

Reviews

Great War History, Great War Myth: Brian Bond's *Unquiet* Western Front and the Role of Literature and Film

The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History. Brian Bond. New York: Oxford UP, 2002, x + 128 pp., notes, bibliography, index. \$25.00 cloth.

Review Essay by Matthew Stewart, Boston University

There comes a remarkable moment near the end of Peter Wier's 1980 film *Gallipoli* when Frank Dunne (played by Mel Gibson) dashes across open ground that is exposed to enemy machine gun fire at close range. The scene has been set up so that both the character and the audience have already seen a demonstration of what is likely to happen to anyone foolish or unlucky enough to cross into this zone (the Australians keep a man posted at the end of the trench to prevent accidental encroachment). Prior to this dash Dunne has shown himself to be a fearful and reluctant soldier, trembling with dread at the prospect of the coming battle. Yet, when the moment arrives, he summons the courage to take this murderous short cut in an effort to save the lives of his mates.

My own experience of the film, however, yields something even more remarkable than this character's unforeseen bravery. I have read every critical article and review of the film that I can lay my hands on; I have chatted about it with other teachers and with devotees of the film; I have taught it in discussion sections to at least six hundred students. I seem to have heard every minor detail of the movie brought up and all the major moments hashed and rehashed except for one: I have yet to hear a single word uttered about Frank's unexpected bravery. How is it that no one takes note of what is actually a stand-out moment in Weir's story?

The answer would seem to be that people have difficulty registering data that conflict with a pre-existing mental construct. Brian Bond's study provides the specifics pertinent to the general instance. The audience, he would undoubtedly say, has fully absorbed the myth of the Great War.¹ It has been introduced to the war most probably through reading the Trench Poets or Erich Maria Remarque, and, although they probably are not conscious of the fact, those who watch the film possess a mental construct of the war that has been formulated (in both senses of that word: described and created) for them by the Trench Poets and by the likes of Paul Fussell, A. J. P. Taylor, Sir Basil Liddell Hart, and by their successors all the way on through the contemporary popular media. For the average educat-

ed man and woman in 2003, Frank's dash, so carefully constructed by screenwriter and director to be noticed, remains un-seeable.

On the other hand, everyone wants to talk about the film's other final run, the unforgettable one made by the movie's second protagonist, the innocent Archy Hamilton (Mark Lee), who is slaughtered while hurling himself towards the enemy trenches that both he and the audience know he will never reach. The typical viewer is prepared to see WWI soldiers scythed by sweeping machine gun fire, for that image is consistent with the mental and moral orthodoxy which now greets any depiction of that war. We want to talk about the victim, the wasted life, the lost innocence, the callous officers, the fatuousness of the whole affair. Conventional wisdom dictates that the intelligent and correct WWI narrative necessarily sets out to demonstrate that valor and nobility and idealism were rendered meaningless by the war. Too bad for Frank's growth into courage.

If the phrase "as seen in" or "as depicted in" is inserted into the ambiguous subtitle of Professor Bond's study—*Britain's Role as depicted in Literature and History*—the reader will get a clearer view of the book's focus and organization. Bond is an historian, and he is troubled by what he sees as the powerful legacy of Great War literature: "While the best . . . literary and personal interpretations [i.e., memoirs and autobiographies] have deservedly remained popular and influential they ignored, or failed to answer convincingly, the larger historical questions about political and strategic issues: what was the war 'about'? how was it fought? and why did Britain and her allies eventually emerge victorious?" (viii). For Bond the contemporary historian has his mission set out for him: to overturn the myth of the war by filling in the gaps, correcting errors, and overcoming prejudices and misinterpretations.

His study obviously addresses itself to those with an interest in the Great War, but the general issues it raises are of import to all who wish to make sense of the past. The book evidences the different conceptions of the past and its uses, conceptions which vary along professional lines. In Bond's world, the creative writer and the English professor are at odds with the historian. The book exemplifies a dilemma which presents itself to historians: literature and art, once known and accepted as part of the social landscape, enter the realm of history, but what if their own treatment of history is faulty? What if after-the-fact literary treatments of events prove to be more a product of the time in which they were written than an accurate reflection of the times they purport to record? Bond stakes out an unequivocal position on what have long been controversial issues. He is not merely interested in redressing imbalances, but in eradicating "the myth."

Bond's overall conception of World War I is straightforward: "It was, for Britain, a necessary and successful war, and an outstanding achievement for a democratic nation in arms" (1). While few historians would be shocked that one of their own holds such a view (even if they do not agree with it), many a literature professor and college-educated reader will be. This view certainly puts Bond at odds with Niall Ferguson's much-publicized recent series of speculations that posits Britain's entry into the war as a grand mistake responsible for nearly every major European disaster of the next fifty years. It is impossible to read the book without thinking that it is as much a reply to Ferguson as it is a response to the myth engendered

by writers and artists. In tone and slant, the book is also at odds with the more staid opinion of the luminary Sir John Keegan, who begins his recent volume by asserting that "the First World War was a tragic and unnecessary conflict." Speaking philosophically, Keegan means to refer to the grand sweep of human events. Like all wars, but on a grander scale than previously, the Great War revealed human weakness, human failure. In the run-up to the fighting "had prudence or common goodwill found a voice," Keegan writes, the affair could have been avoided.

Bond clearly does not find the assertion of this sort of humane attitude to be a useful beginning point for discussion of the war. Eschewing the expression of sentiments such as "if only people were better than they are and politicians more capable," he seeks to stick with the examination of the way things actually did play out. The Germans started the war. Britain had to fight it. Eventually it fought it pretty well. Winning was clearly preferable to losing, but the good results of Britain's victory have been ignored (and this is how he describes the end results of the war, as *Britain's* victory). That is Bond's view summarized.

He is among those military historians who subscribe to the idea of a "learning curve" for the British Military in the Great War. This phrase has been in vogue for some time now as a sort of shorthand for several interrelated points of view that should emerge clearly in this essay. Bond moves point-by-point through the myth, righting wrongs, outlining what he sees to be the sources of the myth, describing the constituent parts of the myth, and elaborating recent scholarly efforts to correct the faulty received version of the Great War. Literature and art have been to blame for the myth, along with an educational establishment that perpetuates a view of the war derived too exclusively from the arts; history of an old-fashioned sort will be the only corrective.

The Unquiet Western Front originated as the Lees Knowles Lectures on Military Science at Trinity College, Cambridge, and is constructed as a long literature review. This description is in no way meant to disparage the author's effort. Bond's command of his field is impressive, and his point of view consistently impresses on his readings a provocative quality. I find that the "war-was-necessary" and the "let's-stick-to-describing-what-actually-did-happen" school of military history can appear to be indifferent about the immensity of the war's tragic dimensions.² Notwithstanding this complacency, Bond is a lively and engaging writer, a respectful but no-nonsense controversialist.

The first of the study's four chapters is called "The Necessary War, 1914-1918" and it elaborates Bond's conception of the war as "necessary and successful" for Britain. It seeks to justify the judgement that "despite all the errors and shortcomings . . . Britain's war effort, on both the home and military 'fronts', was very impressive indeed" (73). The author agrees that Britain and Germany were wary of one another to the point of antagonism prior to the war. Nonetheless, neither foresaw their eventual confrontation as military enemies until the very last days before the outbreak of fighting. Even so, Bond will have nothing to do with the "Britain stumbled into the war" school of thought. "Britain's decision to enter the war," he concludes, "although forced on it by an unexpected chain of events, may be viewed as both calculated and justified by fears of what penalties might result from neutrality" (6).

