Front* in order to provide some social commentary on the war as well. It would be nearly impossible to discuss the text without recognizing the strong critical remarks it received, so it must be mentioned in this analysis. Despite the fact that it is regularly included in school curriculums, the text was the subject of heated debate for years after its publication. In 1929 “the Nazi press denounced Remarque’s work as malicious slander of the honor of the German soldier, while the political left felt that Remarque’s pacifism was too bland and non-committal.”<sup>47</sup> This exploration denounces each criticism, as it is clear in Remarque’s text that while there are some romanticized moments in the novel, it is not “bland” or “non-committal,” it just simply includes moments of war that are not

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<sup>46</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Elisabeth Krimmer, *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88.

particularly exciting along with the “exhilarating aspects of war.”<sup>48</sup> It is this exact balance that makes Remarque’s text truthful - it provides the modern-day reader with a realistic idea of the Great War and what it would have been like to fight as a German soldier.

As we previously noted, the use of trench warfare separates the Great War from any other form of combat that came before it. Due to the more personal and psychological nature of warfare in World War I, the term “shell shock” was created to describe the severe effects that soldiers suffered in battle. Symptoms of shell shock often included “fatigue, tremor, confusion, nightmares and impaired sight and hearing. It was often diagnosed when a soldier was unable to function and no obvious cause could be identified.”<sup>49</sup> Remarque illustrates the physical and psychological effects of war several times throughout the text in an effort to convey the realistic consequences of trench warfare that soldiers first encountered in the beginning of the 20th century.

In chapter four, Remarque actually describes the soldiers as animals, implying that the terror of the war has stripped them of their humanity and awakened their animal instincts, turning them into beasts, but allowing them to make it through the battle alive. “It is not conscious;” he writes, “it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness... It is the other, this second sight in us, that has thrown us to the ground and saved us, without our knowing how... We march up, moody or good-tempered soldiers - we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals.”<sup>50</sup> It is in this moment that while Remarque seems to romanticize the situation with strong metaphors in order to include more interesting prose in the

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<sup>48</sup> Krimmer, *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, “Shell Shocked,” *Monitor on Psychology* (American Psychological Association, June 2012), <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/shell-shocked>.

<sup>50</sup> Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 53.

novel, it does not detract from the dehumanization that many soldiers experienced while fighting on the front.

*Wolf Among Wolves* by Hans Fallada was published in 1937 and follows a young man who decides to flee Berlin due to his excessive gambling habits as well as money shortages in the city. This novel differs from that of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in that it takes place immediately after the conclusion of World War I, but provides a very accurate depiction of the effects that the Great War had on Berlin and Germany as a whole. It is no secret that Berlin simply was not ready for a war, much less one of such magnitude as World War I. There are several reasons as to why the city was not prepared, including the fact that:

The decision for war was made in July 1914 and not, as some scholars have claimed, at a nebulous “war council” at Potsdam on 8 December 1912... No one in Berlin had planned for war before 1914; no long-term economic or military plans have been uncovered to suggest otherwise. The Prussian Army’s refusal to expand its peacetime force of 800,000 men by three army corps in 1912-13 for fear that this would undermine the social cohesion of its officer corps alone argues against the thesis of a long-planned war of aggression.<sup>51</sup>

While the brutal violence of the war is in the rearview mirror, the struggle and frustration of postwar Berlin is incredibly prevalent in Fallada’s novel. The failure to prepare in Berlin affected the city during the Great War, but was even more obvious to the public when the war concluded.

In Fallada’s novel, money plays a very large role in the lives of the German citizens. This becomes obvious from the very beginning of the text when Fallada decides to note that “the dollar stands for the moment at 414,000 marks.”<sup>52</sup> This is the reader’s first indication that they need to be paying attention to the value of a mark in Berlin - and Fallada decides to include it on the very first page of the text. During the Versailles Conference, there was much discussion as to

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<sup>51</sup> Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (Bloomsbury, 2014), 21.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Fallada, *Wolf Among Wolves* (Melville House Uk, 2017), 3.

the amount of war reparations that Germany would be responsible to pay for its role in World War I. Huger Jervey explains how Germany came to find itself in an economic crisis:

Before the Germans signed the Treaty, they argued that this was like signing a blank check and that they could make no intelligent effort to salvage what was left of their own financial economy until they knew what out-going sums they must provide for. They themselves suggested a present value of about seventeen billion dollars... But the Allies refused, the blank check was signed under protest, and almost at once began the progressive inflation of the mark which proceeded until money was literally worth less than the paper on which it was printed.<sup>53</sup>

There are several instances in the novel where Fallada calls attention to the value of German currency due to the fact that Berlin was in the middle of an incredible debt crisis. The reader is introduced to Black Meier, who serves as a bailiff and is introduced in order to illustrate the state of the Neulohe Manor where he works. As he stood on the grounds of the manor, he

Lit a cigarette, puffed at it contentedly and gazed at his dirty and worn-out shoes. He needed new ones, but the Rittmeister was an unapproachable man, and 500,000 marks was an unheard-of salary for a bailiff. If he waited for the dollar rate on the first of the month, perhaps he would not even be able to have the shoes soled. There were many things needed on the Neulohe Estate - two more on the staff, for instance - but the Rittmeister was a great man and had discovered that he could do everything himself. The hell he could!<sup>54</sup>

Once again, Fallada brings the reader's attention to the value of a German mark as well as the fact that the manor is understaffed, and its bailiff can't even afford new shoes. This is explained in order to illustrate the economic climate of the city on a smaller scale - making it more personal and allowing for the reader to see how everyday citizens were affected by the postwar economic crisis in Berlin.

