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# The Darkest Nation: American Melancholia in Modernist Narratives of the First World War

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THE DARKEST NATION: AMERICAN MELANCHOLIA  
IN MODERNIST NARRATIVES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Department of English

by

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“One may also speak of melancholy states or nations.”

- Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. DEAD CENTER: THE IRONY OF NEUTRALITY IN WILLA CATHER'S <i>ONE OF OURS</i> .....	24
3. FORGOTTEN RACE: NICK ADAMS'S MECHANIZED WAR.....	60
4. BORDERLINE ROMANCE: THE INCEST PLOT IN H.D.'S <i>KORA AND KA</i> AND F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S <i>TENDER IS THE NIGHT</i> .....	102
5. MARTIAL FUTURES: GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF WAR.....	136
CONCLUSION.....	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	186
VITA.....	198

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation, entitled *The Darkest Nation: American Melancholia in Modernist Narratives of the First World War*, re-conceptualizes U.S. modernism by attending to how the historical event of WWI inaugurated melancholia, or sustained grief, as the cornerstone of a new form of nationalism. Scholars have focused either on how consolatory mourning bolstered patriotism or how melancholia led to the demise of such an imagined community and to the growth of cosmopolitanism. I consider, however, an American modernist commitment to the nation of loss expressed, surprisingly enough, in narratives about noncombatants. For a country that entered the military conflict near its end, noncombatancy (in the form of political neutrality and survivor's guilt) shapes the literary contours of America's melancholy wartime and postwar identity.

In proposing a revised understanding of nationalism, I examine canonical modernist novels such as Willa Cather's *One of Ours* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* and understudied works including H.D.'s story *Kora and Ka*, Ernest Hemingway's story sequence *In Our Time*, and Gertrude Stein's book *The Geographical History of America*. Overall, the project traces a pivotal shift in narratives about nationalist melancholia by exploring the complexities and even contradictions of noncombatancy. Initially a strategy of political neutrality adapted by modernists into a mode of narrative irony incompatible with mourning, by the end of the project it becomes a way for modernists to describe how the nation actually leads the charge to initiate senseless world wars solely to rekindle its citizens'—and writers'—patriotism. Whether through prewar neutrality that forestalls consolatory mourning or through postwar peace that remains ever forestalled, modernist American literature develops a dark, melancholy brand of nationalist sentiment formed at moments when character identity becomes most untenable, warfare most irreparable, and postwar future most unfathomable.

## INTRODUCTION

More than a century since the outbreak of the First World War and on the threshold of the armistice anniversary, the WWI Centennial Commission is making plans for a new memorial to be built in Washington D.C., just steps from the White House, in honor of the country's virtuous mission and the soldiers who died to fulfill it. The architect Joe Weishaar and sculptor Sabin Howard have proposed a monument park composed of green spaces, statues, and 137-foot long ornamental walls. Each cubic foot of these walls will represent one of the American soldiers killed in battle during the war. As the centerpiece of the memorial, an 81-foot long "Wall of Remembrance" will feature 23 relief sculptures of combat scenes alongside quotes from politicians such as President Woodrow Wilson and writers including Ernest Hemingway. Entitled "The Weight of Sacrifice," the memorial "is a space for freedom built upon the great weight of sacrifice. The allegorical idea that public space and public freedom are hard won through the great sacrifice of countless individuals in the pursuit of liberty provides the original design concept for this project" (Weishaar and Howard). The proposal echoes platitudes—home of the free because of the brave; if not for us, you would all be speaking German—but those by no means make the memorial insignificant. Especially in the shadow of an ever-growing cynicism about the country's participation in the seemingly never-ending "war on terror," the designers have altered the idea of WWI to fit present circumstances. Although the War in Afghanistan and the War in Iraq have officially ended, they have contributed to the now ongoing Iraqi Civil War against the newly formed ISIS, more recent terrorist attacks against Syrian refugees and the citizens of both Paris and Brussels, and a resignation that we live in the shadow of wartime without end. Rather than symbolize WWI as a war to end all wars, Howard and Weishaar suggest that honorable and just wars needed to be waged in the early twentieth century just as they do today.

In *The Darkest Nation: American Melancholia in Modernist Narratives of the First World War*, I argue that many modernist writers, including some of those whose quotes will be etched into the “Wall of Remembrance,” constructed a literary war memorialization quite at odds with the national sculpture that will be under construction starting in 2017. The memorial misses a key aspect of the country’s engagement in the war. The U.S. spent most of the war as a neutral party or noncombatant nation, not a belligerent. Rather than suffering a staggering number of casualties like the other countries, it only entered the war near the end, after a drawn-out, nearly four-year period of neutrality. Even when Wilson finally declared war on Germany in the spring of 1917, many individuals who enlisted and trained for combat never actually made it over to the front lines. I contend that, rather than a series of combat images, the cultural memory of American involvement could, more often than not, be illustrated through its lack thereof. Noncombatancy, however, does not signal a complete turning away from national memorialization; rather, I argue that it signals a profound shift away from any consolation about the country’s mission that actually bolsters nationalism in modernist narratives.

Before outlining the concept of melancholy nationalism as it unfolded in modernist war writing, let me first turn to modernism itself. Of the terms that compose the subtitle to this project, modernism will be the least radically revised, which does not mean that it will not be redefined in the ensuing pages. No reader will, I think, be caught off-guard by the list of authors discussed: Willa Cather, H.D., F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein; nor will they be struck by the way I attribute the advent of the literary period to the First World War. By making such a statement, I do not mean to suggest that no trace of modernism existed before the war. Edwardian literature, for example, often illustrates the point that the established and reliable political, social, economic, and religious order was already crumbling, if not already on the verge of collapse, prior to the war. Likewise, modernist avant-



garde movements such as Futurism and Vorticism were well underway if not already finished before it began; however, it took the war to crystallize the cultural, political, and aesthetic upheaval nascent in the pre-war period. Throughout this project, I expand upon the ambiguities of that literary periodization—how the foreshock of modernism occurred before the war whereas the event actually took place during and after it—in order to show how they have everything to do the fraught issue of U.S. military engagement. By examining American noncombatancy, I argue in due course that pre-war, wartime, and postwar temporal categories become conflated in ways that make it difficult to see both the origins of American modernism in the nation's belligerency and the way the endpoint of modernism might be bracketed off by WWII or even the other future wars that followed it.

An examination into modernism and the First World War cannot be separated, at least in this project, from the question of nationalism. John Breuilly notes the importance of WWI, particularly the political fallout in its wake, as significant to the rise of nationalism as a subject of scholarly inquiry: “Nationalism as such first attracted attention by historians because of its political significance in the aftermath of the First World War” (3). From beginning to end, then, WWI has been tied to the rise of nations, spread of nationalism, and the development of the latter as a subject of critical attention. The escalation of the conflict was rooted in nationalism through diplomatic policies and imperialist practices that have their origins in the 19th century. After the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, European leaders met at the “Congress of Vienna” to establish a long-term peace, an arguably successful plan that left the continent free of major, large-scale violence for nearly one hundred years. In addition to restoring territories acquired during the recent conflicts, the Congress also reshaped nations in order to create a balance or equilibrium of power. Such actions were often criticized for disregarding the national will of the people, but they also had unforeseen consequences by consolidating and strengthening that same

collective will. The Congress created a German Confederation by greatly condensing the nearly 400 states of the Holy Roman Empire into a mere 38 states. The creation of the German Confederation and simplification of its constituent parts more easily made it possible, during the decades following, for a German nationalism to grow. At the same time, by creating a balance of power, the Congress paved the way for political alliance to take hold in order to limit the spread of war; these included Otto von Bismarck's Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary created in 1879, the Franco-Russian Alliance in 1894, and Russia's bilateral relations with Serbia. Likewise, the rise of nationalism and spread of political treaties went hand-in-hand with imperialist activities since most of these European countries also controlled territories in Africa and Asia.

One single event lit the spark that started the fire of warfare. On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. His murder developed into a worldwide affair because of the diplomatic and imperialistic aspects of nationalism. Attempting to establish a greater Serbian state, nationalists including the Black Hand were angered by the recent annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria. When they attacked, Russia joined forces alongside Serbia while the Dual Alliance compelled Germany to enter the fight and the Franco-Russian Alliance forced France to declare war on Germany. In addition to escalating conflict between major European forces, imperialist practices also drew territories, colonies, and dominions into the fray, creating an ever-expanding world war. At the end of the four-year conflict, the Treaty of Versailles led to the creation of new nation-states, including Czechoslovakia and Poland, the League of Nations that sought not a balance of power but a community of arbitrating nations, and the Fascist resurgence of German and Italian nationalism.

Nationalism, which Anthony D. Smith defines as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining [national] autonomy, unity and identity” (9), has often been tied, at least

tangentially, to the pervasive scholarly focus on mourning and melancholia in the modernist literature and culture during and after the war. Before discussing that link, let us first explore the way modernist thinkers and scholars have distinguished between the two psychic states. In *Modernism and Mourning*, Patricia Rae introduces the interrelatedness of these two subjects by claiming that during the modernist period, mourning and the “resistance” to it influenced the form and content of literary experimentation (13). Differentiating between mourning and resistance, which might be better referred to as melancholia, Rae echoes the tenets of Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917). Freud asserts, “mourners reinvest the freed libido in a new object, thereby accepting consolation in the form of a substitute for what has been lost and bringing the work of mourning to a decisive and ‘spontaneous’ end.” Near the end of the section on mourning, he reiterates the necessary or successful end that must occur and the freedom it entails: “the fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (245). Throughout the essay, Freud characterizes mourning as a normal grieving process by which people lose someone or something, grieve, and move on. In contrast to this normal condition, he defines melancholia as a kind of pathology. In addition to being able to lose an object of desire through death, the melancholic can also lose it through love. Rather than reinvest desire into a “new object,” the individual cannot successfully complete the grieving process because he cannot know what has really gone; the object of desire remains ever estranged to him. Unable to identify the person or thing he grieves, the individual indefinitely retains a profound sense of loss, a melancholy desire to keep the lost object ever close, a black bile—as the medieval world had imagined it<sup>1</sup>—through which to transmit an impossible love for something forever gone and forever unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) in which he overviews humoral discourse on melancholy during the medieval period. For example, he summarizes Jovianus Potanus’s description of melancholia as a hot or cold “black choler” and he states, “the general notion physiognomers give, be these: ‘black colour argues

Later, Freud would revisit the subject of his early essay in order to reassess and fundamentally redress the way he had initially characterized mourning and melancholia. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), he describes mourning *as* a melancholy activity. Noting the striking shift in Freud's thinking, Tammy Clewell avers, "Mourning [. . .] depends on creating a figure for the lost object and taking this figure into the structure of one's own identity in ways that constitute, decenter, and transform" (13). If the first type of mourning—as outlined in "Mourning and Melancholia"—might be considered a necessarily successful psychic event because, through it, an individual works through loss, then Freud's revision in *The Ego and the Id* transforms mourning into a decidedly unsuccessful activity. The individual does not recover from loss by redirecting desire toward a new object; instead, the loss actually redirects back toward the individual himself so that, much like the previously described pathological melancholic, he becomes transformed by the encounter. Thus, in Freud's later work, mourning becomes "an interminable labor, a process of sustaining and continually refiguring our attachments to loss" (Clewell 13).

Despite the way Freud's later writing conflates mourning and melancholia, turning the former into the latter, in the literary and historical responses to the First World War—both in the modernist period and in our own time—successful mourning rather than its unsuccessful, or melancholy counterpart, has taken precedence specifically when examining the relationship between the war and the "imagined community" of nationalism. For, as Dominick LaCapra suggests in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, consolatory mourning is a social phenomenon; or, better put, it is often a deeply personal activity that simultaneously prepares the individual to interact with others in better and more meaningful ways. LaCapra differentiates between mourning as "working through" and melancholia as a performative behavior or mood of "acting

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natural melancholy" (207, 208). He also refers to the medieval description of the disorder as "balneum diaboli, the devil's bath" (200).

out” that does not get the individual anywhere. Additionally, he states, “In line with Freud’s concepts, one might further suggest that mourning be seen not simply as individual or quasi-transcendental grieving but as a homeopathic socialization [. . .] that allow[s] for a measure of critical distance, change, renewal, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal” (66). In this longish, single sentence, LaCapra refers to society twice through his reference to “socialization” and “social life.” Society affords the mourning individual both the stick and carrot as he voyages through mourning. It becomes the “homeopathic” aid that helps him recover from loss and, due to his desire to resume social engagements, one of the many goals of that recovery.

During and after the war, the social aspects of mourning led to the renewal of nationalist thoughts and feelings. Like LaCapra’s two-pronged approach to society, the nation became the means and the end of a mourning process through which citizens found that they could share in and attempt to recuperate together. It not only found novel ways to manage grief but actually required the raw material for melancholia—death and other kinds of loss—in order to institute a collective mourning processing that would, as Yael Tamir notes, “strengthen communality” (227), that would in other words reinvigorate what Benedict Anderson refers to as the nation’s “unisonality” (145) through speeches praising bravery, prayers extolling goodness, and monuments symbolizing sacrifice.

In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, for instance, the historian Jay Winter takes an avowedly traditional approach to WWI and mourning by arguing that, in the wake of violence, citizens often chose to heal by creating nationalist “sites.” Early on, Winter sets his project against the more “modern” interpretation of the war as expressed in Paul Fussell’s landmark study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. As Fussell claims, the irony and absurdity of the war “reversed the Idea of Progress” (8). In contrast to Fussell, Winter examines the war as a

remarkably less ironic, absurd, or modern event.<sup>2</sup> Challenging the argument that it was a historical rupture that birthed a modern world, he examines an ostensibly simplistic mode of remembering, one that expands what might be considered “modern,” since “modernists didn’t obliterate traditions; they stretched, explored, and reconfigured them in ways that alarmed conventional artists, writers, and the public at large” (3). Attending to “the cutting edge of ‘modern memory’” which was “melancholic, but [. . .] could not heal,” Winter proposes that “traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind” (5). In the chapter, “Communities in Mourning,” he examines the affective networks that developed around sites of war bereavement: “Families were torn apart by the war. Nothing could have reversed this tide of separation and loss. But after 1914 there was as well a gathering together, as people related by blood or by experience tried to draw strength from each other during and after the war. The bonds thus formed were powerful and in many cases durable” (29). Later, in his discussion of post-catastrophic forms of consolation, Winter turns to national similarities and differences regarding bereavement: “Each nation developed its own language of commemoration, but some features were universal. One was the tendency to locate the men of 1914-18 in the long history of martial virtue” (82). Winter immediately describes how monuments to military officers—whether Marlborough, Nelson, or Hindenburg—as well as memorials for the common soldier—most remarkably the cenotaphs and Tombs of Unknown Soldiers—existed in various countries and signified the integrity and bravery of the nation as a whole.

Crafted as literary, cultural, and above all national products to help ease grief, these monuments as well as speeches, prayers, and other expressions of mourning are also works of

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<sup>2</sup> Rather than interpret WWI as the historical event that inaugurated modernism, Winter deems the end of WWII as a more lasting rupture: “In contrast to the post-1918 period, the rupture of language and imagery which followed the Second World War was profound and enduring” (18).

narrative. They are preoccupied with showing and telling events, putting these events together in a coherent form with a beginning and end, and, above else, coming to an ending or conclusion to both the story and the grieving process. If, as Pericles Lewis claims, modernist representations of nationalism took narrative form in the novel genre, then attentiveness to the wartime and postwar culture of mourning heightens our awareness to both the structure and the outcomes of that narrative process.

In addition to a kind of narrative arc that moves from war death to national recovery, modernist writers and thinkers offered a plot twist. Conciliatory mourning that turned loss into patriotic virtues like bravery and self-sacrifice for the renewal of nationalist sentiment also led to a disillusionment with the nation since, not only were such virtues fundamental to violence in the first place, but citizens who also failed to register their loss appropriately might be turned away from national renewal altogether. Clewell observes, “the beliefs that promised to offer consolation in the wake of battlefield death were the very same beliefs that led to the wars outbreak and legitimation” (31). In other words, conciliatory virtues like bravery, self-sacrifice, and virtue itself might have helped individuals grieve the dead as national heroes, but they also spelled the demise of nationalism because those same beliefs and ideals were often interpreted as the cause of the carnage. Although asserting and richly complicating a traditional approach to mourning and modernism, Winter even concedes the fact that certain traditions began to falter. Writing specifically about the interwar period, he asserts, “[B]y no means all traditional languages survived the 1914-18 war and its aftermath intact. Slowly but surely, expressions of patriotism, or inhumanly idealized images of combat, suffering, and death as ‘glory,’ began to fade” (18). Fading out, nationalism often gave way to cosmopolitanism—whether it be a complete turn away from the nation or, in line with Julia Kristeva’s new universalist thinking, a

community of “nations without nationalism”—both in modernist culture and in scholarship on it.<sup>3</sup>

In *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*, for instance, Jessica Berman describes cosmopolitanism as a reaction to the prejudice and violence encouraged by modern nation-states. She examines a set of modernist writers who perceived historical and cultural “transformations that occasioned on the one hand an almost desperate effort to recoup community in the form of nationalism and fascism, and on the other hand an insistence on deepening cosmopolitanism” (3). In the early twentieth century, nations tried to desperately maintain more “totalitarian models” of community through “nativism, anti-Semitism, immigration restriction, proto-fascism, or unmodified patriarchal dominance.” In contrast to these racist, misogynist, and altogether violent acts of desperation, the cosmopolitan represents an alternate and more utopian community. Picking up on Berman’s point, Rebecca L. Walkowitz asserts in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* that “at the beginning of the twentieth century, modernist writers sought to measure various experiences of thinking and feeling globally, especially in the contexts of imperialism, patriotism, and world war” (5). Throughout her discussion of how the theme of modernism beyond the nation shows up in the stylistics of modernist writers as well as novelists such as Salman Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro who might be considered beyond the traditional periodization of modernism itself, Walkowitz identifies form broadly as “attitude, stance, posture, and consciousness” (2) but analyzes those categories primarily in terms of narrative. Examining the style of narratives, she elaborates on the positive historical and cultural aspects cosmopolitanism—including global citizenship, decolonization, and democratic individualism—and how they were embedded in literary form.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Nations Without Nationalism*, Kristeva refers to the problems surrounding a discourse of origins but, at the same time, the need for them.



Summarizing these two books—and scholarship on modernism and cosmopolitanism more generally—as idealistic in their goals misreads the utopian vision that Berman and Walkowitz propose. After all, Walkowitz endorses the need for scrutiny by advocating a critical cosmopolitanism and, as if anticipating that need, Berman suggests that modernist writers left behind a legacy of cosmopolitanism by articulating a narrative form of community often founded on isolation and fracture. Like utopia, then, the cosmopolitan community exists nowhere. It arises out of a desire to redress nationalism but cannot possibly because, as a utopian condition, it depends for its survival on its very impossibility. Such a characterization of modernist cosmopolitanism resembles Sanja Bahun’s recent articulation of “countermourning,” a neologism she uses to describe the modernist need to express melancholia in social (if not always or ultimately socially empowering) ways (9). Rethought as melancholy or countermournful, for lack of a better term, in its very utopian foundation, cosmopolitanism also shares conceptual common ground with works such as Wolf Lepenies’s groundbreaking *Melancholy and Society*. Deriving his concept from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, in which Robert Burton describes the psychological condition as a utopian one, Lepenies depends on “a dialectical and mutually constituting relationship between melancholy and utopia, one that can be traced through different historical moments, in which utopian thinking is motivated by the desire to find a remedy for melancholia” (Flatley 37). Like the cosmopolitan, then, the utopian impulse responds to melancholia by converting it into a mourning process; however, the work of mourning can only be successful to an extent because, at the end of that process, melancholy must still survive; that is, loss must not be worked through completely for the utopian impulse to remain existent.

If nationalism can be interpreted as an ideological doctrine reinforced by mourning and cosmopolitanism can be interpreted as both an outgrowth of mourning and melancholia, then the persistence of loss in real and fictive cosmopolitan communities starts to reveal how melancholia

might just sustain community—even the imagined communities of nationalism itself. Before turning to how we might begin to understand melancholy nationalism in American modernist war writing, let us first examine how scholars—predominately poststructuralist and queer theorists—have connected melancholia and community in thought-provoking ways that have often left nationalism under-theorized but, at the same time, have urged for a reconsideration of it. In *The Inoperative Community*, for instance, Jean-Luc Nancy makes the counter-intuitive argument that community might best be achieved and sustained through failure. Clarifying his point, he contends that once a community identifies itself as a single thing—and thus makes itself into a product or a “work”—it loses the ability for separate individuals to exist in common.<sup>4</sup> As such, “it loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together with a being *of* togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. Community is made of what retreats from it” (xxxix; emphasis original). Nancy’s conceptualization of community contrasts with Georges Bataille’s notion of lacerations, which he develops throughout *The Unavowable Community*. For Nancy, “laceration” problematically foregrounds a distinction between the inside and the outside, one’s interiority versus the exterior world. Rather than a lacerating wound, Nancy uses the example of an open mouth that, without being exposed to the outside world, would not exist. Following that line of reasoning, the self cannot be contrasted to an exterior world precisely because exposure to it produces a sense of self in the first place. As such, community exists through singularities and, therefore, prior to any knowledge of what might make each person who or what they are (30). Alluding to Freud’s ethical shift from successful mourning to perennial, resistant, or unsuccessful mourning—or melancholia—Nancy argues that community

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<sup>4</sup> As Sue-Im Lee has recently stated in her discussion of Nancy, “when [. . .] unity is founded on the fact of what ‘we’ have in common—in history, self-interest, life experience, objective, and so on—the primary fact of being in-common is elided. [. . .] Nowhere is this danger more strident, Nancy argues, than in the discourse of single body community” (15).

must remain inoperative or unworkable, melancholically acting out loss in common rather than mournfully working through it together.

In the same vein as Nancy, Judith Butler begins *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* by rhetorically asking, “What allows us to encounter one another?” It turns out the answer is not what one might expect; instead of the ability to mourn, or the “power” that individuals and societies can collectively wield through psychological recuperation, grief actually allows people to encounter each other. For Butler, grief shows us “the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide. [. . .] We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. This seems so clearly the case with grief” (23). As Butler describes, loss radically alters the way we understand the world and our place in it. After the death of a friend, for instance, we are at a loss for words that might provide some sort of meaning that sums up their life and death, a summation that might also provide meaning for who we are in the wake of loss. The inexplicability of grief—the loss for words that comes with loss—reveals to us, as if for the first time, the inseparable bonds between individuals. Unable, like Nancy, to “operate” or function properly, to know the other or the self, grieving individuals act out their effects on each other and, consequently, reveal how relationships retain their power well after irrevocable loss has taken hold.

Butler’s insistence on melancholy “acting out” as the relational performativity of identity echoes her other, more well-known, scholarship in gender and queer studies, suggesting the ways queer community might be envisaged as melancholy, or melancholy community as always already queer. In her moving reading of gay and lesbian culture and history in the age of modernism, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love extends arguments made by Miranda Joseph (in *Against the Romance of Community*) and Christopher

Nealon (in *Foundlings*) by reflecting on how death and loss might not merely oppose but become quite foundational to love, friendship, and other kinds of fellow feeling. Writing about the potential negative effects of a growing awareness about and tolerance of queer identities, she shows how the desire to assuage the historical shame of gay culture represented in pre-Stonewall literature encourages misunderstandings about the community represented in modernist narratives and the one evoked across time between writers and scholars. Just as readers “feel backward,” turning from the present to the past, in order to comfort their modernist subjects, these individuals—writers, narrators, and characters—similarly turn backward away from such contact. In their depression, anxiety, and shame, they turn away from interaction: “While we may try to give them the gift of modern sexual identity and queer community, what they have to give us is an inheritance of historical anxiety and longing” (98). By describing the queer refusal of community, Love actually articulates a form of queer community based on shared experiences of loss.

Critical attention to melancholy community has also led to a necessary sea change in discussions about the nation in modernist American literature. As Jonathan Flatley observes in the epigraph to this project, “one may also speak of melancholy states or nations” (37). For a nation to become melancholy and still retain a sense of its identity, unity, and autonomy depends, to some degree, on what Robert H. Wiebe refers as the two greatest strengths of nationalism: permeability and adaptability (6). Nationalism not only allows grievous situations to permeate it, thus adapting them to better ends through, but it also adapts *to* melancholia. At the beginning of *National Melancholy: Mourning and Opportunity in Classic American Literature*, Mitchell Breitwieser extends this thought process by proposing a series of provocative questions: “[H]ow is the understanding of oneself as participant in or particle of a nation affected when there is weakness, vicissitude, or fracture in the idea of the nation? Does weakness in the idea of the

nation install weakness in individuals [. . .]? By what means does the precariousness of the national subject get cycled back into a renewed dependence on, allegiance to, nation?" (3). In order to answer these questions, he differentiates between two kinds of futurity integral to understanding the American nation: the "not-yet" and the "no-more." Drawing on Anderson's assertion that the nation is an "imaginary compensation," Homi Bhabha's that it "fills the void," and Eric Hobsbawm's that "Americans are those who wish to be," Breitwieser contends that what characterizes a nation as distinctly American is the actual absence of it. He asserts, "This feeling of the absence of the nation is historically produced by the deep belief that there ought to be—and that there could be—a nation, that is, a political and spiritual object that compensates for the extreme losses that typify the experience of modernity" (278). Yet, if the nation always exists as a utopian "not-yet," a more perfect political entity that can temper grief and loss but always remains out of reach, then it also resembles the aforementioned discussion of Lepenies's melancholy society. Ranging from analyses of poetry, autobiography, and fiction in the writings of Anne Bradstreet, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Fitzgerald, and Jack Kerouac, Breitwieser claims:

woe begets woe: misery makes company; those whose life-spot has been touched seek the life-spots of others; [. . .] the melancholiac's alacrity when cruelty calls—whether directed toward the self, in acts of sacrifice, or toward another, in holy revenge—explains [. . .] the hardy persistence of America's historical nightmares, the long strings or series of self-replicating and self-proliferating atrocities. (51)

Interpreting "classic" works of Puritan, Transcendentalist, and Beat literature, he perceives them all as part of a long tradition of American grief literature, a form of writing that refuses consolation in favor of irreconcilable loss. The utopianism of "not-yet" changes into "no-more," diminishing certain idealistic features of the nation without losing hold of the fact that bonds can still be retained and even forged anew in this different, more miserable, form of community. The sheer range of Breitwieser's work as it moves from Puritanism to postmodernism, however,

forces him at times to discount historical subtleties that would only enrich a reading of national melancholy.

In *The Darkest Nation*, I extend Breitwieser's argument but not his range. Rather than trace an idea from Puritan poetry to postmodern fiction, I focus specifically on the historical, cultural, and formal subtleties of modernist narrative, nuances that can rather easily go missing in discussions of psychoanalytic subjects like mourning and melancholia. Throughout the project, I re-conceptualize modernism by attending to how the historical event of WWI inaugurated melancholia as the cornerstone of a new form of nationalism. For a country that entered the war near its end, noncombatancy—including political neutrality and survivor's guilt--shapes the literary contours of America's melancholy wartime and postwar identity. In proposing a revised understanding of nationalism, I examine the intersection of race, gender, and cosmopolitanism in canonical modernist narratives such as Cather's *One of Ours* and Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* and understudied ones including H.D.'s story *Kora and Ka*, Hemingway's story sequence *In Our Time*, and Stein's memoir *Wars I Have Seen*. I argue that modernist American literature develops a dark, melancholy brand of nationalist sentiment formed at moments when character identity becomes most untenable, warfare most irreparable, and a postwar future most unfathomable.

As a distinctly American trait in wartime and postwar politics and literature, the country's belated entrance into combat inspired melancholy nationalism in modernist narrative. In *The Pen and the Gun*, Keith Gandall shows how many Americans wanted to enlist, or successfully did enlist as doughboys, only to fail to gain combat experience. As he claims, modernist American narrative evidences a "fiction of mobilization" through which writers evoked "their 'mobilization wounds,' their own failure to matter to the army or to become heroic soldiers" (13). The British Empire suffered over one million deaths, the French nearly one-and-a-half million, and the

German Empire around two million. Many more were wounded: over two million in Britain and four-and-a-quarter million in both France and Germany. The U.S. lost a little over one hundred thousand soldiers during the war years; two hundred thousand came back wounded. In fact, fewer Americans died in the war than did from the Spanish Flu.

Comparing these statistics does not somehow prove that fewer casualties would have meant less mourning, especially not for the families who lost loved ones or for the soldiers who came back physically and psychically damaged. On the contrary, numerous American modernist writers explored mobilization, wounding, and combat death (such as William March in his novel about life as a Marine, *Company K*) and scholars have likewise perceptively examined the effects of battlefield massacre on the aesthetics of American modernism (most recently Pearl James's *The New Death*). Gandal's and James's arguments represent two different perspectives on the war by focusing either on the majority who failed to mobilize as guardians of their nation and the few, relatively speaking, who did mobilize only to become acquainted with death and disenchantment. Throughout this project, I chart a middle course between these two poles by interpreting noncombatancy—in the form of political neutrality, racialized melancholia, survivor's guilt, and mediated geography—as a kind of loss that bolsters, however tenuously, a sense of the nation in modernist narrative. While it can be viewed as a somewhat privileged position by which an individual stands a chance of escaping much of the suffering, loss, and grief associated with war, noncombatancy can just as easily be likened to melancholia, especially in the texts that interest me here. Like the melancholiac who cannot properly work through a sorrowful event but incorporates it into his own identity or ego, the noncombatant cannot gain access to calamitous combat experience but remains distant from the war, often hindered from envisioning it in any meaningful way. As well, through survivor's guilt, the individual does not feel he has missed out on the chance to take part in a gloriously patriotic event like combatants

from other belligerent countries but—able to perceive the detrimental effects of combat from afar—that he has lost out on the chance to lose everything on the battlefield.

In light of these remarks about noncombatancy and the earlier discussion of queerness as a community of loss, it is not necessarily surprising that, of the five modernist writers analyzed in the body chapters, three (Cather, H.D., and Stein) were either homosexual or bisexual and a fourth (Hemingway) flirted with non-normative gender identity his entire life. That being said, readers coming to this project anticipating scholarship at the intersection of queer theory, nationalism, and modernism will be sorely disappointed. Only two chapters address such issues head on. The one on Hemingway brings a discussion of gender and sexuality to the fore while also subordinating it to an examination of race issues in the writer's war fiction; likewise, the chapter section on H.D. quickly considers her childhood desire to "twin," which one might argue represents an early bisexual tendency. Yet, however latent in the project, queer theory necessarily energizes my understanding of noncombatancy and its relation to mourning. Either as civilians on the home front or enlisted soldiers who never mobilized, noncombatants often troubled traditional gender identities. In modernist literature, female characters distant from war feel it in ways hardly separable from their male counterparts in the trenches while shell shock and trauma make those same men feel effeminate. By interrogating gender and thus conflating home and war fronts, modernist writers challenge military conflict as a contained event that takes place at certain latitudes and longitudes and for a certain period of time easily demarcated from or bracketed off by longish periods of peace.

Progressing in a roughly chronological manner, from modernist writers who looked back on pre-war neutrality to those who made prognostications about future wars, the project traces a pivotal shift in thinking about American noncombatancy. Initially a political maneuver that brought the country ever so belatedly into the war while keeping its nationalism tied to a kind of



prewar pluralism, by the end of the project it becomes a way to understand the country's belligerency, even reinforcing what I want to identify as an American hyper-belligerency in which the nation no longer begrudgingly engages in world wars after they have already begun but instead leads the charge to continually initiate them in modernist literature. Whether in the form of a prewar peace that foreshadows catastrophe or a postwar peace that remains ever forestalled, the sweep of warfare in certain modernist narratives produces a sense of national community inconceivable without it.

In the first chapter, "Dead Center: The Irony of Neutrality in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*," I argue that the ironic tone in Cather's war novel, published in 1922, lies at the heart of her literary nation-building. The reception of the novel has revolved around the question of irony: does the novel promote its protagonist Claude Wheeler's wartime idealism (for example, through a celebration of his desire to become the nation's Unknown Soldier) or does it point out his patriotic naivety? As this question shows, irony and nationalism have long remained mutually exclusive in critical discussions of the text. By placing *One of Ours* in the context of President Wilson's political non-intervention as imbued in two speeches—his declaration of war and his "America First" speech—in addition to Wilson's own literary theory, I argue that irony represents a key aspect of political and literary neutrality and that the novel depicts the lingering, wartime effects of pre-war neutrality, thus forging a kind of nationalist melancholia in response to the protagonist's combat death. By remaining impartial to all perspectives, the narrative responds melancholically rather than mournfully to the protagonist's death and consequently embodies a neutral counter-nationalism.

Whereas the chapter on Cather explores a protagonist who makes it over to the frontlines, Chapter 2, "Forgotten Race: Nick Adams's Mechanized War," examines the relationship between Ernest Hemingway's protagonist-combatant and a whole population colored in a

negative sense as noncombatants throughout the short story sequence *In Our Time* (1925). Whereas the sequence assembles numerous vignettes and stories in a pastiche-like pattern that resembles the newspaper collage cover that Hemingway's friend Bill Bird had designed for the first iteration of the book, the *in our time* published in 1924, I focus specifically on two stories: one that appears last in the sequence ("Big Two-Hearted River") and the other that was actually written last ("The Battler"). Placed midway through the book, "The Battler" provides Hemingway's final word on the war theme buried within the pages of his celebrated fishing story. I argue that through the characterization of the African Americans in the narrative, Hemingway points to a historical wartime and postwar double bind in which blacks were often excluded from combat experience at the same that war trauma became racialized. As a catastrophic event that never personally affects the African American character during combat—because he has not been allowed either in real life or in cultural memory to participate in war—trauma actually becomes what I want to refer to as racial melancholia, a loss redirected from the combatant who did the suffering to the character who, willingly or not, suffers for it. In contrast to Bugs, Nick constructs a white ideal that engages bravely and never traumatically in combat versus black characters imagined as soft and easily violable. These two aspects of the short story sequence—racial melancholia and ideal whiteness—foreground the construction of a postwar national identity and unity inseparable from the strategic racialization and subsequent sexualization of black identity. At the same time, though, the very mutability of blackness in the sequence leads to the liminality of race in "Big Two-Hearted River," a story where Nick attempts to recover from the war by forgetting about it and thus becoming the kind of noncombatant that he previously associates with racial melancholia.

In Chapter 3, "Borderline Romance: The Incest Plot in H.D.'s *Kora and Ka* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*," focuses on incest, a subject that receives passing attention in

the analysis of Hemingway's "The Battler." Both H.D.'s and Fitzgerald's narratives share a lot in common. They were published in 1934, derive from experiences on the French Riviera, describe the lives of war noncombatants suffering from survivor's guilt, and, most importantly, utilize an incest plot. By accessing Fitzgerald's novel alongside what H.D. referred to as a "long-story," I suggest that both writers position a kind of melancholy nationalism as the furthest limit of their narratives on incest. Whereas scholars have argued that *Tender is the Night* marks Fitzgerald's shift away from the nation and toward a more cosmopolitan community, reading the book alongside H.D.'s shows that, through the theme of incest, these narratives return to the familiarity of nationalism, to a romance that—however perverse—can and must occur within the national family. Mother-son incest becomes integral to understanding that narrative arc; in doing so, it becomes a lens through which to examine a different kind of incest plot in Fitzgerald's novel, one that shares narrative space with the much-discussed father-daughter romance but also reverses its implications.

The final chapter, "Martial Futures: Gertrude Stein and the Geographical History of War," extends an interest in the relationship between the national and the cosmopolitan by examining three texts from the 1930s and 40s: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *The Geographical History of America*, and *Wars I Have Seen*. By putting her autobiography and memoir in the context of her book on geography, I argue that Stein explores how ever-repeating warfare has its historical starting point in U.S. noncombatancy during WWI. From her vantage point as a noncombatant expatriate during two world wars, Stein initially positions geography as one of the chief ways during wartime for individuals to achieve any semblance of certainty about what they can know and feel about far-off conflict. Waiting for news from newspapers and telegrams that arrive periodically and gossip that, though always at-hand, cannot be trusted, individuals turn from mediatedness to the land in order to find meaning. Yet, as Stein shows in

these three texts, geography might initially provide a more stable way of understanding violence but, communicated through media such as maps and landscape painting, ultimately reveals the un-navigability of WWI as both melancholy and nationalistic. Narrators, characters, writers, and readers must wander through military conflicts because—rather than signifying too little during a mediated waiting period—their meanings contradict in ways that must be repeated in new and different iterations of war.

In the conclusion, I end with William Faulkner's novel *A Fable* (1954). Often avoided as one of the writer's worst books, the war narrative weaves together various thematic strands analyzed in the previous chapters. Written by a modernist who, like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, failed to mobilize during the war, the novel explores tombs to Unknown Soldiers, African American experience, and cosmopolitanism, all in the context of a future Cold War. Throughout the novel the narrator recounts Jesus Christ's return to Earth as a WWI soldier who mutinies in order to stop the war; however, he dies during a barrage and ironically becomes the anonymous body of the Unknown Soldier. I argue that, as a Biblical/WWI/Cold War novel about a national war hero who in reality was anything but, the novel advances the notion of mourning-as-melancholia as integral to ever-repeating warfare. Unable to know the identity of the character who has been killed, citizens ironically mourn "Christ the deserter" as a hyper-nationalistic symbol. As such, the novel represents successful mourning as, at its core, a kind of missed mourning or melancholia. Consequently, the condition leads nations to continually engage in wars because, through combat, they differentiate between each other. Faulkner seems to advocate cosmopolitanism through his lack of distinction between the fighting nations. All countries make wars in order to define themselves against others; however, what might be most perplexing about the novel is that Faulkner interweaves a narrative about an African American and a stolen horse into the war novel set on the Western Front. Examining this text in reference

to the other chapters, I show that he conflates various wartimes in order to address the fact that future wars, including those that bookend the modernist period as well as those *post*-modernist or contemporary ones such as “the war on terror” that occur in our own time, must forever repeat and, more importantly, that their very repetition finds its historical source not in the ideas of liberty or justice etched on the walls of a soon-to-be-built memorial but in the American melancholia represented in modernist narratives of the First World War.