Along the way Bond draws upon recent scholarship to argue vigorously against fallacious elements of the myth that stubbornly abide. Propaganda existed, but it was much more limited in scope and intention, and particularly in effect, than has commonly been believed. The enormous casualty rate, while admittedly horrifying and tragic, was statistically not significant. There was, in effect, no lost generation. At home and at the front morale remained relatively high for all four years, certainly high enough for the British to persevere and win the war. The officer-regular relationship was not fouled by antagonism or class resentment, but was characterized by an uncondescending and mutually agreeable paternalism. British military trials, punishments and even executions of its own men were almost always subject to due process, governed by justice and usually tempered by mercy. (Nearer the end of the book, Bond decries recent efforts to exonerate executed British soldiers.) Battle tactics did improve and leaders did learn from mistakes. Those who wish to understand the war must come to see that the command underwent a steep learning curve, and, apart from a few duds, handled this curve as well as could be hoped.

This latter claim sits rather uneasily beside the author's acknowledgment "that senior commanders and staff officers made numerous mistakes, particularly in renewing and prolonging offensives which had bogged down, thus contributing to the heavy loss of life—the main charge against them ever since. Even after ammunition and equipment became more plentiful, by mid-1916, and a learning process was clearly in being, operational progress was still patchy and earlier errors might be repeated" (17). It also sits uneasily beside an ample body of testimony recorded by those present at the time that things were often botched. And, anyway, "mid-1916"! Steep learning curve indeed.

Many, perhaps most, items on the above list of assertions have been rendered convincing by recent scholarship, yet the list will no doubt remain subject to contention for some time to come, perhaps forever. Like that of any world-changing event, the history of the Great War seems to be one of vision, revision and then revision again. As Ian Ousby has put the matter, revisionist lines of argument at this point are probably better called resurrectionist. However, the first chapter contains one reminder that neither historian nor imaginative artist can afford to ignore: to understand the people of a past age requires a suppression of our own attitudes and post-hoc conclusions. All social classes, Bond contends, saw the war as "a liberal crusade against uncivilized behavior," and this attitude was not entirely jettisoned in 1916, 1917 or 1918, even after the public's initial ignorance was replaced by knowledge of modern warfare's horrific powers of destruction. That is the historical reality, says Bond, and the prevailing ironic view of the war in 2003 is the product of after-the-fact mythologizing.

The final three chapters describe the origins and nature of this mythologizing, which Bond breaks into distinct time periods: the birth of the myth in the late 1920s, its rejuvenation and consolidation into conventional wisdom during the 1960s, and then, finally, the beginnings of its overthrow by enlightened historians in the 1990s (some even earlier), a job far from being fully accomplished, and one being done in the teeth of the powerful myth. (Bond relates that some secondary schools in the UK now use *Black Adder Goes Forth* as the primary text for the study

of the Great War.) Modris Eksteins has written that while the historical war ended on 11 November 1918, "thereafter it was swallowed by imagination in the guise of memory."

"Goodbye to All That, 1919-1933," the second chapter, describes the first stage of this process. Bond finds book and film of *All Quiet on the Western Front* to be the most influential document in the formation of the myth. He sees the book as Eksteins sees it, as an example of ahistoricism which has more to do with Erich Maria Remarque in 1929 than it does with the typical German soldier during the war years (or by extension, since the book became a universalized document, the typical British Tommy, French Poilu or American Doughboy). While the war was occurring, both the public and the soldiers themselves still largely conceptualized it by means of pre-war images and modes of thinking. Only during the 1920s and 30s did a certain select and (from Bond's point of view) unrepresentative set of artists supply the mental ingredients out of which "the war was a useless waste" mindset came to be constructed. While not denying that works such as Remarque's are moving and vital and often revelatory of ugly particularities, the assertion is that their general, cumulative effect is to have pushed the public into "the trap of believing that two conflicting views of the war existed in British society between 1914 and 1918: the 'true view', stressing waste and horror, belonging to the fighting soldiers, and the 'false view', that of deluded civilian belief in patriotism and the nobility of sacrifice" (12).

Indeed, Bond rightly points out that many works now assumed to be anti-war tracts are actually mixed in their attitude towards the war. They show the good, the bad and the ambiguous, and were written by authors who remained proud of their service and who thought it right to have fought in the war. (Niall Ferguson troubled to count Wilfrid Owen's poems and by his reckoning 31 of 103 completed should be called anti-war, a substantial number, surely, but hardly reflective of a single-mindedness on the poet's part.) The willingness of now-famous authors to depict the horrible, to deflate the pompous, to catalogue the inane, to expose dishonesty and stupidity does not translate into wholesale anti-militarism, pacifism nor into an expression of regret concerning their own participation in the war. Robert Graves may have said goodbye to all that, but he also came forth to volunteer in 1939. Most of the anti-war sentiment expressed in the anti-war books, Bond concludes, is of a commonsense, indisputable, base-level sort: it is a shame that it ever came to this. Human beings have failed. This truism is morally worthy, of course, and it may be uplifting to express it periodically, but its expression will be of little help in understanding wars that have occurred, nor will it yield much of value to help prevent any that may yet come.

Meanwhile, literary critics have focused their powers of discernment in an effort to sift out the canon of meritorious works of art produced about the war. One need not think this task odd or perverse—an attitude that Bond seems close to adopting—to agree with the author that the focus on literary excellence is matched by a seeming neglect of the body of middlebrow, popular literature about the war. Uplifting, patriotic, even sentimental works by figures now forgotten, were more abundantly produced and more widely read through the twenties and thirties than were Owen, Rosenburg, Sassoon and others in the canon on Trench Poets, whom

we now think of as anti-war. Though Bond seems suspicious, even dismissive of the newer sorts of cultural history being practiced, it would seem that here is an area where the literary/cultural historian should step forward and make his or her mark. What did all those once-popular, now-forgotten works have to say about the war?

It was the sixties, says Bond, that re-discovered the school of Remarque and elevated the myth of the Great War to the status of conventional wisdom. The Trench Poets told "the" truth of the war, and the old men who had led them and lied to them became the "donkeys" who led the unsuspecting "lions" to slaughter. The myth began to slip into nasty caricature, while the more complicated true history receded further and further into the background. Bond does not discuss American authors or American circumstances, but one thinks, for example, of the revival of Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* during the Vietnam War years, its newfound, mostly young audience pushing the paperback version through printing after printing. The Trench Poets became analogues for contemporary experience at the expense of their status as historical beings. Their disillusionment and their complaints became timeless utterances of The Eternal Truth About War, rather than the expression of their own particular thoughts about their own particular war. Their bygone supposedly dirty war became the prototype for Vietnam, the new dirty war; the Great War's perceived chaos and waste of young life were pasted onto the protests of a new time.

Orwell had trouble imagining that any responsible, thinking person could adopt a position of absolute pacifism. Likewise, this reviewer finds it nearly impossible to trust soldier writers who set out to write pure and unrelieved anti-war tracts. Bond quotes Robert Wohl on the subject of the generation of 1914: "The same men who cried out at the inhumanity of the war often confessed that they had loved it with a passion and wondered if they would ever be able to free themselves from the front's magic spell" (29). But the 1960s launched the cultural preoccupation with powerlessness and victimization. It was the heyday of the anti-hero in literature and film. Before the poor grunts in Nam, there were the poor Tommies of the Somme. Before Ron Kovic created his autobiographical persona, there was Dalton Trumbo's Joe. Joe joined up for idealistic and patriotic reasons, tragedy befell him, and the cause to which he had originally subscribed was thereafter discovered to be meretricious.

