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ENG 5061-001: War in Literature

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WAR IN LITERATURE

English Department Graduate Seminar

INSTRUCTOR: John Kilgore. Office: 314K Coleman Hall. Hours: MW 5:30-6:30, T 11-1; other times readily available by arrangement. Phone: (217) 581-6313 (office); (217) 345-7395 (home). E-mail: cfjdk@eiu.edu. Please feel very free to call my home at reasonable hours. When leaving voice mail at the office, include date and time of call, and do not trust voice mail for urgent messages—try me at home instead.

E-MAIL ACCESS. Though I am (alas!) not yet up to speed with Web CT, we will be making fairly extensive use of e-mail in the course. You will need to have access to a computer and printer and a functioning e-mail account with a mailbox you check regularly. If any of this is a problem for you, please contact me immediately to make alternate arrangements.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Assigned readings; short paper (15%); final (30%); research paper proposal (5%); research paper (40%); class attendance and participation (10%). I reserve the right to depart from these percentages somewhat.

SHORT PAPER AND RESPONSE. No later than Monday, June 18, you should choose from the schedule below a reading or readings for which you would like to be the “respondent,” leading class discussion for 15-20 minutes or so, then writing an associated short response paper of 3-5 pages. The reward for going early will be that you can write the paper after your class presentation. But the paper is due July 9, which means that people who go later will have to write their essays in advance. I will be very happy to confer with you in advance of your presentation, via phone or e-mail or in conference.

RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL. As soon as possible, and in no case later than Monday June 25, you need to choose a research topic from the list below or invent one of your own based on the themes of this course. Come see me for a preliminary conference and brainstorming session. Then write a proposal of 2-3 pages in which you
1. Define the area, topic, issue, or problem you will investigate
2. State a preliminary working thesis, or indicate a range of possible theses;
3. Briefly and tentatively elaborate or explain this thesis
4. Give some indication of what you have so far learned about your topic
5. Define, as narrowly and exactly as possible, the exact nature of the information you will be seeking in your research
6. Provide a preliminary working bibliography of no more than a page
7. Describe any problems you have or anticipate, either in working out the logic of your argument or (especially) in finding sources that will give you the information you need.

You must provide copies of your proposal (xeroxed or e-mail) for each class member. During Week 3 we will scrutinize and discuss each proposal in class. This week will be to your research project what boot camp is to the soldier: hellish pain that saves your life in the long run. Anticipate fierce questioning from me and from the class; be ready in particular to defend the relevance of each item of your bibliography and the practicality—in terms of narrowness, focus, and the amount of reading-time you can realistically expect to have—of your project as a whole.

FINAL EXAM. Study questions will be handed out on Wednesday of Week 8; writing will be done in class Friday evening, while the rest of the world is at movies and cocktail parties. There may be some brief
sections of quotes, IDs, and short answers in addition to the essays. The key to success in this culminating exercise is to do ALL the reading, do it carefully, and do it on time.

RESEARCH PAPER. Will be due in multiple copies on Wednesday, July 25. We will spend most of the last two meetings of the semester discussing, appreciating, and critiquing the papers. You are not required to undergo this class workshop; but I recommend it as a stimulating and very educational experience.

You should either choose your research topic from the list below, or after reading the list, invent a topic of your own that seems similar in spirit and design. You MUST obtain approval for your project in either case, as no more than one student will be allowed to work on any given topic. The idea here (in addition to averting conflicts over research materials) is to let everyone take off in a different direction from our common class discussions, becoming expert in some particular area we have touched upon together. That way, when we read the papers in weeks 7 and 8 they should be genuinely informative, rather than repetitious.

Though I have called this a “research paper,” it should also—perhaps primarily—be a persuasive paper with a cogent, interesting, provocative thesis. Let the argument drive the research rather than vice versa; give information because it is directly relevant and necessary to your thesis, not just because you happen to have found it. I will be very impatient with “data dumps” of materials only loosely related; of long reviews of introductory material that ought to be assumed and omitted; of any vagueness in your thesis or argumentative position; of impersonal, textbook-style prose that conveniently fudges the question of what thoughts are original with you; of “padding” by means of unnecessary or insufficiently edited quotes; and especially, always, of any failure to deal conscientiously with your sources.