**DEAD CENTER: THE IRONY OF NEUTRALITY  
IN WILLA CATHER'S *ONE OF OURS***

Writing to Elizabeth Moorhead Vermorcken, one of her Pittsburgh acquaintances, Willa Cather derided the way readers thoroughly misinterpreted her recently published novel *One of Ours*: “Very few people seem able to regard it as a story—it’s [sic] friends as well as its foes will have it a presentation of “the American soldier” whereas its [sic] only the story of one” (*Selected Letters* 325). Rather than a novel about the doughboy in the abstract, the novel represented, at least in Cather’s mind, a specific protagonist, Claude Wheeler, whom she created as a stand-in for a real-life soldier, her cousin G.P. who had died in a battle at Cantigny in 1918.

Of course, it was easy for readers to miss that point. Claude begins the novel as a farm boy living in the small town of Frankfort, Nebraska. As a serious young man, he often feels hurt by his father Nat’s perennial humor and sarcasm; his mother has forced him to endure a religious education at Temple College; and his wife Enid spends most of her time helping his brother Bayliss hand out prohibition pamphlets or volunteering as a missionary in China. Alienated from his family and society, Claude flounders without purpose until he determines to enlist. As one of the first citizens of Frankfort to wear a doughboy uniform, Claude notices how the town folk view him with newfound respect. He trains at an Army camp, sails to the Western Front, and dies picturesquely from a bullet to the heart. After his commander telephones his mother to inform her of Claude’s demise, she receives letters he mailed home during his final days. For Mrs. Wheeler, these letters keep Claude alive not only because they seem written from the grave but also because they offer her consolation: “He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more” (1296). Claude starts out the novel lost but ends believing in America’s virtuous mission to save France from annihilation.

In her letter to Vermorcken, which hints at how to read the book, Cather employs a surprising barrage of combatant language to describe the literary battle raging between the novel's reviewers. She labels as "friends" those who support and "foes" those who oppose Claude's idealism. For Cather, pacifists compose a large portion of the latter camp. Unwilling to fight in the war, they nonetheless wage a rather vicious assault against her. Earlier in the correspondence, she compares them to "a swarm of hornets" and, scrawled out above the salutation, humorously mentions that she is "struggling [. . .] to keep the Pacifists from eating us up." Cather places herself and her novel outside of the conflict. In a letter that hints at how to read—or, at least, how to avoid misreading—the novel, she harkens back to Woodrow Wilson's policy of neutrality. As a novel that traces the shift from non-intervention to war engagement through its protagonist's upbringing, enlistment, and death, *One of Ours* remains ironically neutral.

Critics have not always picked up on Cather's irony. Many of her contemporary reviewers, including H.L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson, and Ernest Hemingway, criticized what they saw as an idealized war story. Mencken referred to the novel's "oceans of romance and blather" compared to the "bold realism" of other depictions of war, particularly John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*. He claimed that the representation of war in Cather's novel "has its thrills and even its touches of plausibility, but at bottom it is fought out, not in France, but on a Hollywood movie-lot" (142). Mencken did, however, separate the two settings of the narrative, seeing the Nebraska chapters as truer art than the war scenes. Likewise, in his October 1922 review of the novel, Edmund Wilson called *One of Ours* "a pretty flat failure," but not in the way Mencken had described it (qtd. in Woodress 333). As Travis Montgomery notes, "Significantly, Wilson did not find fault with the realism of Cather's war scenes. [. . .] For Wilson, the novel was not a failure of surface realism; he actually thought that the battle episodes exhibited

verisimilitude. What he considered fake was Claude's emotional response to the war. Thus for Wilson, *One of Ours* was an *affective* failure" (96-7; emphasis original). Wilson criticized Cather's construction of the protagonist Claude Wheeler's development throughout the war, not because of the war itself but as a result of what he saw as Claude's disingenuous reaction to it. Ernest Hemingway added to the negative criticism of *One of Ours*. Possibly jealous that Cather had won the Pulitzer, he wrote to Wilson in November of that year: "Somebody told me [e.e. cummings's *Enormous Room*] was a flop. Then look at *One of Ours*. Prize, big sale, people taking it seriously. You were in the war weren't you? Wasn't that last scene in 'Birth of a Nation.' I identified episode after episode, Catherized. Poor woman she had to get her war experience somewhere" (80). As Hemingway suggests in his letter, to "catherize" means to anesthetize war stories by giving them D.W. Griffith's epic brand of gas. Here, he refers to Griffith's famous American Civil War film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) while also hinting at the director's more recent WWI romance, *Hearts of the World* (1918), which depicts an American soldier who finds love while enlisting to save France. At the end of the film, after the American doughboys save a besieged, French town, they parade through the cheering streets. The scene switches to warships sailing back to the U.S., while the closing intertitle reads, "America!—Returning home after freeing the world from Autocracy and the horrors of war—we hope forever and ever."

Addressing his letter to Wilson, Hemingway curiously seeks agreement from a writer who, the year prior, had not found Cather's war scenes exaggerated at all. Possibly, Hemingway occupies a middle position between Mencken and Wilson. He elaborates on the former's short reference to Hollywood while also, in terms of the latter, interpreting the war scenes as idealized precisely because they are focalized through Claude's naïve perspective. Neither Hemingway, Mencken, nor Wilson entertain the idea that Claude might not be the fictional proxy for Cather.



Describing her as a “poor woman” too distant from the war to be able to adequately write about it, Hemingway seems to forget the great swath of war fiction written by individuals, such as Stephen Crane and Virginia Woolf, who had never set foot on battlefields. Identifying himself as a writer who actively engaged in warfare, he also conveniently forgets that he generalized about the war based on approximately three weeks of ambulance service before his wounding. In fact, he spent more time convalescing at the American Red Cross hospital in Milan than at the front lines. Whereas Hemingway exaggerated his own war experience, he fails to see the ways Cather capitalizes on her physical distance from the front by creating a “distant” narrative style. Deriding other readers for “taking it seriously,” he—like Mencken, Wilson, and countless others—takes the novel too seriously, missing Cather’s irony.

Starting in the late-twentieth century, readers began investigating that irony. Rather than equate Cather with Claude, they read the novel as a rebuke of naïve patriotism. Upon the publication of David Stouck’s *Willa Cather’s Imagination* in 1975, which demonstrated how Cather satirized Claude’s idealism, “the world of criticism on *One of Ours* broke in two” (Trout 4). Nearly a decade later, in his biography of Cather, James Woodress refers to the shortsightedness of many previous critics who “did not read the novel carefully to see that Cather had no illusions about the war.” He goes on to add that these “reviewers simply ignored the fact the novel is told mostly from Claude’s point of view and they assumed that Claude’s ideas were Cather’s” (326). Susan J. Rosowski extends Woodress’s argument, interpreting Claude as a “befuddled hero” and his search for self-importance and belonging as an anti-quest plot (87). To support this argument, she re-reads Mrs. Wheeler’s letter scene, arguing that Claude has been duped by a beautiful but illusory sense of patriotism, and his mother feels at least comforted by the fact that he died before disillusion could set in. By ending “with the idea that Claude is best out of a world so shattered,” Rosowski claims, “Cather continued the pattern of the novel:

affirmation, then denial” (108). In *Memorial Fictions*, Steven Trout places the novel alongside other kinds of memorials, including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the National World War I Museum and Memorial, and G.P. Cather’s tombstone. He argues that, in a postwar period in which the question of memorialization occupied the forefront of people’s attention, the narrative represents a failure to mourn Claude’s death and thus “contains the seeds of an all-out attack on American values” (82). More recently, Kelly Wager reads the problem of history in the novel, claiming that Cather opposes Claude’s historical imperialism, specifically the way in which he “takes possession, in various ways, of past lives, objects, ideas, and stories for personal and national gain” (107). In contrast, Cather and the narrator operate as anti-imperialists who refuse to valorize their own country by declining to “take possession” of history in any way.

These two broad ways of interpreting the novel—as idealistic or ironic—have one thing in common: irony and nationalism remain mutually exclusive. Cather either shares Claude’s patriotic viewpoint or ironizes his beliefs in order to point out the failures of American nationalism. In the case of the latter, irony takes two different forms. For scholars such as Stouck and Rosowski, Cather employs it to directly counter nationalist sentiment; for Trout and Wager, it turns back on itself in such a way that the narrator resists making Claude’s death meaningful, reflecting the nation’s own failure to reach consensus on how to remember the war and memorialize its dead.

Irony and nationalism can coexist, though, even becoming interdependent. Although Terry Eagleton concedes that “nationalism [. . .] has never been particularly notable for its self-irony” (27), he famously argues that it is, in fact, based on an “impossible irony.” In order to move past the nation—or other identity categories such as class or gender—one must not avoid it but, counter-intuitively, travel through it: “To wish [. . .] nation away, to seek to live sheer irreducible difference *now* in the manner of some contemporary post-structuralist theory, is to

play straight into the hands of the oppressor” (23). For Eagleton, the utopian desire for an instantaneous trans- or post-national condition often fails to account for the historical and political here-and-now by which an individual must reclaim a sense of nationality in order to, ironically, have any hope of escaping it. Other scholars less focused on the trans- or post-national have also connected irony to the nation. Yoon Sun-Lee, in *Nationalism and Irony*, shows how three non-English conservative writers and political thinkers—Edmund Burke, Walter Scott, and Thomas Carlyle—articulated “irony’s civic potential” (5). By exposing incongruities in the nation’s self-identity and history, irony could target a specific citizenry that had remained partially or wholly skeptical of “single-minded, deep, and potentially violent emotional attachment to the idea of a national community” (8). Similarly, in *The Politics of Irony in American Modernism*, Matthew Stratton claims that—more than any other rhetorical device—irony “might be used in equivalently portable ways to characterize personal, political, and national identities—and intersections among these identities” (7). Stratton pays particular attention to how irony opens up competing ideas and interests, thus becoming a, if not *the*, rhetorical term “to engage a variety of political identities.” To his catalogue of anarchists, socialists, communists, and post-suffragists might be added the “neutralist.” Although not quite as revolutionary as the list of other modernist, political figures, the neutralist occupies an ironic situation—even, one might say, predicament—by understanding and embodying the different sides of a war while remaining thoroughly impartial to all.

Neutrality, however, has often been considered an aspect of postmodernism rather than modernism. Roland Barthes, whose theoretical insights shifted in his later years from structuralism and modernism to post-structuralism and postmodernism, gave a series of lectures at the College de France between 1977-78 on the topic of “the neutral.” From the outset, Barthes defines the neutral as “that which outplays the paradigm, or rather [. . .] everything that baffles

paradigm.” Over the course of the lectures, he outlines 23 different traits including “weariness,” “silence,” and “tact” versus non-neutral qualities such as “anger” and “conflict.” Likewise, Arthur M. Saltzman’s *The Novel in Balance* extends the argument that postmodern fiction—such as Robert Coover’s *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) and Don DeLillo’s *Ratner’s Star* (1976)—functions through indeterminacy. Whereas no text can become completely value-neutral or objective, postmodern novels and short stories can perform a kind of hermeneutic neutrality in contrast to a modernist resolution of indeterminacy.

Attention to Cather, however, shifts neutrality back to a modernist rather than postmodern context. Her novel adds another dimension to Stratton’s politics of modernist American irony by showing how, in dialogue with Eagleton and Sun-Lee, it bespeaks an indeterminacy that predates and anticipates Saltzman’s “balanced” literature. In *One of Ours*, narrative irony annihilates a certain kind of wartime jingoism in favor of a more pluralistic, though no less melancholic, nationalism based on neutrality. That is, if Pearl James rightly claims in *The New Death* that Cather’s novel “encodes a melancholic and nostalgic desire for the past, for a time before the war” (62), then it does so in part by representing a “new neutrality” that does not so much contrast tradition to modernism (or modernism to postmodernism) but opens up a new angle on Cather’s modernist nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Rather than effectively end in the early days of April 1917, when the U.S. officially entered the war, neutrality persists as a trace in the narrator’s ironic consciousness. It lingers on as if the prolonged years of political impartiality have trained the narrator and certain characters to regard Claude’s life and death with neutral thoughts and emotions. The narrator identifies with various, competing perspectives on the war while also remaining impartial to all. In opposition to the mass patriotism of war

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<sup>5</sup> In her chapter “‘Clean’ Wounds and Modern Women: World War I in *One of Ours*,” James emphasizes gender dynamics in the novel, arguing that, in the wake of a crisis of masculinity, Claude’s insistence on traditional gender roles and his misogynistic scapegoating of independent women such as his wife Enid empower him to hope “to win a fight against the traumatic elements of modernity” (62).

mobilization, *One of Ours* achieves an ironic, nationalistic undertone to the extent that it fails to mourn its protagonist's death.

## I.

Before turning to the novel, though, let us first analyze the political rhetoric of U.S. neutrality in order to clarify issues related its nationalistic dimensions, its persistence during and after wartime, and its relation to irony, which bear on Cather's novel. During the war years, many countries declared neutrality. Some remained completely uninvolved; others refused to join the conflict despite the fact that they had been invaded by belligerent forces; and still others decided to remain at least economically involved by providing supplies, such as food and oil, to either the Allies or the Central powers. Despite the fact that over twenty countries maintained political non-intervention, Woodrow Wilson likened it to a thoroughly American condition. In a presidential address on 18 August 1914, he observed that "the people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict" (390). Fearing that the nation would split apart into partisan bickering, he appealed to his fellow countrymen to stay out of the conflict physically, mentally, and emotionally: "The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought as well as in action, must put a curb on sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party for the struggle before another." Wilson urged citizens to disavow those affiliations and preferences that might otherwise come natural for a nation of immigrants. In a speech that one reporter called "one of the most striking and unusual documents ever issued from the White House," he provocatively called on Americans to speak, act, and even feel impartially.

Easier said than done. In the long, three-and-a-half year period before the U.S. finally joined the war effort, partisanship spread throughout the country. Citizens urged the nation to remain out of the war altogether in order to promote peace, increase its economic standing on the world stage under the guise of peacemaking, enter the war on the side of the Allies since non-intervention would effectively place it on the side of Germany, or stand and fight with the Central Powers. One year after Wilson's initial address, the reality of rampant disunity over the war question led him to revise the notion of neutrality by, again, alluding to America as a nation of immigrants. In a speech entitled "America First," delivered on 20 April 1915 in New York City to the members of the Associated Press, he began by lauding the journalists' significance in national and world affairs before turning to more pressing matters at-hand. No longer referring to the AP men as journalists but as fellow citizens of a country whose persistent political biases might, paradoxically, lead to impartiality, Wilson argued:

We are the mediating nation of the world. [. . .] We are compounded of the nations of the world. We mediate their blood, we mediate their traditions, we mediate their sentiments, their tastes, their passions [. . .]. We are, therefore able to understand all nations; we are able to understand them in the compound, not separately, as partisans, but unitedly, as knowing and comprehending and embodying them all. (*Selected Addresses* 80)

In his description of America's role as arbiter of world peace, Wilson strategically differentiated between mediation on the individual and national levels. Seeing that citizens were not apt to give up biases and embrace a spirit of impartiality, he took a wider view by arguing for partiality and neutrality as but opposite sides of the same coin. Whereas individuals might hold fast to their separate worldviews, opinions, and feelings, the country as a whole—or "in the compound"—could stitch together its cultural pluralism in order to sympathize with all sides. That is, if citizens were resistant to embody the spirit of impartiality, then, composed of these separate individuals, the national body could. Yet, Wilson still looked to the day when that distinction, between individual and nation, would no longer be necessary. Throughout the speech, he

confused the collective pronoun—“we”—by employing it to refer at times to a united nation and at other times to separate citizens who channel the warring country’s “traditions” and “passions” in divergent ways. In other words, partisanship could be viewed as a component of broader neutrality at the same time that such neutrality might put an end to all partisan thoughts and actions.

Through this perplexing relationship between impartiality and compounded partialities, Wilsonian neutrality entails a literary quality that correlates with irony. As early as 1896, in his collection of essays entitled *Mere Literature*, Wilson hints at the literariness of political non-intervention. In the essay “A Literary Politician,” he describes “the man who has the genius to see deep into affairs, and the discretion to keep out of them,—the man to whom, by reason of knowledge and imagination and sympathetic insight, governments and policies are as open books, but who, instead of trying to put haphazard characters of his own into those books, wisely prefers to read their pages aloud to others” (69). In his description, Wilson argues that the literary individual has the sympathy, creativity, and rationality to remain attuned to and even deeply affected by political situations while resisting the urge to intervene in them. Encountering the world as a book, he chooses to read it aloud rather than interject his own plots, characters, or morals into the story. As an example of this kind of individual, Wilson proposes Walter Bagehot, a British journalist and businessman who, unlike Thomas Carlyle—whom Wilson characterizes as his politico-literary antithesis—possessed a “conceiving” rather than a “creating” imagination. That is, in Wilson’s view, Bagehot approached the world, and the political arena in particular, with the desire to understand through “active moderation” rather than to “antagonize” or otherwise interject (96). While irony never receives any sustained attention in *Mere Literature*, the figure of the literary politician occupies a conspicuously ironic position. By recognizing in the “book” of governments and their policies what has been written

but might remain obscured, including the writers themselves, he refuses to interject his own ideas. As one of those rare individuals whose combination of rationality, creativity, and sympathy provides him the ability see what the book is *really* about, the literary politician refuses to impose, to fix problems, or otherwise upset order, precisely because of his mental and emotional faculties. Rather, a politician such as Bagehot functions in accordance with Edmund Burke's theory of "slow thought [as] the ballast of a self-governing state" (98). Almost imperceptibly, improvement takes place to the extent that the literary politician understands without acting.

Whereas the British could not afford the luxury of Bagehot's moderation during the war years, the U.S. assumed that responsibility, at least for a time, by fashioning itself as arbiter of a painstakingly slow peace process between belligerents. Just as Wilson's literary politician finds himself in an ironic situation, so too irony imbues Wilsonian neutrality. If the president envisioned a nation that, by virtue of its partisanship and pluralism, could embody and understand all sides of the war impartially, he also intended for every citizen to rise to that national ideal. Less a real individual than a political ideal or fictional figure, the "neutralist" accomplishes the seemingly impossible goal of remaining friendly to all but allied with none. For, how could a nation remain friendly when its very non-intervention might be construed as a support for either side, as a passivity meant to prolong warfare, or as a maneuver to increase economic standing through overseas trade with belligerent nations? It is hard not to approach such a provocative political doctrine without some amount of skepticism, without an impulse to attend to the distinction between what is said and what is really meant, between the guise of non-intervention and the reality of political and capitalistic maneuvering lurking just behind it. Through irony—a literary device based on such differentiation—neutrality not only becomes the



subject of doubt and cynicism but also somehow functional. To phrase that another way, the neutralist finds a way to internalize competing perspectives on the war while ironically resisting taking sides.

In one sense, neutrality led inevitably to America's declaration of war, but it also persisted in hearts and minds if not in official government doctrine long after, into the wartime period. If, as a nation of immigrants bent on brokering peace between overseas belligerents, the U.S. embodied neutrality, then it also cornered the market on that political stance by engaging in free trade with both sides. Discussing the difference between isolationism and Wilsonian neutrality, the historian Robert W. Tucker argues, "If isolation meant maintaining a separateness from Europe's politics and wars, neutrality meant remaining apart from Europe's wars, while insisting upon a broad right to trade with belligerents," a political position that, in Wilson's mind, reflected his America's "honor and prestige and even its independence" (1). Although politically isolated, Wilson determined to remain commercially active by selling war goods to both the Allies and the Central powers. American business profited from the deal. As David M. Kennedy notes, "Those policies paid off; the economy had been lifted out of a recession in 1913-14, and factories hummed at full capacity as America entered the war" (37). Like every economic upswing, there was a corresponding downturn; the bubble would soon burst, collapsing the financially advantageous distance between the U.S. and the belligerent nations. England attempted to blockade America's commercial ties with Germany while the latter responded with unrestricted submarine hostilities that provoked America into the war. While the most famous victim of German submarine warfare, the R.M.S. *Lusitania*, sank in May 1915, it would take nearly two years for Wilson to give up on the goals of neutrality. After Germany renewed its unrestricted hostilities on the Atlantic in the early months of 1917, Wilson, who had come under increasing political pressure by opponents, finally declared on 2 April that

“neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples” (*Woodrow Wilson: Essential Writings* 400). Declaring war on Germany inaugurated a new nationalism starkly opposed to neutrality.

In his speech, Wilson shifted from impartiality to unification through the nation’s virtuous mission: “We seek no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind” (402-3). Looking toward the future while writing in a striking present tense, he celebrated national traits that had yet to be forged on the battlefield. No longer a collective “we” of separate yet compounded opinions and feelings, his imagined community stood unified by its honorable ideals and impending victory. Throughout a relatively short wartime period, the American government sought to mobilize its citizens on the home front and its doughboys at the battle line through the influence of propaganda and law. Wilson hired on journalists such as Walter Lippman and psychologists including Edward Bernays to develop pro-Allied propaganda.<sup>6</sup> As well, he created the Committee on Public Information, which brought never-before-seen access and “transparency” to the country’s war effort. Headed up by George Creel, and often called the Creel Committee, the CPI disseminated numerous pamphlets, newsreels, and other kinds of ostensibly value-neutral mass media, while also censoring and otherwise spinning that information for patriotic purposes. As Creel observes, the committee was created to respond to the period of neutrality in which “the land had been torn by a thousand divisive prejudices, stunned by the voices of anger and confusion, and muddled by the pull and haul of opposed interests.” In the face of such disunity, the committee promoted “a belief in the justice of America’s cause that should weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination. [. . .] What had to

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between Wilson, Lippman, and Bernays, see Jessica Berman’s chapter on “Commitment and the Scene of War” in *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism*.

be driven home was that all business was the nation's business, and every task a common task for a single purpose" (5). Contradictorily, Americans needed to be indoctrinated into a "mass instinct" in order to save pluralism—what Creel considered the impermissible condition of neutrality—from the tyranny of German *Kultur*.

In addition to propaganda, that gentler art of persuasion, the government also enacted laws to punish treasonous and seditious behavior. After all, only two months after the declaration of war, Congress passed the Espionage Act and, just six months before the Allies and Germany signed the armistice, amended that act to make all modes of sedition punishable. The sedition amendments, signed into law on 16 May 1918, targeted "whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the nation including, but not limited to, its government, flag, branches of the military, and military uniforms. Whereas the Espionage Act initially curtailed treasonous actions, these amendments also made speech and thought punishable. Distinguishing writing from more overtly public activities such as talking or publishing, the lawmakers seem to include in their list of punishable crimes such private offenses as anti-patriotic diary entries. Like the CPI, the Espionage Act and its sedition amendments attempted to reverse the public and private dimensions—the actions, thoughts, and feelings—of Wilsonian neutrality.

However, the spirit of impartiality persisted well into 1917 and 1918. Even the Espionage Act reveals this preoccupation. In its full title, the lawmakers identified it as an "Act to Punish Acts of Interference with the Foreign Relations, the Neutrality, and the Foreign Commerce of the United States, to Punish Espionage, and Better to Enforce the Criminal Laws of the United States and for Other Purposes." As Charles Cheney Hyde, an attorney and authority on international law, pondered in response to the Act, "It seems strange that important additions by way of amendment to the neutrality laws of the United States should have been

made at a time when the nation itself was a belligerent” (143). After this initial reflection, Hyde explains that the amendments would give the U.S. President more power to keep the country out of war by significantly enlarging the scope of what he could do regarding naval vessels. At the same time that, in their speeches and propagandistic committees, Wilson and Creel expressed disapproval of neutrality as an un-American response to violence and forged a new nationalism based on virtuous war effort, the Espionage Act sought to ensure that, in any future military conflict, the nation could remain politically neutral.

Just as the desire for non-intervention persisted in wartime legislation, so did neutrality itself in a sense, just under the rubric of patriotism and dissent. For, if the Espionage Act calls to mind one of the ways in which the American government mobilized hearts and minds, it also betrays the extent to which such mobilization proved ineffective. To phrase that more positively, even in wartime the nation displayed its ability to understand and embody contradictory opinions “in the compound.” Despite the fact that, officially, the nation became a belligerent, thus punishing treasonous or seditious behavior, neutrality lingered on as a reality long after belligerency through the Wilsonian contradiction of political non-intervention as impartiality via a compound of partialities.

## II.

From a literary historical perspective, the political rhetoric of dissent, loyalty, and neutrality impinged on modernist American war literature. Certain writers, such as William Faulkner in his first novel *A Soldier's Pay* (1926), examined a character network of divided public sentiment, where individuals espouse loyalty or disloyalty to the national program during wartime dependent upon their roles as either combatants or noncombatants. In the novel two soldiers return an injured pilot named Donald Mahon, who has been given up for dead by his

family, back home with a predominate forehead scar and long-term amnesia. Due to the head injury, he cannot remember his family or his pre-war life. Consequently, the scar symbolizes the irreparable disenchantment the war has wrought on Donald and combatants like him. Unable to remember who he was, by the end of the novel Donald does relive his injury as “something gnawing through his frontal bone, like mice;” afterwards, he feels “an imminent nothingness” in accordance with war’s meaninglessness (290). Elaine Scarry claims that, in war, “injuries-as-signs point both backward and forward in time,” as memorials of past events and evidence of a future world fought for but not made present (121). Donald’s amnesia complicates injury’s ability to signal the past and future because he cannot remember the national rhetoric that propelled him into battle that has left him physically and psychically damaged. One of the soldiers accompanying him home sneers, “let’s have a look at the glorious nation which we have fought for” (20), thus voicing a public sentiment that Donald’s scar symbolizes but that he never quite vocalizes.

Unlike the amnesiac protagonist, his family still lives in the past, believing that Donald will fully recover and take his rightful place in the heroic homecoming that they had imagined. In response to Donald’s father’s optimism that the amnesia might only be a “temporary condition,” the doctor tells the family “that [Donald] remembers nothing that happened before he was hurt. The man that was wounded is dead and this is another person” (114). Likewise, the family’s servant Emmy and the maternal widow Margaret Powers love the man who has returned, imbuing Donald’s wounding with all the trappings of romantic heroism. In one sense, Faulkner explores how the sheer distance between the front lines and the American home front protected family members, friends, and others back in the States from the disillusioning effects of war.

Yet, the narrative also includes moments in which civilian characters trouble that facile distinction. For instance Donald's fiancée Cecily, who believed he died long ago when the family first received the now fallacious news, has begun a romantic relationship with another character by the name of George Farr. Once he returns alive, she does not second-guess her decision to marry George but, along with Donald's father, considers the mutilated pilot a "poor bet" for marriage (114). Near the end of the novel, the protagonist receives his "soldier's pay" when Cecily officially breaks off their marriage. While in the later chapter on H.D. and Fitzgerald, I will explore more fully the modernist representations of male combatants who enlist to fight for fiancées, wives, and mothers back home—as part of a cult of patriotic motherhood—here I want to suggest that through Donald's turbulent relationship with Cecily, Faulkner conflates national and marital loyalty as a transaction or "payment" that yields the dissolution of romance and patriotism. Phrased differently, throughout the novel Faulkner depicts competing public sentiments about U.S. involvement in the war but resolves them in a melancholy narrative about wartime and postwar disillusionment. Like his protagonist, the narrator suffers from a bout of amnesia, forgetting patriotic characters such as the servant Emmy. Rather than a novel in which the irony of the "glorious nation" persists until the end, the irony is that, for some characters, it does remain glorious. Actually the real irony—one that Faulkner alludes to but that the novel does not fully embody—is that American nationalism could be founded precisely on an ironic disposition toward competing public sentiments, on the melancholy aesthetics of a political neutrality whose pre-war beginnings Donald has long since forgotten.

Before returning exclusively to *One of Ours*, it might be helpful to place it alongside another novel, which, published in the same year and with a similar plotline, expresses such narrative neutrality but in a way that does not introduce melancholia as nationalistic. Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* begins with the young protagonist Jacob Flanders's early childhood,

follows his enlistment into the military and death on the Western Front, and ends with his mother grieving for her dead son. As a story about British—or, more to the point, non-American—war experience, the novel quickens temporality in order to represent the rush into belligerency in contrast to the seeming idleness of political non-intervention. Woolf builds the narrative out of small sections and stylized gaps, thus accelerating the reading process and therefore Jacob's development toward his fated death. Specifically for Jacob, one of the members of England's upper class, a complex of patriotism and class identity determines the course of his life and death. The narrator emphasizes the fact the protagonist must matriculate at Oxbridge, love foxhunting, learn to love the classics, travel to Greece, idolize Greek heroes, and enlist in the war to fight and die for England. Precisely by propelling Jacob towards his inevitable death, however, the narrator fails to grasp his identity. The story rushes so quickly to its conclusion that he, in effect, becomes a blur. Early on, the narrator remarks on this inability "to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (21). Just as *One of Ours* ends with Claude's mother holding the letters he wrote her just before he died, *Jacob's Room* ends with Mrs. Flanders and one of Jacob's friends cleaning out his room. All that is left behind are his room and the objects in it. In the closing scene of the novel, she holds up a pair of shoes asking what she should do with them. Not only addressed to her son's friend, this question also beckons others to attempt to figure out Jacob based on the "hints" he has left behind. By trying to figure out Jacob's identity, characters and readers develop forms of affiliation beyond national boundaries. David Sherman argues, for instance, "Woolf begins imagining in *Jacob's Room* a condition of mind, some model or quality of self, that is not bound to its dead through the state. This is a voice that circulates without having been interpellated, and that stirs a desire for the dead to also circulate more freely, beyond processes of interpellation" (104). Like Woolf, Cather leaves open-ended how one should understand the war

and mourn its dead; however, rather than connect this failed mourning—that is, melancholia—with the “freely” moving literary articulation of transnational community, *One of Ours* equates it, through irony, with political neutrality and therefore with a form of American nationalism that, opposing patriotic mobilization, persisted as a counter-patriotism into wartime.

Among all of the major and minor characters in Cather’s *One of Ours*, Nat Wheeler best embodies the irony and persistence of neutrality. In fact, whereas WWI begins midway through the novel, sustained narrative focus on America’s non-intervention does not actually occur in any significant way until much later, when Nat quite literally brings the issue home to his family and to the novel’s readers. During Claude and Enid’s turbulent marital life, England declares war on Germany. When his wife determines to undertake missionary work in Hong Kong, Claude moves back in with his family where they hear the news that Germany will renew its unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic. Nat, who has traveled to Wary, Colorado, where he has helped his youngest son Ralph establish a farm, sends a telegram back to the rest of his family in haste, directing them to read the newspapers if they have not done so yet. In response to Claude’s uncertainty as to why his father would need to tell them to look at headline news that had, by then, already absorbed the entire Nebraskan town, if not the whole country, his mother’s explanation opens up the narrative to the Wheeler family’s various interpretations of the nature and precarious future of political neutrality.

Mrs. Wheeler advises her son that, since his father has relatives who worked as sailors in and around Portsmouth, he telegraphed because he knows war is imminent “when our shipping is told where it can go on the ocean” (1118). Voicing her own opinion as that of her husband, she believes that neutrality would be unsatisfactory because it would effectively ally the U.S. with Germany. Always religiously minded, she has faith that God has fated the U.S. to enter the war or to die by submarine attack in the attempt: “If our only alternative is to be at the bottom of



the sea, we had better be there.” In contrast to his mother, Claude’s brother Bayliss remains a staunch pacifist. In his opinion, the U.S. should stay its course by remaining out of the war. He holds out hope that, through non-participation, the country will profit financially from war-torn Europe. Almost gleefully, he foresees how America “would soon be in possession of the capital of the world” (1122). Whereas Bayliss would seem the neutral character in the novel, his pacifism betrays an insidious militarism. While belligerent countries attempt to capture each other’s capital cities, he intends for the U.S. to overtake—in a less literal but no less violent manner—a very different kind of capital. Unlike his rather callous son, Nat actually demonstrates neutrality. During a conversation between Bayliss and his father over the question regarding the economic benefit of non-intervention, the narrator considers how “there was a kind of logic in Bayliss’ utterances that shook Nat Wheeler’s imperturbable assumption that one point of view was as good as another” (1122). As a homesteader who has become quite wealthy from buying and leasing land, Nat takes pride in his son’s surprising display of business acumen. Although it seems that Bayliss’s bent toward war-profiteering shakes the very foundation of Nat’s indeterminacy, the novel also shows how Nat does not actually place financial gain above all else but—much like Wilson’s idea of the neutralist—seeks to cultivate friendliness toward all people, even when it costs him.

For example, in the first chapter of the novel, Claude wakes up early one morning with his mind set on driving the family car to see the circus that has come to town. To his chagrin, his father informs him that, instead of the car, he will need to take the wagon loaded down with stinking and greasy cowhides and pulled by an obstinate mule. Claude reflects on how there had already been and would still be plenty of other days to take the hides to market, how the odor would permeate the nicer clothes he had planned on wearing into town, and how the cattle had died during a winter storm because of the negligence of the family’s two farmhands, Dan and

Jerry. Whereas he despises the two men because of their severe mistreatment of the farm animals—including the cows and an older horse—Nat wants to make sure his son takes the wagon so that he can drive Dan and Jerry to see the circus attractions. He shows hospitality to the farmhands even though, as Claude perceives, the hides would sell for less than half the money his father has spent in time and materials to prepare them. Fuming, Claude considers that “this was just his father’s idea of a joke.” For Nat, liking everyone and laughing with them, or at the tricks played on them, go hand-in-hand.

By the end of this chapter, the narrator emphasizes how his friendships with all manner of people—including farmhands who lose him money—often interconnects with his sense of humor: “There was this to be said about Nat Wheeler, that he liked every sort of human creature; he liked good people and honest people, and he liked rascals and hypocrites almost to the point of loving them. If he heard that a neighbor had played a sharp trick or done something particularly mean, he was sure to drive over to see the man at once, as if he hadn’t hitherto appreciated him” (948-9). In addition to vicariously enjoying others’ tricks, Nat also plays his own jokes, as when he pokes fun at the family’s housemaid, Mahailey, when she accidentally sits down on flypaper. Although his behavior could be mistaken as mean-spiritedness or even haughtiness, the narrator quickly points out that, even when enjoying someone else’s tricks or making a joke himself, “he never laughed immoderately” nor was he “boisterous” (949). His humor, more than any other quality, demonstrates his affection for all kinds of people. Central to Nat’s character, the impartiality produced by affection and ridicule not only spans the first chapter but also the entire novel, aligning this major character to the narrator’s ironic consciousness about warfare.

A defining aspect of Nat’s character that only becomes more reinforced as the threat of war looms ever closer, Nat’s comical impartiality does not diminish after the country shifts away

from political neutrality; it spans the pre-war and wartime periods, standing out most markedly in a courtroom scene that takes place in the same month that the U.S. passed the Espionage Act. Two German immigrants, Troilus Oberlies and August Yoeder—the latter, one of the Wheeler family’s neighbors—have been taken into custody, accused of disloyal and treasonous behavior. Unsurprised that the more boastful Oberlies has been brought in, but shocked to see Yoeder in his company, Nat has come to help his neighbor in any way he can. During the court proceedings, witnesses testify that Oberlies “had said the United States would be licked, and that would be a good thing; America was a great country, but it was run by fools, and to be governed by Germany was the best thing that could happen to it.” Witnesses also claim that they overheard Yoeder say “he hoped the United States would go to Hell, now that it had been bought over by England [ . . . ] and he wished somebody would put a bullet in the President” (1127-8). In response to the testimony stacked against him, Yoeder concedes that he did make these statements but also appeals to the First Amendment as support for his behavior. The judge acknowledges that, in these dire times, freedom of speech must be tempered by appropriateness and decorum: “a man can speak his mind, but even here he must take the consequences” (1128). He charges Yoeder and Troilus with disloyalty, fines them each \$300, and warns them that, next time they end up in his courtroom accused of treasonous behavior, his punishment will not be so lenient. Through the judge’s ruling, the courtroom scene depicts the juridical and cultural shift towards national single-mindedness during a wartime period in which dissenting opinion could not be tolerated, much less celebrated, while soldiers and noncombatants alike were mobilizing to make the world safe for democracy.

In contrast, Nat actually embodies impartiality, specifically through his humor. During the testimony, for example, he “slap[s] his knee with a loud guffaw” when one witness complains that Oberlies “sat on his front porch and played *Die Wacht am Rhein* on a slide-

trombone, to the great annoyance of the neighbors” (1127). Nat’s laugh incites others in the audience to react in a similar fashion to the witness’s xenophobia. Later, however, when Yoeder leaves the courtroom worrying that his sons will soon be drafted, swept up in a mass mobilization overtaking the nation, Nat responds by making his neighbor the butt of his jokes. Comforting Yoeder, he says, “I wouldn’t worry about it. A little military training is good for a boy. You fellows know that” and then gives a wink to which “Yoeder’s grim mouth twitched at one corner” (1129). Nat’s quip at the end alludes to the fact that military training has not been “good” but instead has left so many thousands upon thousands of German “fellows” dead over the past three years. He winks because in order to remain covertly ironic lest his remarks lead him to be accused of seditious acts alongside Yoeder and Oberlies. The real irony, of course, is not that Nat sounds nationalistic while implying something far more critical of the government but that his friendliness toward Yoeder leads him to voice pro-German, anti-German, patriotic, and treasonous opinions all at once. He desires to comfort his neighbor by siding with his sedition during the courtroom scene, by emphasizing the way in which the military would benefit his sons, and by hinting at the futility of war itself, which in one sense helps support Yoeder’s anti-Ally stance but hardly makes him feel secure about his sons’ potential enlistment. As Yoeder registers Nat’s contradictory statements and body language, trying to figure out his neighbor’s actual opinion of the war, his face contorts into a contradictory expression—a scowl and smile, or grim grin. Yoeder, who during the trial praised America as a country where a man could say anything, finds in Nat a version of that ideal, not an individual voicing a dissenting opinion covered by First Amendment rights but someone who assumes a more neutral disposition through his ability to quite literally say anything and, at the same time, remain ironically distant from the contradictory opinions he espouses.

### III.

Whereas, for Nat, neutrality cannot be separated from humor, which at times assumes an ironic form, irony itself becomes central to the novel's approach to Claude's life and eventual combat death. To phrase that another way, the narrator—although not nearly as overtly jocular as Nat—acts similarly in the way he displays a lingering impartiality during the war years. The narrative arc tracing Claude's enlistment, combat, and death is, after all, rife with dramatic and situational irony. More than anything else, Claude worries about making a fool of himself. He knows he has fouled up his education and marriage but perceives the war as the single most important corrective to all of the domestic and professional disappointments he has incurred. In turn, the narrator makes Claude's exuberant and naïve patriotism the target of his most sustained attack. Yet, just as Nat's irony turns back on itself so that he undercuts all opinions, so too the narrator provides no secure position on the war.