By the 1990s, victims were no longer just victims, subjects worthy of compassion, but victims had replaced heroes as the object of cultural devotion, or at least there was a widespread disposition to see the victim as automatically conferred with moral worthiness, even sanctity. One was on firm ground appreciating Owen's pity or Siegfried Sassoon's scathing poetry. One could discuss the circumstances surrounding Sassoon's remarkable public protest, but the fact that on the battlefield he was an excellent killer had better pass without remark, for such a fact was bound to add a confusing element to the issue, much as Frank Dunne's dash squares oddly with the anti-war message ascribed to *Gallipoli*. While Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy can be criticized for foisting 1990s attitudes onto certain of its 1910s characters, it had the integrity to make clear how much Sassoon the anti-war poet longed to be back at the front with his men. And if one really wants to com-

plicate the matter, the George Sherston of Sassoon's memoirs is an altogether different persona—so often bemused and amusing, seldom purely bitter—from the angry voice which dominates his most frequently anthologized poems.

Historians too played a large role in the "Donkeys and Flanders Mud" school of thought on the Great War (Bond's title for chapter three, subtitled "The War Rediscovered in the 1960s"). In Bond's version of historiographical developments, the earlier skepticism and relatively tempered criticisms expressed by Liddell Hart and the clever ironies of A. J. P. Taylor were succeeded by studies notable for their vituperation and for their monomaniacal pursuit of the blame game—works written with neither the scholarly authority nor the penetrating intellect of the earlier critics who, while wrongheaded, spoke from an intellectually earned position and who were more apt to be hard-but-fair than the were the neophytes.

It isn't just poets, novelists and narrative filmmakers who are to blame, then, as writers of history joined the mythmaking crowd. Along these lines, Bond also criticizes recent documentary television programs on the war, including the Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett production aired in the US in 1997 on PBS. He finds these new efforts inferior to the 1964 BBC production *The Great War*, watched by eight million people per episode during its original airing. Even then, the end result of that series was to reinforce the myth. In a set of research findings which somehow took the well-intentioned screenwriters and consulting historians by surprise (ideas about the power of the medium to affect the message were apparently not so widely understood in these somewhat earlier years of television) the balanced script was overwhelmed by the emotional impact of the program's visual content. The pity of war had won again, this time via pictures, even as the series made substantial inroads in documentation and the use of archival materials.

For educators teaching in an age increasingly inclined toward interdisciplinarity, Bond's study raises serious issues. "It seems likely that teachers of English rather than history still have more influence in the shaping of views on the First World War, through the teaching of war poetry, and from a narrow selection of poems, especially those of Owen and Sassoon," he laments (88). As a military historian, Bond unsurprisingly advocates his own discipline as most likely to give the true picture of the war, and he provides no concrete set of instructions as to what's to be done about all these artists and English teachers who have ruined history. If cultural productions have caused the damage, cannot good cultural history help to undo it? Bond seems to think not really: "If policy and strategy are omitted, or not properly explained, then terms like 'pointless' and 'futile' all too easily slip in as a natural response to the destruction and heavy casualties" (81). No doubt there will be plenty of readers ready to jump on statements such as this, point to the conduct of the Somme battles or the Gallipoli campaign, for example, and conclude that there is no such thing as a bad British policy or a poorly conceived strategy in Bond's world. But here let it be remarked that the author seems unable to envision any sort of interdisciplinary approach to studying the war that combines deep and balanced explorations of the cultural climate with a proper understanding of "the big picture" (and this is to postulate that policy and strategy alone form the big picture when perhaps that is rather too simple a formulation to accept unquestioningly as a point of intellectual departure).

One wishes to make other demurrals. One can admit the usefulness of the "learning curve" metaphor, and also acknowledge how frighteningly steep this curve was, without going as far as Bond, Gary Sheffield, John Terraine and others have taken the concept. Haig, et. al. were not in all cases at all times the monstrously stubborn and stupid "donkeys" sometimes portrayed, but neither can "the generals" be forgiven nearly so much as they are implicitly forgiven on these pages. This may seem the wishy-washy way out of the controversy but it is nonetheless true. If polemicists bring one to the middle of the road towards accuracy, then they have served a useful function. In certain cases a gymnastics of special pleading is required to defend leaders: Bond's own admission about the prolongation of pointless offensives and the repetition of errors quoted above could serve as a case in point.

More minor objections can be raised. Bond makes much of the fact that Britain did, after all, win the war, proving on the face of it that the conduct of the war cannot be the grand failure that it is said to be in the myth. One is willing to grant that this is so, rather than seeing it as a matter of the Germans having lost the war, but one cannot help noting the absence from Bond's picture of the immense help provided by the Colonials and the pressuring threat of increasing American involvement in those final weeks of 1918 when the British finally approached the top of that learning curve. The author's repeated contention that Paul Fussell's well-known study on the war and modern memory is an example of an ahistorical "post-modernist" approach, that it "lies outside history," contains merit, but needs elaboration.³ There are a couple of unattractive phrases suggesting that namby-pamby, sensitive-souled high literary sorts need not be taken seriously since their kind can only be expected to find war distasteful. This line of argument is more ad-hominem than substantive, and it is contradicted by the author's own insistence elsewhere in the book that these scribbling softies were often very good soldiers and not deserving of the anti-war epithet assigned to them by the myth's true believers. There are lines in which the author doesn't seem to realize that he is betraying himself. When he writes, for instance, that Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* depicts "an extreme view of the slaughter on the Somme," one is forced to wonder what an un-extreme slaughter might look like (76).

Bond's study provides a capacious and stimulating overview of the steps by which the present conventional understanding of the war came to be conventional. He is strong on elaborating the key moments and enumerating the key texts in this process. He is good on how, when and what, and this is to be good at a very great deal. In the end, he does not engage the question as to *why* the poets and English teachers won the day and *why* the right sort of historians have had such a hard time getting themselves heard. What is there about the "mythical" story told by the former group that beats out the "true" story that Bond says is only now making its way into the public consciousness? Put another way, what are the elements of the zeitgeist which make the former version attractive, or at least palatable, and the latter, unbelievable, even repellent?

Bond cannot be blamed for not having the answers to these questions, but his lack of engagement with them seems to betray a desire simply to hustle literature and art off the stage. How to do that when that is who the public has come to see

play the roles? The actual answers to these questions are woven so deeply into the intellectual and emotional patterns of the century that the prospect of ever extracting and gathering up all the necessary threads out from the weave seems daunting, even doubtful of accomplishment. But they will never be answered by a method that sets up traditional military history in the mansion and relegates art to the little shed out back.

Notes

1. While the general manner in which Bond uses the word *myth* should be clear enough in this essay, the word has been used so variously by scholars and critics that one wishes he would have put forth his own brief definition at the outset. Much cultural criticism and historical writing does not, of course, necessarily equate the word *myth* with falsehood. Bond does, and I follow his use here for purposes of clarity and consistency, not because it is the definition I would choose to use.

2. Complacent but not motivated by bad faith. The answer of Bond and the growing body of scholars who write from his general perspective would undoubtedly begin their defense by saying that their first allegiance is to history, and that getting right what happened is the ultimate honor the historian can pay to those who suffered and those who died.

3. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson have mounted the most concerted offensive against Fussell's sins of ahistoricism. "Paul Fussell at War." *War in History* 1.1 (1994), 63-80.

Hearing the Rhythm and Drama of War: Emerging Histories of Popular Culture and World War II

God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War. Kathleen E.R. Smith. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.

Radio Goes to War. Gerd Horten. California: University of California Press, 2002.

