

Tom Burns, Elcio Cornelsen, Volker Jaeckel,  
Luiz Gustavo Vieira (eds.)

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# War and Literature

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*Looking Back on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Armed Conflicts*



*ibidem*

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# WAR AND LITERATURE

*Looking Back on  
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## Introduction

The collection at hand is neither a new book nor a second edition. It is not a simple translation as well. Our previous collection, *Revisiting 20<sup>th</sup> Century Wars*, is what we might call a predecessor. As our group's first international publication, *Revisiting 20<sup>th</sup> Century Wars* features essays in German and English by scholars from different countries and institutions. This new work, *War and Literature: Looking Back on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Armed Conflicts*, preserves some essays of our previous work (duly revised and updated) which were written in English. Some essays originally written in German have been translated into English (and also revised and updated). Finally, some new, still unpublished, contributions have been added. The work of our group, NEGUE (*Núcleo de Estudos de Guerra e Literatura* – Center for Studies of War and Literature), is an active, ongoing and dynamic process. Our publications are but one element of the research carried out at the College of Letters of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), but also a consequence of this research, aimed at conveying the vitality and dynamism of the work. Every semester, the group organizes lectures and seminars on the representation of armed conflicts; we hold movie sessions with commentaries by members; professors from our group offer courses on the literature of war for undergraduate and graduate students on a regular basis; master, doctoral and postdoctoral research is constantly underway; new members join and other members unfortunately leave. In six years, the group can claim three collections published in the form of books and one in the form of a special edition of the college of letters' periodical (*Aletria*) on the literature of the Spanish Civil War. Another, special issue of *Aletria*, on War Memoirs, is due late this year, 2014. It is notable that only two authors appear in all of them; over 35 scholars have had their essays published in collections organized by UFMG's Center for Studies of War and Literature.

*War and Literature: Looking Back on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Armed Conflicts* is as hybrid as our research, as hard to define and as dynamic as our subject matter: representations of armed conflicts. In fact, we deliberately wanted the book to reflect both in its form and in its content the multi-faceted nature of its subject matter, one that undoubtedly challenges labels and definitions. In terms of scope, whereas Sérgio Marino's text focuses on one author (Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien), Luiz Gustavo Vieira's essay provides an outlook on the changes in the



nature of combat, and hence of its representation, during the last century. Chronologically speaking, not all the conflicts herein analyzed did take place solely during the Twentieth Century. For instance, the Canudos War, discussed in Javier Uriarte's essay, happened between 1896 and 1897, although Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*, its most well-known representation and Uriarte's main topic, was published in 1902. Similarly, Helmut Galle's essay dwells on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, still being waged and triggered by an ubiquitous 21<sup>st</sup> century event: the 9/11 attack against the Twin Towers in New York. Regarding the media or genres approached, this volume does not restrict itself to literary or written representations. Elcio Cornelsen's essay is about cinematic representations of the Balkan Wars; José Otaviano's piece discusses rock band Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, which he calls an "intermedial product consisting of a music album, a concert and a movie." Even in terms of written representations alone, the variety of literary genres and modes of discourse testifies to the many forms men and women have adopted in their attempt to convey, represent, and understand war: Valéria Pereira pores over letters written by Germans, civilians and combatants, during the Second World War; W. D. Ehrhart analyzes Korean War Poetry; Tom Burns focuses on Second World War novels and journalism; Olinda Kleiman writes on Antônio Lobo Antunes' autobiographical *Os Cus de Judas*, about his experience during Portugal's colonial war in Africa. Roberto Vecchi's essay deals with the same conflict, but from a completely different point of view. One single conflict is the topic of Oliver Lubrich's analysis of Ernst Jünger and Volker Jaeckel's study on Blasco Ibañez: the so-called war to end all wars.

Exactly one hundred years ago, in the middle of the year 1914, an armed conflict broke out in Europe and lasted four years. Because of its scope and length, its waste of lives, its murderous practices, and mainly because of the way it has reverberated for years on end, the First World War changed the world. Much has been written about this war. Nevertheless, in spite of all the study, debate and analysis, controversy still surrounds it: What should we call it? The First World War, World War I, The Great War, or The War to End All Wars? When did it really start? Why did it start? How many lives did it claim? Who emerged undoubtedly victorious after four years of apparently futile bloodshed? One thing, however, remains certain: this war has changed war itself, its nature, the way it is waged, and the way we view, discuss, and write about war. The First World War questioned and ultimately rendered meaningless the very vocabulary of war: terms

such as “battle”, “front”, “non-combatant”, “open city” and “hero” were emptied of former connotations. New words, new approaches, new theories and new texts had to be found or even invented. Armed conflicts have become so widespread, murderous, and recurrent since the 1914–1918 war that the work of studying such an event acquires urgency and requires care, respect, and theoretical grounding: how can we speak of war if we do not know what we mean by this term? In order to have a world free from armed conflicts, we must first understand what war really is. If we are going to talk about war, then we must know what exactly we are talking about. This book acknowledges and gives testimony to the complexity and far-reaching meanings of the subject, and humbly hopes to be of assistance for those who wish to understand and study what Heraclitus called “The Father of us all.”