Despite Claude's intentions to live with purpose, his education at Temple College and marriage to Enid represent the two most important failures preceding his decision to enlist. Convinced by a Temple faculty member, Brother Weldon, who has visited various farming families to discuss their children's educational futures, Mrs. Wheeler enrolls her son in the school. Claude despises Weldon and the mediocre religious education he receives. Based on Mrs. Wheeler's—and, by extension, Weldon's—theological idea of education, "one should learn, not think; and above all, one must not inquire. The history of the human race as it lay behind one was already explained; and so was its destiny, which lay before" (962). Claude determines to transfer, on the sly, to the state university where he begins to take a course on European history. During the semester, he becomes excited about the possibility of one day leaving a legacy by altering the course of history; however, he receives news that he must return to Frankfort because his father has put him in charge of the homestead. Reluctantly, he quits

school for good for what he considers the drudgery of farm life; however, a work accident leaves Claude scratched up by barbed wire and infected with erysipelas. Hearing about his injuries, Enid—a friend since childhood—visits him in order to help nurse him back to health, and Claude witnesses her tireless dedication at his bedside. He determines to marry her, establish a home, and salvage a sense of self-worth even in a town like Frankfort. One day, Claude visits Enid’s father to ask for his blessing but, in addition to parental consent, receives a warning that Enid’s missionary work could pose problems for his marital intentions. As Pearl James surmises, Claude “imagines that marrying [Enid] will solve his ‘problem,’ as if playing opposite a woman in a marriage plot will bring his manhood to the fore,” but “Enid refuses to play the feminine role that [Claude] casts her in. This plot development and the imagery that surrounds it establishes ‘The New Woman’ in the role of [. . .] a ‘destroyer’” (42). True to her name, Enid represents the near reversal of the kind of Edenic paradise Claude imagines. After he marries Enid, she effectively, though unintentionally, destroys him and his plans by joining Bayliss’s prohibitionist cause and eventually leaving the Midwest to work as a missionary in China. Although the inability to achieve his dreams or even a satisfactory marriage plagues Claude, these failures actually become the impetus for narrative interest in the protagonist and the war effort he joins, foreshadowing a narrative irony akin to political neutrality.

Failure sets Claude apart from other characters. While beginning to spiral into despair, he voices these concerns to Enid’s foil: Gladys Farmer. For much of the novel, Gladys has been Bayliss’s rumored girlfriend and soon-to-be fiancée; however, when Claude broaches the subject of their marriage plans, she tells him, “I am afraid I won’t marry [Bayliss],—because you are the member of the family I have always admired” (1142). Whereas Bayliss has spent many of his days with Enid trying to turn the country dry, Gladys has been pining away after Claude. In an attempt to quickly counter her surprising display of affection, Claude remarks, “But that’s it,

Gladys. What *have* I ever done, except make one blunder after another?” (1143). She responds with a statement not just poignant in the context of their relationship, but for the novel’s structure as a whole. “I don’t know; perhaps it’s by their blunders that one gets to know people,—by what they can’t do. If you’d been like all the rest, you could have got on in their way. That was the one thing I couldn’t have stood.” In Gladys’s mind, Claude’s failures set him apart; by succeeding, he would resemble someone like Bayliss or any of the other countless young men in Frankfort. As a blundering protagonist, Claude becomes the object of her affection and, it would seem, the entire reason that the narrator has chosen to focus on him and his war story.

Interestingly, Gladys shares this revelation with Claude on one of his final days in town. He has already enlisted and awaits the trip for training camp. The question—“What *have* I ever done, except make one blunder after another?”—therefore voices a concern about the past, not the future. Believing that the war will give him a sense of purpose severely lacking in his life up to this point, Claude desires to no longer be set apart, as love interest or protagonist, but to take part in the nationalistic indoctrination. He feels a sense of newfound respect walking around the town in his doughboy outfit. Fresh from training camp, he awaits the day when he can help his country defeat the Hun. When influenza befalls his warship *Anchises* headed to the Western Front, he immediately assumes the role of caregiver and reflects on how “the feeling of purpose, of fateful purpose, was strong in his breast” (1182). Yet, all of these examples of what Creel referred to as the “white-hot mass instinct” pale in comparison to Claude’s ruminations on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Out patrolling the front lines one evening, Claude and one of his men, Hicks, enter a cemetery to smoke cigarettes and wait for approaching nightfall. They come across an epitaph: “On a cross at their feet the inscription read merely: *Soldat Inconnu, Mort pour La France*. A very good epitaph, Claude was thinking. Most of the boys who fell in this war were unknown,

even to themselves. They were too young. They died and took their secrets with them,—what they were and what they might have been” (1245). Unlike those other, younger soldiers whose premature deaths forestall self-knowledge, Claude thinks he knows the “secret” of his identity.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson observes that “no more arresting emble[m] of the modern culture of nationalism exist[s] than [. . .] tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* [. . .] no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times” (9).<sup>7</sup> During the war years, it became customary to place tombstones over the corpses that could be identified; where identity could not be verified, soldiers sometimes created tombstones to unknown soldiers. A makeshift practice at the time, the anonymous burial became the foundation for national monuments and memorials in the years following the armistice. After violence came to an end, debates arose on the subject of whether the dead would be repatriated, interred in overseas cemeteries, or left buried at the battlefronts. Certain individuals claimed that they should not be moved from the front lines that they so valiantly defended; others argued that, even if they should, they could not because many of the dead could not be identified. In 1920, Britain and France interred anonymous soldier remains. In 1921, other countries including Italy, Portugal, and the U.S. followed suit. Erected in the Arlington National Cemetery, completed by 1931, and transformed into the Tomb of the Unknowns (with the addition of WWII and Korean War soldier remains) in 1958, the anonymous body of the American soldier synecdochally represents the vast dead who could not be repatriated from warfronts. In his commemoration at Arlington, President Harding honored the “typical soldier of this representative democracy [who] fought and died believing in the indisputable justice of his country’s cause.” Without markers of age, class, race, or religion, the

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<sup>7</sup>It is worth noting that, in this section of his book, Anderson refers to cenotaphs in addition to tombs of Unknown Soldiers. In reference to the invisibility of the Unknown Soldier, Laura Wittman observes, “remarkable effort was made to keep the actual body invisible. In fact, even as legal documents insist on the importance of making the Unknown Soldier Memorial ‘visible to all’ in order to facilitate mass mourning, what was visible was only a coffin” (126).



corpse became a democratic site for individuals to collectively mourn the patriotic sacrifice of their family members, friends, and fellow countrymen.

Claude perceives himself as a walking, talking Unknown Soldier whose (ultimate) sacrifice to save the French from the Huns will bring honor to himself and to his nation. In this way, Claude resembles the speaker in Countee Cullen's poem "At the Étoile (At the Unknown Soldier's Grave in Paris)" who declares in the final stanza, "Since he was weak as other men,— / or like / Young Galahad as fair in thought as limb, / Each bit of moving dust in France may strike / Its breast in pride, knowing he stands for them" (lines 10-13). Like the speaker who begins with thoughts of weakness but quickly turns to strength, Claude too imagines that fighting for France will bestow upon him a Galahadian purity and nobility. In more ways than one, Claude might choose to compare himself to Galahad whose famed purity, among all the Knights of the Roundtable, would provide him a way to narrativize his ruined marriage to Enid and unrequited romance with Gladys as knightly acts of celibacy. However, rather than, like Cullen, represent the French dead and living, Claude hopes that, by fighting and possibly dying for France, he will epitomize his own nation's virtuous cause.

He views the war in ways similar to propagandistic U.S. WWI fiction, most obviously in Edith Wharton's autobiographical account of her tour through the Western Front, entitled *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* (1915), and her novel about the friendship between an American soldier and a French schoolmaster, *The Marne* (1918). In the former, Wharton shows how guarding France's "intellectual light" and "moral force" against German militarism would improve American civilization (238). Whereas *Fighting France* was published during the period of political neutrality, and thus pushes for war engagement, in *The Marne* Wharton rationalizes a one-year-old intervention by depicting a young American protagonist, Troy Belknap, who enlists in order to save his French tutor. Through a salvation plot, she highlights

the pettiness of the American home front while also depicting how the U.S. could model its values on the French. Like Cather's Claude, Wharton's Troy discovers personal and national purpose by becoming one of the champions of the rights of France if not, as Wilson declared, all of mankind.

Yet, in Claude's statement about the Unknown Soldier there is a strange transition between his assessment of the epitaph and his reflection on the majority of soldiers who have died in the war. Whereas he wants to distinguish between the kind of individual who has given his life in the service of his country and the soldiers who have died "unknown, even to themselves," the lack of transition between the sentences conflates both forms of un-knowing so that the latter becomes an ironic commentary on the former. Claude, who believes that his entire life has been one big blunder up until his enlistment, does not and cannot realize the "secrets" hidden within his naïve patriotism. It might seem that, by exposing the shortsightedness of the protagonist's idealism, the narrator promotes an anti-jingoistic stance; however, the narrator actually ironizes Claude's idealistic desire to become an unknown soldier by placing his death at the center of an imagined community dedicated to unknowability. To phrase that another way, the narrator advances a neutral counter-nationalism by forging contradictory opinions—ranging from patriotic fervor to fizzled out disillusionment—that ironize each other, leaving the narrator and the reader without any clear perspective on what the war means or how to memorialize its dead.

A few examples will illustrate the point. They range from the early days when Claude first enlists through to the final day when his family receives news of his death. While on leave from training camp, Claude travels back home but first stops off at a restaurant run by a German immigrant woman, Mrs. Voigt. Having eaten at that same restaurant on his way to the camp, Claude has become acquainted with the woman, even beginning to form the initial stages of

friendship. This time, though, he observes her crying. He soon realizes the reason: a gang of boys has just entered her restaurant and accused her of plotting as a German spy. Seeing Claude, she pleads, “You know I ain’t no spy nor noddin, like what dem boys say. I sell dem candy since dey was babies, an’ now dey turn on me like dis. Hindenburg, dey calls me, und Kaiser Bill!” (1131). Claude immediately leaves the restaurant to stand up for Mrs. Voigt to the gang. He tells the boys that they should be ashamed because only the Huns would terrorize a woman. The narrator notes that Claude “was still burning with the first ardour of the enlisted man. He believed that he was going abroad with an expeditionary force that would make war without rage, with uncompromising generosity and chivalry” (1134). The narrator’s judgment works in two different directions. First, based on the contrast between Mrs. Voigt’s and the gang’s behavior, it raises the question of whether the U.S. should have intervened on the side of the Germans who, in this scene at least, are characterized as more generous and civilized. Claude fails to perceive the way in which his country’s intervention on the Allied side makes Mrs. Voigt the target of attack. Second, the narrator alludes to how, no matter the reason for intervention or side fought on, nations including the U.S. cannot maintain generous and chivalric war goals.

A minor character echoes the latter opinion when Claude sets sail for the Front. While on the *Anchises*, he begins to idolize a seasoned Royal Air Force pilot named Victor Morse who attempts to warn Claude: “Take it from me, there are thousands who will never go back! I’m not speaking of the casualties. Some of you Americans are likely to discover the world this trip . . . and it’ll make the hell of a lot of difference! You boys never had a fair chance. There’s a conspiracy of Church and State to keep you down.” (1195). True to his name, the disillusioned Morse attempts to transmit to the protagonist the realities of war awaiting him. His reference to the way religion and government attempt to keep soldiers down suggests a pervasive societal divide between the exploitative upper class—composed of government officials, military staff,

businessmen, church practitioners, and noncombatants—and the exploited, lower class of soldiers.

Cather seems to have drawn from John Dos Passos's novel *Three Soldiers*, which had been published in the year prior to *One of Ours*, in order to create the character of Morse. Separated into chapters such as "Making the Mould," "The Metal Cools," and "Machines," Dos Passos's novel shows how enlisted soldiers become mere cogs in a vast war system. The three protagonists—John Andrews, Dan Fuselli, and Chris Chrisfield—find themselves indoctrinated into a regimental life often exploited by their commanding officers and by businessmen solely invested in making profits. During a scene in which a warship transports the protagonists overseas, Dan—an idealistic soldier, much like Claude, who wants to do right by his country—discovers a stark class divide. Officers and advanced enlisted troops reside above deck in leisurely staterooms while privates and corporals travel in cramped, stuffy holding cells below deck. When a sergeant orders Dan to deliver a message to the officers in one of these staterooms, he sees "a different world" made of "white paint and the gilt mouldings on the partitions," reminding him of the cruise liners back in his hometown of San Francisco (125-6). In contrast, he and his fellow enlisted troops live in steerage down in the lower quarters of the ship, where influenza and spinal meningitis spread insidiously, claiming the lives of many of the novel's minor characters.

In Cather's novel, despite Morse's recognition of wartime class exploitation, he too takes part in it. An Iowan who has joined Great Britain's RAF, Morse works as a pilot, which sets him quite literally above and figuratively apart from the common foot soldier; added to this, he has adopted a thick, affected English accent that transforms him from Midwest farm boy into gentleman. His fellow travelers note the way he "said 'necess'ry' and 'dysent'ry' and called his suspenders 'braces'" (1162). Urging Claude to come to London after the war, Morse brushes

aside the standard tourist traps, like the Tower of London, and invites his acquaintance to join him at the Savoy Theatre. Describing the Savoy, Morse states, “The curtain will rise on this world for you. Nobody admitted who isn’t in evening dress. The jewels will dazzle you. Actresses, duchesses, all the handsomest women in Europe” (1164). Whereas the second-person pronouns position Claude, a potential newcomer to the Savoy, as the observer dazzled by opulence and beauty, Morse is actually the one infatuated with the rank and finery of the upper classes attending the hypothetical show. When Claude prods him to recount some of his “aerial adventures,” Morse initially resists but finally opens up to list off the collection of “loot” he has acquired from downed German planes: “alimeters and compasses and glasses,” including a pristine Zeiss camera lens he describes as “positively invaluable” (1163). Claude’s conversation with Morse inadvertently pokes holes in the pilot’s disillusionment. For a man who believes that there’s a conspiracy keeping soldiers down as a disempowered class, Morse has a knack for climbing the social ladder. Enamored with the pilot, Claude does not sense any of this, though. Neither Morse’s conspiratorial warning nor his hypocrisy reach their intended receiver. Claude maintains both an idealistic belief in America’s mission and an unconquerable idolization of Morse’s heroism. Doubly ironic, the character of Morse provides further proof for the narrator’s disillusionment about generous and chivalric war goals—expounded during the Mrs. Voigt scene—while also undercutting that sentiment.

After Claude arrives at the Western Front and dies during a battle, his mother’s and Mahailey’s mourning practices present two final perspectives on irony and memorialization. During an offensive at a location called “the Snout,” Claude dies of “three clean bullet holes—one through his heart.” Some of his men—Hicks, Bert Fuller, and Oscar—and his commanding officers convey to the Wheeler family how quick and honorable was his passing. Belatedly, after a phone call from military officials conveying information about her son’s death, Mrs. Wheeler

begins receiving a steady trickle of letters written and mailed by Claude during his final days. In reference to these letters, the narrator records Mrs. Wheeler's sense of consolation:

When she can see nothing that has come of it all but evil, she reads Claude's letters over again and reassures herself; for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. [. . .] She divines so much that he did not write. She knows what to read into those short flashes of enthusiasm; how fully he must have found his life before he could let himself go so far—he, who was so afraid of being fooled! He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more. She would have dreaded the awakening,—she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. (1296)

Although she does not admit it, Mrs. Wheeler has discovered the errors of her ways. Whereas she had earlier believed that God fated the U.S. to intervene in the war and ordained young men such as Claude to undertake a righteous mission, she now interprets the war as an evil event. Yet, God does not disappear completely since, by “divining” meaning from Claude's letters, Mrs. Wheeler still finds a way to place her faith at the center of her mourning. In fact, she envisions the four years of devastating and senseless violence as a consequence of God's wrath—a reversal of her earlier sense of fatedness, which also allows her to mourn Claude's death.<sup>8</sup> As such, Mrs. Wheeler seeks a different narrative for Claude's life and death, a negative reassurance in which Claude's failure to perceive the limits of his patriotic vision leads to another form of traditional mourning, this time based on Judeo-Christian theology.

By killing Claude so early in life, the war saves him from a suicidal end that, in Mrs. Wheeler's mind, would bar him from entering the kingdom of Heaven. As an explanation of what she means by those final, cryptic words and phrases such as “awakening” and “dreadful disappointment,” she imagines the various soldiers, sailors, and airmen she has known or heard about who, unlike Claude, were not lucky enough to be killed before disillusionment set in. Mrs. Wheeler's statements echo modernist writers' descriptions of “the lost generation.” In *This Side*

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<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Wheeler compares the scale of war violence to “the passage of the Red Sea, in the Bible” (1296).

of *Paradise* (1921), Fitzgerald states, “Here was a generation [. . .] grown up to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken” (304). Likewise, in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), Ernest Hemingway would reminisce about Gertrude Stein naming that generation, describing “all [. . .] young people who served in the war” as “a *génération perdue*.” These men ended up committing suicide “in obscure lodging houses,” “in their office,” or by “slip[ping] over a vessel’s side” (1296). Mrs. Wheeler’s description of suicides in domestic and professional spaces, on land and at sea, shifts from past to present tense as if such horrendous atrocities, which took place during the midst of war, continue through the present without any sign of stopping for the foreseeable future. In contrast to these suicides, “one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion . . . [was] safe, safe” (1297). Just as Mrs. Wheeler switches between past and present throughout her discussion of the suicides, here she chokes back sadness—communicated through ellipsis—by imagining Claude shielded safely from disappointment in Heaven’s eternal present.

Accompanying Mrs. Wheeler in the novel’s closing scene, Mahailey also advocates a redemptive, religious narrative by telling the grieving mother, “you’ll see your boy up yonder.” Throughout the novel, Mahailey has been, by a wide margin, the one character in the family with whom Claude has felt most closely connected. When his father makes a joke at his expense, she comforts him; when Enid leaves for China, she eases his sense of abandonment; when he decides to enlist, she voices her approval long before anyone else. Unswerving in her admiration for Claude and his desire to help the nation achieve its moral mission, Mahailey does not, like Mrs. Wheeler, feel any disillusionment about war’s evil nature; however, she too takes solace in the fact that, killed in battle, Claude has gained entrance into Heaven. Placed at the end of the narrative, her consolation effectively offers the final word about what Claude’s life and death, and what the war itself, means.

Yet, by ending the novel with Mahailey, the narrator also circles back to the first chapter, where the maid becomes one of the objects of Nat Wheeler's jokes. For, after the maid's expression of comfort, the narrator does not miss the opportunity to poke fun at her. Observing that, for Mrs. Wheeler, "God is near," the narrator points out that, for Mahailey, who "is not troubled by any knowledge of interstellar spaces, [. . .] He is nearer still,—directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove" (1297). The soft, playful joke about Mahailey's opinion of the space between the earthly and spiritual planes of existence also extends to the narrator's ironic perspective on the maid and her employer's conciliatory mourning. In her solace, Mahailey calls Mrs. Wheeler "Mudder," a phonetically spelled term of endearment that suggests both the German expression of "mother" ("Mutter") and, more to the point, mud or someone who muddies. Throughout the novel, Claude despises how people pronounce his name, with a short, clipped vowel sound that transforms it from "Claude" to "clod," a word referring to dirt and to a stupid individual. The play on words pinpoints his anxiety that farm life will make him stupid; at the same time, it foreshadows how, in his eventual combat death, some corner of a foreign land—where earth mixes with the dust of the naïve and idealistic dead—will forever be America. Whereas Mrs. Wheeler makes reference to Claude's fear of being fooled as integral to her relief, the term "Mudder" associates her and to an extent Mahailey with cloddishness, or—in this case—muddiness, and therefore foolishness. Mahailey employs such maternal terminology while comforting Mrs. Wheeler about the certainty of Claude's afterlife. Her unreserved patriotism—that Claude saved the country and, now dead, belongs with the Savior—ironically sheds light on a paradox in Mrs. Wheeler's slightly different mourning strategy.

For Mrs. Wheeler, the nation has both killed and saved her son. By criticizing the way the government, military, public, and family thoroughly indoctrinated her son, imbued his meaningless existence with a patriotic fervor that led swiftly to his demise, she takes comfort in



his untimely death. Despite her concerns about illusory nationalism and evil warfare, she holds dear the fact that, by enlisting as an American doughboy to fight for France's freedom, Claude's body might have perished but his soul has been saved. In other words, Mrs. Wheeler criticizes patriotism at the same time that she takes solace in its effects on her son. Although her theological determinism has altered from an advocacy of America's moral mission to a proclamation of war's wickedness, she fails—in the novel's closing scene—to offer any satisfactory way to mourn Claude's death. In the final assessment, her conciliatory mourning is clear as mud.

Through characters such as Mrs. Voigt, Victor Morse, Mahailey, and Mrs. Wheeler, *One of Ours* ironizes wartime mourning practices. The novel opens up to a drastically unstable position as the narrator shifts between and refuses to judge various, contradictory perspectives on the war. The narrator promotes pacifism or pro-German intervention since support for the Allies makes public enemies of sympathetic characters such as Voigt (as well as other immigrants including Yoeder). The pilot Morse echoes the narrator's own disillusioned remarks about the war only to be exposed as a hypocrite through Claude's flattering interrogation of him. In terms of Mahailey and Mrs. Wheeler, the narrator makes some of the most pointed remarks about Claude's naïve idealism only to celebrate the way patriotism has saved the protagonist. Needless to say, *One of Ours* has its friends and foes, but by remaining impartial to all perspectives, the novel responds melancholically rather than mournfully to the protagonist's death and consequently embodies a neutral counter-nationalism.

## FORGOTTEN RACE: NICK ADAMS'S MECHANIZED WAR

After publishing *in our time* (1924) through Bill Bird's small, Paris-based Three Mountains Press, Ernest Hemingway added short stories to the book's original series of eighteen vignettes or "chapters," cobbling together a newer, more experimental version entitled *In Our Time*, which he published the following year. In its second iteration, the short story sequence provides a kaleidoscopic vision of the fictional and historical losses experienced between 1910 and the mid-1920s. Detailing life among Native Americans in Michigan, the horrors of childbirth, adolescent romances and adventures, dismal realities of WWI and the Greco-Turkish War, tourism in postwar Europe, public executions, and victories and defeats in the dusty Spanish bullring, Hemingway emphasizes the loss of love, life, sanity, and faith all while employing a radically and now famously terse prose that submerges most of the meaning below the surface and a disjointed narrative pattern that oscillates between shorter vignettes and ever-so-slightly longer stories. Beginning as an outgrowth of *in our time*, the book ends with the celebrated fishing story, "Big Two-Hearted River." Although, for all intents and purposes, *In Our Time* ends there in the streams of upper Michigan, its composition history does not.<sup>9</sup>

While finalizing the story sequence, Hemingway realized that the sexually explicit content of one of his stories, "Up in Michigan," in which a waitress loses her virginity to a blacksmith, might cause trouble for his publisher Boni & Liveright. He had written the narrative back in 1921 and then published it in *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923). Forced to create something new to replace the tale, Hemingway wrote a story about his young protagonist Nick Adams stumbling upon a white ex-prizefighter named Ad Francis and his black companion, Bugs, who ends up knocking out the boxer. In a letter to Horace Liveright, written on 31 March 1925, Hemingway directed his publisher to substitute the new story for the old and shift the order

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<sup>9</sup> The story does not literally close out the book. The vignette "L'Envoi" comes at the end; however, "Big Two-Hearted River" is the last, and the longest, story in the entire sequence.

of the sequence: “You are eliminating the second story—Up in Michigan. The next three stories move up one place each and this new story—~~The Great Little Fighting Machine~~ Battler—takes the place at present occupied by—The Three Day Blow” (*Letters II* 295). As Hemingway’s letter also shows, he had initially entitled the story about Nick, the boxer, and his companion “The Great Little Fighting Machine” before revising it as “The Battler.” The last story Hemingway ever wrote for *In Our Time* and the last story in the sequence closely resemble each other. Both begin with the same image conveyed through similar language: a train disappearing around a curve in the upper Michigan wilderness. They also develop into similar plots about Nick making, or encountering, a campsite. In the boxing story, he discovers a camp after being thrown off the train. In the fishing story, he whiles away his time thinking about and making a satisfactory one. Both stories also end with Nick meditating on perplexing, even troubling, sites: a fire, and a swamp.

In this chapter, I argue that, placed midway through the story sequence, “The Battler” provides Hemingway’s final word on the war theme buried within the pages of “Big Two-Hearted River.” Through the characterization of Ad and Bugs, Hemingway points to a historical wartime and postwar double bind in which African Americans were often excluded from combat experience at the same time that war trauma became racialized. As a catastrophic event that never personally affects the black character during combat—because he has not been allowed either in real life or in cultural memory to participate in war—trauma actually becomes what I want to refer to as racial melancholia, a loss redirected from the combatant who did the suffering to the character who, willingly or not, suffers for it. Nick thus constructs a white national ideal that engages bravely, never traumatically, in combat, in contrast to black characters imagined as violable. These two aspects of the short story sequence—racial melancholia and ideal whiteness—foreground the construction of a postwar national identity and unity inseparable

from the strategic racialization and subsequent sexualization of black identity. In defining wartime and postwar racial melancholia, I am indebted to Anne Anlin Cheng who, in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*, describes racial loss as a form of melancholia foundational to U.S. nationalism. As Cheng asserts, “Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others” (27). In connecting “The Battler” to “Big Two-Hearted River,” I will unpack the “yet-retention” aspect of Cheng’s claim by contending that the very mutability of blackness in the sequence leads to the liminality of race in the fishing story, where Nick attempts to recover from the war by forgetting about it and thus becoming the kind of noncombatant that he previously associates with racial melancholia. *In Our Time* thus signals a two-fold melancholy nationalism, one in which black racial loss propels a white national identity that, far from consoling the country or helping its veterans recover, gets metabolized in the dialectical workings of the protagonist’s post-traumatic stress disorder.

Unlike in the previous chapter, in which I argued that Cather employs pre-war neutrality as the basis for an ironic wartime and postwar community, Hemingway initially constructs a literary form of nationalism more aligned with Wilson and Creel’s propagandizing. Like them, he envisions a “white-hot mass instinct;” whereas the notion of mass or collective instinct became the focus and critique of my examination of *One of Ours*, here Hemingway turns to the role of whiteness—versus blackness—as pivotal in the stabilization of American identity after the horrors of war.<sup>10</sup> If as a genre the short story sequence operates as a “fictive community,”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Hemingway charges Cather with a Nativist outlook during his aforementioned letter to Wilson about the influence of *The Birth of a Nation* on *One of Ours*. Referring to the hypocrisy in Hemingway’s statement Karsten Helge Piep states that he “tends to suppress the multiplicity of ways in which authors from different backgrounds and perspectives sought to understand and shape the socio-political implications of World War I” (19).

then within these two stories that compose a neglected theme in *In Our Time* it does so by exploring a distinctly American one dependent on white supremacy and racial melancholia.

In *Our America*, Walter Benn Michaels argues that American modernists employed a nativist doctrine of race to bolster national identity. He asserts, “newly revised categories of collectivity—and, in particular, of collective *national* identity—began in the 1920s to occupy what I will argue was a central position in American culture” (6; emphasis original). Examining works such as Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920), Charles Gould’s *America, A Family Matter* (1922), and Horace Kallen’s *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924) alongside novels by modernists including Hemingway, he asserts that writers promoted national identity by committing to “the nativist project of racializing the American” (13). Even at their most pluralistic, texts such as Hemingway’s early novels *The Torrents of Spring* (1924) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) cannot escape nativism because, as Michaels claims, “there can be no anti-essentialist account of race” (134). In the well-known counter to his argument, Marjorie Perloff mocks the reductive nature of *Our America*: “The identitarian paradigm once introduced recurs with minor variations in novel after novel: [. . .]. There is a ‘Gotchal’ quality to all this, as if to say, ‘[. . .] what the novel is *really* about is race” (101-2). According to her, the rote nature of Michaels’s book ensures not the reader’s acknowledgment of a vast, nativist network in both canonical and little-known modernist texts but rather the reader’s suspicion that there might be some other, unacknowledged quality that Michaels misses in his symptomatic analysis.

Although a fixation on race might have become too habitual in Perloff’s opinion, it has recently become critical to a scholarly reevaluation of Hemingway’s life and writings. Specifically in his thoughts on, relationships with, and literary characterizations of African

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<sup>11</sup> See *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995).

Americans, Hemingway has been seen as both a propagator of nativism and as a sensitive and even forward-thinking writer when it comes to race issues. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison famously observes that American writers—Hemingway possibly foremost—rarely explore African American existence beyond racial stereotypes. More recently, however, critics such as Amy L. Strong and Marc Kevin Dudley have begun to interrogate the presumed stereotypes and prejudices in Hemingway’s works. Strong positions her analysis in *Race and Identity in Hemingway’s Fiction* as part of the revisionist endeavors occurring over the past thirty years. She argues that in scholarship on Hemingway’s narratives non-white characters have either been dismissed completely or interpreted as ancillary to the plot of a white protagonist. In contrast, she argues that Hemingway envisioned race as a cultural construct that left self-identity radically permeable. Similarly, in *Hemingway, Race, and Art: Bloodlines and the Color Line*, Dudley claims, “Hemingway’s body of work suggests that as we shift the dividing line between the races, between (white) self and racial ‘other,’ difference disappears. Moreover, imagined difference must be amplified to maintain any sense of ‘true’ selfhood” (6). In order to make their arguments, both scholars read “The Battler.” Whereas Strong examines Ad and Nick’s white supremacist behavior, Dudley explores how Hemingway challenges white supremacy as a myth through Bugs’s dominance over Ad at the end of the pugilistic story. Both Strong and Dudley position “The Battler” alongside Hemingway’s other boxing-related narratives such as “A Matter of Colour,” a story he published much earlier in his Oak Park High School arts magazine *Trapeze*, and “The Light of the World,” a story he published nearly a decade after “The Battler.” While in this chapter I address connections to “A Matter of Colour,” I more importantly set “The Battler” alongside “Big Two-Hearted River” in order to examine how race, war, and nationalism

intersect in the story sequence in ways that, as Dudley notes, both amplify racial difference and cause it to disappear.

Before elaborating on that argument, I first need to say that it depends on the idea of *In Our Time* as metafiction. At Gertrude Stein's urging Hemingway excised an eleven-page story fragment, which Philip Young entitled "On Writing," from the final pages of the fishing story. The fragment includes Nick's reflections on fishing, friendship, marriage, Anglophobia, and, most importantly, the metafictional composition of the entire book. Nick considers how "writing about anything actual was bad. It killed it. The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined. That made everything come true" (*The Nick Adams Stories* 225). Nick then turns to the example of James Joyce's protagonist Stephen Dedalus to demonstrate how the close likeness between author and character deadens the artwork. Ironically, Hemingway's employment of Nick as a rather unimaginative mouthpiece for his own thoughts and feelings about—and rivalries with—other modernists effectively killed "On Writing" since, in Stein's opinion, it told the story rather than showed it. As an apprentice to Stein, Hemingway took her advice and wrote to his friend and fellow writer Donald Ogden Stewart about his radically new judgment of the story's closing pages: "An important development has arisen. I have discovered that the last eleven pages of the last story in the book I sent you are crap, ie. faecal matter, to wit shit, either bovine or equine. It don't matter" (*Letters* Vol. II 172). Whether included on the page or submerged deep below it like the subaqueous bulk of an iceberg, the ending to the fishing story has mattered a great deal to scholars because in the pages "On Writing" Nick alludes to the fact that he has written stories such as "Indian Camp" and "My Old Man." As well, he reveals that, although he has determined to give up writing for a period of time, which seems to include the time span of the fishing story, he will begin again.

As early as the 1930s, critics such as Edmund Wilson began examining these meta-fictional aspects of the sequence. In the introduction to the Scribner edition, Wilson inquires if Nick has written everything, even the vignettes about British soldiers and Greco-Turkish War executions: “Has the young man who gets wounded in the War, who watches the cabinet ministers shot and who pots the enemy as they are trying to get over a simply priceless barricade, really come such a long way from the boy who went fishing at Big Two-Hearted River?” (x). Fifty years later, Elizabeth D. Vaughn would answer in the affirmative, describing the sequence as a “self-begetting fiction.” She contends “that Nick is the sole narrator of *In Our Time* and that voices that identify themselves as someone other than Nick constitute Nick’s experimentation with the convention of the narrator’s status as a disembodied voice” (708). Like Vaughn, Debra Modellmog asserts that Nick has written the stories and vignettes of *In Our Time*, but she also claims that he has done so after the war. The sequence thus serves as a wish fulfillment, allowing Hemingway’s protagonist to fictively control a chaotic world (597). More recently, Milton A. Cohen has rejected the notion that Nick has written everything, especially the easily identifiable war vignettes that depict the multi-national cast of narrators and characters who talk about and respond to war in ways Nick would not. For Cohen, “the assumption of a monolithic voice and experience blurs the very real differences these voices represent—differences of speakers, of their war experiences, and most important, of their psychological reactions to their experience—their states of affect” (24). Whether or not the reality of Nick ventriloquizing British, French, and Italian voices would diminish the narrators’ and characters’ different perspectives on war will not be the purview of this chapter nor my interest in the story sequence as metafiction. Instead, I want to address a specific conundrum regarding the metafictionality.

Quite possibly, Hemingway intended for his metafictional reveal in “On Writing” to turn the short story sequence into a circular narrative; by the end of the book, Nick prepares to begin



writing it. Or, Nick, who has been writing the stories and vignettes ever since his return from the war, takes a break around the time that the fishing trip occurs and resumes writing after his bucolic reprieve. Regardless, the story fits into and yet resists metafictional narrative design since “On Writing” highlights the fact that Nick has not written the fishing story, or has not written it quite yet. By bringing up the notion of metafictionality, Hemingway makes Nick the author of the story sequence at the same time that he calls into question Nick’s specific authorship of the final story. While, in “Big Two-Hearted River,” free indirect discourse positions the character of Nick close to the narrator, they are not synonymous, leaving room for the story to disrupt the wish fulfillment the protagonist attempts to establish. Put bluntly, in making an argument about race and war in the sequence, I interpret “The Battler” as a metafictional wish fulfillment and “Big Two-Hearted River” as a story that, composed while Nick has given up writing, illustrates the protagonist’s desire to control a chaotic world, as Modellmog notes, but fails to achieve the same level of narrative control as the boxing story.

Throughout this chapter, I offer a four-pronged approach. First, I intend to examine the racial dynamics in Hemingway’s boxing story, extending scholarship on white supremacy in the story while also uncovering certain themes such as servility, homosexuality, and cultural amnesia that have gone critically under-examined in the story. Second, I will argue that although the story takes place in a pre-war setting and refers to the racial tensions surrounding the Jack Johnson-James J. Jeffries boxing bout on 4 July 1910, in the short story sequence Hemingway contextualizes the story through the war. In this middle section I claim that, read as a war rather than boxing story, “The Battler” illustrates racial violence during and after the war. In order to shore up a white national identity, African Americans were often disallowed from becoming combatants while nonetheless suffering the traumatic effects of mechanized war, which most often afflicted white soldiers in the U.S. military. In other words, black participation in combat

was erased from cultural memory at the same time that violence and its traumatic effects were racialized as a form of melancholia. Racial melancholia bolstered national virtues such as the freedom and liberty of African Americans to avoid the shackles of combat while also shoring up a specifically *white* nationalism by displacing trauma onto racial others paradoxically disallowed from taking part in the combat that might induce it in the first place. Third, I return to Hemingway's short story sequence by examining the final story, "Big Two-Hearted River," in which Nick metabolizes both ideal whiteness and racial melancholia in his traumatized, postwar maundering along the upper Michigan waterways. In order to embody a white national ideal, he chooses to both think about the war *as* a fishing story and think about fishing instead of war. He mentally organizes the war through the daily tasks he seeks to complete at the same time that those tasks often eclipse warfare altogether. Consequently, Nick becomes both a mechanized white national ideal in search of personal peace and, by staving off trauma by avoiding warfare entirely, a kind of African American noncombatant imbued with trauma in "The Battler" and in U.S. wartime and postwar culture. That is, the route he takes to recuperate from trauma actually leads him back to it by splitting his identity into both white and black. Finally, I turn to the broader story sequence by showing how Nick negotiates his incomplete narrative control. By blurring the color line, he demonstrates how his own racialized melancholia makes it possible for him to promote nationalism in and through his fictive community.

## I.

As a story written by Nick, "The Battler" reveals his ability to maintain a doctrine of white supremacy despite a plot that might destabilize it. The story begins after a brakeman has beaten up Nick and kicked him off a train near Mancelona, Michigan. Wandering through the wilderness beside the railroad tracks, Nick tries to look at his black eye, which has just begun to

puff up and become sore. Unable to see his reflection in the dark water, though, he spies a campfire gleaming in the distance. He cautiously approaches it and meets the ex-prizefighter, Ad Francis, who has been sitting there alone, watching the flames. In the first half of the story, the narrator continually focuses on the boxer's toughness and whiteness as traits Nick should emulate. After Nick describes his run-in with a "lousy crut of a brakeman" (97), Ad mentors him on the virtues of toughness, asking Nick if he's "a tough one." Initially, Nick denies that label, but after Ad confirms that "all you kids are tough," Nick parrots, "You got to be tough (98). As the eponymous character of a story originally entitled "The Little Fighting Machine," Ad demonstrates a desire to achieve a kind of imperviousness to pain. Equated with machinery, toughness also becomes a sign of whiteness to such an extent that even Nick's fresh black eye becomes a symbol of his race. For, in the midst of Ad's discussion of pain tolerance, he asks Nick where he got "the shiner," thus equating the bruise to light rather than darkness, to whiteness rather than blackness. Through their discussion of the bruise, these two characters define the white race by its ability to manage pain.

In the midst of their conversation, though, Nick glimpses the boxer's disfigured face: "In the firelight Nick saw that his face was misshapen. His nose was sunken, his eyes were slits, he had queer-shaped lips. Nick did not perceive all this at once, he only saw the man's face was queerly formed and mutilated. It was like putty in color. Dead looking in the firelight" (98-9). Aware of Nick's gaze, Ad refers nonchalantly to the gruesome look of his "pan," then gives Nick a close-up of his missing ear. The narrator emphasizes the temporal dissonance Nick experiences while observing the aspects of Ad's face. Initially, Nick only notices the oddness of the boxer's visage before later catching the specific detail of his nose, eyes, and lips. For Ad, the mutilation signifies his toughness. After showing off the stump of his ear, he tells Nick, "I could take it [. . .]. Don't you think I could take it, kid? [. . .] They all bust their hands on me [. . .]."