Sound scary? For most people, the antidote to most of these problems is simple: think of the class itself as your audience. Term papers tend to go bad when the writer falls victim to a vague terrifying sense of not knowing whom she is writing for or why, but of being somehow obliged to know everything. Then panic sets in, and the writer begins committing all the sins just mentioned, like an octopus squirting ink. But by starting with a clear sense of audience (us) and argumentative context (the course readings and discussions), you should find yourself much better able to decide what needs to be said, what can be omitted, what information is new, what your topic really is, what you yourself are bringing to it. Rather than being plagued by the guilty awareness of never knowing as much as the experts you are reading, you should feel empowered, once you have done a decent amount of research, by the awareness of knowing many things that the rest of us in the class do not; and then you should be able to address us with instinctive confidence and skill, rather than dread and confusion. You should realize instinctively that those three little words—"I don't know"—are perfectly acceptable in a research context, if not used to excess and if accompanied by an energetic overall research effort. Your style should still be basically formal and your focus objective; but within these limits a lively, realistic sense of the class context should be very helpful.

Stay tuned for further guidelines and directives. Did I mention that this paper should be fun?

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. Will count approximately 10% of your grade in the course. From the first meeting on, I will be passing around an attendance sheet which you must sign. At the end of the term, I will assign a participation grade according to the following scale: 1 absence—A; 2 absences—B; 3 absences—C; 4 absences—D; 5 absences—F; more than 5—each absence will lower the course grade by a letter grade, e.g., from C to D.

Note that you have one "free" absence. Use this if you have to, but otherwise keep it as insurance. I will listen sympathetically to excuses, but I will not normally award attendance credit for any session you have missed. In truly exceptional circumstances, however, I may be willing to assign difficult and challenging make-up work for attendance credit. See me if you prefer make-up work to taking the absence. (Hint: It's easier just to be here. Honest.) Note: it is your responsibility to find and sign the attendance sheet at each session, and to make sure make-up work if any has been duly credited. If at any point you have any questions about your attendance record, be sure to check with me.

LATE WORK POLICY: For the papers and the proposal, I am willing to be somewhat flexible provided that you have been in touch with me before the missed deadline. Otherwise late papers will be penalized one
third grade (e.g., from "A" to "A-") or from "A-" to "B+") for each calendar day of lateness, weekends and holidays included; and they will receive no written commentary, but a letter grade only. Pick up the phone, dial my number, and save yourself from this demoralizing fate.

Please be aware that the penalty for plagiarism or cheating, which I trust I will not have to impose, is automatic failure of the course. See me if you have any questions about this policy. I will be more than happy to make reasonable accommodations for any student with a documented disability. Please contact me if you will need such an accommodation; or call the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services, 581-6583.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Lombar!lo, trans., The Iliad
Robert O'Connell, Of Arms and Men
Heaney, trans., Beowulf
Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part One; Henry V; Coriolanus
Michael Shaara, The Killer Angels
Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front
Ernest Hemingway, Short Stories
Fussell, ed., The Norton Book of Modern War. (NBW)
Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried
Various handouts
Movies: Dr. Strangelove; Patton; Gallipoli; Schindler's List

SCHEDULE

1. Please complete the readings for each session before the class meets. As the course gets underway, try hard to READ AHEAD of the schedule.
2. Please make a habit of bringing this syllabus to class with you, as we will need to adjust the schedule from time to time.
3. In addition to the scheduled readings below, please read, as soon as possible, brief histories of the Trojan War, the American Civil War, World War I, and World War II. Encyclopedia entries or chapters in textbooks will be fine.

1) June 11, 13

"War Poems" (handout).
Gellhorn, “The Face of War,” NBW 491
Schwarz, “The Real War” (Handout)

Choose Topic for Response Session and Paper by Monday.

