Spring 1-15-2000

ENG 4300-003: War Stories

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WAR STORIES

English Department Senior Seminar

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Extensive assigned readings; mid-term (15%); final (25%); research paper proposal (5%); research paper (40%); class attendance and participation (15%); possibly some quizzes. I reserve the right to depart from these percentages somewhat.

RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL. ASAP, 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 3-5 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.

The proposal must be handed in in 17 copies, so that each class member will have a copy. During Week 5 of the class 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.

MID-TERM. Will take place on Monday or Wednesday of Week 9. An in-class portion, consisting mainly of brief written replies to various questions, must be handed in at the end of the period. A take-home portion, consisting of one or two longer essays, must be handed in at the next class period. For both this exam and the final, the key to success is to do ALL the reading, do it carefully, and do it on time. Both exams will let you play your strengths to some extent, but both will test for broad, comprehensive knowledge of readings and class discussions. An unread assignment will leave you fatally vulnerable, like Achilles with his undipped heel.

FINAL EXAM. Will resemble the mid-term, with a take-home portion due at the beginning of the exam, then two hours of heavy combat to finish the semester. Some questions will be synoptic, reaching back to the early weeks, but the chief emphasis will be on works covered since the mid-term.

RESEARCH PAPER. Will be due in 17 copies on Wednesday, April 12. We will spend the last two weeks of the semester discussing, appreciating, and critiquing each paper. This will be a gentler and more leisurely discussion than that of week 5, but you can expect a candid assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of your paper.

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 two students 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 14 and 15 they should be genuinely informative, rather than repetitious.

Though I have called this a “research paper,” it should be essentially a persuasive paper that happens to be researched and information-rich. The key is to focus, focus, focus, letting the argument drive the research rather than vice versa. Give information because it is directly relevant and necessary to your argument; not because you happen to have found it and it seems interesting. I (and the class) 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. The key to success is not so much doing a huge amount of research, as finding the information you need and remaining in control of the topic and your sources.

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

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. Will count approximately 15% of your grade in the course. From the second 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: 3 absences--A; 4 absences--B; 5 absences--C; 6 absences--D; 7 absences--F; more than 7--each absence will go on hurting the final grade as much as the last three did. I will raise the participation grade a bit if I think your contributions to class discussion have been especially good.

Note that you have three “free” absences. Use these if you have to, but otherwise keep them as insurance. I will listen sympathetically to excuses, but I will not normally award attendance credit for any session which you have missed. In truly exceptional circumstances, however, when you really can't be blamed for missing either the three free days or days beyond that, 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.

LATE WORK POLICY: Extensions for the two take-home exercises (at mid-term and final) will be granted only for truly exceptional circumstances, and then I will reserve the right to grade the exercise “Pass/Fail” rather than assigning a letter grade (a “Pass” would have no impact on the average of your other grades in the course; a “Fail” would be averaged in as an F). For the research paper and the proposal, I am willing to be somewhat flexible providing 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:

Lombardo, trans., The Iliad
Robert O'Connell, Of Arms and Men
Shakespeare, Henry V; Coriolanus
Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels*
Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*
H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*
Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*
Ernest Hemingway, *Short Stories*
Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*
Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*
"War Poems"—A handout.
Movies: *Dr. Strangelove; Patton; Gallipoli; Schindler’s List; Platoon.*

**SCHEDULE**

*Please complete the readings for each session before the class meets. As the course gets underway, try hard to READ AHEAD of the schedule. You will have a hard time keeping up at the end of the term if you do not make a head start on the longer readings.*

*Please make a habit of bringing this syllabus to class with you, as we will need to adjust the schedule from time to time.*

*In addition to the scheduled readings below, please read, as soon as possible, brief histories of the American Civil War, World War I, and World War II. *Encyclopedia entries or chapters in textbooks will be adequate.*

1) **January 11-14**
   **COURSE INTRODUCTION**
   "War Poems" handout.

2) **January 18-21** *(No class on Monday)*
   *The Iliad.* Read Preface, Introduction, and Books 1, 6, 8, 9, 22, and 24.