Review Essay by Douglas A. Cunningham

Kathleen E. R. Smith's *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* and Gerd Horten's *Radio Goes to War* both fill major gaps in the current scholarship surrounding American culture during World War II. The detailed research and scope of these books prompt the reader to ask where studies of the popular music and

radio of wartime America have been hiding all these years. No doubt dozens of unpublished theses and dissertations have already covered some of this ground, and certainly books of a purely nostalgic nature have also appeared on bookstore shelves from time to time. Of course, books dedicated to the political and psychological impacts of films during World War II are legion—and have been for a couple of decades. Why can we not say the same for the types of books Smith and Horten offer us?

I see two primary reasons. First, as was the case with film studies, both academics and the general public have had to adjust to the idea that popular entertainments can stand as legitimate and revealing objects of study. Major American academic thought about motion pictures took decades to develop, only finding somewhat shaky footing in the early 1960s at the major metropolitan universities closely associated with the “dream-factory” industry—NYU, USC, and UCLA. (And this only after the French intelligentsia and *La Nouvelle Vague* critics began writing seriously about films themselves—a trans-Atlantic cultural influence typical of a much more Franco-philic period in American history.) The field has grown exponentially since then, but even today, film studies faces a battle of legitimacy in many corners of the academy, and ambitious analyses of popular music and radio have, over the years, faced the same struggles.

The second reason why books of this caliber have eluded us for so long is that unlike movies (most of which can be found on video or DVD) or novels (most of which, again, can usually be located with ease), the subjects Smith and Horten study are not, in many cases, readily available for rental, purchase, and/or review at a local library. Without easy access to most of the material under discussion, the reader must overcome an immediate obstacle in order to gain a full appreciation of the book. Fortunately, both Smith and Horten provide enough detail about their respective songs and programs that the reader does not feel lost without having that material in hand. Horten proves somewhat more successful in this regard, simply because he concentrates his study on non-musical radio programming; Smith's study of the popular songs of the day is slightly hampered by the fact that one cannot always contextualize them unless he or she can hear the music or is already familiar with the songs. Of course, one cannot blame Smith for this drawback; after all, it's a problem inherent to any book of this sort released without a CD compilation as a supplement—an effort that would have proven prohibitively expensive for a university press and its potential consumers. Smith, however, includes in her book the next best thing to such a supplement—a detailed and comprehensive “Selected Discography” appendix that lists all the major songs of the most popular artists and the record labels and numbers under which each can be found. In short, whatever the reason for the reluctance of scholars and presses to publish books like these before, I'm very glad such books are available now. The academy will appreciate them, too.

In *God Bless America*, Smith asks one central question: Why did Tin Pan Alley (the American music industry) and organizations such as the Office of War Information (OWI) and The National Wartime Music Committee have such difficulty in producing a popular “rallying song” equivalent to the George M. Cohan hit from the previous war, “Over There”? Smith marvelously demonstrates that the

effort to produce another such hit actually caused a surprising amount of anxiety among those Washington officials responsible for guiding public opinion through culture. In fact, the book features many interesting gems of information that effectively summarize the ways in which the OWI sought desperately to find music to energize the public. "The OWI had so much difficulty in finding popular militant war songs that appealed to the American public," she states, "that it began to seek solutions on its own. The OWI said that the audience, who formerly participated actively by going to dances to hear the latest music, was made passive by radio." According to Smith, the OWI even went so far as talking about "getting Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire to invent a new style of dance so the United States would become 'more oompah and militaristic.'"

The inability of the OWI and other organizations to find or produce a popular war song does not, Smith asserts, mean that no one tried. Smith cites a number of examples of patriotic songs produced and distributed with the full backing of government enthusiasm and support. Unfortunately, these songs simply never caught the imagination of homesick soldiers or pining girlfriends, most of whom preferred the sentiment of "separation" love songs such as "The White Cliffs of Dover," "White Christmas," "I'll Be Seeing You," and "Sentimental Journey" to the overtly patriotic "All Out for America," "Let's Bring New Glory to Old Glory," or "This Is Our Side of the Ocean."

Smith eventually concludes that even though the search for the "proper war song" failed, Americans did not, in fact, need such a song to feel motivated about the war. "The lack of a war song did not dampen the enthusiasm as the country closed ranks against Germany and Japan," she claims, and of course, she is correct. The irony, of course, is the fact that the era's most popular music—albeit more sentimental than militaristic—stands today as one of the most recognizable hallmarks of the war. (Who, for example, can think of the cultural backdrop of World War II without also thinking of "String of Pearls" or "In the Mood"?) *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* takes its reader on a sentimental journey, but it also educates the reader about the long arm of the U.S. wartime propaganda machine, which—as Smith convincingly argues—all too often stretched over its intended subjects rather than out to them.

Similarly, Gerd Horten's *Radio Goes to War* provides a much-needed assessment of how government agencies exploited a medium of mass communication to promote the war. The real strength of Horten's book is its structure, which follows the history of radio's involvement in the war, but in a fashion that seems more categorical than chronological. The result is a fascinating overall history of wartime radio made all the stronger by in-depth examinations of very specific social issues. For example, one chapter, entitled, "Closing Ranks: Propaganda, Politics, and Foreign-Language Radio," explores how the government employed foreign-language radio programming in an attempt to win the support of certain ethnic groups during the war. Other chapters explore the roles that specific programming played in the propaganda and morale efforts, often with interesting revelations. The chapter entitled "'Twenty Million Women Can't Be Wrong': Wartime Soap Operas" looks closely at the ethnic and gender politics at work in such daytime serials as *Today's Children* and *Guiding Light*. In *Today's Children*, the character of Elizabeth Schulz,

one member of the program's fictional German-American family, chooses to work in a defense plant and leave her children at home to be raised by their grandmother. Horten analyzes the way in which World War II radio used such daily programming to sensationalize and sentimentalize the national discourse surrounding such controversial issues. Horten also shows how the OWI and program sponsors intervened regularly to ensure programming aligned with national guidelines and goals. While reading Horten's summaries and analyses about radio, its programming, its politics, and its listeners, one cannot help but feel caught up in the excitement of the time. More importantly, one comes to understand how a medium like radio could so thoroughly affect American thought and identity—and how government agencies attempted to influence that consciousness (sometimes unsuccessfully, as Smith also asserts) by manipulating programming.

Well researched and entertaining to read, *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* and *Radio Goes to War* offer different perspectives on the cultural politics of American culture during World War II—yet with surprisingly similar conclusions. As I write my own study of a very specific niche of film production during the same period—a history of the United States Army Air Forces First Motion Picture Unit—I can't help but admire the way these books tell their stories, and the acumen with which their authors make connections among the social, the political, the cultural, and the commercial.

Odysseus in America: Combat and the Trials of Homecoming

Jonathan Shay. New York: Scribner, 2002. 352 pp. \$25.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Brian Hanley, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia

This praiseworthy book is a sequel to Shay's acclaimed *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994), which analyzes the psychological and moral injuries of Vietnam combat veterans by the lights of Homer's *Iliad*. Admirers of Shay's earlier work will find nothing to disappoint here. *Odysseus in America* expresses an understanding of the later Homeric poem that is original without being eccentric, trivial, or self-consciously clever in the way that much scholarly criticism is nowadays. What is most impressive about *Odysseus in America* is that the warrior and the loved ones of warriors, the student of Homer, the citizen interested in military affairs, and any other reader possessed of mild curiosity and a measure of humanity will benefit from Shay's carefully researched and well-written book.

