

The First World War and the Rise of Modern American Novel: A Survey of the Critical Heritage of American WWI Writing in the 20th Century

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to analyze the relationship between the First World War and the rise of modern American novel. The long-lasting impact of WWI has brought about a paradigm shift in people's belief system. For the young writers during and after WWI, the War has not only provided them with a change in their notion of war as a literary subject but also helped them realize the powerfulness of language. The skillful integration of a suitable subject and a useful tool results in the rise of modern American novel.

This analysis is followed by a comprehensive survey of the critical heritage of American WWI writing in the 20th century, which shows the importance of WWI novels in the entire American literature of the 20th century. The eighty years from the end of the War to the end of the 20th century will be divided into four periods – each consists of approximately twenty years, with each period having its own critical focuses. While in the first two periods, criticism of war novels was mainly concentrated on either the political debates of war novels' truthfulness or the representativeness of the war writers, the third period is characterized by the thematic criticism and transnational studies, and the last period by linguistic-turning and gender-oriented critique.

Key Words: World War I, Modern American Novel, Critical Heritage, Survey

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I was certain that all the young people were going to be killed in the war, and I wanted to put on paper a record of the strange life they had lived in their time.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*

War, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, is the “hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state.” What is of more interest is its definition of peace, which reads as “freedom from, or cessation of, war or hostilities; that condition of a nation or community in which it is not at war with another.”

The fact that we would rather define peace as the absence of war than war as the absence of peace is very telling: It reveals the way we view the world and its possibilities. Consciously or unconsciously, we see war and conflict as more normal and universal than peace, which has become so rare a condition that Margaret Atwood would say, through a Military historian in one of her poems, that “for every year of peace there have been four hundred / years of war.”(qtd. in Annas 1994, p.892) An even more radical and pessimistic view of peace can be found in Michel Foucault’s assertion that peace is “a form of war, and the States a means of waging it.”(1992, p.1141) A comparison of the OED definition of war with Carl von Clausewitz’s might be even more interesting. Clausewitz says, in *On War*, that “war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”(1976, p. 87) “We must always consider,” he goes on, “that with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end.”(pp.90-91) In his eyes, war is a special case, one of the means to achieve peace. And he believes that his definition of war could not be incorrect “even if war were total war.”(p.605) It seems Clausewitz was too confident of himself here: The contrast in the two definitions mentioned above shows the complete change in people’s notion of war and peace with the knowledge of what “total” modern war really is through the First World War.

1. WWI AND THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN PEOPLE’S BELIEF SYSTEM

That World War I is completely different from previous wars, and is thus a dividing line in human history, is a truth universally acknowledged. The impact of this war is long lasting. It was World War I, the Great War meant and proclaimed to end all wars, that turned out to engender a century of conflicts, hot and/or cold, on the global scale. Also it was in World War I that began the unprecedented technological massacres of human beings by artillery shells, tanks, gas bombs, submarines and other new weapons – an estimation of 13 million military deaths within four years. Although the Second World War surpassed the First in the scope of fighting, the volume of killings and the scale of destruction, the First continues to be called the Great

War, indicating its unique position in modern life and consciousness. And for Americans especially, World War I brought about a great paradigm shift in people's belief system.

"All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love," says Dick Diver, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, while visiting WWI battlefields in Europe (1986, p.57). What made Dick, an American, say so is not the fact that America got 48,000 fine boys killed in battle, 2,900 missing, and 56,000 dead from disease during its 19 months' participation in the war, which was comparatively a rather slight cost. Nor is it because Western Civilization, represented by France, was almost shattered completely by relentless bombardments from German artillery. What shocked Dick Diver, and most Americans as well, was the great paradigm shift in people's belief system the War had brought about. Even before August 3, 1914, the meliorist view of progress that existed in the 19th century was already deteriorating, but then the war itself accelerated and expanded a more cynical attitude. Most American young men "flocked into the volunteer services," eager to save the world, to test their courage, and, in John Dos Passos's words, to "see the show"—what war was like (qtd. in Minter 1996, p.68). But soon they were horrified by the carnage of mechanized warfare, with military leaders blindly and yet stubbornly sacrificing large number of men in wave upon wave of charges against an entrenched enemy. Again, Dick Diver is telling a horrible truth when he says that

