

From the Gates of Troy to the Trenches of the Western Front:
The Representation of War in the *Iliad* and in novels of the Great War

By

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For her, my Helen,
for whom I would assemble a thousand ships,
fight a ten-year war,
and storm Troy

Acknowledgements:

In the opening of the epic, the poet calls upon the Muses for inspiration. They are the ones who inspire and assist him throughout his composition. The Muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne (memory personified) and Zeus (son of Chronos and the god who organized the universe) – they thus provide remembrance both organized and within a time frame. I am no poet but my muses, the ones whose memories I have brought through time and who have, in one way or another, assisted me, are named here so that they may inspire my composition as well.

Luiz Ernesto, my father, the greatest teacher I have ever had – and always will have. Simply, the *áristos*.

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ABSTRACT

The following research aims at investigating the differences and similarities between two sets of war narratives: Homer's *Iliad* and novels of the Great War of 1914-18. Dwelling on Hayden White's metahistory theory and refraining from discussing the fictional or factual nature of the texts to be analyzed, this thesis is focused on two aspects of the narratives.

The main difference regards the role of the individual in warfare. Whereas in the *Iliad*, we are provided with the powerful, necessarily named warriors, in the Great War novels, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Paths of Glory*, and *Company K*, we encounter powerless, nameless soldiers who are overwhelmed by the murderous technology of total war. The hero gives way to the figure of the Unknown Soldier in war narrative. The principal feature these narratives share is war's inherent unpredictability. Both the *Iliad* and the Great War novels represent war as an event whose outcome never comes as previously expected and whose means are disproportionate to its presumed ends, laying bare a gap between what men idealize of war and what men actually encounter.

Keywords: War narrative, *Iliad*, Great War.

RESUMO

A presente pesquisa visa investigar as diferenças e semelhanças entre narrativas de Guerra, mais especificamente entre a *Ilíada* e obras da Grande Guerra de 1914-18. Com base na teoria de Metahistória de Hayden White, e abstendo-se de discutir a natureza ficcional ou factual dos textos analisados, essa dissertação é centrada em dois aspectos das narrativas.

A principal diferença diz respeito ao papel do indivíduo na guerra. Embora na *Ilíada* tenhamos guerreiros poderosos e necessariamente nomeados, nas obras da Grande Guerra, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Paths of Glory* e *Company K*, encontramos soldados indefesos e anônimos, impotentes face à mortífera tecnologia de uma guerra total. O herói é substituído pela figura do Soldado Desconhecido. A principal característica que essas narrativas compartilham é a inerente imprevisibilidade da guerra. Tanto a *Ilíada* como as obras da Grande Guerra representam a guerra como um evento cujas conseqüências não são nunca de acordo com o esperado e cujos meios são desproporcionais aos supostos fins, revelando uma distância entre o que se idealiza de uma guerra e o que realmente acontece.

Palavras-chave: narrativa de guerra, *Ilíada*, Grande Guerra.

Introduction

“War Makes Rattling Good History”

“In war you lose your sense of the definite,
 hence your sense of truth itself,
 and therefore it’s safe to say that
 in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true”
 (O’Brien 88).

“This book is not about heroes.
 Nor is it about deeds, or lands,
 nor anything about glory, honor,
 might, majesty, dominion,
 or power, except War”
 Wilfred Owen (qtd. in Stallworth 266).

Thomas Hardy, in *The Dynasts*, has the Spirit Sinister argue that “War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading” (54). Armed conflicts, or wars, have been the theme and background of countless works of fiction and the object of countless historical books. Men have always fought wars and seem to be fascinated by them. The Spirit Sinister’s argument, in spite of its crudity, is in fact truthful. On a different tone, Wilfred Owen, a poet who died in war in 1918, stated that his subject was “war, and the pity of War” (qtd. in Stallworth 266). War may be, and indeed is, good history. But this good history is also pitiful: wars kill and modern wars have brutally killed and maimed millions. My research is on the telling of war, on what makes war “rattling good history”; and on the pity of war as it is conveyed by those who tell of wars, who narrate wars.

The first work that turned war into a good story is Homer’s epic the *Iliad*. The pity Wilfred Owen writes about is what he witnessed as a soldier in the First World War of 1914-18, the so-

called Great War¹. My research attempts to bring the *Iliad* and a few representative fictional Great War narratives together and analyze how these accounts tell pitiful but good stories. The thesis herein presented investigates the differences and similarities between these selected narratives of war. The corpus to be analyzed is Homer's epic and a few examples of the literature that stem from the Great War of 1914-18. My contention is that although in the *Iliad* the individual is portrayed as playing a key and decisive role in warfare, in the novels *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), *Company K* (1933), and *Paths of Glory* (1935), which are set in the Western Front of the Great War, the individual is shown as powerless. At the same time, it is important to note that both Homer's work and these Great War novels show that wars are inherently uncontrollable events whose outcome is unexpected. My research therefore must also dwell on historical aspects of war in order to explain how the literary works represent the Great War and in what ways the conflict changed the way wars are, or can be, narrated.

The telling of war is at the very birth of written narrative – be it labeled historical or fictional. The founding works of the study we today call history are narratives of war: Herodotus's *Histories* (about 440 B.C.E.) and Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* (about 411 B.C.E.). Dubbed by Cicero “the father of history,” Herodotus opens his narrative on the war between Greeks and Persians by stating his inquiry is “to preserve the memory of the past” and “more particularly, to show how the two races came into conflict” (13). Thucydides, also in his opening lines, affirms that he writes “the history of the war fought between Athens and Sparta” (35). History, a field of study to tell of the past and to try to reconstruct the past, from its very beginning, took war as its subject matter. However, before turning to their own subject matter, to the wars they are interested in, both Herodotus and Thucydides allude to the first work in western

¹ The Great War is how the conflict is commonly referred to by British audiences and scholars. After the 1939-45 conflict, it was called the First World War. World War I is the name given by Americans. The French call it *La Grande Guerre*. I shall call it “The Great War” for it is the term most applied by the studies used throughout this thesis.

literature that narrates a war: Homer's epic the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* is the archetype of war narrative; it is the first narrative of war in the millenary tradition of western literature.

Homer's epic is not history in the sense that we understand it today. It is not a historian's attempt to gather evidence or documents of the past and arrange them into a truth-claiming narrative account of what happened at some given time. Besides, any argument about the historical or fictional nature of the *Iliad* fails to acknowledge the fact that a separation between a historical text and a fictional text did not exist at that time². History, as we understand it today, had not yet come into being as a separate or independent study when the *Iliad* appeared. James Redfield explains that the epic "stood between history and fiction" for there was no other place for it to stand (*Nature* 56). According to the influential theorist on the nature of historical writing, Hayden White, a specific field for the study of the past – History - was created in the western culture; such a study does not even exist in other cultures (*Invenção* 6). Western Culture, as Jacyntho Brandão points out, once conferred authority on mythological discourse - as in the period when the *Iliad* was composed - and today confers authority on scientific discourse (*Gregos* 33). History, as a study, is supposed to belong to this latter kind of discourse.

However, in the epic, Homer "is trying to reconstruct the remote past" (Lattimore, *Iliad* 20), or, in the words of Redfield, the *Iliad* is "a kind of history: through the epic the past is preserved from obliteration" (*Nature* 35). Costa Lima, when discussing the nature of historical and fictional texts, states that "o aedo não conta a verdade do que houve, a sua não é a memória do sucedido em algum tempo preciso, senão aquela que a memória cultural sustenta" ("the bard does not tell the truth of what happened, his is not the memory of an event taking place at some given time, but the one sustained by cultural memory"; 169). The *Iliad* therefore is not history in the sense that it claims to be a truthful narrative account of what happened in the past, but it attempts to make the past less remote by narrating the tales shared by the community – i.e. it preserves the cultural

² For more about the differences between a historical text and a fictional text and its relation to the *Iliad*, see Goulart (2002).

memory of the community. The concept of cultural memory, cited above by Costa Lima, is paramount to this research and, as we shall see, greatly associated with the Great War narrative.

Before leaving these brief theoretical remarks on the nature of the Homeric epic and to discuss how the Great War narrative is to be approached here, a comment on the link between the *Iliad* and the Great War narrative is necessary. The Great War narrative has been profoundly studied but has not commonly been associated with the archetype of war narrative, the *Iliad*. Many studies have been devoted to studying how the Great War was compared to a crusade against an evil enemy (Germany), how propaganda played a major role in encouraging men to fight and the part nationalism had in the conflict. The Great War has been extensively compared to preceding conflicts, such as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the American Civil War of 1861-65, as well as to the subsequent world conflict, the Second World War. However, to my knowledge, few studies have attempted to bring the Great War narrative close to Homer's *Iliad*. This research, therefore, is an attempt to contribute to an area of knowledge not yet satisfactorily researched.

One such study is classicist James Tatum's *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam* (2003). Tatum explains that "[o]nly in the last few years have classicists begun to read the *Iliad* as a war poem" (49). Tatum's work discusses the issue of remembrance in several conflicts, not the Great War and the *Iliad* in particular, however,

The *Iliad* speaks to the way we think about war, because the one impulse that has proved as enduring as human beings' urge to make wars is their need to make sense of them, . . . to think with Homer about war is to learn to compare and to juxtapose. It comes to seem natural to extend our imagination beyond the *Iliad*, to other wars and other poets. (xi)

This is what this thesis aims to do: compare and juxtapose war narratives; extend our understanding of the Great War narrative by placing it against Homer's archetype.

The Great War began in 1914 and ended in 1918, but not before millions of men had died in an unprecedented spectacle of horror and carnage. As Burns puts it, “an estimated eight and a half million soldiers killed and twenty million wounded, as well as six million civilians killed” (18). The opening chapter of British historian John Keegan’s *The First World War* is properly named “European tragedy.” According to him, the war was:

tragic because the consequences of the first clash ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more, destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent and left . . . a legacy of political rancour and racial hatred so intense that no explanation of the causes of the Second World War can stand without reference to those roots. (3)

Although historians may disagree about the exact number of the dead – between eight and a half and ten million people - they agree on assessing the war as a watershed that changed European and world civilization. In short, “the world that used to be and the ideas that shaped it disappeared” (Tuchman 310).

Never had the world witnessed such destruction, nor was it the destruction of lives alone. The war “damaged civilization . . . permanently for the worse” (Keegan 8). The roots of totalitarian regimes such as Germany’s Nazism and Italy’s Fascism may be traced back to the Great War, when Europe lost confidence in principles such as “constitutionalism, the rule of law and representative government” (Keegan 8). Many of the evil tendencies of the twentieth century began with the Great War: the growth of state power, the widespread use of mass political propaganda, and the establishment of chaotic social and economic conditions that encouraged the rise of fascism and totalitarian types of socialism (Payne 78).

The Great War introduced “the first example of large-scale genocide” (Payne 31). It “inaugurated the manufacture of mass death that the Second brought to a pitiless consummation” (Keegan 4). Hence, it is understandable why the contemporaries of the conflict - naively for us

who enjoy the benefit of hindsight - called it “the war to end all wars.” Men who had fought and survived believed that a repetition of these horrors was unthinkable. But, in fact, the Great War created the hideous practices the rest of the twentieth century would unfortunately grow used to: mass murder, civilian executions, indiscriminate bombardments, complete disregard for the so-called conventions of war – the Great War was truly the first total war in history. It has also been truly called the First *World War*.

How then could one tell of it and describe it? The reality of the conflict was so appalling that “the words for it had to come later” (Burns 18). It was no longer possible to approach this conflict as others had been or record what it had been like as others had recorded past wars. The language used for the Napoleonic Wars, for the Franco-Prussian War, for the Boer War - the most recent wars before the Great War - would not suffice. As Paul Fussell writes: “the problem for the writer trying to describe elements of the Great War was its utter incredibility, and thus its incommunicability in its own terms” (139). Fussell explains that the Great War resists to be elevated, “it resists being subsumed into the heroic myth The war will not be understood in traditional terms: the machine gun alone makes it so special and unexampled that it simply can’t be talked about as if it were one of the conventional wars of History. Or worse, of literary history” (153). This war could not be told as other wars had been. The conflict resisted being glamorized and its participants turned into heroes. Bernard Bergonzi’s study, *Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (1965), corroborates this assessment. Bergonzi claims that the Great War “meant that the traditional mythology of heroism and the hero . . . had ceased to be viable” (17). War had to be narrated differently after 1918 and the heroic myth found no place in this narrative. Heroes, individuals of prowess in combat, had no place in the Great War narrative.

For some time shadowed by the Second World War, which was far more deadly, the Great War of 1914-18 has aroused great interest, being extensively debated and researched in recent years. At the 80th anniversary of the end of the war, in 1998, the war started to be once again

studied, discussed and analyzed (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 11-12). The opening, in 1992, of the Historial, a trilingual museum and center for cultural research of the war housed in Peronne, France, is evidence of the growing interest that the conflict has aroused. However, it is notable that the focus of attention has shifted from military and strategic accounts towards a cultural analysis of the conflict. More attention has been paid to the writings of veterans and of common soldiers than to the more commonly read memoirs of the leading generals and statesmen, or to the broad historical accounts which aim at rendering a general view of the conflict. The studies of the Great War are now focused on cultural memory: “a set of codes in which educated men and women place their personal recollections of the past in literary, aesthetic, and philosophical framework” (Jan and Aleida Assmann qtd. in Winter 104). The most prestigious contemporary historians of the Great War, scholars such as Jay Winter, Jean-Jacques Becker, and John Horne, have therefore turned their gaze into what the experience of the Great War was like and how it has informed our contemporary frame of mind. It is noteworthy that Winter defines the focus of Great War studies by using the same concept Costa Lima applied to the Homeric epic: cultural memory. This thesis is a study on the cultural memory of war based on a literary framework.

Jay Winter states that “[w]e should note in particular the increasing significance within historical study of literary scholarship, offering fundamental contributions to the cultural history of the First World War, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world” (46). Modris Eksteins, in his analysis of the cultural impact of the Great War, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, approaches the issue of historical and fictional narratives of the Great War and their significance:

It is noteworthy that among the mountains of writing built up on the subject of the Great War, a good many of the more satisfying attempts to deal with its meaning have come from the pens of poets, novelists, and even literary critics, and that

professional historians have produced, by and large, specialized and limited accounts.

(291)

Literary scholarship and literary works, the so-called works of fiction, contribute to a comprehension of the meaning and the impact of the Great War because they shape and inform cultural memory. In this respect Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) is seminal for its approach to the ways the Great War has been inscribed in modern memory. Fussell does not distinguish between history and literature, between what is supposedly true and what is supposedly fiction, in his widely cited analysis.

History, as Hayden White has pointed out in many of his writings on the poetic nature of historical writing, can only be grasped through texts and is, therefore, ultimately, a narrative. A historical work gathers elements of events that happened in the past and arranges them into a story that makes sense: a narrative with a beginning, middle, and an end. Certain events are thought to represent initial aspects, while others are considered terminal aspects. Moreover, narratives "might well be considered a solution . . . to the problem of how to translate knowing into a telling" (White, *Content* 1). Narrativity is therefore a way of arranging past experiences into a shaped and comprehensible form. White also stresses how both factual and fictional storytelling are coherent representations that inform us of the past (*Content* 44), a notion that is very important for my research, since my primary *corpus* is comprised of three examples of so-called fictional accounts, i.e. novels of the Great War, and an epic poem. The novels to be analyzed inform us of the past and, more particularly, of the Great War. The epic, as I have already pointed out, is both an attempt at reconstructing the past and a representation of war.