We would like to thank all the people without whom this collection would not have been possible: Thiago Braga and Andre Weiss for formatting and revising the essays; Valerie Lange and Christian Schön at *ibidem*-Verlag for their support.

Belo Horizonte, January 2014

Tom Burns  
Elcio Cornelsen  
Volker Jaeckel  
Luiz Gustavo Vieira



## Introduction to Revisiting Twentieth Century Wars

In 2007, scholars at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, long devoted to the analysis of literary representations of war, created a permanent space where students, professors, and any interested party, could gather, discuss, and study the subject. Since then, NEGUE – Núcleo de Estudos de Guerra e Literatura (Center for Studies of War and Literature) has organized several lectures and seminars with Brazilian and foreign scholars; produced, through its permanent members, six master's theses and one PhD dissertation; and published, in addition to scores of papers by its members, one collection of essays entitled *Literatura e Guerra* (Literature and War). With the publication of this volume on twentieth century war literature, the group intends to cross national frontiers and inaugurate an international dialogue with those also interested in this hardly-defined, urgent, and yet fascinating field we call war literature. Let us begin by clarifying the qualifications just mentioned.

Not only war literature, but war itself is a hardly defined word. Specialists such as anthropologists, sociologists, archeologists, and the like, have had a hard time pinpointing what war really is. If, on one hand, a strict definition, in a single sentence or paragraph, may fail to contemplate and encompass the various and multifaceted aspects armed conflicts have shown throughout history; on the other hand, a broad definition will end up accepting any local feud or rivalry as war. Organized violence is not war. Definitions of war risk being commonplace, lacking specificity or scientific rigor. Perhaps the best way to understand what war is lies in isolating its features, what Robert O'Connell calls a "defining structure"<sup>1</sup>: wars display a) premeditation and planning – war is not a momentary emotional response and requires elements of logistic such as supplies and mobility; b) of collective nature – war deals with societal issues, to be solved through force; c) direction – war is led or conducted by some form of leadership or government; d) willingness – combatants are willing to get engaged in time-consuming actions that imply risks and are willing to kill each other; e) result – war, at least theoretically, must bring about either positive or negative effects, of a certain duration, not only immediate gain. It goes without saying that not all wars in history have displayed all features above. Some wars have been triggered by the whims of dictators who aimed at nothing but their own personal benefit; some men have fought unwillingly, as slaves or conscripts. However, as a limiting framework, O'Connell's set of

characteristics does help us better envisage what we are talking about when we say “war”.

The origins of human war may be traced back to seven or eight thousand years ago in the form of what we may call organized theft when two distinct ways of life clashed. As human activities split into two different communities, agricultural and pastoral, certain nomads, devoted to the rearing of cattle, started raiding agricultural settlements. These settlements, in turn, started organizing themselves for protection and raiding other agricultural communities – why not attack weaker parties in search for food, slaves and cattle if this is easier than work, provided you are willing to kill in order to obtain such gains? Thus war is born. The only animal, other than man, that wages war is the ant. Certain species of ants engage themselves in organized, violent confrontations against other creatures in order to acquire long-term benefits. However, the ant’s war is inherent, written into their genes – the war of the ants has never been subjected to change. Man’s war is utterly different. Human war is a cultural institution, meaning that it has changed over time and space and has been shaped by the cultures that wage them. Eastern cultures, such as China and Japan, favor limited, traditional wars of deception, the ultimate goal being to win without firing a single shot. Ancient cultures of the Americas, such as the Aztecs, and aboriginal peoples, adopt ritualized confrontations aiming at dominance and capturing victims for sacrifices rather than killing the enemy. The model of war we westerners are most familiar with (and tend to view as “fair”) is what Victor Davis Hanson has dubbed “the western way of war”. The western way of war, conceived in Ancient Greece by the city-states and fought by the hoplites, centers around an open, decisive, short-lived, murderous confrontation that aims at total victory, the total obliteration of the enemy: the battle.