It is a rare thing for a book to offer instruction and pleasure, as Shay's two books on the Homeric poems do, to different classes of serious readers. We live in an age of niche markets, and books—to include works of scholarship—have proved to be no different from other consumer products created to satisfy a discrete marketplace demand. It used to be considered a disquieting side effect of

progress that a humanities professor and a science professor could not be expected to understand much about each other's fields, so specialized had humanistic and non-humanistic subjects become by the mid-twentieth century. The ghettoizing of knowledge now obtains within the humanities. Check out your local bookstore, or glance at a university press catalogue: literary criticism contains a number of sub-disciplines, each catering for the needs of a distinct set of readers and each, increasingly, relying on its own pseudo-scientific terms. It wasn't always so. In the mid-eighteenth century, when the literary marketplace was beginning to mature, review journals often published criticism by the same writer on all kinds of books—botany, politics, experimentations in electricity, current events, history. The idea was that the author, the critic, and the ordinary reader could communicate with each other without any mediating agency beyond a sound understanding of received English and an appreciation for the need to chip away at our natural enveloping ignorance. Jonathan Shay's work fits squarely within this tradition.

In Part I, "Unhealed Wounds," which comprises the larger half of *Odysseus in America*, Shay sees the *Odyssey* as a timeless soldier's story that helps us understand the social, moral, and psychological torment that many Vietnam combat veterans faced when they returned home and continue to wrestle with thirty years later. Shay uses each episode in the *Odyssey* as a metaphor for the experience of the returning veteran. "*The Odyssey* shows us ugly deformities of character that trauma can cause," Shay argues, "but these deformities are fully human such as might happen to ourselves, and, in fact, did happen to many of the veterans I work with" (120). Shay's interpretation of the Cyclops narrative is a good example of his manner of proceeding.

Commentators on Odysseus' behavior are divided between those who emphasize his 'curiosity'—praising him as a sort of ancient proto-scientist—and those who emphasize his greed—that he hoped for a guest-gift of some immensely valuable item. I see the adventure with the Cyclops as an emblem for combat veterans' attraction to danger, an attraction that has cost so many of them their lives *after returning home*, and tortured those who love them with untold hours of fear for their survival. (44)

Shay's readings of the other episodes in the *Odyssey* follow this pattern. Shay's critical views may not amount to the last word on Homer's art, and some readers may not find everything he says wholly persuasive, but the positions Shay stakes out are always sensible and defended by solid evidence. Put another way, the literary criticism here is as substantial as any other that one can expect to find on the subject—and better than most.

The second and third parts, using the *Odyssey* as a point of departure, discuss ways to treat and prevent the psychological injuries that bedevil front-line soldiers in particular. Three appendices—a "pocket guide" to the *Odyssey*; a list of resources for Vietnam veterans and their families; a set of proposals for reforming the military personnel system—close out the volume and, it should be noted, are useful to the point that they can be profitably consulted quite apart from the meritorious crit-

icism that precedes them. All of this material is valuable, but what is most ambitious here is Shay's advice for current military leaders and their civilian colleagues on how to prevent psychological and moral injury in warfighters. Keep units together, Shay argues: the idea of rotating troops individually from one unit to another every few years is counter-productive. "The leading preventive psychiatry recommendation," Shay says, "is to *keep people together through training, into a fight, and home again*" (5). The military personnel system should avoid treating rank-and-file soldiers, and leaders in particular, as interchangeable parts. "Put the right person in the right place. In the wrong place, he'll do harm," Shay points out. "As a staff officer, strategist, independent intelligence operative, and solo fighter, Odysseus was brilliant," Shay observes. "As a troop leader, he was a catastrophe" (241).

Some of Shay's other recommendations—based on his reading of the Homeric poems and his experience treating psychologically injured combat veterans—include decentralizing officer management, replacing the "up-or-out" promotion system with an "up-or-stay-if-still-performing" model, and requiring all officers to serve in the enlisted ranks prior to commissioning. Very little of what Shay argues for in regards to military personnel management is completely new. Nevertheless, the long list of generals and colonels on the "Acknowledgments" page, not to mention the appreciative commentary by Max Cleland and John McCain, two Vietnam combat veterans who serve on the Armed Services Committee of the U.S. Senate, suggests that the time has come to give at least some of these ideas serious reconsideration.

The literature on military leadership, the Homeric poems, and the psychological stresses of combat may strike some, justifiably, as exhaustive. *Odysseus in America* deserves to be among the first books that readers interested in these fields should consult.

The Simple Sounds of Freedom: The True Story of the Only Soldier To Fight For Both America and the Soviet Union In WWII

Thomas H. Taylor. New York: Random House, 2002. 336 pp. \$24.95, cloth.

Reviewed by Allegra Johnston, United States Air Force Academy

Thomas H. Taylor's *The Simple Sounds of Freedom* is an interesting contribution to the body of literature written about WWII. In it he tells the true story of Joe Beyrle, a young man from a small-town, German-American family who had a rather

extraordinary experience in WWII, fighting for both America and the Soviet Union, as well as spending time as a POW. Beyrle worked directly with Taylor to create this biography, and the book is sprinkled with direct quotes from Beyrle (both things he remembers saying long ago and more recent reflections on his experience) and excerpts of documents such as government correspondence. These original sources help the reader remain engaged in the story and feel more of a connection with its main character.

Taylor himself has military experience; he is a veteran of the 101st Airborne Division and was awarded the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars for valor, the Purple Heart, and five other decorations for his service in Vietnam. After leaving the army he went on to pursue graduate education and writing. He has won the Carothers Prize for literary composition and been designated a Bread Loaf Fellow at Middlebury College, Vermont. Taylor has written novels based on his own military experiences, so with *The Simple Sounds of Freedom* he is on somewhat familiar terrain.

Joe Beyrle is portrayed as a man many readers could relate to—more of an athlete than a scholar, someone for whom every experience in the military was a new one compared to the simple way he'd grown up, and someone who strongly believes that luck, as much as anything, was what kept him alive throughout his many struggles in WWII. He begins as an enlisted member of the 101st Airborne, an enthusiastic soldier whose jumping skill gets him selected for a special mission to parachute into France with money for the French resistance. While this first expedition goes well, a later, similar mission places him in danger and makes him more aware (particularly in comparison to his cocky and youthful comrades) of the risks of war. The author does particularly well in transmitting the unique combination of fear and anticipation that the soldiers felt just before one of the defining moments of the war: the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

As a paratrooper, Joe jumps into Normandy the night before the rest of the invasion, and it is at this point that things begin to go wrong. In the confusion after the jump he is unable to locate the remainder of his unit and ends up lost (though actively trying to get to the meeting point) for the next day or so, after which he stumbles into a German machine gun nest and is captured. As a POW he sees some of the other men he trained with, some injured and others killed. Suddenly, the training he went through seems quite different from the reality of war. Joe himself goes through a gruesome period of escapes, recaptures, time in POW camps, and unspeakable treatment at the hand of the Nazis.

Taylor sometimes breaks from Joe's story in order to follow the actions of Ed Albers, another young man from Joe's hometown who ends up in the 101st (and ironically inherits some of Joe's belongings) after Joe had dropped into Normandy and been captured. Although the two men never really knew one another after the war, the inclusion of Albers' story makes sense because it provides the reader with a perspective on what was going on during the war while Joe was out of the primary action.

Only a relatively small portion of the book, towards the end, covers the period in Joe's life when he finally manages to escape from the stalag where he was imprisoned and, freezing and alone on the eastern front of the war, joins up with

Russian forces (he served with a tank battalion commanded by a woman he knows only as "Major") before eventually making his way back to America. It is somewhat disappointing that there is not more to this section, although perhaps the reason for this is that most of it relies on Joe Beyrle's recollection, and there are no detailed records of exactly what happened, how, and when. Taylor has done his best to reconstruct as much as possible, and with reason, for this is primarily what makes Joe's story different from other personal accounts of WWII.