Narrowing the discussion into the act of narrating the Great War itself, Winter claims that "[t]he authenticity of narratives about war is a highly contested subject The experience was too varied for anyone to claim a privileged viewpoint There can never be such a thing as 'authoritative' eyewitness to such a multifaceted catastrophe" (196), a remark that refers to those

who experienced the war first-hand but that also applies to those who try to tell about the war. When historians and other people come together to remember the past, “they construct a narrative which is not just ‘history’ and not just ‘memory’, but a story which partakes of them both” (Winter 11). There is, therefore, no such a thing as a definitive account of the past, or of a huge, complex event like the Great War of 1914-18. The historical accounts to be used here as secondary *corpus*, the epic, and the novels to be analyzed in this thesis are simply narratives of war. Although they may be labeled, respectively, as factual and fictional, they all try to represent the past and render a better understanding of it.

The preceding remarks on the nature of historical and fictional narrative provide the theoretical basis I shall apply in the forthcoming chapters. All the narrative texts to be approached throughout will be dealt with as narratives and no attempt shall be made to distinguish what is supposedly true and what is not. This research is not a theoretical analysis on the differences between history and fiction – it is an analysis both of war narratives and how wars have been narrated through an examination of the differences and similarities found in the founding epic narrative of war and in representative novels of the Great War. A thorough and comprehensive theoretical analysis of the distinction between history and fiction lies beyond the scope of this research and, one might say, has still not been completely formulated³.

The first chapter, called “War’s Finest Hour,” will address the *Iliad* and the way war is represented in the epic. Refraining from discussing the myth surrounding the Trojan War, the analysis is focused on the role of the individual in Homeric warfare and on the inherent unpredictability of war. The plot of the epic, the role of the gods, and the diction are only discussed when they refer to the representation of war. The analysis relies on theoretical studies of the epic, but principally on textual evidence provided by the narrative.

³ For more on the distinction between history and fiction and how unsuccessfully this issue has been addressed and theoretically formulated, see Costa Lima (2006).

The second chapter, called “Achilles Entrenched” (a reference to how the role of the great hero that Achilles embodies is changed by the Great War), is a brief account of the way the Great War of 1914-18 has been narrated and the changes it brought about in warfare. The analysis, as I have pointed out, is not a historical account of the conflict but rather a cultural discussion of the importance and the impact of the Great War. Relying mostly on Hayden White’s theories of historical writing, this chapter provides evidence, from historical and fictional narratives, of how brutal and anonymous in its bloodshed the Great War of 1914-18 was. Likewise, evidence is principally, but not solely, gathered from the influential studies of Fussell, Eksteins, and Samuel Hynes (*A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*) on the cultural impact of the war. The studies of Bernard Bergonzi (*Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War*), Stanley Cooperman (*World War I and the American Novel*), and Thomas Burns (*War Stories: Narratives of the Two World Wars*) also provide comment and analysis of the literature of the war.

The third chapter, entitled “The Unknown Soldier,” analyzes the role of the individual in warfare as it is represented in the epic and, principally, in the selected Great War novels. It shows how the individual, once powerful and decisive, as in the *Iliad*, becomes powerless and irrelevant in the age of modern technological war – an age inaugurated by the Great War of 1914-18. Special attention is paid to the figure of the Unknown Soldier, which came to symbolize the anonymous bloodshed of that conflict. The character named “Unknown Soldier,” who narrates his own death in *Company K*, Paul Baumer in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, who “personalized for everyone the fate of the unknown soldier” (Eksteins 290), and the passage in *Paths of Glory* when the soldiers to be executed are chosen by drawing lots, are all examples of the Great War’s constant “anonymity of death” (Burns 46). Whereas the representation of war in the *Iliad* provides the famed and named heroes mainly embodied in Achilles and Hector, the Great War novels provide anonymous and nameless men, embodied in the Unknown Soldier. As this is a study of certain

aspects of the Great War narrative, I will refrain from describing the plots of the novels and will narrow the analysis to the aspects relevant to the thesis presented herein.

The three novels to be discussed are chosen because they are examples of a narrative that has already been called “the Myth of the War” (Hynes xi). The action of all three novels takes place mostly in the trenches of the Western Front, a setting that has become the icon of the Great War. The features we usually associate with the Great War – continuous shelling, No Man’s Land, ceaseless rain, mud, voracious rats feeding on decaying corpses, dirty men feeling helpless, incompetent leaders – are all present in the selected novels. This narrative of the Great War is “mythic” not because it is a falsification, but because it is “the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true” (Hynes xi). It is the way we all imagine how the war was fought - how we think of the war.

Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* is arguably the greatest classic of the Great War literature. *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a combat novel, a sub-genre that is “primarily the narrative of an individual’s experience of battle” (Burns 34), entirely focused on a small group of German soldiers. The book follows these men as they fight, rest, go to Germany on leave and, ultimately, die. Its narrative technique (the plot is episodic, seemingly pointless and narrated in the first person) provides the reader with the sense of helplessness and powerlessness the soldiers experience and makes the war a fragmented and meaningless event. William March’s *Company K* has as many narrators as the American Army company of the title has members. No single narrator is repeated and several incidents are told from different points of view. As the novel does not offer a linear narrative, the fragmentation and meaninglessness of the war is reinforced. Humphrey Cobb’s *Paths of Glory* tells the story of a failed French attack and the executions carried out by the army’s command because of the supposed cowardice the soldiers displayed in the offensive. Although *Paths of Glory* is more traditional and less fragmented in its narrative than the other two novels, it provides examples of the “anonymity of death” in Great War narrative and of the

powerlessness of the individual in modern warfare. The fact that the novels deal with different armies (German, American, and French) and have so different plots, but share such common features as the powerlessness and meaninglessness of war, the fragmented narrative, and the anonymity of death, attests to their being exemplary narratives of the Great War and therefore useful for the purposes of this thesis.

The fourth chapter, entitled “The Common Field of Troy, of the Somme, and of Verdun,” strives to show in what ways the representation of war found in the Great War novels reflects what was already present in the *Iliad*, that is, war’s inherent unpredictability. Relying on textual evidence from both the epic and the novels, this chapter discusses how wars are always worse than expected and unpredictable, hence laying bare the irony between what men idealize in war and what they actually encounter. This chapter tries to find, in the narratives, evidence for Fussell’s remark that “every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends” (7). The Trojan War, in the *Iliad*, was waged for nine years because of a single woman: Helen. The Great War lasted four years, claimed about ten million lives and “reversed the idea of progress” (Fussell 8). It was, in Fussell’s assessment, the most ironic of all wars (7). The irony found in the *Iliad* and in the Great War novels provides the “common ground” of the title for the chapter.

The conclusion to this research, named after Simone Weil’s translation of a line in the *Iliad* (“Arès est equitable, et il tue ceux qui tuent” “Ares is just and kills those who kill”; 27), sums up the ideas discussed in the previous chapters. It reviews the notion that war, as represented in the Great War narratives studied, has become, in the age of technological warfare, an anonymous and utterly murderous event in which individuals make no difference. It also reviews and reinforces the notion that in all the narratives studied in this research, including the *Iliad*, war can only be viewed as glorious and heroic when it is idealized. War, once actualized, is always worse than expected.

Chapter 1

“War’s Finest Hour”

“The world’s greatest war story”
(Goulart 47).

“Zeus set a vile destiny, so that hereafter/
We shall be made into things of song for the men of the future”
Helen to Hector⁴ (VI.357-8).

The *Iliad*, an epic poem of 15,693 lines divided in 24 Books, is the first work of Western literature; a narrative whose lasting influence over Western culture stretches for more than two thousand years. The plot of the epic, its vocabulary and its diction, its representation of the relation between men and the gods, and its heroes have been studied and analyzed for centuries. The Homeric question, the discussion over Homer’s actual existence, was a source of debate as much as the exact date when the poem was first written down or when it reached its current form. Another matter of dispute is the Trojan War itself: archaeological evidence has proved that a city named Troy actually existed and that a conflict took place in or around it. However, neither the date nor the nature of this conflict has been definitely established. As the epic is also the first representation of war in literature, it stands as an archetype for war narrative.

As the present thesis is neither a historical study on the Trojan War nor a discussion about the epic’s authorship, the above mentioned debates shall not be addressed. The *Iliad* will be here approached as a narrative of war only, as it stands today for 21st century readers. For the same reason, the myth surrounding the Trojan War, a large subject in itself, shall not be discussed either. I will refrain from referring or alluding to events and incidents which are not present in the epic. One useful example for this methodological clarification is the supposed invulnerability of

⁴ Different translations of the epic provide different spellings for the names of the characters. Achilles, for example, may be written as Achilleus, Akhilles, or even Akhilleus. I am here adhering to the most familiar form in my text. In quotations, the translators’ form will be maintained.

Achilles: there is no reference at all, in the epic, to the later story that he was invulnerable or made invulnerable by being bathed in the river Styx. Stories like this, while popularly known, are not a part of the *Iliad*, hence, they fall outside the scope of this research.

Another important methodological clarification regarding the approach to the epic poem is the issue of translation. Richmond Lattimore's translation, according to classicist James Tatum "excels in capturing the words and the lines of Homer, with an excellent ear and a philological precision that makes his verse translation helpful in construing Homer's Greek" (xix). Though Tatum favors other versions in terms of readability, in his study Lattimore's translation is the most cited. As this thesis aims at precision in Homer, not readability, Lattimore's *Iliad* is used unless stated otherwise. Robert Fitzgerald's and E. V. Rieu's translations are illustrative, as it shall be seen, for dealing with the invocation to the Muses in Book 2 of the epic.

The *Iliad* may be called the "the world's greatest war story" but it is not an account of the whole Trojan War: nine years of combat have passed by the time the poem begins (II.134), and the narrative ends before the conflict is over. The subject matter of the *Iliad* is clearly stated in its opening lines: "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles and its devastation" (I.1-2). The theme of Homer's epic is the wrath of Achilles and the consequences of his withdrawal from battle. These consequences are a "devastation" because Achilles's inaction and the fighting that follows "hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes" (I.3-4). The plot is so well concentrated that it can be summarized in a single paragraph.

Agamemnon, the Greek⁵ king, refuses to return the daughter of a priest to her father. In punishment, Apollo sends a plague against the Greek army. An assembly of the Greek leaders is then summoned to discuss how to best solve the situation. The king accepts returning the girl but takes, in compensation, another girl who has been given to Achilles as a prize. Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors, hurt in his pride, withdraws from battle – and, with him, his

⁵ The group of men assembled against the Trojans is not called "the Greeks" in the epic. Homer calls them Danaans, Argives, and Achaeans. For practical purposes, they shall be referred to as "Greeks" throughout this study.

soldiers, the Myrmidons. The war then turns in favor of the Trojans with Hector, Troy's ablest warrior, finally breaking into the Greek defenses and actually setting fire to one of the Greek ships. Patroclus, Achilles's closest friend and one of the Myrmidons, urges Achilles to let him go into battle wearing Achilles's armor. Achilles acquiesces. Patroclus fights brilliantly but is killed by Hector. Patroclus's death brings Achilles back into action and eager for revenge. He kills Hector and drags his corpse around the walls and into the Greek camp. Eventually Achilles returns Hector's body to his father, King Priam of Troy. The poem ends with the funeral rites of Hector.

The previous paragraph is an obvious simplification; however, it serves to show how condensed and tight the action of the epic is. The entire plot of the poem unfolds in 52 days, from Apollo's plague to the funeral of Hector. Moreover, some events which take several days are simply referred to in the poem, sometimes in a single line: the reader, for example, is simply told that the Greeks are plagued for 9 days (I.53-55) and that Hector's funeral takes other 9 days (XXIV.783). Achilles's attack on Hector's dead body lasts for 12 days (XXIV.31). On the other hand, Books 11 to 18 cover a single day of combat, a mere 24 hours, culminating with the struggle between Hector and Patroclus and Achilles's decision to fight again.

Nevertheless, the epic provides a broad panorama of Trojan War, both its past and its future. In Book 2, the poet lists all the leaders and the number of ships each one of them takes to Troy. This passage, known as the catalogue of ships (II.484-877), introduces all the main characters of the narrative, Greeks and Trojans alike. In Book 3, Helen and King Priam sit on a tower on the walls of the city and she tells him the names of the Greek leaders who have gathered on the plain to fight (III.161-242). From a purely logical point of view, it is rather improbable that, after nine years of war, Priam does not already know who his enemies are. However, as a narrative device to present the characters, the passage is useful. Similarly, also in Book 3, a duel between Menelaus, Helen's husband, and Paris, Priam's son and the man who seduced Helen and ultimately caused the war, is arranged (III.253-384). Why does such a duel only take place after nine years of war? It

is another narrative device whose aim is to compress the epic's action but, at the same time, offer the reader the impression that the Trojan War is represented in its fullness.

Not only is the past of the war alluded to, but its future as well. Throughout the poem, the reader is told that once Hector is killed, Troy shall fall (VI.403, XII.10-12, XIV.144-146). Zeus, in Book 10, forecasts the entry and death of Patroclus, the revenge of Achilles on Hector, and the fall of Troy (XV.61-71). The reader also knows that Achilles will die shortly after killing Hector (XVIII.95-100, XXII.356-360). Neither event, the fall of Troy or Achilles's death, is narrated in the poem. However, we know these things are bound to happen in the near future. Therefore, although being put into writing sometime between 700-800 B.C.E., the *Iliad* displays a sophisticated narrative structure, or "an economy and focus combined with breadth of vision that have informed narrative literature ever since" (Rieu xiv). The epic narrows its focus and broadens its vision so that the reader is offered immediate actions as well as a large overview of the conflict as well.

In both the immediate actions and the large overview, the *Iliad* is centered on the individuals who fight the war for the city of Troy. The epic, it has been noted, opens with the invocation to the Muses and the statement of what the subject matter of the poem is: the wrath of Achilles. In another invocation to the Muses, the one which precedes the catalogue of the ships in Book 2, we may find the evidence for affirming that the epic is centered on individuals. The passage reads as follows: "[t]ell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympus / . . . / Who then of those were the chief men and the lords of the Danaans? / I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them, / . . . / I will tell the lords of the ships, and the ships numbers" (II.484-93). The poet clearly asks the Muses to tell "who were the chief men." In Greek, the word translated as multitude is *plethýs*, which means, particularly in the epic, "group of men" but also "the people", "men of a lower cast" (Brandão, *Personal Communication*). The poet cannot tell of the multitude and, hence, will tell the lords of the ships.

In Rieu's and Fitzgerald's translations of the invocation to the Muses in Book 2, the center of the narrative becomes more revealing for the purposes of this study on the role of the individual in warfare. In Rieu's translation, we read: "tell me who were the leaders and commanders of the Greeks? As for the rank and file, I could not name or even count them . . . So I shall list the captains and their ships from first to last." In Fitzgerald's, we read: "[t]ell me now, Muses, dwelling on Olympus, / . . . / who were the Danaan lords and officers? / The rank and file I shall not name; I could not, / . . . / Let me name only captains of contingents / and number all the ships." The poet proposes to sing of the leaders, of the captains, and not of the rank and file. "Rank and file" is the expression to which I would like to draw some attention: it is a term used to designate the people who form the major part of a group, except the leaders. In military terms, the rank and file represents all the enlisted troops except the officers. The *Iliad*, in the famed passage of the catalogue of the ships, already tells us that the common troops, made up of ordinary men, are not to be named, let alone be the center of the narrative. The narrative is to be about the leaders.

