

THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

COMMON THEMES IN THE AMERICAN
WORLD WAR II NOVEL

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

WILLIAM KELLY JOYCE, JR.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

JUNE, 1954

1 3 1 9 1 3

TEN
J89

PREFACE

The idea of investigating the World War II novel first presented itself to me when I was on duty as an active member of the Armed Forces during the Korean Police Action. I read what was being written about the Korean conflict and began to wonder what had been written about World War II. Different questions shaped themselves in my mind. Did the authors give an accurate picture of the war? Was their writing in the nature of a crusade? Was there a unifying factor that united all the World War II works? Did these writings about a war that spread over the globe and involved millions of uniformed peoples have any theme or method, any hates or loves in common?

I started to gather material tentatively for a bibliography on the complete topic of World War II Novels. One of the first articles that I encountered was written for the New York Times Book Review by David Dempsey. In this article, he raised many of the same questions about which I had been wondering.

Do the authors, as one publisher claims for his book, 'take the reader into the mind of the protagonist and show us what his generation is thinking about the war and the relation to the world afterwards?' Do they capture the inarticulate shades of meaning which give wings to the soldier's passion, words to his anger, and a soul

to his hatred? Have they discovered that which makes war one thing to the soldier and another to the civilian? . . . There are other questions, too, which will help determine the final verdict on our war literature. Shall our novels glorify the fighting man, or picture the spiritual decay, frustration and self-pity which take their toll just as brutally as enemy bullets? Is the truth of battle in its raw agony, or its self-sacrifice, teamwork, and love which men find there for each other? Is the G. I. a fighting ambassador of democracy, or an ideological dolt? Do men hate war, or look upon it as an adventure? Was it worth while or just another mockery in man's search for freedom?¹

Because of the nature of my questions and the queries of Mr. Dempsey, I decided that the answers, if there could be answers, would have to be manifested in the form of themes, major and minor, that could be found in the novels--that is to say, subjects present in such quantities and so sufficiently articulated as to indicate the author's important concern with them. So, I undertook an investigation of the American World War II Novel. I hoped to find a common theme or themes in the works which I examined.

I did find the common themes. The manner in which this was accomplished is described in the following pages.

A definition of the problems presented and my method of attacking them will be found in the introduction.

1. David Dempsey, "The Novelist and the Soldier," New York Times Book Review, L, No. 49 (December 9, 1945), 1.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	11
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE MAJOR THEMES	8
III. THE MINOR THEMES	45
IV. CONCLUSION	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Although it has been nine years since the last shot of the Second World War was fired, the literature of that war is still living and growing. The writers are still in the process of considering the many facets of the conflict. Because the writers are still at work, and because we are still too short a distance from it, the critics have not, as yet, appeared in any great numbers. It was necessary, then, first, to define and limit a somewhat elastic topic, and, second, to compile a bibliography of this defined, limited topic.

The title, The American World War II Novel, in itself narrows the topic. By limiting the topic to American works, about Americans in action, such things as Apartment in Athens or The Moon is Down were eliminated. The term novel was used to eliminate the thousands of short stories that had been written about the war. I did, however, adopt the usual reviewer's position and accept Mr. Roberts and Tales of the South Pacific as having sufficient central unity to be called novels. Novel also does not include such personal documentary approaches as the journals of Ernie Pyle, Here is Your War and Brave Men; the I-was-there efforts that

produced such books as They Were Expendable and Guadalcanal Diary. These books, for the most part, were written during the war years.

Whatever their scope or subject, the war books included few novels. Writers had little time for the artistic reflection and the ordering essential to fiction, and readers generally preferred knowledge of events and blueprints for a better world.¹

It is the above class that I have eliminated, feeling that the novel has, by definition, an objectivity, selection, and ordering that makes its analysis more valuable.

I have used the term War Novel in my title. I restrict its application to a novel that concerns itself with the actual conflict of a combat situation, or with a conflict, a situation that has arisen as a result of the war. Thus, you may have a War Novel such as Guard of Honor, in which the action never leaves the State of Florida. But this definition resulted in the exclusion from consideration of Carson McCuller's Reflections in a Golden Eye, and the very popular From Here to Eternity of James Jones. They were both eliminated for the same reason. Their action takes place against a training camp background in a peacetime situation. The participants are not there because of the war but because it is a way of life that they have chosen for themselves.

The final thing that was necessary before compiling a bibliography was to limit the topic as regards to time. The

1. James Hart, The Popular Book, p. 351.

subject had already been defined as works produced by Americans, about Americans, of novel length and complexity, fictional, and involving a war-time, or war-caused subject. Because the war novel is in a living and growing field of fiction it necessitated a cut-off date in the reading. The beginning date that was used was the date of our entry into the war, December 8, 1941. The cut-off date was December 1, 1953.

After defining and limiting the topic, I compiled my primary and secondary research in the following manner. All the normal outlets such as the scholarly journals, Book Review Digest, and the periodical indices were consulted. I found that five books--After the Lost Generation, by Aldridge; Fifty Years of the American Novel, by Gardiner; The Popular Book, by Hart; The Modern Novel in America, by Hoffman; and The Cavalcade of the American Novel, by Wagenknecht--were the only critical secondary references, other than articles in periodicals and book reviews, that considered the war novel.

Both because of the dynamic nature of the topic and because of the scarcity of critical material, I compiled a list of those men who were working in this field from the "Research in Progress" section of the April PMLA for the years 1947 to 1953. I wrote each of these men, explaining what I was trying to do, citing the references that I had found and asking them which direction they were going in the

field. The following excerpt is an example of the answers I received.

I believe that you are correct in concluding that not much critical material--except of course, thousands of book reviews--is available on your subject. That can be good; you can chart uncharted waters and perhaps emerge with a few good articles.

Since you are after themes, it seems to me that the obvious way to proceed is to read as many of the novels as you can, making a chart of the themes as you proceed. You will then have to sift the major from the minor themes. Certainly attitudes toward the war, toward the possibilities of a lasting peace, toward life in the Army, toward officers, toward the value of the military service would be major. You might also notice, as I did, that when an author starts out to debunk war in any way, he always manages to glorify it in the old tradition in some way. War is brutal, senseless and a number of other things. But it is also exciting, and it does evoke heroism.²

I constructed two charts. The first measured the frequency with which a war novel was critically considered as distinct from being simply reviewed. The five aforementioned secondary sources, plus five major periodical articles,³ were used as a yardstick of the novel's importance.

2. J. Sherwood Weber, from a letter dated December 30, 1953.

3. W. P. Albrecht, "War and Fraternity," New Mexico Quarterly Review, XXI, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 461.

Malcolm Cowley, "The Young Conquerors," New Republic, CXVIII, No. 26 (June 28, 1948), 23.

Martha Foley, "War Fiction--A Mirror for Americans," Survey Graphic, XXXVII, No. 12 (December, 1948), 499.

"The Novels of the Second World War," Publisher's Weekly, CLIV, No. 17 (October 23, 1948), 1802.

Francis Wolle, "Novels of Two Wars," Western Humanities Review, V, No. 3 (Summer, 1950-1951), 279.

This chart showed nine novels that were agreed on as being important by the literary critics:

The Young Lions, by Irwin Shaw

The Naked and the Dead, by Norman Mailer

A Bell for Adano, by John Hersey

The Gallery, by John Horne Burns

The Girl on the Via Flaminia, by Alfred Hayes

All Thy Conquests, by Alfred Hayes

Guard of Honor, by James Gould Couzzen
(Pulitzer Prize Winner, 1948)

Mr. Roberts, by Thomas Heggen

Tales of the South Pacific, by James Michener

To this list I added two books, The Caine Mutiny, by Herman Wouk, the Pulitzer Prize Winner for 1951, which had appeared too late for much solid critical consideration, and Beach Red, by Peter Bowman, 1945, a war novel with a format that made it unique. In his critical article Wollé mentions that, ". . . as for technique, only Beach Red has done something new."⁴

Although A Walk in the Sun by Harry Brown was one of the first war novels (1944), and a ". . . starkly simple representation of war,"⁵ it has been excluded because, with the exception of Hoffman and the book reviews, it received no critical notice.

4. Wollé, op. cit., p. 296.

5. Frederick Hoffman, The Modern Novel in America, 1900-1950, p. 175.

These eleven books are the novels that I systematically charted. I read and considered all the war novels listed in the bibliography, but it is these eleven that were given the main consideration. From these, I extracted the major and minor themes that are presented in the following two chapters.

A theme was termed major because of the frequency of its appearance, the intensity with which it was presented and the contribution that it made to the plot. A theme was termed minor if it appeared frequently but did not contribute materially to the work in which it was mentioned; i. e., such a fact as the constant appearance of Coca-Cola as a symbol of home. Coca-Cola did not contribute materially to the novel. Scotch and water, or U. S. A., might just as easily have been substituted, and sometimes were.

There is one final exception to be mentioned. This thesis excluded any novel that concerns itself with the United States Marine Corps. In the first place, there are very few novels about them. In the second place, I served as a member of that organization and would find it hard to be objective in anything concerning it.

The second chapter is devoted to an exposition of the major themes that are common in the World War II Novel. The third chapter is devoted to the minor themes in these novels. The final chapter is a summary of the conclusions on this question of themes.

The four major themes that will be presented in the second chapter are The Reduction to Zero, The Hatred of the Caste System, The Defeat of Idealism and the Presence of Prejudice.

CHAPTER II
THE MAJOR THEMES

In this chapter the four major themes presented will be The Reduction to Zero, The Hatred of the Caste System, The Defeat of Idealism, and The Presence of Prejudice.

In his critical work, After the Lost Generation, John Aldridge has a chapter entitled, "Mailer, Burns and Shaw, The Naked Zero."¹ From this title has been adopted the name for one of the more prominent of the major themes that are to be found in the World War II Novel. The theme is called The Reduction to Zero. There is a definite trend in these works to build up a character, a mission, a situation, and then to level it, reduce it to zero. It is probably correct to say that, basically, war is the villain. But it is not the antagonist of any tragedy in the classical sense. The men who meet defeat are not dignified or ennobled by their defeat. That is not the value of zero. Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead sees and presents the war to us as the great leveler. It reduces the good men to the zero of death. The evil men may continue to exist. But they are stripped naked. Their camouflage of sham, hypocrisy,

1. J. W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation, p. 33.

deceit is removed and they are presented to us in their true nature. All is zero where we have only the naked and the dead.

