New Review from Matthew Komatsu: Adin Dobkin's 'Sprinting Through No-Man's Land'

I cannot separate my early memories of war from those of cycling. I'd just begun to cycle competitively – as a lieutenant and duathlete stationed in San Antonio – when I deployed to Afghanistan in the summer of 2002. And in the short several months I was stateside before deploying to Iraq 2003-2004, I spent much of my time in the saddle. In fact, I was run over by a San Antonio driver and violently ejected from my bike the week before I boarded my plane to Iraq. On the flip side of Iraq, I put in over 200 miles a week on the bike. As much as ten hours a week, post-war, often spent alone and silent. That's a lot of time to think.

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I thought a lot about those days as I followed Adin Dobkin's nonfiction narrative along the 1919 Tour de France in his debut *Sprinting Through No Man's Land*. It was hard not fill the minds of the cyclists, many of whom fought in WWI, with thoughts of my own. But while I the cyclists of *Sprinting Through No Man's Land* spent close to half the race along a course that was altered because towns that had once been stage starts or finishes either no longer existed, or were so devastated that they could not support the logistical needs of the race and its competitors.

The book begins, fittingly, in Paris in the Fall of 1918, mere days after the end of WWI. At the desk of Henri Desgrange, the editor of the sporting newspaper *l'Auto* and founder of the

Tour de France, we witness his decision to resume the Tour de France even as Armistice celebrations are erupting in the streets. From there, we're off to the races, if you'll forgive the turn of phrase, following a cast of characters as the Tour makes its way around the periphery of France.

To call Adin's cast "colorful" falls short. There's Desgrange – positioned as a kind of rigid omnipotent. The ll-seeing, all-knowing, and ultimately all-powerful race director and mouthpiece of the race through *l'Auto*.. The racers: brothers Henri and Francis Pelissier, both veterans of WWI. The former, an underdog by his age; the latter, the younger brother still in his elder brother's shadow. Eugene Cristophe, older than even Henri Pelissier. French veteran. Firmin Lambot, the Belgian who weathered WWI under German occupation. And others, of course.

The research that went into the writing of this book is exhaustive, and Adin takes great pains to show the reader the sourcing and methodology he used to develop the writing itself. He does a marvelous job of world-building, layering context in a chaptered structure that roughly matches the 15 stages (and gobsmacking 6,500km/4,000 miles covered during the 1919 Tour). He even went the extra mile, including three interesting vignettes regarding under-represented narratives that are connected geographically with where the reader is in the race at the time. In other words, I learned a great deal about WWI-era France.

Which leads me to my only quibble with the book, which has more to do with the baggage I brought to the reading than Adin's intentions for the book: this isn't your average armchair sports enthusiast paperback. Those books are predictable: event-driven, illustrated by flashes of character background, and largely high-velocity pacing. *Sprinting Through No Man's Land* is a careful book, slow and methodical, that takes great pains (as alluded to in Adin's afterword in which he addresses the pitfalls of narrative building) to

paint as full an understanding of the race as possible. In Adin's world, it would appear he's more concerned with telling the story of a time, than of a particular race and its characters. To do so, he spends a great deal of time providing the reader the story of the land in order for us to experience the race. So, don't come expecting chaptered race standings and attrition lists (the number of racers who quit before the race's end is breathtaking) because that's not Adin's story. And that's just fine because it's impossible to separate the 1919 Tour from WWI. The landscape, the racers, the people: WWI had changed *everything*. Countryside towns along the front had been reduced to rubble and roads thrashed by the years worth of passage of men and machine. Three previous victors had died in WWI. And the people themselves had been traumatized by the wartime experience, many of them displaced and grieving. So really, Adin's book is as complete a story of that time as he could make it.

As a former competitive cyclist, I found Adin's technical details refreshing. The Tour of today inherited the spirit of those Tours – the grueling distances, staged structure, and general classification scoring methodology and accompanying yellow jersey primary among them – but I doubt Desgrange or the Pelissier brothers, if popped into a time machine to see what their race would become in a century's time, would find much in common with today's Tour. Unlike today's professional cycling team structure, the teams then rallied under similar kinds of corporate banners, and remained amateur in nature. The teams of today serve to protect one most talented member of the team and his chances of winning the overall race. *Domestiques* – typically junior members – sole purpose in life is to create advantages for their captain, often find themselves breaking the headwinds for their captain, fetching water bottles and sustenance from the team's chase vehicle, and even giving up their bicycle should the captain's fail. In 1919, each rider was an island in Desgrange's amateur storm. If your bike broke, you had to stop and fix it yourself in,

say, a local blacksmith shop. And I do mean *yourself*. No spoilers, but there's a nail-biter of a scene in a late chapter that will have you counting seconds as a rider repairs his bike fork while the blacksmith simply observes. If a rider fell behind, other riders on his team were forbidden from falling back and pulling him forward lest they all risk time penalties from the ever-present eyes of Desgrange's armada of *l'Auto* journalists/race observers. Today's bicycles are technological marvels to the point that several years ago, professional cycling implemented minimum bicycle weights, and specified wheel types and bike frame geometries to reduce aerodynamic advantages. The bikes you see in the Tour today are a far cry from what Adin exposes us to: thick-tubed steel framed bikes with one-gear wheels that required a racer to dismount and manually change out to change gears. They were tanks to today's sports cars. And the clothing – my god – ask yourself how you'd feel about cycling 4,000 miles in wool, minus the luxury of padding under your ass.

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Sprinting Through No Man's Land is a triumph of nonfiction storytelling, and it will be a welcome addition for the bookshelves of cycling fans and war literature aficionados alike (I'm both if you can't tell). Every page is a delight, unified by Adin's excellent prose and editorial choices, from the exit from and return to Paris, and it brought me back to my own post-war cycling in ways unexpected and refreshing. My recommendation: turn on this year's Tour. Read a chapter at the end of every stage, and let Adin build that world for you in ways that simply watching it never could.

Allez!

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Dobkin, Adin. Sprinting Through No-Man's Land: Endurance, Tragedy, and Rebirth in the 1919 Tour de France.

Mr. Mendes’ War: Film Review, ‘1917’

“You have to construct a journey for the camera that’s every bit as interesting as the journey of the actor. What I wanted was one ribbon, like a snake, moving forward, in which the information that you needed happened to fall in front of where the camera was pointing.”

-Sam Mendes

It is a glorious thing to live in an age that is learning to remember the Great War.

Once the Centennial passed, I started to worry that WWI would fade back into obscurity.

There would be nothing more to it than the occasional badly-produced documentary, rehashing all the basic facts. Or the once-a-decade feature film composed primarily of maudlin melodrama and scenery-chewing. Great War geeks would be reduced, finally, to re-reading what little their local library has on the subject (invariably, a shelf or two perched on the edge of the vast glacier of paper that is EVERY BOOK ABOUT WWII EVER PUBLISHED, which even the most modest county library is guaranteed to have).

We’d keep on of course, as we have for decades, finding solitary joy in studying the minutiae of this defining moment of the 20th Century, only telegraphing our interests by posting Siegfried Sassoon’s “Survivors” on social media every Armistice Day. We know how to live like this.

And it may yet come to that again, in ten years or so. But for now, the Great War retains a prominent place in scholarship and the public eye. Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old* (see my review for WBT last year) was the first great post-Centennial media event, generating accolades, controversy and awards, and proving so popular it was re-released in theaters twice in one year.

Sam Mendes' masterful *1917* carries on this legacy, and in my honest and no doubt potentially unpopular opinion, surpasses Jackson's film in almost every way. I know, we're talking about two fairly dissimilar things here. The statement stands. *1917* evokes the character of the Great War, it contains the soul of the War, and it conveys these ideas to the audience in a way that documentary cannot do. In short, were you forced to show someone who had never heard of the Great War only one film that evoked the nature of the War, you would choose *1917* over *They Shall Not Grow Old.*

For one thing, it is shorter; for another, it is much more compelling; finally, it is free from the glaring flaws of Jackson's film. *They Shall Not Grow Old* suffers from low-key jingoism and Jackson's bizarre visual insistence on depicting only white British infantrymen (it turns out there were other people there).

1917 is the WWI movie I've been waiting for my whole life.

Yet after I saw it, and then read more than a few reviews of *1917*, I was left with one major question:

What movie did y'all see?

Because the *1917* I've encountered in the criticism is not in any sense the film that I watched.

For example, Manohla Dargis writing for the NYT describes a film containing "next to no history" and refers to the entire piece as "a carefully organized and sanitized war picture from

Sam Mendes that turns one of the most catastrophic episodes in modern times into an exercise in preening showmanship."

Justin Chang on *Fresh Air* was generally more positive, but like many other reviewers spent ages decrying the film's technical skill. (If you're somehow unaware, the major conceit of Mendes' film is its use of a simulated single tracking shot, actually achieved through a variety of cinematic tricks—if you're interested you can see exactly how it was done on YouTube.) In fact, the most persistent line of bitching about this movie has been that it's "too perfect", with the NYT reviewer even throwing out an offhand line about the movie spending too much time on getting the buttons on the uniforms right.

To which I have to respond: have you ever MET a Great War geek? Get the buttons wrong on the uniforms and you will quite literally never hear the end of it on the Internet. And anyway, maybe I'm missing something here with this whole "sure, it's technically magnificent, BUT" angle. People WANT it to be sloppy?

This film is the opposite of sloppy. This is theater, ready for any contingency. This is opera, or better yet a musical, with sets and costumes meticulously and obsessively constructed. This is in every sense a careful production. I'm really missing why this is a problem. With that said:

Sam Mendes gets this a lot.

Fifteen years ago, people said the same shit about *Jarhead*.

Fie on the critics (for now, anyway). If you haven't seen this movie, you need to understand what it was really like to dive into it on the big screen. Because this film is beyond epic. It's beyond "a good film", beyond even the proverbial "good war film"—it is an *experience.*

It is immediate.

Overwhelming.

Shocking.

The success of this film lies in the concept of cinema-as-immersion. Toss the viewer straight into the milieu and drag them along, whether they will or no, through all the horror and the madness and the despair that was the soldier's lot in 1917. Of course it doesn't dwell on politics or slap you in the face with the grade-school primer on the whys and wherefores of alliances and Archdukes. There is, quite simply, no time for that.

The plot of the film centers on two Lance Corporals of the East Surrey Regiment, Blake and Schofield, played by Dean-Charles Chapman and George MacKay. Fans of *Game of Thrones* will recognize Chapman as an all-grown-up version of King Tommen Baratheon, First of His Name*.

*The fact of his starring role in this film prompted the following exchange. While we were on the way to the cinema, my wife said to me "Who's directing this?"

ME: Sam Mendes.

MARY: What else has he done besides James Bond?

ME: *American Beauty. Revolutionary Road. Jarhead.*

MARY: Oh. Oh God.

ME: What?

MARY: I just got this incredibly clear picture of Tommen dancing around with a Santa hat on his junk, to a tinny clarinet-and-piano '20s jazz version of "O.P.P."

ME: <inarticulate with laughter>

MARY (*imitating Cab Calloway*): Ya down with O.P.P? Yeah, you know me!

At that point I nearly wrecked the car.

I digress (but you laughed). Blake and Schofield are first seen on their backs in an unspoiled field, trying to get in one of the naps that soldiers everywhere can manage at the drop of any hat, when they're interrupted and summoned back to HQ in the trenches. Along their way, they pass by any number of black British soldiers from the West Indies Regiment.

Jackson's film made no acknowledgement whatsoever of the service these people made during the war. Mendes, whose Trinidadian grandfather was a messenger serving in much the same capacity as Blake or Schofield, is careful to honor the sacrifices of these brave people who served despite the racist and classist treatment they suffered while doing their duty. All of this is accomplished in the first five minutes.

Awaiting them is General Erinmore, portrayed by an extra-gruff-and-crusty Colin Firth. Our Heroes are informed that there is a mission of extreme importance that must be undertaken immediately; the German "retreat" to the Hindenburg Line has been revealed through aerial reconnaissance to be anything but, and their comrades in the 2nd under Colonel Mackenzie are walking into a deathtrap. Their orders to attack will ensure the deaths of 1600 men. As Blake's brother is a lieutenant in the 2nd, Blake is chosen for this mission and entrusted with orders from General Erinmore to call off the attack, and as he is allowed to choose one man to go with him, of course he chooses his best mate Schofield.

These are literally the only moments of peace the film has until its end. From this moment forward, everything is propulsive, violent, and fast. Even the scenes of relative inaction are fraught, with the promise of calamity never further away than the next street or the next trench.

