

## Books

*Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory*, by Lynn Hanley.  
Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.  
Pp. 1-168, \$24.95 (Hardcover), \$12.95 (Papercover).

by Patricia L. Skarda

Lynne Hanley not only says but demonstrates that the literature of war need not be restricted to stories of men on the front lines. In a stirring mix of critical essays and short stories, Hanley exemplifies in one volume the debate on genre and gender by alternating literary analyses and creative illustrations of war. She proceeds systematically and carefully. After a thoughtful introduction, she begins her book with "War Stories," the first of her interlocking stories, implying that the six stories, "in memory of the mothers" (17), take precedence over the five probing, provocative critical essays.

Hanley tells her stories from the point of view of the female, a figurative "I" personally and often historically involved in the effects of war at home. The stories move discernibly from past to present, from World War II in "War Stories," which resonantly links a hurricane to the threat of invading Germans, to the uneasy peace in the contemporary present of "Planting Tulips," which celebrates a woman's work and a woman's memory of her dead, our dead, in the dying fall and the hope of spring. Emblematically, the stories record and, by recording, resolve into a perilous poise of peace the bellicosity Hanley finds everywhere in American society. Life can, she quietly suggests, be rich without war, rare without tensions born of "the habit of our culture" (148).

In "War Torn," the shooting at Tan Son Nhut reaches around the world to northern California, and two victimized women are still running after a decade. Scars remain as visible on the nameless Vietnamese woman seen on TV as on Elizabeth, who protests the fall of Saigon in 1975 by running from home and family. "War Torn" describes in counterpointed actions the mutual distress in two countries long locked in conflict, now separate and still binding their women's wounds. In Saigon, "The embassy will never get all its paper out, never shred all its history"; at home, "Except

for Elizabeth we left Berkeley deliberately, with new plans for the future now that the war was over, not that the war was over" (128). Haunting the memories of Vietnamese and American alike, the Vietnam Conflict rages on in refugees and in refuges known only to the lonely survivors.

Surviving is never enough in a war-torn world. Lydia, in "Lydia among the Uniforms," takes her own life rather than be deported back to Germany, to her Luftwaffe husband and her sons on the eastern front and in the Hitler Youth. No good wife of the Reich, Lydia made her way to America, to an Admiral's house at Shipbottom on the New Jersey shore. Having seen a concentration camp and recognized in her son the power of propaganda, Lydia retreats into hiding, living less than a life by sadly commemorating her sons with seashells in a lamp. With Lydia's wish for daughters lies the indictment of men for making wars as well as the hope that wars may cease altogether, for "war is never over, it just comes home" (101).

Even at home, war reigns in the bellicosity between the sexes, the generations, and even the races. In "Little Women," Hanley's most complicated story, war's effects range from infidelity, infertility, filial hostility, to abortion. Always it is the women who suffer. "Like abortion and childbirth, war is an experience men and women have not shared" (73), Hanley writes in her most impressive transition from story to essay. Men may have the time of their lives on the battlefield, but for childless women like Louise in "The Time of Her Life," death alone carries the promise of a better time. Unhappy Louise is as much "a casualty" (40) of war as are Lydia, Elizabeth, the Vietnamese woman, and the narrator herself, who represents all American women. In each story, particular details combine to create the single impression that women, whether at home or abroad, bear the burden of wars made and glorified by men.

As a creative writer and as a scholar critic, Hanley takes a new position on women and war that builds on a long and usually honorable tradition. In older novels by women, "the war is present not as an experience but as the absence of one, as the empty space between two distinctly different structures of feeling, two sharply antagonistic views of Western men and their culture" (73-74). But in more recent novels, war can be felt, heard, seen, and abhorred. In a masterful sweep of the literature of war by women—Colette, Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Vera Brittain, Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, and Joan Didion—Hanley comes to recognize the essential differences that emerge from a woman's objectivity to masculine bellicosity. Women express buried truths men refuse to see. Hanley twice quotes Virginia Woolf's question and response in *A Room of One's Own*:

•

When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed? Certainly it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. (49-50,74)