They couldn't hurt me." (99). As Nick continues listening to and watching the boxer, however, the scales fall from the young boy's eyes.

Nick soon realizes that his white ideal is nothing more than a raving punch-drunk fighter. Ad's inability to manage pain destroys both his and Nick's white idealism. After telling Nick that his opponents might have hit him, even knocked him out, but that he has remained undefeated because nobody could hurt him, Ad confesses rather matter-of-factly to Nick that he is crazy and then asks him to stay for dinner. When Ad asks to borrow Nick's knife in order to make sandwiches, though, Nick refuses because Bugs instructs him to hold onto the knife rather than hand it over. Ad perceives Nick's non-compliance as an affront; whereas he has taken up most of the narrative action and dialogue until this moment, Ad now sits in the background suspiciously quiet while his companion prepares the meal. Finally, while Nick and Bugs talk about the upcoming meal, the ex-prizefighter explodes: "How the hell do you get that way? [. . .] Who the hell do you think you are? You're a snotty bastard. You come in here where nobody asks you and eat a man's food and when he asks to borrow a knife you get snotty. [. . .] You come in here and act snotty about my face and smoke my cigars and drink my liquor and then talk snotty" (101). Ad's pent-up aggression that returns, at the end of the outburst, to his face, betrays the fragility of a mentally unstable and ashamed boxer who has gone one too many rounds in the ring, has certainly been denied dangerous utensils before, and has been plagued by a persistent worry about his disfigurement. In addition to the shame Ad feels about his facial features, he also hides out in the woods in part because of a professional and domestic embarrassment. Later in the narrative, Nick learns that Ad was allegedly involved in an incestuous relationship with his sister-turned-manager. When their intimacies received criticism in the newspapers, she ended up leaving him. Bugs tells Nick that, whereas the beatings in the

boxing ring made Ad “simple,” he became “crazy” after the relationship with his sister dissolved (76).

Through the plot twist, Hemingway reveals that the white ideal the young Nick initially intends to emulate is nothing more than a punch-drunk with possible incest issues. The revelation fits well with one of the working titles for the original iteration *in our time*. In a handwritten list of possible titles, Hemingway had scrawled out “THAT WAS BEFORE I KNEW YOU.” Suggestively, to be “in our time” might mean not really knowing anyone, or realizing that nobody is what he initially seems. Whereas the original story sequence does not include a metafictional element, the final one, with Nick in command of the narrative, situates the very instability of identity at the center of the protagonist’s strategy. More than any other word used to describe Ad, the “putty” that Nick likens to the color of the boxer’s face counters his toughness. Unlike Ad’s motto that he can take pain, putty cannot. As a malleable substance, it can be quite easily shaped and distorted by the slightest of external forces. It can also change form; its very essence is based on mutability. In addition to his craziness and shamefulness, Ad suffers from a problem of identity. That is, shame operates both as a gateway for Ad’s aggression and as an affect that undoes his identity. In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines the relationship between shame and identity, claiming, “Shame [. . .] generates and legitimates the place of identity—the question of identity—at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted” (64). Shame makes possible a kind of individuation without identity. On the one hand, it heightens self-consciousness; the telltale signs of shame—such as downcast eyes or, in Ad’s case, the out-of-the-blue reference to his face—illustrate the extent to which the sense of another’s judgmental gaze directs the individual in toward himself. On the other hand, shame’s performative aspects suggest the unboundedness

of identity itself. The self has no essence; much like putty, its very formlessness makes it perfect as a plaything “to be constituted.” In his rant aimed at Nick, Ad ironically refers to this fact when he criticizes the young boy for showing up at the campsite despite the fact that “nobody” has invited him. Of course, Ad implicitly invited Nick by carrying on a hospitable conversation only to then invite him to stay for dinner. In other words, Ad is nobody.

If shame calls identity into question, then Nick exploits the mutability of Ad’s identity by turning him black. After realizing Ad’s traumatized character, Nick divests him of whiteness in order to salvage the ideal that the boxer had initially come to represent. Strong notes that Ad’s mutilated face displays a kind of Negro minstrelsy, which reinforces the ambivalence of his racial identity (49). Through his “sunken” nose and slitted eyes, Ad’s face might initially call to mind a character in yellowface rather than blackface; however, Nick’s remarks about the face emphasize the way his whiteness darkens into blackness. While sitting silently in the background, “[Ad] glared at Nick, his face was white and his eyes almost out of sight under the cap” (101). Not only does the scene vividly illustrate Sedgwick’s physiognomy of shame, where individuals avert eyes or at least hide them almost entirely under their caps, but also in the story the sentence structurally enacts the character’s darkening skin. Although initially insistent about Ad’s whiteness, Nick sees how the boxer’s eyes—and thus the skin surrounding them—seem to recede into the shadows.

If Ad disrupts Nick’s notion of whiteness and Nick colors the boxer as black, then throughout the story the protagonist characterizes both Ad and Bugs as servile African Americans, often coding that servility in terms of effeminate homosexuality. First and foremost Nick essentializes African American identity. For instance, when Bugs introduces himself, Nick cannot see the color of the man’s skin because he is standing between the protagonist and the roaring campfire. Yet, outlined by firelight, Bugs gives clues to his race such as the way he talks

and walks. Nick considers, "It was a negro's voice. [He] knew from the way he walked that he was a negro" (100). Throughout the narrative, neither the protagonist nor the narrator identifies the man by his proper name but more often than not through terms such as "the negro" or "the nigger." As well, for the majority of the story, Bugs spends his time preparing food as the servant for the two white men. Nick actually meets Bugs as he returns to the camp to make dinner. The narrator lingers over the scene in part because of Nick's hunger but also in order to violently contain Bugs in a servile role: "Into the skillet he was laying slices of ham. As the skillet grew hot the grease sputtered and Bugs, crouching on long nigger legs over the fire, turned the ham and broke eggs into the skillet, tipping it from side to side to baste the eggs with the hot fat." Hungry, Nick takes in the sights, sounds, and smells of the meat and eggs cooked by a man who, preparing the meal "on long nigger legs," runs the risk every second of grease, fire, and fat burning him.

By forcing upon Bugs the role of cook and homemaker normally attributed to female characters in the story sequence (such as Mrs. Krebs in the story "Soldier's Home"), Nick begins to associate blackness with homosexuality, underscoring a link already alluded to in his observation of Ad's "queer-shaped lips." By the end of the story, the narrator reveals that Ad and Bugs are not just campmates; instead, during his discussion of Ad's feelings for a woman who may or may not have been his own sister, Bugs reveals how homoerotic desire draws him and Ad together. Twice, Bugs says virtually the same thing about the relationship between Ad and his ex-wife: "She was an awful good looking woman. Looked enough like him to be twins" and, later, "She's a mighty fine woman. [. . .] She looks enough like him to be his own twin" (103). Like the newspaper reports that have shamed Ad and forced him to retreat into the backwoods of Michigan, Bugs's conversation implies incest despite the fact that Bugs adamantly denies it. As he tells Nick, "Of course they wasn't brother and sister no more than a rabbit, but there was a lot

of people didn't like it either way and they commenced to have disagreements." A form of love enclosed within a family, incest occurs between twins or twin-like characters here and in other Hemingway stories, such as "The Last Good Country." While discussing Ad and his girlfriend, Bugs switches from past to present tense—from "she was" and "looked" to "she's" and "she looks"—as if Ad's mutilation initially contrasts with his twin's beauty but then becomes the mutable thing that allows Bugs to envision them both as the same. In other words, whereas Nick uses the malleability of Ad's putty-like face to cast him as black, Bugs employs it as a way to legitimize his desire for Ad by turning it into an attraction toward the woman—sister or not—who resembles him. What Sedgwick would describe as a situation in which a female character operates as a mediator between men, as the connector of male homosocial bonds, the alleged incest between Ad and his sister staves off charges of overt homosexuality while also reinforcing them in the narrative.

Yet, a crucial event could cause trouble for Nick's strategy of coloring Ad as black and blackness as servile and homosexual. Bugs feels at liberty enough to divulge the information about Ad's past because he has just knocked the boxer out cold. After Nick's perceived "snottiness" causes Ad's outburst, the ex-prizefighter approaches the young boy and coaxes him into a fight. In the nick of time, Bugs intervenes: "The little man looked down at Nick's feet. As he looked down the negro, who had followed behind him as he moved away from the fire, set himself and tapped [Ad] across the base of the skull. He fell forward and Bugs dropped the cloth-wrapped blackjack on the grass" (102). Hemingway based the idea for this turning point on the earlier story, "A Matter of Colour," in which a Swede has been hired to rig a match between white and black pugilists in order to ensure the former wins. Color-blind, he ends up knocking out the white boxer, delivering victory to his opponent. Although in that story, the victory of the African American boxer depends upon the actions of another character, in "The



Battler,” a story populated with an ex-prizefighter and a tough young man who prides himself on pain tolerance, Bugs is the only character who actually commits any act resembling “battling.” According to Gary Edward Holcomb, the story “stag[es] the twentieth-century’s historic *war* against the inequitable, inherited master-slave relationship, as Bugs [. . .] is a character who reflects the disobedient New Negro” (*Hemingway in Context* 312). Nick, however, subdues the perceived racial transgression. Bugs’s knockout blow goes unnoticed because it cures Ad by giving him short-term amnesia at the same time that the young Nick reverses his prior strategy by coloring Bugs as white. For instance, Nick observes the way Bugs “drank the coffee and wiped his lips with the pink palm of his hand” (103). At no other point in the narrative does Nick associate Bugs with non-blackness; rather, he identifies the companion’s race in his silhouette against the fire, the way he talks, how he moves, and the fact that his weapon of choice is a blackjack. Yet, in this moment, just after Bugs has skillfully knocked out his companion with one gentle tap to the back of his skull, Nick lightens the man’s skin tone.

Nick’s strategizing parallels the cultural reaction to the boxing upset between Johnson and the “Great White Hope” Jeffries. In 1910, Johnson beat Jeffries, becoming the first-ever black Heavy Weight Champion of the World and thus seriously challenging the deeply entrenched myth of white superiority. In the aftermath of the boxing match, race riots erupted across the nation as newspaper headlines tried to make sense of the sporting event. Some blamed the fiasco on Jeffries’s lack of training while others, such as *The Times Dispatch* of Richmond, Virginia, interpreted Johnson’s victory as, surprising as it may seem, a win for the whites. The front page of the Sporting Section proudly proclaims, “His Courage as White as His Skin is Black.” In contrast, it seems that Jeffries’s failure must have been as black as his skin was white. As the headline suggests, the figurative dimensions of skin color can rather easily be manipulated—just as a boxing match might be rigged—against certain races of people, keeping

them out of the winner's and perpetually in the loser's column. Similar to the viewpoint espoused in one of the many sports articles printed after the upset, Nick ensures African American defeat by ensuring any and all victory as a fundamental aspect of whiteness.

Throughout the rest of the story, Bugs remains an African American caricature of homosexuality and servility in Nick's eyes. Immediately after the knock out, he demonstrates homoerotic desire by tending to Ad: "The little man lay there, his face in the grass. The negro picked him up, his head hanging, and carried him to the fire. [. . .] The negro splashed water with his hand on the man's face and pulled his ears gently. The eyes closed" (102). Attempting to rouse Ad, Bugs's actions—holding, carrying, bathing, tenderly pulling—suggest the affection that goes beyond that of mere campmates. Likewise, after ensuring that his victim will recover satisfactorily, Bugs goes back to his prior occupation by preparing food for the white characters, this time making coffee for Nick. As the protagonist walks away from the campsite, he hears Ad awakening from his black-out and Bugs's affectionately servile response: "You'll feel better, Mister Francis. [. . .] Just you drink a cup of this hot coffee" (104). Walking up to the train tracks but looking back at the campsite, Nick looks back in order to watch the firelight, a symbol that throughout the story represents his narrative strategy of creating shadow and light.

Several embedded ideas place the wartime context in more meaningful perspective. From beginning to end, Nick insists on maintaining a white ideal embodied in an individual (such as the man Ad used to be) with an impenetrable pain threshold. In order to maintain that ideal after encountering the present-day punch-drunk, Nick identifies the boxer as black and associates blackness with both servility and effeminacy. At the same time, when African American characters act in surprising ways that might trouble such a reading, Nick interprets them, or at least their actions, in terms of whiteness. The fluidity of race and the permeability of the color line become important themes not just in the context of the Johnson-Jeffries bout but

also as an undeniable aspect of warfare and its legacy of trauma. After all, a “battler” (a term synonymous with a pugilist such as Battling Nelson or Battling Siki) also refers to war combatants. In fact, the complexities of the story might be better understood in the context of the war. Within the larger sequence of *In Our Time*, Hemingway positions the story just prior to a vignette about a character who sustains spinal injuries during the war. It is as if the boxing story leads naturally, at least in Hemingway’s or his narrator’s mind, to thoughts of warfare and wartime.

## II.

Although set in a pre-war context, “The Battler” reflects racial tensions in the wartime and postwar period, illuminating how the stabilization of white nationalism after the war required racial melancholia. The fact that Bugs turns white after engaging in violence actually says less about boxing than it does about military conflict precisely because, in the boxing ring, African Americans were allowed to take part whereas, in the trenches and front lines of WWI, they were not. Disallowed from participating in combat, African Americans escaped the brunt of the traumatic effects of a mechanized war that restricted soldiers to radically passive positions, thus troubling the distinction between combatant and noncombatant. In the etiology of trauma, though, African Americans were nonetheless burdened with shell-shock that, at least in cultural memory, was recalibrated as a disorder affecting a population largely unable to get close enough to the action to experience artillery explosions. Through the displacement of trauma, whites envisioned themselves as man-machines—or, in light of the previous story, little fighting machines—with an impermeable pain threshold ensuring the nation’s victory in the ostensibly good fight against the Central Powers. Persevering in combat, they could aid the nation in restoring peace without suffering the psychic damage that might spoil the war or its virtuous

mission all while patronizingly refusing African Americans the same opportunities because they were too susceptible to trauma to engage in war yet also leveraging that imposed noncombatancy for the benefit of the white race.

During the shift from neutral to belligerent status against the Germans, Wilson and his administration envisioned the war as a thoroughly white affair. While more than 360,000 African American troops joined the rank and file, they were not assigned to combatant roles but to Supply of Service units. In response to a delegate questioning Wilson's decision to disallow blacks from serving in military capacities alongside whites, he replied, "segregation is not a humiliation but a benefit" (qtd. in Cowie 78). Such federal re-segregation did not foster the separate-but-equal quality Wilson sought, and it did not help his case that he had been born, by chance, in a Southern state. For many African Americans, the war necessarily restrained them in a double bind: if they joined the "white man's war," then they were relegated to labor units as second-class citizens; if they did not enlist as soldiers because they refused to support a racist nation ravaged by "Jim Crow" laws, then they were not doing their duty as citizens.

In an editorial for *The Crisis* published just two months after the war declaration, W. E. B. Du Bois reacted to the fearfulness that had led to the creation of a segregated war effort: "Certain Americans—Southern Bourbons, and Northern Copperheads—fear Negroes. They do not fear that they will not fight—they fear that they WILL fight and fight well. [. . .] They cannot 'Carrizal' the news and boost the white putty-head who blundered, forgetting the very name of the brave black subalterns" (61). Here, Du Bois refers to the Battle of Carrizal fought in June 1916. After Pancho Villa had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border and raided Columbus, New Mexico, General Pershing ordered Captain Charles Trumbull Boyd to lead a group of Buffalo Soldiers from the 10th Cavalry of the United States Army on an expedition in search of him. Upon receiving intelligence that Pancho Villa was housed in the town of Carrizal, Boyd and his

troops pursued him but suffered massive casualties in the attack. Boyd died as well as 10 Buffalo Soldiers while others were taken prisoner. In the editorial, Du Bois emphasizes the fact that although Boyd received a funeral procession, the self-sacrifice of the African American cavalry soldiers went largely unnoticed.

Turning from Carrizal to WWI, Du Bois argues that white Americans resisted allowing African American soldiers the chance to participate because not only would they out-perform their white counterparts on the battlefield, but also French and other national press agencies would not allow that fact to go unnoticed. Unfortunately, even African American participation in service and labor units was widely forgotten. During the Allied victory parade on Bastille Day in Paris in 1919, for example, black troops were not invited to take part in the celebration; nor were they depicted in the massive cyclorama *Panthéon de la Guerre*, painted in Paris during the war and now hanging in the Memorial Hall at the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City.<sup>12</sup> When African American troops returned back home, demobilization led to increased incidents of lynchings and race riots. In part, the image of returning black soldiers wearing military uniforms became an irrefutable and dangerous visual rhetoric of “their claim to citizenship” (Carden-Coyne 46). Added to this, competition between black and white veterans for jobs in a booming post-war U.S. economy led to the Red Summer race riots that occurred throughout the U.S. but were especially prevalent in cities and towns such as Chicago, Washington D.C., and Elaine, Arkansas. Both figuratively and quite literally, in the master narrative and at the end of the noose, blacks were violently removed from the cultural memory of the First World War.

Neither foreseen by Wilson nor addressed in Du Bois’s editorial or, for that matter, understood by the white mobs of the Red Summer was that the very racism against blacks during and after the war inevitably linked whiteness and injury, becoming especially evident when

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of the cyclorama and the victory parade, see Mark Whalan’s essay “‘How did they pick John Doe?’: Race, Memorialization, and Modernism in US Interwar Literature.”

disabled vets began to return by the thousands, suffering physically and psychologically from mutilation and war neurosis, or when they never returned at all.<sup>13</sup> Du Bois alludes to the point in his editorial by differentiating between black bravery and white putty-headedness. In his assessment, whites might be unfairly praised, but they are also the only ones who can “blunder” in the first fully mechanized war where “technology was removed from a context in which it was comprehensible as the instrument of production and distribution” only to be “‘resituated’ into a context of destruction, work, and terror” (Leed 31). Technological forces such as barbed wire, bombs, artillery shells, machine-guns, and poisoned gas constrained a war of movement into one of attrition, restricting most soldiers to a single section of trench where they waited with boredom, suffered through another trench mortar barrage, or were commanded to go over the top to meet shell explosions and machine-gun fire. Rarely able to look over the trench parapet much less take an active role in determining the outcome of affairs, humans were overpowered by the weaponry that seemed to do all the fighting autonomously. In other words, technology was no longer an “instrument,” as Leeds points out. Instead, technological machinery became the soldiers while humans assumed roles as mechanized workers who, severely restricted in how they moved, what they thought, and where they went, were charged with the quasi-noncombatant task of keeping the “real” soldiers fighting.

As scholars such as Joanna Bourke have claimed, the industrialized tactics that forced soldiers into passive victimization led to shell-shock symptoms like uncontrollable twitches and outbursts that were often interpreted as signs of homosexuality (58). Before examining that specific link between race, gender, and war, let us turn quickly to the Chapter VII vignette, in which Hemingway overtly explores the theme of traumatic homosexuality. Set in the trenches along the Fossalta di Piave, the vignette depicts an anonymous soldier praying for a deafening

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<sup>13</sup> See John M. Kinder’s *Paying with Their Bodies: American War and the Problem of the Disabled Veteran*.

and earthshaking bombardment to end. Attempting to muffle his voice from any fellow soldier who might be listening, he prays, “Oh Jesus Christ get me out of here. Dear Jesus, please get me out. Christ, please, please, please, Christ” (109). Internalizing the popular opinion that any loss of composure in battle signals homosexuality, the soldier seeks to perform a heterosexual counter-identity by sleeping with a prostitute at the Villa Rossa the night after the bombardment. Interestingly, in the sentence preceding this “straight” act, the narrator shifts focus from the soldier to the entire group of troops: “We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up.” By shifting to the collective pronoun, the narrator implicitly populates the Villa Rossa with the soldier’s fellow troops, so that they might watch and approve his actions, or at least forget about his seemingly shameful behavior the day before.

While trauma was associated with homosexuality and the relatively passive and mechanized position of soldiers, it was also likened to bodily permeability. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud relates trauma to an intrusion of an organism’s epidermal barrier. As he states, “external excitations as are strong enough to break through the barriers against stimuli we call traumatic. In my opinion the concept of trauma involves such a relationship to an otherwise efficacious barrier” (34). Elaborating on Freud’s point, Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma occurs when an event “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of survivors” (4). Importantly, the very word that Du Bois chooses—putty-headedness—might be employed to imagine just this kind of penetrable barrier that could easily decimate the mind, turning individuals into shell-shock victims or, in the case of Ad Francis, into punch-drunks with queer-shaped lips.

Particularly in the U.S., effeminized trauma and how it was contradictorily imagined as stemming from mechanization and epidermal permeability or malleability were displaced onto

various populations of people including African Americans. Before turning to two examples about the war, I want to initially examine Sianne Ngai's argument that, in the early twentieth century, African Americans were imbued with a kind of "animatedness" in literary and cultural representations. For Ngai, the term lumps together contradictory concepts of mechanization and emotionality: "On one hand, animatedness points to restrictions placed on spontaneous movement and activity [ . . . ]. On the other hand, the affect can also be read also be read as highlighting the elasticity of the body being animated" (100). The first concept might best be illustrated through the regimented movements of an assembly line worker while the second appears in Sergei Eisenstein's notion of "plasmaticness," which he defines as the "rejection of once-and-forever allotted form" (21). As Ngai perceptively argues, the plasmatic freedom or liberation inherent in the animated body relies on its "utter subjection to power, confirming its vulnerability to external manipulation and control" (101). In analyses of literary and cultural portrayals—ranging from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to prime-time television cartoons—Ngai demonstrates how African Americans become mechanically restrained yet emotively uncontrollable, a contradiction inscribed on their bodies as, at the same time, enslavable and excitable.

Ngai's animatedness aligns quite easily with Du Bois's putty-headedness rearticulated, in war and postwar literature and culture, as an attribute of the African American race. Such individuals were viewed as mechanized noncombatants either because the vast majority of them resided in industrialized, northern cities during the war years or because those who did enlist were in a real sense enslaved as laborers rather than fellow soldiers. Imagined as mechanized in their civilian or military employment and, above all, in their subordination to the white race through a legacy of slavery, African Americans were burdened with the trauma associated with mechanized passivity that had predominately targeted white soldiers. Mechanistically



controlled, they were also characterized as a race given over to traumatic animatedness illustrated, as we will see, in exuberant music, hyper-sexuality, and finally the undercurrents of Hemingway's fishing story.

In "Echoes of the Jazz Age," published in 1931, F. Scott Fitzgerald examines a music genre that he claims had met its demise two years prior, at the end of the 1920s. In the essay, he relates jazz to the "nervous energy stored up and unexpended during the War" (130) and elaborates on that point later by likening it to "a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike big cities behind the lines of war" (132). Through the image of anthropomorphized urban spaces, he seems to refer to inhabitants of large cities such as London or Paris who remained north or west of the trench lines awaiting news of German advancement. In my final chapter on Stein, I will elaborate on this particular theme of noncombatancy, American expatriation, and information or news technologies. Presently, though, I am more interested in how Fitzgerald discusses a quintessentially American music created by African Americans and thus has in mind major American cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York that had become increasingly populated by African Americans during the first Great Migration.<sup>14</sup> Hit by economic depression and subjected to Jim Crow segregation in the South, African American migrants turned their sights on northern cities where political neutrality had produced an urban economic boom. In the largest internal migration in U.S. history, many of them found work, for the first time in their lives, in manufacturing industries. As such, in the essay, Fitzgerald starts to connect noncombatancy, urban mechanization, traumatic nervousness, and African American identity.

Published during the demise of "the jazz age" as a reminiscence of its booming years, Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) weaves together the themes found in Fitzgerald's

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<sup>14</sup> In the same issue of *The Crisis* that includes the editorial on racism and the Washington Conference, Du Bois also published an editorial on the Great Migration, attempting to give "a definite, coherent picture of the whole movement" as it existed in the second half of the 1910s ("The Migration of Negroes" 63).

essay into a narrative about the protagonist Jake Brown's desertion from the Army after realizing that, despite his extensive rifle and bayonet training, his nation only needs him to carry lumber in one of the service units (4). Jake returns home to a jazz-infused city space described as "animated with dark figures going up, going down" (140). The animatedness of the city reflects his crisis of noncombatancy as numerous characters violently debate whether or not he should have deserted the Army that had mistreated him. Unable to assume the status of a white soldier in the military, Jack engages in a substitutive "blood-battling for womens [sic]" (285), or competition of sexual prowess, only to discover that women either do not find him attractive because of his darker skin (in comparison to "yellow men") or do find him attractive because, as an enlisted soldier, he resembles a white man. Demobilized as a heterosexual male, he hears a tune hum throughout the narrative: "And there is two things in Harlem I don't understand / It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man" (129). Kept out of the war, Jake embodies nervousness about the future for African Americans stuck between enslavement in the war effort and freedom as a deserter, a double-bind in which either option forces the noncombatant Jake to be viewed as a traumatized homosexual by some of his own Harlem neighbors and by the white majority.

Just as Fitzgerald and McKay explore and critique representations of African Americans as mechanistically servile, homosexual, and easily traumatized, whites responded to the war by imagining themselves as man-machines. In *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, Tim Armstrong observes, "the man-machine equation seems to slip readily from positive to negative prosthesis; the body signals lack rather than efficiency, an absence of meaning rather than an embodied meaning" (96). Whereas Armstrong analyzes the shift from positive to negative, here I want to discuss the opposite, moving from the African American's "negative prosthesis" to the white American's positive one. Instead of having penetrable barriers that could easily be violated by war stimuli, whites sought to inhibit trauma by figuratively becoming machine-like.

Resistant to the effects of trauma, whites could help their country win the war. For example, in Charlie Chaplin's film *Shoulder Arms* (1918), the duck-footed and mechanized protagonist Charlie graduates from Army training camp and sails over to the Western Front. After volunteering for a reconnoitering mission, the protagonist escapes German troops, begins a romance with a French woman, and captures Kaiser Wilhelm. In a sense, he resembles Marinetti's Futurist man-machine that "resist[s] shocks and omnipresent speed, in preparation for a non-human, mechanical, and combative destiny" (Poggi 150). Comically aloof to real violence and potential dangers all around him, the machine-like Charlie resists traumatization and embodies heterosexuality all while miraculously winning the war for the U.S. and thus—instead of ensuring Marinetti's "combative destiny"—restoring international peace.

Likewise, foreshadowing the way he would relate pugilism and mechanization through the working title of his boxing story, Hemingway describes his wounding along the Fossalta di Piave in pugilistic terms. In a self-congratulatory letter to his parents on 18 October 1918, written from a hospital in Milan nearly three months after a mortar explosion and subsequent machine-gun fire left his right leg riddled with more than 200 shrapnel wounds, Hemingway writes of his near-death experience just as he would a boxing match: "[I]t does give you an awfully satisfactory feeling to be wounded, its getting beaten up in a good cause. We all offer our bodies and only a few are chosen, but it shouldnt [sic] reflect any special credit on those that are chosen. They are just the lucky ones" (*Letters* Vol. I 147). Ever the boxing enthusiast, Hemingway begins the passage with patriotic vigor about having taken his share of jabs and haymakers in a good fight, before launching into a discussion of the luckiness of those elected to be satisfactorily wounded "in a good cause." Hemingway seems to be referring to the nation's virtuous, brave, and self-sacrificial mission to curb German aggression and promote peace.

Intriguingly, though, Hemingway was not one of the “lucky” combatants chosen to receive an honorable war injury.

Having signed up with the Missouri Home Guard, Hemingway had already volunteered with the paramilitary organization, the Red Cross, by the time his guard unit had grouped with the National Guard for overseas duty. About these biographical details, Kenneth Lynn states, “The likelihood, therefore, is that for all his patriotism the prospect of trench warfare put Ernest off” (qtd. in Florczyk 24). Yet, Hemingway’s work manning rolling kitchens and emergency canteens brought him close to the trenches. Out near the trenches on 8 July 1918, he was caught in the explosion and machine-gun fire that would send him to Milan. Afterwards, Hemingway would recall how he had pulled an Italian soldier to safety; for his bravery and self-sacrifice, he received war medals from the Italian government. In *Hemingway, the Great War, and the Red Cross*, however, Steven Florczyk notes that, in a post-incident report, Robert Bates (the commanding officer of Hemingway’s Red Cross unit) challenges the writer’s version of his story by mentioning that an Italian soldier had actually protected him “by blocking him somewhat from the explosion” (qtd. in Florczyk 79). Rather than resolve the heated debate over Hemingway’s meritorious behavior along the Piave, here I want to suggest two important ideas.

First, the noncombatant Hemingway who received war injuries just as a combatant would crystallizes the slippage between the categories of combatancy and noncombatancy in mechanized warfare. Second, Hemingway fashions a combatant identity through the image of a pugilistic man-machine. Much like the combatant Charlie in *Shoulder Arms*, his white man-machine resists trauma and promotes the national war mission. Later, in the war novel *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway would extend this idea when depicting the protagonist Frederic Henry who attempts to stave off shell-shock by carrying a Saint Anthony talisman with a white, metallic

skin.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Henry does end up shell-shocked in one of the most famous war scenes in modernist American literature. During a bombardment, he has an out-of-body experience in which he feels himself “rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out” (55). Seven years after his wounding and four years before he published the war novel, Hemingway would interrogate the nationalist discourse of a white man-machine in “Big Two-Hearted River,” a fishing story about a strangely mechanized angler whose postwar recuperation requires him to traumatically experience racial melancholia.

### III.

In “Big Two-Hearted River,” Nick tries to become the white national ideal that Ad could never be. He determines to remain tough after being “beaten up in a good cause.” Crucially, though, Nick achieves his man-machine identity, evidenced through a remarkably mechanical narrative style, by *not* thinking about war. Whereas the repression of war experience makes him like the “little fighting machine” he had praised at the beginning of the earlier story, the psychic and narrative strategy that helps him resist war trauma also forces him to encounter himself as racially melancholy. That is, banishing thoughts of war, he strategically acts like a noncombatant; but doing that requires him to also assume the traumatic consequences that come with such noncombatancy. Nick’s conundrum resembles what Lauren Berlant refers to as “cruel optimism,” which occurs when “something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (1). In making such an argument, I intend to bridge two opposing interpretations of the war. On the one hand, scholars argue that although the narrator never overtly broaches the subject of war the story is nonetheless Nick’s most sustained meditation on the subject in the entire story sequence. As Hemingway would later state, “The story was about coming back from the war but

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the symbolism of the Saint Anthony talisman, see Trevor Dodman’s *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I* (110).

there was no mention of the war in it” (*A Moveable Feast* 76). Other scholars argue that the lack of any overt reference to the war signals that the story has nothing to do with it; in short, the fishing story is just a fishing story.<sup>16</sup>

I contend, though, that the narrative is and is not a war story. Less obliquely, I want to show that “Big-Two Hearted River” represents Nick’s therapeutic trip to the woods, where his daily tasks and the natural world itself become proxy combat experiences through which he narrativizes the war as coherent, meaningful, and good; at the same time, it represents Nick’s complete dismissal of combat. As Mark Cirino aptly states, “Nick’s strategy involves more than turning himself off and entirely eliminating his consciousness. He attempts not simply to banish the thoughts of war from his mind but, more sensibly, to *replace* these unpleasant thoughts” (29; emphasis original). At the heart of this notion of replacement lies a contradiction latent in the trip-as-substitute-for-war plotline. I will show that Nick becomes a white man-machine through his investment in the trip as a proxy for combatancy at the same time that he attempts to erase combatancy entirely by replacing war with camping and fishing, subsequently transforming himself into a noncombatant or racial other.

In this deceptively simple fishing story, Nick attempts to recover from his war wounds by recuperating in the woods of upper Michigan. He hops off a train near the town of Seney, Michigan, which has recently been ravaged by a fire. In the nearby woods, he makes camp, prepares food, eats, digs for fishing bait, fishes, and finally leaves the rugged home he has made in the northern wilderness. Through the metaphor of woods as warscape, he transforms combat into a series of chores. He lugs a burdensome pack, establishes a campsite, cooks food, searches for grasshoppers, creates makeshift mosquito netting, and completes an array of other arduous and simple tasks. Through the story’s pared down narrative style, Nick changes what he thinks

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<sup>16</sup> In “The War in ‘Big Two-Hearted River,’” for example, Allen Josephs argues that neither in the story as it now stands nor in the excised portion “On Writing” does Nick refer to the war, leading him to deduce that the story “had nothing to do with coming back from the war.”

about and how he processes those thoughts, turning himself into a machine hardwired to complete tasks as orderly and efficiently as possible. By envisioning himself as machine and the woods as war, Nick uses his tasks to manufacture a chronological narrative of the camping trip, assembling them into a linear timeline that will help him to prognosticate the future where he will inevitably recover fully from the war. For example, after nearly finishing making camp, Nick begins to make something else entirely—a story about himself hiking earlier in the day, then making camp, and then moving on to preparing dinner. The narrator, focalized through Nick, states, “He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. [. . .] He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry” (167). In this example, Nick creates a sequential order to his day by choosing specific events from his past; of course, in the passage, the events are not specific at all but relayed through words such as “this,” “things,” “there,” and “it.” Actually, out of all the tasks Nick describes, only the preparation for food to satiate his hunger gets communicated clearly in this section of the narrative. Yet, even though the reader might not be able to identify the other tasks, Nick knows them and places them in a temporal order divided between past, present and future. Beginning with memories of what had taken place earlier in the day (“He had not been unhappy all day”), he moves to the present (“This was different though”) only to then reiterate that temporal shift between past and present (“There had been this to do. Now it was done”) before moving to the present as a temporal condition requiring future action (“Now he was hungry”).

Nick not only puts tasks into sequence but also uses memories of past experiences to aid his decision-making. In order to ensure that he has the best fishing experience possible, Nick recalls various locations, judging whether they would be suitable for him now. For example, he remembers having fished the Black River and the prime locations for trout depending upon the

time of day: “The very biggest ones would lie up close to the bank. [. . .] Just when the sun made the water blinding in the glare before it went down, you were liable to strike a big trout anywhere in the current” (178). At the time of the story, though, Nick fishes along a river at the hottest part of the day. By considering the best locations for fishing in the late afternoon, he mentally prepares his strategy for the remainder of the day. In addition to considering the best locations, Nick also remembers the worst. Although fish might be located in the current near dusk, he realizes that “it was almost impossible to fish then, the surface of the water was blinding as the mirror in the sun.” Additionally, he wonders about fishing upstream away from the setting sun but remembers how “in a stream like the Black, or this, you had to wallow against the current and in a deep place the water piled up on you. It was no fun to fish upstream with this much current” (178). Due to his war experiences, Nick resists any situation in which he might be immobilized by the water. His worry about wallowing against the current echoes an earlier moment when, having just walked into the water for the first time, Nick feels how “his trousers clung tight to his legs. His shoes felt the gravel. The water was a rising cold shock. Rushing the current sucked against his legs” (175). Nick wants to avoid such fishing locations because the immobilization experienced there would remind him of his own war wounding.

In the Chapter VI vignette that follows “The Battler,” a character identified as Nick sits against the wall of a church in an unidentified, bombed-out Austrian city. Having been hit by machine-gun fire, his “legs stuck out awkwardly. He had been hit in the spine” (105). Immobile, he observes the remains of shelled buildings and the streets littered with rubble and dead Austrians while considering the progress of Allied forces: “Things were getting forward in the town. It was going well.” The vignette ends with Nick noticing Rinaldi, a fellow soldier in the Italian Army who, propped up beside him against the church, has silently succumbed to fatal gun injuries. Nick tells his dead or dying companion that they have each made “a separate



peace.” In other words, one character rests in peace, or soon will, while the other watches the Allied forces fighting for it.

Quite possibly, Nick’s hesitancy to fish upstream or in currents depends on memories of such a war wounding since, struck in the spine, he would not have been able to move his legs just as he cannot in rushing water. Yet, as Cohen has pointed out, there is uncertainty about whether the Nick in the vignette is actually Nick Adams. As he wonders, “If Nick is American, the narrative never explains how he came to be fighting with the Italians. True, Americans did fight on the Italian-Austrian front, but in their own units” (23). Exploring this ambiguity further, he also summarizes Michael Reynolds’s assertion that the “Nick” in the vignette is actually Nick Nerone, an Italian officer in the war and Hemingway’s friend from Chicago. Added to this conundrum, we might also do well to remember that, if Nick did write everything—everything except the fishing story, as I propose—then based on the excised “On Writing,” he would not have recounted his actual war experience but fictionalized it, possibly in the guise of a real-life individual with the same first name.

In light of his own war wounding and the trouble he might encounter in upstream fishing spots, Nick also avoids the “tragic adventure” of trying to hook fish in the swamp because its landscape reminds him of trench warfare. As Nick thinks, “It would not be possible to walk through a swamp like that. The branches grew so low. You would have to keep almost level with the ground to move at all” (179). Although Nick avoids the swamp because by fishing it he might run into difficulties and, what might be worse, traumatic memories, the story ends optimistically: “There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp” (180). Hence, Nick structures history and futurity into a coherent narrative that ends in his final victory over the war.

Nick's machine-like ordering and processing of past and future events allows him to experience that one thing we normally assume machines can't: emotions; and emotionally, he achieves victory over war by connecting to his former, pre-war self. The narrative technique that loops back to the past to move to the future, in slow, cautious fashion resembles the movements of his fishing reel that helps him capture fish and certain emotions. Nick lets line out and takes it back in, moving forward and backward in space and time, balancing tension and slack, in order to control physical environments, history, and the emotions of lived experience. Too slow and his internal monologue stops developing; too fast and, ill prepared, Nick might "rush his sensations" (177). In this way, Nick's slow, mechanistic narrative rhythm does not contrast with his desire to be human. As the narrator remarks early on in the story, after Nick catches a glimpse of trout in the river: "He felt all the old feeling" (164). Part man, part machine, Nick temporally and emotionally organizes the tasks and events in his life in order not only to optimistically believe but also to *feel* that he can move on from the war. By turns, he forgets about losses incurred on the battlefield, substituting other thoughts for them in order to navigate the currents of time toward a better future.