Lt. Hearn is the most important character in Mailer's book. The story revolves around him. Yet at the end of the book, he has accomplished nothing and is reduced to nothing. He is killed through the efforts of a jealous Platoon Sergeant just as he begins to take the first positive action of his life. Prior to this Hearn has a series of encounters with General Cummings, the leader of the military campaign in the story. In these meetings he is forced to bend to the other man's will:

Hearn is ostensibly broken by General Cummings, the embodiment of military fascism, but he is represented from the beginning as somewhat of an empty shell and therefore lacking all potentialities of destruction.²

Each character in Mailer's novel meets this destruction, or this personal reduction to zero. Sergeant Croft, the Platoon Sergeant, has one main objective, to scale a highly symbolic mountain. The mountain defeats him. He fails. Mailer builds up our respect for the military prowess of General Cummings and then levels it by having the campaign won by a bungling subordinate officer while the General is on another island at a conference.

2. Aldridge, op. cit., p. 136.

The entire novel is full of incident after incident in which we see the defeat, waste, leveling and reduction of men.

The Gallery by John Horne Burns is divided into "Promenades" and "Portraits." The "Promenades" are first-person meditations on the cities of Africa and Italy and on the larger moral issues of the war. The "Portraits" are physical descriptions of the different areas combined with individual portraits of persons engaged in, or touched by the war. The zero theme courses strongly through the book; indeed, it may be said to triumph, although, as Aldridge says, Burns' basic intention was, if not affirmation, at least a balancing between it and the negative forces.³

Of the two sections, "Promenades" and "Portraits," the latter are clearly the more dramatic and effective. There is Hal, the neurotic Lieutenant, who attempts to find himself and ends with the insane belief that he is Christ. Moe Schulman, an idealistic character with a good set of values, a man who protects his German prisoners, who Burns would have us believe is able to build a better tomorrow, is cut down violently at the end of the book. Father Donovan, a Catholic chaplain, is portrayed as a man who has the ability to help right the evils of the war world. He is trying to do good. For his efforts he is reduced, ironically by a British lorry, to a smashed zero in a Naples street

3. Aldridge, op. cit., p. 137.

accident.

One entire "Portrait" (the eighth) is dedicated to the description of the VD cure taken by an American Army sergeant. It is a disease that he has contracted from a girl in Naples and that he has passed on to other girls of Naples. His role of a hero, a liberator, has been reduced to the zero of a disease carrier.

The novel Guard of Honor by James Cozzens is the story of three days at a Florida Army Air base. In these three days different problems arise. There is a race incident that is never solved. There are administration problems raised, problems of great significance that require command decisions, yet still hanging-fire at the end of the story, still waiting to be lifted out of their zero state. The two characters that are portrayed as the "good" people of the story, i. e., those with the best set of values, Nathaniel Hicks and Amanda Tureck, are found at the end of the story to have been reduced to the nothingness of an extramarital affair. Cozzens' viewpoint is that it is a nothingness, a loss of value. He paints it in a sordid light with a condemning finger.⁴

The entire story of Mr. Roberts by Thomas Heggen is taken up with the zero idea. The characters are trapped aboard the Reluctant, a navy cargo ship that sails between

4. James Cozzens, Guard of Honor, passim.

Tedium and Apathy with an occasional side trip to Boredom. The complicated technocracy of modern push-button warfare has robbed them of any chance for war's one compensation, the glory of personal combat. They sail the war's back waters and deliver such military essentials as toothpaste and toilet paper. Each of the characters is affected by this condition. Roberts, the main character, is killed just after he finally gets the active combat duty that he has so long desired. The Doctor, an educated and competent man is reduced to crudely jesting with the crew members for his amusement. David Bookser, a crew member built up by Heggan as one of the few noble men aboard the Reluctant, is reduced to the common zero.

David Bookser, a seaman of the first division, was a beautiful boy. He looked spiritual; he was a pure Adonis; his features were pure and flawless, his skin almost transparently white, and his blond hair grew carelessly about his head in graceful ringlets. He did not look effeminate, though, and the crew did not regard him that way. They were a little stunned by his beauty, even the dullest clod among them, and they made a sort of pet of Bookser. He was a quiet, earnest boy, and a hard worker, and he was going to enter the ministry when he got out of the Navy. The one time the crew held a 'Happy Hour,' devoted almost entirely to skits of the broadest and most animalistic sort, Bookser stole the show with his poised, true singing of 'Adeste Fidelis.'⁵

When the crew goes on liberty in Elysium, Bookser is AWOL and spends the time living with a girl he meets in church. He has been presented to us as a piece of rare

5. Thomas Heggan, Mister Roberts, p. 116.

crystal and then shattered.

And always in the background of these individual cases there is the conflict between the captain and the rest of the ship. The idea of a hopeless incompetent, such as the captain, arbitrarily and completely controlling the lives of his subordinates is itself a negation of all we believe.

The connecting device in All Thy Conquests by Alfred Hayes is the trial of an Italian Fascist. The specific crime for which he is being tried is the execution of twenty hostages. They are executed because some members of a German patrol have been killed. This man, a petty official who has aided the Germans while they were in power, is now being brought to trial in a democratic fashion. Trial by jury and protection of the law are positive values that the non-fascist Americans have brought with them. Yet they are completely negated by the action of the mob, the onlookers of the trial, who tear through the police cordon and beat the Fascist to death before the trial can be properly concluded and justice administered. The people have been aroused by the belief that justice will not be done. On the one hand they see the court procedure as an example of American democracy. But on the other hand they observe the black market activities around them which are conducted by the same Americans. They see rape, theft, racketeering as an example of the same American democracy.

The very title, All Thy Conquests, is a statement of zero expressed in the words of Mark Antony. Because the

Americans lost their ideals or had none in the first place, the glories of their conquest are reduced to dust. The conquerors have become the conquered. They lose everything for which they fought.

In The Caine Mutiny, Pulitzer Prize novel by Herman Wouk, the main characters and action (with the exception of the limping love affair of Willie Keith) are brought at the end of the book to a stage of nothingness. Queeg, the chief villain, is transferred without any great stigma to command a naval supply depot in the Mid-West. Willie Keith is still wandering around New York with his future still undecided. And the future of Maryk, who could have been, and wished to be, an excellent Navy career officer, is summed up by the lawyer who defends him, speaking at a dinner for Keefer, the successful novelist:

Steve, the thing is, this dinner is a phony. You're guilty. Course you're only half guilty. F' that matter you've only been half acquitted. You're a dead duck. You have no more chance now of transferring to the Regular Navy than you have of running for president. The reviewing authorities will call it a miscarriage of justice, which it is, and a nice fat letter of reprimand will show up in your jacket--and maybe in mine--and its back to the fishing business for Steve Maryk.⁶

Keefer is exposed to us, stripped of his sham. He may be a surface success, but we are given the knowledge that he is a coward, a zero figure.

6. Herman Wouk, The Caine Mutiny, p. 447.

Because of the nature of the story, a bloodless mutiny in the United States Navy, and the factors that caused it, the theme does not stand out so strongly as in some of the other works. It is further hampered by Wouk's careless handling of Willie Keith and his affairs. The story is the mutiny, not the development of Keith. But even this development is not a positive value.

The title, Beach Red, of the novel by Peter Bowman signifies the presence of death that is found in this work. At the end we are left with the dead, the zero remainder of the equation of war.

The narrator, the central figure of the story, is reduced to this zero of violent death. All through the novel he dreams of and plans for a better world. He demonstrates his fitness and right to live in such a world and then is cut down. In the last line he is described, ". . . there is nothing moving on him but his watch,"⁷ by the man who is checking to see if he has escaped death.

The story of The Girl on the Via Flaminia by Alfred Hayes is concerned with an American soldier who is looking for the companionship and later the love of an Italian girl. But in his intentions he manages to cause the arrest of the girl as a prostitute. At the end of the story, he is in love with her, but she walks off and leaves him. He is left

7. Peter Bowman, Beach Red, p. 60.

with the knowledge that he has destroyed her. He has nothing. She has been reduced, through the degradation of her liaison with him and her arrest as a prostitute by the police, to nothing.

This theme, The Reduction to Zero, is manifested prominently by the destruction of good in Tales of the South Pacific by James Michener.

One chapter concerns itself with the island of Norfolk. It is the island that was settled by the Bounty mutineers. Later it was used as a prison island by the British. The United States Navy has to build an airstrip on the island. There are two manifestations of man's presence on the island. The first is the cathedral of the spirit, a magnificent, mile-long avenue of majestic pine trees. It is a living memorial conceived by Fletcher Christian and executed by his descendants. The second sign of habitation is the English prison. It is the pine trees that are cut down; the prison remains.

Doesn't it seem horrible? The trees all down. We don't destroy one single memento of the prison days. Not one building do we touch. The airstrip runs twenty yards from the stone stables, but they're as safe as the Gallow's Gate. We won't touch a rock of the Bloody Bridge, where they buried the murdered guards, nor the obscene officer's bath. But the cathedral of spirit, that we knock to hell.⁸

It. Joe Cable USMC falls in love with Liat, a Tonkinese girl. He can't marry her. Yet, their love is presented to

8. James Michener, Tales of the South Pacific, p. 35.

us as the first real thing that has happened to either of them. Cable is killed, after he has seen the girl forced into a marriage she detests. Tony Fry, a casual Navy man who spends the whole story doing good, is killed while performing another man's job.⁹ Commander Hoag, a man who has championed the enlisted man and the minority groups, is killed by a fluke of chance, and is replaced by a bigoted incompetent who undoes all the good Hoag has done.¹⁰

In A Bell for Adano by John Hersey this theme is articulated a little less intensely. Major Joppolo performs his job and performs it well. But he is removed from office by a tyrannical general, and as the book ends we are left with the suggestion that all the good he has done, all the positive work of reconstruction, will be wiped away by his incompetent replacement. It is here less intensely because there is the possibility he will be replaced by a qualified man.

The Young Lions, by Irwin Shaw, traces the lives of three men, two Americans and a German, through the war. Christian Diestl, the German, is reduced from a positive, clear-thinking character to a brutal and corrupt personality at the end of the novel. But he is killed by one of the two Americans, Michael Whitacre, in retaliation for destroying the other American, Noah Ackerman. The development of

9. Michener, op. cit., p. 315.

10. Ibid., p. 324.

Ackerman is the most prominent point of the story. It is, indeed, the heart of Shaw's novel, the tragic affirmation and tragic ennoblement of man by war:

. . . Ackerman is made to develop from the condition of meaningless and futility in which we find him at the death of his father through a series of triumphs to a condition of positive strength: he overcomes the deep racial prejudice of a Vermont farmer in order to marry his daughter; he fights the most powerful men in his company to assert his right to be treated in the Army as a human being; he performs a magnificent act of heroism in battle out of sheer determination to prove himself; he becomes, in short, a living dynamo of Jewish fortitude.¹¹

The development and elevation of Ackerman would seem to be a value which was anything but zero. But of his three characters--Ackerman, Whitacre and Diestl--only the evil one, Diestl, emerges as believable. It is highly ironical and most significant that the one author among the entire group of novelists who attempts to write affirmatively of war fails at exactly this point and fails in proportion with his melodramatic affirmation. This is the most ironic of zeros. Shaw's accomplishments in this novel lie in the direction of the other novelists' accomplishments: a leveling and a wasting of men and their hopes.¹²

The Reduction to Zero is indeed a major theme in the World War II Novel.