The study and theoretically-grounded analysis of war representation is evidently urgent when we think of how recurrent and encompassing this cultural institution has become. Focusing on the twentieth century alone, and leaving aside the two most murderous events in human history, i.e. the two world wars, more than 160 armed conflicts have killed over 50,000,000 people since August 1945, that is, *after* the most deadly weapon ever invented was used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For more than a hundred years, not a single day has passed without a war going on in one part of the planet. Moreover, the conflicts of the past century were neither the business of a warrior elite nor a restricted affair settled in a matter of hours on a battlefield. Civilians, who were 5% of the casualties in the First World War,

responded for 90% of the victims in the 1990's. Terms such as "front", "rear", "non-combatant", "open city", and the like, have been rendered meaningless in modern technological wars. Engagements such as Verdun or Stalingrad lasted for whole months, claiming tens, sometimes hundreds, of thousands of casualties.

Any study on the subject of war, no matter for what field of human activity, must acknowledge that war is as hideous as it is fascinating. It is naïve and untruthful to deny war's allure over people, which is not the same as advocating in favor of war or viewing it under a positive light. War fascinates because it is an extremely relevant event, affecting millions of lives, shaping the world we live in for millennia; besides, veterans often claim that no other experience in life is as intense as combat, that you never feel as alive as when you risk your life in battle. War, in an apparent contradiction, is as attractive as it is repulsive. War's importance and appeal become evident when we think that the first works of the field we now know as history are about war (Herodotus' *Histories* and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*); that some of the world's greatest works of art take war as their subject (Beethoven's symphony "Eroica", Goya's painting "3 de Mayo de 1808", Picasso's huge "Guernica", Coppola's "Apocalypse Now", to name a few); that Freud developed some of his groundbreaking concepts and theory under the influence of, and during, World War I; that medicine sees great development during war, with new medications and practices appearing in response to combat situations; that many of the inventions we enjoy in peaceful life first appeared, or were perfected, in wartime.

As for the field of literature, war and story-telling have undoubtedly walked hand-in-hand for millennia. It may be argued that, except for the theme of love, no other aspect of human experience has been more influential or more recurrent in literature than armed conflicts. From Greek epic to medieval sagas, from Roman epic to plays, from lyric poetry to postmodern novels, countless authors seem to agree with Ernest Hemingway when he claims that war is "the writer's best subject...since it groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get".<sup>2</sup>

The 13 essays herein featured, by internationally recognized specialists of eight countries and different areas of study, bear witness to the urgency, fascination, and difficulty of definition of war representation. Selected with a view to providing a broad canvas of current scholarship in the field, the texts contemplate a wide array of literary genres and of modes of representation: the novel, the film, the memoir,

the epic, the journalistic account, the poem, the autobiographical novel, the historiographic narrative are all treated. It concerns a subjective, but almost representative selection of articles on representation of bellicose acts in modern times.

The wide range of wars treated in these essays starts with the Canudos Civil War in the Brazilian state of Bahia in 1896-97, including new perceptions and interpretations of World War I, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the Holocaust, World War II, the Korean War, the wars in the former Portuguese colonies of Africa and the Balkan Wars of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and closes with the current war in Afghanistan, which began in 2001. The wars treated, although having different origins, like national pride, territorial expansion, fanatic religiousness, ethnic and racial conflicts, great social differences, the process of decolonization and terrorism, have one thing in common, which is their significant and constant repercussion in the print and broadcast media over a long period of time. Therefore, these modern wars have frequently been the object of new readings and reinterpretations until our days. The history of these wars could not have been written without the development of journalism, mass media and new technologies of war reportages in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, this book provides neither a chronological sequence nor a thematic arrangement, and it is not concerned with each conflict's supposed historical relevance either, since it has been devised as an outlook on the variety of the research now underway in different countries, on different topics. Hence, a paper on Second World War novel may be followed by one about Korean War Poetry; a comparison between types of combat follows an analysis of literary representations of colonial wars in Africa, and so on. As professor Kate McLoughlin states in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, "it is vital that techniques and tools are found to represent war accurately: such representations might not stop future wars, but it can at least keep the record straight".<sup>3</sup> Such has been our goal with this publication: look for the tools and techniques, help represent war accurately, keep the record straight, for if we may lack the power of preventing war, we must at least respect its countless victims.

Finally, we would like to thank all the people who contributed to the success of this volume; our special thanks will be to Arthur Guerra, Sue Bähring, Sylvia Henkel for formatting and revising the essays, and last but not least to Valerie Lange from *ibidem*-Verlag for the great support.