Yet, if Nick stops thinking directly about war and thus uses his camping tasks as a way to recover, then his very resistance to combat memories also puts him in a position akin to historical and (his own) fictional black individuals who, denied combat experience, were seen as somehow traumatized by the war. In a key passage already quoted but not exhaustively analyzed, Nick refers to the Black River as mirror-like when the late-afternoon sun casts rays in his eyes. The Black River, or blackness itself, operating as a mirror recalls the moment early on in "The Battler" when, after receiving a black eye from the brakeman, Nick tries to see his reflection in the dark water beside the track. Whereas in the boxing story he finds that it is too late in the evening and the water too dark to see his eye, which only later gets observed by Ad as

a “shiner,” the scene means something different when read alongside the fishing story; rather than darkness inhibiting Nick’s reflection, it actually becomes what Nick reflects just as his injured eye reveals the ability of presumably white skin to become black.

More than any other character in the story sequence, the task-oriented Nick in “Big Two-Hearted River” resembles Bugs. Like the African American companion, he makes coffee and sandwiches, tends the campfire, and keeps the conversation—even if it is only internal monologue—on a nice and even keel. As well, just like Bugs and Ad whom Nick describes in blackface, black identity gets tied to trauma. The association between blackness and trauma occurs near the beginning of the story. Walking into the woods near Seney, Nick observes how smoke and soot have affected the coloring of the forest animals: “The grasshopper was black. As he had walked along the road, climbing, he had started many grasshoppers from the dust. They were all black. [. . .] [H]e realized they had all turned black from living in the burned-over land” (165). Nick perceives how the literally burnt and symbolically traumatized land discolors insects—or bugs—by turning them black.

In an important scene from the story that resembles Ngai’s notion of “animatedness” as a contradictory complex of mechanization and emotive uncontrollability, Nick fishes only to realize that his reel has started producing a “mechanical shriek.” Hemingway writes, “[The reel] “ratcheted into a mechanical shriek as the line went out in a rush. Too fast. Nick could not check it, the line rushing out, the reel note rising as the line ran out” (176). Whereas Nick has tried to stop thinking about war in order to put his bucolic tasks and observations into a coherent narrative, his hyper-concentration on such events leaves him overly receptive to external stimuli. The reel does not just unwind; it unwinds too rapidly, and its sound becomes a painful rushing. As such, uncontrollable speed disallows Nick from putting affective intensities into structured narrative or coherent emotions. In “The Autonomy of Affect,” Brian Massumi suggests that

emotion, in contrast to affect, happens within narration; it is “a narrative element that moves the action ahead, taking its place in socially recognized lines of action and reaction” (26). In other words, affects “resonate to the degree with which [they are] in excess of any narrative or functional line.” Like a traumatic event that repeats, affect energetically “resonates” because it cannot be narrativized. Consequently, Nick experiences a complex of affects that leaves him with different, contradictory sensations: thrilled and “shaky,” he also feels sick, but only “vaguely” (177). Certainly, he does not feel strongly about what he feels and, overwhelmed by affect, cannot create a narrative that leads him away from trauma and toward a more stable self-identity and recuperative future.

Through the reference to the speed that leaves Nick feeling uneasy, Hemingway also relates the traumatic experience to homosexuality by echoing the vignette preceding the fishing story. In Chapter XIV, the narrator recounts the matador Maera’s fatal goring. Hemingway writes, “Maera lay still, his head on his arms, his face in the sand. He felt warm and sticky from the bleeding. Each time he felt the horn coming. Sometimes the bull only bumped him with his head” (161). Resembling Nick’s feeling that the fishing line had run out too quickly, Maera dies in fast-forward: “Then [everything] got larger and larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then everything commenced to run faster and faster as when they speed up a cinematograph film. Then he was dead.” More than describe the machismo associated with *toreo*, here Hemingway imagines Maera’s homoerotic death through the machinery of cinema. In *Cinematic Modernism*, Susan McCabe argues that “cinema was associated with the [. . .] feminine” since spectators took on a passive role and screen images, through montages of cut-up images, showed characters’ susceptibility to injury and mutilation (19). Feminized, Maera feels the bull’s “horn coming” from behind; afterwards, he feels “warm and sticky.” In reference to the homoerotic atmosphere of this and other bullfighting scenes in Hemingway’s writing, Jeffery Meyer claims,

“If the bullfight symbolizes sexual intercourse, as it clearly does in *The Sun Also Rises* (‘the sword went in, and for just a second he and the bull were one’), then the matador’s triumphant domination of the bull at the moment of orgasmic death represents a virile defense against the threat of homosexuality” (248). Yet, following Meyers’s logic, when the matador does not dominate the bull but dies in a similar orgasmic death, the scene would not represent a defense against homosexuality. Likewise, Hemingway connects the bullfight to noncombatancy. In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), he famously remarked that watching bullfighting was the closest thing to actually seeing warfare. In his statement, Hemingway positions himself as a spectator rather than an active participant in the war-like events occurring in the arena below at the same time that he characterizes the exchange between matador and bull as war-like without really being warfare.

Read alongside the bullfighting vignette, Nick’s traumatic homosexuality in the “mechanical shriek” scene is all about the war and not about it at all. Stemming from the protagonist’s desire to become a man-machine and thus make war coherent, the episode evolves into a reinvestment of mental and emotional energies in tasks that eclipse warfare entirely at the same time that the trauma associated with such noncombatancy also resembles the combatant’s effeminate passivity in the face of technological weaponry. Paradoxically, the replacement of war with daily tasks and natural landscapes returns Nick back to the negative effects of war but without the actual war experience; that is, his “mechanical shriek” becomes likened to the African American experience during and after the war years.

#### IV.

The structure of the short story sequence as a whole mimics the racial dynamics at work in “Big Two-Hearted River” while also emphasizing nationalist ideology. In the closing pages, I

do not want to organize the chapter as I have done in the analysis of the fishing story—by moving from white national ideal to racial melancholia—but in reverse order, from blackness back to whiteness, from traumatic noncombatancy to patriotism in order to emphasize a key idea. Whereas the fishing story slips through Nick’s metafictional control, revealing the melancholia at the heart of nationalism, the entire sequence itself, which Nick controls in large part, metabolizes the “cruel optimism” depicted in the final story by representing the protagonist’s celebration of that nationalist sentiment propelled by his own melancholia. Phrased differently, whereas my analysis of “Big Two-Hearted River” shows how the man-machine voices a “mechanical shriek,” here I want to show how Nick leverages the possibilities of racial melancholia in order to bolster nationalism within the fictive community of the sequence but without ultimately being able to displace trauma onto a racial other because, after all, he is that “other” he seeks.

Just as Nick’s traumatic fishing experience echoes Maera’s death, the vignette-story structure parallels the way Hemingway turns the goring into a blockbuster event through the way the viewed world becomes “larger and larger and larger and then smaller and smaller” (161). In a letter to Edward J. O’Brien, Hemingway describes the reason for the structure, explaining how in the stories “you get up very quietly but absolutely solid and the real thing but very close and then through it all between every story comes the rythm of the in our time [sic] chapters” (*Letters* Vol. II 154). Likewise, in a separate letter written to Wilson, Hemingway clarifies what he means by the “solid and real thing” and the “rythm” interspersed between the stories. He says the structure resembles “looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coastline, and then looking at it with 15X binoculars. Or rather, maybe, looking at it and then going in and living in it—and then coming out and looking at it again” (*Letters* Vol. II 166).

Organizing the sequence through the aesthetic of cinema, or an optical machine, Hemingway initially characterizes the war as a disillusioning and ultimately traumatic experience. While working on the first iteration of the sequence, Hemingway told Ezra Pound that when the vignettes “are read altogether they all hook up. It seems funny but they do. [. . .] The war starts clear and noble just like it did, Mons, etc., gets close and blurred and finished with the feller who goes home and gets clap. [. . .] It has form all right” (*Letters* Vol. II 41). Interestingly, in the letter, Hemingway reverses the relationship between closeness and solidity that he hinted at in his correspondence to O’Brien and Wilson. Rather than a story, character, or event becoming clearer when the camera eye zooms in on it, the war “gets close and blurred.” Through this reversal, Hemingway constructs a well-known and well-worn trajectory for WWI, beginning with naivety and ending in the disillusioned feeling that all that was solid before and during the first months and years of the war had melted into the air.

By examining how the optical structure plays out in the sequence, we notice that Nick embodies the racial melancholia of noncombatancy that also makes it possible for him to organize an overarching narrative that reflects that nation’s war mission. As has already been stated, the closest thing to a narrative about Nick’s war experience comes in the vignette about the injured “Nick” who might or might not be the protagonist. Hemingway would not explicitly write about Nick’s actual war experience until years later when stories such as “In Another Country” and “Now I Lay Me” appeared in the *Men Without Women* story collection (1927).<sup>17</sup> Through a story sequence in which Nick’s chronological development has been interspersed amongst other stories and vignettes, none of which recount his combatancy, *In Our Time* demonstrates a radical unboundedness to Nick’s identity that resembles Ngai’s notion of

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<sup>17</sup> Exploring the biographical aspect of Hemingway’s hesitancy to write about Nick’s combatancy, J. Gerald Kennedy notes, “Apart from the elliptical ‘A Very Short Story’ and two or three vignettes in *In Our Time*, Hemingway had largely concealed his own post-traumatic anxieties; not until 1926, when he wrote the war stories ‘In Another Country’ and ‘Now I Lay Me,’ did he begin to probe his own recurrent flashbacks and insomnia” (*Letters* Vol. II lviii).

African-American animatedness and occurs through an oscillating, optical structure of long-shots and close-ups that parallels the homoerotic death scene in the bullfighting vignette where Maera sees the world grow larger and smaller.

In his letters to O'Brien and Wilson about the optical structure, Hemingway refers to the ways the stories occur as close-ups and the vignettes as long-shots. The shift in an expansion or contraction of the visual field occurs during the moments when the sequence moves from one narrative to another and, more importantly, from one character to another. Following Hemingway's optical metaphor, the reader would view the bullfighting vignette through long-shot before zooming in to the first part of the fishing story, only to then zoom back out to see characters waiting on the scaffold in the vignette about Sam Cardinella's hanging, before seeing the final part of the fishing story in close-up. In other words, Maera must shrink as Nick expands only to shrink in place of the hanged men and then to expand once more before disappearing to be replaced by the Greek king in the final vignette. Able to assume different bodily sizes and forms—in part because he metaphorically transforms into and out of characters and because, metafictionally, he in some sense always already is them—Nick assumes the bodily unboundedness associated with black identity in the cinematic age.

Early film critics, theorists, and writers were remarkably attentive to how bodies appeared and moved on screen. In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), Vachel Lindsay discusses how, unlike in the theater, a movie actor's body expands and contracts to inhuman, racialized proportions:

In the new contraption, the moving picture, the hero or villain in exit strides past the nose of the camera, growing much bigger than a human being, marching toward us as though he would step on our heads, disappearing when largest. There is an explosive power about the mildest motion picture exit, be the actor skillful or the reverse. The people left in the scene are pygmies compared with each disappearing cyclops. (110)



Lindsay, the American poet who had penned “The Congo (A Study of the Negro Race)” (1914) about black savagery, here uses racialized images to discuss the violence of cinematic spatiality. Due to film’s inability to register depth on a two-dimensional screen, the protagonist can grow to the height and girth of a Prometheus, even blacking out the camera upon exiting towards it while the remaining cast members shrink to mere “pygmies.” It is particularly intriguing that Lindsay uses violent, militaristic language to describe such bodily transformation. Rather than just walking or exiting, the actor’s body “march[es] toward us,” a simple action that lights the fuse of an “explosive power.” Published in 1915 and revised in 1922, *The Art of the Moving Picture* responds to new, technological methods of violence, such as those that occurred during WWI. Unlike Lindsay, Nick does not associate blackness with savagery or combatancy but with effeminate and traumatized noncombatancy; however, he too explores the bodily unboundedness or puttiness of the “Negro” or African-American race.

Yet Hemingway’s optical rhythm of long-shots and close-ups, or vignettes and stories not only causes Nick to undergo a sort of plasmaticness or “putty-headedness” but also affords him the opportunity to demonstrate how he mechanistically organizes time and affect to resist trauma and promote wartime and postwar nationalism. By strategically interspersing himself throughout the sequence so much and so often, Nick ensures his own traumatic plasmaticness while also making it possible for him to gain narrative control over the chronological coherency of the sequence, transforming it from a narrative of wartime and postwar disillusionment to one of peace.

Adding the stories to the vignettes, Hemingway—or Nick, as the case might be—adds a level of reassurance by crafting a chronological narrative of development from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood where he recovers from war. Roughly mirroring the trajectory of naivety, disillusionment, and redemption, the stories progress from Nick’s youthful

optimism in “Indian Camp,” to his adolescent heartbreak in “The End of Something,” his strategizing about race in “The Battler,” and his postwar reconstruction in “Big Two-Hearted River.” The sequence also conflates Nick’s development with a larger, master narrative about the nation since his childhood begins with the birth and development of America. Like the nation borne out of a conflicted history with Native Americans, Nick fictively begins in the context of a Native American labor and delivery. As well, he recuperates from war just prior to the closing vignette, “L’Envoi,” about a Greek king who wishes to escape violence in Europe by sailing to the U.S. Both the king and Nick seek peace. By mechanistically reconfiguring the narrative of war—both in “Big Two-Hearted River” and in the cinematic construction of the sequence—as one that ends in peace, Nick restores the missing word in the title of the book. Entitled *In Our Time*, the book refers to the concept of “peace in our time” found in *The Book of Common Prayer* and, more importantly, in Wilson’s national war mission. Finding peace in his recuperative thoughts and actions in “Big Two-Hearted River” and in his assemblage of the entire story sequence, Nick embodies the nation’s mission to wage war in order to end all conflict and restore peace.

In the aftermath of the ex-prizefighter Ad’s presumed failure as a man-machine, Nick seeks to achieve what the other character cannot—not by completely displacing melancholia onto another individual or race but by internalizing the dialectic of racialized melancholia and nationalism into his own character. Whereas the protagonist’s racist discourse surrounding blackness actually ensnares him in the fishing story, he reverses the link between patriotism and race in the broader story sequence so that black identity makes it possible for him to structure a pro-American fictive community. Yet, the sequence reveals a melancholy nationalism—and not just melancholia in the service of nationalism—because (unlike Nick in “The Battler”) the metafictional author of the entire sequence cannot fully control the narrative by investing the

racial other with all war trauma. The stylistic and thematic links between the stories “The Battler” and “Big Two-Hearted River” and their relationship to the larger sequence *In Our Time* reveal how Hemingway redraws and blurs the color line in ways that reinforce white nationalism while also attaching it to melancholia that cannot be completely displaced or otherwise mobilized in the service of Nick’s patriotic project.

**BORDERLINE ROMANCE: THE INCEST PLOT IN H.D.'s *KORA AND KA*  
AND F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *TENDER IS THE NIGHT***

Nationalism is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity.

- Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*

Like most members of his generation, F. Scott Fitzgerald believed in the romance of war. Men went to war to prove their mettle, to overpower their enemies, to rescue their nations, and, in doing so, to fall in love. For Fitzgerald, the opportunity to enlist arose during his stint as an undergraduate student at Princeton University. While practically failing out of school at the Ivy League institution, “a hotbed of war sentiment against Imperial Germany” (Meredith, “World War I” 140), he jumped at the opportunity to find success elsewhere by enlisting as an Army officer. Upon reporting for training at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fitzgerald began writing “The Romantic Egotist,” which would later become his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). By the summer of 1918, he was stationed at Camp Sheridan, in Alabama, where he first met and began to court Zelda Sayre. In letters addressed to Zelda, Fitzgerald forecasted how he would die gloriously and patriotically within three months of active service. As a writer, he hurriedly finished the novel; as a lover, he quickly gathered rosebuds. With a relationship with Zelda just kindling, his anticipation of seeing the Western Front was dashed, however, when, in November, he received news of the armistice. One romance began as another ended.

Throughout his career, Fitzgerald would write about the relationship between romance and his own noncombatant status. No work embraces that relationship quite like *Tender is the Night*. Nearly a decade-and-a-half after he finished *This Side of Paradise* and nine years after his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* appeared in bookstalls, Fitzgerald finally published his bulky, searching novel. Subtitled it “A Romance,” Fitzgerald tells the story of the doomed marriage between Dick Diver—a psychiatrist who suffers from survivor’s guilt because he never fought in the war—and his patient-turned-wife Nicole Warren; however, when Fitzgerald initially put pen

to paper, he did not have this idea in mind. In fact, out of all his novels, this one entails the most meandering composition history. In 1925, after the final touches to *Gatsby* had been made, Fitzgerald wrote an enthusiastic letter to his publisher Maxwell Perkins in order to sell him on the next major creative undertaking: “new novel—it is something really NEW in form, idea, structure.” Despite Fitzgerald’s optimism, newness or novelty connoted endless uncertainty and dissatisfaction. At various times, he called the novel *The World’s Fair*, *Our Type*, *The Boy Who Killed His Mother*, *The Melarky Case*, *The Drunkard’s Holiday*, and *Doctor Diver’s Holiday*. Originally, he had intended to explore a matricide plot, then changed his mind to write a Hollywood story, went back to matricide, and finally developed a story centered on Dick and Nicole Diver.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as I intend to show, Fitzgerald still retains a narrative about mothers and sons within his psychiatric novel based on the hospitalization of his wife, Zelda, for mental illness.

In 1930, Zelda suffered from one of her first bouts of mental illness and was diagnosed as a schizophrenic. In the months and years following, Fitzgerald took her to a series of pre-eminent, mainly European psychiatrists, holding out hope for a cure. Between 1931 and 1932, back in the U.S., Zelda received treatment at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, located at Johns Hopkins University. While at Phipps, she published her fictionalized autobiography, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932). Whereas Zelda had previously written reviews of Fitzgerald’s work (including *The Beautiful and the Damned* [1922]) and co-written stories with him (such as “Our Own Movie Queen,” even though he often kept her name out of the by-line), *Save Me the Waltz* was different. It covered the same time period and many of the same details that appeared in Fitzgerald’s novel-in-progress. Furious that his role as “sole writer” had been challenged and also that Perkins had so quickly accepted the first draft of Zelda’s novel, Fitzgerald took them

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<sup>18</sup> For a more developed overview of this composition history, see William Blazek and Laura Rattray’s introduction to *Twenty-First Century Readings of Tender is the Night* as well as Scott Donaldson’s “A Short History of *Tender is the Night*” in *Fitzgerald & Hemingway: Works and Days*.

both to task, claiming that, as “the highest paid short story writer in the world,” he owned his and Zelda’s common life experiences (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 150). In addition, he wrote a letter to her therapist, Dr. Squires, advising that he was being paid handsomely to treat Zelda, not to provide her room and board as the clinic’s writer-in-residence.<sup>19</sup> With Zelda’s health plummeting, Fitzgerald’s novel would internalize these complicated mental and domestic issues. Whereas early versions of the Diver narrative had revolved around a wife who murders men, the final version depicts Nicole as a woman whose incestuous relationship with her wealthy father, Devereux, leads to her inevitably schizophrenic condition. For Dick, who becomes a doctor instead of a doughboy, the incest plot operates as an analog for war experience by producing his own financial, emotional, and moral deterioration, all under the glare of the French Riviera sunlight. Rather than engage in a successful mourning process that retains the nation—albeit one without intensity or heartfelt fervency—Fitzgerald advances a melancholy nationalism through the novel’s incest plot.

In the years since its publication, many scholars have pinpointed the years Fitzgerald spent composing the novel, from the late-1920s to the early-1930s, as pivotal for his representation of a protagonist who turns away from nationalism and toward more cosmopolitan thoughts and sentiments. For instance, examining the European stories Fitzgerald wrote at the same time he composed the novel, J. Gerald Kennedy perceives how “we witness the emergence of a larger, composite narrative of displacement and cultural encounter that delineates national identity as it critiques American naiveté and excess.” Such a narrative therefore marks “a notable shift from exuberant nationalism toward a more tolerant cosmopolitanism” (119). As Jessica Berman has persuasively argued, modernist writers often looked beyond the nation for models of social organization. In *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of*

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Wagner-Martin covers these biographical details in her chapter on “Zelda in the Shadows,” in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Context*.

*Community*, she shows how modernist writers decentered the modern nation-state in favor of cosmopolitan fictive communities. Likewise other scholars, such as Rebecca Walkowitz, have claimed that modernism put forward a “critical cosmopolitanism,” a term that describes the process of “reflecting on the history, uses, and interests of cosmopolitanism in the past—how, for example, cosmopolitanism has been used to support or to tolerate imperialism” and how “a commitment to collective agency may be a style rather than an index of transnational politics” (4). If, by exhibiting a certain cosmopolitan style, Fitzgerald’s novel also resists actual transnational politics, then it also returns to the nation.

Throughout his book *National Melancholy: Mourning and Opportunity in Classic American Literature*, Mitchell Breitwieser alludes to the persistence of the nation in the novel. Following Eric Hobsbawm’s assertion that nationalism precedes the nation just as concept might precede the completed task, Breitwieser asserts, “In representing the United States as a real nation fully arrived on the world stage, then, the Fitzgerald of *Tender is the Night* is also revoking his nation’s transcendentalism, substituting a variably conscious array of behaviors and attitudes for the idea of an intensely aware, fervent, heartfelt, and unified allegiance” (25). Disregarding melancholia in favor of mourning, Breitwieser perceives in the demise of nationalism an “array of behaviors and attitudes” that create opportunities for that nation’s citizens and, it would seem, its writers. Although an intriguing schema, the novel does not really work that way.

Scholars have often viewed such a plotline as peripheral. In his essay “*Tender is the Night* and American History,” Milton R. Stern concludes, “The material of all Fitzgerald’s major fictions are dreams, love, money, and marriage. In [the novel] they are complicated by incest and madness and hugely enlarged by an international setting. But madness and incest are not what the novel is about” (116). Other critics such as Pamela A. Boker, Robert Wexelblatt, and

Susann Cokal have nonetheless honed in on incest as critical to the novel's content, form, and overarching meaning. Whereas Boker and Wexelblatt investigate incest on historical, cultural, and thematic levels, Cokal turns to the more formal dimensions of incest. She claims, "The time is perhaps ripe for an investigation into [. . .] Fitzgerald's attempts to *express* that content," specifically how the novel "stretches over a classic Freudian framework of cause, effect, and blame centered on the incest issue" (76). The time is also ripe for an investigation into the fraught connection between incest, nationalism, and melancholia in Fitzgerald's narrative. In *The Sane Society*, Erich Fromm has famously connected the first two ideas, arguing, "nationalism is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity" (57). He describes how the incestuous allegiance to a national family might be considered a mental disorder because it inhibits a love for humanity: "Just as love for one individual which excludes the love for others is not love, love for one's country which is not love for humanity is not love, but idolatrous worship." More recently, Gillian Harkins reads gendered violence in neoliberal American literature to claim that incest challenges nationalism and alternate forms of community: "[I]ncest both reveals hidden forms of gendered violence and lends itself to new hegemonic forms of domestic consumption. But this book also reads incest as a trope able to interrupt this revelatory hegemony, stealing away from the enclosures of either residual forms of nationalism or emergent forms of social organization" (4). Fitzgerald's novel engages in a similar resistance to community but ultimately, through the incest plot, returns to the nation. That is, Fitzgerald initially substitutes cosmopolitanism for a bankrupt form of nationalism but, finally, substitutes a different, more melancholy nationalism for that cosmopolitan community. It is a "critical cosmopolitanism" that becomes too critical; its "form" of incest becomes a circle leading Fitzgerald, his characters, and his readers back to the nation.



Read alongside *Tender is the Night*, H.D.'s long story *Kora and Ka* can help make sense of the relationship between incest, melancholia, and nationalism while also opening up new interpretive possibilities for H.D.'s fiction. The same year that Fitzgerald finally completed his novel, H.D. printed *Kora and Ka*. After a trip to Monte Carlo with her friend and lover Kenneth Macpherson and at Bryher's urging, she published the story in a private, fifty-copy edition through Darantière, the Dijon-based company that had published other notable modernist works including James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). As part of her unfinished *Borderline* cycle, *Kora and Ka* details the way incest plays a part in the life of a noncombatant protagonist, opening up the borders of his psyche and identity. In the story, a London accountant named John Helforth suffers a nervous breakdown after his brothers die in the war. His psyche splits in half; one part remains John while the other turns into "Ka," an Egyptian term for the impersonal ghost or soul that lives on after the body has died. Through this self-splitting, he develops a kind of "mother-complex" that also enables his romantic feelings for his wife Kora, who serves as an embodiment of the Greek goddess Persephone. Echoing William Carlos Williams's collection of poems *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920), H.D. sets the romance between Kora and John in the underworld.

Psychoanalytic examinations into gender and sexuality predominate scholarship on the story and on H.D.'s more major works. Whereas her appearance in Macpherson's film *Borderline* (1930), her masterpiece *Trilogy* (1944), and her *Tribute to Freud* (1956) receive the brunt of scholarly attention, the story *Kora and Ka*—when it is read—often gets interpreted as a fictional representation of her psychoanalytic poetics, specifically her bisexuality and her interest in the therapeutic aspects of *écriture féminine*. As Dianne Chisholm claims, "*Kora and Ka* works with at least five 'texts': autobiography, psychoanalysis, modernist quest, Egyptian and Eleusinian mysteries. [. . .] Helforth is a modernist quester who journeys neurotically [. . .] through an Egyptian/Eleusinian 'hell' en route to catharsis and rebirth" (23). By promoting a

redemptive conclusion, the story “reflects H.D.’s serious commitment to finding a writing cure and sets the stage for the work of translation which she will perform with Freud in analysis” (25). Yet, as Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed out, the story structures that analysis along gendered lines, with an active and logical masculine side and, in contrast, a feminine side that remains “unreconciled and mad, impervious to the psychoanalytic cure” (270). If, as Friedman suggests here and argues more explicitly elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> H.D. sought to transform the tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis, then she did so not only by calling into question Freud’s patriarchal prejudices but also by finding ways to intersect her interest in psychoanalysis with her growing sense of U.S. nationalism as incest.

Recently, critical attention has turned to representations of the nation in H.D.’s writings. In *The American H.D.*, for example, Annette Debo argues that, after her expatriation to England and Switzerland starting in 1911, H.D. would finally begin to reassess and ultimately reassume her American identity in 1930 when she wrote “Two Americans,” a story that interrogates the arbitrariness of nations. Debo perceives the way expatriation actually sustains a sense of nationalism throughout H.D.’s writing during this period: “Her refusal to settle down for long released her not only from domestic responsibilities but also from a new national attachment. Her refusal of permanence allowed her the psychological freedom to remain an American” (4). Published just after “Two Americans,” *Kora and Ka* seems to extend a radically cosmopolitan condition but emerges out of H.D.’s nationalistic phase. Fueled by her experiences in the south of France, the story, which recounts a British family’s war loss imagined through Greek mythology and Egyptian spirituality, describes—in a strange way—a profoundly American experience. By accessing *Tender is the Night* alongside H.D.’s story, I suggest that both writers position a kind of melancholy nationalism as the furthest limit of their incest plots. The

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<sup>20</sup> See *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

narratives return to the familiarity of nationalism, to a romance that—however perverse—can and must occur within the national family. That is, in both narratives literal and figural incest lead not only to the irrevocable loss of a national ideal but to the irrevocable fact of loss as that national ideal. They lead back to a romance fit for Hell, a melancholy tenderness for home.

## I.

*Kora and Ka* describes a remarkably American experience through the mother-son intimacies that echo the cult of patriotic motherhood disseminated in First World War propaganda. As Jennifer Haytock examines in *At Home, at War: Domesticity and World War I in American Literature*, war propagandists promoted patriotic motherhood by employing incest imagery in order to mobilize the nation: “The soldier needed a representative of home and domestic ideology to support him, and the wife/girlfriend figure had liabilities the mother did not. [. . .] The mother would never break off with her son [. . .], and thus she became a stand-in for the girlfriend/wife” (34). For example, in one poster advertising government bonds, a white-haired, matronly woman stands before a star-spangled banner and a background scene of doughboys in combat at sea and on land. Smiling and with her arms outstretched toward the viewer, the mother figure appears unarmed and markedly vulnerable to the torpedo explosions and bayonet charges that surround her. Above her head, the poster reads, “Women! Help America’s Sons Win The War.” In this poster and in others, the mother stands innocent, defenseless, and steadfast, promising the young man that by enlisting, fighting, and possibly dying, he will become a man. That is, cult of patriotic motherhood propaganda often fused mother-son incest with American virtue since, it seems, incestuous feelings could only arise because the mother exhibited the kind of purity and resoluteness imbued in the nation as a whole. Yet, if girlfriends and wives were liabilities because they could leave, whereas it would be

unthinkable for the mother to do so, liabilities similarly followed the mother figure precisely because of her steadfastness. Responsible for mobilizing the nation's youth, she also takes the brunt of blame for their deaths—just as she does in *Kora and Ka*.

Midway through the story, John voices his and his wife Kora's views on the cult of patriotic motherhood:

*It was our Mother.* This may or may not have been true. [. . .] But mother had become symbol. I should have seen it sooner. I had, in Kora's language, "inhibited" the fact that Larry really need not have gone so early. I blamed mother for the death of Larry and I was not noble like Bob. Kora declares that I was in love with madre and that Bob taking the place of father, was my rival. [. . .] Kora says my attitude is fantastic and linked up with mother-complex. I say I don't think so. (35-6)

As a kind of amateur psychoanalyst, Kora attempts to establish three facts: first, incestuous feelings led John's brothers Bob and Larry to mobilize; second, the noncombatant John wishes he could have fought in the war in order to be like his brothers and, thus, become more intimate with his mother; and third, John blames his mother for his brothers' deaths because he actually loves her. The oldest son Bob, who goes off to war first to fight for mother and nation, "take[s] the place of father." John, who is also in love with his mother but has not had the opportunity to enlist, sees Bob as a rival with an upper hand; however, in order to "inhibit" taboo feelings for his mother, John determines to blame her for sending his other brother Larry to his death. John refuses to believe, however, that his feelings about Bob and Larry depend on a mother-complex.

The truth, however, resides somewhere between John's self-analysis and Kora's psychoanalysis. Certainly, the story does not reject Freudian theory wholesale. Starting as far back as 1909, H.D. had developed a fondness for Freudian psychoanalytic theory so much so that, one year after the publication of *Kora and Ka*, she even underwent analysis with Freud himself in order to understand her own bisexuality. Yet, the narrator affirms neither Kora's assertion that John blames his mother in order to covertly pursue taboo love nor John's denial of incest. Rather than diagnose blame as a symptom of John's denial, the story actually shows how

blame—both in the form of his mother’s culpability and his own acute sense of noncombatant’s or survivor’s guilt—signals a melancholy response to war that returns to a form of incest between mother and son, citizen and motherland.

The intersection of incest, melancholia, and nationalism occurs in relation to the Ka. John relates the Ka to two psychological conditions: externalization and amnesia. He declares, “I am that sort of shadow they used to call a Ka, in Egypt. A Ka lives after the body is dead. I shall live after Helforth is dead.” The narrator describes himself as a ghost haunting the protagonist, viewing him from the outside and dissociating his self-identity. For example, in a third-person account of his own actions, John disinterestedly watches how “the hand of Helforth lies affectedly across the grey knee of his lounge suit. The clothed knee is a dummy knee in a window. The shod feet are brown leather lumps” (10). Just as John interprets his body through color (“grey”), shape (“lumps”), texture (“leather”), and metaphor (“dummy”)—as a thing distinctly external to himself—he also fears that he will, or already has, begun to forget himself. Seeing himself from the outside, he worries that he might also lose a hold on what remains inside. As if repeating an affirmation to ward off amnesia, he says, “I will remember. I will to remember. For one instant, for some long or short space of time, memory was eradicated. Ka brushed across my mind, a sponge on a slate” (27).

Through externalization and memory loss, the Ka sheds light on the relationship between melancholia and noncombatancy. Whereas Kora assumes that her husband suffers “mobilization wounds” because he has missed out on the chance to fight for an erotically charged, nationalistic cause like his brothers, John only wishes he could have enlisted and made the ultimate sacrifice during heightened moments when he fully registers the fact that his brothers were compelled to die in a senseless war. Ever so belatedly, he enters a warzone of the mind where, transformed into a Ka, he can be haunted by his brothers and, in turn, imagine his own demise over and over

again. For example, John declares, “It was not Larry who had been picked by vultures nor was it Robert. I began to curse Larry, to curse Bob. Because of their casual and affable ‘sacrifice,’ I was left, flung high and dry” (39). Putting sacrifice in scare quotes, John actually refers to the fact that his brothers’ deaths lack any patriotic resonance. He feels guilty that, as the only surviving sibling, he has found a way to live while his brothers have been killed so violently and ingloriously. Much like the troop of ghostly soldiers who return from the battlefields to seek revenge on the townspeople in Abel Gance’s film *J’Accuse*, Larry and Bob haunt John. Unable to give their souls peace by making sense of their deaths, John determines to assuage his guilt by taking advantage of the phantasmagoria.

By weakening the borders of John’s self-identity, the Ka allows him to double as Larry. Just as his brother was flung into a war without purpose, to enlist, die, and serve as a meal for the birds, John sees Larry’s life and death as his own past, present, and future. Their relationship parallels the one between H.D. and her own brother Gilbert. In her *Tribute to Freud* (1956), which H.D. published near the end of her life, she reminisces about the fact that she had many male siblings but only one sister who died in infancy. Evoking a kind of Noah’s Ark imagery, she describes how “there were two of everybody (except myself)” (32); however, as Dianne Collecott shows, H.D. began to twin herself with her brother Gilbert, who would eventually enlist in the U.S. Army and die in the war (250-1). Like H.D., who must have felt that she too had headed off to war while her feet were firmly planted a home, John states, “When Larry went [to war] I, in some odd manner, went ‘west’ with him. It was my feet that were severed . . . a mule’s intestines . . . but I must stop this” (37). Later, he reiterates, “I was the half of Larry. That half gone, I too went” (38). In these two different quotations, John describes how external viewpoint and memory loss capture his phantom mobilization. Alluding to Larry’s gruesome death (probably by some kind of mortar or bomb explosion), he sees his own feet detached from

his body and his own viscera more figuratively distanced as mule innards. Additionally, when John states, “That half gone, I too went,” he also suggests how his mind has begun to go. As Larry’s double, John wishes to imagine himself at the warfront in order to suffer in the same way. As a spirit, the Ka seems to haunt John, enacting and reenacting traumas that never really occurred, phantom injuries that the noncombatant brother perversely wishes would have ravaged his physical and psychological health. The Ka sends John, at long last, to the warzone, keeps his dead brothers close to him, and, as we shall see, renews in him a romance, if not love, for his country.

Just as the Ka allows John to twin his brother, he also—through his guilt—identifies with his mother. Surprisingly, their twinning shows up most evidently through his relationship with his Kora. John often envisions her more as a mother than as his wife. Whereas Kora is John’s first wife, she has had a previous husband, named Stamford, and children from that previous marriage. During a description of Kora’s marriage to Stamford, John refers to the fact that, since his brothers could not assume their responsibilities as members of the bridal party, he was required to “‘ghos[t]’ for them both, soon, veritably, to take on that role for life” (37). His twinning as Larry and Bob brings him close enough to watch Kora wed this other man. In fact, after Kora and John marry, he tries to persuade her that she still loves Stamford, soon realizing that he is saying what Larry would have said (46). John does not desire to love Kora as his wife but to see her as someone else’s wife, as someone else’s mother. For instance, at one point John gets annoyed that Kora keeps talking about her children with Stamford. He demands, “Stop thinking of the children. Anyhow, you don’t really want to see them, it’s (to use your own phrase) guilt-complex” (28). Kora astutely reminds him that he has no children of his own to fuss over and, therefore, can offer her no advice on how to handle her own; however, she does not realize that John is really talking about his own mother. Referencing the term “guilt-

complex,” which echoes her other term “mother-complex,” she fails to understand that, in this moment, John sees her as his mother and her children as his brothers. His statement—“you don’t really want to see them”—which reveals his cruel nature toward Kora, takes on new meaning when “them” becomes not her children but his brothers.

Although he does not seem to love Kora in any conventional sense, John, through guilt—and, therefore, through the Ka—identifies her with his mother in a way that allows a mother-son incest to persist. In the last lines of the story, he confesses, “Sometimes I call Kora, Ka, or reverse the process and call it Kora. [ . . . ] I am Kora, Kora is Helforth, and Ka is shared between us” (26). The story closes by declaring, “We were Kora of the Underworld and Dionysus, not yet risen. I was then Larry and those others, had no place then in any living landscape. Now we are Kore and the slain God . . . risen.” (54). By ending with the word “risen,” H. D. appears to finish on an optimistic note as if John has somehow found a way to move past his brothers’ deaths and to finally see Kora (or its variation Kore) as a wife rather than as a culpable mother. Yet, by calling his wife “Kora of the Underworld” and “Kore” and himself “Dionysus” and “the slain God” of Greek mythology, John closes the story by identifying Kora as Persephone and self-identifying as Persephone’s son, Dionysus. He does not rise above mother-son incest but, true to his surname, retains or at least returns to such intimacies by ending in a romance in Hell between mother and son, citizen and motherland. Instead of a conventional, patriotic love for one’s country, their romance depends on the melancholia associated with guilt and blame, as if—in the catastrophic aftermath of wartime and postwar disillusionment—melancholia supplies a way to feel *for* the nation.



## II.

Three important aspects of *Kora and Ka* open up *Tender is the Night* to new readings. First, in the narrative, incest leads to disillusionment with the nation and to a cosmopolitan atmosphere that actually masks H.D.'s intensive re-engagement with American identity. Second, through a return to mother-son incest—facilitated by the noncombatant protagonist's survivor's guilt—H.D. explores the perverse romance of melancholy nationalism. Third, as a way to explore that romance in the story, H.D. examines liminal borders, not just between brothers and mothers (e.g. John as Larry's double; Kora as John's mother's double), but also between the sexes in the sense that Kora becomes John and John becomes Kora as well as his own mother.