"[t]his land here cost twenty lives a foot that summer. ... See that little stream – we could walk to it in two minutes. It took the British a month to walk to it – a whole empire walking very slowly, dying in front and pushing forward behind. And another empire walked very slowly backward a few inches a day, leaving the dead like a million bloody rugs." (1986, p.57)

Eventually, the survivors realized the meaninglessness of their sacrifice and the helplessness of the individual before the war machine. They were disillusioned. They were even more so when they returned to their hometown to see an unbridgeable gap between them and the civilians, who had been fed up with propaganda by newspapers and politicians. But what disillusioned them most were President Wilson's compromises in the Treaty of Versailles and the U. S. Senate's rejection of the League of Nations. Now they saw clearly that under the hollow names of honor, courage and patriotism were all lies. Therefore, trust in authority vanished, whether that authority being the government, the press, or the church.

1.1 War: a suitable subject

While for ordinary young people, this paradigm shift in their belief system might lead to a completely new and extraordinary life style, for those would-be writers, one of the major results was a change in their notion of war as a literary subject. Of course, "war as a subject has been written about far more often than peace" throughout the long history of world literature

(Annas 1994, p.892). World literature, as it appears, began with poems about attitudes to war.¹ So far as American literature is concerned, some critics would contend that it also began with war writing. John Limon, for example, sees Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" as the "ancestor" of such "war fiction" as *A Hazard of New Fortunes* by William Dean Howells and *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway, and sees "the American inauguration of fiction as the absence of an epic, and inaugural, war." (1994, p.8) Limon's study of war fiction is quite different from an ordinary one: he prefers to analyze those works about the absence of war. In Rip's case, he manages to evade service in the Revolutionary War by his twenty-year-long sleep in a cave. Actually, throughout the history of American literature, almost all American writers have dealt with the subject of war in his or her writings. And as an extreme example, even Emily Dickinson, a timid woman poet who confined herself in her house almost all her life, tried her pen at the problems of war in such poems as "My Triumph Lasted Till the Drums" and "Success Is Counted Sweetest."² For an American novelist, it is even suggested by John Limon, to miss war is to miss America, since it is "a country made by war." (1994, p.7)

In retrospect, we may find the American history, together with the American literary history, has been inextricably interwoven with its history of war. Here, a brief account of the history, both national and literary, may be helpful. The early settlers from Europe founded their colonies by waging wars on the native Indians, which were vividly depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales." And the colonies, in turn, obtained their independence and founded the United States of America through wars against Great Britain, its host country; and Cooper's *The Spy* was based on this historical event. Only by means of a civil war could this young country achieve unification once and for ever; and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, which offers a true-to-life description of fighting in the Civil War (although the author had never been to the battleground), constitutes one of the "prototypes for contemporary war novels." Few steps of the country's later expansion were made without its fighting with another country, and in the end, the country rose to become a world power through the two World Wars, which entailed a vast bulk of war literature. Undesirable as it is, war, as Peter G. Jones asserts, has become "part of the overall experience of life" in America, and after the First World War, "the war novel has become one of the most logical ways of writing about life in the twentieth century." (1976, p.viii) As extensively-used as it was, war in pre-World War I novels was treated only as "a narrative framework" or "a standard literary device", whose advantages were obvious: The qualities of intensification, pathos, dramatic contrast, crisis, and action were

¹ The earliest poem, which is about the prowess of the Babylonian King Gilgamesh, was found set in cuneiform script on twelve clay tablets about 4000 years old. And 200 years later there appeared "Hymn to Victory", a chant by the Egyptian king Thutmose III. Long after (about 800 B.C.) came Homer's *The Iliad*, which is generally considered the beginning of European literature. For a brief account of ancient poems of war, see Eberhart and Rodman, 1945, pp. xvii-xxxiv.