- <sup>1</sup> O'Connell, Robert.. *Ride of the second horseman – the birth and death of war*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 5.
- <sup>2</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *Ernest Hemingway Selected Letters 1917-1961*. Carlos Baker (ed.). (London: Granada, 1981), 176.
- <sup>3</sup> McLoughlin, Kate. *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), I.





## **Hunters turned into Prey: Predation in Twentieth Century War Literature**

Luiz Gustavo Vieira

Violence is a common and inherent feature of the animal world. Carnivores are always hunting, killing, and eating other animals. Violence, and combat for that matter, must be viewed as essential for the survival of countless species – both predator and prey must resort to it in order to eat and to avoid being eaten. On the other hand, war, herein understood as collective and organized combat, is a human institution. The only creature other than man that wages war against its own species is the ant. However, ants make war because it is in their genes to do so<sup>1</sup> and, unlike man's, their way of war has never changed, it has never been subjected to technological progress and cultural adaptations. Man is the only being that has turned war into a cultural institution. It is therefore obvious that violence as it is encountered in the natural world differs from the kind of violence that humans display at war. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some similarities between these two forms of combat and to reach some revealing conclusions by comparing the features men and animals share when it comes to fighting and killing.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze some examples of war literature, chiefly twentieth century literature, by applying to them the observations and remarks on the nature of combat as they are forwarded by American analyst Robert O'Connell in his study *Of Arms and Men – a history of war, weapons, and aggression* (1989). In order to do so, we shall begin by discussing O'Connell's work and his comments on combat as it is carried out by both animals and men. Next, war literature written before the twentieth century shall be mentioned for comparative reasons to highlight the changes that have occurred in armed conflicts with the advent of modern technological war. Finally, works representing three conflicts of the twentieth century, namely the First World War, the Second World War, and the Vietnam War, are to be approached and subjected to O'Connell's dual categories of predatory and intraspecific combat.

Robert L. O'Connell, a senior analyst at the US Army Intelligence Agency's Foreign Science and Technology Center with a Ph.D. in History, wrote *Of Arms and Men – a history of war, weapons, and aggression* in 1989. Resorting to research from several fields of knowledge, such as psychology, history, and

anthropology, to name a few, the book traces the development of war and of weapons from the second millennium B.C. to our days, from the first application of any object for deadly purposes to the invention of nuclear weapons. O'Connell also analyses the advent of war, from its birth as a somewhat organized theft, as nomads started raiding agricultural cultures, and as farmers in turn started organizing themselves for protection against these nomad groups,<sup>2</sup> to the bloodshed engineered by industrialized nations in the twentieth century. However, the point I would like to draw attention to and highlight in O'Connell's instigating work is the parallel he draws between the types of violent encounters we find in the natural world – what is called predatory and intraspecific combat – and the practices men adopt at war.

As O'Connell's chief interest lies in weapons, their evolution and their application, the author first attempts to define what a weapon is and how it is used. In order to make it clear that weapons are not an exclusively human tool, he begins by analyzing how predator and prey deploy their own natural weapons: claws, fangs, horns, poison, and the like. For him, “the mouth of a shark, the branch grasped by a frightened chimp, the bow of the hunter, and an F-16”<sup>3</sup> are all functionally linked together: their essence is the ability to damage or prevent damage from another organism. It is during this argumentation that he forwards the dual categories of predatory and intraspecific combat and their respective features.

Intraspecific aggression may be defined as strife among members of the same species. First of all, and utterly relevant for our purposes of drawing parallels between war and natural combat, is the fact that intraspecific aggression displays effective restraints on combatants, its purpose being dominance rather than killing. It is also “characteristically ritualized, with the instruments of combat often being specialized to serve the ends of these ceremonial confrontations”.<sup>4</sup> Animals of the same species seldom engage in mortal combat, and the weapons they choose for facing their likes are different from those they choose for fighting against their prey and predators. Hence, rattlesnakes do not bite each other and determine dominance through wrestling matches; deer use antlers only in social combat and their hooves against predators; piranha fish never bite other piranhas, choosing instead to use their tail fins; and while “northern elephant seals do attack conspecifics with their tusks”, they try to take blows on shoulders and chest, “areas protected with heavy layers of skin”.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these confrontations are “overwhelmingly individualized”,<sup>6</sup> aiming to settle individual disputes. Finally, intraspecific combat is marked by symmetry and complexity: the same weapon is deployed by both

contenders and the variety of such weapons in nature is astonishing, in terms of size, shape, and function. Some animals have even developed weapons which are in fact bordering on the bizarre as they are simply out of proportion with the rest of the body: the horn of the Hercules beetle or the horns of a bighorn sheep, for instance. Many of these developments make sense when we realize that much of non-predatory combat moves towards bluff and ritualization, not killing. In intraspecific aggression, looking bigger or more menacing counts as much as being actually able to kill. Predation, on the other hand, is about killing and nothing else. Its characteristics are therefore very different.