From here, the camera follows Blake and Schofield with all the obsession of a stalker. Through the use of wildly varying

color palettes, Mendes carefully establishes “chapters” in the film. The British trenches they leave are orderly, earth-colored, dusty but tidy. Their entry into No Man’s Land, with its foul slurry of churned mud, discarded boots, and body parts, is clearly Chapter Two: a sudden break with the imagery seen before reveals a landscape riddled with the grey of rotting flesh, the brown of human shit, the occasional burst of gold or green to remind one that this was once a place where people lived with their families, farmed, tended their business.

The initial shots of No Man’s Land are strikingly reminiscent of Max Ernst’s *Europe After the Rain II:*


Max Ernst. Europe After Rain II: 1940-42.

There is a moment of dark Great War humor when the two encounter Lieutenant Leslie (Andrew Scott, familiar to viewers of *Sherlock* as Moriarty) who lends them flare guns (“Throw them back when you’re done, we’re forever out of these”) and reminds them that on the way to their destination, they should “mind the bowing chap”. The Bowing Chap is revealed to be a decaying corpse suspended from barbed wire, a shoutout to the works of the inimitable Otto Dix, whose “Corpse on Barbed Wire” is one of the most memorable pieces of art from the War.

Further, a lingering shot on the corpses of two horses evokes the work of Dix, whose art provided an inspiration for Jackson’s *They Shall Not Grow Old* as well. “Horse Cadaver” is apparently every WWI movie director’s favorite; in both movies, the shots of dead and decaying horses are arranged precisely in the same aspect and POV as Dix’s picture.

Stomach-turning images of this kind can and should be employed by those who would make movies about war; *1917* pulls no punches here. During their dangerous sojourn in No Man’s Land and the German trenches, rats swarm everywhere and flies

infest all surfaces, including *inside* a gaping wound on a corpse. Lance Corporal Schofield cuts his hand on barbed wire and then trips, firmly inserting his wounded fist into the bacteria-laden hole where rats were feasting not moments before. It is both disgusting and entirely realistic; the chief cause of death in every war before the First World War was from infectious disease, not combat. If one were feeling particularly apocalyptic, one could definitely argue that the number of people felled by the Spanish flu during and after the conflict showcases the continuing role of Pestilence following along in the wake of War.

Otto Dix. Horse Cadaver, Plate 5 from ‘Der Krieg’ (The War), 1924.

From the German trench (where Schofield is nearly killed, only saved by the valiant efforts of Blake) they proceed to a bombed-out French farmstead. Here the plot takes an unexpected turn, as the corporals observe a dogfight between the Boche and two English pilots, which ends with the German plane crashing mere yards from the broken-down barn where Blake and Schofield have taken shelter.

And it is now where things begin to go horribly awry.

The German fighter plane crashes and catches fire. The pilot screams for help. Blake and Schofield don’t wait for moral considerations or strategic concerns: they pull him from the wreckage as though he were their own comrade. He is burned and wounded, and Schofield suggest they employ the *coup de grace*, but Blake demurs.

Moments later, Blake is stabbed in the gut by the ungrateful recipient of his kindness.

Schofield shoots the German pilot over and over again, enraged at his perfidy, but Blake is mortally wounded. Schofield holds

him as he dies, promising to write to his family back in Britain. “Don’t tell them I was scared,” Blake says, as he dies in agony.

From now on the story is Schofield’s. In service both to his comrades in the 2nd and his fallen companion, he will not be denied in his obsessive focus on the completion of The Quest.

The frenetic pace increases. Schofield manages to catch a ride further into German territory from a group of British soldiers on their way into the battle zone. Among them is a Sikh, a figure common in the British soldiery, but one whose presence in this film inspired ridiculous accusations of “forced diversity” by racist English actor Laurence Fox. To briefly address Fox’s “concerns”: one in every six British soldiers who served in WWI originated from the Indian subcontinent. Sikhs, Malays, Sepoys and others served proudly in many capacities during the War. In fact, there is a famous photograph of Indian lancers proceeding into the now-abandoned No Man’s Land during the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line:

Later, Schofield is shot at by a German sniper while making a perilous crossing over the blasted-out girders of a destroyed bridge. He survives and kills his opponent, only to be knocked out by a ricocheting bullet. When he awakens, he is forced to flee through a bombed-out cityscape of arches and dark passageways lit only by flares and the roaring fires from bombing, which scene makes clear reference to the disturbing cityscapes of De Chirico.

“Melancholy and the mystery of the street” – Painting by George de Chirico, 1914.

The existential horror of solitude. The dread and horror of

war, The War, any war. All are displayed here, experienced by the viewer in real time as the protagonist experiences them. As Schofield continues on his journey, the color palette changes again and again and again, from yellow to orange to blue.

At one point, Schofield falls into a river, ending up floating in a pool laden with cherry blossoms, creating a scene that is clearly a sort of genderswapped *Lady of Shalott* or Ophelia:

John Everett Millais, “Ophelia,” 1851-2.

At long last, Schofield finds the 2nd, only to realize that they are already in the process of going over the top. In his efforts to reach Colonel MacKenzie with his letter calling off the attack, Schofield, gripped with the madness of obsession, runs *across* No Man’s Land as the shells fall around him, perpendicular to the line of battle, knocking over his comrades and nearly getting killed over and over again. He reaches his goal, delivers his message, and while he is too late to save the first wave of men cut down by German machine guns, he does manage to convince Mackenzie (played by an particularly intense and mustachioed Benedict Cumberbatch) to call off the attack. In the aftermath, he locates Blake’s brother, played by none other than *Game of Thrones’* Richard Madden (the irony of a Stark playing the brother of a Baratheon will not be lost on fans of the series) and delivers the news of Blake’s death. “I am so glad you were with him,” Madden says, as he shakes Schofield’s hand and tries and fails to prevent the tears from falling.

At the end, we discover that Schofield has a wife and child at home, whose picture he regards lovingly as he finally gets a few moments of rest beneath a twisted tree, still standing despite the bombardment and destruction all around.

In a last response to the critics, I have this to say. Yes, it was technically perfect. But this movie also had *soul*. This was a film that portrayed the horrors and the despair of the Great War realistically, that depicted soldiers who were anything but gung-ho, soldiers who questioned where they were and what they were doing. It could not have been set at any other time than 1917, when the German "retreat" freed up more land than the Allies had been able to recapture since August of 1914. The date displayed at the beginning of the movie is no coincidence either: April 6, 1917 is the day the United States entered the war. In its last moments, the film depicts a figure at rest, able to finally hope, to consider a future. This reflects the actual attitudes and emotions felt by the beleaguered British and French who had fought themselves into exhaustion and madness in the three years prior.

1917 is a masterpiece. It is the Great War movie that everyone can love. If the theater we viewed it in was any indication—it was so crowded I couldn't even sit with my family—it is reaching people. *1917* has accomplished what so many other films and television series produced over the last six years could not: it has engaged the general public with WWI. Mendes' triumph is thus not just one of aesthetics or skill or "polish"; it is a triumph of thought. If only we could have a film like this every year, the world might well reconsider its addiction to war.

Mr. Tolkien's War: A Review of Peter Jackson's 'They

Shall Not Grow Old,’ by Rob Bokkon

Anyone who knows me at all well can tell you that I don’t really have a personality, per se: what I have instead is a gigantic amalgamation of obsessions. Fandoms. Things like the life and work of Prince Rogers Nelson. Hungarian cuisine. The history of Jim Jones and Peoples Temple. The films of Peter Jackson. The Great War.

So, obviously, when word came through that those last two things were colliding, in the form of a documentary commissioned by the Imperial War Museums, I was nearly beside myself. If anyone could capture the horror and the bravery of the Great War, it’s the guy who gave us the Pellenor Fields and the Battle of Five Armies on the big screen. I counted the days until the release date. I jabbered about it to all three people I know who love WWI as much as I do. I was, to put it mildly, stoked.

Which remained my default state right up until I sat down in the theater to absorb what I truly hoped would be a modern masterpiece. The truth, as always, was rather more complicated.

The version we saw was bookended by both an introduction, and making-of featurette, from Mr Jackson himself. It is my current understanding that the greater theatrical release of the film will not include these, which is a pity, as the film loses much of its impact when one is unaware of the sheer labor of love involved in the restoration of the old footage. And, of course, consider yourselves warned that SPOILERS ABOUND, both for the film and for the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

The theater was almost three-quarters full, which surprised us; the crowd was fairly diverse, but included a high

proportion of fit middle-aged guys in outdoor-pursuits gear, who by their conversation seemed mostly to be veterans. We live in a university town, so the history dorks (us) were also well-represented. The former dean of the college of arts and letters was there. Enthusiasm was high.

And then we fucking sat there for thirty solid minutes. Not thirty minutes of previews, mind you, but some "edutainment" compiled by Fathom Features that consisted of an "interactive" quiz, six multiple-choice questions about the Great War—"Did the Great War take place in A: 1914-1918, B: 1861-1865, C: Never, D: Last Week" and "Was Baron Von Richtoven, aka the 'Red Baron', a A: toilet cleaner in Bournemouth, B: your mom, C: a famous WWI flying ace with 80 confirmed kills or D: the inventor of owls?"—designed for people who have never heard of the Great War.

But when the film finally began, and the rowdy high-schoolers three rows back finally shut up, absolutely everyone in the room was transfixed.

Because this movie is *stunning*.

It begins and ends with images of the war with which we are familiar, in shades of silver and black and white, complete with the sound effect of an antique projector. The voice-overs are the voices of old men, disconnected from their source, joined to past time and image only by association. Jackson's decision to jettison traditional narration in favor of archival recordings from Great War veterans is meant to grant immediacy to the film by immersing the viewer in direct experience rather than received history.

The question that must be asked is, "Does this work?" And the answer is, yes and no. While my socialist soul champions the decision to represent the War exclusively from the perspective of the people who actually fought the damn thing, the narrative feels tailored nonetheless. Blame it perhaps on the

source material, as the archival audio was taken from something like 600 hours of interviews done in the ‘50s and ‘60s by the Imperial War Museums, who clearly have their own version of the War they wish to promote. A version of the war where the sun still has not set on the British Empire, George V regards us all favorably from the wall of every post office, the tea is hot and everyone knows their place.

Still from Peter Jackson’s ‘They Shall Not Grow Old.’

There are moments—a few—in the voice-overs where a note of fatalism or horror or even protest will arise. Mild moments, expressed with little fervor, which seem to be included only to evoke veracity. At the end, we get a series of voices reminding us that war is useless, pointless, a waste. A series of voices that feels tacked-on, as though we as an audience of modern sensibilities expect to hear this condemnation. Overall, throughout the film we hear the stories of Tommies who were happy to be there, who’d “go over again,” who missed it when they left, who saw it as “a job of work that had to be done.” Is this the overarching experience of the average British soldier in the war?

My reading has told me otherwise. Robert Graves’ *Good-Bye to All That* certainly seems to indicate otherwise. Siegfried Sassoon would undoubtedly curl his lovely aristocratic lip at the very notion. Is it worthwhile to hear these voices, these stories? Absolutely. Is it honest? This I cannot answer, but I have doubts.

But never mind that. You’ll forget all your criticism, all your doubt, if just for a moment, when that color footage hits the screen.

Jackson has always directed with a cinematographer’s eye, and this film is no exception. The first few shots of Tommies arriving in France, clad in khaki (a very authentic shade of

khaki, as it turns out; Jackson spent weeks getting the color exactly right from uniforms *in his private collection*, since Peter Jackson is the world's biggest World War I geek), baring their very British smiles for the camera: these are enough to make you forget that this footage ever existed in another form. The color used is not the bright and hyper-real shading of a modern film. The tones are very much those of a color photograph from 1914, which just serves to make the images seem more immediate and real.

The soundtrack at this point becomes a thing of pure artifice, but what artifice—Jackson's otaku devotion to detail has never been showcased to greater effect. As revealed in the making-of featurette at the end, lip-readers were employed to pore over the footage and to reconstruct all possible dialogue. Then, by identifying uniforms or cap-badges, Jackson was able to place the regiments, and based on their origins (Royal Welch, Lancashire, &c.) actually found actors from the appropriate locales and hired them to do the voice-overs. Further, every boot hitting the mud, every rustle of a rucksack, every clank of a helmet being thrown to the ground is there.

My jaw stayed on the floor for a long while. It is beautiful, there's no denying that. It is a labor of love. And in true Peter Jackson style, the camaraderie of camp life, the minor inconveniences and sanitary arrangements, or rather the lack thereof, the cheerful bitching about the cheap beer and wretched cigarettes lasts only a little while, to be replaced by the screaming terror of battle and its stomach-turning consequences. Jackson has never pulled his punches when it comes to revolting images (if you've ever seen Dead Alive or Meet the Feebles you'll know what I'm talking about) and this film is no exception. Popcorn went untouched when the images of trench foot, bloated corpses, maggots and rats swarm across the screen.