3) **January 24-28**
   Movie: *Dr. Strangelove*
   O’Connell, *Of Arms and Men* (first half)

4) **January 31- February 4**
   O’Connell, *Of Arms and Men* (second half)

5) **February 7-10** *(No class on Friday)*
   Movie: *Patton*
   Shakespeare, *Henry V; start Coriolanus*

   **RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE IN MULTIPLE COPIES, WEDNESDAY**

6) **February 14-18**
   Discussion of research proposals; read outside of class, be ready to discuss in class.

7) **February 21-25**
   Shakespeare, *Coriolanus.*

8) **February 28-March 3**
   Movie: *Gallipoli.*
   Shaara, *The Killer Angels*
9) March 6-10
   Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

**MID-TERM EXAM**

**SPRING BREAK, MARCH 11-19**

10) March 20-24
   Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

11) March 27-31
   Hemingway, *Stories*, the following: "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," "Old Man at the Bridge," "On the Quai at Smyrna," "Soldier's Home," "In Another Country."

12) April 3-7
   Movie: *Schindler's List*
   Heller, *Catch-22*, the following excerpts: Chapters 1-14 and 41-42.

13) April 10-14
   O'Brien, *The Things They Carried.*

**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE ON FRIDAY**

14) April 17-21
   Discussion of Research papers.
   Movie: *Platoon.*

15) April 24-28
   Discussion of Research papers.

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**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 if you prefer it to any of those listed below. No more than two students may work on any one topic from this list, with the exception of number 8, below, which will permit a maximum of 4. Remember, you must confer with me before submitting your proposal in Week 5.*

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

1. **Sport and War:** Starting with from O'Connell's account of the psychology and nature of warfare—in particular his theories of intraspecific vs. interspecific aggression—ask 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 supercede 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 females; then apply these categories to works read in this course. (Note: this option obviously overlaps with number 8, below, but should differ from it in its emphasis on feminist criticism and theory.)

4. 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? Does the average female soldier of today contribute to her unit’s mission as effectively as the average male soldier? 2) 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? 3) 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? 4) Overall, has the admission of women weakened or strengthened the American military?

5. Shakespeare’s Battles. Read Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Macbeth, Hamlet, Henry IV Parts I and 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? And what does all this have to do with the particular armaments being used?

6. 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. 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 Menenius and Falstaff become the heroes in modern war stories?

7. War Movies. Watch, in addition to the movies required for this class, a ton of other films, and become deeply versed in their occasion and critical reception. Then select a small sample for intensive critical review and commentary. When your paper comes up for discussion in class, show and discuss clips from important films other than those we have already watched. A challenge here is to define a thesis that will make this a single, coherent paper rather than a chain of separate reviews. For example, you might want to trace a changing concept of heroism or of warfare itself in post-World War II movies—or to emphasize the resistance to change, as seen in the dogged recurrence of the same archetypes of heroic behavior.

8. 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, in the last major war, noncombatant casualties outnumbered military deaths. 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? As many as 4 students may choose this topic.

9. 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.

10. Darwin and Wells. Read appropriate secondary materials on *War of the Worlds*, then broaden your research to give yourself a basic background in Social Darwinism, learning something about 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?

11. Life imitating art in the American Civil War. According to Twain in *Life Along the Mississippi*, Sir Walter Scott brought ruin to the South by infecting it with the ideals of a thoroughly outdated chivalry. Read Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and (perhaps) *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, then supplement *The Killer Angels* with some reading in the military history of the Confederacy. How true is it that romantic and literary notions concretely influenced the conduct of our bloodiest war?

12. 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, perhaps visiting the battlefield. 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?

13. A number of other, quick suggestions:
   - prepare a very short anthology of classic “inspirational,” pro-war poems through the ages, and defend their status as classics.
   - Discuss the relative (and shifting?) importance of *prowess* and of *sacrifice* as the key elements of heroism.
   - Investigate and speculate on the relationship of homosexuality to military camaraderie.
   - Relate Hemingway’s concept of heroism to Homer’s.
   - 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.
   - Weigh the comparative importance of *narcissism* and of *camaraderie* as motives for heroic, risk-taking behavior in works we have read.