11. Aldridge, op. cit., p. 154.

12. See an important quote from Shaw later in this paper in the Presence of Idealism theme discussion, Chapter III, pp. 57 and 58.

America is a democratic nation. The necessary military hierarchy and caste system is in opposition to our individual democratic background. To many of the men in service this caste system was completely unacceptable. Their repugnance for it ranged from mild dislike to sheer loathing. This attitude was noticed and recorded by the authors of the war novels. The greatest gap in the caste system is between the officer and enlisted ranks. It is the officers that are attacked most frequently. In many cases because the authors portray the officers as prejudiced, incompetent, and ignorant these assaults are merited. Thinkingly or unthinkingly, the writers of the war have recorded an attitude of hatred for the caste system.

This attitude is considered so often and so intensely that it must be recognized as a major theme, The Hatred of the Caste System.

. . . there is a general picture that emerges from all these books, becomes their most impressive feature. Different as the many authors are in character and in type of experience, they end by repeating almost the same message; that Americans aren't soldiers by choice, . . . they hate the Army caste system.¹³

Almost all the officers agree that a gulf exists between the two military castes.

Often the men complain of the special privileges granted to officers in respect to food, liquor and liberty. Some of the more sensitive officers, but only a few, are depicted as being ashamed to enjoy these privileges.¹⁴

13. Cowley, op. cit., p. 23.

14. Ibid., p. 24.

A short time ago (January 11, 1954) there was an editorial in Life Magazine. It was written in answer to a letter written by a German girl who had asked what books she should read to get a true picture of America. Whether or not the editors of Life produced a satisfactory answer is not to be noted here. They did however call her attention to a salient point concerning American World War II Fiction.

. . . when the smoke lifted, a number of our fiction writers--especially the younger ones--turned out books arguing that just about every officer of our Armed Forces was a caste-ridden, sadistic beast toward the enlisted men that he commanded.¹⁵

In his consideration of the novelists of the war for Father Gardiner's book, Fifty Years of the American Novel, Robert Healy notes that the average officer presented to us in the usual fiction of the war is either incompetent or a fascist or both.¹⁶

Healy goes on to say that in the novels, Mister Roberts, Tales of the South Pacific, Guard of Honor and Bell for Adano there is a different portrait of officers and men, a more rounded and hopeful picture. This is but his opinion and as far as Tales of the South Pacific and Mr. Roberts are concerned, much evidence is to be found to the contrary. Guard of Honor is concerned more with a race question than with the problem of command, and a Bell for Adano

15. "Letter to a Fraulein," Life, XXXVI, No. 2 (January 11, 1954), 22.

16. Robert Healy, Fifty Years of the American Novel, edited by H. Gardiner, S. J., p. 259.

does not have a true officer-enlisted-man situation in it.

There are, however, incidents that illustrate the gulf between the castes in these two books in spite of their pre-occupation with other problems.

In The Naked and the Dead this theme is most shockingly presented to us. Lt. Hearn is assigned to the recon platoon. Up until the time he takes command the platoon has been run by Sergeant Croft. Croft as an enlisted leader reacts violently to this loss of personal power.

Hearn was his foe. Without even stating it to himself, the attitude was implicit in everything Croft did. Automatically he considered it Hearn's fault that the transfer had been made, and resented him instinctively for it.¹⁷

Driven by this hatred Croft deliberately engineers the death of Hearn so that he will once again be in command.

This dislike and the caste system that fosters it is recognized not only by Americans but also by the peoples with whom they come in contact. Adele and Lisa, two of the female characters in The Girl on the Via Flaminia discuss it:

'Won't it be difficult,' Lisa asked, 'your going to Florence now?' 'Why?' 'It's forbidden for civilians to travel without a permit,' Lisa said. 'But I suppose for a soldier . . . !' 'Not a soldier, cara,' Nina said. 'An officer. In the American army there is a great difference.'¹⁸

17. Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead, p. 372.

18. Alfred Hayes, The Girl on the Via Flaminia, p. 24.

In his fourth "Promenade," John Horne Burns, through the medium of his character-speaker, sums up his attitude toward American officers. After a consideration of this attitude it is relatively easy to understand the Hatred-of-the-Caste-System theme and to see how it is developed in this fiction.

I know my Army officers pretty well, having observed them for years from the perspective of a pebble looking up and squinting at the white bellies of the fish nosing above it. Americans usually go mad when by direction of the President of the United States they put a piece of metal on their collars. They don't know whether they're the Lone Ranger, Jesus Christ, or Ivanhoe. Few Americans I ever knew could sustain the masquerade of an officer. Their grease paint kept peeling in unexpected places. I heard that in combat the good officers simply knew their men well and did them one better in daring. But to be a good officer out of combat demands a sort of shadowboxing between truth and posing. Europeans know the secret. But few Americans can play the nobleman without condescension or chicken.

American officers fall into three easy slots of the doughnut machine. The feminine ones, I mean those who register life and are acted upon by it, become motherly, fussy, and on the receiving end of the GI's under them. If they rule at all, it's by power of their gentleness, which can fasten a GI in tight bonds once his will consents and admires. Second, there are the violent and the aggressive, who as commissioned officers assume a male and fatherly part ranging from drunken pas who whale their sons on Saturday nights to the male and nursing tenderness of an athletic coach. Yet these most masculine men aren't always the best officers in a crisis or showdown. Third, there are those commissioned nonentities who as civilians were male stenographers, file clerks, and X-ray technicians. They are neither masculine nor feminine. They move through the army in polyp groups of their own sort. They're never alone. I can be in the same room with such officers without feeling the presence of anything or anyone. Touching their personalities is like poking at a

dish of lemon Jello. They smile and assume another shape.¹⁹

In the above statement, Burns puts into crisp, exact language what the other authors also feel and express in varying degrees of intensity.

Mr. Roberts is presented to us as a born leader. But he is set in an atmosphere that is dominated by this theme. He himself is engaged in the hatred of the system when he contributes to the resistance movement against the captain, the lawful military superior.

Just before some members of the crew present Roberts with a medal for his defiance of the captain, they discuss officers in general:

'We got a pretty good bunch of officers on here,' Stefanowski said. 'On the whole, I mean.'

Dowdy looked at him a little coldly. 'You know why don't you?' he said superiorly, and then he went on: 'Because they don't do anything, that's why. Because they just sit on their asses and don't give a damn about nothing. Hell, it's easy to be a nice guy that way, when you ain't trying to do anything. It's when you got work to be done, when you've got to turn to with a bunch of guys, that you can really tell a good officer. 'Old Roberts,' he said; 'now, there is really a good officer. He gets out there and turns to himself, and turns everyone else too and, by God, they still like him. He's still a nice guy and that's the test. Just because these other bastards lie in their sacks and don't bother anybody, you say they're all right. How the hell do you know?'²⁰

19. John Horne Burns, The Gallery, p. 139.

20. Heggen, op. cit., p. 151.

In Tales of the South Pacific this theme is presented to us in both a stated and implied manner.

The Commander-narrator notes: "He looked at me with the grim stare which officers see so often and which always means: 'What in hell are you doing here?'"²¹

Later on in the story he records the conversation of some of the men ashore at Kuralei, the island which is assaulted and taken as the climax of the story.

'I was thinking of over there,' Burke said. 'Them other guys at Beach Red. Poor bastards. We did all right. But this knuckle-brain Hendricks. You know, Eddie, honest to God, if I had a full bladder, I wouldn't let that guy lead me to a bathroom!'

'Yeah, maybe you're right. He's so dumb he's a colonel. That's all, a full colonel.'

'Please, Eddie, we've been through all that before. I got a brother wet the bed until he was eleven. He's a captain in the Army. So what? He's so dumb, I wouldn't let him make change in my store. Now he's a captain! So I'm supposed to be impressed by a guy that's a colonel! He's a butcher, that's what he is. Like I tell you a hundred times, the guy don't understand tactics.'²²

The Caine Mutiny was primarily concerned with officer actions in regard to other officers. But the theme is present and so are the evils of the caste system that cause it. Queeg, the captain of the ship, is explaining his views of the officer-enlisted relationship to Willie Keith. Willie has just been speaking to the captain on behalf of a seaman who was punished for reading on watch. Willie thinks that

21. Michener, op. cit., p. 301.

22. Ibid., p. 319.

because the captain is violating a regulation by transporting a personal stock of whiskey he should be a little easier on the seaman who has violated a regulation. It is the "rank hath its privileges" philosophy that intensifies the evil of the caste system.

'Sir, I'm not sure that reading on watch is any greater violation than transporting whiskey aboard ship.'

The captain laughed amiably. 'You've got a point there. But rank hath its privileges, Willie. An admiral can wear a baseball cap on the bridge. That doesn't mean the helmsman can. No, Willie, our job is to make damn sure that the enlisted men do as we say, not as we do.' (Jiggle, jiggle, jiggle.) 'And, as I say, the one way to make them do as we say is to get goddamn tough with them and make it stick.'²³

The attitude of the enlisted man is later presented when Willie Keith discusses the forthcoming trial of the same seaman with the seaman.

'Well, anyway, sir, this Callaghan, this yeoman said I sure as hell ought to plead not guilty. He says I'm a cinch to get acquitted. He's not an officer, so you can probably believe him.' 'That's how I figure it, sir,' the sailor said with perfect seriousness.²⁴

In the Young Lions we are shown that this officer hatred is not a peculiarly American trait. A column of German troops retreating from the French coastal defense area pass a staff car which has been machine-gunned by the Allied air; "'Officers,' said a voice behind him. 'They wanted to ride.'

23. Wouk, op. cit., p. 183.

24. Ibid., p. 262.

The man behind him spat."²⁵

This theme is further defined by Alfred Hayes in All Thy Conquests, when he describes the movements of two G. I.s on liberty in a captured town:

They slouched together up the Via Veneto, the bottle making a bulge inside Schulte's woolen shirt. Their uniforms were too hot, their boots too heavy. They moved, with that long unmilitary gait, past the entrances of embassies, shops, cafes, hotels. The sentries did not slap their rifles for them, they were not saluted, they were the concern only of the hustlers, the shoeshine boys, the women selling maps, the peddlers selling mosaic bracelets. They had no share in the life of the country, only in the destruction of it. They looked enviously and bitterly at the officers of their own army and country who sat, with women, in the cane chairs outside the cafes. The officers were clean with a cleanness they could not achieve;

Thus it has been seen that a Hatred-of-the-Caste-System theme existed and was of major import. Some authors listed the ills of the system. Some took specific viewpoints, officer and enlisted man. But all acknowledge the presence of a hatred for the system, a hatred that probably grows out of the relatively free and individualistic system of the United States.

Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils
Shrunk to this small measure?
--Julius Caesar, Act 3²⁷

25. Irwin Shaw, The Young Lions, p. 498.

26. Hayes, All Thy Conquests, p. 137.

27. Ibid., initial page.

This quotation appears on the opening page of All Thy Conquests. It is the keynote of the theme of the story. It could well be the keynote of a theme that is prevalent in all the war fiction that this thesis considers--the theme of the Defeat of Idealism. For in these novels idealism is defeated in a number of ways; individuals with various idealistic outlooks and aims are ground into the dust; liberated countries that eagerly welcomed the liberators find that they have merely substituted one bad master for another; the culture of the French and Italians was not freed from barbarous rule by the Americans but further subjected to it.

In general the novelists do not suggest that the war was foolish in its aims or that, given the temper of its people, it might have been avoided by wiser statesmanship. They were not disillusioned with the war itself--so much as they were with victory. And they are more than disillusioned; some of them are heartbroken at the contrast between our aims and efforts on one hand and our achievements on the other; between soldiers dying in the jungle and soldiers drinking in the Japanese houses of prostitution; between the delirious joy with which our men were greeted when they marched into a liberated city and the despair of the inhabitants when they learned that we could be just as ruthless as the Fascists with the people who had been pushed around already.²⁷

W. P. Albrecht wrote an article entitled, "War and Fraternity," for the New Mexico Quarterly Review. In it he defined fraternity as the absence of self-love, the desire to do good for the sake of others, an appreciation for, and the adoption of, a moral code. He points out that this

28. Cowley, op. cit., p. 24.

fraternity is absent in the World War II Novel. Generals, civilians, American soldiers and American society itself are found to be deficient in democratic values. Black marketing, race prejudice and anti-Semitism in the military are all paralleled by similar happenings at home. This last point is made quite clear by his consideration of the formation of the characters in The Naked and the Dead, or by an exposition of the motives, the real motives, of the crusaders in The Crusaders.²⁹

But it is his concluding thought that is most applicable in the illustration of the theme of Idealistic Defeat. He believes that all the writers fall into three groups:

The Pessimistic. Evil triumphs; the Liberal (or Idealist) is defeated as in The Naked and the Dead.

The Middle Group. Evil is halted, the Idealism of the democratic state is restricted rather than defeated as in Guard of Honor or Mr. Roberts.

The Optimistic. Evil is defeated, the Good of Idealism is consummated, but at great individual price, as in A Bell for Adano or The Young Lions.³⁰

The belief that the loss or defeat of ideals and idealism occurs repeatedly in the World War II fiction is further echoed by Wagenknecht's echo of Aldridge in The Cavalcade of the American Novel:

29. Stephan, The Crusaders.

30. Albrecht, op. cit., p. 461.

As for 'war novels' in the narrower sense of the term, their characteristic note, . . . is 'an elaborate documentation of wartime misery, ranging from the suffering of the common soldier under the fascist hierarchy of the American Army, to the sufferings of civilians in countries dominated by a corrupt American occupation force.' They 'stress the cruel disparity between our ideals and our practice, the ideals which won us the war and the practices which lost us the peace.'³¹

One of the Italian characters in All Thy Conquests sums up this shattering of ideals:

The Alleati have promised us a great deal. But the only thing that arrives in any quantity is barbed wire. Eventually I expect to see the peninsula from Taranto to Istria decorated with this symbol of military authority. We are liberated. We have been liberated from cigarettes, shoes, meat, gasoline, and our women. As for me, I look forward to a winter full of amusing demonstrations of friendliness on the part of the English. I expect to see the Mediterranean begin soon to fly into the Thames. As for the Americani, the French, and the Russians, all of whom so profoundly admire beautiful Italia, our art, our past, our culture--well, fratelli, all I can say is I would not like to be caught alone in the dark of a men's gabinetto with these great admirers of ours.³²

Four of the novels considered--The Girl on the Via Flaminia, A Bell for Adano, All Thy Conquests and The Gallery--concern themselves with our actions in Italy. It is in these four that the theme is strongest. This was the one country that was early freed by the American forces and used as a permanent advance base. Here, then, the difference between the intentions and accomplishments can best be

31. Edward Wagenknecht, The Cavalcade of the American Novel, p. 452.

32. Hayes, All Thy Conquests, p. 235.

studied. In France, the same situation existed, but for a shorter time. In four novels mentioned, the theme takes many different forms. It always presents the basic idea, that idealism is defeated.

In the liaison between Robert and Lisa in The Girl on the Via Flaminia, idealistic defeat is on the character level. She is an Italian girl, released from the German yoke by the all-conquering American Army.

Lisa is not a woman of the streets, but she is reluctantly driven by hunger into a liaison of convenience with the American soldier, Robert, a callow All-American type who looks to her for sex, not love.³³

In one of their first encounters she makes the statement that the people despise the Americans and then goes on to tell why.

'Italy has been invaded by barbarians before,' she said. . . . 'By what?' he said. 'Barbarians!' 'Now I'm a barbarian.' The barbarian thing annoyed. There was no reason it should have, more than the being stupid or arrogant or untrustworthy, but it did. 'Look,' he said, 'you may have Leonardo da Vinci, but we've got U. S. Steel . . . ' 'And it rusts,' she said. 'And Da Vinci peels . . . ' 'It lasts longer than metal!' 'But it ain't so hot on a tank,' he said . . . 'Why do the Americans boast so much?' she said. 'Why do the Italians complain so much?' he answered. 'We've suffered!' 'We didn't cause it,' he said. 'You bombed our cities.' 'The Germans were in them,' he said. 'And now you,' she said.³⁴

Later in the same story, an Italian boy, a former Axis soldier, speaks of the disillusionment that the Americans

33. Healy, op. cit., p. 267.

34. Hayes, All Thy Conquests, p. 52.

have caused.

'When we go into the street,' he said, leaning forward, accusing them, because of the uniform, 'what do we see? Your colonels, in their big cars, driving with women whose reputations were made in the bedrooms of fascist bureaucrats! With my country's enemies! Or your soldiers, drunk in our gutters. Or your officers, pushing us off our own sidewalks! Oh, the magnificent promises the radio made us! Oh, the paradise we'd have! Wait, wait--there will be bread, peace, freedom when the allies come! But, where is this paradise? Where is it signori--?'³⁵

Part of this defeat is presented in a myth-debunking form.

I don't know how much you know about General Marvin. Probably you just know what has been in the Sunday supplements.

Probably, you think of him as one of the heroes of the invasion; the genial, pipe-smoking, history-quoting, snappy-looking, adjective-defying, divisional commander; the man who still wears spurs even though he rides everywhere in an armored car; the man who fires twelve rounds from his captured Luger pistol every morning before breakfast; the man who can name you the hero and date of every invasion of Italy from the beginning of time; the father of his division and the beloved deliverer of Italian soil.

You couldn't be blamed for having this picture. You can't get the truth except from the boys who came home and finally limp out of the hospitals and even then the truth is bent by anger.

But I can tell you perfectly calmly that General Marvin showed himself during the invasion to be a bad man, something worse than our troops were trying to throw out.³⁶

The novelists did not make this failure of idealism a privately-owned, American commodity. In The Young Lions,

35. Hayes, The Girl on the Via Flaminia, p. 109.

36. John Hersey, A Bell for Adano, p. 42.

the Nazi idealist, Christian, encounters it.

The whole myth of comradeship in war . . . And the other men around him were swine. There was no getting away from it. They thanked God morning, noon and night they were in Rennes instead of outside Tripoli, or Kiev, and everyone of them was busy making all sorts of black-market deals with the French and putting away piles of money for the depression after the war. How be comrades with men like that? Money-lenders. War-dodgers in uniform. Whenever any of them was in danger of being sent to one of the fronts he pulled every wire imaginable, bribed regimental clerks, anything, to remain where he was.³⁷

In Mister Roberts this theme is presented to us in a particularly poignant fashion. The entire book, of course, dramatizes the difference between the heroics of war as it once was presumed to have existed and its degrading and dis-integrating actualities. The very name of the ship, Reluctant, and its itinerary between Tedium and Apathy herald the presence of the theme. Roberts tries throughout the whole story to get near the fighting war. Just as he achieves his objective he is killed by a suicide plane. This is a final idealistic defeat. But before it occurs, while Roberts is still on the Reluctant, he harasses the hated captain by throwing his pet palm tree overboard. Shortly afterward the crew awards him a medal on which is inscribed this sentiment: "Order of The Palm to Lieut. D. A. Roberts, for Action Against the Enemy, Above And Beyond The Call Of Duty, On The Night Of 8 May, 1945." When

37. Shaw, op. cit., p. 132.

the crew members have left, Roberts turns to his roommate and says, "Now I've got a medal to show my grandchildren . . . ; and for the first time in perhaps fifteen years he felt like crying."³⁸

Beach Red is unique because of its taut, prose-poetic style. At the end of each section there is a short, sharp comment that sums up that which has gone immediately before, i. e., "Happiness is a good thing. Somebody ought to start it." And it speaks of the why of the war we are fighting with the same caustic insight.

. . . Ask a Jap
 what he fights for and he will tell you that
 he has also come a long way to protect his
 home and family. So there you have it. Americans
 and
 Japs fighting for the thing they had before they
 started
 to fight and giving them up in order to fight
 for them. Christ, it doesn't make sense. The
 ordinary American
 wants no part of a Jap's house, and the common
 Jap would be miserable living in America. And yet
 one
 of them commits an act of aggression in response
 to
 an order, and the other rises to retaliate in
 accordance
 with national conscription and they both endeavor
 to kill each
 other when commanded to do so. There are little
 people
 and there are big people, and the little people
 are
 in the overwhelming majority, but just the same
 they always
 do what the big people tell them to do. And
 that is at once the silliest and the most out-
 rageously

38. Heggen, op. cit., p. 154.

impertinent form of tyranny the world has ever
 known, for
 it is the persecution of the many by the few.
 Battle doesn't determine who is right. Only who
 is left.³⁹

There were many examples of the theme in Tales of the South Pacific, but one of the most succinct and revealing occurred in the chapter entitled, "The Cave."

'Sir!' an enlisted man called out from the path almost directly above us on the hillside. 'V. I. P. coming ashore!' 'Where?' Charlesworth cried. As an Annapolis man he was terribly attentive when any V. I. P. was about. He had long since learned that half his navy job was to fight Japs. The other half was to please 'very important persons' when they chanced to notice him. Like all Annapolis men, he knew that a smile from a V. I. P. was worth a direct hit on a cruiser.⁴⁰

This last statement is made by the author about one of his good characters. The navy officer, Charlesworth, goes on to do great things and is held up as an example of a competent officer. It is quite a cynical comment to say that he has learned the value of a V. I. P.'s smile. It is a demonstration of the far-from-ideal conditions that exist.