Romance as Hanley defines it is "that tendency of each sex to soften the features of the other" (50), but when romance is gone, even Virginia Woolf, an admitted admirer of the patriarchy, comes to distrust the establishment. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf lashes out against both the makers of war and the tyranny of the way things are. In this pacifist-feminist polemic, Woolf's tone becomes so strident that women who welcome the war, work for it, and who use their charms and sympathy to encourage men to believe fighting is heroic share the blame with men. Although Hanley chooses not to deal with Woolf's inclusive indictment of women (or with the historical evidence presented by Jane Marcus in "The Asylums of Antaeus" on the loss of ground in the women's suffrage movement during the war years), she comments sensitively and accurately on Woolf's growing sense of endangerment and betrayal. By cataloguing the negative responses to *Three Guineas*, Hanley builds a case for regarding Woolf as the first in a long line of female writers against war.

Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* regards war's "allure" as its greatest danger for both "boys and girls who have just reached the age when love and friendship and adventure call more persistently than at any later time" (74). Jean Rhys, in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, shows how difficult the Great War has made it for women "to sustain the illusions they cherished about men, their rulers, and their protectors" (76). And Doris Lessing's Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* records her fears of war in nightmare and reality. War, wherever it occurs, in Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays*, *Run River*, *Book of Common Prayer*, and *Salvador*, intersects at home with war abroad, enmeshing women "in a web of violence spun by men they know" (80). The case against war may be overstated, but as the considerable evidence from Joan Didion and Doris Lessing accumulates, men for war and in war become convincing scapegoats for animosities between women and men regardless of other factors of time and place and circumstance. Nothing is trivial in this argument or in the fictions of Joan Didion and Doris Lessing, who refuse to avert their eyes from the horrors of war and its many implications.

Hanley's analysis of Vietnam literature and film in "Reconstructing Vietnam" contributes to the ongoing debate about both the causes and effects of that tragic conflict. In Didion's *Democracy*, American losses

escalate in direct proportion to American profits, providing an index to the disintegration of American culture. In Lessing's *Children of Violence* something of the same collapse of certainty eventuates. "The Cold War, the War between the Sexes, the War between the Generations are merely the domestic names for the mentality that erupts militarily under the names of World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua" (114). This "the Century of Destruction," as Lessing calls it in *Shikasta*, results not from remembering but from forgetting war. When remembered, as in the fictional trial of George Sherban in *Shikasta*, the white race must plead guilty and must search out and destroy "the enemy in ourselves" (123) that assumes superiority in race, sex, and nationality. Listening only to soldiers, as Paul Fussell has in *The Great War and Modern Memory* and *Wartime*, condemns all humankind to continued bellicosity, whether in actual war or in sport or in social programs like the declarations of war on drugs, poverty, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, or cancer. Genuine progress will be made, Hanley concludes, only when women's voices, in critical essays and in literature such as her own, can be heard above the familiar din of cannons in the accepted canons of literature. With *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory*, Lynne Hanley contributes her strong voice to correcting the habit of our culture.

*Smith College*

*War Journal of an Innocent Soldier*, by John T. Bassett.  
First published by Archon, 1989. New York: Avon, 1991.  
Pp. 1-152. \$4.50.

*And No Birds Sang*, by Farley Mowat.  
First published by Little, Brown, 1979.  
New York: Bantam, 1982. Pp. 1-208, \$3.95.

by E.A. Muenger

There was something particularly heartbreaking about the 1943-45 Allied campaign for Italy. Perhaps it was the misplaced optimism predicting steady advancement up the peninsula that made the slow progress seem at times like no progress at all. Perhaps it was Italy's forbidding terrain that so mocked the modern mechanized tools of war. Or possibly it was Italy's ambiguous status as a belligerent during much of the slow struggle.

Finally, it might perhaps have been the irony of the Italian effort tortuously plodding, scaling, winding on during the very end of the war, when farther north, allied armies were outrunning their own supplies with the rapidity of their movement. Memoirs of the Italian campaign seem somehow reminiscent of World War I's recollective literature, rife with monotony, futility, irony, and yes, a certain innocence that bespeaks the unexpected character of the fight for Italy. The grey and grim quality of the Italian campaign dominates memoirs like Farley Mowat's *And No Birds Sang* and John Bassett's *War Journal of an Innocent Soldier*.

