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“We Are All Responsible”: Post-World War I
Parenting and the Politics of Memory in Dorothy
Canfield Fisher’s *The Deepening Stream*

THOUGH RELATIVELY OBSCURE TO CONTEMPORARY audiences, Dorothy Canfield Fisher was a best-selling and prolific author during the Progressive Era, a Vermont native whose fiction and non-fiction was eagerly read by middle-class, Anglo audiences seeking her opinion on a number of topics, including how to raise anti-materialist children in a society increasingly obsessed with consumption, and how to negotiate the competing demands of work and family.¹ Canfield Fisher was equally well respected for her knowledge of war, so much so that Willa Cather requested she review the manuscript of her own Great War novel, *One of Ours*, for accuracy prior to its publication.² This cultural capital stemmed from Canfield Fisher’s firsthand wartime experience: During World War I, she grew impatient with the United States’ isolationist stance and elected to move, along with her husband and two young children, to Paris in 1915 to aid in the war relief effort. While Canfield Fisher’s husband worked at the front as an ambulance driver for the French, she remained at the rear, raising their two young children and taking an active role in the relief effort, establishing, among other things, a convalescent home in the South of France for orphan children and literacy classes for blind veterans. At the same time, Canfield Fisher wrote at a feverish pace, as she

needed the income to support her family. In addition to publishing a children's novel, *Understood Betsy* (1917), which explores how Montessori-based education teaches children both independence and collective responsibility, Canfield Fisher wrote numerous articles on her war experience, along with two collections of vignettes, *Home Fires in France* (1918) and *The Day of Glory* (1919). Alan Price has aptly noted that Canfield Fisher's war-time writing is highly propagandistic, a blatant attempt to garner support for the war effort.³ Critics Janice Stout and Karsten H. Piep have further suggested that Canfield Fisher's war-time writing is also concerned with demonstrating how war-time provides women with unprecedented control over the domestic sphere.⁴ Piep argues that the settings of Canfield Fisher's war stories, particularly those located in *Home Fires in France* and *The Day of Glory*, might be interpreted as feminist utopias, or felicitous spaces that permitted white, middle-class women to challenge and revise gendered expectations.⁵

In this paper, I read Canfield Fisher's war-time writing not for its consideration of the "women question," but in terms of how the author used her depiction of the traumas women and children face during wartime to call upon post-war parents to rethink parenting, ultimately constructing an approach that situates American children in an internationalist context and teaches them the necessary skills to solve conflicts without the use of violence. The desire to "use" war to achieve laudable social goals was shared in the 1920s and 1930s by early childhood educators and writers such as Canfield Fisher, who believed that childhood represented a unique opportunity to instill in individuals intolerance for war. These proponents of peace education sought to engage with problematic memories of war in order to prevent future conflict, placing this responsibility not with government organizations such as the failed League of Nations, but with parents. I will read Canfield Fisher's final Great War text, *The Deepening Stream* (1930), in terms of how it uses depictions of the plight of women and children during war to construct a rhetoric of community, one that urges American audiences to cease their isolationist tendencies. I will further explore how Canfield Fisher differed from other post-war writers who placed the responsibility for preventing war not with the larger community, but with parents. Canfield Fisher's philosophy invoked a different approach, one that made childrearing a political act to be shared by both the individual and the community. Canfield Fisher further used her post-war rhetoric to preach a unique brand of internationalism, one which contained an anti-consumerist, pro-public service message.

During the war, Canfield Fisher was determined to write a realistic portrait of how armed conflict disrupts domestic spaces. Evidence of this desire emerges in a

1917 letter to her good friend, the poet Sarah Cleghorn. In her letter, Canfield Fisher describes her desire to use her writing “to make people at home REALIZE [her emphasis] a little more of what war means. Not by the usual descriptions of battlefields, but by showing how it affected men sitting by their own firesides.”⁶ It is perhaps because of this that Canfield Fisher avoided writing at length about the traumas of combat in her early writing, focusing instead on garnering US support for the war. For example, in the “The Refugee: A Narrative of the Suffering of Invaded France,” published in *The Outlook* in September 1917, she mentions the plight of women and children in wartime, yet avoids discussing the situation in detail, writing “until the world turns over and we have awakened from the hideous nightmare, no one may speak aloud of certain matters up there in Belgium and in the invaded provinces of France.”⁷ Canfield Fisher concentrates instead on the terrible ignorance of US citizens, quoting a French refugee woman who derides Americans who have “absolutely little idea of what is going on up there under [German] rule!”⁸ The irony here is clear: Even as Canfield Fisher chides American readers for their ignorance, she refuses to tell them what is really happening, a strategic dance that unwittingly helps to perpetuate the very violence she seeks to condone. She did write during the war about the tremendous bravery of French women and children, as well as their deep communal ties. In “Notes from a French Village,” published in *Home Fires in France* in 1918, for example, Canfield Fisher illustrates this connection in domestic terms, explaining that the French rarely bake their own bread, as they “discovered long ago, over and over, in each house, labors which are better done in centralized activity.”⁹ Canfield Fisher applauds envisioning the private spaces of the home as a communal space, noting that American women would be well-served to adopt a similar way of thinking, as it would eliminate redundancy in housekeeping. Here again she employs a food-related example to illustrate her point, noting that “in American towns too small to have a delicatessen shop, how many of us quail before the hours of continuous heat needed to boil a ham, and the still more formidable enterprise of getting it all eaten up afterward with a too dreary monotony!”¹⁰ It is worth noting that Canfield Fisher suggests that such values are, ultimately, strong enough to withstand the destructive forces of war. In *Home Fires in France*, “Notes from a French Village,” with its celebration of the French tendency to overlap the spaces of home and community, is the first story in the collection. The final story of the book, “La Pharmacienne,” evokes a more somber tone: Here the female characters are struggling to rebuild their town after the war. Yet once again they turn to the strength of the community, in which war widows work collaboratively to reopen businesses once run by their husbands.