Taylor's style is engaging, focusing on the human interest of Joe's experiences as well as details of the war in which he participated. There are certainly a lot of specifics about the war, particularly aspects relevant to the story, but Taylor's book sticks primarily to Joe's perspective, making for a more interesting read than a simple accounting of battles. If your history books in school always seemed mind-numbingly dull (as mine did to me), then this book may offer you something new: a historical accounting that is both informative and interesting. Only the most callous of readers could fail to admire what Joe and other soldiers endured. *The Simple Sounds of Freedom* will not tell you everything there is to know about large issues of military and political strategizing or of the horrors of the holocaust, but it will provide a soldier's view of the war that is unique because of the many sides from which he viewed it. Occasionally, the author jumps around in chronology or location in order for Taylor to describe some part of Joe's story that did not directly involve him, but this is not a problem once the reader gets a feel for his style (after the first chapter or so). One other small annoyance is that Taylor is a bit heavy-handed with statements that forecast some interesting event, but then the reader must wait a long time before finding out the details (for example, at one point when Joe is a POW and gets issued new uniform items, there is a sentence that says "The fact that they were American uniform items would save his life," but only later does the reader find out *why*). Any complaints aside, though, this book is certainly interesting and worth reading. Its place in the overall body of WWII literature may not be large, but is valuable nonetheless.

West Dickens Avenue: A Marine at Khe Sanh

John Corbett. New York: Presidio Press, 2003, 208 pages. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Capt Glenn Leinbach, United States Air Force Academy

No one should be surprised that a man who survived the siege of Khe Sanh is still affected by his time there. No one should be surprised that John Corbett, author of *West Dickens Avenue: A Marine at Khe Sanh*, brings Vietnam home with him when he steps off the plane in California after what seems to be a lifetime away from the "world." What will surprise some of his readers is that Corbett writes in the present tense throughout his book. In fact, Corbett seems obsessed with the present tense, which at first seems out of place. After all, the siege took place in 1968, more than

30 years ago. But his perspective makes sense, after all, when Corbett tells of watching a fellow Marine, "silhouetted against the rising sun, getting shot by an NVA soldier." As he notes, "I recall that incident at every sunrise I have seen since" (195). Corbett lives Khe Sanh every day.

Corbett allows his readers to live Khe Sanh, as well. Through his use of the present tense they tag along with him as he enlists, as he leaves for Vietnam, as he lands at Khe Sanh, and as he scrambles for cover for the first time, less than one week into his tour in Vietnam. His writing style, which at first makes the story more difficult to read, eventually allows his readers not only to experience Khe Sanh with Corbett from January 4 to April 14, 1968, but also to see how much Khe Sanh still affects him.

His time there obviously did affect Corbett, but he engages in less introspection than one might expect. Examples abound. On page 54 he talks to a Marine who receives a "million-dollar wound" and who is now going home. The Marine is happy about being shot, to which Corbett replies, "I am stunned." He doesn't understand why the man would be happy about such a wound; therefore Corbett is "stunned." Other than that, however, Corbett never does say much about the incident, a pattern he repeats. While there is no need to go through them all, Corbett includes many examples of this lack of introspection—look at pages 84, 86, 91, 95, 134, 135, 143, 156, 158, 170, 190, 197, 202, 204, and 205. In each situation Corbett could take the opportunity to contemplate his circumstances, to think about the larger implications of what is going on around him, and then write about them, but he does not. Corbett merely nods at introspection but always catches himself and either stops the discussion or presses on to another topic. One wonders about Corbett's time frame—does he refuse to ponder these things now, or then, or both? Of course, the sympathetic reader can't blame Corbett if he doesn't want to think about the larger implications of Khe Sanh. As he notes on page 203, Corbett has brought Vietnam (and Khe Sanh, and all those dead Marines he's seen) along with him.

While Vietnam comes home with him, he and the other Marines take America with them to Vietnam. Khe Sanh's inhabitants relieve stress by throwing a football, they play records on an old record player, they pin up Playboy centerfolds, and Corbett brings his guitar, which he plays until a string breaks, at which time "two nearby Marines cheered" (74). And in the midst of the red clay of Khe Sanh, Corbett finds an odd piece of home upon his arrival—the street sign for which he names his book. He makes a crude pole for his street sign and drives it into the ground at his foxhole. He writes, "with this simple act, my previously nameless, personality-less, and featureless hole in the earth is no longer nameless, personality-less, and featureless. With this seemingly inane act, everything about my hole has changed. Now I have a home with an address: West Dickens Avenue, Khe Sanh" (36). When he finally leaves this hole 3 months later, Corbett fondly calls it his "very lucky place in the ground" (174). He leaves a piece of home at Khe Sanh and then brings Khe Sanh home.

No doubt everyone who served at Khe Sanh brought a piece of it home. Corbett shares his piece, his experience, with those who could never know what Khe Sanh was really like. Corbett does his best, though, taking his readers on a tour of his temporary home—a place of war so foreign, yet made so familiar by

something as ordinary as a sign someone could have ripped off the corner of any American street.

A Good Idea of Hell: Letters from a Chasseur à Pied

Joshua Brown, editor. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003. 221 pp. \$39.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Michael S. Neiberg, United States Air Force Academy

The letters compiled in this book were written during World War I by the editor's great-uncle, Robert Pellissier. A native-born Frenchman, Pellissier was an assistant professor of Romance Languages at Stanford University when the war began in 1914. Although he was not required to join the French army by virtue of his long-term residency in the United States, Pellissier nevertheless went to France on the first available ship. Once in his homeland he joined the *chasseurs à pied*, a light infantry unit charged with the defense of the Vosges Mountains in Alsace. Although he did not see much sustained combat until the 1916 Somme campaign that claimed his life, Pellissier's letters are full of wonderful insights about the daily life of the French soldier and the meaning of the war to a man who had no obligation to fight in it.

The book benefits tremendously from the editor's introduction and the insightful foreword by historian Leonard Smith. Smith's own work on French soldiers in World War I emphasizes many of the same themes that emerge in Pellissier's letters. Nevertheless, Pellissier was different from his fellow soldiers both by virtue of his education and because of the many years that he had spent away from France. His time in America did not create in Pellissier any doubts about where he needed to place his own loyalties. In letters to his American correspondents, he consistently referred to the United States as "your" country. Still, his insights into the American mind led him to take a special interest in America's slow drift from neutrality.

The single most striking feature of these letters is their virtual absence of any mention of larger events. Pellissier's world was the world of his unit. He scarcely mentioned the First Battle of the Marne, which was taking place less than 100 miles away from him as he traveled through Burgundy, or the tremendous bloodletting at Verdun. Pellissier's sector was quiet for most of the war, and he spent three months away from the front recovering from a shoulder wound. As such, a reading of this book will not give the reader an understanding of the larger patterns of the war.

A Good Idea of Hell will give the reader wonderful insights into how the war looked from below. Senior French leaders hardly ever entered into Pellissier's world. One such appearance was that of French President Raymond Poincaré at the hospital in Givors where Pellissier was recuperating. Far from being a moment of

inspiration for the wounded soldiers, Pellissier only noted, "Much sweeping and dusting. Sheets for the cots put in an appearance" (70). Pellissier thus constantly reminds us how limited the vision of most soldiers was and how little of the larger issues they saw.

The thoughtful and reflective nature of Robert Pellissier led to his resounding condemnation not only of the Kaiser and his war machine, but of French ultra-nationalists and chauvinists as well. Pellissier did not share the nationalists' extreme hatred for the Germans, and therefore he had a difficult time understanding German brutality in Belgium and in his own Vosges sector. In one letter he compared the Germans to a hold-up man. One had to defend oneself, but after striking the man in self-defense, one had an obligation to help the attacker get to a hospital.