And yet, it is here that the film reaches its greatest artistic heights. Again and again I was reminded of the works

of Otto Dix. For those who don't know him, Dix was an enthusiastic volunteer for the German army in 1914, whose drawings from the front remain a poignant and disturbing testament to the aesthetic impact of conflict. His true fame came during Weimar Berlin, which earned him the enmity of the Nazis, who denounced him as a "degenerate artist."

In *They Shall Not Grow Old,* a shot of a disemboweled cavalry horse strongly recalled Dix's *Horse Cadaver,* the animal's ruined body a testament to the service of all the animals who aided in the war effort.


Otto Dix, "Horse Cadaver from the War."

Many times Jackson shows bodies dangling, untended and ignored, from barbed wire, akin to those from the *War Triptych* or the obviously named but no less striking *Corpse on Barbed Wire*.


Otto Dix, "Near Langemarck (February 1918)."


Otto Dix, "Corpse on Barbed Wire."

A group of Tommies, exhausted, huddled together in their trench, are positioned almost exactly like Dix's *Resting Company,* the only difference their uniforms. The parallels were too obvious to ignore; Jackson, in his years of searching through the footage provided by the War Museums, had clearly searched for and found footage that matched the works of Dix. Otto Dix, perhaps more than any other artist, truly captured the soul-killing dread and visceral, bleak reality of this war. Jackson, in his deep and thorough understanding of his subject, chose images echoic of Dix's in order to evoke in the viewer that same sense of despair, of resignation, of trauma.

This conscious homage is my favorite takeaway from Jackson's film.

Whether conscious or not, however, Jackson's most prominent homage, and ultimately the film's downfall, lies in its obvious parallels to his most famous subject matter: the works of Tolkien.

J.R.R. Tolkien served in the Lancashire Fusilliers, as a signal-officer. He saw action at the Somme and lost two of his closest school friends to the War.

The narrative structure of *They Shall Not Grow Old* is, almost exactly, that of *Lord of the Rings*. A group of brave, innocent Englishmen/hobbits, inadvertently forced away from the comforts of hearth and home, reluctantly but bravely sally forth to do their duty in the face of certain destruction. Along the way, their innocence is lost. They confront unimaginable evil and emerge scarred, only to return home to a land unwelcoming, hostile, entirely changed from the one they left.

Of course, Jackson cannot be blamed for telling the truths of the War; this narrative, though romanticized and muddled, parallels the experience of many Englishmen during the War. It was certainly Tolkien's narrative. It is the very Englishness of the narrative that presents us with the film's biggest problem, one Andria Williams (of the Military Spouse Book Review, and a Wrath-Bearing Tree editor) also covered extensively in her review, which is that of representation.

To the casual viewer, seeing *They Shall Not Grow Old* leaves one with the clear impression that the entire Great War was fought by the British infantry and artillery, more or less single-handed. The French of course are mentioned, and even seen in a few shots, but overall the collection of images on the screen is of British, Welsh, Scots and Irish troops, every face a white face. The British West Indies Reserves are never

seen. The film is innocent of a single Sepoy, there are no Gurkhas, no Malays.

In the featurette at the end of the film, Jackson addresses these concerns with a literal wave of the hand and a dismissive remark about the focus of the picture and the material available to him, while the screen actually shows unused footage of black troops, giving the lie to his explanation even as he offers it. What really pissed off your humble reviewer was the sentence Jackson used to cap this segment of the featurette: "This is a film by a non-scholar, for non-scholars."

Wow. OK. Certainly it's not an academic film, but to suggest that giving representation only to white British troops on-screen is in some way justifiable because the film is "by a non-scholar" rubbed me the wrong way. Mr Jackson, you're going to tell us that you, the man who owns a closetful of original WWI uniforms—the man who literally minutes before was showing off his collection of *actual Great War artillery pieces*—the man who admitted to owning every issue of *The War Illustrated* magazine—you, of all people, would offer this lame excuse?

I think the issue here is not an actual dishonesty on Jackson's part, however. I believe that his inability to see his own biases stems from a long association with the works of Tolkien, in which the War of the Ring is fought and won by the Men of the West, the people of Gondor and Rohan. (Although as noted by other viewers of this film, even Tolkien's coalition was more diverse than the one shown in *They Shall Not Grow Old*—at least the Fellowship included elves and dwarves).

The issue of Tolkien's source material, and whether or not it is actively or casually racist, is one that encompasses far too great a scope for this review. Certainly Tolkien did not think himself a racist, and was a vocal opponent of Nazi racialist theories, even going so far as to send a series of nasty letters to a German publisher who wanted to reprint *The*

Hobbit in the late ‘30s but only after confirming if Tolkien was “arisch”—that is, Aryan. He also hated apartheid, having been born in South Africa, and was similarly vocal in his condemnation of the practice.

J.R.R. Tolkien in WWI uniform.

Yet there are Tolkien’s own works, which reflect the unthinking cultural biases of a man born in the Victorian era who came of age in the Edwardian. The nations of the East (Rhun, Harad, &c.) are all populated by dark-skinned Men who are under the thrall of Sauron. Tolkien’s own remarks about the appearance of Orcs (found in his letters) include a distressing description of them as like “the unlovliest of the Mongol-types,” and he explicitly stated that the gold-loving Dwarves were based on the Jewish people, for whom he nurtured a public admiration his whole life, but the association is an uncomfortable one to modern thought.

In conclusion: should you see this film? Absolutely. Should you see it with caveats and reservations? Clearly. Beautiful but flawed, *They Shall Not Grow Old* is a necessary film, but an incomplete one.

The Hundred-Year Itch, or Remembering The Great War

Here are some facts about

The Great War. It started in 1913.

We know that from books.

and the scarred nobles

grandma met in the deli

off 23rd and 8th,

Ich hätte gerne eine Bratwurst

they’d say, eyes scared red.

It was my fault; I must admit,

quanta exist in different places and

in different times;

some have been in my brain,

and also in Hitler’s old brain

the war’s most famous vet.

Not quite Afghanistan; still, his war

and my war was the same,

A vicious trick,

Russian saboteur

made disasters, it’s true,

walk with me here:

the Soviets invade in 1979.

Great Britain joins France

as the Marne collapses,

a wet snowdrift, over-heavy
in 1914. Add the numbers.
We surround ourselves with stories,
these fluid lines always converge.

Remember that line, the human
marching through town, shrive-faced,
boots laced tight, cap perched on his
kiss-me forehead, rifle shouldered,
we’re gonna beat the Hun—
there’s another line, now, 451AD,
Attila plundering across the plain,
stopped by whom? The Roman? No—
Aetius heads a motley crew of Frank
and Gaul, Suebi, Goth and Visigoth,
and *Saxon*! Yes, the Germans saved
the West from Hunnic rule!
Until—it always comes around to this,
that boy marched home again
some years after the great siege,
at Verdun, Ypres, or Somme;
really it doesn’t matter.

Siege used to mean sit, but he won’t;

not without his boots and cap,

all that chipper stuff gone,

he’s been unseated, the siege lifted

his mien took on a leaner slant,

suspicious eyes for prying words

could not prepare a waiting world

for what came next.

Plenty! Champagne *avec vous*

on all the quays and ways

of Venice, Paris, Bruges;

Sur la table, Monsieur?

If you weren’t there, you can’t know,

and he wasn’t. All there.

***

When will war weary of me. Woeful wight,

wailing across the width of destiny,

I sprawl comfortless in a rancid hole,

a thick cloth great-coat stiff with sweat and grist

my second skin, then, for a skull, some tin

riddle: helmet, brain-pan, will you sit still?

The unfrozen mud’s alive, the stench, strong,

rat I’d say, someone’s let them in. Writhing,

muse for a Rosenberg, a whole den’s worth:

and that’s a good day, without bullets, bombs,

or the whistling artillery storm—

the rain of steel shrapnel, cutting like wind

across Europe’s newly irreligious plain—

flesh, it seems, has a its breaking point, splits wide

the human spirit spills, squandered, betrayed

amid the great gulf between my chilled hand

and the quiet, marble hand of German kin;

or British, or French—what odd clay. The flesh

grieves, parted by that vast, pitted waste,

unshrivened the filthy flesh yearns to be

whole again; compartmented, sufficient,

Unified. one man, one nation—one God.

***

A great civilizing wind stirs on the plains.

Leaves cast off the towns, like trees,

the Supple young men march in step

all balled fists, full of boasting oaths

they stride, ennobled by a promise

of liberation, plunder, and rape.

The best of the land! This lot’s the best!

But someone’s pulled a cruel prank.

At the front, the sergeant calls time

with a note pinned to his back. It reads:

“Take my wife, she’s free.”

Below, a crude sketch.

***

On a computer or smartphone,

an educated citizen

has just checked the market. It’s up,

cause for optimism, and sun,

and a feast fit for all the hounds

who prowl our sordid memory,

just looking for some sad excuse

to get me back out in the fury

Heroes fighting heroically during the battle for the Meuse-Argonne, which as everyone knows guaranteed peace for generations of Europeans and was a useful investment of human life and energy. Via US Army Europe Public Affairs

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New Fiction by Matthew J. Hefti: “Jean, not Jean”


Illustration by Matthew J. Hefti

Jean, not Jean

by Matthew J. Hefti

When I look in the mirror, I think I look stupid. Otherwise, I don’t even think of how I look. But when I do look in the mirror, it’s like I can’t look away. Also when I do, I pick a lot. Today is especially bad.

My mom said once that it’s anxiety from stress.

My dad said, he’s thirteen. What’s he got to be stressed about?

I’m pretty torqued on the way to school. I don’t really know why. I think it’s because I missed the bus. I missed the bus because I couldn’t stop picking at myself, and I think it’s because I can feel everything—like how tight my socks are and how my feet are already a little moist and my socks aren’t doing anything about it, and my shirt’s a little tight in the armpits and it’s pulling at my armpit hairs, and one of the hairs in my eyebrows is curled or something and it’s really

annoying me, and I think maybe I have a hair growing in my ear. I'm not sure.

My mom asks what she can do to put me in a better mood.

I tell her that she doesn't have to do anything.

She says my happiness is important.

It's important to you, I tell her.

Jean isn't at school today. He's probably my best friend. He had an allergic reaction yesterday. He's allergic to pretty much everything.

Mr. Rogers is subbing again because Mrs. Neumann is sick. Mr. Rogers hates when we call him that and tells us to call him anything but that. We called him all kinds of things for a while, like Mr. Fluffy Head and Poo Poo Bear, but it got boring because he really meant what he said about being able to call him anything. He didn't care.

You wouldn't guess it by his name, but Mr. Rogers is this tough looking dude that used to be in the military. He still has a flat top.

Mr. Rogers calls Jean's name three times, pausing for infinity each time as if it's not completely obvious there's an empty desk and no one is responding. But he says it like Jean, like something you wear or like he's a girl, but his name is Jean, like Victor Hugo's hero. It rhymes with Shawn. You'd think he'd know that by now.

I've never read anything by Victor Hugo, but that's what Jean's mother always says when someone says it wrong: It's Jean, she says. Like the greatest hero in western literature,

drawn in full by Victor Hugo. Except she says litra-ture. And then if people say, who's that, she won't answer. She just snorts a little like they're stupid.

I asked his mom once if I could see the picture of the Jean in the book. She said, What do you mean? I said, the one drawn by Victor Hugo. She snorted. I guess she thinks I'm stupid.

Jean told me that his mom named him that because the Jean in the book is like a kind of Christ.

I asked him what that was supposed to mean since there's only one God.

He said, he's not Christ. He's a type of Christ.

I said, you can't be a type of something if there's only one of that thing.

He said he asked his dad about it once and his dad said that the only thing he's the hero of is the miserable ones.

Who? I said. Jean or Christ?

Jean shrugged. Both I guess.

I used to call him Jean too. Even though it's Jean, not Jean. Everyone did. He's small and kind of nerdy looking. Plus he's sick a lot, and saying Jean made us feel stuck up. But now most of us have gotten used to it. It's just his name.

I didn't call him Jean because he was nerdy. I called him that because he was my arch nemesis. He stole my job as milk monitor last year, when we were in sixth grade. Each of us had a class duty, and I had the best one.

It wasn’t the best because counting the orders and getting the milks at lunch was so great or anything. But the milk monitor for the fifth and sixth grade classroom had to go with the milk monitor for the seventh and eighth grade classroom. And Heather Saint James was the milk monitor for the seventh and eighth graders. Heather Saint James didn’t have the prettiest face—that was Jennifer Gohrman—but she did have the biggest boobs in the school.

The way it worked was, the older kid would bring the milk crate and wait by our door. That was like the signal to Mrs. Neumann that she needed to wrap it up. Then she’d say, raise your hand if you want chocolate. Then, raise your hand if you want white. You’d count the hands and then go to the gym closet with the older kid to get the milks, and then you’d bring them back.

Heather Saint James would put the milk crate on the ground to slide open the big fridge door to get the milks and put them into the crate.