Predation, in marked contrast with intraspecific combat, shows no restraints: the sole purpose is killing in the fastest and easiest way possible with “any means of offense or defense being employed without hesitation”.<sup>7</sup> Predation is about survival and thus displays none of the limitations usually found in struggles among members of the same species – in predation there is no ritual. Predators, moreover, if given a chance, will choose the youngest and most helpless as victims. Secondly, predators, especially mammals, frequently hunt in groups – increasing the level of lethality. Also in contrast with conspecific struggle, predation is usually asymmetric: preys do not counter claws and teeth with their own, choosing rather to flee or to defend themselves with natural shells and armor. The variety of methods for killing in predation seems poor when compared to the diversity and complexity of intraspecific weapons: predators may display spectacular physiques but the killing instruments are seldom out of proportion and rely basically on penetration and poison – tools of such proven efficiency that evolution has not bothered to alter them. The shark, “evolutionarily stabilized for hundreds of millions of years”,<sup>8</sup> remains one of the world’s most efficient and feared predators with its submarine design and set of powerful teeth. Quadrupeds such as lions, tigers, and wolves, make use of tearing teeth and claws – and, in terms of design and weapon of choice, a tiger and a domestic cat only differ in size. O’Connell, however, points out to certain exceptions to the trends of “conservatism and uniformity”<sup>9</sup>: birds of prey that attack from above and legless serpents are alternatives to submarine and quadruped models. They nevertheless rely on penetration and poison as almost all other predators do.

In short, one may then separate both kinds of violence in the natural world as follows: predation is unrestrained, matter-of-fact killing, asymmetric, conservative in weapons, collective or individualized; whereas intraspecific combat is restrained, ritualized for dominance, symmetric, innovative in weapons, and individualized. As

we now move on to our primary topic, that is, war literature, it will become clear that man is the only being to apply the characteristics, or if we dare say, the rules, of predatory combat against members of his own species.

### **Intraspecific combat**

Perhaps the finest example to illustrate the nature of combat and of war before the advent of the gun, and of other more deadly weapons, is Homer's epic *The Iliad*, which stands as not only an archetype of war narrative, but as an archetype of intraspecific combat as well. Dubbed "the world's greatest war story"<sup>10</sup> and "the bible of land warfare",<sup>11</sup> it narrates approximately 50 days of the ten-year siege imposed by an assembly of Greek armies against the walled city of Troy. Explicitly centered on the leaders of the opposing armies – the heroes – the epic at times reads as if the whole Trojan War were a duel, to be settled by individual combat: either between Hector and Ajax, or between Diomedes and Aeneas, Patroclus and Hector, or mainly between Hector and Achilles. Few scenes depict engagements between masses of men. The *Iliad* is not about the armies, which stand in the background of the narrative and are irrelevant for the outcome of the conflict. Instead, it is about the few outstanding warriors who strive for glory – *kléos* – on the plain of Troy, and who ultimately settle the outcome of the war.

Although the text provides gruesome passages that reveal the violent nature of the fight, combat in the *Iliad* is highly ritualized. As two warriors approach each other, they often tell their names and their lineage and then engage in an exchange of threats and boasting. At times, as in the encounter between Diomedes and Glaukos, combat is even set aside once a common ground is established.<sup>12</sup> Combat begins by throwing spears and if this does not settle the winner they resort to swords; both contenders usually carry shields for protection. Chariots are used for arriving at and leaving the battlefield – it is a means of transportation not a weapon. Once an opponent is killed, it is acceptable to strip him of his armor as a trophy but his body should be left for proper burial. This standardized form of combat reads like a ritual, and every hero is expected to abide by the rules of the so-called warrior code. A breach of the code is met with scorn and surprise, sometimes causing anger on the opposing side. After killing Hector, Achilles refuses to leave the body for burial and instead abuses it for twelve days – an action the gods themselves reproach.<sup>13</sup> Diomedes scorns Paris when the Trojan wounds him with an arrow: the bow is "the blank weapon of a useless man, no fighter".<sup>14</sup> At times,

death is not even required. In the beginning of the epic, Hector and Ajax fight a duel which is fully ritualized: both pledge to return the body of the defeated, gifts are exchanged after the duel and neither combatant is killed.<sup>15</sup>