² The very fact that the poem of "Success" is collected or quoted in such books as Eberhart's *War and the Poet* and Michael Gelven's *War and Existence: A Philosophical Inquiry* proves its relevance to the present topic.

all readily at the author's disposal.³ But ever since the Great War, war as a subject is no longer the same as was traditionally used. War is not only "a narrative framework" or a "literary device", it has also become "the Chief Protagonist" (to use a term from Mary Lee's "It's a Great War!") (1929, p.27). In other words, war is no longer only one of the subordinate elements contributing to an aesthetic whole, but the overwhelming chief determining everything else in the works. What Francis Hackett said of Hemingway was also true of most of his contemporary writers: "The primitive mood of war gave him the chance to dig down into himself for a native primitiveness that peace had long since ruled out of bounds in American fiction." (1949, pp.32-33) Thus, the War provided a suitable and handy subject for the young writers.

1.2 Language: a useful tool

Not only did the Great War provide the young writers with a suitable subject matter, it also made available a useful tool for them. While in the process of disillusioning and distrusting during and after the War, the young writers nevertheless also sensed the power of language. Hadn't the lofty words of the politicians and generals caused such disasters, which the journalists tried to conceal with invented stories of victory? Now that Europe, the cultural icon for the would-be writers, had been shattered to pieces before their eyes, and that the old mores, manners and even modes of speech were no longer valid to them, these talented young men were free and ready to take up "the task of restoring freshness to a much-abused language" and to invent a literature of their own (Minter 1996, p.83). From the ashes of war-stricken European civilization arose the phoenix of modern American novel.

2. THE RISE OF MODERN AMERICAN NOVEL

Or rather, what arose was an eagle, the eagle of American war novel. American novels during and after the First World War were so preoccupied with the War that it would be improper to discuss modern American novel without paying much attention to the war novels of the same period. In the history of American letters, there had never been so many writers involved in a single war as in this one,⁴ and the bulk of war books they produced was amazingly large. Even in the course of the War, many writers published war books one after another: Arthur Train's *Earthquake* (1918), Temple Bailey's *The Tin Soldier* (1918), Della Thompson Lutes's *My Boy in Khaki* (1918) and Edith Wharton's *The Marne* (1918), to name only a few. While most of the wartime writings were written by women and were generally taken as mere propaganda, there appeared, after the end of the War, a bloom of war novels mainly by male writers. Beginning

³ For a detailed discussion of the change the War brought about in literature and literary criticism, see Cooperman, 1967, pp.193-194.

⁴ The long list of would-be writers and critics who participated in the War can be found in Elliott et al. 1988, p.849, and Cowley 1934, p. 38, etc..

with John Dos Passos's *One Man's Initiation, 1917* (1920) and *Three Soldiers* (1921), American war novel took on a new light. The flood of war novels, such as E. E. Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922), Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* (1923), Elliot Paul's *Impromptu* (1923), Lawrence Stallings's *Plumes* (1924), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), William Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* (1926), James Stevens's *Mattock* (1927), Leonard Nason's *Sergeant Eadie* (1928), John Whiting's *S. O. S.* (1928), Bayard Schindel's *The Golden Pilgrimage* (1929), Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), Theodore Fredenburgh's *Soldiers March!* (1930) and William March's *Company K* (1933), can all be called anti-war novels, permeated with a strong sense of disillusionment and protest. Of course, there were different voices, voices of affirmation rather than negation, which could be heard in Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922), Mary R. S. Andrews's *His Soul Goes Marching On* (1922) and Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front* (1923). During and after the 1930s, while sporadic works could be found, there had never appeared such a bloom of WWI novels as in the 1920s. And this bloom really ushered in a conscious and extensive criticism of war literature.