Canfield Fisher, like other writers, eventually abandoned her war-time strategy of shielding readers from descriptions of violence in order to protect those currently in harm's way. As Paul Fussell notes in his oft-quoted *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "Western European society was, on the eve of the Great War, founded on and sustained by certainties and principals such as belief in God, the family, the state and nationhood, Progress, and commonly accepted humanistic values. These icons, and many others, were to be decisively atomized on the battlefields of Flanders."¹¹ In *The Deepening Stream*, Canfield Fisher examines not only the "truths" destroyed by war, but the terrible sense of despair that invaded those who had nothing left in which to believe. It is perhaps for this reason that Canfield Fisher turned her attention to disturbing images of violence in her final war novel. Like other accounts published of the war during the 1920s and 1903s, including Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and Dos Passos's *1919* (1932), *The Deepening Stream* builds from the sense of despair brought on by the Great War and the notion that recent technological inventions, once thought to be a sign of society's advancement, had been used to hasten its destruction. In particular, *The Deepening Stream* examines how war impacts those at the rear, specifically women and children. Unlike her earlier writing about the war, in which she invoked an ebullient tone as she praised the courage of French and Americans working to stop the German advance, *The Deepening Stream* is a somber novel, one that looks at the dramatic impact that war has upon families in general, and children in particular. In this novel, Canfield Fisher writes about what she had once considered unmentionable: The families unraveled by war, the orphan children with no one to care for them, the survivors with no home to which to return. One of the more troubling aspects of war is that it tears parents from children, a temporary arrangement that is all-too-often made permanent by the death of a parent. Such acts destroy one's childhood, the sacrosanct space during which individuals are to be sheltered from the harsh realities of adulthood. Canfield Fisher mourns this loss of innocence in her war writing, and yet she refuses to permit her readers to wallow in despair, arguing instead that readers bear a responsibility to care for such children.

Because readers may not be familiar with this novel, it is worth pausing here for a brief plot summary. Highly autobiographical, *The Deepening Stream* traces a middle-class Anglo mother, Matey and her husband, Adrian, after they decide to move to France with their two young children in 1915 so that they may take part in the relief effort. There Matey stays behind at the rear and becomes active in French-run relief efforts, while Adrian enlists with the French ambulance corps and travels to the front. The novel places the very specific chronicles of Matey's

wartime struggles, which include endeavoring to find adequate food to feed her children, in the context of the profound sacrifices that French women and children experienced during the war. Among other things, the novel describes the deep and varied needs of the many women and children made refugees by the German advance, as well as the inadequate attempts by US relief agencies to help them. Much of the novel focuses on Matey's attempts to do what government agencies cannot or will not: She finds homes for French refugees, she takes in war orphans, and she helps reunite separated family members. She supports such efforts with the small fortune inherited from a distant relative, eventually spending the entire amount on the relief effort. Intermixed with the tale of Matey's heroic efforts are graphic descriptions of war atrocities and their impact. Unlike earlier descriptions of the war, here Canfield Fisher does not shy from graphic descriptions of soldiers whose bodies have been ravaged by gangrene, of women who have endured rape and must subsequently choose whether or not to care for the children who are the products of sexual violence, and of children who are so traumatized by what they have witnessed that they are unable to do anything except cower underneath beds. In doing so, she argues that not to speak of such crimes is to perpetuate them.

As my summary suggests, *The Deepening Stream* continues the work Canfield Fisher accomplished in her earlier war fiction, in which she attempted to blur the distinction between public and private space. In this novel, she examines how the war front enters the domestic spaces of home. In *At Home, At War: Domesticity and World War I in American Literature*, Jennifer Haytock notes that numerous American novels written about the Great War show that "war and domestic life exist on a continuum."¹² Although Haytock does not discuss *The Deepening Stream*, the novel supports Haytock's assertion that war novels often use their portrayal of violence to question ideas about home and domesticity. In Canfield Fisher's portrayal, war and home are overlapping spaces: In the apartment she shares in Paris with her children and Madame Vinet, a French widow whom Matey first met while visiting Paris as a child, Matey plays host to refugees whose homes lie behind the lines. Such guests literally bring the front "home," filling the apartment with longing to return to their own towns and villages, many of which have been ravaged by war. Matey's philanthropic efforts, which primarily focus on helping refugees return home, further illustrate the overlapping of war and domestic spaces: At one point, she travels to a rural town north of the city so that she can help resettle a French refugee whose home was destroyed by the German advance. Later, she helps Madame Vinet's eldest daughter, Mimi, move from her home outside the city to her mother's apartment in Paris in anticipation of the German advance. Near the

conclusion of the novel, Matey assists Madame Vinet's youngest daughter, Ziza, when she returns to Louvain, a city most dramatically impacted by the fighting, after the war. In this novel, "home" is an ever-moving site, one shifting in response to troop movements. It is also the site of numerous ideological battles, including the roles that women and men are expected to play. When Ziza returns home after the war ends, she does so with her husband, who is paralyzed from the waist down and has lost an arm and a leg due to gangrene. Because her husband is no longer able to work in the bank he owns, Ziza assumes the responsibility of breadwinner, taking on her husband's position in order to help support her family and to assist the community as it begins the process of rebuilding. Here we see Canfield Fisher considering how war precipitates a change in the beliefs about the work men and women are expected to do. If making a home in a war zone necessitates a rethinking of what a domestic space entails, then so too does it call for a rethinking of the roles that men and women are expected to play.