2) June 18, 20

Movie: Dr. Strangelove
O’Connell, Of Arms and Men; omit Chapters 5-6 and 15-16 if you wish.

RESPONDENTS:

3) June 25, 27

The Iliad. Read Preface, Introduction, and Books 1, 6, 8, 9, 22, and 24.
Heaney, trans., Beowulf
RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE IN MULTIPLE COPIES, WEDNESDAY OR FRIDAY

RESPONDENTS:

4) July 2

Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part One*
Discussion of research proposals; read outside of class, be ready to discuss in class.
Movie: *Patton*

RESPONDENTS:

5) July 9, 11

Shakespeare, *Henry V*
Shaara, *The Killer Angels*
Movie: *Gallipoli*

RESPONSE PAPERS DUE ON MONDAY

RESPONDENTS:

6) July 16, 18

Hemingway, *Stories*, the following: “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” “Old Man at the Bridge,” “On the Quai at Smyrna,” “Soldier’s Home”
Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*
Jones, *WWII*, NBW 335-352
Higgins, “War in Korea,” NBW 657-666

RESPONDENTS:

7) July 23, 25

Movie: *Schindler’s List*
Fussell, “Obscenity Without Victory,” NBW 649
O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (excerpts TBA)
Pratt, *Vietnam Voices*, NBW 681-691
Ketwig, “And a Hard Rain Fell,” NBW 720-736
Hersh, *My Lai 4*, NBW, 692-714

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE ON WEDNESDAY

RESPONDENTS:

8) July 30, August 1

Discussion of Research papers
Exam review

FINAL EXAM, FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 7:30-9:30.
Sample Term Projects

The following are samples and suggestions only. Many, many other projects are possible, and you are quite free and welcome to propose your own. No more than one student may work on any one topic from this list; topics will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Remember, you must confer with me before submitting your proposal in Week 3.

Topics below should be substantially redesigned and customized as you work on them during the term. In particular, the reading suggestions below are just that—suggestions.

1. Sport and War: Starting with O'Connell's account of the psychology and nature of warfare—in particular his theories of intraspecific vs. interspecific aggression—as to what extent the nature of sport parallels that of war. Is sport fundamentally a sublimation of the urge to make war? A rehearsal for it? To what extent may similar rituals and behaviors be observed in the two realms? Do changing definitions of courage, as analyzed by O'Connell, find any parallel in the realm of sport? Does the comportment of professional athletes as opposed to amateurs parallel the contrast between mercenaries and citizen soldiers? Some suggested readings: Ball Four, Green Bay Diary, Semi-Tough, and almost any issue of Sports Illustrated. In writing this paper, you will want to compare the behavior of literary heroes (e.g. Achilles, Coriolanus) to those of modern sports heroes.

2. The Shaara Trilogy: Read Gods and Generals, The Last Full Measure. Give a brief history of the writing of the trilogy; then compare and contrast the visions of father and son, especially in regard to their concepts of military strategy and ethics. Which has the more favorable view of war in general, this war in particular? Do their views of tactics and strategy coincide? Do their characterizations of particular historical figures agree? Relate their accounts of Pickett's charge and Grant's siege of Richmond to O'Connell's thesis that during the Civil War arms development began to superecede the motives of war, imposing its own outcomes regardless of the will of the protagonists.

3. Women in War Stories: Read extensively in the critical literature pertaining to the roles played by women in the male-dominated genre of war stories. Develop a working taxonomy of the roles most often assigned to women; then apply these categories to works read in this course.