I could see right down her shirt where those big heavy things were hanging. While she waited for me to stammer the count for our class, she would stay bent over like that with her hand on the bottom shelf. Like she didn’t even realize they were there.

To get to the gym closet, you had to walk through the whole school and then finally the principal’s office. You could go through the gym instead of the principal’s office, but we weren’t allowed to go that way.

When I was in fifth grade and David Pfeiffer was the milk monitor, I thought they made them go through the office because they were afraid the milk monitors would start playing

in the gym on the way there. That was before Jean even went to our school.

But then when I got older, I realized that didn't make any sense because all the balls and toys and stuff were stored in the gym closet, which is where you had to go to get the milks anyway.

After I had spent some time as the milk monitor myself, I realized they made you go through the principal's office because they were probably afraid that if you went through the gym, you'd probably goof off in other ways. I never did though.

Jean says I chickened out and had plenty of chances, but that's not what happened. What happened is that he stole my job.

One day while I was doing the sweater stare—it was fall by then—I had forgotten the count when Heather Saint James asked me the numbers. I thought fast and gave her two numbers that added up to eleven. That's how many students we had in our class after all.

But Jean doesn't drink milk. He's allergic. According to his mom, deathly allergic. So the real number was supposed to add up to ten.

I should have guessed that anyway because that's how many kids had been in my class my whole life until Jean showed up. But I remembered the new kid made us eleven.

It wasn't the first time I had gotten the numbers wrong. It wasn't even the first time I made the mistake of bringing back eleven milks. But the first time I did it doesn't count. I just did it that time because I thought that Mrs. Neumann

would let me have the extra chocolate instead of taking it back.

She didn’t like that.

I told her I couldn’t take it back because Heather Saint James already went back to her classroom.

She told me that she was sure I would find my way. She was always saying that, even when it didn’t make sense in context.

The time I forgot the numbers on accident, she asked why I brought back the wrong number of chocolate milks again.

I told her it was because I forgot Jean was allergic to milk.

She said, you know who won’t forget that Jean is allergic to milk?

No, I told her.

Jean. That’s who.

So she made Jean the milk monitor.

When I told my dad what happened, he laughed and said, Well, there’s dramatic irony for you.

I was pretty mean to Jean for a while. Then one day he asked why I cared about being milk monitor so much, and I told him it was obvious.

He said it wasn’t obvious to him.

I mentioned Heather Saint James.

He said, that’s it? Then he claimed he didn’t care about that because he could look at all the boobs he wanted because they

had the internet at home. I think he just wanted me to like him.

He offered to stick his finger in one of the milk cartons so I could get the job back. I think he wanted to be liked so badly that he would have really done it, but I told him not to because they might give the job to anyone. And if someone else got the job, he'd just be risking his life for nothing.

It made me feel bad that he was so obsessed with being liked that he would risk his life to get a friend and also give up the chance to sneak peeks down the shirt of Heather Saint James.

So I said sorry for being so mean and that I wouldn't view him as my arch nemesis anymore.

After me and Jean became friends, I asked him why he came to our school.

Jean said the public school told him he missed too many days. He didn't want to be stuck in fifth grade.

So I asked him why he could be in sixth grade in our school when everyone said it was harder than the public school.

He said the state couldn't tell our school what to do. Then he said our school was just as easy as public school. But going to any school is a waste of time, he said.

He had a point there.

When I asked him why he didn't just get home schooled, he said his mom told him that all home school kids are weird.

He had a point there too.

But why our school? I asked. You're not even Christian.

Yes I am, he said.

But you don’t go to our church, I pointed out.

Are you stupid or just brainwashed? he asked.

I told him he could use some milk of human kindness.

We both had a good laugh at that one.

It was milk that gave Jean the reaction yesterday, but it could have been anything considering practically half the normal foods in the world are like phosgene or mustard gas to him. I learned about phosgene and mustard gas yesterday in history class, not from Mr. Rogers, but from Jean.

When history class started, Mr. Rogers asked what we were learning about from Mrs. Neumann.

Jean told him World War One.

Tabby Gardner raised her hand and said, why do we always have to learn about wars in history class?

Mr. Rogers told her it was because wars were like the epicenter of an earthquake in a country’s timeline with seismic waves moving out in every direction. If you wanted to, he said, you could pick any given war and study the whole country’s history just by studying that war. You could ask yourself what led to the war and then what were the consequences of the war. By asking what led to the war, you could go as far back into history as you wanted. By asking what the consequences of the war were, you could study all the history from the war until the present and then as far into the future as infinity if you wanted.

Tabby Gardner told him we’d already been studying World War One for infinity.

I have to admit, I was pretty bored myself.

Well, Mr. Rogers said, if a war is like an earthquake in a country's timeline, then wouldn't a World War be like an earthquake in the entire world's timeline? So doesn't it make sense to spend time studying it?

Okay, Tabby Gardner said, but we already know everything about it.

Then tell me what you know about the war, Mr. Rogers said.

Jean raised his hand, like always.

Mr. Rogers said, I want to hear from Tabby. But then she didn't say anything for a long time, and Mr. Rogers called on Jean, like always.

Did you know, Jean said, that in World War One, they used phosgene and mustard gasses? Also, did you know that the Germans would hit troops with gasses that could get through the gas masks? It would hurt their eyes and nose and stuff so bad that they would take off their masks, even though that could kill them. Then after taking off their masks, they'd inhale the phosgene and mustard and stuff like that. Their lungs would start to blister and their eyes would bleed or they'd start coughing so bad they could puke up their stomachs and all sorts of stuff.

Tabby Gardner raised her hand.

Mr. Rogers called on her.

Real prissy she said, can we please not talk about blistered lungs and puked up stomachs?

You could tell Mr. Rogers was thinking about it because he didn't say anything for a while.

Then he said, so like I was saying before about the

earthquakes, I actually know a guy who got messed up really bad—big red oozing blisters all over his body—after he put a mustard round in his truck thinking it was a regular old projo.

Then he told us all about IEDs made with chlorine tanks, stock piles of mustard rounds, troops that got gassed that couldn't get benefits once they got home, and how the whole reason we were there was because some General convinced the UN that there were WMDs there.

Jean ate it up. He loved that kind of stuff.

But what happened with the milk yesterday was, after history class we had lunch. I was reading the joke on my milk carton, and I said, I don't get it.

The jokes were like numbered in a series. Everyone with a number five, for example, would have the same stupid joke. An example would be, Why was the cow jumping up and down? Because it wanted a milkshake. But that wasn't the actual joke yesterday.

Mr. Rogers was at his desk eating his lunch and drinking his milks—he always ordered two chocolates. He asked me what number I had.

Twelve, I told him.

Me too, he said. It's a pun.

But I don't get it, I told him.

He said, you know back when I was in school, milk cartons didn't have jokes. They had pictures of missing kids.

But these have jokes, and I don't get this one.

Instead of jokes, we'd have to look at pictures of these kids

who were abducted, he said.

Jean asked what the joke was.

Mr. Rogers said, it’s not a joke. It’s a pun.

Then Jean said, well then read me the pun.

Mr. Rogers said, you wouldn’t get a pun like this if I told it to you. You have to read it.

I can’t read it myself, Jean said. I’m allergic to milk.

When I was a kid, Mr. Rogers said, we didn’t have all these allergies either. All this helicopter parenting. Kids are too sheltered these days. Protected from everything so they can’t handle anything.

I think Jean didn’t want to look weak in front of Mr. Rogers. He grabbed my milk carton to look at it for himself. And I guess a little spilled on him or something because it wasn’t long before he started turning red and wheezing and everything.

It’s a good thing Mr. Rogers was subbing that day, because Mrs. Neumann probably would have freaked out. She’s the nervous type, but Mr. Rogers has all that war training.

Mr. Rogers acted all calm like it was no big deal. He asked Jean if he had an EpiPen and where it was. It was in his desk, so Mr. Rogers grabbed it in no time and gave him the shot. Then he pointed at someone and said, you, go down the hall and have the secretary call 911. Then he pointed at me and said, you, go in the top pocket of my backpack by the right side of my desk. There’s an EpiPen in there. Bring it to me.

In pretty much no time, the ambulance had come to take Jean to the hospital.

Mr. Rogers said it was just a precaution.

Jean loves Mr. Rogers. Every time he subs, Jean spends all recess talking to him, and Mr. Rogers doesn't seem to mind.

But today at morning recess, Mr. Rogers just stands at the corner of the soccer field with his hands in his pockets. He swings his foot back and forth like he's kicking apart an ant hill or something, but he does it the whole time. He never looks up at the kids to make sure we're not fighting or anything.

Mr. Rogers looks pretty lonely without Jean there. But before recess is over, the principal comes out and says something to him. Mr. Rogers doesn't say anything back. He just goes inside early and the principal follows after him.

I asked Jean once why he wanted to waste all his recess time talking to the teacher about boring stuff like history.

He said we had to study history because those who don't study history will be doomed to repeat it.

Sounds like the opposite would make more sense. If you don't know about it, it would be pretty random to repeat it, which makes repeating it seem pretty unlikely.

I told him so, and he said we should ask Mr. Rogers what he thought.

I told Jean I'd just take his word for it.

But I guess Mr. Rogers is pretty lousy at the whole not repeating history thing. What I mean by that is, Mr. Rogers isn't in the classroom when we get back inside from recess. While we're all just waiting around, I hear Paisley Schmitt

say they fired him because he was talking about bleeding eyeballs and coughed up stomachs during history class yesterday.

That makes sense coming from her.

I say that because the first time Mr. Rogers subbed for us, he told us not to ask if he killed anyone unless we wanted him to kill us. Then the principal made him apologize to the whole class after Paisley Schmidt narced on him to her mom.

And it’s doubly believable because Mrs. Neumann shows back up, even though she still looks sick and sounds like she’s going to cough up her stomach.

I don’t think Mr. Rogers is as great as Jean does, but I think he’s okay. He says bad words sometimes when he’s telling stories, and you don’t often get to hear a teacher say swear words. It’s easy to distract him and his stories are pretty good. Better than Mrs. Neumann’s anyway.

But that’s kind of just how he is. He’ll talk to you like you’re on the same level.

Like when he started his apology speech after Paisley Schmitt narced on him. He said, apparently, you’re not supposed to talk about killing with middle schoolers. You could tell he thought the whole thing was stupid by the way he said apparently.

Me and Jean had a good laugh at that too.

An Interview with Jennifer Orth-Veillon, Curator of the WWI Centennial Blog, by Andria Williams

Andria Wiliams: Jennifer, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with Wrath-Bearing Tree.

We are all huge fans of the WWrite blog, which features posts from writers investigating a variety of aspects of the events and legacy of the First World War. Since 2016, you've had close to 100 contributions on topics such as the portrayal and care of wounded veterans and their rehabilitation; German battlefield cemeteries; writer-soldiers of the War; and more. It's truly a feat and, taken as a whole, a remarkably intelligent way to explore the effects of WWI on art, literature, citizens, and the public imagination.

How did you get the idea to start the WWrite blog, and how did you go about it?

Jennifer Orth-Veillon: Over a glass of Beaujolais wine. Seriously. In 2015, for family medical reasons, I packed up my life in the US and moved with my French husband and small daughter to a small village, Cogny, in the wine-making region of the Beaujolais, located in southeastern France not far from Lyon. Prior to the move, I held a 3-year-long postdoctoral fellowship in communication and literature at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta where I initiated the first student veteran writing group.

Jennifer Orth-Veillon

During these three years, I also taught a class on war

literature and veteran memoirs. The students began by studying the literature of WWI as it was one of the first major conflicts that happened on foreign soil. For the returning soldiers, this meant an even greater gap to forge between the civilian community and their war experience. WWI also marked a break with traditional war narratives. Before WWI, these acceptable narratives communicated a sense of patriotism, triumph, and noble sacrifice. The strong soldier fought bravely and didn't complain. The weak soldier was a coward and a criminal. While patriotism, triumph, and heroic sacrifice are certainly important aspects of the combat experience, they do not paint a complete portrait of the long-lasting effects of war on soldiers, on families, and on the community. It could be said that WWI writing, for the first time in history, was responsible for exposing the severity, variety, and complexity of war wounds to the public. Hemingway's sparse prose and Wilfred Owen's grotesque images and irony did something revolutionary.

And why did it take WWI to do this? It inevitably had to do with the unprecedented elements this war introduced to an unsuspecting world—the unbreakable nationalistic alliances formed by powerful empires, the misery of inch-by-inch trench warfare, masses of soldiers suffering deep psychological damage ("shell shock"), new weapon technology that disfigured the human body beyond recognition and razed entire cities in seconds, entire populations wiped out not only by war, but also by the Spanish flu epidemic that swept the continents. In combat, Russia, France, the British Empire, Germany, and Austria lost close to a million soldiers each and their wounded nearly doubled that number. America officially entered only in 1917 but lost around 53,000 soldiers in combat during just seven months in 1918. The Vietnam War serves as an interesting point of comparison—this conflict lasted fourteen years and the combat dead totaled around 47,000. In addition, WWI-era's Spanish flu epidemic cost Americans another lost 63,000 lives by Armistice.