The Deepening Stream is also a novel concerned with how to commemorate war in a society desperate to move beyond and forget what had happened. In the novel there are multiple descriptions of traumatized men, women, and children, "mutilated human organisms" who were "always nerve-sick, either half crazed by their sense of injury or, more often, deadened and starved into an incredible apathy."¹³ These are parents who no longer know how to care for their children: In one scene, Canfield Fisher describes a refugee woman who "would not look at her baby."¹⁴ The novel further observes that such traumas—whether in war- or peacetime—are not easily displaced.¹⁵ We see this point illustrated with the character in Matey, who, along with her husband, Adrian, struggles after the war to come to terms with what she has witnessed. Matey, for example, suffers from vivid nightmares in which she searches desperately for lost food ration cards, the only thing preventing her children from starvation. Adrian too must deal with unwelcome memories, including the knowledge that he, like other men, enjoyed the violence, that effectively paralyze him, making it impossible for him to interact with his wife and children. Although both exhibit classic symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder, or what was identified as "shell shock" during World War I, they nevertheless desire to process their experience in different ways.¹⁶ When Matey attempts to speak with her husband about her nightmares, he begs her to stop, saying that "I'm going to forget the last four years because I don't know what else to do about them."¹⁷ Like many Americans, Adrian is unable to process the memory of the war; he does not know what to do with what he witnessed, so he seeks to bury them in a defensive gesture born of desperation. According to contemporary

philosopher Cathy Caruth, this is a common defensive reaction to trauma. Caruth explains that to discuss trauma, one must engage in “a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.”¹⁸ It is this prospect of “double-telling” that effectively paralyzes Adrian, causing him to remark, “I keep wondering if we’re ever going to find any basis for going ahead.”¹⁹ His father also suffers from similar anguish. A Civil War veteran, he is, like his son, unable to speak of his own memories of the battlefield because he believes “there’s no use talking about it.”²⁰ Father and son’s desire to make the war unspeakable represents an American public that, for the most part, sought to preserve a similar degree of silence, if only to avoid having to discuss what precipitates such acts of violence. For such individuals to commemorate is to forget, to make silent, and to obscure. Silencing painful memories provides but a temporary salve; in the novel, more meaningful healing comes to those who speak of what has happened in order to move forward.

Canfield Fisher’s post-war rhetoric of healing is undoubtedly gendered, one in which women lead the healing process by creating community-based partnerships. The character most adept at “double-telling” is Matey who, rather than forget what she has experienced, chooses to learn from her memories, using them to create new community-based partnerships. These acts, which include working at the bank, provide Matey solace. Psychologist Judith Hermann, whose studies of trauma have included those impacted by World War I, notes that community-making is an essential aspect of healing. She writes that trauma survivors “learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a feeling of belonging. Trauma shares and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.”²¹ Matey’s post-war behavior supports this idea: Her attempts represent a productive and positive way to deal with the memories of war, to create community via the shared act of remembering what has occurred. Informed by the events of the past, the community nevertheless moves forward. Matey moves ahead by using memories of the past to question social scripts guiding what work women may do. Like Ziza, she too chooses to work in a bank after the war, a choice that signals a rethinking of the relationship women ought to have with money. This symbolic shedding of stereotypical gender roles—among other things, Matey realizes that working at

the bank will necessitate hiring someone to help her at home, as she will have less time to devote to domestic chores—is precipitated by the desire to link the very intimate needs of a nerve-sick husband with the equally significant needs of the community. Matey decides to work at the bank so she can help her husband, but also so that she can help the community by approving loans that will enable people to improve their lives. Here we see Canfield Fisher demonstrating how a painful past can positively shape the present: Traumatized by the memory of struggling to provide food for her children, Matey uses her dis-ease to create new opportunities for the poor to achieve financial security.

Even as the novel explores the different strategies adults employ in order to heal from the trauma of war, it evokes the vulnerability of children, demonstrating that, as Canfield Fisher writes, “fear felt by grown-ups is not destroying like the terrors of children.”²² Canfield Fisher’s desire to make audiences “see” atrocity through written description aligns her with other postwar writers who, as Dominique Marshall attests, used “visual and written accounts of atrocities” in order to “give evidence of incredible problems.”²³ In the novel, traumatized children are most often depicted as cowering in corners and unable to interact with those around them. When Ziza first arrives in Paris with her son, Adrien, after escaping from German-occupied Belgium, the boy is described as being in good physical condition, even though Matey notes that he has a “pale vacant little face” she interprets as an outward sign of psychological trauma.²⁴ There is ample evidence to suggest that he is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder: He is incapable of interacting with others, and he suffers from chronic insomnia. In addition, Canfield Fisher writes, “he would eat nothing if anyone was in the room with him. He had not said a word nor showed that he understood one. And if left to himself for a moment he still crept into the darkest corner he could find and crouched there, facing the wall, making himself small” (265-266). Unable to play and interact with other children because they “frighten him,” he is isolated from the community, most likely because of his exposure to some unnamed violence (266). To Canfield Fisher, play was an invaluable part of childhood, as it provided a space for children to work through the conflicts they would encounter as adults.²⁵ That Adrien refuses to play with others alludes to his deep pain, and the potential danger to society. If children don’t play with others and thus learn how to peacefully solve problems, then the entire community is at risk, as such children may become adults who know only how to solve conflict with force. Indeed, Canfield Fisher suggests that traumatized children have a particular need for play, if only to learn new strategies for dealing

with conflict, ones that provide an alternative to the violent examples they have already witnessed.