In the Caine Mutiny, the failure of idealism is presented most strongly in the climactic, after-trial speech of Greenwald in which the Jewish lawyer admits that he had used unfair tactics to get an innocent man cleared by a court-martial that never should have occurred in the first

39. Bowman, op. cit., p. 110. The lines of Bowman are presented as they are written in the book, thirty lines to a page, ten words to a line.

40. Michener, op. cit., p. 152.

place. He brings out the fact that Keefer, one of the really evil forces, is going to get away untouched. Maryk, the honest man, is through in the Navy, his choice of a life's work.⁴¹

The angriest, most fervent presentation of this theme is in The Gallery. Burns lists explicitly that which other officers have mentioned only partially.

I remember that my heart finally broke in Naples. Not over a girl, or a thing, but over an idea. When I was little, they'd told me I should be proud to be an American. And I suppose I was, though I saw no reason I should applaud every time I saw the flag in a newsreel. But I did believe the American way of life was an idea holy in itself, an idea of freedom bestowed by intelligent citizens on one another. Yet after a little while in Naples I found that America was a country just like any other, except that she had more material wealth and more advanced plumbing. And I found that outside of the propaganda writers (who were making a handsome living from the deal) Americans were poor spiritually. Their ideals were something to make dollars on. They had bankrupt souls. Perhaps this is true of most of the people of the twentieth century. Therefore my heart broke.

I remember that this conceit came home to me in the crudest black and white. In Naples in 1944 we Americans had everything. The Italians, having lost the war, had nothing. And what was the war really about? I decided that it was because most of the people in the world didn't have the cigarettes, the gasoline, and the food that we Americans had.

I remember my mother teaching me out of her wisdom that the possession of Things implies a responsibility for Their use, that They shouldn't be wasted, that having Things should never dominate my living. When this happens, Things become more important than People. Comfort then becomes the be-and-end-all of human life. And when other

41. Wouk, op. cit., p. 447.

people threaten your material comfort, you have no recourse but to fight them. It makes no difference who attacks whom first. The result is the same, a killing and a chaos that the world of 1944 wasn't big enough to stand.

Our propaganda did everything but tell us Americans the truth: that we had most of the riches of the modern world, but very little of its soul. We were nice enough guys in our own country, most of us; but when we got overseas, we couldn't resist the temptation to turn a dollar or two at the expense of people who were already down. I speak only of Italy, for I didn't see France or Germany. But with our Hollywood ethics and our radio network reasoning we didn't take the trouble to think out the fact that the war was supposed to be against fascism--not against every man, woman and child in Italy. . . . But then a modern war is total. Armies on the battlefield are simply a remnant from the old kind of war. In the 1944 war everyone's hand ended by being against everyone else's. Civilization was already dead, but nobody bothered to admit this to himself.

I remember the crimes I saw committed against the Italians as I watched them in Naples. In the broadest sense we offered the Italians security and democracy if they came over to our side. All we actually did was knock the hell out of their system and give them nothing to put in its place. And one of the most tragic spectacles in all history was the Italians' faith in us--for a little while, until we disabused them of it. It seemed to me like the swindle of all humanity, and I wondered if perhaps we weren't all lost together. Collective and social decency didn't exist in Naples in August 1944. And I used to laugh at our attempts at relief and control there, for we undid with one hand what we did with the other. . . .

For all this that I saw I could only attribute a deficient moral and humane sense to Americans as a nation and as a people. I saw that we could mouth democratic catchwords and yet give the Neapolitans a huge black market. I saw that we could prate of the evils of fascism, yet be just as ruthless as Fascists with people who had already been pushed into the ground. That was why my heart broke in Naples in August 1944.⁴²

42. Burne, op. cit., p. 302 ff.

It is almost unnecessary, after a consideration of the selections in this chapter, to state that there was an awareness of the defeat of idealism in the novel of the Second World War. It was present in a powerful form. For some authors it was an important part of their story, a part to be developed along with the rest of the elements, as in The Caine Mutiny or Beach Red. For other authors, it was the story, as in The Gallery or All Thy Conquests. But regardless of the part it played, it was a major theme in the American World War II Novel.

The Presence of Prejudice is a strong theme in this fiction.

Martha Foley, writing in the December, 1948 Survey Graphic, states that war fiction mirrors America. In the article she points out the prevalence of prejudice, anti-Negro, anti-Semitic and other, in the American war novel. She cites a personal instance in which she encountered a bigoted member of the American Military Government. This meeting causes her to ask:

One question is--what of the military governments we have abroad now, if helping administer them are bigoted, prejudiced men like the one we met in the restaurant that evening? That there must be many of them is obvious from the number of times anti-Semitic, anti-Negro sentiments are vociferously expressed by characters in our war novels.⁴³

43. Foley, op. cit., p. 499.

This idea of prejudice is not something new to the American writers. When men from all walks of life and areas of the country came into service they brought with them their civilian beliefs and prejudices. If anything these prejudices were intensified by the unpleasantness and limitations of service conditions. The individual intolerant G. I. is a microcosm of the area he represents. The author's portrayal of the bigot is a comment on the bigotry that exists in the nation, more embittered and ironic, to be sure, under the pressure and necessities of war. One of the novels that was considered in the research for this paper was The Last of the Conquerors by William Gardner Smith. Its main theme is this anti-Negro prejudice.

Its real value lies in its portrait of a military ghetto--of what the Negro soldier feels, thinks and hopes for, and what he found--ironically, in the wrong country.⁴⁴

The story concerns a young Negro army man who is sent to Germany on occupation duty. It is a sort of a journal of the friendly treatment he received from the German people and the prejudice-inspired persecution of the same individual by the color-conscious members of the army. All the things that he was denied in America he found in Germany, i. e., acceptance, tolerance, an opportunity to live in complete color freedom. Finally when a group of colored soldiers are ordered home for an unmerited bad conduct

44. Dempsy, op. cit., p. 1.

discharge, some of them go A. W. O. L. rather than go back to the "home of the free."

The Young Lions is the book in which this theme is the strongest. The entire story is an attack on anti-Semitism. In his effort to attack this evil strongly and bitterly, he makes the war and consequently his novel revolve around the prejudice and as a result of this emphasis there is a decided feeling of disproportion.

This anti-Semitism is first strongly stated when Noah Ackerman's father dies. Noah calls the undertaker:

'One more thing, my dear man,' the voice went on. 'One more thing. The last rites.'

'What about the last rites?'

'What religion does the deceased profess?'

Jacob had professed no religion, but Noah didn't think that he had to tell the man that.

'He was a Jew.'

'Oh.' There was silence for a moment on the wire and then Noah heard the woman's voice say, gayly and drunkenly, 'Come on, George, let's have another little drink.'

'I regret,' the man said, 'that we are not equipped to handle funeral services on Hebrews.'

'What's the difference?', Noah shouted. 'He wasn't religious, he doesn't need any ceremonies.'

'Impossible,' the voice said thickly, but with dignity. 'We do not cater to Hebrews. I'm sure you can find many others . . . many others who are equipped to cremate Hebrews.' . . .

Then the woman got on the phone. 'Listen,' she said loudly, her voice brassy and whiskey-rich, 'why don't you quit? We're busy here. You heard what George said. He don't burn Kikes. Happy New Year.' She hung up.⁴⁵

Goldstein and Roth, the two Jewish members of the recon platoon are the object of this prejudice in The Naked and

45. Mailer, op. cit., p. 52.

the Dead. The members of the platoon brutally rebuff all Goldstein's attempts at friendship.

He was tired of hoping to make friends with them; they didn't want to get along with him, they hated him. Goldstein smacked his fist against his palm in exasperation. 'How can You permit the Anti-Semites to live, God?' he asked. He was not religious, and yet he believed in a God, a personal God with whom he could quarrel.⁴⁶

Later Goldstein was called a "Dirty Kike" by Gallagher, another member of the platoon:

He seethed, but with more than self-pity now. He understood. He was the butt because there always had to be a butt. A Jew was a punching bag because they could not do without one.⁴⁷

This happens just before he is killed while attempting to hurdle a gap in a mountain ledge.

Prejudice does not play a strong part in The Caine Mutiny, but it is present.

Willie liked Jews in a group, for their warmth, humor and alertness. This was true though his home was in a real estate development where Jews could not buy.⁴⁸

The issue comes up again in the trial of Maryk, the trial in which he is defended by the Jewish lawyer.

In the corridor, Greenwald lounged against the wall and remarked to Maryk, 'Captain Blakely doesn't like Jews. Intonations on the name Greenwald. I have an absolute pitch for those harmonies.'⁴⁹

46. Mailer, op. cit., p. 178.

47. Ibid., p. 558.

48. Wouk, op. cit., p. 20.

49. Ibid., p. 386.

Captain Motes is the subject of the sixth "Portrait" in The Gallery. He is a Southerner and is assigned to be the commanding officer of a company of colored soldiers. "Every month Captain Motes put in for a transfer away from his nigras."⁵⁰ He is finally reduced to playing solitaire and saying, "These goddam nigras will drive me mad."⁵¹

In the last "Portrait," Moe, the Jewish lieutenant, speaks with a Jewish captain:

. . . sometimes I se funny looks. Den dey're say-ink, He's a Yid and he's got two silver bars and he can't tuk American. So who is this Yid to be commanding us? Let him go back to the pawn shop.⁵²

At least a third of Guard of Honor is built around a "race incident." The Air Force is attempting to form an all-colored bomber group. The arrival of this group at the air base and their subsequent segregation form part of the main plot. A fair analysis of the colored problem is presented to us through the thoughts of Judge Ross, Colonel Ross, the commanding general's chief advisor.

Behind a black face might be a courageous spirit and a sharp intelligence; but you must expect both to be dampened and spoiled by the inbred resignation, the experience of generations bitterly resenting, yet always resenting impotently, the white man's yoke. Every day the white man's greed and folly proved that his claimed superiority was a lie. He was not clever; he was not strong; he was not good; he was nobody's born

50. Burns, op. cit., p. 91.

51. Ibid., p. 191.

52. Ibid., p. 325.

master. All he was, was, to a black man's sorrow and shame, a little too much for most black men.⁵³

The above was an honest evaluation of the situation.

But as evidenced by the excerpts below, the majority of the characters did not think this way.

This bomb group here--if and when it's activated! Does any one in his right senses think that it will stack up with a good white medium-bomb group? Jesus God: by and large, man by man, they just haven't got it! The Bible says hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that was no fooling! Look around you, use your eyes, ask anyone! Talk to Colonel Mandible, commands the Engineer Corps here. He was telling me last week. What those jigaboos can do to machinery and equipment would break your heart! Give them a new truck, and in a week it's ruined. Give them a machine gun and in ten minutes it won't fire. Take away the white officers, and by night your squadron paperwork will be screwed up so nobody can ever straighten it out; . . .⁵⁴

What you're trying to say is that a Negro is equal to a white man. Don't you see that if he was equal, you wouldn't have to be demanding 'rights' for him? . . . The two races just aren't equal. Anyone who says they are, either doesn't have good sense, or doesn't know Negroes. . . . No amount of chances, and nothing I could do, would change the fact that a Negro happens to be a member of a relatively inferior race; physically, mentally, every way. It may be too bad, from his standpoint, and yours; but it's true.⁵⁵

All Thy Conquests also gives us an example of the problem of prejudice.