3. THE CRITICAL HERITAGE OF AMERICAN WWI NOVELS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Therefore, it is understandable that it was not until the First World War that a conscious and extensive study of war literature became possible and necessary, since critics simply could not afford to bypass the looming flood of war writing during and after the Great War. While sporadic studies of some specific war writing (especially *The Red Badge of Courage*) could be found before the War, there had never been so many intellectuals involved in the discussion and appraisal of war writing as an outstanding genre. On the whole, most of the intellectuals agree to regard it valid and significant to discuss war literature as a genre, but such critics as Leslie A. Fiedler think differently. In his *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Fiedler dismisses all war novels since Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* as mere sentiment or, to use his own term, "cliches." (1967, p.441) However, Fiedler's is a rare case. To make a survey of the scholarship and criticism of WWI war literature, especially war novel, manageable, the eighty years since the War will be divided into four periods – each consisting of approximately twenty years.⁵

3.1 The first period: from the beginning of the War to the 1930s

Since Great Britain entered the war almost three years earlier than the U. S., scholarship of war literature at the other side of the Atlantic was quick off the mark. As early as 1915, F. W. T. Lange and W. T. Berry edited and published four volumes of *Books on the Great War*, a general compilation of all kinds of works about the War. But Americans were not oblivious of

⁵ Since it is about the literature of a *World War*, it is understandable for some of the studies to be transnational, and therefore for me to include them in this survey of American war literature of WWI.

the War at all; they were nonetheless contemplating the War's impact on the country's literature and its men of letters, as can be seen in such titles of journal articles as "What Literature Reaps from War" and "War's Effect on American Letters." The distance from war even enabled some scholar to keep calm enough to produce a book entitled *Psychology of War*. During the war years, with the rapid increase in the number of war books produced by Americans, the evaluation of them appeared more and more frequently in such American literary journals as *Dial* and *Fortnightly Review*.⁶

The end of the War did not mean the end of either the production of war novels or the criticism of them. Rather, both were developing on a larger scale in the inter-war decades. Almost all literary journals and magazines were involved in the discussion of war books: *The New Republic*, *Nation*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Saturday Review of Literature* and *Yale Review*, to name just a few.⁷ Compared with their British counterparts, American scholars were no less productive; they were now producing books on war literature as insightful and comprehensive. What concerned scholars on both sides of the Atlantic were more or less the same things: both were either offering critical guides to the war books,⁸ or meditating over some fundamental questions concerning war.⁹ There was, above all, a similarity in their critical approaches: Critics from both sides were mainly dealing with the political or ideological aspects of war books at the time. Thus, we can find many articles and books examining whether or not the war writings were telling the truth about the War. For example, V. A. T. Lloyd argued that American war books were telling the truth about the War. And A. C. Ward, in his insightful book *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade*, argues that it is impossible for war writers to present truth because "[w]e are prevented from knowing that truth." (1930, p.140) In the book, the chapter entitled "The Unhappy Warriors" focuses on the question of truth, which was either concealed by the authorities or simply could not be perceived by the people, soldiers and civilians alike. With the emergence of anti-war books, however, many critics were worried about the descriptions of relentless and meaningless trench warfare and the sense of disillusionment in the war books of protest and disillusion. Douglas Jerrold (1930), for example, warned that the then predominant anti-war fiction would lead to

⁶ For examples, Robert Herrick's "War and American Literature" in *Dial* and V. A. T. Lloyd's "War in Fiction" in *Fortnightly Review*.

⁷ Some of the articles appearing in these journals and magazines are: V. A. T. Lloyd's "Telling the Truth about War" in *Nation*, F. B. Kaye's "Puritanism, Literature, and the War" in *New Republic*, H. McAfee's "The Literature of Disillusion" in *Atlantic Monthly*, H. M. Tomlinson's "War Books" in *Yale Review* and A. Loveman's "The War in Fiction" in *Saturday Review of Literature*.

⁸ Books written by British scholars are C. Falls's *War Books: A Critical Guide* (1930) and Sir G. Prothero's *Analytical List of Books concerning the Great War* (1923), while the American ones are G. Greever's *War Writing* (1918) and E. Nitchie et al., eds, *Pens for Ploughshares: A Bibliography of Creative Literature That Encourages World Peace* (1930).