If healing children takes time, then it also takes the willingness of adults to donate their efforts. Marshall notes that for many interwar readers, “the process of ‘seeing’ itself entailed a responsibility,” as “children embodied a serene and traditional society to be saved.”²⁶ Canfield Fisher takes on a similar tone in her writing, even though she acknowledges that many were unable or unwilling to put forth the effort required to heal such victims, in part because of their own experience. This sentiment stems, in part, from people like Matey’s husband, Adrian, whose reluctance to speak about the war renders him incapable of imagining what he might do to prevent future violence. Such sentiments were reinforced by the popular opinion that such children were irreparably damaged and beyond rehabilitation. This sentiment is voiced by Matey’s housekeeper in Paris, who urges her not to waste her efforts on traumatized children, noting, “You can’t do anything for him . . . I’ve seen children before who’d had too great a fright. They are always imbecile.”²⁷ With the housekeeper’s quote comes the idea that children are easily victimized, that they are too often traumatized not by war, but by bad parenting, inadequate food, and abysmal shelter. Canfield Fisher wants to do more than just convince this one child to come out from under the bed; she wants to put a new system of thinking in place, one that will prevent this from happening again. Matey’s greatest accomplishment is that she works relentlessly to find something that will provide the child with a sense of safety and normalcy.

In Canfield Fisher’s novel, rehabilitating traumatized children is a form of commemoration, a way of acknowledging their suffering by helping them to heal from the wounds of the past. Canfield Fisher suggests that traumatic memories of how war impacts children must be made visible, both so that a process of healing may be initiated, and so that we use such images to prevent future conflict. This, she suggests, is the best way to commemorate the war, for it uses the specter of unpleasant memories to eradicate it. To talk about the traumas experienced by children is not to ignore soldiers’ trauma, but rather to put it in context, to acknowledge the unspeakable acts that accompany armed conflict. As other critics, including Steven Trout, have noted, there was widespread ambivalence during the 1920s concerning how to commemorate the war appropriately: Although some veterans’ groups were staunch advocates of creating numerous shrines for the dead, still others called for an end to valorization of the war.²⁸ Trout argues that novels such as Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* should be read as just one of the post war novels grappling with the issue of how to appropriately commemorate war. In particular,

One of Ours makes readers cognizant of the traumas suffered by children: In one section, Claude Wheeler encounters an orphaned Belgian refugee who has witnessed an unnamed trauma. Cather writes, "She could not be coaxed from the courtyard into the quiet street. If the neighbor children came into the garden on an errand, she hid herself. She would have not playmates but the cat."²⁹ When Claude wonders aloud what has happened to her, his companion, Gerhardt, tells him that no one knows of the little girl's experience, as she does not speak French and is either unwilling or unable to learn. Because the Jouberts, the French family that has taken her in, do not speak the refugee's language, Walloon, the child is caught in a prison of silence, unable to recount her experience to those around her. That we do not know what has happened to her, only that she has been traumatized, is significant, for it alludes to the profound difficulty of comprehending the horrible events witnessed by war victims. The child's experience calls upon readers to ask how we can possibly understand what such victims are telling us, as well as what should be done with the information gathered. Like the Jouberts, Claude wants to help the little girl, but his indecision renders him unable to act. His hesitation is emblematic of Americans in the 1920s who struggled to know what to do with those victimized by war. *The Deepening Stream* similarly attempts to give voice to refugees akin to the little girl in Cather's novel, and to put people to work in order to heal the trauma.

One of the most basic ways to commemorate traumatized children is by denormalizing fighting, thus ensuring all children have access to safe space. In her treatise on parenting entitled *Self-Reliance* (1916), Canfield Fisher argues that children should learn at a young age that war is an unnatural act. She writes, "It would normally be a part of the logical functioning of a mind at the seven-year-old level that the wrongness of international armed conflict should be clear. Toward this end our training should aim."³⁰ The "would" in Canfield Fisher's statement is significant, for it suggests that these are abnormal times, one which children are no longer taught that war is deplorable. In *The Deepening Stream*, Canfield Fisher continues to portray war as an unnatural act, even as she expands the definition of what constitutes war to include the domestic sphere. The first half of the novel traces Matey's childhood, in which she moves repeatedly because her father, a professor, is forever accepting new positions. Matey's childhood is marked by conflict: Matey and her two siblings grow up in a household where her parents are constantly arguing over how much money to spend, where to live, and with whom to socialize. By placing the undeniable horrors of war alongside more banal images of parents fighting, Canfield Fisher attenuates the vital connection between war trauma and

home problems, suggesting that both are spaces of alienation and betrayal. Indeed, Canfield Fisher uses the images of parents fighting to build a sense of community among her readers. Although most readers will never have lived in a literal war zone such as Paris, they likely have experienced domestic battles.

American children, Canfield Fisher suggests, have been traumatized, not by war, but by bad parenting. As such they are victims in need of rehabilitation. In the novel, the trauma of watching their parents' never-ending fighting has negative consequences: As a young adult, Matey never feels at home and struggles to make meaningful attachments with other people. Her sister, Priscilla, grows depressed and decides not to have children because she fears exposing them to the kinds of trauma she faced as a child. Their elder brother, Francis, internalizes the arguments by becoming obsessed with making money, so much so that he becomes an isolationist unable to envision the needs of others. During the war, for example, he resists efforts to send humanitarian aid to food to women and children in Germany, so much so that he rebukes Matey "for her sentimental sympathy with the enemy," noting, "We are at war with a race of beasts and barbarians who are proud of their beastliness, and that's the thing to keep steadily before our minds. They must be exterminated if the world is ever to know peace and civilization again."³¹ Francis further urges that they should "Let Germany rot!" How much did the Boches think of French and Belgian women and children? It is their turn now. The fewer of that brood the better"(350). The point here is that these character flaws are the result of the environment in which they were raised, and that too many children are subject to petty bickering among their parents. These flaws, moreover, have ominous consequences. Witnessing his parents's behavior has taught Francis to be intolerant, a critical position that makes him unsympathetic of German citizens caught in the literal crossfire of the conflict.