Readers acquainted with Mowat's literary talent as a conservationist, wit and social commentator will barely recognize the wry and sober style of his account. As part of the Canadian First Corps, Mowat took part in both the July 1943 invasion of Sicily, and later, the struggle for the Italian mainland. As a bookish and boyish infantryman, he constantly observed his own failings as a soldier even as his pen captured the grinding struggle of his unit's slow advancement and the large and small acts of compassion and bravery exhibited by his fellow soldiers. Amid the physical exhaustion and the equally exhausting boredom, Mowat found solace in nature, often ironically juxtaposing two incompatible worlds—

Standing in the unroofed gunner's compartment of the lead carrier, I had been bird-watching when the battle started, my binoculars focused on a pair of red-tailed kites soaring on the updrafts from the escarpment. As I tried to hold the big birds in the shaky circle of my glasses, they went into a sudden dive, sliding swiftly out of sight. I heard a distant snarling bark, a whining scream, and then a stunning crash as a shell burst a few yards away from the carrier. Shrapnel and stone splinters sprayed against the vehicle's thin armor. It gave a skittish little leap, like a frightened horse, and slid sideways into the ditch. (78)

Serving as an intelligence officer for his unit, Mowat saw more than his share of tight situations and was also in a position to know the probable extent of German opposition as the Eighth Army continued to "blunder into mountains hoping for the best" (147). As German resistance continued to limit allied advances to a crawl, the high cost of every mile brought the Canadians to bleak despair:

I assisted the padre and the burial party. Despite the chill, wet weather, the bodies had bloated to the point where they had stretched their stained, stinking, and saturated clothing sausage-tight. They did not look like men anymore. They had become obscene parodies of men. Somebody handed me Gerry's broken spectacles, and for the first time since the real war began for me my eyes filled with tears. For the first time I truly understood that the dead...were dead. (172)

Mowat's time in Italy lasted less than five months, but the reading of his unit's part of the struggle bleakly suggests an endless time of boredom, terror, discomfort, often death. As winter overtook them, the Canadians continued to struggle up the peninsula, supposedly "spearheading the advance. . ." under weather conditions they had been ill-prepared for:

It was a time for plants to die, for birds to flee, for small animals to burrow deep into the earth, and for human beings to huddle by charcoal braziers and wait the winter out. It was assuredly not the time nor place for waging war. (186)

In January 1944, a much older Farley Mowat was transferred from his regiment to Brigade Headquarters. After the war, he went on to begin a writing career that has spanned four decades, but it was not until the late 1970s that he addressed his Italian war on paper. It is not without significance that for the ailing knight-at-arms the fitting chapter headings

came from an earlier war and earlier poets—Owen, Brooke, Blunden, Graves.

In a very long month between mid-April and mid-May, 1945, John Bassett, “not famous,” as his author’s blurb maintains, kept a war journal. He too was part of the Italian campaign, and his memoirs, also, leave enough sobering reverberations to cover an entire war. Bassett’s memoirs are haunted by birdsong that frames the horror of his experiences, the unreal notes of a skylark that lend nerve-wracking, simplistic beauty to a collage of tedium and death. Bassett evokes the Italian campaign’s slow-paced hell as effectively as Mowat, in a quietly unprepossessing voice that only emphasizes the terrible, logical, non sequiturs of war. Bassett should be famous, for he’s a born writer.

Interestingly, Bassett begins his taut, stark journal with Thomas Hardy’s “Drummer Hodge” of Boer War fame. The poem is less well known than many, especially for Americans, but the ignorant innocence of young Drummer Hodge evidently moved Bassett, as we are moved by Bassett himself. We are plunged straight into his predicament without ever being properly introduced, as it were, much as he dodged into already occupied trenches head first. The immediacy of Bassett’s world overwhelmed him as it does us:

The hole was much too small. That didn’t matter though. If I  
could get my head down in that hole, I knew I could survive.  
A bullet in my ass or legs would hurt and I would bleed a lot,  
but I could live through it. A bullet in the head was goodbye.  
(12)