Another passage that serves as evidence for the central emphasis of the narrative in the *Iliad* is found in Book 9, known as the embassy to Achilles. Phoenix, Odysseus (Ulysses for the Romans), and Ajax are chosen to go to Achilles and urge him to resume fighting. As they walk into the warrior's tent, they find him singing (IX.189). He is singing of *kléa andrôn* – "the glory, or fame, of men." Scholars⁶ have pointed to the metalinguistic effect of this passage: in the epic that celebrates the glories of great men, the greatest of these men is singing of these glories (Malta 150). Besides, as this great man, Achilles, stays outside the battlefield and cannot achieve glory in combat, he searches for this glory in singing. And who are those great men, the commanders and leaders of Book 2, the great men who seek the glories Achilles sings in Book 9, whose glories are the center of the *Iliad*?

⁶ See Kirk (1985-93) and Segal (1992).

An outstanding warrior, in Homeric epic, is a man who possesses *areté*⁷ (excellence and prowess) in combat. This warrior is revered by his community and they share a reciprocal relation of dependence and recognition: the warrior must be willing to sacrifice his life in combat in order to protect the community; in reward, the community bestows upon him glory and wealth – he becomes a leading figure amongst his fellow men. This is the society represented in the *Iliad*: a society where war is “a background condition of life” (Redfield, *Nature* 99). This leading warrior, in Homeric language, is called a *heros*. A hero, in the epic, is therefore offered with a role: defend the community; and with a status: his leading position. In Redfield’s words,

The warrior’s role generates the warrior ethic. The community asks of some members that they leave the community and enter the anticomunity of combat. There they must overcome mercy and terror and learn to value their honor above their own lives or another’s. The community praises and honors those who have this capacity.

(*Nature* 104)

Therefore, a hero is an outstanding warrior whose prowess and excellence in combat must be exerted in the interests of his community and, consequently, he is acknowledged and rewarded by the community. A hero puts his life in danger for a community that must praise such willingness for “os heróis homéricos lutam sem coação, escolhem a luta com todos os riscos” (“Homeric heroes are not coerced into fighting, they choose to fight with all the risks involved”; Schuler 118). It must be then emphasized that heroes are not completely at the mercy of fate, or at the mercy of the gods. Homeric heroes are not playthings to the whim of gods. Fate does not determine the whole of men’s actions. There is room for them to choose and to act freely. In the quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles holds his sword and ponders whether to kill the leader. Athena appears and advises him to restrain his anger because he will be vindicated. Achilles has a choice: he can disobey Athena. Moreover, Achilles had not decided that he would kill Agamemnon and the

⁷ For more on the concept of *areté*, see Snell (1960) and Jaeger (1986).

goddess changed his mind. Achilles consciously and freely decides to follow the goddess' advice (I.188-218).

A hero is, by definition, active and responsible. A passive hero would not be a hero at all (Schuler 24). The heroes of the *Iliad* are fully aware of the risks they take and accept it in exchange for *kléos* (*kléa* in the plural): *kléos*, literally, means “to listen” or “that which is listened to”, “what is sung” (Malta 29). These are the glories and fame of men, the goal of a hero: to become worthy of being sung. Battle, or war, is then “a means to an end, a way of life that gives them the chance to win a reputation among their fellows and longed-for immortal glory” (Rieu xv). A hero wishes his great deeds for the community to be turned into the songs that will glorify him.

The heroes, in the representation of war provided by the *Iliad*, come from the aristocracy, or the nobility. The captains and leaders of Book 2, men whose glories the epic sings, are the kings and the princes who have sailed to fight before Troy. For example, Menelaus is king of Sparta. Odysseus is the king of Ithaca. All the men named in the catalogue of ships rule in their respective lands. On the opposing camp, Hector himself is the prince of Troy. Aeneas, one of the Trojans' allies, is the leader of the Dardanians (II.820). An army assembled in this manner, made of aristocratic rulers, greatly differs from a modern day army. Hierarchy does not apply to the Greek army as it does to a contemporary army. Agamemnon is the leader of the expedition but all other heroes can freely and openly disagree with him (XIV.83-85, IX.32-49). Only by being able to persuade others with his speeches and opinions is Agamemnon obeyed. The withdrawal of Achilles is a clear evidence that the hero is not unarguably subjected to Agamemnon's authority. Achilles refuses to fight and the other heroes do not view this attitude as a challenge to Agamemnon – they blame their king for this mistake but see the hero's withdrawal as a failure to the community (IX.107-110 and 300-303, XIII.111-114). Authority and respect, in the *Iliad*, must be earned in counsel and in combat. Heroes are revered and respected for what they do.

On the other hand, the armies which face each other before the city of Troy, the rank and file, if we apply either Rieu's and Fitzgerald's translations or the terminology of a contemporary army, stand in the background of the war narrative provided by the *Iliad* and are, ultimately, irrelevant for the result of the conflict. Moreover, the mass of men that compose the armies is anonymous. When a hero kills another hero, this victim is named – sometimes even his patriarchal lineage is given; when a hero kills members of the rank and file, these men are never named:

Who then was the first, and who the last that he slaughtered,
 Hektor, Priam's son, now that Zeus granted him glory?
 Asaios first, and then Autoonoo and Opites,
 And Dolops, Klytios' son, Opheltios and Agelaos,
 And Aisymnos, and Oros, and Hipponoos stubborn in battle,
 He killed these, who were lords of the Danaans, and thereafter
 The multitude. . . (XI.299-305)

Hector kills enemies whose names are provided. These men are heroes and the poet even mentions Dolops's father and the stubbornness of Hipponoos. The members of the rank and file killed by Hector are all grouped together into the "multitude." Diomedes, in a passage, kills twelve members of the rank and file, all unnamed (X.488). Conversely, when Odysseus kills seven Trojan heroes on a row, they are all named (V.677-678).

Only once, throughout the whole epic, does a member of the rank and file speak: Thersites in Book 2. Thersites is also the only member of the rank and file to be even named in the epic. Revealingly, Thersites is described as a man "of endless speech . . . / who knew within his head many words, but disorderly; / vain, without decency . . . / This was the ugliest man who came to Ilion. He was / bandy-legged and went lame of one foot" (II.212-17). Thersites cannot speak properly – proper use of the word is an aristocratic hero's skill. Heroes speak in assemblies; Achilles sings of the glories of men. Thersites is ugly and lame. Achilles, Hector, and the other

great heroes are physically beautiful, strong men. The passage on Thersites and the way this single representative of the rank and file is depicted serve well to demonstrate how “the story centers round the aristocratic heroes, not the general mass of troops” (Rieu xii).

Names, then, are of primary importance in this narrative of heroes. Heroes, we have seen, are named; the common troops have no name. The name of a hero must be known so that this man is acknowledged and revered by the community. How can a hero be sung if his name is unknown? Names are so relevant that all heroes always mention their father’s names and have their lineage referred to in the narrative. Achilles is the son of Peleus, Odysseus is the son of Laertes, Diomedes of Tydeus, and so on. The glory of their fathers, also heroes, comes attached to these warriors who strive to find a glory of their own. This observation is meaningful, for we shall see in the forthcoming chapters how the Great War gave birth to the figure of the Unknown Soldier, a nameless fighting man. In one narrative, the *Iliad*, we are provided the necessarily named warrior; in another, the Great War’s, we are provided the Unknown Soldier.

As the story centers round the heroes, so does war. Discussing the nature of war in the epic, Schuler points out that fighting, in the *Iliad*, may be individual or collective. Major engagements are always very brief. Homer represents an aristocratic culture that praises its best individuals: “a vitória não depende nunca da supremacia numérica” (“victory never depends on numerical superiority”; 34). War is decided by individual actions, or inaction, if we take into account Achilles’s withdrawal, for “the burden of a Homeric battle falls on a few leading men” (Redfield *Nature* 99). The heroes, in the *Iliad*, do make a difference to the result of battle. Individual warriors determine whether a battle, or an entire war, is won or lost.

Achilles is, undoubtedly, the greatest hero of the epic. He embodies “le modèle iliadique individualiste du pouvoir decisive et déséquilibrant du grand héros” (“The *Iliad*’s individualistic model of decisive and unbalancing power of the great hero”; Assunção 381). He is the man most needed by the Greeks if victory is to be achieved and the man most feared by the Trojans. In

Lateiner's formulation, Achilles is the "indispensable superwarrior" (283). As it shall be seen in the forthcoming chapters, there are no indispensable superwarriors in the Great War narrative. Before Achilles leaves the battlefield, "Hektor would not drive his attack beyond the wall's shelter / but would come forth only as far as the Skaian gates and the oak tree" (IX.353-54). This sentence is uttered by Achilles to the men who come to persuade him to resume fighting. Therefore, it may be taken as an exaggeration on the part of a man who has his own pride hurt, but nobody challenges his statement. Goddess Hera confirms it: "[i]n those days when brilliant Achilleus came into the fighting, / never would the Trojans venture beyond the Dardanian / gates" (V.788-790). Hera is a pro-Greek god whose opinions are clearly biased, but it is noteworthy that the Trojans also share the view that Achilles is indispensable to the Greeks: "[w]hile this man was still angry with great Agamemnon, / for all that time the Achaians were easier men to fight with . . . With him, the fight will be for the sake of our city and women. / Let us go into town" (XVIII.257-266). While Achilles fights, the Trojans are held close to the walls of the city. With Achilles away from the fight, the Greeks are forced into building a wall to protect their own ships (VII.336-40). The building of a protective wall shows how exposed the Greeks feel without him.

Achilles's words are also revealing in another sense: he does not speak of a Trojan army. He speaks of Hector, and of Hector alone. The whole war, in this sense, is represented almost as if it were a duel between two individuals: Achilles fights and Hector is held close to the city; Achilles leaves and Hector endangers the whole Greek army. Individual prowess in combat is clearly what counts in the representation of war in the *Iliad*.

Achilles is not the only warrior in the epic whose excellence in combat is unbalancing and decisive. His refusal to fight provides the narrative with an opportunity to show the feats of the other heroes – men who make a difference in the battlefield. The first *aristeia*, a display of valor on the part of an individual⁸, of the *Iliad*, is shown by Diomedes; Book 5 is almost entirely

⁸ Nagy understands this complex word as "prestige" and also approximates it to "grand heroic moments" (24; 28).

dedicated to his deeds. Diomedes brings havoc to the Trojan army. His excellence in combat is so great at this moment that the hero is able to wound a god, Aphrodite (V.336-337), and dares to charge four times against Apollo before being warned of his imprudence (V.438-440). In Book 6, as Diomedes keeps on fighting effectively, the Trojans pray to Athena so that she “might hold back from sacred Ilion the son of Tydeus” (VI.96). The Trojans fear that Diomedes, son of Tydeus, may be able to break into the city almost single-handedly.

Odysseus, the main character in the *Odyssey*, is another Greek hero of great excellence in combat. At times, he is left alone to fight and, even wounded, kills many (XI.401-488). And yet, Odysseus’s skills are not reserved for the battlefield only. The king of Ithaca is also revered and respected for his ability in speech and for his cunning. By the time the Greeks must choose the men to persuade Achilles, Odysseus is a natural choice. In Book 10, the Greeks decide to spy on the Trojan camp and try to find out what the enemy is planning. Diomedes volunteers and, when asked who he would like to have by his side in this perilous action, he replies: “how could I forget Odysseus the godlike, he whose / heart and whose proud spirit are beyond all others forward / in all hard endeavours, and Pallas Athene loves him. / Were he to go with me, both of us could come back from the blazing / of fire itself, since his mind is best at devices” (X.243-247). Everyone knows how clever and intelligent Odysseus is, the best at schemes. It is his cunning and sense of leadership that makes Odysseus stand out and hold the army together when the rank and file, urged by Thersites, threatens to sail away from Troy (II.149-152). His attitude is very revealing of both his excellence as a hero and of the relationship between the heroes and the rank and file: “[w]hen he encountered some king, or a man of influence, / he would stand beside him and with soft words try to restrain him” (II.188-189); on the other hand, “[w]hen he saw some man of the people who was shouting, / he would strike at him with his staff, and reprove him also” (II.198-199). He convinces the leaders to stay, but orders the troops to stay. If Achilles is the hot-tempered, passionate hero; Odysseus is the shrewd, rational one.

Ajax, a “gigantic” warrior carrying a huge shield, is “the wall of the Achaians” (III.229). In the catalogue of ships, he is ranked as second only to Achilles (II.768). In a duel against Hector, he is deemed victorious (VII.311-312). Ajax’s valor is best displayed at the moment when the Greek army is most endangered. When, with most of the other heroes wounded, the Trojans are about to break the protective wall, “he blocked them all from making their way on to the fast ships / and himself stood and fought on in the space between the Achaians / and the Trojans” (XI.568-570). A single individual warrior is then able to hold off the Trojan army as he stands between this army and his own troops.

Even Agamemnon, once he has acknowledged his failure to deprive Achilles of his prize, is able to display his skill in combat. His *aristeia*, in Book 11, shows how brilliant a warrior he is and serves to restore his authority with the army (XI.91-251), although he is wounded and must leave the battlefield (XI.252). This is the first in a series of wounds that seriously deplete the Greek army and pave the way for the coming of Patroclus and the return of Achilles. Diomedes (XI.376) and Odysseus (XI.434) are the other “casualties” on the Greek side. Note that all three heroes, Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Odysseus, kill those who wounded them. Great heroes cannot let another warrior live after wounding them.

On the Trojan side, Hector is the foremost and ablest warrior. Prince of Troy, he fights brilliantly with the assistance of Zeus and Apollo in his defense of the city and in his drive to the Greek ships. It may be argued that Hector sometimes seems to be more feared for what he may do than for what he actually does, and that he claims more than he can actually do. He is defeated by Ajax in their individual combat; he is hit by a huge stone and carried back toward the city (XIV.410-432), only to return urged on by Apollo (XV.244-245). In the struggle against Patroclus, Hector only kills him after the Greek is struck by Apollo (XVI.790-855). Finally, he literally runs away from Achilles (XXII.136-138). However, when Hector challenges any Greek for a single combat, all stand “in fear to take up the challenge” (VII.93). Ajax volunteers only after Nestor

scolds the heroes for their cowardice before the prince of Troy (VII.124-170). Hector is surely able to push the Greeks back against their ships and to set fire on one of them. Perhaps, Lattimore's assessment that Homer so industriously diminished him "for the sake of others that we sense deception, and feel that Hektor '*really was*' greater than Patroklos or any other Achaian except Achilles" (*Iliad* 36) is true. In a work that takes a Greek point of view, the other heroes excepting Achilles could not be all defeated by the enemy. In an attempt to show, simultaneously, that Achilles is necessary but that the other heroes are also excellent warriors, the narrative must work both ways: it deflates Hector as much as it makes him an extraordinary opponent.

As soon as Hector manages to set fire to the ships, the time for the *aristeia* of Patroclus arrives and it takes most of Book 16, which ends with his death. Patroclus, like the other heroes, displays excellence and prowess in combat "cutting away their first battalions" before turning back "to pin them against the ships, and would not allow them / to climb back into their city though they strained for it" (XVI.394-396). Amidst the battle, he kills Saperdon, a son to Zeus himself (XVI.490-491), and pushes the Trojans, including Hector, back into the city (XVI.653-655). His drive is so powerful that Apollo must hold him back from mounting the towers of the city (XVI.702-703). However, he forgets the warning of Achilles for not trying to take the city and is killed by Hector, with the help of Apollo (XVI.803-866).