⁹ For examples, J. C. F. Fuller's *War and Western Civilization* (1932), G. Ferrero's *Peace and War* (1933) and S. B. Fay's *Origins of the World War* (1930). The first two were written by Englishmen while the last one by an American.

disaster. The last but not the least characteristic of American war-literature criticism of this period is that American critics were no longer treating American literature as a branch of English literature. They would not follow the suit of their former English “tutors”; they would rather deal with questions exclusively American. For example, Francis B. Gummere (1920) in his article “War and Romance” tried to analyze the War’s impact on the writing of Romance, a literary genre with which Nathaniel Hawthorne achieved great success. And F. B. Kaye’s “Puritanism, Literature, and the War” was an attempt to explore the religious as well as literary responses to the War (1920).

3.2 The second period: from the 1940s to the 1950s

During the second period, the critics’ dissatisfaction with the negativism of World War I novels was no less than before. Joseph Remenyi attempts to judge the World War I writers by the absolute criteria of a humanist. Demanding affirmation or, to use his own words, “an expression of total being” from the war novels, he defines the Great War literature as one that “impresses upon the reader the magnificence and wastefulness of human energies” and can “touch the innermost existence of man, and defy the nothingness of human life.”(1944, pp.137-147) Chester E. Eisinger holds the same view in his “The American War Novel: An Affirmative Flame.” Mainly a critique of World War II novel, the article in some places compares the novels of both Wars, with the conclusion that “a heightened moral consciousness” of World War II books should be highly valued over “the negativism of the twenties.”(1955, pp.272-288) In these two decades, exclusive studies of WWI novels are few, due to people’s preoccupation with the immediate concerns during the Second World War. Usually, a comparative approach is adopted in the studies of novels of the two Wars. For examples, Malcolm Cowley’s “Two Wars and Two Generations” and Lawrence H. Feigenbaum’s *War as Viewed by the Postwar Novelists of World Wars I and II*, a Doctoral dissertation. But, rather to the disappointment and disapproval of later scholars, some of these studies tend to view the WWI novels through the context of World War II, with the inevitable consequence of underestimating the value of WWI novels and the position of WWI writers. John W. Aldridge is in this case a good example. In his *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars*, Aldridge’s evaluation of the novels of WWI is primarily based on his assumption that WWI writers

“were special observers, immunized by their nationality and the good fortune of their service from all but the most picturesque aspects of the war. ... As spectators, guests of the war by courtesy of the management, they were infected with irresponsibility, thrilled at second hand by danger, held to a pitch of excitement that made their old lives seem impossibly dull and tiresome.”(1951, pp.4-5)

So the young writers could only feel a “romantic distillation of other men’s despair.” And their portrayals of the war experience, especially the feeling of despair and disillusion, were therefore invalid and unbelievable (p.10).

Other critics attempted to build up some critical model to make their interpretation of novels of

the two Wars more integrated, as was done by Charles C. Walcutt in his article “Fear Motifs in the Literature between the Wars.” He asserts that “[f]rom World War I to World War II there has been a cycle or pattern of attitudes toward war. … It begins with guilt, turns into fear, and purges itself in confrontation. Immediately after the first war came guilt and remorse. These were imperceptively transformed into fear of the coming war. This fear almost entirely disappeared in the literature of confrontation after the war began.”(1947, pp.227-238)

3.3 The third period: from the 1960s to the 1970s

The third period is a period of thematic criticism and transnational studies. While during the first two periods, criticism of war novels was mainly concentrated on either the political debates of war novels’ truthfulness or the representativeness of the war writers, it concerned itself more and more with the literary aspects of war novels during this period. Attempts of such kind can be found in Charles T. Bruce’s *Major Literary Concepts of the Soldier in Certain War Novels* and Holger Klein’s *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. However, most of such studies were rather limited, in the sense that they were only dealing with certain themes in the war novels. For example, Klein in his work discusses “Love and War” in R. H. Mottram’s *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* and Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* in Chapter 2, “Aesthetics and the Doom of Individualism” in Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers* in Chapter 3, and E. E. Cummings’ “Social Vision” in *The Enormous Room* in Chapter 4. Likewise, Stanley Cooperman in his *World War I and the American Novel*, an extensive research on novels of WWI, arranged the chapters of the book thematically. He stuck different labels to the characters from dozens of war novels: “heroes”, “antiheroes”, “the War Lover”, the aesthetic rebel, the death-lover, etc. And on the whole, Cooperman’s discussions of the war novels are no more than surface summaries stringed together with threads of some themes.