Eventually, and coincidentally, we learn more of Bassett’s story. He was 20 in 1945, with all the internal conflicts of the young, caught in a panoramic conflict that threw his own inexperience, doubt and innocence into sharp relief. Above all, Bassett was honest: the journal, in all its variation of tone and feeling, chronicles the honest reactions of a soldier to a set of situations that make no sense to the intelligent. Early in the book, Bassett condemned a Private Brown, whom he had previously liked, when Brown refused to continue with the unit and left with the walking wounded. He angrily called Brown a coward as he himself trudged on (9), but later is quick to admit the rapidity with which fighting courage can change to out-on-a-limb terror. Bassett candidly presents his own feelings of inadequacy and episodes of embarrassment. We learn about his love of piano playing, and the humiliating episode at training camp when he hiked back from bivouac to get to his service club piano. Clearly, Bassett was of the same mold as Mowat, innocent in that he never became inured to the violence, noise, hopeless courage and conscience-stricken guilt.

Bassett's month was full of advances and halts, narrow escapes and escapism, yet against the monochromatic canvas of warfare at its most banal (and therefore perhaps most horrible), the young infantryman who was John Bassett in 1945 remains a testimonial to life. In his low-keyed and seemingly un-self-edited account, Bassett's quiet reflection tackles the largest questions of men who fight and who think about their foes:

We thought the Krauts were evil; but we were evil too. I was prepared to kill a man, or men for a crime or crimes he or they may not have committed. Should it be right for me to kill a middle-aged Kraut who loved his family and believed in God, not in Hitler, but who was drafted by the Third Reich to serve his country? I could not stop to think it out: the line dictated that I follow it obediently, and since I was a good soldier, I did so. (43)

As Bassett's unit continued to make slow progress toward the Po River in the waning days of April, Bassett's tenseness began to show. He found himself doing the very things he had condemned earlier on—taking over the ownership of someone else's already dug trench, questioning the necessity of further advances, succumbing to a fatalism that ages his writing. Where once he had taken comfort in the skylark, he now could not bear comparing the bird's life to his own:

The wind was still blowing across the brightly greening fields. I heard a skylark as it soared above the convoy. God, I thought, how unfair it is to hear this bird again; how cruel to watch it climb up into the sky and disappear among the clouds that come to settle on the river and await the morning sun. (98)

Bassett, however, kept going, past promises that the company was to be relieved, past more inedible breakfasts, past the shellshock and battle fatigue of his comrades. He grew more reflective, grew from innocence into bravery and from simple compliance to philosophical maturity. As he observed a sergeant's refusal to lead his men across the Po in rowboats, an older Bassett thought again about Brown, who refused to fight:

Then I remembered little Private Brown from the steel mills of Pennsylvania. He had not been able to tolerate his first crisis. But he was not to be pitied. No, a man who cannot kill another human being is not to be pitied. So I was no longer angry with him. I shook it off and gave my attention once again to the column and the countryside and to the road. (101)



The war ended and John Bassett found himself still alive, mountain climbing in Austria, only to narrowly avoid what would have been a fatal fall into a crevasse, and knowing, as he stopped to pick some edelweiss, that "the climb was over." Bassett, in his jewel-like journal, reaches inner layers of self-knowledge elegantly. He gives the profound dilemma of man at war its dignity through ambiguity; there are no answers here.

*U.S. Air Force Academy*

*Lonely Girls with Burning Eyes*, by Marian Faye Novak.  
Boston: Little, Brown, 1991. Pp. 1-277. \$19.95.

by Rosemary A. King

I think you had to have someone there to feel the real home-front terror. I felt it, and it seemed all the more terrible to me because those of us waiting suffered it behind closed doors, on the life-as-usual streets of Hometown, USA. (183)

*In Lonely Girls with Burning Eyes*, Marian Faye Novak recounts her wait for her husband David to return from a thirteen-month tour in Vietnam. After Dave departs the U.S. on April 30, 1967, Novak's sense of time warps partly because of the lengthy time difference between the U.S. and Vietnam (late evening in the U.S. being late afternoon the next day in Southeast Asia). The book's narrative is primarily epistolary as Novak moves from letter to letter, admitting, "Gradually the passing of time came to be marked for me by the mail.... The mail truck and the mailbox became the physical focal point of my existence, the time of the mailman's arrival the center of my day" (171).