The German soldiers' rapes of Alsatian women led him to take on a harsher tone, but Pellissier refused to believe that the future was hopeless. "The Prussians must really be stark mad," he wrote to his fiancée in Massachusetts upon learning of the German sinking of the *Lusitania*. "I still believe that there may be a few good Germans," he added, "but it's no time to talk about the exceptions that prove the rule" (104-105). An allied victory, he believed, needed to be accompanied by an indemnity that would include a surrender of Germany's colonies. Nevertheless, he looked forward with remarkable prescience to a United States of Europe that would resolve future disputes without war.

The war did not make him hard and bitter. He hoped, tragically in light of future events, that the war would produce a better world and thereby redeem the sacrifices of the dead of all nations. Even the victors, he concluded, would have to stand humbly before the modesty of their victory. In such an environment he hoped that the hyper-nationalism of the pre-war years would fade before a common human understanding. "France, of course, but humanity and civilization are placed above France," he wrote to a Stanford colleague (90). In another letter he concluded, "If this is not the last European war, it will be because all Europeans are crazy" (88).

Pellissier drew these conclusions despite having seen very little of the war's main battles. His reassignment to the Somme sector in the summer of 1916, however, dramatically changed his relationship to the larger war. Like so many of the war's victims, he sensed that his luck had probably run out. His last letter, written to a family friend in France, asked his correspondent to tell Pellissier's brother, John, that "I do not regret the choice I made in returning to France" (182). His letters may not provide a study of the war's famous figures and campaigns, but their eloquence will more than repay the time spent reading them.

Navajo Weapon

Sally McClain. Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2001, 212 pp., notes, bibliography, appendices, index. \$16.95, paper.

Reviewed by William Newmiller, United States Air Force Academy.

This book, Sally McClain's first, began, not as a written project, but as a personal quest to learn about the contributions of Navajos as code talkers in the Pacific theater of World War II. During her third interview with a group of Navajo code talkers, the men stopped talking, leaned back and folded their arms. "You're not writing this down," said one. "We're old. Who will know, if you don't write it down?" So the book was born, and McClain determined to tell their story as completely and as accurately as she could.

She cobbles *Navajo Weapon* from an impressive collection of interviews, books, military documents, newspapers, correspondence, and private collections. She includes appendices containing a comprehensive listing of those known to have served as code talkers. Here, too, is a complete dictionary of the original code as well as the final revised version used by WWII code talkers to communicate tactical information in the heat of intense combat at Iwo Jima, Saipan, Okinawa, and other battles.

McClain tells the story of the code talkers chronologically; first comes the context for the story: a description of the Navajo life during the 1920s, when the men who would become code talkers were youngsters on the reservation. Next, McClain provides a brief history of the rise of Japanese Empire and a review of the American military's pursuit of a system to secure speedy and accurate communication during combat. She then takes us through the recruitment and training of the first group of Navajo code talkers and how they developed the code that served so well for the rest of the war. The book includes detailed descriptions of major battles in the Pacific and the contributions code talkers made in each one. Finally, we're treated to a brief description of the code talkers' return to the reservation after victory and given a glimpse of the post-war challenges they faced and the contributions they've made.

The fascinating story of Navajo code talkers lies at the intersection of language, war, and culture. In *Navajo Weapon* we learn about Navajo children in government-run reservation schools having their mouths washed out with lye for speaking their language, children who as young men served that same government by using their forbidden tongue to gain victory over Japan.

McClain succeeds well in telling this story completely and accurately, but like all good stories, this one leaves something of greater value than the sum of its parts—something that goes to the center of the American identity and the tension between forces for cultural diversity and those of assimilation. The words of code talker Kee Etsicity, quoted by Sally McClain, speak to this issue with simple eloquence: "We, the Navajo people, were very fortunate to contribute our language as a code for our country's victory. For this I strongly recommend we teach our chil-

dren the language our ancestors were blessed with at the beginning of time. It is very sacred and represents the power of life.”

The Officer's Ward

Marc Dugain. Translated by Howard Curtis. New York: Soho Press, 2001, 136 pp. \$21.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Glenn Leinbach, United States Air Force Academy

As is the case with most war novels, *The Officer's Ward* is less about war and more about how war affects its victims. I recommend this book not so much for those interested in war literature—though it is set in, and driven by, war—but more for those readers captivated by mankind's ability to survive difficult circumstances. In this short novel Dugain tells the story of a railroad engineer turned Army officer whose war is cut short by an exploding German shell. Losing his mouth and nose, Adrien Fournier moves from despair to eventual acceptance of his situation. In this book, Dugain links two main ideas: whether a human can control his own destiny, and the notion that one can lose so much that nothing remains to be lost.

Fournier is a man who seems, at first glance, to passively accept whatever happens. The idea of fate appears early on, while he speaks with a woman he seduces. Comparing city to country life, he thinks to himself: “men of the soil know that they are mere links in a chain, a chain governed by simple laws. To delve any deeper is to torture yourself for nothing” (9). After being injured, he compares himself to a fly caught in a web, noting, “the fly has lost. It doesn't complain” (19). Dugain seems to point his reader in one direction: Fournier is a mere victim of circumstance, unable, like all men in war, to affect the outcome of his situation. This mirrors the fatalistic perspective found often in those at war and in the literature of war.

Interestingly, however, these passages are interlaced with the difficulty Fournier has accepting his circumstances. He notes early in his recovery that it was “the absurdity of my fate, and my powerlessness before it, that caused me more suffering than my facial wounds” (31). Though he feels “powerless” regarding his fate, Fournier certainly feels he can affect what happens to him. Retrieving his service pistol, he plans to end his life, noting, “it was a strange sensation to be at my own mercy” (48). Here he clearly influences his own fate, specifically by *not* pulling the trigger: “I had not the courage to kill myself. I had the courage *not* to kill myself” (50, italics mine). Fournier directly shapes his own fate, wresting power away from a faceless entity by making his own choices. And in the midst of his boasting that no one in the ward begrudges the situation (50), he often does so while alone in the dark. There is honesty behind the lie that he accepts his fate. The truth is that while he blusters about how he willingly acquiesces, he still struggles with it when the lights are out and he is alone with his thoughts, a weapon close by. Regardless of his horrific wound, Fournier is, at this point, exactly like the rest of us.

Along with the idea of fighting (or accepting) one's situation goes the notion that one can lose so much that nothing remains. Fournier experiences no emotion when he sees his reflection for the first time: "the image . . . did not affect me. I felt no desire to cry, in fact I was not troubled at all" (45). Here Dugain presents the first aspect of the idea that one can lose everything. Fournier feels his future and all happiness are lost and accepts that he will never be whole again. Later, he notes the men in the ward are possibly the lowest of the low, thinking "only the dead could envy us" (50). Out of this despair, though, grows the second, more interesting aspect of this theme. The men eventually stumble onto a surprising sense of well-being:

We had that feeling of extreme freedom which is the prerogative of those who no longer need to care about their image and who derive from their proximity to death and the daily cohabitation with suffering a kind of detachment from all those things that make men so limited and petty. (126)

Fournier encapsulates this concept when he says the ward's occupants "feared nothing because they had nothing to lose. Our detachment impressed everyone. We were taken for wise men" (130). He realizes there can be joy within tragedy, and feels his eventual marriage and the birth of their daughter, both unimaginable in the ward, are undeserved blessings. He and his comrades replace their normal faces with a heightened sense of self-worth, something most people with normal faces do not enjoy. Although he struggled with his fate in the quiet and dark hours of the hospital, he and his fellow officers can now, years later, sleep through the night, owners of "a self-assurance and gaiety that became widely known" (130). The lessons he learns by necessity are seldom internalized by those of us fortunate enough to avoid such tragedy.