Though the previous remarks furnish a mere overview of the epic, it becomes clear that the most important features previously associated with intraspecific combat are notable. In consonance with the ritualized nature of combat and with non-predatory violence, symmetry is valued in the *Iliad*: spear against spear, sword against sword, scorn for the bow, an inherently asymmetric weapon. Warriors engage in individualized duels, aiming at establishing superiority, as in the case between Hector and Ajax. It should be noted, however, that as the war drags on, combat eventually acquires more somber and cruel tones, tending towards predation, principally after the death of Patroclus and the return of Achilles. Nevertheless, though unrestrained after these events, most of the basic rules of intraspecific aggression still prevail in the epic, even when the warriors strive to kill wantonly: symmetry, ritual, and individualized combat. In short, as Connell says, “the Homeric conception of warfare seems fundamentally in consonance with the characteristics of intraspecific combat”.<sup>16</sup> And this conception has had lasting influence.

Homer, in fact, “told men how to act when they fought one another”<sup>17</sup> and this pattern was destined to be ingrained in people’s minds, teaching them to value the search for glory in single combat – deemed fair because it was symmetric and heroic because it was “at the closest possible range”.<sup>18</sup> The sequence of combat of the Roman army, for example, duplicates exactly what is found in the *Iliad*. Stretching well into medieval times, the Homeric *ethos* can be found in the duels between knights – another distinguishable form of intraspecific combat: ritualized, symmetric, individualized and reserved for a few nobles, aiming at dominance or superiority with a view to achieving glory. As we reach this point, however, another work of literature offers insight into the changes in warfare and the move towards predatory forms.

In Shakespeare’s play “Henry V”,<sup>19</sup> the battle of Agincourt (1415), a landmark in the Hundred Years War between France and England, shows what happens when the two kinds of aggression face each other. The French knights, whose very identity rested upon one way of combat marked by contact with the opponent in a display of courage, charged against the English bowmen. The 9,000 English, heavily outnumbered against 30,000 enemies, created an actual killing zone as the

French kept on charging, like lemmings, against the arrows of the longbows. As we have seen, since Homer, the bow was viewed as a coward's weapon for it allows killing from afar, without promoting tests of courage. The French knighthood could never conceive of adopting such faceless type of combat and were thus massacred: 6,000 dead. Asymmetry (bow and arrow against charging troops), collective combat, lack of restraints and of ritual, matter-of-fact killing had definitely entered war – predation started being adopted and was to become the rule. The bow itself provides a very illustrative example when it comes to analyzing weapons and types of combat. When it first became widespread in Europe as the crossbow, it was met with such outrage for its inherent asymmetric nature that the Church, in 1139, outlawed its use against Christians.<sup>20</sup> Be it noted that the Church never discouraged its being used against Muslims. As the Muslims were viewed as pertaining to another, and inferior, species, there was no need for restraining combat against them – predation, after all, is by definition against another species. By applying the dual categories of predation and intraspecific combat, it is easier to understand why nations and religions use propaganda to belittle and deprecate their enemies, portraying them as the inferior other: a soldier will be more willing to kill another man if he is not perceived as such, if he is viewed as belonging to another species. The fight then is turned into predation, when killing is accepted, and moves away from intraspecific combat, when killing is not natural.

### **Predatory Combat**

However, Agincourt and medieval battles are just minor engagements when compared to the slaughter that the twentieth century had in store once predatory features became the rule in warfare. In 1914, as many a young man welcomed the outbreak of war, eager to prove themselves in a rite of passage into adulthood and a test of manhood,<sup>21</sup> little did they know that they would not make war – war would be made upon them.<sup>22</sup> The First World War inaugurated a new kind of war and deprived men of their power. After 1914, “death at war was no longer a fate you chose”,<sup>23</sup> war no longer the business of nobles or professional soldiers. In intraspecific combat, opponents choose to engage in combat; in predation, the prey chooses nothing – it only tries to survive. These young men who had welcomed the conflict thought they would take part in an intraspecific struggle. They found predation instead, and, what is worse, were placed in the role of the prey. A

soldier's skill, training, courage and prudence, or any other quality once valuable to assure survival, were rendered useless by the machine gun, one-ton shells, and gas – survival became a matter of chance.<sup>24</sup>

One of the greatest classics of the First World War literature, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, is a combat novel centered on the experiences of a small group of Germans in the Western Front. In the novel, the reader does not find the tests of courage or the ground for achieving glory that were present in the literature of previous wars. We are instead repeatedly reminded of men's utter helplessness before the technology of modern war. Instead of individualized duels between warriors of prowess, in this work there are masses of countless and faceless soldiers being maimed and killed by weapons they often do not even see. The First World War "made a mockery of the warrior ethic"<sup>25</sup> in pointless bloody battles such as Verdun, the Somme, and Passchendaele. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, symmetry, ritual, and individualized combats do not exist: men can do nothing but flee and hide against shells and machine guns; the enemy is seldom seen; and engagements involve tens or hundreds of thousands of soldiers – the collective feature of predatory combat.