Novak's attempt to bridge the distant shore with phone calls is thwarted when the Red Cross informs her that calls to the field require seventeen hours to transmit information. "That very moment," Novak concludes, "my husband could be lying on the jungle floor nine thousand miles away . . . he could be wounded, bleeding and in pain or dead, and it would be seventeen hours before I would know" (173). Moreover, when Novak births a daughter on July 24, 1967, the Red Cross prediction of the time difference proved optimistic: it took more than two days for the news to reach her husband (178).

During her husband's tour, Novak lived with her in-laws in Tacoma, Washington, and later with her parents in Fresno, California. Other wives did the same. The friends she had made while stationed at Marine Basic School at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia—Bonnie, Libby, and Leah—settled with their parents as well (159). "We were not weak women—time would prove that—but separated from our husbands and from one another," Novak writes, "there was really no other place for us to go" (182). With organized support groups unavailable, these four wives form their own network by mail and telephone: "Nothing but hearing from my Quantico friends connected me to the reality that was life" (187).

Novak and her friends shared experiences of loneliness and alienation with thousands of wives waiting for their husbands to return from Vietnam. Novak cites Yvan Groll in *Requiem for the Dead of Europe* to capture this widespread sentiment among wives on the homefront and to reveal the origin of the book's title: "At every window stand lonely girls whose burning eyes are bright with tears" (3). Novak provides an appropriate quotation such as Groll's as openings to each of the book's chapters, a technique that enriches rather than intrudes.

In an attempt to dispel the loneliness caused by the sudden displacement to her parent's home and the difficulty of communicating with her husband, Novak enrolls at Fresno State College to pursue a graduate degree. But her separation from the military community leaves her uncertain of her status in society:

Even though I was so much like the other graduate students in so many ways, especially the married women with children, our thoughts and feelings ran in different directions . . . I was only marking time in a no-man's-land, certain of nothing. That was an important difference between me and the others. Not all the difference, but it was enough to really matter. (187)

In addition, Novak becomes increasingly alienated from her peers because of the uncaring, apathetic attitude demonstrated by fellow students:

Our college friends not connected to the military were going on with lives that had little to do with ours. They went to work, came home, watched the news, ate supper and went to bed without much idea of the gut-wrenching fear the war inspired in those of us who had loved ones in it. (183)

While enrolled at Fresno State, Novak was often insulted by her peers because of her husband's participation in the war. Cruel comments, coupled with the growing momentum of student peace demonstrations, caused Novak to minimize time spent on the Fresno campus.

*Lonely Girls with Burning Eyes* clearly outlines the American homefront as a lonely, desolate place for military wives such as Novak. Neither the military nor civilian community offered understanding for those waiting for loved ones. Novak reflects:

Perhaps I don't speak for the others, the other wives who waited, when I say we were almost unbearably lonely, and

that we were always frightened, afraid of what might happen to our men. (195)

Novak's alienation raises an important philosophical question about the American homefront during Vietnam. Are Americans still unwilling to acknowledge that war affects more than just male combatants? While Novak's account offers this question for contemplation, Novak clearly proposes an answer by citing T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" from *Four Quartets*:

We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them. (277)

Although Novak's memoir is one of the few autobiographies written by women about the homefront experience, other notable accounts of the Vietnam War include works by Jean Bethke Elshtain, Sharon Macdonald, Joyce Carol Oates, and Laura Kalpakian. In *Women, Militarism and War*, Jean Elshtain and Sheila Tobias underscore the potential long term political implications for a society that fails to acknowledge the effect of war on women. They write that

the most explicit rendering of the issue of women, war and American politics in recent times . . . [is] the 1984 strategic Ferraro-Bush debate in which a woman's competence in military, strategic, and international affairs was publicly challenged not only because she was a woman, but because she had never participated in war. (176)

Thus, Novak cynically questions, "What could we possibly have to say about war?"