My class at Georgia Tech also read memoirs and war literature through the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, including works by Seth Brady Tucker, Kayla Williams, Brian Castner, and Brian Turner. I was fortunate that these authors were so accessible – Seth Brady Tucker and Brian Castner both had Skype sessions with my class, which was fantastic! And, after we finished the reading, the class, for their final project, had to write a multimedia memoir on a veteran from Georgia Tech or from the Atlanta community. When the students asked Tucker and Castner about their writing influences, both immediately mentioned the writing of WWI for many of the reasons I discussed above. Seth Brady Tucker went as far to say that, while studying Wilfred Owen in an Iraqi foxhole, he learned to both read and write poetry (Incidentally, his post for WWrite is entitled "Discovering WWI Poetry in an Iraqi Foxhole"). In addition, many of the contemporary veterans who became subjects for my students' memoirs cited WWI literature in their interviews.

I left the US, but I knew I couldn't leave my work there entirely behind. I know that living in a golden-stone medieval village in the middle of French vineyards sound like a dream to any American, but the reality was that moving to France was professionally and personally a new start for me. And I wasn't in Paris. It's one thing for people living in this beautiful, rural region to encounter tourists. It's altogether another matter if someone from the outside wants to come in and be part of the community. The Beaujolais is full of families who have lived there for generations and finding ways to integrate was an isolating challenge. Yet I did find traces of my previous life. I would spend many days driving from village to village looking for work and writer/artistic communities. I didn't find either. However, each village's, each town's center features a monument to the WWI dead.

Beaujolais war monument in the village of Saint Julien, with the names of the dead on the side. Photo by Jennifer Orth-

Veillon.

What I learned was that, even if the monument was small, the place's loss was enormous. I would often get out of my car and count the number of dead and then go to the village municipality to see what the population count was in 1914-1918. One village lost 9% of its population. Another lost almost all of its young men. November 11th isn't Veteran's Day but Armistice Day – a national holiday for commemorating WWI only.

WWI monument in the village of Sainte Paule in the Beaujolais. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

Once, after a car accident, I had to go to the police station to finish filing the report. While waiting, someone called to report they had found an unexploded WWI shell while digging a pool in their back yard. After the police officer said he would send someone over and hung up, he looked at me and said "happens all the time." It's worth mentioning that no WWI battle took place in the Beaujolais region. This anecdote illustrates how central the Great War is in the French memory and imagination.

Which is why what I discovered over my glass of Beaujolais was so startling. I was in the town of Vaux-en-Beaujolais, otherwise known as Clochemerle, the setting for a famous French satirical film written by Gabriel Chevallier. Each village in the Beaujolais makes its own wine and has a central wine bar/cellar for tasting it.

A painting of Vaux-en-Beaujolais by Gabriel Chevallier. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

I was chatting with the barman pouring me the wine about

possible translation work for the town's tourist brochure when he asked me about my work in the US. I started to tell him about the veteran class [at Georgia Tech], thinking that it would have no relevance to his world and that he would listen because he felt sorry for my loneliness. However, he went to the door of the bar and asked me to follow him. Glass in hand, we went next door, which turned out to be a Gabriel Chevallier museum.

The entrance to the Chevallier museum in Vaux-en-Beaujolais, France. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

A part of the small museum was dedicated to the famous *Clochemerle,* but a larger section featured Chevallier's WWI experience and his novel, *La Peur*, translated as *Fear.* As I learned through the collections of drawing Chevallier did during the war and the pages from the manuscript, *Fear* was nothing like the satirical *Clochemerle.* It has nothing to do with winemaking, socioeconomic class, or religion; it was a book that spared nothing as it described the ghastly details of the ways men were killed and maimed during Trench warfare. It was published in 1930, but like many works of art that criticized the Great War in France and elsewhere, it was censored. Today, *Fear* represents all that we know well about WWI found in books like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Guns of *Steel*- it was a senseless, barbaric massacre.

As it was the only thing that resembled my literary work in the US, I visited the village, the museum, and the bar several times after that. No one was ever looking at Gabriel Chevallier and that's when I realized that, in the middle of a huge national narrative about WWI, holes existed and were ignored. Amidst the monuments, the parades, and the days off, a real discussion of the Great War and the damage it did to

France was missing. Everyone knows about the monuments. No one knows that Gabriel Chevallier wrote anything other than *Clochemerle.*


Self-portrait of Chevallier. Photo by Jennifer Orth-Veillon.

This was the theme I found in so much of the war literature I studied with my classes. Veterans from every past or present war we studied – the celebrated icons of war– felt neglected by the public narrative. This did not stop with WWI. In fact, these same veterans, including contemporary ones like Tucker and Castner, had even expressed that this phenomenon was first brought to our attention by WWI writers like Owen and Hemingway. I realized that today's war writers owed something like a debt to WWI writing and, with the imminent Centennial, I wanted to explore that idea. I contact the United States World War One Centennial Commission with my ideas. At the time, they had no substantive information about WWI literature although I found such sites elsewhere. Looking not just at WWI literature, but at how WWI can continue to shape literature, writing, and thought today seemed original. They accepted my proposal and I started work in April of 2016. The first blog post went in January 2017. And it's been going ever since.

AW: Where did your personal interest in WWI begin?

JOV: WWI has always been both a personal and professional interest for me. I realized WWI had more importance than the few pages about alliances in my history textbook when I started working on my first novel, which is based on a lifelong friendship between my grandfather, a WWII battalion surgeon, and a concentration camp prisoner he liberated, a Dutch artist. I read the 1,000+ letters my grandparents wrote each while he was gone and one struck me as very important. It was a letter from August 1945, a few months after VE day in Europe. With his war over, he finally had the space to digest

the horrible scenes from combat and he had terrible crying spells and nightmares. That's when he told my grandmother that he finally understood why one of his close relatives, who had served in WWI, was always "crying at nothing." Before that, he had considered this relative weak and unmanly. I knew that to understand WWII, I need to better understand WWI. That's why I jumped at the chance to be TA for a study abroad summer class on WWI and literature taught by James Madison University English professor Mark Facknitz, my former mentor. I was living in Paris at the time working on a Master's Degree at the French University on WWII and Holocaust literature. Concentrated on Paris and the Nazi Occupation, I had never explored WWI in a deep way. With Mark and about 15 students and other TAs, we traveled in vans across the WWI battlefields and memorials in France, Belgium, and England. We read literature and essays and then applied the ideas about cultural memory and war narratives to the different public memory sites – the American cemetery at Belleauwood, the French ossuary at Douaumont in Verdun, Kathe Kollowtiz's famous statue "The Grieving Parents" in a German cemetery in Flanders. I did this for two summers and came to realize that WWI was present everywhere. It's end was one of the reasons for the turmoil in the Middle East today, it advanced feminist movements, shed new light on racial issues, and shaped many US federal programs today. I believe that to grasp any geopolitical issue today, you have to dial back to WWI to fully understand it.

AW: I know that no one can pick favorites, but I'm curious which contributions or posts surprised you the most, gave you new information or made you see something from a wholly new angle.

JOV: That's like asking which child you love most! I have valued, loved, and learned so much from every single blog post and its author. That's what's so great about the blog – not only the variety of different kinds of posts, but the

incredible quality of the writing. I have never been disappointed by a post and each time I get a new one, I feel so lucky to have discovered this author and their work. I guess that before the blog, I felt like a fair amount of knowledge about trench warfare, the events of combat, the major battles, the perils of nationalism, the poetry, the literature, the culture of commemoration. However, I knew much less about the role women, African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants played. And, sadly, I came to learn how much they had been forgotten. Chag Lowry's post on his graphic novel about Native Americans, Soldiers Unknown, Tracy Crow's post about female Marine Sergeant Leila Lebrand, Peter Molin on Aline Kilmer, Joyce Kilmer's wife, Keith Gandal on the treatment of African Americans after the war, and Lorie Vanchena's post about German immigrant poetry provide a few examples. I also have a new perspective about WWI in other countries, even in enemy countries through Ruth Edgett's short story about Canada, "Hill 145," , Andria Williams' (your!) post on the British "Black Poppies", Michael Carson on Victor Shklovsky and the Russian Revolution, Mark Facknitz on German POWs in Japan, and Benjamin Busch's post about finding a British WWI cemetery in Iraq. From an ideological perspective, I was struck by Elliot Ackerman's post on Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*. Through Junger, Ackerman argues that we live in society that pushes us to thrive on violence rather than mourn war and hate death. But again, these just come to mind at the moment. If I had space and time, I would list every post as one of my favorites. Every post has given me new information and angles.

AW: What has been the biggest challenge in curating the WWrite blog?

JOV: I've had two major challenges. The first is the technical side of the blog and issues of design. I'm not a coding expert and I have to make everything fit the platform requirements of the WWICC site. I think it is much more sophisticated than I

am. Formatting takes an incredibly long time. I've spent an hour on getting a picture inserted, margins adjusted, etc. But, I think this is an issue that many artists have to confront today. The digital medium is necessary but requires extra training and patience. The second is convincing writers that they are, in fact, influenced by WWI even if they don't think they are. Sometimes I'll contact a writer and, even if they are interested by the project, they say no because they don't know anything about WWI. I beg to differ! Everyone is touched by this war in some way. It just takes a little digging. For example, I met and actor/writer in Atlanta named Darryl Dillard. We talked about the project and he basically said, good luck! But later he came back to me because he realized that African American WWI soldiers faced horrible racism, similar to what they faced on stage at the time.

AW: Woodrow Wilson famously (after H.G. Wells) called WWI "the war to end all wars." How do you find the study of this war significant in our modern approach to conflict? Are there any particular lessons you think humanity stands to learn, or does WWI paint only a bleak picture in terms of the way history repeats itself?

JOV: I don't know if history is repeating itself or it's just the present asserting itself against things that haven't changed but should have throughout history – like nationalism, economic inequality, class inequality, gender oppression, emasculation, misogyny, racial oppression, using technology to kill masses of people – these things at the heart of WWI's tragedy haven't gone away. They are still present and still cause harm. So, yes, it's a very bleak picture.

However, I do believe that's it's not irreparable as long as we can take action by engaging in a fight to make these issues better. Remembering and commemorating war is not enough. As the French say, we need *engagement.*

AW: What is your favorite piece of art or literature to have

come out of World War One?

JOV: Once again, picking favorites is hard. I think the work that has stood out for me most recently is Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*, which was, of course, censored because it was considered too ghastly and graphic. As a nurse, she wrote this surreal memoir about the war during a period when most war memoirs were written as conventional autobiographies.

Using images and other aesthetic strategies, she seems to show that conventional language wasn't enough to capture WWI combat. Conventional autobiography cannot push the limits of human experience the way war can. I admire her battle to challenge us with language, to show that there are parts of war that are unimaginable, that don't fit into proper punctuation or sentence structure. The work is indeed ghastly, but it is so much more that I come up against my own limits of expression when I try to describe it to anyone. And, it's in that incapacity to describe that I know her writing comes from where no one can go and survive intact – no man's land, the space between the trenches. She uses language to take on that space. It's a battle.

WWrite Blog contributions by *Wrath-Bearing Tree* editors:

Adrian Bonenberger: Brest-Litovsk: Eastern Europe's Forgotten Father

Michael Carson, "The October Revolution, Russian Occupation of Persia: WWI Soldier Viktor Shklovsky's Sentimental Memoirs"

Rachel Kambury, "War Without Allegory: WWI, Tolkien, and The

Lord of the Rings”

Andria Williams, “Black Poppies: Writing About Britain’s Black Servicemen”

New Poetry by Amalie Flynn for the WWI Centennial

Zone Rouge

(for the centennial)


photo by Amalie Flynn

1.
When the land was.

2.
Full of bodies dead. And twisted.

3.
When the fighting was.

4.
Sustained.

5.
With bodies. Dead. Twisted on a riverbank.

6.
Wrist bent. Hand hovers. Over water.

7.
Dead bodies with fingers. Like feathers.

8.
Stretched feathers or the calamus.

9.
Attaching to bird skin.

10.
These are bodies. Bodies of war.

11.
Dead with. Feathered fingers.

12.
Wing of a bird.

13.
300 days of shelling.