Paul Baumer, Remarque's first person narrator, stresses the fact that there is nothing he can do as he watches one after another of his colleagues die: "Kemmerich is dead, Haie Westhus is dying, they will have a job with Hans Kramer's body at the Judgment Day, piecing it together after a direct hit; Martens has no legs anymore, Meyer is dead, Max is dead, Beyer is dead, Hammerling is dead".<sup>26</sup> As the war drags on, another comrade, Muller, dies and then Kat. After listing the men who died, Baumer bluntly states that "[b]ut our comrades are dead, we cannot help them".<sup>27</sup> The list of the men who died and this statement that they cannot be helped are made soon after he thinks about the terror of the war and about how soldiers must behave in order to survive: he describes a sense of narcosis, or numbness: "terror can be endured so long as a man simply ducks;- but it kills, if a man thinks about it".<sup>28</sup> Baumer acknowledges his own powerlessness in relation to his dead comrades and how he cannot mourn them lest he becomes more vulnerable. This is completely different from the *Iliad*: Achilles not only mourns Patroclus but also takes revenge for his death. The death of a comrade in arms, someone you know and cherish, cannot go unnoticed and, more important, unavenged in the epic. Baumer, on the other hand, must helplessly watch all his comrades die before his eyes. Actually, "once the idea of heroic action is denied,



the whole conception of the hero, and of narratives that shape the actions of such figures, is called into question”,<sup>29</sup> that is, narratives of intraspecific combat are rendered meaningless once war only offers predatory practices.

Samuel Hynes argues that “[a]gainst the weight of [the First World] war, the individual has no power of action; he can only suffer”.<sup>30</sup> However, even suffering, in the example of the dead comrades, must be put in relative terms. Baumer cannot suffer, i.e. grieve, for the deaths he sees – he affirms that suffering and feeling the losses would only make him more vulnerable. Baumer has the feeling of those who are preyed upon: survival is the only thing that matters and, like a herd of wildebeests when hunted by lions, a soldier must strive to live on as others are brought down. However, not even Baumer is spared: in the final lines, the novel shifts to a third person narration to tell of Baumer’s death, only one month before the end of the conflict.<sup>31</sup>

For reasons of scope and length, *All Quiet on the Western Front* shall stand as an example for the pattern of predatory features also predominant in other works of literature written by men who witnessed the First World War, novels such as Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, Henri Barbusse’s *Under Fire*, Humphrey Cobb’s *Paths of Glory*, William March’s *Company K*,<sup>32</sup> not to mention the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. However, the representation of the conflict with an emphasis on its predatory nature is also to be found in what Petra Rau has called “post-memorial war writing”,<sup>33</sup> that is, literature produced by those who did not live through the conflict they narrate. Pat Barker’s highly acclaimed trilogy *Regeneration* – *Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door* and *The Ghost Room*, written in the 1990’s, depicted the trauma of those who served on the Western Front, the trauma of those who survived being hunted.

Another work written decades after the war is the Canadian Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*. *The Wars* is explicitly narrated as a post-memorial work since it reads like a reconstruction of the life of the main character Robert Ross. There are, for instance, descriptions of photos and transcriptions of interviews in Findley’s attempt at telling what happened to Robert Ross. It is one passage, however, that best serves the purposes of the present discussion. Ross and a group of Canadian soldiers are ordered to place guns in forward positions. Once they venture into No Man’s Land, gas is released by the Germans.<sup>34</sup> The gas spreads over their heads and the men are forced to jump into a flooded crater. Against a gas attack there is nothing to do but run and hide. They are without their masks and to avoid the gas