Patroclus dies and the armies engage in a fierce battle for his naked body – the armor he was wearing, Achilles's armor, is taken by Hector. Unable to resume fighting without armor, Achilles shows himself to the Trojans and, with the help of Athena, drives "endless terror upon the Trojans" (XVIII.217-218). We have already seen how the Trojans voice their fear of the warrior Achilles and how the Greeks voice their need for him. Now, actually fighting, the narrative shows how indispensable a superwarrior Achilles is. Typical of the Homeric battle that Schuler defines as never depending on numbers, the Trojans, who seem invincible for the Greek army, "são repelidos em algumas horas por um único homem, Aquiles" ("are repelled in a few hours by a single man");

Schuler 34). The onslaught of Achilles is so powerful and murderous that the hero makes the river Skamandros rise against him in fury, for the waters are crammed with corpses (XXI.218). The entire Trojan army flees in panic back into the walled city (XXI.526-536). Only Hector refuses to go back into the city and stands his ground to fight Achilles. Nonetheless, as the revengeful Greek comes closer, Hector runs but is eventually tricked by Athena into facing Achilles. They fight and Hector is killed, thus proving how necessary and decisive Achilles is. But, as individuals determine the result of war, does the representation of war in the *Iliad* also make it a predictable event? Does the idealization of war, in the epic, correspond to the reality of war? Does war end up to be as Achilles, the indispensable superwarrior, expected? Are warriors really in control of what happens in a war, as it is represented in the *Iliad*?

The *Iliad* is not only an archetype of war narrative but also a challenge to the values of glorious combat, a challenge to the glorification of warfare, insofar as Homer's epic deals with the inherent unpredictability of war and the inescapable process of brutalization in war – a process that ultimately shows that wars are never as previously expected and that the idealization of war cannot resist its reality. At first, the war as portrayed in the *Iliad* is regarded as glorious and heroic; men seek *kléos* in combat. The war is also conducted with respect for certain values, a code of conduct in warfare. However, as the action of the epic unfolds, the war becomes grimmer (as all wars do), and the values are not always respected. Let me turn to textual evidence to make this point clearer.

A close reading of the epic shows that the battles that take place before the withdrawal of Achilles and those that occur immediately afterwards are still fought with observance and respect for certain codes and values. A warrior who defeats his opponent does not necessarily have to kill him – a ransom may be accepted in exchange for his life. A duel between two warriors does not necessarily have to end with one man's death – they part after having done their best, acknowledge each other's worth, and exchange gifts. Stripping the armor of a dead opponent as a symbol of achieved glory is customary – but his body should be left for proper burial. The search for glory in

the battlefield, true of Homeric heroes, only applies to the beginning of the epic. As the war moves on, it becomes grimmer, and the codes and values seem to lose their importance.

The proem of the epic already hints at this different kind of fighting: “Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilles / and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the / Achaians, / hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls / of heroes” (I.1-5). The fighting which ensues from Achilles’s withdrawal, a devastation, leads to the deaths of a multitude of heroes. It is a bitter fighting, uncommonly violent and painful.

The narrative provides evidence of the kind of combat prior to the beginning of the epic. Andromache, Hector’s wife, says that Achilles killed her father but “did not strip his armour, for his heart respected the dead man, / but burned the body in all its elaborate war-gear / . . . / and when he had led my mother . . . Achilles / released her again, accepting ransom beyond count” (VI.417-427). This passage cannot be judged according to contemporary moral standards, which deem any killing as wrongful and view ransom as immoral. Achilles, in this passage, as told by Andromache, still abides to the code of conduct expected of a hero. He honors the man he has killed and spares a woman’s life in exchange for a ransom. We shall see how different Achilles’s behavior is once he resumes fighting.

The duel between two warriors is also carried on with respect for the warrior code. In the combat between Ajax and Hector, the heroes pledge to return the body of the defeated for proper burial (VII.84). The struggle ends without either of them being killed, and they exchange gifts (VII.299). Hector even says that they “fought each other in heart-consuming hate, then / joined each other in close friendship” (VII.301-302). This duel is conducted in a very respectful manner, with pledges and exchanges of praises from both sides. It is, to use an anachronism, chivalrous. The encounter of Diomedes and Glaukos is even more respectful. The heroes meet in the battlefield and, after they tell each other of their lineage, they learn that Glaukos’s grandfather

once hosted Diomedes's grandfather for twenty days. The two heroes decide not to fight and exchange gifts instead (VI.119-236).

Two other passages are very revealing in terms of what kind of combat was fought before the epic begins and of what kind of combat is to be fought during it. In the beginning of Book 6, Agamemnon criticizes his brother Menelaus for capturing a man alive: “[d]ear brother, o Menelaos, are you concerned so tenderly / with these people . . . let not one go free of sudden / death and our hands; not the young man child that the mother carries / still in her body” (VI.55-59). Agamemnon promptly runs his spear into the man. Nestor makes this shift in attitude even clearer: “O beloved Danaan fighters, henchmen of Ares, / let no man any more hang back with his eye on the plunder / designing to take all the spoil he can gather back to the vessels; / let us kill the men now” (VI.67-70). The men should no longer care for loot but get on with the slaughter. This “any more” means that, in the past, it was acceptable to take ransom and be concerned with plunder. The war now has become different and they must be concerned with killing.

The words of Nestor and Agamemnon urging others to kill the enemy are spoken before the encounters of Ajax and Hector and of Diomedes and Glaukos. However, they signal a change in the overall fighting, in the conduct of the war as a whole. The encounters apply to more particular instances, specific duels between specific warriors. Moreover, we shall see that even these specific encounters assume a crueler and more brutal aspect as the war drags on. The encounters of Hector and Patroclus and of Achilles and Hector are such examples.

Agamemnon, trying to encourage his troops, lays bare the gap between what one expects of war, its idealization, and what one actually witnesses at war, its actuality:

Shame you Argives, poor nonentities splendid to look on.

Where are your high words gone, when we said that we were the bravest?

Those words you spoke before all in hollow vaunting at Lemnos

. . . how each could stand up against a hundred or even two hundred Trojans

in the fighting. (VIII.229-234)

The king's speech ends with a plea to Zeus: "Let our men at least get clear and escape, and let not / the Achaians be thus beaten down at the hands of the Trojans" (VIII.243-244). When the war was imagined, idealized, the men boasted that they were brave and could defeat the enemy. Now that war is real and they must face its inherent brutality and cruelty, and the fact that it means death on both sides, the men are afraid. Agamemnon, their leader, just wants to get back home in safety. In the forthcoming chapters, we shall see how this gap between the idealization of war and its real nature is a feature of the narrative of the Great War as well.

This reading of the *Iliad* suggests that the war before the withdrawal of Achilles was a stalemate with the Trojans remaining within their walled city and the Greeks raiding the surrounding cities. As the greatest Greek warrior leaves the battlefield, the Trojans believe they can win and venture beyond their walls, while the Greeks fear for their own survival. Both sides thus start fighting for their lives, not for glory. The Trojans envisage the possibility of victory; the Greeks envisage the possibility that they may be thrown back at the sea. It is in these terms that Ajax addresses the men once the Trojans approach the ships: "[h]ere is the time of decision, whether / we die, or live on still and beat back ruin from our vessels. / Do you expect, if our ships fall to helm-shining Hektor, / you will walk each of you back dryshod to the land of your fathers?" (XV.502-505). The Trojan War now becomes a life or death struggle. As it becomes more murderous, everywhere "the battlements and the bastions" are "awash with men's blood shed from both sides, Achaian and Trojan" (XII.430-431).

This more murderous aspect does not affect the Greeks alone. Hector also undergoes a change as the war becomes grimmer. Respectful with Ajax in their duel, concerned about the well-being of his wife and son when they meet before he sets out for battle, aware of the responsibilities he has before his people as their leading warrior (VI.440-494), Hector starts to boast, to be cruel, and to dismiss any advice once the Trojans get the upper hand. He repeats Nestor's and

Agamemnon's words: "[m]ake hard for the ships, let the bloody spoils be" (XV.347). He dismisses Poulydamas's advice twice. First, at night, when Poulydamas urges him not to camp outside the city, Hector threatens to kill him (XII.231-250). After Patroclus is dead and Achilles shows himself, indicating he will resume fighting, once again Hector disregards Poulydamas's words and says "[i]f it is true that brilliant Achilles is risen beside their / ships, then the worse for him if he tries it, since I for my part / will not run from him" (XVIII.305-307). Ironically, this is exactly what he does.

The killing of Patroclus reveals how the behavior of Hector changes. In the duel with Ajax, he pledges to preserve the body; after killing Patroclus, however, Hector wants "to cut his head from his shoulders / with the sharp bronze / to haul off the body and give it to the dogs of Troy" (XVII.126-128). He promises that the man "of you who drags Patroclus, dead as he is, back / among Trojans . . . I will give him half the spoils for his portion" (XVII.229-231). A bloody battle ensues as Hector tries to drag the dead body into Troy, in a clear disrespect of the warrior's code. Hector is then chided by Apollo for he forgets the battle and tries to capture the horses of Achilles (XVII.75-81). The god tells him the Trojans are dying because of his greed. Hector, inflated by his exploits, forgets what his responsibilities are. After killing Patroclus, he brags that he may even be able to kill Achilles (XVI.860-861). Hector, in Malta's words, becomes "desmedido e soberbo" ("excessive and arrogant"; 239). As he stands his ground to face Achilles, Hector remembers Poulydamas's words, sees how arrogant he was, and how he failed his people: "by my own recklessness I have ruined my people" (XXII.104). Hector changes his behavior because the war changes. The ideal soldier in an idealized war becomes a brutal warrior in a brutal war.

The behavior and words of Achilles also demonstrate the brutalization process of war and the inherent unpredictability of war. When he sails for Troy, the hero is aware of the choice that he has to make: he can either fight, win glory but die young; or he can go back home, live a long life but be deprived of glory (IX.410-416). However, as his status is challenged by Agamemnon, Achilles

starts to question the role of a hero: “[f]ate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard. / We are all held in single honour, the brave and the weaklings. / A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much” (IX.318-320). Achilles starts to ponder whether there is a reason for fighting well, or for fighting at all. He questions the war aims - why he should fight a war for the wife of Agamemnon’s brother: “why must the Argives fight with the Trojans?” (IX.337). The indispensable superwarrior claims he will sail back home and advises all others to do the same (IX.417-418), but he stays, only to witness and even embody the process of the brutalization and the unpredictability of war.

The return of the hero to the fighting marks an all-out war that is signaled by Zeus himself when he tells the gods they can go down and assist any side they please, for Achilles, in his rage, may even go against destiny and storm Troy before its due time (XX.20-30). Achilles disregards the code and disrespects all the men he encounters. He takes twelve young men to be sacrificed in honor of Patroclus (XXI.27 and XXIII.175). We have seen how he clogs the river with the bodies of the men he kills. In a famous passage, his meeting with Lycaon, a son of Priam he had previously released for ransom, Achilles bluntly states that “[i]n the time before Patroklos came to the day of his destiny / then it was the way of my heart’s choice to be sparing / of the Trojans, and many I took alive and disposed of them. / Now there is not one who can escape death” (XXI.100-103). Lycaon begs to be spared, kneeling before Achilles, but he is immediately killed. Achilles scorns the dead man, saying the fish will now feed upon him (XXI.122-125). The Trojans must now “die all an evil death” (XXI.133). Hainsworth points out that in fact no supplicants are spared in the battlefield (qtd. in Assunção 198). The fighting in the epic is different in kind from the idealized war that took place before Achilles withdrew.

As he encounters Hector and is about to enact his revenge for the death of Patroclus, Achilles refuses to acquiesce to Hector’s request for proper burial and claims there are neither agreements nor oaths to be made (XXII.261-266). The Greek hero kills Hector, saying he wished he could eat

him raw for the things he had done and that no one can hold the dogs away from Hector's head (XXII.345-349). Achilles drags Hector's dead body to the Greek camp and abuses it for twelve days.

Achilles kills Hector, settles the war, and is ultimately vindicated, since his worth is proved beyond doubt. He truly is indispensable to the Greeks. Achilles achieves all he wanted but not in the way he wanted: he knows he has failed his community and his friend. His friend is dead and a multitude of heroes have gone down to Hades. Achilles recognizes this fact and accepts his own dreadful fate when he tells his mother that he is not going back because he "was no light of safety to Patroklos, nor to my other / companions, who in their numbers went down before glorious Hektor, / but sit here beside my ships, a useless weight on the good land" (XVIII.101-104).

War turns out to be unpredictable even to the invincible warrior, Achilles. He cannot be defeated but neither can he control what happens on the battlefield. Hector imagines he can control what happens as his side begins to push the Greeks back to the ships. Patroclus is inflated with his success, disregarding the advice of Achilles, and dies. All these heroes, possessing undeniable prowess, men who can settle the result of a war, do not actually control what happens on the battlefield. War, as represented in the *Iliad*, turns out to be much worse than all of them expected.

Chapter 2

“Achilles Entrenched”

“Whenever war is spoken of
I find
The war that was called Great invades the mind” (1-3)
Vernon Scannell, “The Great War.”

“Tom was killed [and]
I found myself thinking perpetually
of all the men who had been killed in battle –
Hector and Achilles and all the heroes of long ago,
who were once so strong and active, and now are so quiet”
Alexander Gillespie in 1915 (qtd. in Fussell 161).

The Great War of 1914-18 seems to call for negative definitions and to reject any sort of positive terms. The accounts of the conflict that have been written and survived to this day are almost unanimous in defining the war as an unarguably negative event. The narratives supporting the war as a crusade against barbarian enemies (Germany), claiming it was a rite of passage for young men or a purge that would purify and cleanse decadent Europe, all such narratives have been deemed biased, old-fashioned, or simply untrue, and have been thus discarded and forgotten. No-one dares find a single positive aspect in the conflict or in its aftermath.

Wars are, surely enough, murderous and despicable events. However, it is possible to argue in favor of at least some aspects of some wars. The American Civil War ended slavery in the USA. The Second World War destroyed Facism and ended the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis. The Algerian and the Vietnam wars were fought, on the Algerian and Vietnamese sides, for independence. These are not absolute definitions of these conflicts; they are arguments that may be discussed, supported or refuted. The Great War of 1914-18 does not invite any such arguments – they are not even voiced in the narratives that have survived and that are still being written about the conflict. It is no longer claimed that the war destroyed empires, liberated the German people,

and created the League of Nations (Hynes 452) – these supposedly good consequences of the conflict find no place in the narrative of the war. The memory of the Great War that has informed our frame of mind, what Samuel Hynes calls “The Myth of War” (xi), is built on negative values.

The myth of war, as formulated by Hynes, is “the received, accepted version of what happened in the First World War, and what it meant in human terms.” It is not only what the war was but also what it did “to history, to society, to art, to politics, to women, to hopes and expectations, to the idea of progress, the idea of civilization, the idea of England” (Hynes 439). Hynes does not include language in this list of what was affected by the war. But, as we shall see, both his and other studies address the issue of how language was challenged and affected by the impact of the Great War. The myth of war is then defined as a “received, accepted version” or a sum of what I have called the narratives that have survived. What is this accepted version and why is it negative?