4. Blaming the Women. Perhaps a subcategory of #3. Starting perhaps with Homer's Helen and Shakespeare's Volumnia, notice and trace the tendency of war literature by males to envision women as the source of all the trouble (Helen), or at best impossibly demanding of men and fundamentally unable to imagine their hardships (Volumnia). What more modern instances can you find of such themes and motifs? Why do the veterans of modern wars, in particular, seem virtually unanimous in perceiving the women-at-home as fundamentally out of touch? Somewhere in here you might consider Hemingway's Margot Macomber, the ultimate Bitch Goddess; but to complicate things and be fair, you might also consider Catherine Barkley, incarnating woman-as-angel in Farewell to Arms, and Pilar, the woman warrior of For Whom the Bell Tolls. You might also consider the way modern feminism, in some radical incarnations, has turned the tables, depicting war as a fundamentally male invention and institution.

5. Pagan and Christian heroes. Compare Homer's implicit concept of heroism to that of the Beowulf poet and perhaps to Shakespeare's as evinced in Henry V. To what extent do the latter works seem to give a gentler, softer model of heroic behavior, one more restrained by ideals of chivalry, more prone to emphasize sacrifice rather than prowess?

6. Crusaders and Deserters in Hemingway. Hemingway's work shows a fascinating ambivalence on the whole topic of war. His heroes may find themselves urgently, ideallistically called to serve, like Robert Jordan in For Whom the Bell Tolls; but the brutality and absurdity and hypocrisy of modern war may then lead them to desert, like Lieutenant Henry in Farewell to Arms. Trace out this dialectic, reading the two novels just mentioned, a strategic sampling of Hemingway criticism, and other stories to which your research leads you.
7. Women in the American Military. Take an admirably restrained, disinterested (look that word up),
objective approach to this hot-button topic. Reading extensively in contemporary sources, learn and
present the arguments for the inclusion of women in the military, then the arguments against. Then
(and only then!) state your own view, trying to answer the following questions in particular: 1) What
particular strengths and weaknesses—physical and mental—do female soldiers typically show, as compared to their male cohorts? How important are the admitted deficits of female troops in terms of purely physical performance? 2) Are women soldiers typically capable of the bravery—essentially suicidal, in extreme instances—that has traditionally been expected of men? 3) How has the admission of women to the military affected morale and group dynamics? Do dual-gender units function more or less effectively than same-sex units? 4) What about the impact of sociological and political factors? Have the services benefited from the effective doubling of the personnel pool from which they can draw? From being perceived as non-sexist and fair? 5) Overall, has the admission of women weakened or strengthened the American military?

8. Shakespeare’s Battles. Read *Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Macbeth, Hamlet, Henry IV Part II*, and perhaps one or two other plays incorporating battle scenes, along with selected secondary sources. Then try to define Shakespeare’s conception of military strategy, tactics, and ethics, in his own time and in classical times. Relate his conception of courage to O’Connell’s account of the historical function of the aristocracy as a warrior class. What tends to be the decisive element in his battles: courage, prowess, or planning? Do aristocrats fight better than commoners? Does chivalry or realism win out? To what degree is the combat unrealistically personalized? To what degree is the contribution of sheer numbers adequately dramatized? And what does all this have to do with the particular armaments being used?

9. The Code of the Anti-Hero. The anti-hero, according to O’Connell, emerges as a distinctive figure in the twentieth century largely due to the perception of the futility of individual heroism (if not of military action altogether) in the face of modern armaments and the massive scale of modern military mobilization. Using Heller’s Yossarian and some appropriate secondary discussions as your starting points, try to define and illustrate the code of anti-honor that defines the anti-hero. What principles does he hold to, and how are these a mirror image of the principles of the traditional aristocratic warrior? Do Hemingway’s Nick Adams and Lieutenant Henry fit the type? What other precedents or instances of the type do you find in our course readings? Have Falstaff and Pistol become the heroes in modern war stories?

10. Sins of the Cinema. The camera’s need to show warfare in personalized, dramatic terms—with close-ups, recognizably heroic gestures, and mass outcomes visibly influenced by individual action—tends to lead to a persistent falsification of the realities of combat. Watch, in addition to the movies required for this class, a ton of other war movies, then select just 2-4 for close scrutiny. Look at the battle scenes and appraise what is (in the most literal sense) realistic and what is not, doing research as needed to support your contentions. You might also want to consider a contrary example or two—battle scenes that hold to a comparatively high standard of historical realism—e.g., the opening of *Saving Private Ryan* or the close of *Gallipoli*.