In the novel, one of the most productive uses of war comes when it inspires parents to abandon such destructive ways of thinking and subsequently rethink how they relate to their children. The mundane arguments Matey witnessed as a child become the basis for her connection to the children harmed by war. Canfield Fisher writes, "She understood the sick little boy crouching in his corner. There had been long periods in her youth when she too had crept into a corner and turned her face away from what life seemed to be" (266). Canfield Fisher acknowledges that it would be easy for postwar parents to similarly hide in a corner, to use feelings of despair to rationalize the decision not to become involved in preventing future war. Matey's husband, Adrian, embodies this way of thinking. In one scene, he remarks that war has made him question whether or not they should have had children: "It

might have been better for us if we had never been born,” said the man from the front, “and hadn’t brought two more human beings into the world” (257). Canfield Fisher, like other 1920s critics, sought to move beyond reasoning that encourages a passive relationship with the community to a more active position that calls for a rethinking of parenting strategies in response to the horrors of war. In accordance with this point, Matey processes the traumatic events of her childhood by remembering and reinterpreting the events of her childhood, but also by putting them to use.

Canfield Fisher used the horrific memories of war to call for a new cooperative spirit, one in which difference was no longer seen as a threat, but as the lifeblood of community. Her unpublished essay, “Parental Education and War,” written during the interwar years, may be read as an example of the desire to use trauma as the inspiration for rethinking both family and work. In this essay, Canfield Fisher urges her audience, which was primarily composed of white women, to move past any lingering sorrow they feel about the war, arguing that “weeping and tearing of hair in sorrow is not enough anymore.”³² It is worth noting that Canfield Fisher uses the language of illness to describe the impulse to commit violence. In one section, Canfield Fisher argued that “war is not something that is to be cut out of human life but must be cured out” (10). She assigned this role to women, whom she urged to adopt “a long course of preventative treatment in the malady of war, rather than trusting to violent surgical methods at the crisis” (10). A proponent of the scientific approach to motherhood, in which mothers used scientific methods, such as boiling bottles in order to prevent milk fever in young children, Canfield Fisher similarly urged readers to apply scientific principles to the prevention of war, devising games and activities that would teach children to resolve conflict without using force. Doing so, Canfield Fisher argued, would signal a “steady, patient, vigorous building up of social justice” (10). Here we see Canfield Fisher participating in a new rhetoric of raising children, one that mentored parents to teach their children an internationalist view of the world.

Although Canfield Fisher’s post-war ideas about parenting clearly stemmed from her experience in France during the Great War, her philosophy was also influenced by earlier writing on the subject of children and parents. An advocate of the Montessori approach to education, in which children are given the physical and psychological space to chart the course of their education, Canfield Fisher wrote three books dedicated to the topic of raising children, *A Montessori Mother* (1912), *Mothers and Children* (1914), and *Self-Reliance* (1916). Her ideas about childhood were well-respected in the 1920s and 1930s, so much so that Eleanor Roosevelt

would eventually name Canfield Fisher among the ten most important women in America, a designation due in no small part to the advice she offered parents.³³ An advocate of the concept that play ought to be a constructive activity, Canfield Fisher urged parents to apply this concept to the act of playing “war.” In her 1916 book, *Self-Reliance*, for example, she urged parents to teach children to play a new, more pro-social kind of ‘war.’ Rather than permit children to play “blood-thirsty reproductions of actual battles” in which they pretend to kill one another, she argued that children should be encouraged to play pro-social war games that used work to teach cooperation.³⁴ For example, Canfield Fisher proposed that children ought to create camps such as the ones similarly constructed at the rear of the battlefield. Such camps exist, of course, to forestall and repair the damage done at the front. Teaching children about life such camps requires them to think about war in a more global context, an act that must eventually transition from destruction to reconstruction, if only to insure the survival of those not destroyed by the violence. Indeed, Canfield Fisher argues that these camps at the rear teach children to view war in terms of care giving: In them, children cook and care for the other “soldiers,” an exercise that teaches “the principles of hygienically caring for a large body of men; and more to the point in the matter of self-help.”³⁵ In this quote we see Canfield Fisher attempting to make productive use of war by using the battlefield to teach responsibility and self-care, rather than wanton destruction. Implicit in this planned activity is the notion that parents must be involved in lives of their children, not so much by telling them how to think, but by creating settings that will encourage children to model cooperative play. Ideally, playing war in the manner Canfield Fisher envisioned would benefit both the present and the future, as children would develop the conflict-negotiation skills necessary to solve conflicts without the use of force.

Canfield Fisher’s interest in using parents as a bulwark against future war must be placed amidst the context of other postwar rhetoric about the war and its impact upon families. As other critics have noted, war reminded parents of the vulnerability of children; this, combined with the growing popularity of scientific parenting, spurred a desire to do something productive with the memory of war. Diana Selig notes that “the new science of the child, which gained prominence in the interwar years, sharpened the view of childhood as a distinct and malleable stage of life deserving of special protection. Peace advocates drew on this science to describe children as both vulnerable and impressionable, the most easily injured and the most likely to escape the ills of prejudice, violence, and war.”³⁶ Historian Dominique Marshall further notes that “the idea of children’s vulnerability and

the conviction that armed conflicts deprived them of a childhood inspired a sense of duty in adults,” who believed that “children embodied a serene and traditional society to be saved.”³⁷ Selig points out that many concerned parents sought to inculcate their children with an internationalist vision, one that taught children the importance of recognizing cultural similarities as opposed to difference. Selig argues this vision was shared by mainstream society, including *Parents Magazine*, the popular advice magazine established in 1926, which frequently contained articles describing how to raise children to not make war. Selig writes that the first editor of *Parents*, Clara Savage Littledale, travelled to the front during the war, an experience that later inspired her to connect the “public concern for peace with the private realm of parenting, underlying the political meanings of childhood. In her account, childrearing offered the best possibility for a future without war.”³⁸