Though set in World War I, *The Officer's Ward* is not a typical "war novel," such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. There are no mortar shells exploding in the dark of night, no foxholes sheltering wounded men, no mustard gas creeping toward trenches filled with doomed men. Instead, Dugain's novel serves as a rally point for those suffering the same fate as Fournier. At the same time, Dugain provides a quiet window into the healing process (both physical and psychological) for those who have not endured the same thing. Those untouched by such tragedy often whistle past the graveyard while brave men like Fournier directly confront their fears by thriving in the midst of inhumane circumstances.

Killing Ground: Photographs of the Civil War and the Changing American Landscape

John Huddleston. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, 185 pp., index, \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Matthew Stewart, Boston University

John Huddleston's book is a meditation on the meaning of place in America. It is organized as a series of juxtapositions, with facing pages containing carefully organized pairs of photographic plates. On one side there is a black and white period photograph taken during the American Civil War, while on the other is a color photograph taken in recent years at the same site as the original. The photographer took the contemporary shots at the same time of year, and insofar as possible, the same day as the "originals"—originals not being quite the correct word, since the modern pictures seldom seek to duplicate or reproduce the subject matter of the older black and whites in any literal fashion, though often there is a formal continuity or repetition of form clearly visible. The modern prints were developed from 8" X 10" film taken through an old-fashioned, large wooden camera. The photographer's technological empathy did not extend to the use of glass plate negatives and nineteenth-century development salts and emulsions, although his introduction includes some interesting remarks on the ramifications of the long exposure times necessitated by these antiquated materials. Each plate receives a caption on its own page, stating the place and the date of the original with a brief description of the subject and a count of total American casualties (that is, Union and Confederate combined).

The modern photographs must often have cost their author a great deal of research. For example, the late-November 1863 battle at Fort Sanders in Knoxville is represented with a war-time photograph of its defensive earth works, a series of berms and trenches with a lone figure standing atop a large, flattened work in the background. The contemporary photograph at the site is labeled "Position of the Union Right, First Line, in Front of Fort Sanders," a location of particular specificity, which may have been arrived at by luck in the form of a commemorative plaque or historical marker at that site, but more likely was obtained only after sifting through some combination of local and national records. The contemporary photograph appears to be taken in a typical sort of light industrial "park," the type of which can be seen in any sort of small American city, with chain-link fences, telephone poles, parking lots, dumpsters and flat, nondescript buildings—a scene not remotely beautiful and verging on the seedy. Such an area is not quiveringly evocative of History, and driving through it, one would be surprised to find a commemorative marker (though, granted, one finds them in unexpected places).

One issue presents itself as immediately relevant to the book. Of late a good many efforts—some relatively well publicized—have been staged to preserve historical sites from commercial and residential development, including Civil War battlefields. These efforts develop quite often into local, and sometimes national, political hot potatoes. About them the author says nothing directly in his introduction or his photographs, though the pictures obviously reveal that many small battlefields are locations of everyday modern activity. There is a pair of photos on pages 38 and 39 which capture the very stereotype of developers vs. preservationists political contention, with the site of Fort Sedgwick (at appalling Petersburg) now the site of a Kmart. Several photos make clear that what might have been set aside as hallowed ground is now the site of a motel or gas station, while sometimes the area remains a field or stand of woods. Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga is a National Military Park run by the National Parks Service. Ruff's Mill near Smyrna, Georgia, a three-day battle where "only" 470 men fell, is depicted as the site of a small-town crossroads strip mall, surely commemorated with a roadside plaque, in the usual manner of the state of Georgia, but hardly the site of pilgrimage or ACW-inspired tourism.

In regards to the question of what is to be remembered and what forgotten or disregarded, the weakness of photography as a rationally discursive and contextually informed medium is sometimes evident. The pair of photographs for the battle of New Hope Church, for example, is remarkable for the parallels in compositional form that Huddleston has been able to achieve; however, the modern photograph's feel, perhaps its likely "message," is bound to mislead many viewers. It depicts a kudzu-infested lot with the rust-spotted rear end of a pickup truck jutting into the frame over a weedy area that seems to form a neglected, dirt-packed parking spot. The picture gives the impression of an unintended, even forgotten non-mark on the landscape despite the fact that some 4,700 casualties fell at New Hope Church in three days (the battle was one of Sherman's few miscalculations). Yet New Hope Church is actually the recipient of a good deal of commemorative attention, including a tidy visitor's center at nearby Pickett's Mill, a related web site, printed materials for teachers and students, and regularly scheduled commemorative and educational activities. The issue in Paulding County, Georgia does not seem to be a lack of public display regarding Civil War battles.

Lest the previous paragraph seem to indict the author-photographer of tententiousness or, possibly, even bad faith, it should be made clear that he proposes to make no pointed argument with the photographs. His only agenda is the very general one of a call to pay attention, and the feel provided by the individual photographs and the book's set-up is as much artistic as it is documentary, indeed, more so. As for tendencies, the expected tone of "the modern world is trashy" is frequently evident, but often is not, the author's passing remarks on the disgusting amount of trash he encountered in his photographic journeys notwithstanding. Juxtaposed are: amputated feet with a Kentucky bluegrass pasture, a dead boy soldier and a stand of trees and grass (another commemoration of awful Petersburg), a skeletal prisoner of war and a stand of Louisiana live oaks. So, while the modern world is often made to look flatly ugly (as in the Knoxville photograph described above), rusty, trashy, vulgar, ignorant, dilapidated, heedless, the war produced grim

and violent images that reflect the gross failures of that era. Only nature is beyond moral judgment here. It as if the sites left to nature can produce something pleasing to the eye, but if left to man's invention, little that is aesthetically pleasant can come of things. The best to be hoped for might be something tidy and utilitarian, as in the above-mentioned photograph taken at Ruff's Mill or the little pre-fab looking Resaca, Georgia, Church of God.

The most provocative pairings would seem to transcend arguments about the obviously ugly and inferior. The Union dead and battlefield debris are shown paired with the Gettysburg College practice football field. Again, the formal similarities are remarkable: a flat field with a tree-lined horizon as the vanishing point. On one field lie the motionless bodies, frozen in time, bound never to move on their own again, but only awaiting to be moved one last time. This is one of the archetypal ACW photos included by the author. On the facing modern photo, the football field is broken with the still forms of blocking sleds, pads and goalposts, with several stone plinth and column memorials far in the distance.

Viewers will no doubt see the football equipment variously: as silly and trivializing, perhaps, an obvious reminder of the link between sport and militarism that has grown strong since the Civil War. The ironically inclined viewer will impute a mindlessness to those who practice on this field. Alternatively, the picture might be seen as a token that American life has gone on and young men now battle each other more benignly and voluntarily on fields that soaked the blood of their counterparts from a different age. Other cultures have shown no hesitation at playing games on even their most sacred sites. Doing the same in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, is therefore not necessarily a callous or heedless act. Whether the current activities on this field (which actually looks lonely and therefore joyless in the photo) are enjoyed as "mere" recreation or participate in an unacknowledged perpetuation of male warrior culture remains open to debate.

"I have made photographs . . . concerned with the long-term results" of the war, Huddleston writes in his breezily informative introduction. While he clearly wishes us to think about the past, his best pairings inspire no easy conclusions as to what those long-term results truly are.

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