Tracing the trajectory between these three aspects reveals crucial differences between the two narratives and similarities that have long gone unnoticed. Much like H.D.'s noncombatant protagonist, Fitzgerald's Dick Diver suffers survivor's guilt to the extent that he responds melancholically to war; that is, he too feels as if he missed out on the chance, not to make a patriotic sacrifice, but to lose everything. Likewise, Fitzgerald uses the theme of incest to draw attention to the failures of wartime nationalism and the virtues of postwar cosmopolitanism. Whereas John Helforth does not directly engage in any incestuous feelings or behaviors until he returns, however latently, to a mother-son romance and, consequently, to a different kind of nationalism, incest becomes much more central to Fitzgerald's creation of a noncombatant protagonist. Throughout the novel, Fitzgerald explores two different kinds of incest: father-daughter and mother-son. Scholars have, by-and-large, focused on the former without paying attention to how it relates integrally to the latter. As we will see, Dick perceives his wife Nicole's sexual exploitation by her father, and her subsequent mental illness, as an analog to war trauma. Having never enlisted, Dick feels strangely envious of his wife's battle wounds, and he determines to be like her while, at the same time, helping her to recover. He wants to experience

the war like her, to pass off the aftershocks of her madness as his own combat experience. To phrase that another way, Dick starts out as a parent-substitute—allowing Nicole to transfer blame onto her husband—but ends as a child-substitute, as a version of Nicole herself, while she recovers by effectively becoming the kind of parent who abused her. In other words, Dick is central to a parent-child incest plot that swings from father-daughter to mother-son romance and, thus, from disillusionment with the nation to a new, melancholy nationalism based on a disintegration of the protagonist's mind, body, and spirit.

Through the relationship between Nicole and her father Devereux, Fitzgerald explores sexual cruelty and moral corruption hidden behind a façade of love. Dick meets the two characters while working as a psychiatrist at a sanatorium in Zurich, Switzerland. Devereux escorts his sixteen-year-old daughter to the clinic for a consultation with the leading psychiatrist, Doctor Dohmler. Leaving out any mention of their sexual encounters, Devereux begins by requesting Dohmler to cure Nicole's irrational fear of all men, feigning innocence as to how and why these fears began. Pressed to explain his daughter's condition further, Devereux finally confesses that, in the wake of Mrs. Warren's death, he and Nicole had been "just like lovers—and then all at once we were lovers." In his confession, Devereux leaves uncertain the part that Nicole might have played in provoking her father. Later on, Dohmler even suggests that Nicole must have felt complicit in the romance, despite the realities of the situation. "From sheer self-protection," he suggests, "she developed the idea that she had had no complicity" and fabricated the idea that all men are evil, especially the most seemingly trustworthy ones (173). The psychiatrists diagnose her delusions as symptoms of "*Schizophrénie*" (170). Later, while having a conversation with her sister, Baby Warren, Dick refers to Nicole as "a schizoid—a permanent eccentric" (199). At the core of the novel, then, Fitzgerald explores how parental love goes bad and, when it does, leaves psychological scars on its survivors.

More importantly, Fitzgerald relates such incest to widespread disillusionment with America during and after the war. As John F. Callahan and Min-jung Kim have observed, the novel traces the illusions of U.S. nationalism through characters such as Devereux who believe optimistically that their lives and the lives of those associated with them will end successfully and happily. In no uncertain terms, the narrator identifies Devereux first and foremost as American. For example, while relaying to Dick information about the Warrens' arrival and Devereux's confession, his colleague Franz Gregorovious describes the father as "an American gentleman" and as a "fine American type in every way, tall, broad, well-made," a man from one of the great, feudal Chicago families numbered among the Armours, Cranes, and Swifts (166). By highlighting Devereux's wealth and placing the Warren name alongside other illustrious American families, the narrator alludes to the relationship between incest, financial security, and national identity. In *Fictions of Capital*, Richard Godden explores this particular theme, arguing that accumulating the sexuality of the daughter in the novel would suggest, since accumulation stores money, the prevention of money from further circulation (120). Rather than engage in a non-incestuous relationship that would inevitably disperse his capital to other bloodlines beyond the Warrens, Devereux's father-daughter romance allows him to keep it all in the family, not only by keeping Nicole to himself as a proxy spouse, and thus doubling his own sexual capacity as a paternal courtier, but also by keeping her off the marriage market and thus disabling her from opening the Warren treasure chest to the risk of potential suitors.

Just as Gregorovious describes Devereux as a well-off American, Fitzgerald also likens Nicole's mental illness to combat experience and, ultimately, war trauma. During the famous scene of the Picardy battlefield tour, he draws together a discussion of money and country in order to show how the abuse of financial power leads to disillusionment with the nation. Walking the hallowed ground where four major battles had been fought, Dick claims that

skirmishes during the first months of the war, including the first battle of the Marne, might be able to take place again, in some future conflict, but what WWI came to be known for—the attrition associated with trench warfare—could never be achieved again. Pointing out geographical markers, he notes a “little stream—we could walk to it in two minutes. It took the British a month to walk to it—a whole empire walking very slowly, dying in front and pushing forward behind. And another empire walked very slowly backward a few inches a day, leaving the dead like a million bloody rugs. No Europeans will ever do that again in this generation” (74-5). Dick continues by describing such slow violence as a “western-front business” that required “years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relations that existed between the classes” (75). Although Dick never clarifies precisely what he means, he alludes to the fact that the war depended on the lower class trench soldiers who would follow the orders of their upper class commanding officers and military staff. As Eric J. Leed points out, a soldier’s class status and wealth determined the degree to which he would suffer during the First World War (207). Soldiers who could afford a commission stood a better chance of surviving barrages from an officer’s dugout or, better yet, from the vantage point of the top brass who rarely ventured past the reserve lines if they entered the warzone at all. Lower level enlisted men, including subalterns, found themselves far closer to the deadly action. If, as Dick claims, the steadfast relationship between the classes propelled a war of attrition ever—if ever so slowly—forward, then it also produced resentment, a sense that the have-nots were led to slaughter while the haves got fat off the feast.

As Dick’s Eurocentric language suggests, he seems to disregard U.S. involvement in the kind of conflict that ravaged the Picardy countryside. Abe North, for example, attempts to argue that trench warfare originated in the American Civil War, specifically during Ulysses S. Grant’s Siege of Petersburg; however, Dick adamantly persists that modern warfare could only be

dreamed up by fantasy and fairy tale writers such as Lewis Carroll, Jules Verne, and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué; that is, only the British, French and Germans could have created the surreal atrocities of the First World War. The differentiation between Europe and the U.S., though, spells a problem for a protagonist who feels he missed out on enlistment. Yet, by also referring to the “business” of war and, more romantically, to the war as “the last love battle,” Dick alludes to the Warren incest plot. Similar to the ostensibly European war that depended on a certain relation between classes but ended in disillusionment with the nation, the incestuous relationship between the rich Devereux and his daughter leads not only to his consolidation of wealth but also to her downfall and, along with it, a disillusionment with the American Dream as well as any kind of romance for the American nation. Whereas Dick prophesies that “[n]o other Europeans will ever do that again in this generation,” his love language reveals a noncombatant analog to war that identifies Nicole and himself as proxy soldiers who must go through the horrors of war again. Dick often connects Nicole’s incest-induced mental illness to war trauma. For example, while talking with Gregorovich about Nicole’s case, Dick wonders if, despite a complete lack of combat experience, he might also be “changed like the rest” (176). His cryptic statement gets clarified later on, when, married to Nicole, he wakes up early one morning from a war dream. After seeing images of military uniforms, emergency vehicles, and combat hospitals, Dick hastens to write down the scenes that recently occupied his mind, adding to his description a half-ironic note: “non-combatant’s shell-shock” (236). In the quiet, he hears Nicole from the next room, “mutter[ing] something desolate” in her sleep. Her mutterings seem to have been the soundtrack to his war dream, a symptom of her shell shock.

Much like the protagonist in *Kora and Ka*, Dick wishes that he had mobilized during moments when he realizes the horrors of war as expressed through Nicole’s madness. In order to become a proxy soldier like his wife, he must first become her father in order to help her recover

by transferring her anger from Devereux onto himself while, at the same time, assuming the negative aspects of her identity. In other words, he seeks to forever remedy Nicole's "shell-shock" by becoming the victim of his own incestuous thoughts and desires in such a way that his personal disintegration also necessitates the disintegration of national filiations. The narrator charts Dick's similar rise and fall, as he assumes wealthy aspirations and incestuous feelings only to be left completely broken by the end. When talking to Gregorovious, for instance, he asks, "How about your old scheme for America? [. . .] We were going to New York and start an up-to-date establishment for billionaires" (113). His colleague chalks these high-society dreams up to med students' wishful thinking. Tellingly, though, Dick's question comes during a scene in which Gregorovious describes the way that Nicole has become attracted to the protagonist. Her attraction offers Dick a chance to make his wealth but also foreshadows his downfall. Like Devereux, Dick starts off as Nicole's psychiatric guardian but violates professionalism and becomes her lover.

Whereas Devereux seeks to keep the Warren family fortune intact, Dick co-opts it. Nicole's sister, Baby, voices such fears. After hearing Dick's intention to become Nicole's doctor and husband, she tells him that the plan is "ill advised" to which he rebuts, "Nicole's rich, but that doesn't make me an adventurer" (207). Baby persists, "That's just it. [. . .] Nicole's rich," leaving Dick to suspiciously respond, "Just how much money has she got?" After their marriage, Nicole's money funds Dick's travels to exotic locales such as Monte Carlo and Rome, finances their big house—the Villa Diana—on the Mediterranean, supplements his modest salary as a psychiatrist, and affords him the chance to meet movie stars like Rosemary Hoyt. In fact, his incestuous desires get underlined further by the fact that he falls in love with Rosemary, an actress who has just made a name for herself in the film *Daddy's Girl*.

Adamantly claiming that he is no fortune hunter seeking to steal his wife's wealth, Nick desires to unconsciously desire the opposite. Rather than profits, he wants to incur losses, to become financially, physically, and emotionally bankrupt in the marital transaction. Initially becoming like Devereux, Dick attempts to resolve Nicole's trauma by allowing her not only to compete with him but to effectively topple his safe world, turning him into the victim that she had once become.<sup>21</sup> As Donaldson notes, Oswald Spengler's and D.H. Lawrence's theories on sexuality influenced Fitzgerald to explore how "the postwar world [. . .] invited women to compete against men" (128). Attempting to treat his wife's schizophrenia, Dick becomes its final victim as alcoholism, divorce, and professional obscurity slowly disintegrate his health, relationships with wife and children, promising career, and national filiations.

Midway through the novel, he returns to the U.S. to bury his father and, more importantly, to say goodbye to "all [his] fathers," before swiftly leaving the States again (267). In the final chapter, he ends up in the backwoods of upstate New York. The narrator closes the novel, "in any case he is almost certainly in that section of the country, in one town or another" (408). Where he once had mental prowess and professional promise, he has now lost his partnership in the Swiss sanatorium. Once charming, he now makes enemies quite easily. His physical health has given way to the bottle. Divorced and thus estranged from his children, he has also gone bankrupt, unable to even take advantage of Europe's feeble postwar economy. The ambiguity about Dick's hometown—"in one town or another"—not only reinforces the obscurity of his professional and personal life but also the marked lack of interest the narrator and, it would seem, the protagonist have for any section of the country.

Through Dick's attempts to resolve his wife's mental disorder by becoming the perpetrator and victim of his own incest plot, the narrative demonstrates shifting postwar

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<sup>21</sup> For an in-depth study of how the shell-shock sub-plot intersects with the history of gender identity and WWI, see Tiffany Joseph's "'Non-Combatant's Shell-Shock': Trauma and Gender in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*." *NWSA Journal* 15.3 (Fall 2003): 64-81.

allegiances from nationalism to cosmopolitanism. Schizophrenia plays such a pivotal role as *the* effect of incest, that focusing specifically on it will help demonstrate a cosmopolitan aesthetic and politics in the novel. The term has received no shortage of attention in major theoretical works. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe schizophrenia as a strategic desire at once optimistic and pessimistic, one linked to freedom and constraint. They claim, “What we are really trying to say is that capitalism, through its process of production, produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear, but which nonetheless continues to act as capitalism’s limit” (37). As Ian Buchanan clarifies, capitalism functions on complex desire in which need drives a purchase, which must result in an appropriate measure of satisfaction: too little, and the consumer stops purchasing; too much, and there is no need to continue purchasing. “The model is anti-dialectal,” Buchanan suggests, “because any raising-up is also a tying-down” (162-4). Extending *Anti-Oedipus*, Frederic Jameson argues that schizophrenia has occurred as a distinctly late-capitalist disorder because commoditization has dissolved any meaning beyond the cash nexus. He contends that schizophrenia entails a “breakdown of the signifying chain” to the point that history is “reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (27). Later on, though, in his *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson discusses schizophrenia and schizophrenics as examples of a utopian imagination associated with the rhythm of success and failure (131). Like Deleuze, Guattari, Jameson, and Buchanan, Fitzgerald focuses on the relationship between capitalism and schizophrenia but ties that thinking to the nation in order to show how such a mental disorder accords with the utopian social condition of cosmopolitanism. In fact, just as success-in-failure becomes central to understanding schizophrenia and—for Jameson—utopia, it also characterizes Fitzgerald’s cosmopolitan world, an “improved” kind of



community founded, more often than not, on the continuation of violence, loneliness, and other kinds of actions and behaviors in need of improvement.

Fitzgerald uses the theme of schizophrenia in order to characterize Dick as the inheritor of Nicole's mental disorder and thus to conceptualize cosmopolitanism as a consequence of incest. Characterized by the narrator as both a remedy and expression of the mental disorder, cosmopolitan communities exist not as an idyllic counterpart to nationalism but as a trans-national network of tolerant, though often times hostile, bonds between individuals. I argue however that, because Fitzgerald inextricably links incest to nationalism, the "resulting" cosmopolitanism only forms a narrative midpoint before returning back to nationalism, albeit one that looks and feels different because it has been informed by a schizophrenic cosmopolitanism. From the start, the novel explores the community surrounding Dick and Nicole as inclusive, kind, and separate from the mean-spirited, nation-based groups. After arriving at a hotel on the French Riviera, Rosemary makes herself at home on the beach and in the ocean, but becomes immediately bombarded by a group of British beach-goers—such as Mr. and Mrs. McKisco—who invade her privacy with questions about the silver screen. In contrast to them, she sees a group further along the beach, Nicole among them. Mesmerized by Nicole and Dick, Rosemary emphasizes the close-knit community that forms around them: "there was much visiting and talking back and forth—the atmosphere of a community upon which it would be presumptuous to intrude" (6). Although her over-protective mother, Mrs. Speers, has urged her to stay away from such groups, which she refers to as "cliques" and "drones," Rosemary senses a "special gentleness" present in the group of Americans, French-Americans, and British sunbathers and swimmers (24). Unaware of Nicole's mental illness, Rosemary cannot know at this point that Dick has brought the group of people together in part to help restore his wife to health. As he later considers, "The brilliance, the versatility of madness is akin to the

resourcefulness of water seeping through, over and around a dike. It requires the united front of many people to work against it” (191-2). Obviously evoking war imagery by referencing a united front, Dick also integrates water imagery appropriate to the opening beach scene. He brings together a cosmopolitan group in order to stave off the effects of schizophrenia.

Rather than just a kind of opposition to madness, such a community also forms through it. After visiting the beach, Rosemary gets invited to Dick and Nicole’s party at the Villa Diana. Prior to the event, Dick confides to his wife, “I want to give a really *bad* party. I mean it. I want to give a party where there’s a brawl and seductions and people going home with their feelings hurt and women passed out in the cabinet de toilette. You wait and see” (35). His comment foreshadows the way the party gets interrupted by Nicole who has a schizophrenic spell in the bathroom. A mystery surrounds this event since the narrator and the two main characters have kept the mental illness quite a secret so far. Mrs. McKisko, finds Nicole in a questionable state in the bathroom. Naturally, questions arise; guests gossip or hurriedly hush each other up; and two characters—Mr. McKisko, standing up for his wife’s honor, and Tommy Barban, a man in love with Nicole—fight a comical duel. Unlike the beach scene, the cosmopolitan party does not offer a gentler, more tolerant, or altogether better world. Instead, Fitzgerald suggests that, through violence and the wreckage that ensues well beyond the bounds of any one nation, transnational relationships abound.

In order to reinforce this point, Dick assumes a schizophrenic split-personality. The narrator states:

His love for Nicole and Rosemary, his friendship with Abe North, with Tommy Barban in the broken universe of the war’s ending—in such contacts the personalities had seemed to press up so close to him that he became the personality itself—there seemed some necessity of taking all or nothing; it was as if for the remainder of his life he was condemned to carry with him the egos of certain people, early met and early loved, and to be only as complete as they were complete themselves. There was some element of loneliness involved—so easy to be loved—so hard to love. (317)

The passage relies heavily on an arguably improper definition of schizophrenia. Labeled “dementia praecox” in the early 1800s and then coined as “schizophrenia” by Eugen Bleuler a century later, the term means “split-mind.” The definition has been described as a misidentification since the disorder does not produce a bifurcated personality or identity but a split within and between intellect and emotion, a break from reality. Yet, even in Bleuler’s description of the disorder in his *Textbook of Psychiatry* (1924), he conflates it with split-personality: “schizophrenia produces different personalities existing *side by side*” (138; emphasis original). In the field of literary rather than psychiatric study, T.S. Eliot makes a similar point. In his highly influential Norton lectures, entitled *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Eliot warns against a poet also assuming the role of philosopher, a condition of being “virtually two men,” which he likens to “thorough schizophrenia” (90). The scene from the novel also resembles Fitzgerald’s “Crack-Up” essay, published two years after his novel, in which he confesses a “strong sudden instinct that I must be alone” in part because of his “tendency to identify myself, my ideas, my destiny, with those of all classes that I came in contact with” (521). Like Fitzgerald, Dick becomes a composite of all the other characters, the other nationalities with which he has come into contact. Part American (like Nicole and Rosemary), part British (like Champion), and part French-American (like Tommy), his cosmopolitan identity becomes a mark of the “broken universe” inaugurated by the war. In order to take part as a quasi-combatant, Dick determines to experience Nicole’s warlike trauma as perpetrator and victim of incest, thus allowing his wife to transfer her anger and resentment onto him while he takes on the kind of physical and psychological disintegration that initially plagues her. Through his decline, including a schizophrenia of sorts, he reflects a postwar paradigm shift from nationalism to cosmopolitanism.

Or so the story goes. Actually, cosmopolitanism occurs as a mere narrative midpoint. Similar to the permeability of identity that H.D. explores in *Kora and Ka*—where the protagonist becomes his brother, wife, and mother—Fitzgerald describes what Wai Chee Dimock, in reference to the novel, has identified as “switchability” between characters. Not only do Nicole’s and Dick’s schizophrenic personalities already suggest such a quality, but switchability pervades the incest plot well beyond the way that Dick becomes both a father-substitute and a version of his wife. By transferring her negative aspects onto Dick, thus giving him the opportunity to belatedly take part in the war, Nicole does not get better or recover, per se, but actually turns into her father, the parental identity that Dick left behind when he, in a sense, became her. Among other things, what that means is that the narrative never works its way out of the incest plot, never leaves behind the familial romance of nationalism. Starting out as story about literal father-daughter incest, it ends—with Nicole as the parent and Dick as the child—as the inverse, a story about figural mother-son incest. In other words, Dick might be able to say goodbye forever to his father, to all his fathers, but he cannot say goodbye to mothers, nor to the motherland. Similar to the way the mother and son become guilty parties in *Kora and Ka*, Dick’s shame about becoming a doctor while others “changed” during the war connects with Nicole’s culpability as she forces him to cure her by taking the brunt of her “non-combatant shell-shock.” Likewise, just as H.D.’s guilty characters forge a romance in Hell, so too tenderness in Fitzgerald’s novel arises not as a kind of cosmopolitan fellow-feeling, but as a melancholy nationalism through mother-son intimacies.

Before turning specifically to the second-phase of the incest plot, let us first turn to Fitzgerald’s short story “The Swimmers,” one of the six short stories (including another seminal text, “Babylon Revisited” [1931]) that enabled him to work out themes and characters critical for the later novel. In the story, a dissolution of marriage leads to a reflection on persisting

nationalist sentiment. After Henry Clay Marston and his French wife Chouquette break up, she begins a relationship with a man named Charles Wiese, who describes the U.S. as an economically booming country built by people just like Devereux Warren. Talking to Henry, who has been living overseas in Europe, Wiese states, “Money is power. You were abroad so long that perhaps you’re inclined to forget that fact. Money made this country, built its great and glorious cities, created its industries, covered it with an iron network of railroads” (508). For Henry, financial power that built the U.S. should not be registered in its profits column but as a profound loss. Leaving, at the end of the story, to head back overseas, he criticizes the country that fades from view but also, counter-intuitively, maintains a kind of nationalist sentiment: “Watching the fading city, the fading shore, from the deck of the Majestic, he had a sense of overwhelming gratitude and of gladness that America was there, that under the ugly debris of industry the rich land still pushed up, incorrigibly lavish and fertile, and that in the heart of the leaderless people the old generosities and devotions fought on, breaking out sometimes in fanaticism and excess, but indomitable and undefeated” (512). Although the country fades out behind the thrumming ocean liner and under the weight of “the ugly debris of industry,” Henry feels both gratitude and gladness that somewhere, behind all the saltwater spray and beneath all the ironworks, the country still lives on. Referring to other citizens’ “devotions” that persist through thick and thin, Henry also seems rather surprised that he could be identified as one of its members. In fact, by using a word such as “debris,” he foreshadows the way he will later connect the indomitable country, and his own nationalist feelings, to war. At the story’s close, he considers, “France was a land, England a people, but American, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter—it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart.” Unlike Dick who, during the

Picardy tour, refuses to see the connection between the American Civil War and the First World War, Henry positions the Battle of Shiloh alongside the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. On the other hand, the “willingness” to die for empty words and ideals—the melancholy quality of the American ideal that so mesmerizes Henry—also appears in the novel, but with an important variation. Henry expresses the indomitable spirit of doughboys giving their lives, however recklessly, for patriotic falsehoods, whereas Dick shows how the falsehoods themselves wither long before the soldiers—or, in his case, proxy soldiers—disintegrate. He desires, however belatedly, to enlist in a war that he knows holds no meaning and, by virtue of its senselessness, draws him—like Henry—back to a certain devotion for the nation or, more properly put, for the motherland.

The melancholy relationship between mothers, sons, and the American nation finds its most explicit treatment in Dick’s statements about the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage. During the war years, U.S. families flew flags with blue stars symbolizing the number of family members fighting overseas. A silver star would replace the blue one for a wounded soldier. When a soldier died, though, the blue or silver star became a gold one. Placed outside the front doors, these flags tallied the living and the dead, announcing to passersby in quantitative, rather than just qualitative terms, the family’s dedication to its country. The “Gold Star” was a distinctly American symbol of the war dead. As a Chicago newspaper reported, “A movement was begun here today for the substitution for the black garb of mourning, such as the Gold Star in memory of American soldier dead” (qtd. in Graham 12). A decade after the war, a pilgrimage was created around the Gold Star and everything it represented. In 1928, a small group of 25 women in Washington D.C. came up with the idea to take an overseas tour to visit war cemeteries because the bodies of so few troops were repatriated to the home front. Between 1930 and 1933, more than 6600 women went on these pilgrimages. Extending the cult of patriotic motherhood,

these mothers (and, often times, widows) traveled to pay their respects at the graves of sons and husbands. As John W. Graham notes, “The Great War pilgrimage movement was patriotic and profound. Yet the movement was also very personal. A mother mourned her son at his graveside half a world away from home” (11). Yet, by replacing the more normal mourning band worn around the arm, the star also provided the pilgrims with a way out of personal grief, a way to mourn successfully: “The idea of the Gold Star was that of honor and glory accorded the person for his supreme sacrifice, rather than the sense of personal loss which would be represented by mourning symbols” (Graham 13-4).

Fitzgerald’s treatment of the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage has received scant critical attention. The oversight seems even more pronounced since, in Christian K. Messenger’s estimation, “With the Gold Star Mothers, [. . .] Fitzgerald crafts a rich moment of historical compression and emotional sweep; in such high sentimental conceptions he has no peer in modern American letters” (46). In the novel, the Gold Star Mothers show up while Dick, Nicole, and Rosemary enjoy an evening at a café. As the three sit together, talk, and drink, Dick notices a troop of women enter the room. Their presence pulls him away from his conversation with his wife and lover, and he asks the waiter what kind of group or association the women represent. “Those are the gold-star muzzers,” the waiter explains. Looking over his wine at them, Dick perceives “in their happy faces [. . .] all the maturity of an older America. For a while the sobered women who had come to mourn for their dead, for something they could not repair, made the room beautiful.” With effort, Dick returns to his own party, but—at least in the first edition of the novel—the scene closes by returning, once more, to the Gold Star Mothers. Edward Shenton’s black-and-white illustration (or “decoration” as the novel’s cover page identifies his drawings) depicts a war cemetery covered with evenly spaced white crosses underneath a draped flag bearing a single star.

For Messenger, the entire scene accords with the official doctrine surrounding the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimage. Written before and during these overseas tours and published only one year after they had ended, the novel seems to promote their patriotic mourning practices. As Messenger argues, “Dick’s appraisal of the Gold Star Mothers is one of intense sentiment where he intuits their sadness but honors their ability to successfully mourn with dignity” (37). He hones in on the fact that, rather than enter the café looking despondent, these mourners all wear “happy faces.” Although grief-stricken that they have lost loved ones, the pilgrims successfully work through their grief by taking solace in the fact that their sons and husbands bravely and honorably made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Undeniably, the mothers’ uplifting faces and collective viewpoint on war loss draw Dick to them, but there is something else at work in Fitzgerald’s description that Messenger misses in his interpretation. By using the phrase “old loyalties and devotions” to describe the pilgrims, Fitzgerald echoes his protagonist Henry’s phrase in “The Swimmers”: “old generousities and devotions.” In the context of war mourners, the parallel therefore recalls the end of that story in which doughboys die willingly under false pretenses. Just as the disillusionment with the nation seems to evade the soldiers but produces in Henry a persistent gratitude toward his country, so too the Gold Star Mothers initially demonstrate conciliatory mourning but, in Dick’s final assessment, reveal the way melancholia does not diminish but actually bolsters nationalist sentiment. For, in addition to maintaining “happy faces,” these women also advance a more “sobered” outlook on war loss as irreparable, an outlook that cannot be divorced from the fact that, through the cult of patriotic motherhood, they inspired and possibly even unwittingly compelled their sons (and husbands) to die in a conflict that ultimately served no purpose. As Dick watches the women, he feels overcome by the fact that they had traveled a great distance to mourn “for something they could not repair,” a futile effort that has nonetheless “made the room beautiful.”



The Gold Star Mothers scene not only incorporates Dick as observer but also as participant. While watching the group of pilgrims, he gets transported back to his youth, effectively becoming one of their sons. He imagines sitting “again on his father’s knee, riding with Moseby while the old loyalties and devotions fought on around him” (131). By “Moseby,” Fitzgerald refers to John Singleton Mosby, the Confederate commander who fought in Virginia against the Union Army during the Civil War. As his father’s playmate and as an officer in a nineteenth-century war, Dick transforms himself into the kind of rambunctious young boy whom the women might happily remember as their own sons while, at the same time, placing himself within an earlier historical period (even one well before his own childhood) that he believes would fit well with their optimistic—and ostensibly un-modern—mourning practices. Yet, by becoming one of their sons in a sense, Dick imaginatively takes part in the beauty exhibited through the mothers’ irreparable mourning. The scene thus advances two ways of viewing the Gold Star Mothers: one, a more official way in which they become not just pilgrims but foreign ambassadors of their country’s honor and bravery; the other, a more melancholy way in which they remain pilgrims who can never achieve what they set out to do and, in their failure, symbolize the kind of national romance that Fitzgerald wants to evoke through the incest plot between Dick and Nicole.<sup>22</sup>

During Nicole’s eventual and long-awaited break with her husband, Fitzgerald brings about a national romance quite similar to the one alluded to in the Gold Star Mothers scene, where the inability to successfully mourn a senseless war not only defines the relationship between mothers and their enlisted sons but also subtends a topsy-turvy patriotism. Towards the end of the novel, Nicole finally decides to act on her romantic feelings for Tommy Barban. During that affair, she and Dick have it out, and she severs ties with him. In a rapturous passage,

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<sup>22</sup> Earlier in the scene, Dick also discusses Rosemary’s sexual liaison with a man named Hillis. He describes Rosemary and Hillis as a “community of misfortune” (115-6), which also rings true for the way he interprets the Gold Star Mothers and his marriage to Nicole.

the narrator describes how “she fought him with her money and her faith that her sister disliked him and was behind her now; with the thought of the new enemies he was making with his bitterness, with her quick guile against his wine-ing and dine-ing slowness, her health and beauty against his physical deterioration.” By transferring all of her anger and resentment onto Dick, she transforms him from the glamorous and likeable playboy on the beach to a drink-ravaged, friendless, and financially impoverished soon-to-be ex-husband. Upon cataloguing the kinds of domestic havoc she has wreaked, Nicole realizes the fact that “suddenly, in the space of two minutes she achieved her victory and justified herself to herself without lie or subterfuge, cut the cord forever. Then she walked, weak in the legs, and sobbing coolly, toward the household that was hers at last” (389-90).

As the financial superior to Dick, Nicole finally achieves her own sense of autonomy but, in so doing, actually becomes just like her father, the real enemy she has been trying to defeat this whole time. More important than any of the other weapons with which she fights Dick, Nicole uses her money. The narrator begins by saying, “she fought with her money,” just as, only pages earlier, Tommy Barban says to Nicole, “You’ve got too much money. That’s the crux of the matter. Dick can’t beat that” (378). By using the Warren money to win against her husband, Nicole becomes a member of a markedly patrilineal line, figuratively reenacting the incest plot with Dick in her place. After all, the victorious, internal monologue ends with her assuming her role as head-of-household as she walks back toward “the household that was hers at last.” Her change into one of the Warren men becomes more explicitly when Dick tells her that she has “white crook’s eyes.” Caught off-guard, Nicole coolly strikes back: “if my eyes have changed it’s because I’m well again. And being well perhaps I’ve gone back to my true

self—I suppose my grandfather was a crook and I’m a crook by heritage, so there we are” (377).<sup>23</sup>

Although connected to her grandfather and thus her father, specifically through her financial power, Nicole also—and more importantly—becomes a kind of mother figure while Dick adopts more of a childlike, specifically filial, identity. Just prior to the remark about Nicole marching back toward her household, the narrator refers to how she had effectively “cut the cord” between herself and her husband. Cord-cutting elicits childbirth images. Cutting an umbilical cord removes, in a sense, the last vestige of physical connection between mother and newborn just as, precisely through the act of cutting—or the fact of being cut—the severed cord makes the relationship one of mother *and* child now more than ever before.

Elsewhere in the novel, Fitzgerald overtly connects the two ideas—cord-cutting and maternal identity—by referring to the relationship between Rosemary and her own mother. The narrator states, “Rosemary had never done much thinking, save about the illimitability of her mother’s perfections, so this final severance of the umbilical cord disturbed her sleep” (52). After seeing and meeting Dick on the beach, Rosemary has immediately fallen in love with him. Eager to push her inexperienced and naïve daughter out of the nest and force her to become worldly-wise, Rosemary’s mother encourages her to fall in love and get her heart broken. In Mrs. Speers’ mind, her daughter was made to work as an actress, not to marry; consequently, love should not lead to happy endings but to sad, even tragic, and altogether powerful material for her career on the silver screen. The narrator even refers to the way Mrs. Speers considers Rosemary a boy—economically speaking—rather than a girl. The scene thus evokes an image of cord-cutting between mother and child just as, through a slippage of gender, that child

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<sup>23</sup> Nicole’s rebuttal echoes, while also offering an interesting counterpoint to, the narrator’s description of her sister Baby earlier in the novel. Livid about Dick’s plan to marry and treat Nicole, Baby argues loudly about an issue that, as the Dick notes, she does not really understand. The narrator states, “Baby became suddenly her grandfather, cool and experimental” (231).

becomes decidedly masculine. At the same time, it seems to evoke a feeling of foredoomed romance since only failed love stories seem truly valuable; however, Dick himself connects the notion of cord-cutting with the persistence of romance just a few pages later. At the end of his Picardy tour monologue, Dick admits, “The silver cord is cut and the golden bowl is broken and all that, but an old romantic like me can’t do anything about it.” Although the war was the last “love battle,” romance still remains. As the novel’s final pages show, it persists through the doomed intimacies between Nicole and Dick as mother and son.

The romantic feelings between the two main characters keep on going even after Nicole’s break with, and victory over, Dick. His disintegration and the narrative disillusionment with the nation shed light on how incestuous feelings persist and, with them, a return to nationalism. For example, the plot returns to the beach where Dick stands looking out at the distant horizon, “[h]is eyes [. . .] clear as a child’s” (405). Nicole watches him cautiously, just as she began the novel by sitting quietly on shore while keeping tabs on their son playing in the water. When Dick, standing on a rocky precipice, makes a sign of the cross toward the ocean, Nicole, sensing that he is in trouble, tells Tommy, “I’m going to him” (406). Likewise, Nicole feels the need to tell Tommy, “I loved Dick and I’ll never forget him” (407). Although Nicole places their romance in the past, the narrator mentions that she “often” feels the need to relay this information, possibly to reiterate the same exact sentence to Tommy, most definitely more often than he wishes to hear it. The narrator’s allusion to Nicole and Dick’s interminable, though failed, romance that occurs during the chapter in which Dick returns, after a long hiatus, to America. Rather than merely a signal of Dick’s further disintegration in the backwoods of upstate New York, the return to his home country parallels his romance with Nicole. Whereas the chaos and corruption of the war seem to lead away from the nation, the narrative circles back to it. If, in the course of becoming a substitute for Devereux, Dick has buried his own father, determined to

say goodbye to all his fathers, and—what might be the same thing—left his fatherland behind in order to return to Europe, then by following the incest plot to its devastating conclusion, he discovers not only a mother-substitute but also a motherland and a way to feel for it that only remains possible through melancholia.

As such, Fitzgerald manifests the irreparable beauty of the Gold Star Mother's Pilgrimage more fully in the ending between the protagonist and his wife, achieving precisely what H.D. also set out to do in her story about two guilty parties—mothers and sons—who partake in a hellish romance. Dick feels guilty that he never enlisted, that he survived and even prospered while so many others met their physical and psychological disintegration on the battlefield; consequently he wishes he had experienced the shell shock—the catastrophe of war—rather than take part in any brave, honorable, or virtuous acts. A psychiatrist by trade, Dick finds a way to gain such combat experience belatedly. By treating Nicole, he can transfer her “non-combatant shell-shock” onto himself while helping her to recover from the wounds of incest and a resultant schizophrenia. His desire to help his wife recover proves to be the only positive or conciliatory aspect of his “war” experience. Yet, whereas the narrative arc seems to move from disenchantment with the nation to optimism about a trans-national, or cosmopolitan, world, Fitzgerald bends that arc further in order to circle back on the nation. At the end, Nicole embodies the national disillusionment with which the novel began. Upon becoming free from Dick (and thus Devereux), she becomes just like her father except for the fact that Fitzgerald describes her transformation in distinctly maternal terms. In other words, like the cult of patriotic motherhood, Nicole forces Dick into a senseless disintegration that he already seems to want in the first place. As the novel's title suggests, though, tenderness, intimacy, romance—these feelings and relationships take place at night, in the dark, through the black humor of melancholia.

## **MARTIAL FUTURES: GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF WAR**

In 1934, Gertrude Stein finally returned to the U.S. after a thirty-year hiatus from her native country. For six months, she partook in a lecture tour that took her, in a circuitous fashion, to both coasts and many destinations in between. During this period of time, she gave lectures on her theory of composition and, most famously, her “gradual making” of *The Making of Americans* (1925), a book about a family’s progress from old-world stock to new-world breed, which she had completed more than twenty years prior. Towards the end of the lecture, she turns to the relationship between space, time, and the American nation: “It is singularly a sense for combination within a conception of the existence of a given space of time that makes the American thing the American thing, and the sense of this space of time must be within the whole thing as well as in the completed whole thing” (225). In the closing paragraph, she repeats “space of time” five more times before ending by claiming, “it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving” (226). Geographical spaces and spaces of time—these seem to be, at least in Stein’s opinion, what America is all about; moreover, just as Stein repeats words and phrases such as “American thing,” “whole thing,” and “space of time,” so too repetition becomes essential for how she conceptualizes human cognitive functioning and the family’s and nation’s progress. As we shall see, the geographical and temporal aspects of repetition provide a way to understand Stein’s insights into the U.S. role in WWI.

Stein’s remarks about *The Making of Americans* say less about that book than they do about the literary endeavor she was about to undertake and, as I intend to argue, its connection to two of her other works. As if inspired by her travels throughout various regions of the U.S.—from the mountainous locales along either seaboard to the flatlands stretched out for days in between—Stein published a much-neglected book during the year after her lecture tour ended.

Entitling it *The Geographical History of America; or, the Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (1936), she would take up her prior interest in spatiality and temporality by turning to the question of geography and its relationship to history. Robert T. Tally Jr. might very well be correct in asserting that *all* narratives “may be said to constitute forms of literary cartography” (1), even to the point that they become nothing more or less than “mapping machines” (3), but in this particular book Stein overtly develops a cartographic or, more to the point, a geographic framework for her narrative. In it, Stein extends insights she developed not just in *The Making of Americans* but also in *Geography and Plays* (1922), a multi-genre collection in which, among other things, she hints at how space and place influence one’s identity and the kind of writing one composes. Likewise, in *The Geographical History*, Stein explores how America’s geographical features determine human nature (synonymous with self-identity) and the human mind (a more abstract concept that transcends identity and temporality).

In his introduction to the book, Thornton Wilder provides a succinct reference point for Stein’s readers on elusive themes such as how geography affects the human mind of a modernist writer invested in the aesthetics of repetition. At one point, he asks why Stein “repeat[s] herself so often.” He answers, just as Stein had back in *The Making of Americans*, that repetition is basic to human existence and is not synonymous with recurrence or duplication: “The answer to the charge of repetition is on many levels. On one level Miss Stein points out that repetition is in all nature. It is in human life [. . .]. Repeating is [also] emphasis. Every time a thing is repeated it is slightly different” (13). Wilder’s remarks about repetition lead him to consider how and why geography assumes such an all-important place in the book: “Miss Stein, believing the intermittent emergence of the Human Mind and its record in literary masterpieces to be the most important manifestation of human culture, observed that these emergences were dependent upon the geographical situations in which the authors lived” (13-4). As examples of such influence,

he refers to the differences in identity between “the valley-born” and “the hill-bounded” and the way the flat land abounding throughout the heartland of the U.S. “are an invitation to wander as well as to release from local assertion” (14). Wilder hints at the way the act of wandering refers to spatio-temporal roving that, in its very resistance to destination, urges one to retread the same worn path, to revisit the same site, to repeat. Thus for Stein, who had not set foot on the soil of her homeland for over three decades, the country’s diverse geographical features seem to have been infused into her self-identity early in her life and, from a distance, influenced her expatriate writings.