The Great War is considered “l'événement matriciel du XX siècle” (“twentieth century’s essential event”; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 17). It changed the world and therefore it also changed reality. It changed history as well. Or, better still, it challenged the concept of history. Up to the conflict, history was a narrative of the seamless stream of human progress and amelioration. History, in the nineteenth-century and until the war, provided the ground over which national identities were built – it offered nations their genealogy (White, *Invenção* 6). History was the common past that people shared and that bound them together. It was the narrative of how men had been progressing, how men had evolved. The war, then, proved to be a “hideous embarrassment to the prevailing Meliorist myth which had dominated the public consciousness for a century. It reversed the Idea of Progress” (Fussell 8). People suddenly found out that scientific advancement also meant the machine gun, gas, and more lethal shells. People found that the stream of progress had led to a brutal and senseless slaughter. The seamless narrative provided by history was ruptured. The war “is not an event in history but a *gap*, an annihilation of pre-war reality”

(Hynes 129). The war did not fit and could not be included in the narrative of continuous human progress because it was not something added to history: “the *shape* of history had been radically altered” (Hynes 346). Another narrative had to be applied, or invented. This narrative, the myth of war, is filled with negatives and devoid of positives. The adjectives usually applied to this narrative share the suffix “less”: meaningless, pointless, senseless, or worthless. It seemed as if the world before 1914 had gone missing after the war.

In August 1914, when hostilities began, men set out to war eager to prove themselves and to undergo a rite of passage into manhood (Cooperman 7). The outbreak of war was even celebrated in Paris, London, and Berlin. The way young men welcomed the opportunity to fight may be found in many works such as Barbara Tuchman’s *The Guns of August* (1962), John Keegan’s *The First World War* (1998), and Alistair Horne’s *The Seven Ages of Paris* (2002) and *The Price of Glory* (1962). The war was expected to be a traditional engagement with troop movements and decisive battles; it was also expected to be a short conflict. By 1914, “the vision everywhere was still of a war of movement, heroism, and quick decisions” (Eksteins 90). But, the war soon became static – a line of trenches running from the Swiss border to the English Channel was established and no army managed a breakthrough until 1918; it lasted for more than four years; practically no plan or attack succeeded: Verdun (German offensive), Gallipoli (Franco-British), the Somme (mostly British), Chemin des Dames (French), and many other less infamous attempts failed. Men who wanted to be glorious warriors found themselves in ragged mud-stained uniforms surrounded by rats and under a continuous rain. No forecast, expectation, or hope materialized. The men who fought it and their contemporaries could not understand the way the conflict had evolved. What took place in the so-called Western Front was not war in the sense men had been ascribing to this word since time immemorial. What was dubbed “the war to end all wars” really ended war as men had always known it. But it did not end the practice of war – it inaugurated a new kind. And, by inaugurating a new practice of war, it also inaugurated a new way of narrating war.

The war, according to John Keegan, “damaged civilization . . . permanently for the worse” (8). Since 1914 war has become more violent than it ever was and “est apparue une nouvelle forme d’affrontement armé qui fait de 1914-18 une rupture historique dont les consequences ont été determinantes pour toute l’histoire ultérieure du XX siècle” (“a new form of armed conflict has appeared which makes 1914-18 a historical break whose consequences have been paramount for the rest of the twentieth century history”; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 38). The conflict was “the first example of large-scale genocide” (Payne 31). The Great War “snuffed out the age of unrivalled prosperity and unlimited promise . . . and Europe descended into a new Dark Age from whose shadows it has yet to emerge” (Horne, *Price* 16), and it was “a war that had no victors” (Horne, *Price* 331). Eric Hobsbawm says that “the great edifice of nineteenth century civilization crumpled in the flames of the world war, as its pillars collapsed” (22). Finally, after the war, “the world that used to be and the ideas that shaped it disappeared” (Tuchman 310). The assessments cited above are made by historians. They are all, in a sense, apocalyptic: they tell of the end of a world, and suggest how negatively history has narrated the conflict.

Stanley Cooperman argues that it is difficult for us to grasp the meaning and impact of the Great War because “we live with the barbarity of civilization” (8) and that, after the Great War, “[t]he world itself was broken. It was still broken when World War II began, but by then the family china had long been cracked” (56). Modris Eksteins affirms that, after the war, “[t]he modern temper had been forged . . . irony and anxiety, [had become] the mode and the mood” (293). Besides, “[t]he Great War is not likely to be forgotten: the memory of its waste and dumb heroism is part of the twentieth-century sensibility” (Bergonzi 222). Eksteins writes a cultural analysis of the impact of the conflict; Cooperman and Bernard Bergonzi write studies about the literature that stems out of the conflict. But, like the other historians, they argue for the original nature of the war and its overwhelming negative impact.

The war “broke the world,” “forged the modern temper,” and was made of “waste and dumb heroism.” Both political and literary historians corroborate Paul Fussell when he claims that the war “will not be understood in traditional terms: the machine gun alone makes it so special and unexampled that it simply can’t be talked about as if it were one of the conventional wars of History. Or worse, of literary history” (153). The nature of the war had not even been envisaged by the imagination of poets, novelists, and dramatists. Before being understood, the war would have to be imagined (Hynes 106-108). The Great War is a brutal, negative rupture. A new age is inaugurated by the 1914-18 conflict: the age of total war. How can this new form of warfare be narrated? Can it be fitted into a traditional narrative frame and still be satisfactory, i.e. still convey the meaning, or meaninglessness, of the war?

A rupture, an event that broke the world and that made the pillars of civilization collapse and destroyed pre-war reality, could not be satisfactorily rendered and represented in traditional historical narrative. The traditional narrative of history seemed unable to cope with the challenges posed by the war because “[t]o represent the war in the traditional ways was necessarily to *misrepresent* it” (Hynes 108). Historical narrative imposes order upon disordered and disconnected events or, as Hynes explains, “when you construct a story of events from the past into the present, you construct causation, and therefore meaning, and the ruins take shape, the strange becomes familiar” (321). Hayden White’s “Metahistory” theory approaches the issue of historical narrative and how it is “a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (*Metahistory* 2). But what took place on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 was a series of events, and a lack of events, that seemed to reject causation and explanation. It was unexplainable in traditional ways.

The year of 1916 provides the two arguably best examples of events that reject causation and explanation: the Battles of Verdun and the Somme. 1916 is a watershed in the war because “the

'front' experience of 1916-1917 was indeed a 'frontier' experience, an experience of something that was, in its implications, completely new" (Eksteins 172). Cooperman also stresses the importance of 1916 as a watershed in the war experience (46). Keegan, in his *First World War*, has a chapter about the year 1916 which is called "The Year of Battles." But were Verdun and the Somme battles as men understood it to be?

The Battle of Verdun was waged for ten months in 1916 with almost 750,000 casualties in a front no more than twenty miles wide. Four months after beginning the attack, the German Army had advanced a mere five miles; at the end, it had gained less than three miles. The defending French claimed victory and Verdun has been elevated to mythic status in the French national memory. British historian Ian Ousby comments that the Great War seems mysterious and senseless because of "how little resemblance" it bears "to the neat and academic model" (*Road* 25). What happened in Verdun did not resemble a battle: no single battle has ever lasted for ten months – whole wars last for less than this; the French forces suffered "the heaviest bombardment in history" (Tuchman 370); after it, the French still held the city and the Germans were still entrenched before it. In concrete, measurable terms, once the battle was to be deemed over, nothing had changed in the course of war but the fact that almost 750,000 men were dead or wounded.

The Battle of the Somme began on July 1, 1916, when British forces launched an attack against well entrenched German defenses. Soldiers came out of their trenches, in "steady formation" (Keegan 294), and walked across no man's land only to be mowed down by German machine guns. Out of 100,000 men, the British suffered 60,000 casualties; 20,000 men killed in one single day (Keegan 295). Like Verdun, after one month, the number of casualties in proportion to the "gains" was staggering: the British and French forces had advanced three miles at the cost of 200,000 men; German losses amounted to 160,000. Like Verdun, the Somme failed to provide the features previously associated with battles: movement, speed, the gaining of enemy ground,

surrender, and, most of all, decision. These engagements were planned and executed, and men died in the hundreds of thousands, but neither victory nor defeat was any closer. There seemed to be no point in the fighting.

In a study of the Battle of Verdun, Ousby argues that “[b]attles, so military historians have long agreed, are above all stories; the fact that books about battles have become one of the last refuges of narrative history no doubt explains a good part of their popular appeal” (*Road* 23). He then moves on to explain how historians, as Hynes and White argued, try to make a clear story out of it, but

On the battlefield, everything is confusion, everything is chaos Military history takes up the challenge of picking its way through this mass of incoherence . . . it constructs as best it can an authoritative account, a clear story. Yet in the very clarity of the result lies a profound falsification. The incoherence and the misunderstandings . . . are part of the very fabric of the event, the forces that drive it onwards, and give it whatever shape, however disappointingly inartistic, it might come to possess. (*Road* 23-24)

These remarks on the confusing and chaotic nature of battles are an example of the typical Great War narrative – they are post-1918 remarks. The gap between what really takes place during a battle and what is expected to take place has shown itself at its widest in the Great War. French historians argue that “[l]es mots manquent pour dire à quel point un mode d’activité guerrière centré, depuis l’Antiquité grecque, sur ce moment paroxysmique . . . qu’est la bataille fut remis en cause entre 1914 et 1918” (“Words fail to convey to which extent a mode of warrior activity centered, since Ancient Greece, on this paroxysmal moment . . . that is the battle was questioned between 1914 and 1918”; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 49). It is impossible to say whether all battles that have happened in history are confusing. Some battles have not been narrated as incoherent: Austerlitz in 1805 is viewed as a neat, academic model (Horne, *Austerlitz*); so is the

Battle of France in 1940 (Horne, *France*). Narrative histories of battles do not necessarily carry a “profound falsification” because they are clear – the sense, or perhaps the realization, of their being a falsification has emerged after the Great War. The way we think of battles as chaotic and confusing engagements is a consequence of the Great War and of the way it was waged. After the 1914-18 war, we sense deception in a neat, academic narrative description of a battle and are likely to discard it as untruthful. As Winter puts it, “[t]he images, languages, and practices which appeared during and in the aftermath of the Great War shaped the ways in which future conflicts were imagined and remembered” (2).

The way we think of the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and some others is shaped by the images we have inherited from the Great War; but is it not possible that the way we imagine preceding conflicts has also been shaped by the Great War? Our view of the past, and our memory, is shaped and redesigned by what we experience afterwards. The act of recalling is dynamic, and, when remembering, we recreate and reconstruct our experiences: we attribute to the past something only acquired after the event itself (Winter 3-4). Therefore it is likely that the way we imagine the Great War has come to influence the way we imagine past wars – as it is likely to have influenced all those engaged in narrating wars, be they pre or post-1918 conflicts. The narratives of the American Civil War, of the Franco-Prussian War, nineteenth-century wars, are likely to have been affected by the Great War narrative: if they are neat and academic we may find them falsifications; if they are confusing and chaotic, we may find them verisimilar. The Great War changed the way wars are imagined: in this statement lies my contention that the Great War may have changed the way wars are, or can be, narrated. This war remains “a powerful imaginative force, perhaps the most powerful force” (Hynes 469) in the shaping of our conception of what war is.

One pre-1918 narrative that represents battles as confusing and chaotic is Stephen Crane’s American Civil War classic, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). In Crane’s novel, the protagonist

Henry Fleming, often called “the Youth” by the narrator, dreams of encountering a “Greeklike struggle” (12) – one cannot help thinking of the *Iliad* – but finds himself flung into an environment he cannot understand and comes to fear. The reader shares the protagonist’s “confusion” and “disorientation” because the text “radically withholds factual information”, hence depriving the whole combat experience of meaning and causation: the narrative follows “the unforeseen contours of battle itself” (Burns 41-42).

However, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, battles still have movement: soldiers advance and retreat; the technique of following the protagonist as he runs back and forth in the battlefield and in the woods imposes a fast-paced narrative to the novel. Keegan, in the end of his chapter about 1916, affirms that battles are “dynamic and fluid” (316). The tide of a battle may change rapidly because of a mistake, because of an unexpected breakthrough or a failure to take advantage of a breakthrough; a battle may be won because of a general’s ability to perceive and exploit an enemy’s weakness. Battles are fluid and dynamic in *The Red Badge of Courage*, but the sensation of fighting in Verdun and at the Somme was anything but fluid and dynamic: it was static and immutable. No army advanced, no ground was taken, and everything repeated itself: men moved against well-entrenched enemies and were killed by machine gun fire; artillery relentlessly kept on bombarding the two opposing armies. Fussell acknowledges the historical change by italicizing the word “battle” and moving on to explain that “[t]o call these things *battles* is to imply an understandable continuity with earlier British history and to imply that the war makes sense in a traditional way” (9). Fussell’s study is focused on the British world, hence his “British history.” But the definition also applies to French and German history – histories full of battles such as Austerlitz, Jena, and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Calling Verdun and the Somme “battles” is a misunderstanding of how novel that experience was.

Another important difference between the American Civil War and the Great War is the technological advance in warfare: there are no huge shells, barbed wire, and gas in *The Red Badge*

of Courage. The machine gun and the barbed wire had not been invented. Some of the shells weighed over a ton and, when fired, their concussion “broke the windows of houses for two miles around” (Horne, *Price* 42). In the Great War narrative, soldiers are stuck, literally trapped behind trenches in knee-deep mud. When they try to attack, they are met by enemy fire, as in the Somme. Those in Verdun, as I mentioned above, were exposed to the greatest bombardment in history. Commenting on Crane’s novel, Cooperman points out to the Great War’s more murderous technology whose “results were nightmares such as Verdun and the Somme, involving millions of casualties” (217). Battles in *The Red Badge of Courage* are chaotic to the men involved, but they are not nightmares involving millions of casualties.

However, the war was not made of battles only – the Somme, Verdun, Passchendaele, and others, are part of the war, not the whole of it. There were moments when soldiers were not engaged in any battle in particular – what I termed the lack of events. These moments also seemed to reject causation and explanation for the war simply dragged on, day after day, with no perspective of ending. The routine was made up of activities such as trying to kill rats and lice, trying to avoid being shot by a sniper, and living with the stench of unburied corpses that abounded in no man’s land. It might be called boredom, or inactivity, but was not this routine as horrendous as the battles? Was it not as nightmarish as the battles? Was death not present at all times as in the battles?

In Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (1990), a novel about the Vietnam War, boredom in a war is described as follows:

It was boredom with a twist, the kind of boredom that caused stomach disorders.

You’d be sitting at the top of a huge hill, the flat paddies stretching out below, and the day would be calm and hot and utterly vacant, and you’d feel the boredom dripping inside you like a leaky faucet, except it wasn’t water, it was a sort of acid, and with each little droplet you’d feel the stuff eating away at important organs. You’d try to

relax Well, you'd think, this isn't so bad. And right then you'd hear gunfire behind you and your nuts would fly up into your throat and you'd be squealing pig squeals. That kind of boredom. (37-38)

Although the setting is not the Western Front but Vietnam, by changing a “huge hill” and the “flat paddies” for a trench and the shell holes, the “hot” day for a rainy day, and perhaps the “gunfire” for a bombardment, this description could well be applied to the Great War. The setting is different but the feeling equals what soldiers experienced between 1914 and 1918: a dehumanizing process as the “acid eats away” at your organs – as war weighs over you. Eksteins argues that the periods outside the battles might be as horrendous as the battles because being at the front meant facing death and horror in a daily basis – it meant being exposed to experiences never witnessed before and that defied explanation. For Eksteins, in fact, “after several weeks of frontline experience there was little that could shock. Men became immunized, rather rapidly, to the brutality and obscenity. They had to if they were to survive” (154). Soldiers developed a certain “narcosis” (Eksteins 172). Staying at the front is what counts, is what represents a horrendous experience. This experience is “crucial, and that, in its broader context, was novel. With time the former categories and the accepted relationship of the war to previous history wore thin and collapsed” (Eksteins 155). The experience has no parallel in previous history.