14.
The shells were 240 mm. Full of shrapnel.

15.
Mustard gas.

16.
Hitting men and hitting ground.

17.
Making holes. Upon impact.

18.
Shrapnel bursting.

19.
Bloom and rip.

20.
Ripping through dirt and faces.

21.
Ripped skin. Ripping off tissue.

22.
A nose.

23.
Hole in the center of an ear.

24.
Exposing canal and bone.

25.
Missing teeth. One lower jaw is.

26.
Gone. A set of lips.

27.
The chunk of a chin.

28.
And the shells. Shells from Verdun.

29.
Are still there.

30.
Unexploded ordnance. Sunk.

31.
Into dirt pockets. Like seeds.

32.
This blooming. Metal war.

33.
Shrapnel that looks like rocks or.

34.
Smooth egg of a bird.

35.
Soil made of mud and men and metal.

36.
How. Metal leaches and clings.

37.
This soil of war.

38.
Chlorine and lead and mercury and arsenic.

39.
Where every tree and every plant and every animal.

40.
Each blade of grass.

41.
Where 99% of everything died.

42.
Ground stripped raw.

43.
Stripped earth tissue or how this is.

44.
What war also.

45.
Also does.

46.
Damage to properties: 100%

47.
Damage to agriculture: 100%

48.
Impossible to clean.

49.
Human life impossible.

50.
The government declared it *uninhabitable.*

51.
A *no-go zone*.

52.
Broken skeletons of villages.

53.
And the craters that bombs make.

54.
Deep and round holes.

55.
How the bomb craters filled with water.

56.
Making. War ponds.

57.
This is a place.

58.
Where almost everything died.

59.
But the land.

60.
The land was still alive.

61.
Grass stretching again and.

62.
Grafting itself over the bone.

63.
Bone of what happened.

64.
Stretching over trenches and scars.

65.
Like new skin.

66.
And plants and trees and vines.

67.
Rodents and snails and voles and mice.

68.
Deer. Wildcats with metal stomachs.

69.
Still living I say. To my husband.

70.
Who went to war.

71.
War that he did not want.

72.
Afghanistan.

73.
How he came home with hands and feet.

74.
Covered in blisters. *Lesions* the doctor said.

75.
Skin burning. Waking up to him crouched.

76.
On the floor and scratching. Saying *I don’t know.*

77.
And I know.

78.
That this is how war is.

79.
Or later. I will lay in the darkness.

80.
And think about burn pits in Iraq.

81.
Black smoke and jet fuel and fumes.

82.
About Vietnam sprayed. The bare mudflats after.

83.
Defoliation of trees. And birds. Missing mangroves.

84.
How dioxin poisons wind. Sleeps. In a river or sediment.

85.
The fatty tissue of a fish. Atomic blasts in Hiroshima and.

86.
Nagasaki. The incineration of bodies and land.

87.
Tearing skin off people. Tearing trees out of ground.

88.
Tearing everything.

89.
Away.

90.
How black rain fell. Radioactive bomb debris.

91.
Into mouths. Of people and rivers.

92.
How radiation lives. In grass and soil. The intestine of a cow.

93.
About the GWOT. Blood soaked years and streets and.

94.
How many miles of land. Where we left bombs.

95.
Unexploded or forever.

96.
I will think about Zone Rouge.

97.
Trenches like scars.

98.
My husband gardening. The tendons in his arms.

99.
Moving like trees.

100.
Or how war never goes away.

Amalie Flynn

October 2018

The Long Road of History Impacts Today

More than one hundred years ago, nine thousand acres of fruit trees and farm land in Maryland were converted to one of 16 cantonments established in preparation for America's entry into WWI. Laws establishing Camp Meade were signed in April of 1917. By September of that same year, the first recruits arrived, moving into wood barracks so hastily erected the men walked through clouds of sawdust as they entered.

In five months, 1200 wood barracks were built on Camp Meade in the first phase of construction to hold troops preparing for WWI.

Throughout its 100 years, Fort Meade was the home to a great many firsts, many of which were a direct result of WWI. Troops at Camp Meade were the first to receive new Browning automatic rifles, including the M1917 Browning .30 caliber machine gun.

The first women in uniform, known as the "Hello Girls," operated telephone trunk lines at Camp Meade which connected the states to the battlefields in France. Some of the women deployed with the troops and worked from bunkers near the front lines.

After the war, having realized that poor food and sanitation can greatly impact a soldier's ability to fight, the first school for military cooks and bakers would be established at Camp Meade.

Also after the war, U.S. tank crews trained and equipped in

France, would return to Camp Meade to establish the first Tank Crops. Among them were seasoned tank operators who had engaged in the deadliest WWI battle, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Under the command of Lt. Col. George Patton, 165 French Renault FT tanks from the 304th Tank Brigade, attacked fortified German positions along a 20-mile front. As leaders in the first Tank Corps, Patton, and Dwight D. Eisenhower would write the book on battlefield tank tactics, and they would practice those tactics at Camp Meade.

Eisenhower with a Renault FT-17 Tank

Today, Fort Meade is home to the nation's newest combatant command –U.S. Cyber Command, where 24/7 service members of all branches engage in conflict and competition in the firth dimension of warfare.

Despite all of these Fort Meade firsts, there had never been a definitive book written about the installation's history, until now.

A free PDF version of the book is at www.ftmeade.army.mil. *Hardcover versions are at Amazon.com.*

Fort George G. Meade, The First 100 Years is a more than 300 page book, a majority of which concentrates on WWI and the rapid construction, first arrivals, training and deployment of hundreds of thousands of men and women from Camp Meade. The pages are filled with historic photography, poetry, letters, essays and personal memories of people connected to the installation. The following is just one of more than 100 essays that trace the installations role in conflicts from the

trenches of France, to the terror threats of Iraq and Afghanistan and into the current conflict platform, cyberspace.

Paving the way for the Interstate

Excerpt from Fort George G. Meade: The First 100 Years

By all measure, the most notable person to have served at Fort Meade so far in its 100 year history is Dwight D. Eisenhower who came to Meade as a young officer of the first Tank Corps and went on to be President of the United States.

While stationed at Meade, Eisenhower was sent on a mission which later would inspire him to literally change the landscape of America.

In notes he wrote describing the mission, Eisenhower said, “I was detailed for duty as an observer on Trans-Continental Motor Truck Trip on the day that the train left its initial point, being impossible to join the train before the evening of that date, nothing is known by me of the preliminary arrangements and plans for the trip, nor of the start from Washington.”

Printed in Fort George G. Meade; The First 100 Years, courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

What follows is a sober recounting of what was the first attempt to move 81 vehicles, including trucks; heavy and light; cars, motorcycles, ambulances, tractors and trailers from Washington D.C., to their final destination in San Francisco, more than 3,251 miles away. According to the final

report of the endeavor, making the trip were 24 expeditionary officers, 258 enlisted men and 15 War Department staff observation officers. Due to his late addition, it would seem Eisenhower's orders were to serve as part of the War Department staff.

The convoy began on July 7, in Washington D.C., and spent the first overnight stop on of the trip in Fredrick, Maryland, a drive that, on a good day, might take just more than an hour today. In 1919, it took the convoy an entire day. A slow start to what turned out to be a herculean task.

Eisenhower joined the convoy in Fredrick and remained with it throughout the 62 days it took to complete the trip facing untold challenges along the route.

While many roads in the Eastern and Western states could handle vehicle traffic to a degree, the roads in the middle of the country were often impassable dirt roads, mountain trails and alkali flats. The insufficient roads were littered with bridges incapable of supporting the heavy trucks and equipment or overpasses with clearance too low to allow the convoy to pass through.

The roads were only part of the problem. The vehicles were capable of vastly differing speeds making it difficult to keep them in a convoy formation and frequent stops due to breakdowns harassed the drivers. All along the way, Eisenhower assessed the performance of each vehicle and made recommendations for how they should or shouldn't be deployed in the future. "Motorcycles had much trouble after getting in the sandy districts. Except for scouting purposes, it is believed a small Ford Roadster would be better suited to convoy work than motorcycle and side car."

Photo courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library

Living and work conditions throughout the trip were described as “hardship,” with constant sanitation problems, and difficulties in finding food, shelter and even suitable drinking water. Extreme rain and wind storms, punishing heat and persistent challenges due to terrain resulted in an average travel speed of six miles on hour or just under 60 miles a day.

The convoy experienced 230 vehicle accidents. The official report of the convoy recounted, “The most arduous and heroic effort in rescuing the entire convoy from impending disaster on the quicksands of the Salt Lake Desert in Utah and the Fallow Sink Region in Nevada. In these emergencies, the entire personnel, regardless of rank, engaged in rescue and salvage operations.”

Prior to this convoy, the longest military vehicle march recorded went 900 miles. It is reported that, over the thousands of miles the Trans-Continental Motor Truck Trip traveled, “thru various casualties en route,” 21 men lost their lives.

The experience of the trip traveling along the Lincoln Highway became something that stuck with Eisenhower throughout his life. After WWII and his experience driving on Hitler’s Autobahn, the importance of a functioning highway system and the role it might play in the defense of the nation hit home. Once he became president, Eisenhower made developing an interstate highway system one of the major goals of his administration.

100 Years of Fort George G. Meade is available in PDF format on the Fort Meade website at www.ftmeade.army.mil. A hardcover version is available at Amazon.com.

M.L. Doyle has served in the US Army at home and abroad for more than three decades as both a soldier and civilian. She

calls on those experiences in her award-winning Master Sergeant Harper mystery series, her Desert Goddess urban fantasy series, erotic romance and coauthored memoirs which all feature women who wear combat boots. M.L. Doyle serves as an editor for The Wrath-Bearingtree.com

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1917: Ukraine's First Bid to be Independent

The Red Revolution created space for independence in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and – for a time – in Ukraine

This February marks the 100 year anniversary of an event that transformed Europe, brought the US into WWI, and nearly led to the destruction of capitalism. While it seems farfetched from the perspective of our western-dominated consumer-capitalist world order, a union between workers and soldiers—February Revolution, in Petrograd (now St. Petersberg)—toppled Russia's Tsar Nicholas II and terrified the US and Europe.

These events also led to a (briefly) independent Ukraine. After it declared independence, Ukraine was embroiled in its first war for sovereignty and self-governance.

Military background

It's impossible to imagine an independent Ukraine or the Russian revolution that made independence possible without WWI. Contemporary discussions of the feasibility of leftist organization or revolution in Europe or the US often overlook

the importance of that extraordinarily damaging war to Lenin’s success.

And it didn’t take *much* war—the workers and soldiers of Petrograd rejected Moscow's authority after a bit more than two years of fighting. Consider by contrast that Germany would not surrender until 1918, and only after pushing Great Britain and France to the very brink of their own capitulation. Germany and Austria-Hungary differed from Russia, of course, in that both of them incorporated democratic mechanisms into their governance—whereas the Russian government was barely changed from that which had resisted Napoleon in 1812.

Critically, too, Russia was not directly attacked by Germany or Austria-Hungary—from the outset, those nations were fighting a war of self-defense, where Russia was the aggressor. Its largely-disenfranchised citizens did not see throwing millions of lives away in the name of "alliance" and land grabs as a good exchange.

Fighting in WWI was bloody, dramatic, industrial. As a country whose industrial base was more thoroughly exploited than others, the blood Russian soldiers shed told more deeply. Brusilov’s Offensive—a battle that lasted from June to September of 1916 that ended in major Russian gains, still entailed millions of killed and wounded on both sides. More than any other battle, Brusilov's offensive was responsible for creating the conditions necessary for an independent Ukraine in both Austria Hungary and Russia.

As Russia's social order frayed, Germany and Austria-Hungary held on along the Western Front, scored important victories against the Romanians and Italians, and slowly fell back along the Eastern Front. While Russia advanced into Austro-Hungarian Galicia (part of modern-day Ukraine), trading heavy casualties for territory, its ctizens grew increasingly disgusted with the war. This disgust took different forms for the Russians, Fins, Estonians, Ukrainians, and Poles fighting for the

Russian military.

It also wrecked Austria-Hungary's military and strained their society to the limit. These conditions were perfect for granting constituent populations greater political power and autonomy within Austria-Hungary. So long as groups were working against Russia and Russian interests, they were permitted to go about their business.

So it was that Russia traded battlefield success for social stability. The empire was teetering on the brink of revolution, and when workers and soldiers revolted in Petrograd, the Tsar abdicated his throne. He was replaced by a Soviet-friendly government led by Alexander Kerensky.

This could have been the end of Russia's problems. Seeking to follow up on victories in 1916, however, and eager to propitiate military committments to France and England, Kerensky pushed the Russian military further. Despite making some progress at the beginning of an offensive operation, when the Germans and Austro-Hungarians counterattacked and the Russians began taking heavy casualties, the offensive halted, then turned into a rout. Rather than unifying his country and quieting social unrest as Kerensky had hoped, the military failure resulted instead in the total collapse of Russian morale.

By June of 1917, moderate socialists declared the “Ukrainian People’s Republic” in Kyiv. In October of 1917, Kerensky's government collapsed, and he was forced to evacuate in front of Bolshevik forces. Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918, bringing Russia's role in WWI to an official end.