Although an insightful access point to the geography book, Wilder’s short introduction eclipses warfare as a pervasive theme in the book, specifically the way Stein characterizes war as a mediated event—a conflict observed at a distance—that underpins both her physical separation from the U.S. and her spatio-temporal aesthetics of repetition. Recently, scholarship has turned in exciting and provocative ways to the mediatedness of modern warfare. In *War at a Distance*, for example, Mary A. Favret analyzes the way distant combat during pre-modernist wars such as the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars changed the way people understood temporalities of war. She begins by calling attention to the fact that, in military conflicts waged far away from noncombatants, “how one can know or learn of war becomes massively important” (12). Throughout the book, Favret argues that separation between homeland and warfront and the speed of information technologies produced a distinct meantime that delimited civilians from knowing *what* to make of war because they could not put wartime into a coherent chronology of past, present, and future. As Favret puts it, the “wayward meantime, the ‘lost hours’ and ‘dull morn’ between one delivery of the news and the next [. . .] brings with it affective and epistemological effects that fall out of or away from the reassurances of chronological time” (70). In this waiting period, civilians anticipated the arrival of news that was always already old



by weeks if not months; they sent letters to soldiers and sailors unsure if, or when, their mail would arrive at some point in the distant future, unsure even what that future would look like; devoid of any sense of what lay ahead, they attempted to develop epistemological and affective certainty by turning to metaphors of weather, climate, and geography: “scientists and poets together produced a recognizable *georgics* of the sky, fusing the *work* of war and weather to highlight questions of mediation, especially between bodies and events located at great removes from each other” (122; emphasis original). For Romantic writers given to wandering lonely like clouds, the sky patterns produced by geological features below allowed citizens back home to come into contact with war at a geographical distance.

During the First World War, military science and soldiers’ epistemological and affective approach to combat were often grounded in geography. Stereoscopes fashioned to reconnaissance planes provided three-dimensional pictures of the battlefield terrain below; reading the nuances in these photographs, intelligence analysts could detect enemy formations, supplies, vehicles, weaponry, and living quarters disguised by the newly invented camouflage that, through painted patterns, mimicked the surrounding geographical features. At the same time, the use of new chemical weaponry such as mustard gas required advanced knowledge of weather patterns and topographical features so that the poisonous vapors would end up being blown down into the enemy trenches rather than hovering in No Man’s Land or, worse, floating toward one’s own front lines. Likewise, the soldiers living and dying, working and waiting in the vast, subterranean network of trenches composed of front, support, reserve, and communication lines often partook in what Santanu Das has identified as a “haptic geography” based less on the sight of battlefields and more on the touch of physical features such as trench walls and fellow soldiers.

By considering geography and mediated war, I want to turn not to the WWI soldiers' experiences of it but to the civilian Stein who, similar to Favret's Romantic poets, elaborates on the mediatedness of wartime and on geography as a way to make sense of it in three modernist narratives: *The Geographical History of America*, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). Especially in the autobiography and memoir, Stein overtly documents her experience of living as a civilian through wartime while conflict occurs at a distance, sometimes only miles away. Three years before the geography book, *The Autobiography* had appeared in print, becoming an instant success that propelled Stein to literary fame and led her to undertake the lecture tour across the U.S. in the first place. In the chapter entitled "On War," the narrator "Toklas" never actually recounts any scenes from the war. Rather Stein and her partner reside at various residences in England, France, and Spain while receiving information about the conflict. Similarly, Stein wrote *Wars I Have Seen* from the isolated comfort of Culoz, a French town tucked away in the southeast of the country, near the Swiss city of Geneva. She lived there in hiding to avoid Nazis and the *collabos* of the Vichy regime. Emphasizing the distance from the conflict, she states, "In these days January forty-four, here where we are, we are once more as we were in nineteen forty—we have the terror of the Germans all about us, we have no telephone, we hear stories and do not know whether they are true, we do not know what is happening to our friends in Belley, except for the life of this village of Culoz we seem separated from everything" (145).

Read alongside *The Geographical History*, the autobiography and memoir also reveal Stein's interest in geography. In the former, Stein refers to a character with "a passion for geography" as intense as her own,<sup>24</sup> evidenced by the fact that she and "Toklas" detail the time

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<sup>24</sup> While visiting the Whiteheads during in England while violence escalates on the continent, Stein develops a friendship with their daughter Jessie who "had a passion for geography," evidenced by the fact that "she always made friends with foreigners from strange places."

spent at their vacation residence in Palma de Mallorca, where Stein composed the bulk of her *Geography and Plays*. Towards the end of *Wars I Have Seen*, Stein elaborates on how both her separation from the war and from her own country invigorates in her a sense of patriotism felt in geographical terms: “After all every one is as their land is, as the climate is, as the mountains and the rivers or their oceans are as the wind and rain and snow and ice and heat and moisture is, they just are and that makes them have their way to eat their way to drink their way to act their way to think and their way to be subtle” (250). It might seem strange to find this passage near the end of a book about wars that Stein has “seen” or, as a noncombatant, has actually missed out on seeing; however, that oddity is precisely what I will be interested in throughout this chapter on the connection between mediatedness, geography, and patriotism in these three narratives.

My argument unfolds in three sections, each dedicated to a different text. Beginning with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, I contend that Stein initially posits a geographical epistemology as one of the chief ways for individuals in wartime to achieve any semblance of certainty about what they can know and feel about far-off conflict. Waiting for news from papers that arrive periodically and gossip that cannot be trusted, Stein’s “Toklas” turns to the lay of the land, so to speak, in order to make meaning through landscape compositions about the battlefields and the terrain surrounding. Yet, Stein’s geographical epistemology actually reveals the un-navigability of military conflict as both senseless violence and the means to reinvigorate her own nationalism. If Stein ends her “On War” chapter by showing violence as necessary for maintaining patriotism expressed geographically, then in the second section, dedicated to *The Geographical History of America*, I show how Stein reads the terrain of the U.S. in order to illogically argue that the country was responsible for waging world war, even though it was one of the last to become a belligerent. Set in an interwar period rife with anxieties about future wars, the book looks past WWI and toward the necessity of future, senseless violence in order to

sustain the patriotism she felt years prior, during the time period recorded in the autobiography. Finally, I argue that *Wars I Have Seen* fulfills Stein's prognostication. Whereas she initially intends to distinguish WWII, which she identifies as the first 20th-century war, from earlier or "nice" conflicts—such as the American Civil War and WWI—Stein actually sets the prior world war on the cusp of the new century, thus imbuing it with positive and negative qualities of melancholy nationalism that affect her initial characterization of the most recent war. I show how the kind of geographical patriotism expressed in the aforementioned passage requires catastrophic violence while, moreover, positioning Stein's endorsement of America's involvement in the Second World War uncomfortably close to Fascist ideology. Unabashedly egotistical about using the war self-servingly to reinvigorate her jingoism, Stein thus perceives how the contradictions that produce her sense of nationalist melancholia necessitate the repetition of senseless wars seen, or at least mediated, through a geographical epistemology.

## I.

Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is first and foremost a study on mediation because it represents her partner Toklas's thoughts, feelings, observations, and life story through the medium of Stein herself. She waits until the end of the book to explain the rationale. "Toklas" states that she is sufficient at housekeeping, gardening, needlework, secretarial and editorial labor, and veterinary care, which leave her little time "to add being a pretty good writer." She continues, "About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. [. . .] And she has and this is it" (310). Moving back from the end of the book to the chapter "On War," Stein takes mediatedness to another level due to the fact that the autobiography about one person told by another revolves around the subject of war that never

receives any direct treatment. The chapter begins with Stein's well-known opening: "Americans living in Europe before the war never really believed that there was going to be war" (176). For "Toklas," the sentence foreshadows the way Americans—and Europeans—would be caught unaware by a conflict that escalated quickly during the final months of 1914. Beginning with the assassination, it took only months for Germany to advance within 90 miles of Paris. Whereas the opening refers to way citizens were caught off-guard by the speed of military developments, it also foreshadows how, for the American "writing" the book and the other American actually authoring it, the war never really occurs. Rather than a chapter "on war," then, Stein actually delivers an account of the way war gets relayed through information technologies including newspapers, letters, and telegrams and through everyday tasks or experiences such as selecting food or chairs and fighting traffic congestion.

Only three paragraphs into the opening of the chapter, "Toklas" sets the scene with Stein avidly reading the pre-war and wartime newspapers. Offhandedly, she describes how "Gertrude Stein in 1913 and 1914 had been very interested in reading the newspapers. [. . .] That winter she added the *Daily Mail*. She liked to read about the suffragettes and she liked to read about Lord Roberts' campaign for compulsory military service in England" (176). In publications such as the London-based *Daily Mail*, Stein could read about Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union, a group that the newspaper had nicknamed "suffragettes." Likewise, she could enjoy reading about how, after retiring as the head of the British Army in 1904, Lord Roberts committed himself to the ultimately unsuccessful campaign for conscription until his death in the winter of 1914. After the military conflict begins to escalate on the continent, though, she and Toklas leave France in order to travel up to Lockridge, England, where they have been invited to stay with Dr. and Mrs. Whitehead, with whom they began a friendship at a social event described earlier on in the narrative. Although Toklas and Stein plan to stay as

guests at the Whitehead residence only for a short period of time until the conflict can be de-escalated, events point in the other direction, toward escalation: peace conferences fall through, France receives the ultimatum that draws it into war, and Germany invades Belgium. Chiefly communicated through the newspaper, these events disturb the occupants in the Whitehead home. Stein reminisces about how she “can still hear Doctor Whitehead’s gentle voice reading the papers out loud” (180). Whereas, in these passages, she focuses on one of the many ways information arrives to civilians, throughout the chapter Stein emphasizes the waiting period between one installment of news and the next as well as fact that news media such as papers and telegrams actually reveal a profound lack of information about warfare.

Unlike the waiting period during the Napoleonic Wars that forms the subject of Favret’s research, modernist mediatedness works quite differently or, for lack of a better term, more efficiently. Instead of arriving by mail ship, mail coach, and post boy weeks or months after being sent, the news of WWI came more quickly by way of steam ship, combustion engine, wireless telegraphy, telephone, and pneumatic mail tube. After the first pneumatic tube network was developed in Philadelphia in 1893, a similar one was quickly constructed in New York City to help rectify the congested mail transportation system already in place. At the same time, wireless telegraphy was being developed to further decrease the amount of time it took to relay messages between cities, within nations, and across oceans. During the war, field telephones and telegraph devices were installed in order to allow military staff at headquarters to communicate with soldiers in the front lines. At the same time, postal services transported mail and goods between the warfront and home front through a system of base depots and supply train rail networks. Due to the invention and development of these and other information technologies, news could travel more efficiently from the home front to the warzone, within the network of trenches, and from the battlefields back to civilians.

Despite advancements in speed, Stein spends much of the chapter waiting for information. Discussing Mr. and Mrs. Whitehead's son North, who has earned a commission in the British military and must report for duty, she states, "North was to join in three days but in the meantime he must learn to drive a motor car. The three days passed very quickly and North was gone. He left immediately for France and without much equipment. And then came the time of waiting" (182), a period that she later refers to as "the dark days of waiting" (185). Although Stein mentions the meantime that certainly absorbs North and his family—as they wait for the day their son leaves them, carrying ever-so-little protective equipment, on a train bound for France—she shifts quickly from that three-day period to the longer meantime that seems to spread from the beginning to the end of the war, a four-year period that only gets interrupted periodically and ever-so-fleetingly by the arrival of news.

For Stein, though, the lack of information not only occurs in the periods of time between installments of news but also within the information relayed about it. For example, after receiving a telegram from her friend Nellie Jacot who has taken it upon herself to describe one of the early battles of the Marne, Stein prefaces her own relaying of the telegram's content by calling the message "characteristic" of a woman who rarely says what one would expect but in ways that always catch one off guard. In the telegram, Jacot characteristically refuses to directly describe the battle but, instead, relays the way in which it inhibited her and her friend's ability to catch a taxi back out to the Bois du Boulogne after spending a day shopping in Paris (184-5). After Jacot finally hails a cab and gives the driver their destination, the man responds, "to my great regret madame it is impossible, no taxi can leave the city limits to-day." She presses him for a reason for such strange behavior, but he merely "winked in answer and drove off." Only later does Jacot understand. After hearing the news (probably in the papers or through word-of-mouth, for Stein never clarifies), she realizes why the cab drivers all acted like she and her

accomplice were playing some sort of practical joke on them. In early September 1914 General Joseph-Simon Gallieni, the military governor of Paris, had commandeered taxis in order to secretly transport soldiers close to the front lines in a battle that would be called a “miracle” since the Allies, who least suspected victory, were able to repel German forces approaching Paris. Jacot leaves this information out of her message, deeming it unnecessary for a telegram recipient sure to read between the lines. Yet, she ends her telegram, and Stein ends the discussion of it, by adding with a tone of finality, “that was the battle of the Marne,” a conclusion contradicted by the fact that Jacot had not encountered a battle but only military transport inhibiting a shopping excursion. Just as Jacot has had to wait until later in the day to learn about the reason behind her cabbie’s strange behavior, the telegram and Stein’s description of it do not represent the war as a subject that everyone knows intimately and thoroughly enough to describe it without needing to talk about it. Instead, they evidence a conundrum in which, even when news does arrive, civilians are still left waiting for that more urgent and crucial news about what the war and its component battles actually mean.

The chapter embodies this modernist meantime through Stein’s cyclical style—where events become old news, so to speak—and obvious refusal to directly confront the subject of war. Throughout the chapter, the narrator abruptly shifts between one scene and the next; often these breaks in thought process take place in conjunction with a news story, whether through the arrival of the newspaper or a character bearing a timely anecdote or juicy rumor. Throughout, the autobiography develops an understated circularity. For instance, during the discussion of her stay with Toklas at the Palma de Mallorca, Stein explains how William Cook met them in Spain and helped to arrange their visit: “Cook often disappeared and one knew nothing of him and then when for one reason or another you needed him there he was. He went into the American army later and at that time Gertrude Stein and myself were doing war work for the American Fund for



French Wounded” (199). Stein spends the rest of the paragraph—a remainder composed of seven long-winded sentences—explaining how Cook helped her learn how to drive on one of the old Battle of the Marne taxis so that she could take charge of the one of the vehicles for the AFFW. Upon realizing that she has gone too far in the narrative, Stein transitions back: “But to come back to Palma de Mallorca” (200). It takes nearly ten pages for her to finally arrive at the narrative development that has already been anticipated. When Stein and Toklas arrive back in Paris, they walk down the rue des Pyramides and notice a car with the American Fund for French Wounded painted across the side. In that moment, Stein’s “Toklas” has an epiphany: “There, I said, that is what we are going to do. At least, said I to Gertrude Stein, you will drive the car and I will do the rest” (207). That epiphanic moment, of course, comes across as old news by this point. Anticipated as something that will surely take place in the narrative future, it becomes—when it finally does arrive—an event that has already, in a sense, come and gone.

On a larger scale, then, the chapter parallels the way Stein’s mediated position waiting for news from the warfront disrupts chronological temporality. Deployed through abrupt shifts and understated circularity, the fragmented narrative signifies what Favret identifies as an “affective and epistemological” falling away from any ability to know what the war means or what one should feel about it by demonstrating how its potential meaning, which can get conveyed through so many different media, never really shows up. Rather than offer any sustained treatment of the war, the civilian narrator jumps from thought to disconnected thought and consequently circles back on herself, evoking a stylistic nervousness about whether or not war, mediated as it is and must be, can ever really be grasped intellectually or affectively. In other words, mediatedness draws the war ever closer in the narrative but only in periodic glimpses that, by means of their sheer ephemerality or lack of substance, cause the chapters themselves to resemble the irremediable aloofness of war to affective or epistemological concerns.

Unlike newspapers that arrive cyclically, letters and telegrams that get delivered sporadically, and rumor and gossip that, though circulated regularly, can rarely be trusted, Stein seems to suggest that geography—the lay of the land—remains ever-present and ostensibly objective. Through a geographical framework, she—or at least her “Toklas”—pieces together a coherent picture of distant war by learning where events take place. Stein’s sense of geography resembles, in many ways, Hemingway’s oft-quoted passage about the concrete—vs. the abstract—in *A Farewell to Arms*: “There were many words [such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow] that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything” (184-5). For Hemingway’s protagonist, Frederic Henry, war could no longer be uttered in the same breath as the big words; in fact, those words died out somewhere along the retreat route from Caporetto where Henry witnesses all manner of brutal injustices. Henry wants to align “the names of places” with other incontrovertible facts including “certain numbers” and “certain dates,” but, just as he begins with the claim that “only the names of the places had dignity,” he returns by the end to “the names of places,” which, more than any other kind of fact, means anything at all. As a fictional character, Henry never actually saw the events; nor did Hemingway who was enrolled in Oak Park High School when the tide turned back and people began retreating from Caporetto. Like Henry and Hemingway, Stein never saw or took part in the events, but she interprets them in a different way than Hemingway’s protagonist. If Henry has lost faith in the ideals associated with the war’s meaning, then Stein is still waiting to figure out what it means in the first place. Yet, like Hemingway’s protagonist, Stein’s “Toklas” finds a semblance of certainty only in geography: the names of places, their locations, the distances between them, the terrain surrounding them.

For instance, during the scene in which Stein and Toklas stay with the Doctor and Mrs. Whitehead at their residence in Lockridge, Stein first hears about the events of war through the arrival of the paper but quickly turns to geography for further insights: “I can still hear Doctor Whitehead’s gentle voice reading the papers out loud and then all of them talking about the destruction of Louvain and how they must help the brave little belgians” (180). In a funny aside—made all the more comical by the somber political backdrop—Stein asks Toklas, “where is Louvain.” “Don’t you know,” Toklas seems to mock. “No,” Stein responds, “nor do I care, but where is it” (181). Of course, she does care. After the news coverage has been read aloud and, just as quickly, transitions into idle speculation about the invasion and a call to arms in order to support the Belgian forces, Stein insists, during the waiting period until the next day’s batch of news, on finding out the location of the capital of Belgium. While speculations and summons echo throughout the Whitehead residence—along with many other homes around the globe—she casts her thoughts elsewhere. Separate from the other individuals who cast their sympathetic thoughts toward the “brave little belgians,” Stein remains indifferent to the events taking place in Louvain. Derogatorily referring to Belgians as “little” citizens, she reveals a marked lack of fellow feeling that contradictorily connotes a conspicuous interest in and even anxiety about the invasion. In fact, Stein wants to know Louvain’s location in order to figure out its distance to her beloved Paris. Substituting concrete facts like mileage and direction for fevered discussion, she wishes to know if, or when, France’s capital might be next, even if that knowledge only leads to further dread. For, as Stein notes, “The germans were getting nearer and nearer Paris.” After Doctor Whitehead learns that all of her manuscripts have been stored in the city, ever vulnerable to the German army, Stein corrects his assumption that she fears, above all else, the loss of her literary work: “The germans were getting nearer and nearer to Paris and the last day Gertrude Stein could not leave her room, she sat and mourned. She loved Paris, she

thought neither of manuscripts nor of pictures, she thought only of Paris and she was desolate” (183).

Stein’s sense of dread that, in the near future, Paris might be taken over, fits with her sense that the war must be fought to secure the French way of life—the epitome of civilization and art—from German barbarism. Her Francophilia, then, resembles Claude Wheeler’s in Cather’s *One of Ours*; however, unlike that doughboy protagonist, Stein registers her devotion to France and, consequently, her love of the American dedication to save it through her treatment of geography in the chapter. For instance, when the autobiography finally turns to elaborate on Stein and Toklas’s months working for the American Fund for French Wounded, “Toklas” records the places they visited and the countryside they saw while driving the Ford truck that Stein affectionately nicknamed “Auntie.” They stop off at Perpignan, Nîmes, and other locales in southwestern France in order to transport soldiers to various military hospitals and visit them with comfort packages. Traveling throughout the south of France, from the Mediterranean and up toward the Western tip of Switzerland, Stein feels just how much “the landscape, the strange life stimulated her. It was then that she began to love the valley of the Rhône, the landscape that of all landscapes means the most to her. We are still here in Bilignin in the valley of the Rhône” (228). By referring to Bilignin as their present location, “Toklas” refers not only to how the French valley invigorates Stein but also how it inspires her to write, in a similarly strange fashion, her partner’s autobiography from her summer home located there.

In opposition to her love of France and its countryside, Stein maintains a stalwart belief in Germany’s inability to conquer the country in part because its military forces cannot handle the rural aspects of France. In one important scene in which other characters refer to the country’s unconquerable efficiency, she contrasts the notion of “organization,” which an army must have in order to win and which the U.S. Army possesses in spades, to the “method” of the

German army. As she states, “Don’t you understand the difference, [. . .] any twenty americans, any millions of americans can organize themselves to do something but germans cannot organize themselves [. . .]. They cannot possibly win this war because they are not modern” (188). Stein wants to associate the terms “organization” and “modernity” because the war, in her mind, has proved to be an event heralding a new era. The advancements in weaponry, manufacturing, social organization, and transportation—evidenced by the “Big Bertha” artillery gun, the assembly-line production, the system of trench networks, and the proliferation of automobiles such as “Auntie”—suggest the ways that, for Stein, WWI stands apart as a thoroughly modern war unwinnable by backward, methodical nations like Germany. Yet, it is through her reference to France’s rural landscape, a non-modernized geography stretching between capitals, that Stein forecasts German defeat.

Earlier in the chapter, a character known only as “the eater of figs,” foreshadows Stein’s precise sentiments. Again, during a conversation in which other characters refer to the fact that “there was no hope of beating Germany as she had such an excellent system, all her railroad trucks were numbered in connection with locomotives and switches,” the fig-eater responds by recasting Germany as too methodical to win: “that is all very well as long as the trucks remain in Germany on their own lines and switches, but in an aggressive war they will leave the frontiers of Germany and then, well I promise you there will be a great deal of numbered confusion” (177). Having created a precise and vast system out of train trucks and rails, the Germans could transport soldiers, weapons, and supplies rather efficiently to destinations along that transportation grid; however, lying just outside the “frontier,” the French countryside could quite literally derail the German method. In other words, Stein remaps the two countries so that Germany becomes extensively urban (though not modern) and France becomes a modernized, though rural, country whose wild landscapes stand as a barrier against Hun aggression.

Stein's geographical prognostication of Allied victory reaches its full development when she finally sees the battlefield. During her trip with Toklas out to the Alsace region after the armistice, she shows just how easily German (and, in this case, American) vehicles could break down in the war-torn frontier; however, now certain that Paris remains safe, Stein turns to the way the French countryside elicits from her a patriotic feeling. For, as Stein had declared elsewhere, "America is my country, and Paris is my hometown." Rather than explore Paris as a kind of any-town U.S.A., she describes in the autobiography the way her American nationalism grows in connection to the landscape just outside its city limits. Invited by their friend Mrs. Lathrop to come visit the Alsace, Stein and Toklas encounter mechanical difficulties when they collide on the roads with a transportable Army kitchen. The accident damages their mud-guard, tool-chest, and steering triangle. Unable to drive accurately, Stein persuades a group of American ambulance workers to fix the triangle but resorts to waiting it out at a repair shop for the mechanic to fix everything else. They drive on and she finally observes the warfront in geographical terms. Rather than see it in terms of soldiers or weaponry, she sees it as a "landscape" (230). The focus on the terrain foregrounds Stein's sense of nationalism only paragraphs later when she begins to think about camouflage: "Another thing that interested us enormously was how different the camouflage of the french looked from the camouflage of the germans, and then once we came across some very neat camouflage and it was American. The idea was the same but as after all it was different nationalities who did it the difference was inevitable" (231). In the proto-Cubist shapes and colors that compose military camo, Stein perceives how design differentiates one nation from another. Studying American camouflage, she interprets the design as a "very neat" style; one might also go so far as to call it a very organized style illustrating the extent to which the U.S. was made to win such a "modern" war. Camouflage was a modernist, or more specifically Cubist, invention. As the first French

*camoufleur* Lucien-Victor Guirand de Scévola stated, “In order to totally deform objects, I employed the means Cubists used to represent them” (qtd. in Saint-Amour (369)). Of course, de Scévola’s reminiscence is not the most famous quote on the subject of modernism and camouflage. For, earlier in her autobiography, Stein recounts how she and Picasso saw a camouflaged cannon for the first time while walking down the Boulevard Raspail in Paris. Observing the patterns on the cannon, Picasso tells her that modernist painters were responsible for the creation of the new military design: “c’est nous qui avons fait ça.” In response, Stein states, “he was right, he had. From Cezanne through him they had come to that. His foresight was justified” (90).

An insistence on seeing the war in geographical terms underlies Stein’s ability to both understand what makes the U.S. separate from other countries and enjoy patriotism even if at a distance. By living abroad as an expatriate during wartime, she develops the ability to love her country from afar: “Gertrude Stein always said the war was so much better than just going to America. Here you were with America in a kind of way that if you only went to America you could not possibly be” (227). Similar to the way Stein lingers over camouflage, specifically the way a technique meant to inhibit recognition actually aids her in identifying the attributes of her homeland, here she suggests that, through wartime expatriation, she can better see national qualities and, thus, be with America. For instance, she starts to see the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) differences between Americans brought up in different states. As “Toklas” notes, “It was at this time that Gertrude Stein conceived the idea of writing a history of the United States consisting of chapters wherein Iowa differs from Kansas, and wherein Kansas differs from Nebraska, etcetera” (222). Meeting various doughboys as a driver for the AFFW, she begins to associate them with their states of origin, calling one soldier “California,” another “Kentucky,” and so on.

There is a catch, however, to all of this patriotic fervor. Despite Stein's insistence that geography mediates war while, paradoxically, providing unmediated access to it, the narrative characterizes it as always already mediated through maps (like the one she mentally references when asking where places are located), from automobile windows (including the windshield of "Auntie")<sup>25</sup>, in camouflage (that would influence Cubist design), and via landscape painting. By examining Stein's reference to war as "landscape," we might better understand how mediatedness leads to a variation of the affective and epistemological uncertainty Favret describes. Rather than the epistemological void associated with Favret's waiting period, the mediated geography of Stein's landscape signifies how war comes to mean too much, its discordant meanings producing (as we will see in the second section) a different kind of waiting period not during wartime but between world wars.

Let us first revisit Stein's remarks about "landscape" in their original context in order to begin examining how she foregrounds mediatedness: "Soon we came to the battle-fields and the lines of trenches on both sides. To any one who did not see it as it was then it is impossible to imagine it. It was not terrifying it was strange. We were used to ruined houses and even ruined towns but this was different. It was a landscape. And it belonged to no country" (230). Observing Stein's landscape compositions, particularly those that detailed her life in and around Paris, J. Gerald Kennedy notes how such writing urges comparison to the techniques of landscape painting and thus to the materiality of both visual art and writing: "Stein's treatment of landscape repeatedly calls attention to the words and phrases by which we represent place. She obviously understood that just as landscape painting resorts to visual sleight-of-hand [. . .], so the writer 'composes' a natural scene by manipulating the tokens of verbal representation"

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<sup>25</sup> In *The Speed Handbook*, Enda Duffy equates the windshield, or windscreen, during the modernist period to other technological media including the photography and film. As Duffy notes, "To look while traveling at speed, as unsettled perceptual limit work, was to become aware that to believe one's eyes was increasingly untenable, and that what constituted the material real might be put into question as well" (162).



(*Imagining Paris* 57). Visually painting a scene of the battlefield, Stein manipulates that scene at the point in which she substitutes the term “landscape” for any description of the war, a subject she adamantly refuses to depict because, as she remarks, “it is impossible to imagine it.” In negative fashion, though, Stein describes what it is not. To extend the writing-as-painting metaphor, she sketches around it, dabbing the foreground and background with paint in order to suggest the size and shape of war while still leaving it a blank space upon the canvas. As she notes, war is “not terrifying;” nor is it like “ruined houses” or “ruined towns.” Having baited her reader for so many pages of the chapter with the promise of a description of war, Stein nonchalantly tells the reader that he had to be there to see it.

Yet, even though she refuses to describe the battlefield sufficiently, Stein places violent and destructive images into her perspective on it. For instance, when referring to the land belonging to no country, she elaborates on its strangeness by alluding to how technological weaponry had decimated the area to such an extent that it looked as if it has been bombed off the face of the Earth. Later, she also employs the image of a violated landscape when offering an anecdote about a nurse from the Alsace: “I remember hearing a french nurse once say and the only thing she did say of the front was c’est un paysage passionant, an absorbing landscape. And that was what it was as we saw it. It was strange. [. . .] It was wet and dark and there were a few people, one did not know whether they were chinamen or europeans” (230-1). Like Stein, the nurse sees the warfront as a landscape whose strange, “absorbing” quality stems from the violence enacted upon it. Just as, earlier, Stein alludes to the ways mortars, bombs, and other weapons systems made the land strange, here she discusses how the dark hues of the scene reveal only the “few people” still remaining on a desolate battlefield that used to be populated with thousands upon thousands of soldiers.

On a larger level, then, Stein's landscape composition foregrounds war as a mediated geography that leaves her in a situation similar to the one she experienced while waiting for news at the Whitehead residence. During that prior meantime, Stein did not know what to believe about the war or how to situate events in a timeline when information technology frustrated chronological coherency. In the aftermath of war, Stein seems to know what the war means; the only problem is that she advances contradictory perspectives on military conflict as wide-sweeping, senseless destruction and, at the same time, as crucial for her renewed sense of U.S. nationalism. Whereas she described the earlier meantime as "dark days" of waiting, here in these two passages about the battle fields around Alsace she uses similar dark hues in her landscape composition to express, in geographical terms, how the warzone remains un-navigable due to its contradictoriness. Dimly lit, the terrain cannot be so easily explored and might even be treacherously crossed; nor can a map help because, belonging to no country, the warzone remains un-mappable. Pockmarked and populated with only a few remaining stragglers where there used to be combatants packed into a network of trenches, the dark landscape does not allow her to distinguish between people from Asia or Europe, but nonetheless does give her access to her own country through the spectacle of camouflaged doughboys. In the remainder of the chapter, I expand on the implications of Stein's mediated geography by examining how the contradiction of patriotism and violence extends forward in time in order to be repeated in future wars. That is, read alongside *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, texts including *The Geographical History of America* and *Wars I Have Seen* show Stein's outrageous narcissism of needing the senseless violence and destruction of warfare to feed her nationalistic emotion over and over again.

## II.

As its title suggests, Stein's *Geographical History of America* draws attention to how geography, the nation, and temporality operate together. Although nowhere in the title, the subject of war shows up frequently—at least fifteen times—throughout the book. Its sheer prevalence seems to contradict Stein's claim that "[w]ar has nothing to do with masterpieces" (186). Either the book is no masterpiece or it is one of those masterpieces that can and does take up the subject of warfare; for, continuing in tongue-in-cheek fashion with her discussion of whether or not a great work of art can and must focus on war, Stein states, "Who says it has. Everybody says it has." Throughout the book, she refers—just as she does in the passage—to war in the abstract. Her technique marks a severe aesthetic and philosophical shift from the individual to the group, from the specific to the abstract. Whereas in her *Autobiography* Stein had published a work about the relationship between two individuals, the year following the publication of the geographical book, she would present to the world another, though much less celebrated, autobiography entitled *Everybody's Autobiography*. More and more intrigued by the commonalities between everyone and everything, Stein infuses that sense of abstraction in her *Geographical History* through, among other aspects, her discussion of warfare. It is routine, of course, to refer to war in general, in the abstract, from a conceptual distance that cannot and need not detail historical nuances. "War is hell"—so goes the commonplace, dating as far back as William Tecumseh Sherman, about *the* fundamental quality underlying all combat. Similarly, in Sam Mendes's adaptation of Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*, a narrative voice declares, toward the end of the film, "Every war is different, every war is the same." Every conflict dating from the American Civil War to those in the Middle East, all the ones that came before Sherman's march to the sea and the ones yet to come resemble each other, even when they differ.

Yet, for Stein, war is and is not an abstraction. Like Swofford's sensitivity to both the

inescapable differences and overarching similarities, she sidesteps the historical pitfall of lumping all conflict together while, at the same time, doing just that; however, she does more than perceive similarities as well as differences. Throughout the book, when referring to “war,” Stein actually shows the way the First World War inaugurates a new way of thinking about combat as a combination of patriotic endeavor and senseless violence that must repeat itself. In other words, all wars might be the same but only because, as Stein suggests, WWI has made it so. All wars, in other words, are but a version of that war.

Never, in the course of the book does Stein refer directly to WWI, but the way she talks about conflict hints at it. Published only three years after the *Autobiography* shed light on her experiences in wartime France and England between 1914 and 1918, the book treats warfare by logically dealing with the most recent world war. There are other clues as well. As has already been acknowledged in the introduction to this chapter, Stein not only takes stock of her mediated position as similar to direct, combat experience, but she also goes on from there to discuss how war produces nervousness. Writers, scientists, and scholars of the First World War have often noted the severe effects of new weapon technologies on the nerves of soldiers and civilians alike. Waiting for events to unfold—whether in the trenches or at the home front—and unable to do anything of real importance that might change the course of events, individuals became nervous. Nerves frayed, they suffered from shell shock, war neurosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Film footage documenting military patients in wartime and postwar hospitals reveals soldiers whose nervous systems have revolted against them, leaving them involuntarily twitching and jerking. For noncombatants, that nervousness would work in more innocuous and sinister ways as has already received passing treatment in the prior chapter on Hemingway who, along with Fitzgerald, interrogated the way mainstream wartime and postwar culture colored nervousness as a condition that, by and large, afflicted the arguably noncombatant African-American population.

As Stein notes, “nervousness has nothing to do with anything but it is always there after a big war” (58). Although she begins the sentence by refusing to acknowledge a causal or corollary relationship between nervousness and “anything,” Stein ends by admitting that big wars inevitably result in the condition. Later on, she states, “Human nature does not excite me but it does make me nervous. Therefore human nature is like a great war, it makes you nervous” (60). Like a “big” war, a “great” one frays the nerves. More so, she links the war to human nature. In the book, human nature refers to the individual component of self-identity that is tied to temporality in contrast to the human mind, which demarcates a more abstract and timeless aspect of the human condition. It is only fitting, then, that in thinking about the specific and individual aspects of human nature Stein compares the concept to a specific war that she refers to using one of the names for WWI: the Great War.

For Stein, though, nervousness not only becomes an after-effect of WWI but stems from a less linear and more repetitive—that is, more wandering—viewpoint on warfare. She specifically identifies wandering as a nervous condition, or nervousness as a condition brought on by wandering: “Any time after a war any one is nervous. They think they are excited but they are nervous. You can see how that brings wandering and the human mind nearer nearer to what” (57). Stein ends with a question that she leaves unanswered; nonetheless, the answer necessarily incorporates the human mind (in relation to human nature, as the title of the book declares) and the U.S. For, just one paragraph prior, she claims, “Wandering around a country has something to do with the geographical history of that country and the way one piece of it is not separated from any other one. Can one say too often just as loving or tears in one’s eyes that the straight lines on the map of the United States of America make wandering a mission and an everything [. . .]. Anyway it has a great deal to do with the relation between human nature and the human mind” (56-7). For Stein, these “straight lines” seem to refer both to the lines of latitude that

stretch from coast to coast and the straight roads that not only make up the street network in New York City, for instance, but also stretch across the flat heartland of the country. In this passage, wandering connects to the nation and the human mind in the same way nervousness, which cannot be separated from wandering, connects to human nature. These various concepts and potential relationships form a conundrum that, in her usual fashion, Stein declines to resolve in the book. Nevertheless, as her title reveals, the solution can be found by observing the “relation” between human nature and the human mind. Stein relates the individual and the impersonal—in terms of specific wars and abstract warfare—by promoting a nervous or, in geographical terms, wandering style that, by advancing nationalism (with “loving or tears in one’s eyes”), expresses a feeling of dread that war must not only take place once again but become an endlessly recurring condition.

In order to examine this idea, let us focus on one specific passage. Its importance argues for citation in its entirety:

Why Europe is too small to wage war.

Why is Europe too small to wage war because war has to be waged on too large a scale to be contained in a small country therefore as they think about war they know that they can only think and not do. They are like our dogs who make believe do things to each other but they know that they can be seen and if you can be seen then you cannot do anything to one another.

Therefore Europe is too small to wage war since anybody now can see it all and if anybody now can see it all and if anybody really anybody can see it all then they cannot wage war. They can have a great many troubles but they cannot wage war. Not wage war.

Also the geographical history of America. (33-4)

Referring to WWI—the most recent one in which Europe has taken part—Stein incorporates camouflage imagery in her lengthy and questionable correlation between Europeans and dogs, neither of which can make war because both can be seen. As she attempts to demonstrate, Europe cannot start a conflict because of the continent’s diminutive size whereas a country as big as the U.S. can and, more to point, has been responsible for waging WWI. The fact that the war

began in Bosnia-Herzegovina makes a mockery of her logic; for, Stein cannot literally mean what she says since, of course, the U.S. was not the first but actually one of the last to become a belligerent. Nonetheless, she does mean that the country was responsible for waging war since, as she shows in the *Autobiography*, the violence led to a renewed sense of nationalism. In other words, the passage does not elucidate the point that the country literally started the conflict but that, as a by-product of the conflict, the country came into its own as a nation composed of patriotic citizens. The two amount to practically the same thing in Stein's eyes.