If children were to be raised in such a way so that they would prevent future war, then parents needed to be taught how to instill world mindedness in their children. No longer were parents trusted to use their instinct or to rely upon the advice of grandparents when it came to the topic of childrearing; instead, they were to rely upon the experts, who gave advice on such varied topics as what to feed children, how to establish a daily schedule, and when to begin toilet-training. As Rima D. Apple notes, listening to the experts gave parents peace of mind, as they believed that it “could help them improve the lives of their children.”³⁹ World-mindedness was at the center of early issues of *Parents Magazine*, which included articles brimming with tips on how to construct an internationalist vision in children. This sentiment is evident in the editorial published in the first issue of the magazine in 1926, in which executive editor George J. Hecht adopted a reassuring tone with parents, pointing out that “everyone is blaming the home these days for the defects of our civilization, and yet who is helping the parents to a better performance of their function?”⁴⁰ *Parents*, of course, offered itself as the text that would provide anxious parents with the guidance necessary to take on this new, all-important role. It noted the difficulty of raising children, even as it pointed out the joys inherent in the activity, stating that “the care and training of children is a complicated, difficult task, as well as a joy, one that challenges their best thought and requires a certain amount of specialized knowledge. . . We propose that it shall also bring both inspiration and definite practical information to those who are the creators of modern lives and molders of human destinies.”⁴¹ The magazine fostered a sense of authority with its readers by contracting psychologists and other so-called ‘experts’ to write articles arguing that it was their duty to instill a sense of internationalism with their children.

It is worth noting the editors of *Parents* placed the responsibility for inculcating a sense of internationalism with parents, who were expected to invent strategies that would teach American children the many commonalities they shared with other children of the world. Failing to teach children such values was viewed as a sign of a parent's ineptitude. This sentiment is apparent in a 1933 article written by psychologist Helen Champlin, who argues that parents teach children to be intolerant, proposing "No child is born nationalized and with isolation prejudices. His point of view becomes narrowly and dangerously nationalistic only when he comes into contact with such points of view in the adults of his environment. It is as easy to train a developing child to be a citizen of the whole world of men as it is to train him to be a too prejudiced partisan of the nation on whose soil he happened to be born."⁴² Champlin locates intolerance in the parent who "unquestionably originates his children's earliest, most permanent and most significant attitudes" (14). To ward off such destructive beliefs, parents are charged with the task of fixing themselves, choosing "the attitudes towards other peoples that we want to build into the mind of the child" (14). Champlin presents "world-mindedness" as the ideal attitude for parents to adopt, for it encourages "sympathetic cooperation," "helpful cooperation," "a clear recognition of both the past and the potential contributions of different peoples to a common civilization," and "an unyielding insistence that among nations that every means must be employed to insure lasting peace" (15). These lofty ideas were to be taught, moreover, as early as possible. Champlin argues that when toddlers play, they should be encouraged "such conduct as sharing one's toy, helping along a less able toddler, contributing one's ideas toward building a house of blocks, taking just one's own share of the candy, waiting one's turn in the game, applauding whole-heartedly for the competitor's skill and giving sympathy" (50). In doing so, parents develop a cooperative spirit in their child. It is worth noting that Champlin is encouraging parents to keep doing what they are doing: Most parents encourage children to share their toys and to wait their turn. What she is advocating, however, is that parents be mindful of the significance of the most ordinary acts, that they understand how the seemingly mundane act of sharing one's blocks might foster a more cooperative spirit that could prevent future war. Note, moreover, that these cooperative attitudes are fostered in the relatively isolated spaces of the home.

Like Champlin, Canfield Fisher connected good mothering with nationalism; however, she differed in that she envisioned that the responsibility for teaching children a sense of internationalism lay not just with parents but with the entire community. This was no doubt due to Canfield Fisher's belief that children

benefitted from regular exposure to other children in Montessori-type settings, in which young children are taught at an early age how the acts of the individual impact the group. A champion of the Montessori system of education prior to the war, Canfield Fisher's war-time writing argued for strengthening one's ties with the community. Indeed, parents were not expected to 'fix' their own behaviors so that they could teach their child properly at home, but to expose their children to a larger community so that they would understand the vital role they played in ensuring the group's survival. This idea is particularly evident in *The Deepening Stream*, as the traumatic experience of war leads to a rethinking of communal responsibility, so that the care of children is no longer seen as a familial, but as a communal job. One of the many themes in the novel is that someone must assume the role of caretaker for these children made orphans by war. Yet Canfield Fisher was critical of the governmental agencies that took on this role, arguing that such agencies too often fell victim to bureaucratic delays. This point is illustrated in the novel when Matey learns that the orphanage she worked so hard to create is to be suddenly closed, in part because it has no bureaucratic home. It is only because of Matey's frantic efforts to break through the red tape that the home remains open. In the novel, the individual, portrayed by Matey, must compensate for the soulless decisions made by inefficient relief agencies. Her efforts create a new version of the family, one in which individuals are related not by blood, but by a common desire to improve the world.