The war was basically made of either the horror of the battles or the horror of boredom: the horror of clashes such as Verdun and the Somme and the boredom of the seemingly endless periods between these clashes. The horror of the clashes was pointless because it did not lead to a progress in the war, did not make the war shorter. It has been claimed, setting aside moral and ethical arguments, that the horror of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki led to the Japanese surrender, thus shortening the Second World War. The horror of the engagements in the Great War led nowhere. Boredom can not be dismissed as the opposite of horror because the supposedly idle moments were spent either trying to avert death or facing death all around:

comrades shot by snipers, decaying corpses devoured by rats and etc. In Ian Ousby's comments about battles, there is a word that well defines this experience: incoherence. An experience without causation and explanation is incoherent. The war was incoherent.

History does not usually narrow its narrative to the individual horror or to the individual boredom, nor can historical narrative be incoherent. History usually adopts an all-encompassing, bird's eyes view and is arranged as a coherent narrative with beginning, middle, and end. However, due to the nature of the fighting in the Great War, it seems as if the bird's eyes view and coherence are insufficient, unable to convey what the war was really like. This is the reason why Eksteins comments that "[i]t is noteworthy that among the mountains of writing built up on the subject of the Great War, a good many of the more satisfying attempts to deal with its meaning have come from the pens of poets, novelists, and even literary critics, and that professional historians have produced, by and large, specialized and limited accounts" (291). The war rejects history's coherence and invites poets' and novelists' different attempts.

One of the Great War classics is Frenchman Henri Barbusse's novel *Under Fire (Le Feu)*. A combat novel, like *The Red Badge of Courage* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Under Fire* was written while the war was still on and it was published at the end of 1916, the year of Verdun and the Somme. The novel is "essentially plotless – episodic and aimless" (Burns 42). It follows a group of soldiers as they march from one place to another, as they are bombarded, go to Paris on leave, and other seemingly disconnected events. The narrative "protests the incapacity of its own method to render the reality of its subject coherently, because incoherence is the essential principle of that reality" (Hynes 203-204). The narrative must search for incoherence, or be incoherent, in order to render the reality of the war.

Alistair Horne's *The Price of Glory* is praised as the greatest historical account of the Battle of Verdun (Keegan 453; Ousby, *Occupation* 318). However, when trying to convey how the troops caught up in battle feel, and what the routine of the war is like, Horne resorts to Barbusse's

narrative: the fifth chapter in Horne's book is named "the waiting machine" – an expression taken from Barbusse's novel (Barbusse 17). Similarly, when describing medical treatment in the French Army, Horne resorts to Barbusse's descriptions of wounds (*Price* 65). Barbusse's incoherence seems more capable of rendering the reality of the frontline experience – though it is not even set in the battle of Verdun: like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Under Fire* refrains from precisely locating where its action takes place. The exact place does not seem to matter for the experience of the war is the same for all those entrapped in the Western Front.

Incoherence is a feature required of those who want to narrate the Great War. As the war rejects causation and explanation, it does not invite a linear narrative. In the words of Hynes, "[i]n history, as in the arts, the familiar would have to be made unfamiliar before it would be accepted by later generations as a credible version of the war's reality" (47). The narrative, in order to be credited, has to be incoherent, without explanation, without a cause, unfamiliar. The narrative of this war tells of a world in ruins, a fragmented and destroyed world. It becomes T. S. Eliot's "heap of broken images" (22). This new way of narrating war represents a great challenge to language itself: it is not only the meaning of war that is put to the test – the meaning of words themselves and the meaning of the world are challenged. As Virginia Woolf's Great War veteran Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* wonders, "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (98)⁹. The summing up of all the elements affected by the war, the elements cited by Hynes in his formulation of the myth of the war, leads the disturbed veteran Septimus to question the meaning of the world itself. This sensation of the world as meaningless is echoed by James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus when he affirms that "[h]istory is the nightmare" from which he is trying to awake (42). Though set in 1904, Joyce's *Ulysses* carries in this commentary the whole weight of the Great War apocalyptic legacy already seen in the comments cited from historical accounts.

⁹ When citing or alluding to works by authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, or T. S. Eliot, I am consciously avoiding the usage of the term "modernism." These authors are only called upon when their works are related to the impact of the Great War. Modernism did not begin after the war, nor is it a direct consequence of the conflict, hence my avoiding a lengthy discussion on such a broad theme.

Historians, poets, novelists, in the aftermath of the conflict, were all in search of a meaning for what had happened.

Regarding the issue of meaning, Fussell asks the following question:

How are factual events deformed by the application to them of metaphor, rhetorical comparison, prose rhythm, assonance, alliteration, allusion, and sentence structures and connectives implying clear casualty? Is there any way of compromising between the reader's expectations that written history ought to be interesting and meaningful and the cruel fact that much of what happens – all of what happens? – is inherently without 'meaning'? (172)

Are Fussell's questions not a direct consequence of the war, since his book is widely cited and considered a seminal work on the consequences of the Great War and how it has influenced our perception of war? By questioning meaning itself, not only the meaning of war or the meaning of single words, the Great War led to irony: the world was not what it appeared to be. War is not what men thought it was. Neither is history. This is why Eksteins claims that, after the war, "the modern temper had been forged . . . irony and anxiety, [had become] the mode and the mood" (293). Irony is a response to what had happened.

In Fussell's words, "[t]he irony which memory associates with the events, little as well as great, of the First World War has become an inseparable element of the general vision of war in our time" (33). The war made irony an essential feature of our world, one that begins with the war (Hynes 469), a world that made the subsequent world war possible: one with extermination camps, gas chambers, atomic weapons dropped on populated areas, and other terrible practices. It is obvious that the war did not invent irony in literature. The years between 1914 and 1918, the effects of the war and of the experience of the Western Front, just made the gap between what is expected and what happens more clearly perceivable and therefore invited an ironic approach. Irony, however, as Fussell contends, is a feature of any war (7). We have already seen in the

previous chapter how ironic the Trojan War turned out to be, i.e. unlike what was expected and how disproportionate its means were in comparison to its ends¹⁰.

The challenge posed against language is not, as Fussell rightly observes, one of linguistics but of rhetoric: “there’s no reason why a language devised by man should be inadequate to describe any man’s works” (170). The point was not so much of creating new words to narrate the war adequately, but of realizing what had happened with the meaning of the words usually applied and what other words were now necessary. Burns claims that the right words “had to come later” (5), but he argues that the problem was “finding the right words to write about the war” (6). The right words had to be found and the others, the “wrong” ones, had to be discarded or their ineffectiveness exposed: “the truth about war was a matter of language – and especially of the words you did *not* use” (Hynes 183). Abstract concepts such as courage, patriotism, bravery, heroism, and many others, were no longer suitable for narrating the new war. Eksteins explains that

Traditional language and vocabulary were grossly inadequate, it seemed, to describe trench experience. Words like *courage*, let alone *glory* and *heroism*, with their classical and romantic connotations, simply had no place in any accounts of what made soldiers stay and function in the trenches. Even basic descriptive nouns, like *attack*, *counterattack*, *sortie*, *wound*, and *shelling*, had lost all power to capture reality. (218)

We have already seen how even the definition of “battle” was questioned by the war. Winston Churchill, in his *The World Crisis*, says that, in the war, “[v]ictory was to be bought so dear as to be almost indistinguishable from defeat” (qtd. in Horne, *Price* 319). Even the meaning of victory, the ultimate goal in a war, is blurred by the horrors of the conflict. The “big words” conveying

¹⁰ Irony as a trope or as a literary device is too broad a subject for being satisfactorily approached in this study whose aim is, besides the role of the individual in warfare, the gap between what is expected and what is encountered at war, as it is represented in two types of war narratives. For more on the subject of irony, as it is related to warfare and the Great War, see Fussell (7-35, 1975). For a different argument, see Winter (118-127, 2006).

abstract and grandiose concepts such as courage and bravery become hollow, devoid of their pre-war signification, because the men who fought the war found none of these concepts in their actual frontline experience. The matter of how the grandiose words fail to convey the experience of the war and of which words are now required finds one of its finest formulations in the argument of Ernest Hemingway's *Frederick Henry*:

I am always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain . . . and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates. (143-144)

Nouns conveying abstract concepts are embarrassing and obscene for they fail to represent what combat is really like. The war did not provide anything glorious or sacred. Now names, real place names, are those which carry the reality of what happened in the war - names such as Verdun, Somme, Ypres, Passchendaele, and many more. The names are real and the nouns have become unreal in the sense that the names were actually seen or lived by those who fought and the nouns were not found during the war. The new reality of the war devalues the old rhetoric and requires a new one (Hynes 109).

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is an example of the literature Eksteins calls "the literature of disenchantment" (172), which "would be on the whole a postwar phenomenon – everywhere" (207). Cooperman calls such novels "the postwar novel of disillusion" (35). Barbusse's *Under Fire* and these novels mostly written in the 1920's and early 1930's, place "great stress on the emerging sense of irony, disillusionment, and alienation among front soldiers" (Eksteins 175): the irony of

the situations in the war and the disillusionment of having their expectations unfulfilled. Hynes traces the definition of the myth of the war in the years from 1926 to 1933 (424), precisely when the novels of disenchantment were being written. Note that the three novels that shall be discussed in the following chapters, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Company K*, and *Paths of Glory*, were published, respectively, in 1928, 1933, and 1935. They are examples of both the myth of the war and of the literature of disenchantment.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederick Henry makes a “separate peace” (Cooperman 188) and flees the war. Frederick Henry “abandons any vestige of attachment to a scheme of public values that had become meaningless to him. . . . In *A Farewell to Arms* Hemingway registers the collapse of the heroic ideal” (Bergonzi 195). The new nature of combat in a technological war renders individuals powerless and they have no control over what happens in the battlefield. Besides changing reality and the concept of history, besides imposing great difficulties upon those who wish to narrate the conflict, besides challenging language and the glorifying nouns usually associated with warfare, the Great War brings about a change in the role of the individual in warfare. Hemingway’s hero is a hero in a literary sense of being the protagonist. He is not a hero in the sense we have seen ascribed to this word in the *Iliad*. He cannot do anything else but flee.

Historical narratives acknowledge this change as well: “[t]here was, then, a terrible irony for the soldiers of 1914-18 in the discovery that battle was above all an experience of supreme helplessness” (Ousby *Road* 84-85). Men were helpless before the new technology used in warfare and before the new war. In the words of French historians, “[c]’est une esthétique et aussi une éthique de l’heroïsme, du courage et de la violence guerrière qui ont disparu dans l’immense cataclysme du début de ce siècle” (“An aesthetics and also an ethics of heroism, of courage, and of violence, have disappeared in the early twentieth century immense cataclysm”; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 49). The way individuals were portrayed in warfare and the role previously assigned to

them are changed. In the new representation of war “there would be . . . no more Big Words; more than that, there would be no heroes and no victories” (Hynes 188).

The new role individuals can play in warfare and how it is represented in the literature of war is well put by Cooperman:

Love, death, and war have always been the great raw materials of literature. Men still love and die in very much the same way that their ancestors – including their literary ancestors in the Homeric and epic patterns – loved and died. They do not, however, make war the same way; indeed, one might say that in the twentieth century war is made upon them. And this change has resulted in enormous problems not only for the literary artist, but for the literary critic and historian. (193)

I would like to draw attention to “Homeric and epic patterns” and to the sentence “war is made upon them.” As we have already seen, in Homeric epic, men make war. Homeric heroes are active individuals in warfare. Cooperman argues that, in the twentieth century, “war is made upon them.” The hero becomes a victim and, instead of inflicting pain, he is inflicted pain – instead of active he becomes passive. The hero stays in a trench being shelled: Achilles is finally entrenched.

Hynes ponders that “[t]he myth accomplished the demolition of meaning . . . by telling the story of the war not in the traditional way – that is, in terms of big battalions – but through the stories of individuals” (455). Frederick Henry, as we have seen, claims that the abstract nouns are obscene and have lost their power to convey what happens in war. He also states that only names have dignity. The names of villages, of roads, and of rivers have dignity, but what about the names of men? If, on the one hand, the myth tells the war in an untraditional way by focusing on the stories of individuals; on the other hand, these individuals, in spite of being the focus of the narratives, are denied names. The Great War gives birth to the nameless hero, a man whose participation and death in battle is mourned and revered but whose name is unknown. In the next

chapter, we study, through the analysis of the novels and a comparison to the *Iliad*, one of the Great War's most peculiar innovations in the narrative of warfare: The Unknown Soldier.

Chapter 3

“The Unknown Soldier”

“We needed an Achilles” (in World War 2)
 Jean Dutourd after the defeat of France,
 in *The Taxis of the Marne* (56).

“France was still Achilles in 1914,
 but has since chosen the part of Nestor”
The Taxis of the Marne (88).

On 11 November, 1920, both Great Britain and France buried the unidentified remains of native soldiers killed during the Great War. The remains were taken from the battlefields, among the countless corpses that abounded once the war was over, where British and French soldiers had died. No one knows who stands for all those who perished in the Great War, who the man that represents victory or defeat is: the representative of all the men who died is unknown. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Churchill said that, in the Great War, victory was almost indistinguishable from defeat. The dead had also become indistinguishable: they were made anonymous. In this chapter we shall see how the Great War narrative turns the hero into a faceless victim.

The “Unknown Soldier” is the symbol of the Great War. The cult of the Unknown Soldier is “la brutalisation de la guerre passée à la postérité mémorielle, c’est l’invention commémorative par excellence de la Grande Guerre: l’anonymat garantit l’héroïsme de tous” (“the war’s brutalization passed into posterity, it is the Great War’s commemorative invention par excellence: anonymity assures the heroism of all”; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 262). For the first time in history, fallen men in battle are called “Unknown”, with a capital letter (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 220). In a seemingly contradictory statement, the Unknown Soldier personifies what Burns calls the war’s “anonymity of death.” The anonymity of death may, in this case, be applied in two senses: it

means that anyone can be killed in modern technological war, that prowess and excellence as a soldier no longer assure survival. In another sense, it means that the dead were anonymous because they could not be recognized; their maimed, torn, and destroyed bodies could not establish their identities. At the end of the conflict, more than half of the dead men were unidentified: over 500,000 British bodies and 850,000 French (Keegan 422); more than a million nameless victims in the French and British side alone. Anonymity, according to French historians, is one of the principal features of the violence that appeared during the Great War (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 64).