Social Background

Ukraine experienced a wave of nationalist sentiment during the 19th and 20th centuries. Many Ukrainians believe that this understanding of themselves as Ukrainian dates back to their national literary and artistic icon, Taras Shevchenko. Shevchenko wrote in Ukrainian in the mid-19th century about a Ukrainian nation. Publishing in Ukrainian was forbidden in Russia then, as was doing anything that could be construed as advocating for autonomy or independence.

A counter to the "Ukrainians were waiting for a hero to unite them" narrative can be found with Russian historians, who claim that Ukrainian nationalism (like the language) was an invention of the Austro-Hungarians, a 19th-century example of one nation attempting to destabilize another. On its face, it sounds reasonable—Russia has distinct ethnicities, and using them as a lever to undermine Moscow's authority would be a brilliant plan. It's also what the Russian empire did with the Kingdom of Serbia, which helped lead to WWI.

There are problems with the Russian reading of history. If Austria-Hungary invented Ukrainian in the mid-late 19th century, then why did Russia ban Ukrainian in the early 19th century? Why was Taras Schevchenko's poetry, written in Ukrainian, perceived as a powerful tool of subversion to Russian interests? One can't "invent" a language overnight, nor can one compel people to read or speak a language in sufficient numbers to make rebellion, resistance, or alternate identities feasible. The popularity of Shevchenko's poetry and the threat with which it was viewed by the Russians offers powerful testimony against some Russians' claim that Ukraine was a Russian-speaking part of Russia with no sense of itself as having a history or culture separate from Russia.

Furthermore, Austria-Hungary is rarely mentioned in histories

as a net exporter of intrigue—the empire's strengths included administration, bureaucracy, and multiculturalism, but its weaknesses included modern force projection and subterfuge. There was no legion of Austro-Hungarian spies flooding into its neighbors to undermine or destroy native sovereignty.

Still, there is some truth to the Russian claims. Austria-Hungary did not have the same laws restricting publication of books in minority-ethnicity languages as did Russia. So the poetry of Taras Shevchenko was free to spread and germinate outside Russia's borders, in a way that it wasn't inside Russian-occupied Ukraine. The free spread of powerful anti-Russian ideas did, then, occur in Austria Hungary—but not because it was part of an Austro-Hungarian plan. Rather, anti-Russian ideas spread because there was a group of people, Ukrainians, with their own distinctive language and culture, and it spread because there was a nearby nation-state that offered Ukrainians freedom of speech, thought, and identity, as well as political opportunity. Austria-Hungary may have given Ukrainians reason to hope for independence, but it did not do so deliberately.

Russia exiled Taras Shevchenko and denied that Ukrainians were a people apart from Russians, while referring to them separately as "Little Brothers" and banning the publication of any literature in the language most "Little Brothers" spoke. Still, the idea spread among Ukrainians that they were a group apart from Russia. This was true for Austria-Hungary as well. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and western Ukraine all lay within Austria-Hungary's borders (to say nothing of Austria and Hungary).

Austria Hungary was great at letting people be themselves, but not as good at getting them

to cooperate to defeat their neighbors, which is why that Empire isn't there any more

It is worth pointing out here that an expansion of this idea, self-determination, used so effectively as a tool against the Austro-Hungarians, ultimately resulted in the destruction of the British, French, Belgian, Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires.

So while the Allies were encouraging western Ukraine (then called Galicia) to understand itself as separate and distinct from Austria-Hungary, the Austro-Hungarians (who had always seen ethnic minorities as entitled to their own languages and cultures so long as they did not interfere with governance, conscription, or the collection of taxes) were permitting Ukrainian identity to germinate and spread in their own territory. Those western Ukrainians, who saw themselves as part of an entirely different nation that, historically, had extended far into Russia, cooperated with Ukrainians living under Russian occupation.

Political Background

At the same time that the Brusilov Offensive was breaking the Russian military's morale, wrecking Austria-Hungary's military capacity to fight, and outraging Russia's industrial population against the Tsar, many populations were preparing to declare themselves independent. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all date their modern independence to 1917 or 1918.

The Allies – Great Britain, France, and (as of April 1917) the USA—were in a bind. Ostensibly supportive of Russia as a military ally, they were hostile to Russia's absolutist monarchy and what they perceived as its unenlightened social

order. Supporting movements that promised ethnicities independent, sovereign nations apart from Russia would be in accordance with their ethical logic, but would also assist Germany, their enemy.

While the Allies were deliberating how to respond to Russia’s political situation, Russia was engulfed in flames. Before the Allies could mount an effective campaign to support Russia's Tsar, he abdicated his throne. His successor, Alexander Kerensky, attempted to work with the Allies by continuing Russia’s participation in WWI on the side of the Allies, and ordered an offensive that was turned back by the Germans, who then overran Ukraine and Belarus.

Aftermath

Ukraine's ambitions for an independent state unraveled swiftly after 1917. The provisional Ukrainian governments in Kyiv and in Lviv were both willing to work with the Germans at first. That changed when they learned that Ukrainian independence was not part of Germany's plans for the region, and Germany began cracking down on Ukrainian politicians and nationalists. If Imperial Russia was unable to contain Ukraine’s ambitions for a State, several German divisions had no chance. Nationalism continued to spread, and while the minor German occupying force was enough to enforce a superficial subjection to German rule, it also bought Ukraine time to organize while the Central Powers fought it out with the Allies. It wasn't enough: after Germany’s defeat in 1918, a republic in the West of Ukraine was defeated by a joint French/US/Polish force. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian republic based in Kyiv was steamrolled by the Red Army.

Ukraine did not become legally independent from the USSR until 1991, and continued its status as a de facto Russian proxy until 2014. It is a strange accident that it should have taken nearly 100 years, but in fighting against Russia’s latest

invasion, Ukrainians may have finally achieved that for which many of them had hoped 100 years ago—a real nation of their own.

Killing is Easy

Killing is the easiest thing in the world, easier than sex. Easier than raising a family or bringing a child into the world, or building a house. Easier than painting or writing or music. Killing is easier than sleeping.

Before November 13th I couldn’t have told you how 9-11-2001 felt. Watching the attacks in Paris, the killing, I remembered helplessness and a physical desire for vengeance, like fourteen years were gone. As I texted, instant-messaged, and

emailed friends in the affected zone, desperate for news of their safety, I felt alternately overwhelmed by great sadness and murderous rage. It was clear then, as it is now, who was responsible for the injustice. And I wanted payback.

For those who have not felt the call to kill in the name of humanity and justice, it is a godly thing. Reading through the initial reports, I choked back tears, heading—where else?—to the gym, hoping to direct this urgent compulsion toward the noble desire for blood somewhere, *anywhere* else. On the stationary bicycle and then at the weight machines watching the President express solidarity for France, I fantasized about my phone buzzing with news from a friend in the military calling me back into service. In the interests of honesty, I must admit that this fantasy involved him telling me that the time had come to clean the Middle East once and for all. From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, and then the vast Atlantic Ocean off North Africa, we would impose the final, drastic justice this situation demanded. That's what I *felt*.

That's what the ISIS terrorists in Paris must have felt reading news of defeat after emasculating defeat for their movement in Sinjar, in Syria, and in Iraq. *We have to do something,* and *the time has come to martyr ourselves*. They must have believed that they were correct to act, and enjoyed the doing of the deed. Killing is the easiest thing in the world.

That seems to be what Francois Hollande was feeling when he implicitly committed France to military action against ISIS, saying, among other similar things: "It is an act of war that was committed by a terrorist army, a jihadist army, Daesh, against France," and "we will lead the fight and it will be merciless." As the attacks in Paris unfolded, I felt the same way.

And that's the end of civilization. It's popular to joke about France and Europe being weak, now, being militarily

incompetent in the aftermath of WWII, but things are stable in Europe and mostly safe as a result of progress, the horror our grandfathers felt when they saw the red gurgling aftermath of their deeds stain their hands, uniforms, and relationship with the natural world. Until 1945, Europe and Eurasia had been by orders of magnitude the most violent place in the world. Mechanisms for killing on an industrial scale never imagined anywhere else were pioneered in the USA and perfected in Europe. When it comes to violence, Europeans are not just masters—historically, they transcended mastery, elevating it first to the realm of art, then, later, incorporating it. It took us *seventy years* to suppress the natural European inclination toward violence on a level that would make even a hardened ISIS fighter's stomach turn and head spin—seventy years, which, in the balance, doesn't seem like enough by half.

The end of civilization is when one acts based on feeling, and especially that low, barbaric feeling to hurt or murder. I know, because I felt it last night—can still feel it in waves. In Afghanistan, over 26 months, the two infantry units I was with killed hundreds of Taliban, Haqqani and Al Qaeda operatives (over 1,000?), taking 15 deaths in return—killing is easy. But what gives me and people like me our reason for being in the liberal West—the evolution of liberal arts education, pioneering human and then civil rights, the components that make us superior to ISIS terrorists, dogs, spiders, and lizards, is that we aspire to be *reasonable*—we are capable of thinking out the logical conclusion of our actions, and acting differently given different stimuli, acting generously and altruistically although our bodies may tell us that killing or hurting would be more satisfying. This was the lesson the West drew in the aftermath of World War II, on the bodies of so many Germans, Russians, Japanese Ukrainians, Polish, French and more—enough bodies to make Syria again three times over. This is the lesson I drew from war, as well. Killing is easy, but it only leads to more

killing. And there's always more blood than you know. Blood that's sticky, and gets everywhere.

No, people who believe that France and Europe are weak because they do not act sufficiently violently for their tastes (a) don't know the region's extraordinarily bloody history, and (b) don't believe in biology. Civilization and modern western society—cultural constructs that encourage cooperation and altruistic behavior—are fragile things, to be nurtured and protected at all costs. They're the product of peace—in times of war, people become callous, cease caring about others, wantonly indulge in the brief satisfaction of vendetta. Small acts of humanity and grace become acts of heroism.

After finishing my time at the gym and hearing from most of my friends, I returned home, showered, and headed out to dinner with a photojournalist friend to discuss the night's events, process what I was feeling. Fielding phone calls on the drive into the city, drinking beers over Turkish kabab, then calling other friends on the way back home, I was able to stabilize the urge to hurt and hate, to ameliorate it with that greatest benefit of living in a developed, safe, modern country—generosity.

Even though it feels now like hurting the people responsible will provide satisfaction, will solve the hurt, logic as well as a brilliant, counterintuitive moral imperative unearthed by Christianity instruct us that the answer in this situation is to open our arms wider, to "turn the other cheek" to the despicable insult, rather than to deliver injustice for injustice, which other cultural traditions and tribal societies would demand. The parasites that are ISIS feed on blood and violence. Let us, by our actions, demonstrate our moral and intellectual superiority. History instructs that we can go down a very different path—we could, if we desired, exterminate them—but then, wouldn't we just be descending to their primitive, animalistic level?

Some reactionaries in European and Western society would have us do precisely that—would turn Europe back into the brutes they were 70 years ago, or would indulge America's more recent penchant for "shock and awe." This is a popular anti-intellectual idea on the right: we should do what feels good, and to hell with civilization. To beat the thugs we must become thugs ourselves. Here's one such confused hot-take. Suffice it to say, if someone is advocating for violence, that person is not civilized, nor do they support humanistic values like charity, magnanimity, and (ultimately) the precious elements that separate humans from apes or lower forms of animals. They are the enemy.

On the other side are people who over-intellectualize the problem, and would stifle any action-those of the extreme left, who have already begun stating their belief that one should experience a similar emotional reaction to the bombing of Baghdad as one does to the terrorist attack on Paris. As a humanist, I am more sympathetic to a call for widespread empathy than I am to kill (empathy is harder than killing), but it is unsympathetic at best (and inhuman at worst) to claim before the bodies are cold that one must feel for all humans or for none at all. It is a truism among this group that Westerners don't react to tragedy outside their community (this type of reaction is already common on Facebook and Twitter), as though feeling for anyone besides oneself were a bad thing if one does not immediately think to feel for everyone. Insisting that others should have to always feel empathy for everyone all the time (that they should behave like bodhisattvas or saints) or never at all (that they should behave like sociopaths) exhibits an interesting symmetry, but doesn't seem like a useful or productive philosophical or human stance, although I suppose it must make the claimer feel satisfied on some level or they wouldn't do it.

For the 95% of Westerners affected by the tragedy who aren't on the extreme left or right, it is okay to feel something

about this tragedy without needing to take on the problems of the world. If you have a personal connection to Paris, as many do, rage or grief is perfectly natural. If you don't have a personal connection to Paris but do to the event, rage or grief is perfectly natural. And in either case, regardless of how one's natural and appropriate feelings on the subject (I certainly felt like exerting violent vengeance on behalf of a city in which I have lived, visited often, and to which I have longstanding and deep cultural ties), the next step is to divorce thought from feeling, and to act in keeping with our cultural, humanist heritage: reasonably.