If the editors of *Parents Magazine* called upon parents to teach their children tolerance, then Canfield Fisher's rhetoric of the family challenged parents to adopt a more active form of parenting, one responsive to all children in need, regardless of their nationality or blood ties. There are numerous instances in *The Deepening Stream* in which parents care for children who do not belong to them: Mme Vinet's daughter, Ziza, for example, arrives in Paris with an infant who is the child of Ziza's former Belgian maid and a German soldier. Because both parents are deceased, Ziza, together with Mme Vinet and Matey, takes on the task of raising the child. Here we can see Canfield Fisher's ideas about internationalism and mothering in action. That the child is half-German and a product of the enemy is of little consequence: What matters instead is that the child is protected from further harm by three women: two French and one American. This collaboration is the ideal way to raise children, for it teaches them the value of community as well as erases the idea that nations are separated by impenetrable differences.

Canfield Fisher argues that the children of war can only be healed as the result of international cooperation. In another scene, Matey helps a French refugee, who

is a widow and the mother of a two-month-old child. With no family or home to return to, the woman is too depressed to care for her infant, so much so “she would not look at her baby, she turned her face away from the sun.”⁴³ Such mothers present a special risk to the rest of the population, for their inability to parent and to nurture raises the specter of children who are raised without an appreciation of difference and others. Matey saves this woman and her child by finding them a new home in the town where they once lived, and by extension, she saves the rest of us, who will not have to experience the consequences of a carelessly raised child. Canfield Fisher’s argument here is that such children must be cared for in order to construct a new social order. The responsibility, moreover, lies not with the child’s parents, who, as in the case of the war widow, may simply be too traumatized to care for the child, but with all of society. Canfield Fisher further translates these ideals from Europe to the United States: While Matey helps to find care for the orphaned children of Europe, her sister, Priscilla, aids those needing care in the United States by marrying a widower for the sole purpose of caring for his children. The sense of self-sacrifice that drives Priscilla’s decision to marry a widower so that she may care for his children is at the center of Canfield Fisher’s ideas about what good mothering involves.

Even though good mothers should be attentive and loving caregivers of their children, Canfield Fisher argues that their own interests and desires should not be subsumed. Rather, good mothers teach their children responsibility, sharing, and self-sacrifice, even as they model more independent qualities. Canfield Fisher underscores this point in *Mothers and Children*, arguing “let a woman, while she is still young, search her heart to know what would have been her keenest interest if she had not become a mother; and then let her hold fast to that interest through all the busy rush of rearing a family.”⁴⁴ This concept is on view in *The Deepening Stream*: An attentive and loving parent, Matey nevertheless maintains her own identity by frequently leaving her children to go help others. To remain solely at home with one’s children, Canfield Fisher suggests, is an inherently selfish act, for it prevents one from interacting with the larger community. In doing so, the isolated mother fails to teach her children the inherent value that comes from connecting with others. In the novel, Mme Vinet is guilty of such parenting: Although she provides weary soldiers with a place to stay, she seldom leaves her apartment. Her grown children further lament the fact that she modeled isolationist thinking when they were young. In one scene, Mimi, Mme Vinet’s eldest daughter, rails against her parents for not encouraging them to adopt more inclusive attitudes towards the world. Canfield Fisher’s point here is that parents unfairly hinder children when

they fail to instill them with an idea of how the intimate workings the family are tied to the larger concerns of the world. Even more significant, is the fact that such mothers are unaware of the community's needs.

While child advocates called upon parents to teach their children an internationalist vision focusing on cooperation, Canfield Fisher sought use this newly formed sense of community to eradicate what she saw as the root cause of war: economic inequality. "Economic forces—tariffs, banking, overwrought industrialism," are one of the "most important causes of war," according to Canfield Fisher.⁴⁵ Once again it is worth turning to *The Deepening Stream* as an example of how Canfield Fisher used speaking about the trauma of war to create a new sense of social responsibility, one that advocated giving war victims a chance to heal via a re-establishment of economic independence. Unlike other relief workers in the novel, Matey opposes providing aid in the form of cash payments to refugees. Instead, Matey works to provide war victims, such as the woman who once refused to look at her infant child, a small farm where they can once again begin to support themselves. In similar fashion, Matey arranges to send a disabled veteran to a technical school to learn how to manage a poultry farm. Here we see Canfield Fisher's concept that meaningful work leads to healing: By giving refugees small plots of land to farm, they are encouraged to once again take control of their lives. Indeed, what proves most beneficial to the boy who once cowered under his bed, afraid to interact with the world, is the gift of a puppy for which he must care. Embedded in these stories of recovery is an anti-consumerist message: By the end of the war, Matey has given away her entire fortune, yet wishes she had more to give. At one point, she laments the purchases she and Adrian made before the war, when they bought a Model-T car and a new furnace for their home. If only they hadn't wasted their money on such tokens of capitalism, Matey thinks at one point, noting, "I brought on the war, too, by my beastly satisfaction with my own share."⁴⁶ Her lament marks an important moment in the novel, for it signals Matey's desire to reshape her own memories: The home that she and her husband so lovingly furnished has become a space of isolation. Creating the perfect space for her family has made her less equipped to deal with more profound problems experienced by those who are the victims of war. The scene also signals Canfield Fisher's desire to make Matey a kind of everywoman, one is easily recognizable to the Middlebrow audiences who so eagerly consumed her books. By pairing characters such as Matey, with her very middle-class concerns (among others things, Matey at one point recalls the intense, indescribable pain of childbirth, an event many of Canfield Fisher's readers no doubt experienced), with more 'foreign' characters such as the Vinet family, Canfield Fisher provides a

model for post-war collaboration, one founded not on government agencies, but on women's shared interest in nurturing their children.