The British “Unknown Warrior” – a term more elevated than Unknown Soldier (Fussell 175) – was buried in Westminster Abbey to lie, as the inscription says, “among the most illustrious of the land” (Hynes 280) and “among the Kings” (Keegan 6). The French *soldat inconnu*, after a debate whether he should be interred in the Pantheon or under the Arc of Triumph, was put to rest under the latter, alone and attended by an eternal flame. The body came from Verdun by train and was followed by a procession through Paris, accompanied by a fictive family: a war widow, parents who had lost sons, and a war orphan (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 263-67). The fallen man stood for all who had died and the fictive family stood for all who mourned. Almost all other belligerents buried their unknown soldiers: the USA, Belgium, and Italy held their ceremonies in 1921; Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in 1922; followed by Greece, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Austria (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 262). The burial of an Unknown Soldier stretches well into the twenty-first century: Canada buried an Unknown Soldier, a body brought from the cemeteries in France, on 28 May 2000 (Veterans Affairs Canada). According to the National War Memorial in New Zealand, one hundred thousand people gathered when the nation’s Unknown Warrior (the term as elevated as Great Britain’s) was buried on 11 November, 2004. After almost ninety years, the Great War and its victims are still remembered.

There are two conspicuous exceptions in the list of nations that buried unknown soldiers: Russia and Germany. Russia favored a mausoleum for the leader of the communist revolution, Lenin (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 263). In Germany, despite some requests, the Weimar Republic never held this sort of ceremony. However, after Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, Nazi writers began calling him "the unknown corporal" and he referred to himself as "an unknown soldier of the world war" (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 263; Keegan 6). Hitler was a veteran of the Great War and the revenge he wanted to extract for the defeat of 1918 led to the Second World War and to the making of millions of unknown victims in extermination camps. In 1943, when the German Sixth Army surrendered to the Red Army in Stalingrad, the Fuehrer, in rage, exclaimed that "life is the nation. The individual must die anyway" (qtd. in Shirer 1218). Hitler's remark may well be regarded as a summary of what he had witnessed as a foot soldier on the Western Front: in name of the nation, one of the abstract concepts and grand words that had led men to war, individuals died by the millions. In addition, the belief that an individual soldier could make a difference also died. Metaphorically speaking, the burial of the Unknown Soldier also meant the burial of the hero as a possible role in warfare.

In the wake of the conflict, twelve nations buried unknown soldiers. Due to the unprecedentedly high and anonymous death toll, it was impossible for nations, in official commemorations, to mourn or praise single individuals. No single individual had made or could have made a difference. Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker's assessment that anonymity assured the heroism of all is right because individual prowess as a fighting man had been suppressed by the new nature of warfare. However, if it assures the heroism of all, it may also assure the heroism of none. All the men who had fought and died on the Western Front, in general terms, could only be looked upon as a single group of soldiers. And their heroism was different from the one we have seen in the *Iliad*: the Great War soldier was not a hero because he displayed prowess and excellence in combat and thus led his side to victory. Hynes, on the other hand, rejects the term

hero and argues that the Unknown Warrior represents “the eternally anonymous and unheroic dead” (281). The hero of the Great War, if the term hero can be rightfully applied, was one who had endured, not inflicted pain: “the hero became the victim and the victim the hero” (Eksteins 146) because, in the trenches, “victimes et héros étaient interchangeables: tout combattant pouvait être blessé, être fait prisonnier, mourir, ou bien survivre” (“victims and heroes were interchangeable: every combatant could be wounded, could be imprisoned, die, or even survive”); Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 313). Before 1914, a combatant’s skills and training, his courage, and his prudence as well, helped him get out of war alive; during, and after, the Great War these elements have no longer counted: surviving has become a matter of chance (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 46-47).

After being turned into a symbol for official commemoration, the nameless soldier who had died in combat, and the anonymity of death, found their way into the Myth of the War. The literature of the Great War proceeded to perform what Bergonzi has called “the supersession of the Hero as a tangible ideal” (176). Heroism, he argues, might still be possible as a kind of behavior in particular situations, but the rhetoric and gestures of heroism were no longer viable (Bergonzi 222). Or, as Hynes puts it, “[o]nce the soldier was seen as a victim, the idea of a hero became unimaginable; there would be no more heroic actions in the art of this war” (215). Figures like an Achilles or a Hector could not belong to the Myth of the War because “in place of heroes there were faceless masses of men butchering each other with little or none of the personal tests celebrated in epics reaching back to the origins of language itself” (Cooperman 8). “Personal tests” were impossible in the trenches of the Western Front because modern technological wars leave no room for individual action to make a difference to the result – an Achilles cannot settle the war by killing a Hector before the walls of Troy. And the song, here applied as a synonym for literature, that stem out of this conflict bestows no *kléos*, no glory. The three selected novels I shall discuss have neither heroes in the epic sense nor glory.

Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (henceforth to be referred to as *All Quiet*) tells the story of a group of German soldiers in an apparently plotless narrative: there seems to be neither movement nor progress in the novel; what the soldiers experience has no purpose or goal but survival. Commenting on Remarque's novel, Hynes observes that "[n]othing causes what follows; everything is broken and fragmentary" (425). Nothing changes in their routine, except for the fact that they die, one after the other, in a seemingly inexorable way. Paul Baumer, the novel's first person narrator, makes a list: "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" (139). Before making this somber list, Baumer mentions the death of Joseph Behn – "the one who hesitated to volunteer, is one of the first to fall. He is shot, left in No Man's Land, does not keep cover and is shot" (11-12). One of the first men to die is, ironically, the one who had hesitated to volunteer. It does not matter whether one is against or for the war – a soldier cannot withdraw from battle like Achilles.

As the war drags on, another comrade, Muller, dies (279) and then Kat (290). After listing the men who died, Baumer bluntly states that "[b]ut our comrades are dead, we cannot help them" (139). 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, similar to what Eksteins describes in the previous chapter: "terror can be endured so long as a man simply ducks;- but it kills, if a man thinks about it" (Remarque 138). Baumer acknowledges his own powerlessness in relation to his dead comrades and how he cannot mourn them lest he becomes more vulnerable. This is utterly different from what we have seen in 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.

Hynes argues that “[a]gainst the weight of [the Great] war, the individual has no power of action; he can only suffer” (306). 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. Suffering, in this case, is more related to bearing the weight of the war. Besides, the rare moments of joy and good humor are but a feeble attempt at forgetting the war: “we are in good humor because otherwise we should go to pieces. Even so we cannot hold out much longer” (140). The individual then becomes more and more powerless: he cannot act, he cannot grieve, he cannot feel, he must fake joy, and he cannot think about it. He must endure only. The description of the front shows what sort of terror Paul Baumer must endure: “[t]o me the front is a mysterious whirlpool. Though I am in still water far away from its centre, I feel the whirl of the vortex sucking me slowly, irresistibly, inescapably into itself. From the earth, from the air, sustaining forces pour into us” (55). One cannot escape a whirlpool that sucks irresistibly and inescapably; one must only hope at making out of it alive. Eksteins comments that “[g]iven the overpowering technology of warfare . . . the individual soldier was overwhelmed by a sense of vulnerability and helplessness” (184). Paul Baumer’s words convey how vulnerable and helpless he feels, and actually is, before the technological power unleashed by modern warfare against the individuals.

When thinking about the conditions of combat, Baumer thus assesses his and his fellow soldiers’ role: “[w]e do not fight, we defend ourselves against annihilation” (113). If Baumer’s assessment is right, he cannot be regarded as a soldier: he does not fight. Soldiers fight, struggle to achieve victory. Achilles fights, so do Hector, Patroclus, Odysseus, Diomedes, and others in the *Iliad*. These heroes may even be defeated and killed, as Hector and Patroclus are, but they fight. Paul Baumer states that the Great War soldier is even deprived of the possibility of fighting. After

all, how can a man fight against one ton shells, tanks, gas, and machine guns? It is, therefore, necessary to reaffirm that the fact that most of these technological innovations made their debut in warfare between the years of 1914-18 greatly increased a man's feeling of helplessness in combat; no soldier had ever been exposed to a machine gun or a tank before.

It seems that hope is the only thing left to Great War soldiers because “[t]he front is a cage in which we must await fearfully whatever may happen Over us, Chance hovers. If a shot comes, we can duck, that is all; we neither know nor can determine where it will fall. It is this Chance that makes us indifferent.” Baumer then tells of a dug-out which is hit immediately after he leaves it: “[i]t is just as much a matter of chance that I am still alive as that I might have been hit. In a bomb-proof dug-out I may be smashed to atoms and in the open may survive ten hours’ bombardment unscathed. No soldier outlives a thousand chances. But every soldier believes in Chance and trusts his luck” (101). We shall see, in the discussion of *Paths of Glory*, how ironic luck and chance may turn out to be in the Great War narrative. Baumer’s metaphor of the front as a cage reveals the gap between what was expected of the war and what was experienced because “[w]hen people had imagined war during the years of peace before 1914...they had often found the prospect seductive, even exhilarating . . . war was active; it brought supreme freedom . . . it liberated the individual in spiritual terms” (Ousby *Road* 84). Instead of liberated as individual, Baumer feels imprisoned, “wretched, like a condemned man” (Remarque 172).

As the individual is rendered powerless and provided with no alternatives or choices, individual identities are also cancelled out and the soldiers are turned into a single group: when they march, “the figures resolve themselves into a block, individuals are no longer recognizable A column – not men at all” (Remarque 57). Baumer explains that “[i]t is as though formerly we were coins of different provinces; and now we are melted down, and all bear the same stamp First we are soldiers and afterwards, in a strange and shamefaced fashion, individual men as well” (242). Their own individuality has been restricted, and their condition as soldiers has already been

questioned by his remark that they do not fight at all. No single soldier stands out in the scenario of the Western Front or in the war they are fighting. Achilles is always recognizable and always stands out in battle. Patroclus may be briefly taken for Achilles because he wears the hero's armor (XVI.278-282) – armor is one of the ways in which a warrior can be recognized on the battlefield. Individual identities are not cancelled out by warfare in the *Iliad*, but the Great War narrative offers no distinction between individual soldiers.

The Great War narrative, where no individual action counted against the impersonal, brutal, and barbarous nature of warfare (Cooperman 13-14), emphasizes the “spectatorial attitude” (Cooperman 226) of the soldiers: “[i]t is often said in the literature of war that men no longer made war; war was made on them” (Eksteins 184). In *All Quiet*, the following passage illustrates this spectatorial attitude and the war that is made upon the men: “[w]e do not see the guns that bombard us; the attacking lines of the enemy infantry are men like ourselves; but these tanks are machines . . . they are annihilation . . . invulnerable steel beasts squashing the dead and the wounded” (282). The technology of the new war is thus represented: “[s]hells, gas clouds, and flotillas of tanks – shattering, corroding, death” (283) and “[b]ombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades – words, words, but they hold the horror of the world” (132). Baumer, unable to act, becomes a spectator of the horror perpetrated by the modern technological war. His life is turned into “simply one continual watch against the menace of death” (273). The word “watch” in this passage perfectly conveys the attitude Cooperman wants to emphasize: Baumer watches the horror before his eyes and must stay alert not to be killed by it.

The sense of helplessness Baumer faces is enhanced by the disappointment he feels. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Great War posed a challenge to the then prevailing concepts of history and progress. *All Quiet* addresses this issue when Baumer comes to the conclusion that “[i]t must be all lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out” (263). The Meliorist Myth Fussell mentions is questioned in

these terms: “I see that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it [the war] yet more refined and enduring” (Remarque 263). One passage links the role of the individual with the questioning of long-held values: “[w]ith our young, awakened eyes we saw that the classical conception of Fatherland held by our teachers resolved itself here into a renunciation of personality such as one would not ask of the meanest servants We had fancied our task would be different, only to find we were trained for heroism as though we were circus-ponies” (22). The young men who volunteered to fight the war imagined they were moving towards an arena for heroism and defense of the Fatherland; they end up deprived of their power and identities as individuals.

Shortly before the end of the novel, Baumer realizes he is “the last of the seven fellows” (293) from his class. *All Quiet* then shifts its narrating voice from first to third person and, in no more than nine lines, describes Baumer’s death – which ironically happens only one month before the end of the conflict (296). In a novel that attempts a verisimilar approach to the horrors of the war, Baumer cannot be made to narrate his own death. The most he can narrate is, say, a fatal wound. This final passage reads like a postscript: something added only to inform the reader that all the characters of the novel end up dead - added only to reinforce the notion that in this war all individuals eventually die.

Eksteins provides the following commentary on *All Quiet*:

All the successful war books were written from the point of view of the individual, not the unit or the nation. Remarque’s book, written in the first person, personalized for everyone the fate of the unknown soldier. Paul Baumer became Everyman. On this level only could the war have any meaning, on the level of individual suffering. The war was a matter of individual experience rather than collective interpretation. It had become a matter of art, not history. (290)

The Great War made no sense historically speaking and had to be approached differently in order to be satisfactorily represented. The conflict, in *All Quiet*, is then narrated on the level of the individual. The *Iliad* is narrated with a focus on the individual as well. Both narratives are centered on the individuals who are involved in the war and who risk their lives in the battlefield. However, as we have seen in chapter 2, in the *Iliad*, the individuals are the chiefs and the lords: the aristocratic heroes. In *All Quiet*, the individuals focused by the narrative are neither chiefs nor lords: there are almost no officers in the war represented by *All Quiet*. No general, colonel, or major appears in the whole of the novel. The soldiers we today call officers would be actually engaged in battle in the *Iliad*: they risk their lives at the “front.” In modern wars, generals and colonels are rarely seen at the front and rarely die in battle.

The focus of the Great War narrative, herein exemplified by *All Quiet*, falls on the “multitude” we have seen in the *Iliad* chapter: the rank and file. In the epic, Thersites is the only member of the rank and file to be named and to speak. In *All Quiet*, a member of the rank and file is not only provided with a voice but with the role of narrator and protagonist as well. In short, one may affirm that both narratives are focused on the men who, despite holding different positions in their respective armies, risk their lives in warfare; those who are constantly exposed to death. Paul Baumer and Achilles are the protagonists of these narratives but their roles are distinct: Baumer, the Unknown Soldier according to Eksteins, suffers powerlessly; Achilles, the hero, fights with prowess. The excellence of Achilles makes him decisive in warfare; Baumer is denied the opportunity for displaying excellence as a soldier because such feature is overwhelmed by the murderous technology available in the Great War.

Humphrey Cobb’s *Paths of Glory* is another example of the narrative that Hynes calls the Myth of the War - what I have called the narratives that have survived. Unlike *All Quiet*, Cobb’s novel has an omniscient third person narrator who sometimes comments and draws conclusions about what happens during the narrative. In the plot, the French Army high command orders an

attack against a well defended German position after a communiqué mistakenly informs the generals that this position has been taken (Cobb 19-26). The French attack fails, with most of the soldiers unable to leave the trenches due to the heavy German fire (123-135). General Assolant, who first refused but finally consented to the attack after being offered a Legion of Honor medal, decides to execute some soldiers for cowardice in order to make an example. At the end of the novel, after a rigged court martial, three men are executed by a firing squad. The procedures of the court martial are written as if they formed a scene from a play: the omniscient narrator gives way to the names of characters before their lines and something resembling stage directions is provided (207-222).

Another difference between Remarque's novel and *Paths of Glory*, besides the narrator, is that in Cobb's novel there are several officers with important roles in the plot. General Assolant orders the attack and the court martial; Colonel Dax is a thoughtful officer who commands the regiment in charge of the attack; there are also majors, lieutenants, and sergeants in the novel. These officers make decisions that mean death or survival for many other soldiers. It is striking, however, that officer's decisions, in *Paths of Glory*, do not affect the enemy army so much as they affect the French army: the attack ordered by Assolant kills French soldiers and not a single German death is reported. Another example is a night patrol led by the incompetent and drunken Lieutenant Roget (64-74): Roget's wrong decisions and fear cause him to kill another French soldier, Lejeune. In *Paths of Glory*, there are no examples of any military expertise leading to the death of an enemy. There are, on the other hand, several occasions when a soldier's decision leads to the death of his own countrymen.