In her memoir, Novak also recounts the family's difficulties after Dave Novak's return from Vietnam on May 29, 1968. The Novaks had been married for 21 months—only nine of which they had lived together. Moreover, Dave had been at war during the birth of his daughter Jeannie and had seen her only briefly on R&R in Hawaii. Novak painfully speculates:

The man I had met for R&R in Hawaii was not the boy I had seen off to the war. How much had the next six months in that awful place done to him? Who was he to me, after all? And who was I to him? Certainly not the girl he'd left behind.

What besides that terrible war and all of its hard lessons did we have in common now? (260)

Upon Dave's return from Vietnam, the Novaks anxiously attempt to rejuvenate their suspended relationship. The final irony of Novak's frustration as lonely wife waiting occurs when Dave refuses to talk about Vietnam. Afflicted by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Dave experiences common symptoms, including nightmarish dreams of combat, hellish flashbacks into war, and a paranoid distrust of others.

Novak sympathetically attempts to adapt to a husband radically changed by the war. As Dave placates himself with alcohol, Novak insists he enter therapy to discuss the war with a specialist. Her attempt to help her husband is futile when neither the doctor nor Dave will broach the subject of war.

As Dave's symptoms of PTSD continue, the family continues to mask the unresolved, disquieting past. Ultimately, Dave separates from the military and obtains a doctorate in mathematics from Washington State University. As the Novaks become college instructors, they quietly slip into academe: "We never told our colleagues about Dave's service; I don't think any of our new friends and neighbors knew that Dave was a combat veteran" (268).

Eventually the couple's healing begins with a cathartic visit to the Vietnam memorial in 1982, 15 years after Dave's return from Vietnam. Although Novak gently convinces her husband that the "bright names on the black monument" (274) are not wasted lives, she harbors her own silent conflict about the American homefront:

Where were you ... when these men needed you? When we all needed you? How can you look so long and lovingly on the silent names of these dead when you were so quick to turn your backs on their living faces? (274)

The man Novak married before the Vietnam conflict returned in body and spirit only after years of patient waiting. Novak reports that other waiting wives—her Quantico friends—were less fortunate. Bonnie and Jon separate because of their experiences with PTSD. Libby still waits for her husband, Ken, who was killed in Vietnam. Having never remarried, Novak notes, Libby has a "love affair with Ken's death—her way of coping with his dying" (276). Leah, who was also widowed, remarries to bury the wounds of her waiting years.

Readers will not fail to notice Novak's emphasis on traditional gender roles for men and women. Prior to the war, for example, some of the Marines spend less time with their families than with fellow soldiers, but Novak accepts their decisions: "It seems that boys gathering courage for a death-defying leap into manhood do not turn to needy girl-wives" (89).

Although such rationale and word choice may offend many today, Novak places her subject in historical context:

Like many girls of my generation, when I was young, I looked forward to getting married and having a rather ordinary life as someone's wife. When I was young, girls often thought that the prefix "Mrs." was a sign of success, a key to their future, a symbol of pride. Such thoughts have turned out to be unrealistic; but that was the way it was. (5)

The quality of Novak's writing is far outstripped by the quality of Novak's story; the sheer importance of breaking the silence of all those waiting for loved ones is long overdue.

*United States Air Force Academy*

*Writers on World War II: An Anthology*,  
edited and with a foreword by Mordecai Richler.  
New York: Knopf, 1991. Pp. 713. \$30.00.

by E.A. Rowe

Never had any season been more felt; one bought poetic sense of it with the sense of death . . . . That autumn of 1940 was to appear, by two autumns later, apocryphal, more far away than peace. No planetary round was to bring again that particular conjunction of life and death; that particular psychic London was to be gone forever; more bombs would fall, but not on the same city. War moved from the horizon to the map . . . . Reverses, losses, deadlocks now almost unnoticed bred one another; every day the news hammered one more nail into a consciousness which no longer resounded . . . . Faith came down to a slogan, desperately reworded to catch the eye, requiring to be pasted each time more strikingly on to hoardings and bases of monuments . . . . (Richler, citing Elizabeth Bowen, 67-69)

The mosaic Mordecai Richler has compiled in his anthology *Writers on World War II* captures the acute awareness of life and death which war first brings, as well as the numbness which eventually overwhelms those who live with war too long. In his choices as editor, Richler captures World War II for "not only those who had lived through the conflict but also those who came after, a few of whom may even now think of Dachau only as an unusual place to visit" (xxviii).

Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Studs Terkel, Noel Coward, Marguerite Duras, Farley Mowat, and Jean-Paul Sartre are among the more than 100 authors represented, some of whom appear more than once. The glimpses provided of the war and of the people who endured or fought it are variously startling, prophetic, pathetic, and ironic. The pervasive image of the collection is one of darkness, uncertainty, and mute endurance, as well as an enduring presence of an intense life force.

The heroes and villains of the war, both magnified in our society by five decades of sentiment, appear here differently. Fifty years ago, Churchill, the "bulldog of Britain," struck novelist John Mortimer as a liquored, aging turtle of a man who would be incapable of leading Britain. "If they

ever put him in charge of the war," he remarked to a friend at first sight of Churchill, "God help us all!" (44).

In his 1940 review of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, George Orwell describes Hitler as "deeply appealing," with "the face of a man suffering under intolerable wrongs. In a rather more manly way it reproduces the expression of innumerable pictures of Christ crucified, and there is little doubt that that is how Hitler sees himself" (41).

As such contemporary writings peel away the years of myth and propaganda for "The Good War," Richler reminds us that its heroes did not always emerge physically or emotionally intact or self-righteously secure in victory. After downing a German pilot, Richard Hillary writes, "He was dead and I was alive; it could so easily have been the other way round; and that would somehow have been right too" (95).

Richler further broadsides the romanticizing of the U.S. entry into World War II—our heroic reaction to the Japanese attack—through Britain's Noel Coward, who could not "help being delighted at America being so dumbfounded" at Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Coward's reaction was not founded on malice, but rather on a genuine relief that Americans

have at last been forced to realize that this war is theirs as well as ours . . . they will never be able to say that they came in to pull our chestnuts out of the fire, as they were quite obviously caught with their trousers down. (196)

American pride and naiveté before the war is perhaps even better captured in Russell Baker's childhood certainty that Americans needed only BB guns to beat the bad guys (265).

Richler shows that such innocence, however, was less easy to maintain for members of a generation who, like Britain's George Macbeth, were mourning the loss of chocolate while listening to the "awesome rising and falling sound" of the air raid sirens (99), or witnessing the humiliation of their nation. As U.S. diplomat George Kennan watched the French return to their homes after their initial panic-stricken flight from invading Germans, he wondered at one girl's bitterness and incomprehension.

Just try to tell her of liberalism and democracy, of progress, of ideals. . . . What is going to be her impression of humanity? . . . She saw her own people pillaging and looting in a veritable orgy of dissolution as they fled before the advancing enemy . . . (90)



The idealism with which many noncombatants now remember World War II was lost to those who carried that idealism in the field. James Jones, who served in the Pacific, writes, "When at any second you may die, there is no adventure; all you want is to get the fighting over with. . . . But in spite of all this, you keep on fighting because you know that there is nothing else for you to do" (365). Yukio Mishima, too, echoes the loss of purpose and the reality which overwhelmed the war's participants. Watching Tokyo's inhabitants cheering air battles over their city, it came to him that "so far as the spectacle seen from this distance was concerned, it seemed to make no essential difference whether the falling plane was ours or the enemy's" (483).

In addition to documenting one generation's immersion in the miseries of war, Richler's selections capture the dark foretones of future conflicts. In 1939, an Italian priest tells a young Jewish refugee that "Jews and Arabs always quarrel . . . they will go on quarreling for a long time to come if somebody does not put an end to the attempts of the Zionists to have a state of their own in Palestine" (33).

The mosaic which Mordecai Richler has assembled is not definitive, as he himself notes in the introduction. After compiling selections which met his standards of excellence, relevance, and authenticity, Richler found he had enough material for three volumes. In crafting his single-volume work, he has nonetheless managed to reveal the overwhelming scope of World War II, enabling readers to more fully understand why this war, in its particular intensity and numbing force, can be captured only in glimpses.

*United States Air Force Academy*