I ain't for keepin' niggers down but I ain't for holding them up. They can go ahead and advance theirselves far as they want but I don't

53. Cozzens, op. cit., p. 135.

54. Ibid., p. 204.

55. Ibid., p. 272.

want and I won't stand for no nigger come rubbin' up against me in a bus or sittin' in my lap in a movie house or longside me in a cafe. I'd shoot a nigger fore I'd allow him to start doin' what he do up North. I do believe that, Frenchy. I do believe I would.

From there it went to the bar. At the bar it got to how when you were in the line with the jigs why the Pinetree boys were always having to go in and take back the ground the boys in the Buffalo lost; and then it went from there to how they should have left all the jigs in Naples or in Leghorn to run the motor pools because all a jig could do anyway was run a truck, in the line they were no good.⁵⁶

The prejudice theme is present in the Tales of the South Pacific. One of the cases has a slightly different twist. Ensign Nellie Forbush is in love with Emile De Becque, a French planter. But because of her racial beliefs she doubts that she can marry him.

Emile De Becque, not satisfied with Javanese and Tonkinese women, had also lived with a Polynesian. A nigger! To Nellie's tutored mind any person living or dead who was not white or yellow was a nigger. And beyond that no words could go! Her entire Arkansas upbringing made it impossible for her to deny the teachings of her youth. Emile De Becque had lived with the nigger. He had nigger children. If she married him, they would be her stepdaughters. . . .

He had read of America. He knew something of its mores and shibboleths. And yet Nellie was correct in assuming that no Frenchman could understand why, to an Arkansas girl, a man who had openly lived with a nigger was beyond the pale. Utterly beyond the bounds of decency!⁵⁷

The name of the theme is the Presence of Prejudice. In all the above cases it was demonstrated positively. A

56. Hayes, All Thy Conquests, p. 246.

57. Michener, op. cit., p. 113.

section from Tales of the South Pacific points it up in a negative manner. It describes Commander Hoag, points out his good qualities, the fact that he was unprejudiced. Unless this prejudice were present, it would not be necessary to cite a man for the lack of it. The latter part of the excerpt shows that at the Commander's death, things have returned to their former state of active prejudice.

I thought of Hoag as I knew him, a man who never buttoned his shirt properly. He was from Atlanta, but he championed the Negro. He was a rich man, but he befriended the meanest enlisted man. He was a Gentile, but he placed Jews in a position of command. He was a man tired with responsibility, but he saw to it that others got rest. Yet when he died, a loud-mouthed bully came along to take his place. One night he called Pearlstein a Kike. Threatened to have no more trouble with a bunch of goddamned niggers. Called hardworking Di Vito a 'grease ball, and you know how they stand up in war!⁵⁸

These, then, are manifestations of the major theme of prejudice that can be found in, and is common to, the World War II Novel. They individually reflect the same big and serious problem of our country, sharpened and intensified by its presence in the middle of a conflict that was supposed, among other things, to do away with prejudice.

Three minor themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

58. Michener, op. cit., p. 325.

CHAPTER III
THE MINOR THEMES

The three minor themes presented in this chapter will be The Adverse Criticism of the United States, The Familiar Landmarks and The Presence of Idealism.

There is in these works a persistent thread of adverse criticism of the United States. It is separate and distinct from the criticism of this country by the peoples with which our military came in contact. It is present enough to deserve the title of theme. But The Adverse Criticism of the United States is not strong enough to be termed a major theme.

In The Naked and The Dead, Norman Mailer describes Americans departing for war as 'a bunch of the dispossessed . . . from the raucous, stricken bosom of America.' This is not an isolated opinion. In various ways it recurs time and time again in the fiction of World War II, fortunately counterbalanced by an opinion of America and Americans which is more optimistic and hopeful. The representative major novels of World War II are at once a criticism and defense of American society.¹

Hoffman puts it this way: "There is in these novels, [the American novels of the war], an explicit and implicit criticism of American culture that reaches deep into the

1. Healy, op. cit., p. 257.

leftist attitudes of the thirties."²

And again, from another source:

Not only the generals, not only the civilian soldiers, but American society itself is found to be deficient in democratic values. Americans, according to Mailer's general, have an 'exaggerated idea of rights due themselves as individuals and no idea at all of the rights of others.' Black marketing, corruption in Military Government, race prejudice, and sexual license are all paralleled by activities on the home front.³

Many of the authors do not realize that the problems they present are problems that exist in our normal, civilian society. These problems have been intensified through the necessity of the war. Authors that this paper is considering are primarily concerned with writing a novel of the war. They are not deliberately attempting to present a criticism of the United States. This is why the theme is minor. Those who realize that their characters are a commentary on the society that spawned them have subordinated this realization to the aims of their particular war novel. Those who are unconscious of the adverse reflection of American culture that their characters make contribute to the theme but only in an incidental and accidental way.

In The Young Lions, Michael Whitacre is in California right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On his way to breakfast the next morning he notices a crowd outside the

2. Hoffman, op. cit., p. 172.

3. Albrecht, op. cit., p. 467.

neighborhood bank. It is composed of panic-stricken people who are going to get their money out before the Japanese come and bomb the vaults. This lack of faith prompts Whitacre to wonder:

Are these the people, created on greatness by the work of Jefferson and Franklin, he thought, are these the bitter farmers, hunters and craftsmen who came out of the wilderness, furious for liberty and justice, is this the new world of giants sung by Whitman?⁴

Still later in the story, just before he is drafted, Whitacre again considers the people and the country for which he is going to fight.

This was a time for roistering and wild-eyed soldiers, crazy with faith, oblivious of death. Michael could see no faith-madness around him. Civilians saw too much of the cheapness of war for faith . . . the chicanery and treachery of the lovers of six per cent, of the farm bloc, and the business bloc, and the labor bloc. He had gone into the good restaurants and seen the great boom of heavy eaters, the electric excitement and pleasure of the men and women who were making good money and spending it before the government claimed it.⁵

In the World War II Novel the individual characters criticize explicitly and the entire work does the same implicitly. But these spoken and unspoken attacks are not the point of concentration of the novel. They are present, not as often as the major themes, more as something minor than with the intense presence of the themes that I have

4. Shaw, op. cit., p. 174.

5. Ibid., p. 212.

designated major.

One very sharp criticism on the objective, explicit, personal level is to be found in Beach Red.

G. I. Joe they call him. 'G. I. Joe,' they say,
 as
 if it were something cute and cunning to be smiled
 at patronizingly. Sure, lots of laffs. Plenty of
 jokes. The
 grinning kid. That's Joe. Ain't he a fetching
 little fella?
 If all there was to it was just washing his
 socks in his helmet. If all there was to it
 was just spending a night in a foxhole. If all
 there was to it was just eating the same tasteless
 rations out of a can three times a day. If
 all there was to it was just swinging down a
 road while the Public Relations Office photog-
 rapher took his picture--
 then he would believe the people who say how mag-
 nificent
 he is and how full of good humor he remains
 and how he is conducting himself through a dirty
 business
 with the dignity and courage and laughter of an
 American.⁶

Mention has already been made of the criticism of the United States that was set forth in The Gallery.⁷

These are brief illustrations of the theme of Adverse Criticism of the United States. It is a criticism of the people that were in the States when the man criticizing was overseas, it is a criticism of the thought of America, and it is a criticism of the system that formed that thought.

The G. I. is presented to us as a morally and frequently mentally bankrupt individual. Most of the American

6. Bowman, op. cit., p. 101.

7. See pp. 35 and 36 of this thesis.

characters in the novel, the men who make up the woof and warf of the material, are spiritually and mentally impoverished. Even though this criticism of the United States is not intended as the main theme of the novel and, indeed, does not seem to be recognized by some of its creators, it still is of value as a highly effective commentary on the American way of life, and the American letters that describe it. The German girl who has read our fiction and then asks the question Life rather haltingly tries to answer--where can one find an American book which contains and explains the good, dedicated young Americans she has seen around her in Munich--is making the point that we are attempting to make.⁸

We have been given a primitive man, labeled American G. I. His very presence is sharp criticism, indeed.

In the theme-designation, The Familiar Landmarks, Landmark means a sign or symbol significant of home that kept recurring in this fiction. It has been said in many places more or less seriously that the stock things for which Americans fought in the Second World War were Coca-Cola, blueberry pie, and a seat in the center-field bleachers. It is not the purpose of this thesis to judge the advisability of these landmarks. The fact that they are present, and inasmuch as they are present often, they form a

8. "Letter to a Fraulein," Life, XXXVI, No. 2 (January 11, 1954), 28.

material articulated sufficiently to be called a theme. Because of their nature, that of an arbitrary selection, they could not be termed a major theme. Whiskey and Soda could be just as well substituted for a landmark of American life. These things, Coca-Cola, blueberry pie, etc., have been arbitrarily but consistently presented to us as symbols of home. Their presence did not contribute materially to a plot, nor was their use intense enough to merit a major classification.

In God is my Co-Pilot, the G. I.'s agreed that what they were fighting for was, after all, the American girl. To us, they said, she meant cokes, hamburgers and clean places to sleep.⁹

In Beach Red, Bowman describes one of his characters by comparing his present position, jungle fighting, with what had been promised him, theoretically, by his date of birth: "The calendar slapped him on the back and offered laughter and pretty ankles and seats on the 50 yard line and a coke at the corner drugstore . . ." ¹⁰

Later in the same book there is a list of the things that matter to a combat infantryman.

Here's what really matters to him: a paved street
lined
with familiar trees and a grassy lawn and a car
and a girl and a hamburger joint and a crowd
coming out of a movie and a hot bath and

9. H. McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride, p. 118.

10. Bowman, op. cit., p. 12.

a gay necktie and the labor of a trolley going uphill and a glossy pond and peanuts behind third base.¹¹

Obviously the authors would have to use some device to indicate the past that the men had left behind. It is the fact that the authors used the same, or nearly the same symbols that is of interest. It points either at a shallowness or insensitivity in the author, or at the same defects in the people about whom he is writing.

In All Thy Conquests there is recorded the following conversation of a group of rear-area, chairborne troopers. They are attempting to pass themselves off as combat toughened troops. So they speak in the idiom of those troops.