Even though Stein alludes to a previous war, one already a decade-and-a-half in the past, she writes about it in a conspicuous present and future tense. When stating that "Europe is too small to wage war" or "cannot wage war," for instance, she describes violence less historically situated within the years 1914 and 1918 and more abstract as a phenomenon that can be waged at any moment given the right conditions and appropriate land mass. Stein thus gives voice to the anticipatory feeling during the interwar period that war no longer represented a condition already come and gone but, instead, a permanent condition doomed to repeat itself. In *Tense Future*, Saint-Amour examines this precise interwar characteristic. He argues, "In the immediate wake of the First World War, the dread of another massive conflict saturated the Anglo-European imagination, amounting to a proleptic mass traumatization, a *pre-traumatic stress syndrome* whose symptoms arose in response to a potentially oncoming rather than an already realized catastrophe" (7-8). This culture of anticipation was particularly relevant for French citizens and for those like Stein making their expatriate home in the country. Roxanne Panchasi, for example, looks at how what Saint-Amour deems a "*pre-traumatic stress syndrome*" occurs in the fear of how quickly and easily the French capital, language, and border with Germany could disappear. In his "Paris Letter," written in 1934, Hemingway's similarly broaches the topic of war's inevitability: "What makes you feel bad is the perfectly calm way everyone speaks about

the next war. It is accepted and taken for granted” (158). In light of these discussions about anticipation and dread, proleptic trauma and calm inevitability, Stein’s statement toward the end of the passage (“Not wage war”) takes on new meaning. Whereas it initially refers to Europe’s inability to do so, it also—separated by a period from the rest of the discussion of Europe—stands on its own as Stein’s wish, even demand, for a peaceful future. Yet, by finishing with the afterthought that reads, “Also the geographical history of America,” Stein knows that the U.S. can wage the kind of war that she hopes to simultaneously avoid and witness. Stein remains torn because another war will repeat the senseless violence that she has already seen in the strange Alsatian landscape and provide her the opportunity to be with her country in ways that far exceed the experiences she can muster while back at home, on the land, within its geographical borders.

### III.

In *Wars I Have Seen*, Stein attempts to avoid the kind of repetitiveness she anticipates in *The Geographical History*, favoring instead a linear perspective on warfare. She traces combat from the 19th to the 20th centuries, from the American Civil War to the recently ended Second World War, by showing the differences between these two centuries, or phases, of conflict. In other words, Stein puts forward the idea that, if humanity has been met with a chain of wars then at least that pattern does not repeat but develops. For Stein, WWII actually inaugurates, however belatedly, a 20th-century viewpoint on war as at once inevitable and tiresome in contrast to early wars, which she identifies as good, honorable, and—as we will see—“nice.” Thus, Stein holds out hope that, if WWII had to happen—as she suggests in her geography book—then its inevitability also spells the end of warfare altogether.

Due to a strikingly lagging temporality, Stein strangely categorizes the First World War as a 19th-century conflict; however, throughout the book, WWI straddles both centuries, fusing



two radically different perspectives on conflict by embodying a melancholy nationalism similar to how she described the war years early in the *Autobiography*. More importantly, such an unanticipated, though reiterated, characterization of WWI also, by the end of *Wars I Have Seen*, changes the way Stein sees the more recent war she has intended to record and subsequently leave behind. That is, rather than characterize WWII as an event marshaling in a radically new phase in world history, one that might finally end warfare altogether, she ultimately envisions it as the mere second coming of WWI, as a link in an ever-repeating chain of conflict that has continued and must continue because, along with senseless violence, it also breeds a love of the country unattainable otherwise.

Stein develops a linear temporality from the beginning of her autobiography. Rather than shift between past and present, she abides by the traditions of the genre by starting with her birth: “I do not know whether to put in the things I do not remember as well as the things I do remember. To begin with I was born, that I do not remember but I was told about it quite often” (3). From the outset, she relies on collective memory to ascertain and assemble her recollection. Referring to Maurice Halbwach’s philosophy of memory, Paul Ricoeur claims that “one does not remember alone. [. . .] Childhood memories are an excellent reference in this regard. They take place in socially marked places: in the garden, the house, the basement, and so on” (121). Stein remembers distinct phases of her development—birth, babyhood to fourteen, and so on and so forth—by considering the anecdotes others tell, the books her parents read to her, the food she eats, and the news that gets delivered. She contextualizes past memories, at least tangentially, through “socially marked places” such as libraries, kitchens, and living rooms. The collectively informed autobiography also invites another social space—the battlefield. Stein writes that she saw only “the Spanish-American war, the first world war and now the second world war” but that she also remembers the Boer War, “the Japanese-Chinese war, and the Russian-Japanese

war” (4). As the “On War” chapter from the earlier *Autobiography* reveals, Stein came close to seeing WWI but did not actually witness any of it; she only drove out to the warzone after the armistice. In addition to confusing the term “seeing” with experiencing indirectly (via media), she also, in other places in *Wars*, confuses remembering as a personal act with remembering as a collective one. Put bluntly: Stein does not believe that an individual would have needed to be alive during a war in order to remember it. For example, through the stories passed down to her about the American Civil War, she claims, “I was always in my way a Civil War veteran” (*Brewsie and Willie* 113).<sup>26</sup> Since warfare becomes so crucial to the way Stein explores collective memory, and such memory forms the cornerstone of her linear narrative, her remarks on the Civil War set the stage for the way in which she divides warfare into distinct and coherent phases of development.

Although occurring in the early years of the 20th century and becoming one of the defining events of literary and cultural modernism, WWI shows up as a 19th century war in the text. For Stein, it resembles the Civil War. The point is not too off-the-mark since, in both events, bayonets were affixed to guns in order to be used in close combat and, in cultural memory, both brought about disillusionment through an awareness of soldiers’ exploitation by their superiors and of their frailty in the face of technological weaponry. Near the end of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1894), for instance, the protagonist Henry Fleming witnesses a “procession of memory” in which his brilliant deeds march alongside “the ghost of his flight from the first engagement” (209). Whereas he begins the novel quite certain of himself only to end up retreating from battle, he now despises his earlier, naïve “blast and bombast,” assuming in their place a “quiet manhood.” In part, Fleming’s new non-assertiveness stems from his recent awareness of his own sheer insignificance. After fighting a successful battle, he overhears Union

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<sup>26</sup> Stein published *Brewsie and Willie* in 1946, composing the WWII narrative as a series of fictional conversations between nurses and American GIs in France.

leaders referring to his regiment as mere cannon fodder. He has also realized that animal instinct and indignation toward commanding officers form the better part of valor. As he watches his war memories pass before him, Fleming sees heroism shift from Greek-like “war ardor and patriotism” (46) to a more humble courage.

Stein’s interpretation of why the American Civil War and WWI were, in essence, the same conflict could not be more antithetical to that cultural memory and, by extension, to Crane’s novel. She perceives the two events as “nice wars,” stating, “The 1914-1918 war was just like our civil war [. . .] it was a nice war. A nice war is a war where everybody who is heroic is a hero, and everybody more or less is a hero in a nice war” (77). Unlike Crane’s protagonist, who escapes combat but later feigns bravery by telling his fellow troops that he was shot in the head, mock-heroism has no place in “nice wars” where real heroism abounds. Yet, for Stein, so much depends on how one defines the “heroic” (which then determines who is or is not a hero) because, as she later discusses, nice wars have clearly demarcated lines between the allies and enemies. As she states, “In ’14-’18 [. . .] an enemy was an enemy and a friend was a friend” (79). Stein’s certainty about the identity of friends and enemies necessarily entails a sense of patriotism because the differentiation between the two includes allies with whom the nation has treaties and oppositional countries or even enemies of the state. In other words, if enemies cannot be heroes (and Stein makes a number of negative statements about the Germans’ unheroic behavior), then only friends can achieve that status as well as nations such as the U.S. that fight for their own self-determination and the rights of their allies.

If, for Stein, WWI remains a thoroughly 19th-century military engagement, then WWII becomes the historical event that, nearly at the midcentury point, creates the break between the two centuries, distinguishing past from present, pre-modern from modern, and nice wars from something else altogether. As Stein boldly asserts, “Incontestably the 1914-1918 war was a

nineteenth century war just as the 1939-19— war incontestably is not. And the hopes and the fears, and the relation to finite and infinity of this war and the method of belief and unbelief, and the hope of progress and reform all these things are not nineteenth century not at all not now” (74). Unlike a nice war in which friends and enemies can be easily identified and thus where an individual remains closely aligned with her nation’s wartime objectives, such facile demarcation and consequent patriotism cannot take place during WWII where “anybody could be an enemy and anybody not” (170). Despite the way in which she imagines a confused and confusing world populated with traitors and double agents, with friends who might just be enemies and enemies who might just be friends, Stein also counter-intuitively claims that the Second World War was more logical than its predecessor: “Everything is so logical in this war, it was much more confused in the 1914-1918 one, and therefore the things one predicts are truer for this war than they were for that one” (76). What Stein predicts is that WWII will logically produce disappointment (74) and exhaustion (79), two intimately connected feelings that she hopes will lead to longstanding peace. In a breathtaking paragraph that spans nearly an entire page but is composed of only four sentences, she elaborates on this point: “There is one thing that is certain,” she begins, “and nobody really realised it in the 1914-1918 war, they talked about it, but they did not realise it but now everybody knows it everybody that the one thing that everybody wants is to be free” (75). Much like Walt Whitman, Stein lyrically catalogues various acts of freedom, beginning with the mundane and finishing with the urgent: “to talk to eat to drink to walk to think, to please, to wish, and to do it now.” Despite the fact that Stein previously mentions that an individual cannot distinguish a friend from an enemy in 20th-century wartime, she remains ever certain that “everybody”—a term she repeats three times—wants to see the end of war. At the end of the memoir, Stein reasserts this belief by stating, “[T]he war is over and this certainly this is the last war to remember” (246).

Although Stein wants to separate both world wars, placing the First World War squarely into the prior century and Second World War in the present one, the former actually becomes the intermediary of both centuries. Taking place more than a decade into the twentieth century, it remains within Stein's idea of the *longue durée* but well past the *fin de siècle*. Instead of acting as a mere repetition of the American Civil War, WWI draws together both perspectives on warfare—as nice and, for lack of a better term, disappointing—and consequently the historical event that WWII actually repeats. Throughout the narrative, Stein emphasizes the fact that WWI sits on the cusp of both time periods because it attempted to do away with the 19th century but ultimately failed. For instance, while talking about how logic and predictability define both modern warfare and modern times, she states, “The nineteenth century did not understand [inevitability], not even in the 1914-1918 war which tried to end the nineteenth century but since it itself did not understand it, it could not end the nineteenth century, but now now we all realize, the inevitable and the thirst for freedom, we all do” (76). Based on Stein's argument, WWI attempted to end the prior century but could not because “it itself did not understand it,” the latter “it” referring to inevitability and, by extension, freedom. The war therefore demonstrated inevitability but could not become a full-fledged modern military conflict because it—the former “it” referring to the anthropomorphized war itself—did not realize that fact. Of course, wars cannot think for themselves at all; however, following Stein's logic, WWI is and is not modern based on its inability to become self-consciously aware of its implicatedness in issues related to inevitability and freedom. Near the end of the passage, Stein alters how she identifies “it.” Rather than the anthropomorphized war, the pronoun stands for everybody living during the war: “but now now we all realize.” Consequently, her insistence that only “now now” do people understand the desire for freedom from an unavoidable war betrays the extent to which individuals felt similarly twenty years prior, as they watched Robert Wiene's film *The Cabinet of*

*Dr. Caligari* (1920) about a doctor controlling a murderous somnambulist or read E. E.

Cummings's autobiographical novel *The Enormous Room* (1922) about his incarceration in and eventual release from the wartime prison La Ferté-Macé.

Re-reading the passage about the distinction between friends and enemies during WWI reveals a similar ambivalence about when to place the conflict. The quote about that distinction was taken from a larger sentence rife with qualifications and second-guesses. Stein states, "In '14-'18 everybody well if not everybody the great majority knew who was an enemy and who was a friend, if they did not know they were pretty sure, and they mostly were not mistaken an enemy was an enemy and a friend was a friend more or less" (79). By the end, Stein seems to assert without doubt that "an enemy was an enemy and a friend was a friend;" however, she couches that assertion in qualifying words and phrases such as "mostly," "pretty sure," and "more or less" that diminish her ability to separate WWI from the latter war where one cannot tell the difference between friends and enemies. Despite Stein's claims to the contrary, WWI does not remain neatly in the "nice war" category. At the same time that it evokes patriotism by stirring individuals to fight against the nation's enemies alongside its allies, the war also produces disillusionment by discouraging individuals from distinguishing friend from foe, compelling them to suffer senseless violence, and encouraging them to desire freedom from it.

Likewise, the Second World War repeats the First. Even though it represents a disappointing war that has exhausted everyone, one that Stein believes will be the last one to remember, she celebrates the fact that it reinvigorates her love for her homeland. Reacting to WWII in the same way she reacted, nearly three decades prior, to WWI, Stein draws together two oppositional perspectives—one melancholy, the other nationalistic—thus characterizing the Second World War as the second coming of these incongruous feelings. Moreover, by the end of the memoir, WWII becomes not just a repetition but also one of the links in a chain of future

wars that find their historical starting point in WWI. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, I want to focus on how Stein's geographical framework repositions WWII as a reiteration of the prior world war, specifically through the way it solidifies her patriotic feelings for what she describes as her "native land" and, at the same time, recasts her sentiments and even America's involvement as quasi-Fascist.

In the epilogue to the memoir, and despite her best efforts throughout to categorize wars as good or bad, nice or not, Stein finally describes the Second World War in the same way she had its predecessor: "It is pretty wonderful and pretty awful to have been intimate and friendly and proud of two American armies in France apart only by twenty-seven years" (247). Stein determines not to differentiate one bit between the two wars by describing the different armies as exactly the same, save for the fact that they have been separated by a large swath of time. Just as she does in the closing pages of the *Autobiography*, in which she pals around with doughboys, Stein wishes to meet the GIs. Referring to the soldiers in an imaginary letter, she states, "Dear Americans how we do want to see them" (241). She finally does meet a number of soldiers, an experience that she anticipates will close the narrative: "What a day what a day of days, I always did say that I would end this book with the first American that came to Culoz, and to-day oh happy day yesterday and to-day, the first of September 1944. There have been six of them in the house, two of them stayed the night and then three were there besides the first three not here at Culoz but at Belley" (244). Rather than end the book with that first appearance of GIs coming to the French town of Culoz, she tacks on the epilogue. In it, Stein seems determined to contrast the GIs to the doughboys by discussing how WWII soldiers conversed more excitedly than soldiers had done in the past (248) and how they were more poised but less provincial than WWI soldiers (251). Yet, by the end, in the closing paragraphs of the memoir, Stein puts all these contrasts under erasure by arguing that Americans do not change. When a fan asks her, upon

returning to the U.S. for her 1935 lecture tour, whether she had noticed any drastic differences in her fellow countrymen, Stein declares, “I said no what could they change to, just to become more American. No I said I could have gone to school with any of them” (259). Consequently, the GIs were no different from the doughboys but had more fully realized or assumed national characteristics; they had become “more American all American” (259) but also exactly the same as any of the young chaps Stein had gone to school with years before. Despite all of this fellow feeling and optimism in national stability, though, Stein couples “pretty wonderful” and “pretty awful” feelings. Although she does not clarify the relationship between the two in this passage, she does later in the epilogue. Specifically in reference to geography, Stein crystallizes her contradictory feelings about a logical, inevitable, exhausting, disappointing war that seems quite different from the early world war except for the “wonderful” way it allows individuals to be with America.

In this book, Stein’s geographical imaginary centers on her conception of what she terms “native land.” Echoing the statement she made about wartime expatriation and patriotism in the *Autobiography*, Stein writes: “There is something in this native land business and you cannot get away from it, in peace time you do not seem to notice it much particularly when you live in foreign parts but when there is a war and you are all alone and completely cut off from knowing about your country well then there it is, your native land is your native land, it certainly is” (250). Stein points out that expatriation plays an important role in stirring patriotic feelings but subordinates geographical distance from the nation to the more crucial need for war. She begins, in fact, by claiming that during peacetime one’s expatriate status does not guarantee nationalism but actually discourages it. On the other hand, during wartime—when, particularly through pro-Allied and anti-Axis propaganda, the country advances its own identity in relation to other countries—an individual can know her “native land” by remaining “alone and completely cut



off.” By referring to one’s isolation, then, Stein circles back not only to the importance of being an expatriate but also to the importance of being “cut off” as a noncombatant who, securely tucked away in Culoz, experiences war at a distance as an event that fuses geography, patriotism, and a problematic nativism.

During this section of the memoir, Stein elaborates on what she means by “native land” by describing her patriotic feelings in geographical terms. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, she declares, “After all every one is as their land is, as the climate is, as the mountains and the rivers or their oceans are as the wind and rain and snow and ice and heat and moisture is, they just are and that makes them have their way to eat their way to drink their way to act their way to think and their way to be subtle” (250). If Stein is subtle here, it is because she overtly claims that geography greatly determines individual identity but implies that the connection between identity and geography occurs at birth, otherwise one’s “native land” remains forever a foreign land; in other words, her meditation on land, climate, gastronomical customs, and subtlety itself actually reveals a nativist ideology. The connection between native land and nativism stems, oddly enough, from the strange fact that Stein writes so fondly of her homeland given that she remained geographically distant from it for the majority of her life.

Spending most of her life in France, Stein does not fathom how its land and climate have affected her. In fact, here and elsewhere she characterizes France, specifically its capital, as a space disconnected from the writer herself. For instance, in her lecture “An American and France,” Stein states that Americans expatriate to the country because “they are free not to be connected with anything” (*What Are Masterpieces* 65). As Kennedy observes, Stein voluntarily disconnects from her adopted city in order to foster her own artistic interiority. In Stein’s writing, the city and even the entire country lose any semblance of “particularity and concreteness of place,” becoming instead an abstract and foreign other that heightens her

awareness of creativity and national difference (*Imagining Paris* 41). In the lecture, Stein echoes the geographical determinism she develops in her memoir. She famously begins with by asserting, “America is my country and Paris is my home town” before then referring to the terrain and climate: “After all anybody is as their land and air is. [. . .] And so I am an American and I have lived half my life in Paris, not the half that made me but the half in which I made what I made” (*What are Masterpieces* 62). At the beginning of the paragraph, Stein declines to clarify what she means by the phrase “their land and air,” whether she refers to the U.S. or France, or both. By the end of the paragraph, however, she distinguishes between the country in which she could create and the other one that had created her through a kind of geographical determinism. Put differently, the U.S. is a country composed of “land” and “air” whereas, devoid of any terrain or climate, France is a non-literal place. As a destination for expatriate American writers, France appeals to Stein all the more because it lacks the physical aspects that make a country real in the first place.

Stein further reinforces the distinction between the two countries in her war memoir by placing her paragraph on deterministic geography in the same section as her praise of nativism. Disconnected from France, Stein feels now more than ever before the way she has been affected by the country of her birth; moreover, she senses that just as her adopted homeland cannot affect her, immigrants to the U.S. would be involuntarily disconnected from the country. Given Stein’s remarks about the “native land,” if she had been in charge of drafting the first section (or “Citizenship Clause”) of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, it would have looked radically different because she refused to believe anyone not born in a country could become a citizen. The geography of the land on which one was born instantly imbued the individual with the character she would become in such a way that emigration and acculturation could not guarantee true naturalization no matter how long one lived on the land or grew

acclimatized and accustomed to its nuanced geography. Just as Stein paints France's lack of concreteness as an absence in her landscape composition of senseless violence and American identity in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, here in the memoir she suggests how such absence promotes her nativism and, at the same time, signals the pointlessness of U.S. involvement in this second iteration of world warfare.

Stein considers how war not only promotes U.S. nationalism by setting the country alongside—while keeping it distinct from—other republics such as England and France and starkly opposing it to Germany and Italy, but also how patriotism based on nativism places her and her country uncomfortably close to rightwing, Fascist political leaders waging full-scale war for a similar cause. Although, in *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America*, John Patrick Diggins asserts that nativism and Fascism were not synonymous in the American perspective,<sup>27</sup> he nonetheless claims, “what is crucial in understanding the mainsprings of America’s receptivity to Fascism is the persistence of nativist sentiment in every aspect of American society” (19). Much like dictators such as Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler who fought for a nativist ideology by stamping out ethnic others, Stein savors jingoistic feelings about America’s opposition to the Axis Powers while, simultaneously, harboring a xenophobic outlook that Barbara Will characterizes as “surprising [. . .] given the disastrous effects of nationalism in the very epoch she chronicles” (241, f. 110). She celebrates the GIs’ fight for freedom against tyrannical rule exemplified in the death camps of Nazi Germany but her nativism reflects the ideology of her country’s sworn enemies and is further reflected in Stein’s political actions during the period recorded in the memoir. In the midst of the war, Stein befriended Bernard Fäy, the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale under the Vichy regime. At the same time, she became a propagandist for the Vichy government by translating Marshal Philippe Pétain’s

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<sup>27</sup> Diggins notes, “some of the most extremist xenophobes, right-wing evangelists and southern Klansmen, continually attacked Mussolini as an anti-Christ and Fascism as a foreign ideology” (19).

speeches. Exploring the “Vichy dilemma”—a term referring to Stein’s outspoken support of aesthetic and political freedom at the same time that she supported an oppressive regime—Will notes that, between 1941 and 1943, the writer translated over thirty of Pétain’s speeches, “including those that announced [. . .] policy barring Jews and other ‘foreign elements’ from positions of power in the public sphere and those that called for a ‘hopeful’ reconciliation with Nazi forces” (138). In her posthumous novel *Mrs. Reynolds* (1952), which Stein composed between 1940 and 1943 and thus during the timeframe she was helping Pétain, she describes a “reconciliation” but not between the French and the Nazis. Rather, in a semi-fictionalized account of life in interwar Europe during the rise of Hitler, she compares the mindset of the eponymous protagonist to her next-door neighbor, a character named of “Angel Harper” who represents the Nazi leader. Throughout the novel, surface differences between the two characters—one an American housewife, the other a soon-to-be dictator—bleed together as the narrator awaits the inevitability of warfare. Through the “native land” rhetoric of *Wars*, Stein—like her fictional creation Mrs. Reynolds—imagines the U.S. bent on reconciling with fascist totalitarianism through their mutual belief in ethnic nationalism, a thought that becomes all the more disturbing given the fact that she was hiding from the Nazis and members of the Vichy regime at the time.

By describing the geographical dimensions of patriotism, Stein refers to the different regions (mountains, rivers, ice, snow, etc.) that stretch from her home country’s two coastlines, thus conjoining the memoir to one of the aforementioned statements in *The Geographical History*. Midway through the book, she describes how the European continent was too small to wage a modern, 20th-century war, whereas a large country such as the U.S. was just the right size to complete the task (93). Stein separates the U.S. from its European neighbors in order to demonstrate how warfare distinguishes her own country from others (since her country can wage

it whereas the others cannot) and, in light of the previous passage, belatedly clarifies that idea by implicating herself in the present military conflict that, although spurred on by fascist dictators differentiating between “native” citizens and ethnic others, remains a decidedly American act of aggression. Although identifying the U.S. as the source of all large-scale violence, Stein nonetheless proves her point that, during WWII, friends and enemies could not be so easily distinguished. In this case, countries that the U.S. opposes actually embody an irritant strain of nativism that makes them, at least in ideology, political friends and, in some sense, proto-American. In other words, the nation must repeatedly engage in destructive war in order to define the borders of its self-identity or, in the case of the GIs, in order to become “more American”; however, the nation’s borders must remain quite permeable because even its enemies can be allies in its warmongering.

Further connecting nativism and nationalism to the eruption of future wars, the entire epilogue of the memoir appears conceptually out-of-place in a book dedicated to the opinion that the historical event of WWII should lead to a more lasting postwar peace. For, although Stein talks a lot about disappointment and exhaustion throughout the book, she does not end that way. If anything, the epilogue maintains an altogether excitable style and optimistic tone. In fact, the very fact that Stein felt the need to add an epilogue onto a complete work suggests the way the war does not stifle but actually invigorates her creative energies. So too, in her appreciation of the way WWI and WWII have promoted patriotism, Stein also seems to turn her back on the past, on “wars she has seen” so to speak, in order to provide a cursory glance on “wars she will see,” or at the very least would have seen if she had not died in Neuilly-sur-Seine the year after publishing her memoir. Although a sort of final word on her thoughts about the Second World War, the epilogue also transports Stein from the concrete and to the abstract. Without a doubt, the closing pages are rich with historical detail—names of places, dates, types of soldiers—just

like the body chapters preceding them; however, as a conclusion to what has happened, the epilogue also includes numerous reference to wars more generally. As much as the book captures Stein's thoughts and feelings during and after military engagements that she did and did not live through, it also undermines the writer's initial linear temporality—from the Civil War to WWII, from “nice wars” to their opposites—by problematizing the separate character of the two world wars and, ultimately, by showing how warmongering becomes a vicious cycle that will not end with the most recent war. Though disillusioning in its aimlessness and endlessness, the kind of war that, in Stein's genealogy, began with WWI stirs nationalist sentiments in ways unachievable otherwise. Rather than neutrally mediating or getting caught up in conflicts after they have already begun, the U.S. takes the lead in waging world wars, any wars, all wars. Its large land mass leads both to its hyper-belligerency and to its citizens' need to wander through the un-navigable memorialization that seeks to conjoin brutal violence and resurgent patriotism, a need to aimlessly repeat, over and again, conflicts whose epistemological and affective contours cannot be accurately mapped, violence that, through its very resistance to conciliatory mourning, shapes the past, present, and future of a dark nation.

## CONCLUSION

What is a melancholy nation? Responding to that seemingly simple question in the context of modernist American narratives written in the wake of the First World War requires a fundamental rethinking of the culture, politics, and aesthetics of noncombatancy. The connections made between melancholia, nationalism, and noncombatancy form a trajectory extending from the lingering effects of pre-war neutrality to the hyper-belligerency of total war.

Starting with the opening chapter on Cather's novel *One of Ours*, I argued that rather than interpret the novel as either the writer's praise or condemnation of her protagonist Claude Wheeler's naïve patriotism we need to examine narrative irony as a literary response to President Wilson's political neutrality. Envisioning neutrality ironically alters it from a peacemaking policy to a technique through which the narrative identifies with competing viewpoints on the war while remaining critically impartial to all of them. Just as Claude wants to fight and die for his country as the Unknown Soldier, the narrator reveals the contradictions latent in the hyper-nationalistic symbol of an anonymous body by showing how narrative neutrality—an inability to coherently narrativize the war and thus mourn its dead—expresses not an opposition to nationalism but a counter-nationalism.

The chapter on Hemingway's short story sequence *In Our Time* took up the issue of racial dominance in the U.S. declaration of war. Whereas the one on Cather explored how noncombatancy persisted into wartime itself, in this chapter I pursued questions about the power structures that allowed certain kinds of individuals to be identified as combatants whereas others were removed from the war if not literally then at least in cultural memory. By analyzing the metafictional dimensions of Hemingway's story sequence, I argued that his protagonist Nick Adams, a war veteran who has sought to recuperate by writing the book, attempts to displace trauma onto the African American population, creating what I referred to as racial melancholia

due to the fact that these individuals were excluded from experiencing the combat that led to the trauma with which they were burdened. In making that argument, I showed how passivity in the trenches rather than active combat actually produced the majority of cases of shell-shock. Deemed noncombatants, African Americans were seen as essentially passive and “traumatized” by a dominant, white culture that not only wanted to displace that trauma but, by extension, wanted to view itself as active and autonomous—as a version of the man-machine—in its nation’s mission to fight for peace. By reading two eerily similar stories, “The Battler” and “Big Two-Hearted River,” I contended that Hemingway depicts the paradox of postwar recuperation. Attempting to recover from the war by replacing his thoughts of combat with more therapeutic thoughts (about daily tasks and the natural world), Nick turns himself into the kind of noncombatant he has racialized. Hence, his goal of creating a coherent narrative about the nation’s mission of restoring “peace in our time” depends on a dialectic of melancholia and nationalism not just because African Americans become targeted as melancholy subjects but also because Nick’s chosen method of recuperating from war forces him to become characterized in ways similar to the racialized and traumatized African Americans, and finally because Nick leverages that dialectic in the overall structure of the story sequence by ultimately celebrating U.S. patriotism without successfully displacing, or working through, melancholia.

Reading H.D.’s “long-story” *Kora and Ka* alongside F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *Tender is the Night*, I extended two claims made in the Hemingway chapter about combatancy as noncombatancy and about nationalism and melancholia as a dialectic in which the latter cannot always be strategically displaced. Thinking through the further implications of those two claims, I also focused on a kind of plot line that appeared in the discussion of racial melancholia but had remained rather tangential: the incest plot. The theme of father-daughter incest in Fitzgerald’s novel has been commonly read as a commentary on his noncombatant protagonist Dick Diver’s



(and his own) declining nationalist sentiment and growing interest in transnational or cosmopolitan communities. Analyzed through H.D.'s narrative about a noncombatant who suffers from survivor's guilt that sustains his incestuous romance with his mother, cosmopolitanism in *Tender* becomes the mere midpoint of a narrative arc that returns Dick to a melancholy love for his own nation through the figural incest that persists between himself and his wife, and mother-figure, Nicole. By attempting to cure Nicole of her incest-induced schizophrenia, he initially has to become her parent-figure, then allow her to transfer her anger from her father to him, and end as the opposite kind of character with which he began the narrative—a destitute individual resembling his wife when she first came to the sanatorium for treatment. Phrased another way, I asserted that in both narratives the incest plot becomes a proxy combat plot through which the catastrophe of warfare allows one to engage in a romance that can and must occur within the national family.

In the final chapter on Stein, I situated one of her autobiographies and her war memoir in the context of her book on geography in order to argue that Stein couples expatriation and noncombatancy by exploring how geographical distance from both home country and battlefield helps her understand nationalism as the by-product of incomprehensible and ever-repeating war. From her vantage point as a noncombatant expatriate during two world wars, Stein initially positions geography as the only way to achieve any semblance of certainty about what they can know and feel about far-off conflict. Waiting for information from newspapers and telegrams that arrive periodically and from gossip that, though always at-hand, cannot be trusted, Stein turns to the land to make meaning; however much geography might initially provide epistemological certainty about violence, it ultimately reveals the un-navigability of wartime and postwar nationalist melancholia. Stein characterizes military conflict as senselessly violent but also egotistically envisions it as the chief way to renew her own sense of patriotism. Extending

her geographical imagery further, Stein shows that the U.S. not only engages in world wars but actually incites large-scale conflict because of its large size. Even though the war began because of the assassination of an Austrian royal by Serbian nationalists, Stein flagrantly misreads history, claiming and even reveling in the “fact” that because the U.S. started the incomprehensible and unending violence, noncombatant expatriates such as herself can reinvigorate the love of their homeland. By exploring such contradictoriness associated with jingoism, Stein also demonstrates how wars must repeat in possibly unending future iterations, if only to serve her own need for reinvigorated nationalism.

I will now close by turning briefly to William Faulkner’s post-WWII novel, *A Fable* (1954), a Christian allegory about Jesus returning to Earth as a French WWI soldier who mutinies in order to establish peace, dies in a barrage, and is ironically entombed as the Unknown Soldier. The book might seem an unlikely choice to suggest a conclusion. Although it won Faulkner the National Book Award, it has rarely been read; or, if it has, readers have criticized it as one of his worst, possibly rivaled only by *The Mosquitoes* (1927) or *Pylon* (1935). The novel’s failure to captivate readers as Faulkner had hoped make it an intriguing afterthought on the failure to mourn in modernist narratives. In the book, Faulkner synthesizes most of the ideas I have elaborated throughout this project. Written by a modernist who, like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, failed to mobilize during the war, it explores such themes and ideas as the Unknown Soldier, African American war experience, cosmopolitanism, and unending cycles of warfare. There is nothing in the novel to suggest that Faulkner or his narrator celebrate a melancholy nationalism akin to the writers, narrators, and characters I have discussed; however, *A Fable* does offer an opportunity to better examine the incongruities of nationalist melancholia in the modernist period.

In 1943, while working periodically as a screenwriter in Hollywood, Faulkner met with director Henry Hathaway and producer William Bacher about an idea for a much-needed film about the Unknown Soldier. The film Faulkner had in mind would never materialize. Instead of a movie, he created a novel based in part on Humphrey Cobb's novel *Paths of Glory* (1935) about a mutiny in the front lines during the First World War. To Cobb's plot, Faulkner would add two critical components: the Unknown Soldier memorial and Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> In Faulkner's narrative, Christ reincarnated as a French corporal decides, along with his twelve compatriots, to mutiny by declining to go "over the top" of the trenches after their commander gives an order to engage in a particularly futile attack. The German troops, with whom the corporal has been in secret talks, also mutiny, thus creating a temporary cease-fire condition that ripples across the entire Western Front. The French deserters stand military trial where they are found guilty and shot by a firing squad. After the war, enlisted men in the French military charged with the mission of finding a suitable body for the Unknown Soldier memorial, receive an order to "proceed to Verdun and thence with expedition and despatch to the catacombs beneath the Fort of Valaumont and extricate therefrom one complete cadaver of one French soldier unidentified and unidentifiable either by name regiment or rank, and return with it" (450). Encountering trouble during their mission, the search party chances upon a stranger who happens to have the kind of body they need, having stumbled upon it while plowing up his farmland while looking for unexploded or "dud" shells (464). Rather than follow orders and venture on, the soldiers select this corpse, which unbeknownst to them is actually the body of Christ.

At the end of the novel, characters come to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier to mourn for the patriotic war dead, never knowing that the anonymous and hidden body over which they pray is actually Christ. In this way, their mourning takes on a melancholic feature because, even

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<sup>28</sup> Stanley Kubrick would adapt Cobb's novel into a black-and-white film starring Kirk Douglas three years after the publication of Faulkner's work.

though they are successful in their conciliatory grieving they, just like melancholiacs, do not and cannot know what has actually been lost.<sup>29</sup> Whereas they think they grieve the loss of a war hero who fought virtuously to save his country from German aggression, the dead Savior was actually a mutineer who attempted to end the senseless violence. Like the tomb in the Cather chapter, this one also memorializes contradictory viewpoints on the war. Dedicated to a French soldier rather than an American doughboy, however, its contradictions do not exemplify the nationalistic tenets of Wilsonian neutrality through an ironic narrator who simultaneously identifies with and remains impartial to all competing perspectives on how to understand the war and mourn its dead. Rather, the narrator depicts a nationalist melancholia more akin to the one latent in the analysis on Cather and explored to varying degrees in the subsequent chapters.

Faulkner shows how nationalism depends on total war, a concept referring to the “unlimited, and potentially interminable, nature” of violence in which the line between combatancy and noncombatancy blurs and where, interspersed sometimes with short-lived moments of peace, warfare must continue forever (Mieszkowski 211). Having intended to escape the battlefield and—as “the prince of peace”—restore permanent international accord, the ironically entombed corporal illustrates the refusal of any spatio-temporal reprieve from war. That is, the narrator suggests that WWI ultimately revealed how governments required large-scale violence as a way to promote and reestablish national identity, unity, and autonomy, markers between nations that would inevitably lead to the escalation of future combat.

Stein might have ended her memoir *Wars I Have Seen* with the idea of WWII as a repetition of WWI, but if she had lived to see the Cold War as Faulkner did, then possibly like him she would have characterized the latter war as but another reincarnation of that earlier one.

Written after WWII, Faulkner’s novel shows how the Cold War inherits from WWI the idea of

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<sup>29</sup> In making this point, I am indebted to Jan Mieszkowski’s poignant claim: “In Faulkner’s vision, the monuments to the fallen mark the loss of an unknown loss (the missed Messiah) rather than the catastrophic annihilation of millions of soldiers” (221).

total war and the melancholy nationalism associated with it. For him, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction produces what I would refer to as a cosmopolitan community quite similar to the hostile, transnational relationships that Fitzgerald examines in *Tender is the Night*. For Faulkner, if nations wage wars in order to renew nationalism, then nationalism might also exist as a mere tool to perpetuate warfare—and if nations are but mechanisms created for war, then all nations are fundamentally the same and all their inhabitants but global citizens of a world gone mad. On the other hand, just as cosmopolitanism forms the mere midpoint of Fitzgerald's narrative, it also becomes that part of Faulkner's cycle that inevitably returns back to the nation, which I would argue does not even refer to France but the U.S. Just as H.D.'s story seems to be about an English protagonist named John Helforth but through its mother-son incest is really about American survivor's guilt (and, more broadly, about the writer's reassessment of her own American nationalism), here I insist that in Faulkner's estimation the melancholy nationalism associated with total war begins and ends with America.

Like the curious parallels between race and war in Hemingway's boxing and fishing stories published in *In Our Time*, Faulkner weaves into his major combat plot an ostensibly minor one about an African American and a stolen horse. Unlike Hemingway's characters Ad and Bugs, whom Nick controls through his metafiction, Faulkner's sub-plot illustrates the character's resistance to dominant and predominately white power structures within the U.S. Ironically, though, such resistance only points out the lack thereof in the war scenes themselves where the narrator focuses on three dutiful American soldiers. As Taylor Hagood notes, "These three young men seem to represent a different type of American presence from that set forth in the story of the racehorse. They have no interest in challenging anything, maintaining instead a belief in national systems and a youthful, somewhat naïve implicit confidence that the powers that be are taking care of them and that they need merely to do their duty" (196). Combining

complicity and resistance, these American characters foreground melancholy nationalism as both the dutiful promotion of traditional national ideals such as bravery and self-sacrifice and, at the same time, the opposition to any naïve optimism about it since such patriotism can only be achieved through repetitions of warfare. By focusing on these American characters as Hagood does, I do not intend to disregard the fact the novel is about a French corporal; however, just as the narrator destabilizes national identity by revealing that Frenchman to be Christ himself, here I want to claim that Faulkner interlaces an American plot into a larger Western Front storyline in order to reveal, just as Stein does in *The Geographical History of America*, that total warfare and its attendant nationalist melancholia are, however illogically, nonetheless distinctly American phenomena.

As *A Fable* moves us beyond the traditional periodization of modernism and into the postmodern period, which arguably began after WWII ended, so too it draws us ever closer to our own time, to our own wars without end. Unfortunately, we are far too familiar with ever-repeating violence in which the borders between soldiers and civilians blur. One war in the Middle East has led to another and to other kinds of conflicts that have all the markings of being warfare—including death count—although politicians refuse to refer to them as such. After the Crimea annexation and conflict in Ukraine as well as Vladimir Putin's military support of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, prognostications about the start of the next Cold War have become more pronounced. Likewise, cyber-terrorist organizations make a mockery of traditional definitions of combat by employing keyboards and computer screens as their weapons of choice at the same time that drones and other advanced weapons technology do the fighting while their pilots sit in air-conditioned control rooms half-a-world away. Now, as in the post-WWI period, the destruction of war polarizes individuals renewed by the nationalist spectacle from those calling for an end to nationalism itself. Yet, if WWI and its aftermath resemble our own, then

the fact that modernist writers often bridged such polarization beckons us to re-evaluate the current state of melancholia and nationalism and how we, in turn, memorialize that older war.

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