Breakthroughs in the field, however, were made from time to time. One is “the integration of the fiction of the Great War into the wider framework of overall developments in modern literature,” as Holger Klein points out (1976, p.7). In this case, we have many outstanding books, such as Bernard Bergonzi’s *Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War*, Malcolm Cowley’s *After the Genteel Tradition*, Arthur Marwick’s *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States*, Judith Lynne Johnston’s “The Cultural Legacy of World War I: A Comparative Study of Selected War Novels,” and so on. The other is the shift of attention toward the analysis of narrative form in war writings, as in J. H. Johnston’s “The Poetry of World War I: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form.” Although a study of WWI poetry, not the novel, Johnston’s study nevertheless precursed a “linguistic turn,” which was to be prevalent in criticism of war writings in the coming decades.

3.4 The last period: from the 1980s to the 1990s

Roughly speaking, the last period is the period of linguistic-turning and gender-oriented critique of WWI writings. No critics of former periods have been so aware of the linguistic revolution in WWI novels. Jeffrey Walsh is considered to be the first to attempt a wide-ranging yet concise introduction to modern American war literature. His book *American War Literature: 1914 to Vietnam*, examines chronologically the rarely considered topic of American war poetry alongside a detailed analysis of war novels and novelists and some war journals. Moreover, believing that “the most fruitful way to examine the relations of literature to social institutions, mechanisms and forces is to draw upon the discipline of literary criticism to explore formal and generic problems,” the author pays particular attention to “the close textual analysis of language” in the works analyzed (1982, p.6). For example, in “Chapter 3 Two Modernist War Novels,” Walsh provides a close reading of Cummings’ *The Enormous Room* and Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*: the “patterning”, “the ironic method” and “code-making” of the former, and “narrative”, “imagery” and the “toughness of language” of the latter (pp.41-48). Language is the consistent underlying focus of Brenda Gabioud Brown’s Doctoral dissertation *Battle Hymns: The Rhetorical Strategies of Twentieth Century American War Novels*. Drawing much from Edwin Black’s *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, she claims to distinguish a “rhetorical” analysis from a “literary” or “stylistic” analysis of American war novels. But these studies are far from satisfactory. Walsh’s book, it turns out, discusses only war novels written by male writers, and thus fails to be as comprehensive as it boasts of. As to Brown’s dissertation, extraordinary as it is, her distinction between “rhetorical” and “literary” or “stylistic” is by no means convincing, since the specific rhetorical strategies analyzed in her work include the authors’ use of lexicon, dialogue/dialect, development of the hero, authorial intent, time sequence, treatment of women, and humor, which are either rhetorical, literary, or stylistic.

Due to the ever-spreading influence of the feminist movement since the 1970s, women scholars direct their energies to the study of women’s war writings more often than before. Anthologies of women’s war writings were numerous, for examples, Catherine Reilly’s *Scars upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (1981), Helen M. Cooper’s *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation* (1989), Dorothy Goldman’s *Women and World War I: The Written Response* (1993) and Trudi Tate’s *Women, Men, and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories* (1995). And useful bibliographies are also available, for examples, Susanne Carter’s *War and Peace through Women’s Eyes: A Selective Bibliography of Twentieth-Century American Women’s Fiction* (1992) and Diva Daims and Janet Grimes’s *Toward a Feminist Tradition: An Annotated Bibliography of Novels in English by Women 1891-1920* (1982). Moreover, there have appeared a handful of criticism of women’s war writings ever since 1980: Tamara Jones’s “The Mud in God’s Eye: World War I in Women’s Novels,” Dorothy Sauber’s “Historical Context/Literary Content: Women Write about War and Women,” Claire Tylee’s *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women’s Writings, 1914-1964*, Lynne Hanley’s *Writing War: Fiction*,

Gender and Memory, and Sharon Ouditt's *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (1994), to name just a few.