A bluff colonel. Played end for West Point. They all played end for West Point. West Point or Notre Dame, and they were always in there before the infantry. That and it was very fashionable now to say you were frightened. Honest stuff: you were doing it for blueberry pie, and you admitted you were frightened.¹²

In some cases the prevalence of the same landmarks is so strong that it would seem as if some of the novelists had either used the same source or copied from one another.

She loved the faces of airplane drivers, so fresh and smiling, unsoured by their grim task. They were never bitter like the infantrymen, and they were never over twenty-four, even if they were full colonels. They were the sort of kids you saw in drugstores who drank cokes, listened to juke boxes and whistled at girls.¹³

11. Bowman, op. cit., p. 104.

12. Hayes, All Thy Conquests, p. 213.

13. Burns, op. cit., p. 46.

This was from The Gallery. Later in the same book, there is a description of the action taken when Washington began to get worried that the foreign thought might affect the American G. I.

Perhaps in Washington, the generals had their doubts about the perfect probity of the American way of life and wished to make sure that overseas we wouldn't come in contact with any other. Consequently we were flooded with American movies and with Coca-cola to distract our wandering attention and to insure that we wouldn't fall into dangerous furren ways of thinking.¹⁴

The theme appears twice in Mister Roberts.

He had been dreaming and in his dream his dead mother was there; it was summer at home and he was going out to play tennis. His mother was sitting on the porch drinking a coca-cola¹⁵

In the sixth chapter a feud between two of the officers is considered to reach very serious proportions when one refuses the other a coke.

The soft-drink presentation of the world at home is present also in Mailer's work.

He looked at the tied bundle of envelopes, sighed and stamped on them, 'Addressee Killed in Action.' He was about to put the letters in one of the bags at his feet, when he noticed the return address. He skimmed through the letters and discovered it was the same on all of them. 'Hey, look at this,' he said to his assistant. The return address on the letters was 'Mom and Dad, 12 Riverdale Avenue, Tachuchet, Indiana.' The assistant read it to himself and thought for a moment of a rosy-cheeked man and woman with graying hair, the Mom and Pop of a thousand billboard ads for soft drinks and

14. Burns, op. cit., p. 309.

15. Heggen, op. cit., p. 41.

mouth washes and toothpastes. 'Gee, isn't it sad,' he said. 'Yeah, it sure is.' 'Makes you think,' the assistant said.¹⁶

The writers used this device, the listing of the same familiar symbol, as a landmark. The soft drink was taken to represent all America. Because it was used so frequently and earnestly it can be called a theme.

But besides being a theme, the use of familiar landmarks can also be a comment on the authors and the culture about which they write. Mr. Roberts recalls a scene of nostalgia concerning his dead mother, and the author puts a coke bottle in her hand. It is a comment on the sloppiness of Heggen's writing.¹⁷

The majority of the writers use as a symbol of America, the soft drink. It would seem as if the French were right and that we did have a Coca-cola culture.¹⁸

We have seen in the earlier part of this thesis that the defeat of idealism is a major theme of the fiction we are examining. Idealism and good people are present to some extent, however. But, probably because idealism is not believed in by the majority of the novelists or their characters, the Presence of Idealism is not a major theme.

16. Mailer, op. cit., p. 225.

17. There is always the possibility in our present-day fiction, which draws so heavily on the auto-biographical, that Mr. Heggen's mother drank that particular beverage, but an author must be aware of the danger of his falling into cliché and cheapening his effect.

18. "The Sun Never Sets on Cacoola," Time, LV, No. 20 (May 15, 1950), 28-32.

A characteristic of almost all the books is the number of good persons they depict in the midst of what seems to be a hopeless world, i. e., Lt. Moe Schulman in The Gallery, Carla in All Thy Conquests, Goldstein and Ridges in The Naked and the Dead, Mr. Roberts in Mister Roberts.¹⁹

Mr. Roberts would almost be an exception. He and his idealism are the moving force of the novel. Therefore in this one case it would be a theme of major proportion. But in the rest of the works, with one important exception, the presence of idealism is of minor consideration.

Sometimes this quality is presented as an aside or a secondary paragraph as in Beach Red:

You only see buckskin shirts in the movies these days
but the sharpshooter's eye is still there, and the guts
and the insolent coolness and the large chew of tobacco.
You're exhilarated and giddy at being part of all this,
and you feel that nothing can stop you now. Nothing.
You can go and bring back the whole universe on the end of your bayonet and stamp it neatly with your regimental insignia and you can lift the ocean
and all its ships and put it in your fieldpack and you can load the stars in your rifle's chamber and nonchalantly take some rifle practice at the whirling cosmos.
It's a corny feeling and a hammy feeling and a kidstuff feeling to be able to look anyone straight in
the eye and say, 'Hell, man--I was there, too.'
But it's a strong feeling and it's a big feeling and you see it reflected in the men around you.²⁰

19. Cowley, op. cit., p. 24.

20. Bowman, op. cit., p. 25.

This idealism is not always put on exhibition and labeled if even in the apologetic terms of Mr. Bowman. Sometimes an author will bring it out in the description of a routine job.

They had but one thing in common. Each man as he came in to see me, fingered his hat and looked foolish. Almost all of them said something like: 'I hear you got a job,' or 'What's this about a job?' I have since learned that when the Japs want volunteers for something unduly risky, their officers rise and shout at the men about ancestors, emperors, and glory. In the Sea Bees, at least, you sort of pass the word around, and pretty soon forty guys come ambling in with their hats in their hands, nervous like.²¹

Or else the author makes mention of a single, small occurrence:

I was flown down to Konora to recruit aviation replacements for IARU 8, which had been destroyed at Kuralei. As always there was ten volunteers for each job up front.²²

In Guard of Honor, one of the minor characters is a happy-go-lucky pilot. Cozzens uses him to illustrate the presence of this idealism. Notice the careful underplaying, indeed the carefully perverse expression of idealism as "bushwah" in a society of individuals afraid to be caught in openly labeled idealism.

He wiped his lips on the back of his hand and said: 'Gashed with honorable scars, low in glory's lap they lie. Though they fell, they fell like stars, streaming splendor down the sky!' As-tounded, Nathaniel Hicks said: 'What's that,

21. Michener, op. cit., p. 244.

22. Ibid., p. 319.

Gene? Bushwah?' 'It's a poem,' Captain Wiley said, grinning. 'Sure, it's bushwah. Here's some more I read.' He frowned attentively. 'Their shoulders held the sky suspended; they stood and earth's foundations stay; what God abandoned, they defended, and saved the sum of things for pay.' He smiled with pleasure. 'Makes you think, Nat!' he said.

It did indeed; Nathaniel Hicks reflected. It was wise to bear in mind that the man who de-claimed against bushwah usually concealed some-where in him the ordinary deep human love of it.²³

Major Joppolo reflects this idealism for the Italian people of the town of Adano. They are unable to comprehend the workings of democracy and he calls the town council together and explains it to them.

Democracy is this: democracy is that the men of the government are no longer the masters of the people. They are the servants of the people. What makes a man master of another man? It is that he pays him for his work. Who pays the men in the government? The people do, for they pay the taxes out of which you are paid.²⁴

Idealism in these novels takes many forms. It is present in The Caine Mutiny when Willie decides to stop playing the piano for the admiral's parties and go to sea.²⁵ It is present in The Naked and the Dead in the actions of Lt. Hearn. Moe Schulman, the infantry officer of The Gallery, exhibits it when he tries to save the lives of some captured Germans.²⁶ It is present as a theme all through this

23. Cozzens, op. cit., p. 213.

24. Hersey, op. cit., p. 240.

25. Wouk, op. cit., p. 63.

26. Burns, op. cit., p. 391.

fiction. But because it does not (with the exception of The Young Lions and Mister Roberts) contribute materially to the plot and story development, it is a minor theme.

The Young Lions is the only one of these novels that is openly idealistic. Shaw is attempting to carry a message. He fails. He portrays three characters for us. The only one that emerges as an individual is the evil one, Diestl. The idealistic one, Ackerman, never really jells. The more idealistic he becomes, the more goodness is piled on his back, the more he resembles a man of straw. Shaw does not seem to be able to write believable idealism. Perhaps it is because of our cynical society that has this reluctance for idealism as a heritage from the Thirties. The following excerpt from Shaw's avowedly idealistic novel illustrates its real strength, which is in fact anti-idealistic. Idealism is actually put into practice only at the combat infantry level, and then only under the most pressing circumstances, when man has been reduced to near animality. Shaw's very figure and the words which describe this basic equality and idealism are a mockery, a paraphrase of the ideal, Christian state.

The exiles, living in mud and fear of death, had, in one way, at least, found a better home than those from which they had been driven, a blood spattered Utopia, now on the fringe of German soil where no man was rich and none poor, a shellburst democracy where all living was a community enterprise, where all food was distributed according to need and not according to pocket, where light, heat, lodging, transportation, medical attention, and funeral arrangements were at the cost of the government and available with

absolute impartiality to black and white, Jew and Gentile, worker and owner, where the means of production, in this case M1's, 30 cal. machine guns, 90's, 105's, 204's, mortars, bazookas, were in the hands of the masses; the ultimate Christian socialism in which all worked for the common good and the only leisure class were the dead.²⁷

27. Shaw, op. cit., p. 574.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

It was stated in the preface of this thesis that the object of the thesis was to look for common themes in the fiction of the Second World War. This field was felt to be plastic, still incomplete in both the departments of original work and criticism of that work. But the recognition of themes could be done now and could possibly serve as groundwork for the future criticism. The seven themes identified are present in a significant way in the fiction of World War II. Their critical interpretation may vary, even diametrically change, but the themes themselves are a constant factor.

Seven themes have been shown, four major and three minor. There were two other themes not formally discussed because of their obvious and common nature. One of them is the presence of sex in these works. Its existence in the World War II Novel is a commonly known fact. Father Gardiner's essayist Healy makes the observation:

. . . sex also wore a uniform as the fifth horseman of the Apocalypse. Like every part of normal human activity, sex was highlighted in the abnormal situation of war.¹

1. Gardiner, op. cit., p. 259.

He makes this statement in a paragraph in which he is discussing sex as the one unifying factor common to all war novels. Because of the common knowledge of this and because of the frequently strong expression of the matter in the novels, it did not seem necessary nor prudent to subject it to exposition.

The other theme not discussed was the language of the novels. This thesis does not seem to be the place to discuss the very old question of an imprudent or inaccurate expression versus artistic integrity. It suffices to say that the common usage of common language constituted a theme in this work. This use ranged from the effectiveness of coarse speech in Mister Roberts at one end to the monotonous repetition of it in The Naked and the Dead at the other.

Preliminary research and thought on this fiction indicated that two specific ideas might assume the stature of a theme. They did not assume this import but they are worthy of a passing mention. One was the "what-am-I-doing-here?" idea or question, and the other was an attempt to define war. The former was strongly presented in The Gallery but it received little attention elsewhere. It would seem that soul-searching, at least of this particular type, is not an important characteristic of the American. Or is this the most condemnatory criticism of all, that the American is too disinterested in anything beyond the personal on a most obvious level, his comfort or safety, to ask, "What am I doing here?" The novelists do not help us with this problem

except perhaps negatively and unconsciously.