they must urinate into pieces of cloth and breathe through these. Utterly defenseless, they know that “if the Germans came, their only hope was to play dead and pray”.<sup>35</sup> How can one expect to fight gas? Gas cannot be fought against. One can defend oneself against gas, but not oppose it. Other weapons may be countered in symmetric or asymmetric ways. Planes can be fought with other planes or with anti-aircraft guns; tanks are countered by other tanks or anti-tank guns; swords by swords or shields. During First World War, sixty-six million gas shells were fired, inflicting 1.3 million casualties, but with little or irrelevant tactical or strategic success.<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding its inefficiency as an offensive weapon, gas cannot be stopped by gas and has always been viewed as cruel and repugnant. Like the bow in 1139, there were attempts at banning its use in warfare: it was made illegal in the 1925 Geneva Convention. Even Adolf Hitler, perhaps remembering his being gassed on the Western Front or acknowledging it would bring little advantage, refrained from deploying it in the battlefield. It would be preposterous, however, to assign this to humanitarian reasons: the Fuehrer would unfortunately find another place to gas other human beings – during the next, and more predatory, world war.

Barely thirty years after the naively called “war to end all wars”, another global conflict broke out and the features of predatory combat would be more clear – and claim a higher toll in human lives. The Second World War, in the frozen steppes of Russia, the beaches of Normandy, in the islands of the Pacific and the jungles of Burma and China, and in the extermination camps of Central and Eastern Europe, became the most murderous and cruel engagement in history, for “it is hard to point a conflict more brutally fought than World War II, or to combatants more driven by the sheer urge to kill”.<sup>37</sup> It was utterly and completely predatory. As soon as they were at war, Germans, Russians, Japanese, Americans, Englishmen, and others strove to kill the enemy in round-ups of civilians, in indiscriminate bombing of cities, in gas chambers, in sinking any type of vessel, and the like. The enemy, with a view to making predatory practices easier and more acceptable, was often portrayed as belonging to another, inferior species.

In Russian journalist Konstantin Simonov’s novel *Days and Nights* and in German veteran Heinrich Gerlach’s *The Forsaken Army*,<sup>38</sup> the Battle of Stalingrad is depicted as a merciless combat, corroborating O’Connell’s assessment that against the Nazis “the Russians fought with the desperation of those preyed upon”.<sup>39</sup> Soviet Ambassador to Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov, seemed to know what was to come. As soon as he was informed of the Nazi invasion, he declared it was

“insulting, provocative and thoroughly predatory”.<sup>40</sup> Future events and the way the battle progressed proved him right. The clash between Nazi Germany and Communist Soviet Union showed “no compromise. The end could only come in the total obliteration of one of the two opponents”.<sup>41</sup> German General Hermann Hoth, commander of the Fourth Panzer Army in Stalingrad, made it very clear when he said that the annihilation of Jews, who supported Bolshevism and its organization for murder, the partisans, was a “measure of self-preservation”.<sup>42</sup> The army had already issued orders, before the beginning of hostilities, depriving Russian civilians “of any right of appeal” and exonerating German soldiers from crimes against them, whether “murder, rape or looting”.<sup>43</sup> Hitler stated it would be a “battle of annihilation”, a “race war”, thus lending the campaign an unprecedented character and successfully dehumanizing the soviet enemy so that the Wehrmacht became “morally anaesthetized”.<sup>44</sup> According to the Fuehrer, the rules of engagement and conventions such as Geneva’s, did not apply there – as the rules of intraspecific combat do not apply to predation. In both *Days and Nights* and *Forsaken Army*, characters of the two armies know they will hardly be taken prisoner: their fate, if defeated, is death. Soldiers of the two sides feel, and indeed know, their roles are either predator or prey – no other choice is left.

Another common feature of predatory combat, asymmetry, is repeatedly found in representations of the Second World War. In Stefan Heym’s *Crusaders* as well as in James Jones’ *The Thin Red Line*,<sup>45</sup> although men do fight other men who are also armed with machine guns and the like, they more often are up against tanks and airplanes. And even though the novels are set in different theaters – *Crusaders* in Europe and *The Thin Red Line* in the Pacific – the experience narrated is the same: a struggle to the death against machines, faceless enemies bent on killing.

The authors of the books mentioned above, as in the first examples of the First World War, were all contemporaries of the conflict they represent: Heym took part in the American war effort; Jones fought in Guadalcanal; Simonov was a war correspondent; Gerlach fought in Stalingrad. And, as in the remarks regarding the First World War, the post-memorial war writing of the Second World War provides examples of its predatory features as well. One such work is Ian McEwan’s best-selling novel *Atonement*, which has a long passage on the ordeal of the British Expeditionary Force as its protagonist, Robbie Turner, tries to reach Dunkirk and escape the onslaught of the German army. The fact that there is not a single German soldier in the novel, and that the advancing Panzers are never seen already hints at predatory features: predators are not supposed to be seen by their prey until