This means collectively and individually helping other humans (the refugees of war, the migrants, the aspirational and the cursed), because it's within our power to do so. We of the developed world are not infected with that ideological disease one finds so often among the mad, the disaffected, and those living in chronic poverty—the cultural *imperative* to kill—as are these ISIS psychopaths. No—let us this once demonstrate our laudable willpower and the unquestionable superiority of our civilization by letting the sword fall from our hand—let us show our strength by not doing what is easy, and easier for Americans and Europeans than anything else (for we are the best at that easy task of killing)—let us show the world mercy. Otherwise we risk losing what was bought with an ocean of our own blood.

Curzio Malaparte: Great & Anonymous WWII Writer

How World War II gets remembered isn't accurate, and for

Curzio Malaparte, it's not even true. Not the American version, not the Russian, not anywhere, really. At best, our memory of WWII has become a lie founded on emotional connections to people barely known in life. A series of well-intentioned miscommunications and words spoken (or not) in German, Italian, Russian, Japanese or English across untranslatable generational gaps. The product of the optimistic if misplaced belief that one human could ever be said to understand another without dreaming some part of one's own self and aspirations into them. Less good, our memory of WWII is a thoughtless generalization, and ultimately, a stand-in for racism, nationalism, and all the worst stereotypes that made anyone feel good about going to the War in the first place. Worst case scenario, it's a deliberate deception – the product of malicious individuals or concerns eager to portray the narrative in ways that advantage themselves and their interests.

In the version of WWII I grew up with – the one popular here in America – here's how it happened. This comes from my grandfathers, one of whom was an enlisted man in Europe with the U.S. Army, and the other of whom was in the U.S. Army Air Corps, an officer (Lieutenant) in a B-24 Liberator. Nazi Germany declared war on Europe and beat them, save for Italy, which was Germany's comically inept ally that was good mostly for humorous tension-relief. Then they turned on their sort-of-ally (more like Frenemy), the Soviet Union. Germany and the Soviet Union were slugging it out, and England was on the ropes, when in jumped America. D-Day, Battle of the Bulge, game over – America: 1, Nazi Germany: 0. The Soviet Union wanted Europe for themselves, but America said, "nope, not gonna happen fellas, hang on while we beat Japan with our other hand," then we got the atomic bomb. Communists and peaceniks stole our secrets and sold them to the Soviets because they hated America, and the rest is history. Bottom line: Britain? Weak. France? Super weak. Italy? Worse than France! Japan? Sneaky, mostly. Russia? Strong, but sneaky.

Germany? Strong, but not as strong as America!

And America? Strongest of all. Just, and right, and boy did we take it to the Germans.

One of the other editors of this intellectual initiative, Mr. Carson, gave me a book for Christmas: *Kaputt*, by Curzio Malaparte, *nee* Kurt Erich Suckert, a northern Italian. While as a "memoir" it falls under biography / autobiography, it's the sort of memoir that can only be produced during a time of catastrophe. *Kaputt* describes Malaparte's time as an Italian Army officer / journalist on the Eastern Front – an absurd account of the violence that is so far as I can tell, both largely inaccurate and unique. Malaparte visits Romania, Ukraine, Poland and Finland and through almost-unbelievable access, bears witness to the horrors of war and governance of the Nazis. That in and of itself is remarkable, because access breeds familiarity, but in this case, it grants the author (and the reader) a perspective on the occupiers that is simultaneously individual and universal. Witness the scene (one of many) with Hans Frank, the Nazi Governor-General of Poland, when Frank attempts to convince Malaparte that the Axis mission is just by invoking his wife and her friends knitting in their parlor:

Frank's hand on my shoulder, though it was not heavy, oppressed me. Little by little, disentangling and considering each feeling that Frank aroused in me and attempting to understand and define the meaning, the pretexts and the reason for his every word and gesture, and trying to piece together a moral portrait of him out of the scraps that I had picked up about his character in the past few days, I became convinced that he was not to be judged summarily.

The uneasiness that I felt within me in his presence was born precisely because of the complexity of his character – a peculiar mixture of cruel intelligence, refinement, vulgarity, brutal cynicism and polished sensitiveness. There had to be a

deep zone of darkness within him that I was still unable to explore – a dark region, an inaccessible hell from which dull, fleeting glows flashed unexpectedly, lighting his forbidding face – that disturbing and fascinating mysterious face.

The opinion I had formed of Frank long ago was, unquestionably, negative. I knew enough of him to detest him, but I felt honor-bound not to stop there. Of all the elements that I was conscious of in Frank, some a result of the experience of others and some of my own, something, I could not say what, was lacking – something the very nature of which was not known to me but which I expected would suddenly be revealed to me at any moment.

I hoped to catch a gesture, a word, an involuntary action that might reveal to me Frank's real face, his inner face, that would suddenly break away from the dark, deep region of his mind where, I instinctively felt, the roots of his cruel intelligence and musical sensitiveness were anchored in a morbid and, in a certain sense, criminal subsoil of character.

"This is Poland – an honest German home," repeated Frank, embracing in a single glance that middle-class scene of domestic simplicity.

Readers receive the usual evaluation of a prominent Nazi leader – that of the thug, the brute – but that is only the jumping-off point for a more careful and scathing indictment, which is to say, the suggestion that the thing that makes Nazi Germany spectacular and special is its specifically middle-class sensibility. In other words – to the British, German, or American reader – the Nazis are like us.

It’s an astonishing book by an extraordinary man, who has been largely ignored by American history, likely for the reason stated above. Malaparte seems to have gotten a bad reputation for his involvement in the Italian fascist party, and, as a human, seems also to have been both a fanatical social

climber, as well as a flamboyant intellectual. For all his political and moral failings, though, it's important to recognize that he spent 5 years in exile for publishing defamatory remarks public statements about Mussolini and Hitler, then was imprisoned for similar anti-fascist/Nazi activity in 1938, 39, 41, and 43. He was a valorously decorated combat veteran of World War I, which means something, especially considering his service with Italy's premiere infantry unit of the time, the Alpini.

Kaputt details the final destruction of a dying world order. We remember World War I as having swept away much of Europe's prevailing social climate, and shows like Downton Abbey catalogue how that played out in Great Britain. There's some truth to that recollection of history – the aftermath of WWI saw the beginning of Soviet (not Communist) Russia, and there were greater "rights" enunciated to women, as well as expanded economic opportunities for the lower and middle-class in non-communist societies (mostly through human space created by war casualties and the Spanish Influenza rather than human altruism) – but the events that were set in motion during World War I accelerated after the fall of Tsarist Russia and the ascension of the Soviet Union. By the time the Nazis swept into power and through Poland and France, the old social order had been almost entirely eviscerated. Malaparte bears witness to this destruction on landscapes that are unfamiliar to most Western readers, and many Eastern European readers as well. *Kaputt* is full of surreal images of the horrors of war – it is a read unlike anything else one will encounter on the subject of World War II. Two quick examples:

Mad with terror, the horses of the Soviet artillery – there were almost a thousand of them – hurled themselves into the furnace and broke through the besieging flames and machine guns. Many perished within the flames, but most of them succeeded in reaching the shores of the lake and threw themselves into the water…while still madly struggling, the

ice gripped them. The north wind swooped down during the night… Suddenly, with the peculiar vibrating noise of breaking glass, the water froze. The heat balance was broken, and the sea, the lakes, the rivers froze. In such instances, even sea waves are gripped in mid-air and become rounded ice waves suspended in the void. On the following day, when the first [Finnish] Ranger patrols, their hair singed, their faces blackened by smoke, cautiously stepped over the warm ashes in the charred forest and reached the lakeshore, a horrible and amazing sight met their eyes. The lake looked like a vast sheet of white marble on which rested hundreds upon hundreds of horses' heads. They appeared to have been chopped off cleanly with an ax. Only the heads stuck out of the crust of ice. And they were all facing the shore. The white flame of terror still burnt in their wide-open eyes. Close to the shore a tangle of wildly rearing horses rose from the prison of ice.

and this account of what a German Lieutenant Colonel did upon taking a Ukrainian boy-partisan prisoner, as told to a German princess and one of her aristocratic friends:

Finally the officer stopped before the boy, stared at him for a long time in silence, then said in a slow tired voice full of boredom: "Listen, I don't want to hurt you. You are a child, and I am not waging war against children. You have fired at my men, but I am not waging war on children. Lieber Gott, I am not the one who invented war." The officer broke off, then went on in a strangely gentle voice: "Listen, I have one glass eye. It is difficult to tell which is the real one. If you can tell me at once, without thinking about it, which of the two is the glass eye, I will let you go free." "The left eye," replied the boy promptly. "How did you know?" "Because it is the one that has something human in it." …

"I met that officer again later at Soroca on the Dniester – a very serious man, a good father, but a true Prussian, a true Piffke as the Viennese say. He talked to me about his family, about his work. He was an electrical engineer. He also spoke

about his son Rudolf, a boy ten years old. It was really difficult to tell the glass eye. He told me that the best glass eyes are made in Germany." "Stop it!" said Louise. "Every German has a glass eye," I said.

and a third, as though two weren't enough – in this, a very different view of German soldiers (circa 1941) from that of the typical "they were all fanatical criminals" so popular in literature, cinema, and plays (a canard that Malaparte disputes):

The German soldiers returning from the front line, when they reached the village squares, dropped their rifles on the ground in silence. They were coated from head to foot in black mud, their beards were long, their hollow eyes looked like the eyes of the sunflowers, blank and dull. The officers gazed at the soldiers and at the rifles lying on the ground, and kept silent. By then the lightning war, the "Blitzkrieg," was over, the "Dreizigjahrigerblitzkrieg," the thirty-year lighting war, had begun. The winning war was over, the losing war had begun. I saw the white stain of fear growing in the dull eyes of German officers and soldiers. I saw it spreading little by little, gnawing at the pupils, singeing the roots of the eyelashes and making the eyelashes drop one by one, like the long yellow eyelashes of the sunflowers. When Germans become afraid, when that mysterious German fear begins to creep into their bones, they always arouse a special horror and pity. Their appearance is miserable, their cruelty sad, their courage silent and hopeless. That is when the Germans become wicked. I repented being a Christian. I felt ashamed of being a Christian.

Malaparte had unfettered access as an Italian journalist to the Eastern Front (when he wasn’t in prison for mouthing off), and describes the events from the persective of someone who knows the war effort is doomed – far more interestingly though, are the ways in which he frames these stories, telling them, as it were, in a series of country clubs and

aristocratic estates to the intellectual and social inheritors of the West's cultural legacy. Swedish, Spanish, German, Italian, and French aristocrats and diplomats. Polish princesses. The wealthy and powerful of another age, now, no longer so – some of whom, bound for the death camps. Malaparte catalogues an amazing history of loss, a way of life swept away forever. The British are largely absent, and come across when they are described as fairly pragmatic if not necessarily "good," and the Americans seem, if anything, to be parvenues – in this sense, *Kaputt* could almost be a companion piece for Henry James's earlier work – the reflection of American ambition for social weight in Europe, viewed through the prism of a massive class war.

Malaparte's writing is powerful and moving, and despite his politics, it's difficult to see how this book would not have had a stronger and more sympathetic reception in the West, save for its fundamental conceit: wealth and strength cannot keep you safe during times of war and true social tempest. There is no shelter from that storm, nothing counts in the end save the raw instinct for survival. This sort of morality tale is unwelcome in the capitalist West – this is not the sort of book anyone with property in the Hamptons would like to read, though I would argue that it is the clearest depiction of the horror of war that I have read, cleaner even than Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, and certainly far better than any of the "realist" portrayals of wartime (O'Brien, Marlantes, etc) who end up sentimentalizing and therefore implicitly endorsing war, which means they couldn't have thought very well about the experience even if they wrote effectively about it.

Malaparte becomes increasingly more sympathetic to the Soviets over the course of the book, an emotional and sentimental desire to see them as better or more than the Germans in part because they have beaten the Germans, and in part because of the horror the Germans have themselves inflicted, a fact that Malaparte observes firsthand on several occasions. This is

interesting as well because the natural evolution of thinking for most in the West is a growing concern that the Soviets will simply replace Nazi Germany – in fact, in terms of history, the Soviets ultimately eclipsed the Nazis as a totem of fear when they acquired the atomic bomb, and became the first non-Western country with the ability to destroy the world. Despite the recent example of the war or perhaps because of it, many German and Italian intellectuals made up their minds to stick with moderates and capitalism after the collapse of Nazi Germany – more of them sided with the Totalitarian Soviets based on a sense that there was something in Communism, and to this day, European communism retains a small but important political presence, often derided in England and America. Malaparte's viewpoint is, therefore, especially interesting considering his various positions before and during World War II.