The attempt at a definition of war was sketchily made in Tales of the South Pacific, The Caine Mutiny and All Thy Conquests. Most of the novelists accepted General Sherman's definition without question. Neither of these ideas was put forth with sufficient intensity of purpose or appearance to be called a theme.

It was originally intended merely to catalogue the themes. But it would be impossible to do this without forming opinions about the themes or the men who made them. Each theme was a commentary on both its specific field and the man who presented it. By studying the themes we are able to form a picture of the literary heritage that the writers of war fiction brought to the field and the culture of the country that formed this heritage.

The section on prejudice showed us some of the various examples and treatments of social discrimination that existed in these works. One of the novels was a full-fledged treatment of prejudice written by a colored novelist. But the more typical use of it was to shove it down to the minor characters and to incidental treatment. This in itself is a kind of prejudice which reflects on a national inability to see our problems quite as the rest of the world sees them.

The Defeat of Idealism and The Reduction to Zero show a type of thought that is a direct result of the literary attitudes of the Thirties. The authors of these novels grew and matured in a depression atmosphere. They were raised in

a literary world that had no values to sacrifice, no laws to rebel against. They had learned that if you did not stand idealistically tall, when you fell the pain was not so great. It is not difficult for these novelists to write of the defeat of idealism and the presence of nada.

The Criticism of the United States is a result in a way of the leftist attitudes of the Thirties when this was the popular thing to do. It is also present because certain artists ever since Henry James have seen differences between our civilization and Europe's. The novelists write cynically of the American soldier on a Grand Tour or Crusade to illustrate their point. In doing so they attack the culture of this country.

They hate the caste system. This is partially due to a rediscovery by experience of the necessary hardships and, frequently, cruelties of a system of command. But it is also an idea they have acquired from American society in general regarding authority and from an earlier generation in particular, who raged against the same caste system in such books as Three Soldiers.

Finally they speak hesitantly of an idealism in man, which would seem to be a mild revolt against the naturalism of the depression years and earlier that was part of their literary heritage.

One final consideration concerns the value of these novels. It is noted that the two novels that are possibly the most famous of the first World War, All Quiet on the

Western Front and A Farewell to Arms, did not appear until ten years after the final "cease fire." It does not seem that "the" novel of this war has yet been written.

These men, the authors of the "new" war novel, had Hemingway to emulate and master. But they did not have the new field that Hemingway had. There have been too many wars, too many deaths between Hemingway's war and ours. The nature of this last war was global. It was not confined to a front, a sector, or a continent. In their efforts to portray this the authors too often give us a broad, wide and shallow concept. They are too busy listing the exciting raw materials in a two-dimensional manner to consider the third dimension--depth, or significance of the matter. They attempt too much and accomplish too little. War becomes the unintended protagonist of their story, not the frame in which they developed that story. As a chief character it hobbles the efforts of the writer.

Two of the greatest war novels, The Red Badge of Courage and War and Peace, have been written by men who lacked the personal experience of war. In many cases it would seem as if the World War II writer was not benefited by his experience. He went off to war or to the observation of it with a preconceived idea in mind. When he came home he presented this idea of war well mixed with sex, creed and color beliefs.

Finally there is the question of technique. It seems right to say that there are no new forms, no new techniques

discovered by the war novelists as yet. They continue in the generally realistic, occasionally naturalistic, direction of the decade and the decades before them, flattening out the picture rather than showing what are probably its true complexities by new arrangements and structures. As the "Presence of Familiar Landmarks" showed, the constant use of cliché symbols indicates either conventional careless thinking or careless writing by most of these authors, probably carelessness in both. The frequent presence of at least three stock characters--the idealist, the intellectual, and the member of the persecuted minority--indicates an unthinking belief that the way one musters a war novel crew, squad or army is to liberally sprinkle his creation with one of each together with a typed representative of each of the geographical sections of the United States.

A brief judgment on the war novels as a group would be only qualifiedly complimentary. There are far too many failures among them, despite occasional strength and power. Shaw, Mailer, Wouk, practically all of the novelists considered, have in their work serious flaws blurring or negating their intentions. But, more importantly, the lowering horizons of sex, sociology, psychiatry, of a callousness, brutality and ignorance of which the authors themselves are too often unaware, make the truly superior performance impossible.

Perhaps on a day some catalytic distance away, when most of the above has clarified itself and when not only the

determination of the nature of the American fighting man as either near-beast or possessor of higher values is made but also the significance of such a determination is apprehended, perhaps then, one of the authors or a member of the same generation will write "the" novel of the war. It is likely that if written it will have many of the themes observed here written down, however, with more of a sense of their possible significance and hence written with a new emphasis and possibly a new structure. It will have to be an effort "above and beyond" the calibre of the present works, and at the moment it would seem right to quote R. C. Healy in conclusion:

Like the Great American Novel, The Great American War Novel seems to be a tempting mirage, tantalizing in the distance but never quite attainable.²

2. Gardiner, op. cit., p. 271.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Books

- Beach, Edward Latimer. Submarine! New York: The Holt Co., 1952. Pp. 301.
- Bowman, Peter. Beach Red. New York: Random House, 1945. Pp. 122.
- Brown, Harry. A Walk in the Sun. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949. Pp. 187.
- Burns, John Horne. The Gallery. New York: Bantam Books, by arrangement with Harper and Brothers. Bantam Edition Published June, 1950. Pp. 402.
- Cozzens, James Gould. Guard of Honor. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948. Pp. 631.
- Eisenhower, Dwight David. Crusade in Europe. New York: Doubleday, 1948. Pp. 559.
- Gellhorn, Martha Ellis. The Wine of Astonishment. New York: Scribner's, 1948. Pp. 325.
- Hayes, Alfred. All Thy Conquests. New York: Howell, Soskin, 1946. Pp. 295.
- Hayes, Alfred. The Girl on the Via Flaminia. New York: Pocket Book by arrangement with Harper and Brothers, February, 1950. Pp. 154.
- Heggen, Thomas. Mister Roberts. New York: Pocket Book by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Co., November, 1948. Pp. 189.
- Hemingway, Ernest. Men at War. New York: Avon Publishing Co., 1952. Pp. 638.
- Hersey, John. A Bell for Adano. New York: Bantam Books, 1946. Pp. 246.

- Hersey, John. Into the Valley. Garden City, New York: The Sun Dial Press, January, 1944. Pp. 138.
- Hersey, John. The Wall. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1950. Pp. 631.
- Heym, Stefan. The Crusaders. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1948. Pp. 642.
- Hunt, George Pinney. Coral Comes High. New York: Harper Brothers, 1946. Pp. 147.
- Jones, James. From Here to Eternity. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1951. Pp. 829.
- Lay, Beirne, Jr. and Sy Bartlett. Twelve O'Clock High. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948. Pp. 274.
- Mailer, Norman. The Naked and the Dead. New York: Signet Book by arrangement with Murray Hill Books, Inc., January, 1951. Pp. 605.
- Maudlin, Bill. Up Front. New York: The Holt Co., 1945. Pp. 228.
- Michener, James A. Tales of the South Pacific. New York: Macmillan Co., 1947. Pp. 331.
- McCullers, Carson. Reflections in a Golden Eye. New York: Bantam Books, by arrangement with Houghton, Mifflin Co., August, 1950. Pp. 117.
- Pyle, Ernie. Here is Your War. Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1945. Pp. 246.
- Seagrave, Gordo Stifler. Burma Surgeon. New York: The Norton Co., 1943. Pp. 259.
- Shaw, Irwin. The Young Lions. New York: Signet Books by arrangement with Random House Inc., 1950. Pp. 621.
- Smith, William Gardner. Last of the Conquerors. New York: Signet Books by arrangement with Forrer, Strauss and Co., Inc., March, 1949. Pp. 191.
- Stuart, Jesse. Taps for Private Tussie. New York: Pocket Books by arrangement with E. P. Dutton, January, 1946. Pp. 248.
- Tregaskis, Richard. Guadalcanal Diary. Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press Inc., 1943. Pp. 263.

- Uris, Leon. Battle Cry. New York: Putnam, 1953. Pp. 375.
- Westcott, Glenway. Apartment in Athens. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946. Pp. 215.
- Whelan, Russell. The Flying Tigers. New York: The Viking Press, 1942. Pp. 224.
- White, W. L. They Were Expendable. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942. Pp. 207.
- Wouk, Herman. The Caine Mutiny. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1951. Pp. 498.

Secondary Sources

Books

- Aldridge, J. W. After the Last Generation. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1951. Pp. 263.
- Gardiner, Harold C., S. J. (editor). Fifty Years of the American Novel: 1900-1950. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1952. Pp. 304.
- Hart, James D. The Popular Book. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950. Pp. 351.
- Hoffman, Fredrich J. The Modern Novel in America: 1900-1950. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951. Pp. 217.
- McLuhan, H. M. The Mechanical Bride. New York: Vanguard, 1951. Pp. 167.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. The Cavalcade of the American Novel. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952. Pp. 567.

Periodicals

- Albrecht, W. P. "War and Fraternity," New Mexico Quarterly Review, XXI, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 461-473.
- Cowley, Malcolm. "The Young Conquerors," New Republic, CXVIII, No. 26 (June 28, 1948), 23.
- Dempsey, David. "The Novelist and the Soldier," The New York Book Review, L, No. 49 (December 9, 1945), 1.
- Foley, Martha. "War Fiction: A Mirror for Americans," Survey Graphic, XXXVII, No. 12 (December, 1948), 499-516.

"Letter to a Fraulein," Life, XXXVI, No. 2 (January 11, 1954), 28.

"The Novels of the Second World War," Publisher's Weekly, CLIV, No. 17 (October 23, 1948), 1802-1808.

Pfaff, William, "The Naked, the Dead, and the Novel," Commonweal, LIV, No. 22 (September 7, 1951), 529-530.

Schneider, Isidor. "Writers After Two Wars," Masses and Mainstreams, I, No. 9 (November, 1948), 31-40.

"The Sun Never Sets on ^{Cocacola} Caccola," Time, LV, No. 20 (May 15, 1950), 28-32.

Vincent, Melvin J. "Fiction Mirrors the War," Sociological and Social Research, XXX, No. 2 (November and December, 1945), 106-111.

Wolle, Francis. "Novels of Two Wars," Western Humanities Review, V, No. 3 (Summer, 1950-1951), 279-296.

Letters to the Author

Billings, Robert. January 11, 1954.

Livingston, James D. December 23, 1953.

Weber, J. Sherwood. December 30, 1953.

Winters, Warrington. December 24, 1953.