11. The Role of Noncombatants. The sufferings of noncombatants tend to be the forgotten, untold story in war literature—or at least an unemphasized sub-plot. The fact is peculiarly salient given that, since 1939, noncombatant casualties have generally outnumbered military deaths in warfare. For this project, start by reading some modern account of the exploits and misfortunes of noncombatants—e.g., *The Diary of Anne Frank*, John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*. Then take a second look at some or all of the readings for this course, examining the fates and roles of the noncombatants, relating these to what seems to be the reigning code of military conduct. Questions you might engage include: Does the modern experience give a new appreciation of what is going on behind the scenes of male-centered heroic literature and military history? Has the relative importance of the fighter and the non-fighter shifted? Is the fate of the traditional hero, exposed to death in combat, more or less desirable than that of those he protects, who are threatened with execution, rape, and slavery? Who owes gratitude to whom? And what, if anything,
constitutes heroism for noncombatants? Are there ways for the nonfighters to achieve a dignity and honor commensurate with those of the traditional hero?

12. Techno-Knighthood in Tom Clancy. Read *Red Storm Rising* and *The Hunt for Red October*, together with appropriate secondary works, and ask: 1) To what degree does Clancy still see war as a sane, meaningful, and honorable pursuit? 2) Do his heroes still abide by Homeric and chivalric ideals? 3) How (and how well) does he defend such a vision in the face of the awesome potential of modern weapons? Bring in O'Connell and various other readings from the course as you discuss the change in the nature of military combat and the ancient provenance of ideas of military conduct to which, perhaps, Clancy still adheres. You might, e.g., compare his heroes to Homer's and Shakespeare's.

13. Darwin and Wells. *War of the Worlds* got dropped from the syllabus at the last moment, but we have the book. Start by reading it, then broaden your research to give yourself a basic background in Social Darwinism, often considered a main contributing element in the overall intellectual context that allowed World War I to happen. Explain how Darwin's theories were made to yield a rationale for war, racism, and aggression, quite visibly influencing the thought and actions of (among others) Theodore Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler. At the end of your long excursion, come back to Wells and ask to what extent he has foreseen the fallacies (as nearly everyone nowadays concedes them to be) of Social Darwinism. Overall, what seems to be his response to Darwin and to Social Darwinism?

14. Shaara’s interpretation of Gettysburg. Become an expert on the Battle of Gettysburg, reading as many fictional and nonfictional accounts of it as you can. Then evaluate Shaara’s account of what happened. Is his thesis that Lee basically failed to understand the nature of warfare in the industrial age shared by others? Does he seem to be correct in his representation of Longstreet as a passionate opponent of Lee’s strategy, in particular of the attack on the Union center on the third day? What other interpretations of the battle are extant?

15. A number of other, quick suggestions:
   a. Drawing primarily from poetry anthologies used in K-12, prepare your own short anthology of war poems through the ages, and evaluate their status as classics. This should be in part an effort to evaluate textbooks and the way poetry is taught.
   b. Starting perhaps with ancient Sparta, investigate and speculate on the relationship of homosexuality to military camaraderie.
   c. Relate Hemingway’s concept of heroism to Homer’s.
   d. Consider O’Brien’s stories in the light of changing military protocols and philosophies, specifically S.L.A. Marshall’s study of combat behavior on Iwo Jima and resulting changes in infantry training. Do the notorious differences between Vietnam soldiers and World War II soldiers stem in part from the different training received?
   e. Weigh the comparative importance of narcissism and of camaraderie as motives for heroic, risk-taking behavior in works we have read.
   f. Some kind of project centering on Steven Pressfield’s wonderful novels *Gates of Fire* and *Tides of War*, modern depictions of ancient combat, with the reading of these to constitute the biggest portion of your research.
   g. Some kind of project centering on Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, a great comic (!) novel of World War II.