*The Case of Sergeant Grischa* by Arnold Zweig was published in 1927 and follows a Russian soldier through his experience in the Great War, starting with his escape from a German prison camp. While this novel does not follow a member of the German army, it provides a very

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<sup>53</sup> Huger W. Jervey, "Reparations and War Debts." *The American Scholar* 1, no. 4 (1932): 450-71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41203900>.

<sup>54</sup> Fallada, *Wolf Among Wolves*, 43.

important commentary on mistaken identity that commonly takes place in war. The text also seems to illustrate the ironic nature of prioritization in war, as it seemed as though the high-ranking German officers were more concerned with what they should do with Grischa than the welfare of their own soldiers.

When Grischa flees the prison camp, he obtains the identity tag of a German deserter named Bjuscheff. He does this in order to avoid being sent back to the prison camp if he is to be found - he believes that being a German deserter is better than being a Russian soldier who escaped. Grischa, however, is illiterate, and is unable to read the notices explaining that German soldiers who desert will be executed unless they turn themselves in within three days of their desertion. Once Grischa is sentenced to his execution, he finally understands his mistake and reveals his true identity to the German soldiers. A power struggle then ensues amongst the German officers, and the failure to prioritize their army becomes increasingly more obvious to the reader.

Interestingly enough, throughout the text it does not appear as though Zweig believes the war was caused in a German military staff office, as Mombauer seemed to believe in her work. Through some further reading, it appears as though “Zweig is too astute a scholar to assign the whole responsibility for the war to the financiers and munitions kings. As a matter of fact, he does not fail to point out the fundamental hostility which exists between the army and those gentlemen, the duplicity and mistrust which lurks beneath their collaboration.”<sup>55</sup> This notion is evident to the reader through the interactions between the officers, their directions to the soldiers, and their treatment of Grischa himself. While Zweig may not be asserting such an obvious political statement as Remarque, it does appear as though he illustrates his own belief in the

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<sup>55</sup> Solomon Fishman, “The War Novels of Arnold Zweig,” (*The Sewanee Review*, 1941), Volume XLIX, 437.



argument of how the war began. It also becomes clear in the text that there is a hierarchy of power within the German military that Zweig may not necessarily believe is effective.

The texts that have been analyzed in this exploration are fictional in nature, but they each depict very real places and occurrences, and offer modern-day readers an accurate understanding of what life was like when the world was at war. The writings of Remarque, Fallada, and Zweig serve to illustrate the fear, struggle, frustration, and difficulties that the German soldiers and citizens faced during and after World War I.

Furthermore, the authors' own beliefs towards the war and Germany's role in it provide the modern reader with even more context as to the political and social climate in which these stories took place. While those beliefs may not be as obvious in each of the novels when compared with one another, further investigation reveals that there may have been more evidence of the authors' stance on the war than originally granted at first glance. Perhaps these beliefs had been concealed from the reader due to the political climate in which each of the texts had been published, but their messages still ring true upon further investigation.

These novels and the period about which they were written are so important in developing an understanding of the German wartime environment, as they provide a collective memory for those readers who were not present at the time of war. While these texts are not a substitution for primary historical sources, they do serve a purpose in expressing the emotional, physical, and economic toll that World War I took on German society, and their importance in that undertaking cannot be overstated.

## Conclusion

World War I was one of the most unique and overwhelming conflicts of global history, and its effects are still present today. Along with the innovations in weaponry and warfare, national armies experienced combat like they had never seen before. Nonfictional accounts and primary historical sources can provide solid foundations for readers of the present-day and offer concrete evidence and facts that can paint an accurate picture of what society was like at the time of the Great War. Literature, however, takes a deeper dive and allows readers to experience the horrors of the war on a more microscopic level – allowing them to familiarize themselves with the stories and lives of individual characters. There is something more personal about the texts that were analyzed in this exploration; they beg the reader to empathize with the characters and place themselves in the middle of the trenches, allowing for a more particular kind of understanding.

The texts that have been explored in this account do not attempt to replace historical accounts of World War I, nor do they claim to. Readers, however, can apply the stories illustrated in their pages to the basic understanding that they have of the Great War to form a more well-rounded perception of the conflict itself. The nations who were involved in the conflict have forever been changed, as have the citizens who witnessed it all. Modern-day individuals can get a glimpse of those effects if they visit the ruins or enter museums, but may not be able to get a complete picture of the horrors of the war unless they read the novels that were analyzed in this report. While the fighting has ceased and the dust has long settled from the trenches, these stories of the Great War remain.

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