In the end, Canfield Fisher's desire to use war to strengthen ties between the nuclear family and the community, both on a local and on an international level, had mixed success at best. "One thing is sure," argues Matey's husband after the war, "we are all responsible, even compromisers like me who wouldn't fire a gun but went around helping patch up the wounded so that they could go back and kill some more" (360). Canfield Fisher attempted to make this point in her novel, arguing that parents must search for more meaningful community ties, ones that would act as an antidote against future war. And yet the author who declared in *The Deepening Stream* that "the only despair lies in thinking that one's life is all, in not seeing the vastness of which it is a part" would live to see the Nazis gain a frightening hold on Europe, as well as to witness the internment of Japanese-American citizens in camps scattered throughout the Western United States (392). The events abroad traveled home in a most personal and tragic way: In 1945, her son James was killed while attempting to liberate prisoners of war in the Philippines.

Notes

1. Canfield Fisher published nonfiction under her maiden name, Canfield, and fiction using her married name, Fisher. For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to her as Canfield Fisher throughout this essay.
2. Janis Stout's excellent essay, "The Making of Willa Cather's *One of Ours*: The Role of Dorothy Canfield Fisher," *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 11, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1999): 48-59, focuses on how Canfield Fisher aided Willa Cather during the writing of *One of Ours*.
3. Alan Price, "Writing Home from the Front: Edith Wharton and Dorothy Canfield Fisher Present War-time France to the United States: 1917-1919," *Edith Wharton Newsletter* 5, no. 2 (1988): 1-5, 8.
4. Janice Stout, "The Making of Willa Cather's *One of Ours*: The Role of Dorothy Canfield Fisher," *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 11, no. 2 (1999): 48-59 and Karsten H. Piep, "War as Feminist Utopia in Dorothy Canfield Fisher's *Home Fires in France* and Gertrude Atherton's *The White Morning*," *Women's Studies* 34 (2005): 159-189.
5. In "'Dear, Tender-Hearted, Uncomprehending America': Dorothy Canfield Fisher's and Edith Wharton's Fictional Responses to the First World War," Mary R. Ryder argues that the authors used their war-time writing to illustrate how the war transformed American culture. Patrick J. Quinn and Steven Trout, *Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
6. Dorothy Canfield Fisher to Sarah Cleghorn, 1917, in *Keeping Fires Night and Day: Selected Letters of Dorothy Canfield Fisher*, ed. Mark Madigan (Columbia and London: U of Missouri Press, 1993).

7. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "The Refugee: A Narrative of the Sufferings of Invaded France," *The Outlook* 19 September 1917, 88.
8. *Ibid.*, 90.
9. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Home Fires in France* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1918), 13.
10. *Ibid.*, 13.
11. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1975), 92.
12. Jennifer Haytock, *At Home, At War: Domesticity and World War I in American Literature* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2003), xxii.
13. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1930), 242, 241.
14. *Ibid.*, 238.
15. Angelika Bammer makes a similar point in her book *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994).
16. In "Involuntary Commemorations: Post-traumatic stress disorder and its relationship to war commemoration," Jo Stanley argues that soldiers who experience PTSD are often deeply concerned by the public displays of war commemoration. Certainly Adrian and his father fit this assertion. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, ed. T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
17. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 361.
18. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 7.
19. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 358.
20. *Ibid.*, 202.
21. Judith Herrmann, 214.
22. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 266.
23. Dominique Marshall, "Humanitarian Sympathy for Children in Times of War and the History of Children's Rights, 1919-1959," in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. James Marten, 184-200, (New York and London: NYU Press, 2002), 187.
24. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 264.

25. Canfield Fisher was an outspoken proponent of Montessori-education, in which children use independent play to practice positive adult behavior. In her 1912 book, *A Montessori Mother*, for example, Canfield Fisher writes, "The learner must do his own learning, and, this granted, it follows naturally that the less he is interfered with by arbitrary restraint and vexations, unnecessary rules, the more quickly and easily he will learn." Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *A Montessori Mother* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 51.
26. Marshall, "Humanitarian Sympathy for Children in Times of War and the History of Children's Rights, 1919-1959," 187, 188.
27. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 267.
28. See Steven Trout, "Willa Cather's *One of Ours* and the Iconography of Remembrance," *Cather Studies* 4 (1999): 187-204 and Steven Trout, *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War*, (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2002).
29. Willa Cather. *One of Ours*, (New York: Vintage, 1925), 286.
30. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Self-Reliance: A Practical and Informal Discussion of Methods of Teaching Self-Reliance, Initiative and Responsibility to Modern Children*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1916), 14.
31. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 284.
32. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Parental Education and War," (Folder 39, ts. Dorothy Canfield Fisher Papers. U of Vermont), 2.
33. Ida Washington makes this point in *Dorothy Canfield Fisher: A Biography*, (Shelburne, VT: The New England Press, 1982), 220.
34. Canfield Fisher, *Self-Reliance*, 65.
35. *Ibid.*, 65.
36. Diana Selig, "World Friendship: Children, Parents, and Peace Education in America between the Wars," in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. James Marten (New York and London: NYU Press, 2002), 136.
37. Marshall, "Humanitarian Sympathy for Children in Times of War and the History of Children's Rights, 1919-1959," 185, 188.
38. Selig, "World Friendship: Children, Parents, and Peace Education in America between the Wars," 137.
39. Rima D. Apple, Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2006), 98.
40. George J. Hecht, "A Magazine for Parents: To Serve the Largest Group in the World Having a Common Interest," *Parents Magazine* 1 (October 1926), 4.
41. *Ibid.*, 4.

42. Helen K. Champlin, "Will Our Parents Outlaw War?," *Parents Magazine* 8 (July 1933), 14-15, 50-51.
 43. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 238.
 44. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Mothers and Children* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 255.
 45. Canfield Fisher, "Parental Education and War," 6.
 46. Canfield Fisher, *The Deepening Stream*, 280.
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