Besides, in the last twenty years of the 20th century, both male and female critics have contributed to the reconsideration of the very idea of war literature, not without weaknesses in their arguments, it should be noted. Lidia Yukman's Doctoral dissertation *Allegories of Violence: Tracing the Writing of War in Twentieth-Century Fiction* is a formal analysis of contemporary novelistic language as it responds to late twentieth-century definitions of war. Yukman argues, through minute analysis of war novels by Larry Heinemann, Dorris Lessing, Don Delillo, Kathy Acker and Leslie Marmon Silko, that the genre of the war novel after 1960 has undergone radical formal changes, and that the novelists in her study present us with new ways to understand the concept of war through narrative means. Basically a feminist reading of contemporary war novels written by women writers, Yukman's study seems partial because she neglects a huge body of war novels by male writers of the same period. Moreover, the most radical formal changes and alterations of the concept of war in American war novel were brought about by World War I as depicted by writers of the 1920's. And this is a notion generally accepted. For example, Diane Helen Shooman asserts, through the analysis of English, French and German war novels of WWI, that the Great War altered completely the view of war as the most glorious heroic deed, to the most destructive manifestation of the urge to heroism. Likewise, Alan Mark Graves argues in his dissertation that the war disrupted not only established definitions of politics and class, but also notions of gender, masculine representation, and male homosocial relations. Even the old topic of "antiwar novel" has now assumed a new significance. Richard Benjamin Lawhon, for example, in his Doctoral dissertation *The American Antiwar Novel: 1919-1979*, provides a comprehensive survey of the American antiwar novels during the sixty years after WWI. Acclaiming *Three Soldiers* by John Dos Passos as a precursor and prototype for the antiwar novel, Lawhon suggests that almost all the subsequent twentieth century American war novels are characterized by four thematic elements: brutality, absurdity, dehumanization, and hypocrisy. But here the terms-- "antiwar novel" and "war novel"-- are of more or less the same meaning, since they refer, in his study, to the approximately same body of American writing. Another weakness of this dissertation is that it is only a comprehensive survey of the war novels, and not a single novel, with the exception of *Three Soldiers*, has been analyzed in detail and depth, since as many as 35 novels have been discussed in the 258 pages of double-spaced dissertation.

3.5 Criticism of American WWI novels in China

Compared with such a large bulk of scholarship and criticism of American war literature, especially novels of World War I, the Chinese contribution in this field appears trivial and far from satisfactory. In the last twenty years of the last century, studies of American war literature usually focused on individual works, particularly Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Sun Also Rises*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, and Stephen Crane's *The Red*

Badge of Courage. Hemingway, in this case, draws the most attention from Chinese scholars. Incomplete statistics show that more than a hundred articles had been contributed to the studies of Hemingway and his works from 1985 to 1999, and the celebration of his centennial in 1999 inspired further interest in him. Articles on American war literature in general have appeared occasionally in literary journals and Magazines. For instances, Zhang Zi-qing's "From Supporting the Justified War to Protesting the Invasive War – A Brief Review of American War Literature" and Yao Nai-qiang's "A Brief Discussion of the Origins and Characteristics of Contemporary American War Novels". The compilation of a comprehensive collection of foreign military literature (including American war literature), which may be seen as a breakthrough in the Chinese scholarship of foreign war literature, was well underway by Professor Li Gong-zhao of PLA Foreign Languages University in this period and the work wasn't published until the new century. No Ph. D. Dissertation contributed exclusively to the study of American war novel in the 20th century.

"To understand war," as a contemporary philosopher suggests, is "to understand ourselves." (Gelven 1994, p.18) By studying American war fiction – American people's understanding of war – so as to understand the American people, we are actually trying to achieve a better understanding of ourselves. This is, hopefully, the ultimate goal of this survey.

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