General Assolant and Lieutenant Roget are examples of officers who cause the death of their own soldiers because of their incompetence, carelessness, and ambition. Lieutenant Paolacci would be an example of the opposite kind of officer: he is an able, thoughtful soldier who cares for his men. Among the soldiers he has "a reputation of being strict but brave" and, among the

officers, of being “conscientious to the point of foolhardiness” (44). Paolacci cares for his men and considers his duty to remain at the danger point to personally direct the soldiers under his command – what he does “skillfully” (44). Immediately after this description, Paolacci is hit by a shrapnel that tears “thorough his pelvis” carrying “his whole right hip away” (45). He falls into a chalk pit and discovers he is lying on his right leg, “his left cheek against his own heel” (53). The five-page description of Paolacci’s death ends with a rat eating his under lip (49-53). Paolacci’s death takes place before the attack, when the soldiers are still moving into position. The death of a conscious, caring, and able soldier, described with such brutality and without comments on the part of the narrator, only reinforces how living and dying in the war do not depend on one’s skills or abilities. A brutal and cruel death is such a common feature of the war that it does not even call for a comment on the part of the narrator – it seems to be taken for granted. The anonymity and indifference of the nature of the war is reinforced by the presence of the rat – that feeds on any corpse, regardless of nationality, skill, rank, or traces of character.

Though adopting a more traditional narrative approach – omniscient third person narrator and a linear unfolding plot – *Paths of Glory* represents the Great War as being as incoherent as it is in *All Quiet*, and Hynes’s comment about *All Quiet*, that “nothing causes what follows”, is equally applicable. General Assolant’s and Lieutenant Roget’s faults and shortcomings as officers do not lead to their being punished or having to somehow cope with the responsibility for what they have done – they actually get away with it. Paolacci’s thoughtfulness, care, and skill, are not rewarded – all his qualities are unable to prevent him from dying horribly, eaten by a rat.

Paths of Glory, by allowing bad soldiers to live and sometimes rewarding them, and by allowing good soldiers to die, intensifies the sensation of how unfair, incoherent, and meaningless the Great War was. Captain Sancy, in charge of selecting one man from his company to be tried for cowardice, admits that “[s]hells kill good and bad soldiers without discrimination” (175) and concludes that “[w]e’re all cannon fodder” (176). Faults do not necessarily cause death, nor do

virtue and skill prevent it. Such an assessment leads to the conclusion that no one is safe from death and that heroes, defined as men who display prowess and excellence in combat, have no place in this narrative. One passage, also in the beginning of the novel, reveals how anonymous, and banal, death may become. At the end of the relief, in which Paolacci is mortally wounded, the company assigned to the attack loses thirty-two men to reach its position; the company leaving this position loses seventeen:

It wasn't a bad record for a relief made during a heavy bombardment, nor did it make the slightest difference to the conduct of war. Every day and every night men were being killed at the rate of about four a minute. The line remained the same, everything remained the same – uniforms, equipment, faces, statures, men Forty-nine men had been killed, and one set of collar numerals had been replaced by another. Rats weren't interested in collar numerals, so it made no difference to them either. (46)

This is one example of how the narrator comments and reaches conclusions throughout the novel. This passage well illustrates the remarks made in the previous chapter regarding the pointlessness of the fighting. In *Paths of Glory*, as in *All Quiet*, men die and nothing changes in the war. The narrator points out that even the rats do not care for who dies: the rat, as in Paolacci's death, is used as a symbol for the war's brutal, indifferent, and anonymous nature. Death alters nothing in the conduct of war.

The soldiers themselves acknowledge the pointlessness of the conflict: in an exchange, a soldier tells private Langlois that “[t]here have always been wars and there always will be. They're part of life, like diseases, storms, death There are lots worse things than war to my mind . . . it takes a man to make a war, but a louse can make money.” Langlois replies: “[i]t takes a fool to make war, if you judge by those who are making this one. Anyway, war never settled anything except who was the strongest” (117). The first soldier accepts the war as a common event, part of men's life that is as natural and common as diseases and natural phenomena – this acceptance, by

itself, already signals towards a banalization of death. However, by saying that it takes a man to make a war and lice can make money, this soldier shows that he still believes in war as a site where individual valor is displayed – it is necessary to be brave and courageous, to be a “real” man, to make a war. He is saying that certain virtues, human virtues such as bravery and courage, are called upon when it comes to make a war.

Langlois’s answer that the war is the work of fools signals towards the inefficiency of the struggle. He rebukes the first soldier’s statement, at least when it comes to the war they are engaged in: the human virtues the first soldier sees in war are no longer present in the Great War. A conflict where valor counts and bravery and courage are necessary disappears when the modern technological war is born. Valor, bravery, and courage belong to past war narratives – narratives such as the *Iliad*. In Langlois’s opinion only fools can fight for so long, for such a cost, and yet reach no conclusion at all. The Great War, in this brief exchange, is viewed as a natural, accepted, and, what is worse, foolish part of life.

The last part of Langlois’s answer, however, does not seem to apply to the Great War. War, as represented in the *Iliad*, does settle who the strongest is. I have already mentioned that the epic displays what may be considered a hierarchy of prowess, or strength: Achilles is the strongest, followed by Hector, and so on. The Catalogue of the Ships introduces this hierarchy (II.760-780). Did the Great War settle who was the strongest? If we think in national terms, the answer is rather difficult. Germany lost and therefore cannot be considered the strongest, though it fought the Russians, the French, and the British almost single-handedly. Russia withdrew. France and Britain only won, with American aid, when Germany was exhausted, but the USA fought for less than a year. The war could not settle who the strongest man was because men made no difference in the fighting. Langlois’s sentence is in the simple past and this may well be the correct verb tense: “war never settled anything except who was the strongest.” The Great War did not settle which country was the strongest; neither did it settle the strongest man. It had no Achilles.

Though the Great War had no Achilles, the term “hero” is not absent from its narrative. In *Paths of Glory*, we find the word repeatedly, and ironically, used. When the attack begins, Captain Charpentier climbs the parapet and waves to his men to come forward. What happens next is narrated as follows: “[h]e stood there, waving and shouting, an heroic looking-figure, fit for any recruiting poster. He did not feel heroic though . . . Charpentier turned to lead the way. The next instant his decapitated body fell into his own trench” (129-130). He looks like a hero, but he neither feels nor has the outcome of a hero: he dies, brutally and pathetically, before leaving his own trench. Cooperman discusses the powerlessness of the soldiers in terms that read as if they were a commentary for this passage of *Paths of Glory*, and for the death of Paolacci as well: “[f]ighting became a passive rather than an active procedure . . . The man was separated from the act; the potential hero could be – and often was – splattered by a stray shell under circumstances that had nothing whatever to do with soldiering” (63).

When it is decided in the novel to shoot three men as an example, Colonel Dax argues in favor of his soldiers and says that “they were heroes” (146); Captain Renouart, also in an attempt to defend the soldiers, claims they “displayed superhuman heroism” (165). The officer defending the accused in the theatrical court martial, Captain Etienne, pleads that “[t]hey were heroes” (218). Captain Sancy says that the man he chooses to die will make a heroic contribution to the winning of the war (174). Throughout the novel, the word hero is used ironically if we compare it to its meaning in the *Iliad*. Charpentier only looks like a hero but is unable to behave like one. The officers who try to defend the soldiers from the accusations of cowardice employ the term in order to praise the soldiers’ attitude and behavior in the failed attack. A hero, in the epic, is not a fighting man who looks or attempts to be brave and efficient; in the *Iliad*, heroes are actually brave and efficient warriors. Their intentions and attitudes are translated into actions that make a difference and change the course of the war. In *Paths of Glory*, the word hero is applied for men who try to make a difference and act as expected but who have no power for translating their intentions into

actions. The participants in the failed attack and, more particularly, the soldiers chosen for the court martial and eventual execution, are seen as victims of an unfair military system and of a brutal, murderous war. Once more, we are presented with the notion that the hero is turned into a nameless victim.

The greatest, and most ironic, example of the anonymity of death in *Paths of Glory* concerns the fate of Private Langlois. In the opening pages of the novel, Langlois, already a seasoned veteran returning from a leave, meets a young and eager recruit who is assigned to his regiment. The young man, Duval, hopes to win a medal and wonders what the chances of getting a commission in a year or so are (7). The narrator comments that “[s]oon he would see the war. His romanticism and inexperience insulated him from the thought that he might feel it, too” (8). Langlois tries to warn Duval and tells him how medals are won and what the war is really like: “[l]isten, young fellow, don’t get the medal bee in your bonnet. It makes you do foolish things, and if you’re patient you’ll probably get the medal anyway without doing foolish things for it What else can it be but lottery? All those men deserve medals . . . but only some of them will get them. So it’s a lottery, isn’t it?” (15). Langlois is saying that merit is not necessarily awarded in the war; just as Paolacci’s virtues and skills are not.

Langlois survives the attack but is chosen to be court-martialed in a way that fully exposes the Great War’s anonymity of ironic death: Sergeant-Major Jonnart is in charge of choosing the man from Company 3 to be tried. In order to be fair, Jonnart decides to draw lots (181-182). After a heated debate to establish the procedures, the sergeant defines that one hundred and eleven – the number of soldiers in the company minus those who did not take part in the attack - pieces of paper are to be numbered and placed in a hat. Each man will take one piece and have a number assigned to him. Next, another sergeant, Darde, will draw a number from another hat and the man holding this number is to face the court martial and be executed (183-184). The first draw is cancelled because a number drawn on one piece of paper may be 68 or 89. In the second draw, the picked

number, 76, belongs to Langlois (191). Langlois is to die because he was unlucky in what may be called a lottery. Getting a medal, Langlois has told Duval in the beginning is also but a lottery. Death becomes a lottery just like being awarded. In the Great War, according to *All Quiet* and *Paths of Glory*, both dying and surviving are matters of chance.

The three soldiers are executed by a firing-squad (260-263). They are examples of the cowardice General Assolant thinks the regiment displayed in the attack. Their executions, to adapt Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker's assessment that "anonymity assured the heroism of all", assure the cowardice of all. The Great War soldiers are all equal in their heroism and in their cowardice; they are all the same, they are anonymous, they are all Unknown Soldiers. Finally, one of the soldiers of the firing squad is, ironically enough, the eager recruit Duval (259). The whole ironic scenario is completed by noticing that, when he is talking to Duval, Langlois writes his wife a note in which he tells her not to worry because he is certain that "[t]here is no German shell or bullet that has my number on it" (12). Langlois is right because the bullet that eventually kills him is not German, but French. French bullets, throughout *Paths of Glory*, only manage to kill French soldiers. Langlois dies because he is unlucky – were he lucky, he would be awarded a medal. By contrast, Hector does not die because he is unlucky – he dies because he faces a warrior whose prowess and excellence in combat exceed his. No soldier is executed by his own army in the *Iliad*. In *Paths of Glory* and in *All Quiet*, men have no power over their fate.

Eksteins, in *Rites of Spring*, offers an insightful observation regarding the issue of how powerless individuals had become because of the nature of the Great War. The author discusses at length the frenzy caused by Charles Lindbergh's solo flight over the Atlantic and argues that "[w]ithout the war, the Lindbergh phenomenon cannot be understood" (263). Lindbergh landed in France on 21 May, 1927, and his feat proved that individuals still could display personal skill and achieve something with their own power. Eksteins calls Lindbergh a "hero" (250) because, to the people who welcomed him in Europe, he was a reminder of an older world, a world "that had room

and ready recognition for individual achievement based on effort, preparation, courage, and staying power . . . a world in which man used the machine and technology to conquer nature” (250); instead of a world in which the machine and technology were used to kill. Moreover, Lindbergh’s feat was imbued with more symbolism since he accomplished it by flying – an individual act. Air fights, in the Great War, remained one of the last refuges for individual deeds because pilots were “engaged in a conflict in which individual effort still counted, romantic notions of honor, glory, heroism, and chivalry were still intact. In the air, war still had meaning” (265). Lindbergh therefore reassured Europeans that individual displays of excellence were still possible. Though Eksteins does not at any point mention the *Iliad*, he says Lindbergh was viewed as a “Homeric individual” (252).

Eksteins’ discussion becomes more useful for the present purpose when he details Lindbergh’s schedule as soon as he arrived in each of the European capitals he visited: his first official act as he arrived in Paris was to place flowers at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arc of Triumph. In Brussels, he went straight from the airport to lay a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Next day, he paid his respects for the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey in London (Eksteins 261-262). The Homeric individual paid his respects to the Unknown Soldiers – the man who, to European eyes, embodied the symbol of an old world knelt before the tombs of the men who symbolized the new world of modern technological warfare.

Alvin C. York, best known as Sergeant York, provides another example of how eager the postwar world was for a “hero” - for someone who showed that the world still had room for individual feats and that the power of the individual had not been cancelled out by the advent of modern technological war. York was an American soldier who, due to his prowess as a sharpshooter, actually killed 28 German soldiers and, with some help, captured 132 others in October 1918. Turned into an American “national hero” (Burns 176), York wrote an autobiography and his life was made into a film starred by Gary Cooper in 1941. The film overplays York’s role to such

an extent that it seems as if he defeats “the whole German army single-handedly” (Burns 176). Though York displayed skills as a soldier in the incident when he killed and arrested enemy soldiers, he neither accomplished any other feat as remarkable during the rest of the war nor made a difference to the final result. York’s feat did not have to be overplayed – it was remarkable enough by itself. However, it is worth pointing out that in a global war, involving millions of men for four years, the example of Sergeant York is undoubtedly an exception: what man other than him is celebrated by his participation as a fighting soldier in the war? Only the Unknown Soldier.

All Quiet represents the war from the point of view of the German Army; *Paths of Glory* is set within the French Army. William March’s *Company K*, the third novel analyzed in this thesis, is set within the U.S. Army and has neither a single first person narrator nor an omniscient third person narrator. It is narrated by all the members of the company – it has one hundred and thirteen different first person narrators. In the list of narrators, there is only one captain and three lieutenants – as in a real company of the U.S. Army. High ranking officers, such as colonels or generals, are not present. The first narrator, Private Joseph Delaney, who seems to be writing the novel, for he is “thinking of the book” which he has “just completed” (March 13), says he wants “it to be a record of every company in every army. If its cast and its overtones are American, that is only because the American scene is the one that I know. With different names and different settings, the men of whom I have written could, as easily, be French, German, English or Russian for that matter” (13). This passage is perfectly suitable for this thesis in the sense that the three novels, in spite of their differences, are records of the Great War and of how similar the experience of fighting it was for all the men involved.

The three novels, set within three different armies, differ in terms of narrative approach: first person, third person omniscient, and 113 different narrators. They differ in terms of plot: *All Quiet* is broken and seemingly plotless, conveying the war from Baumer’s point of view, with brief flashbacks of his prewar life; *Paths of Glory* adopts a more traditional, linear narrative in a single

point of view and an unfolding plot that takes some days; *Company K* has a linear timeline from the prewar days until the postwar period, but with multiple points of view (at times from the same event) without following a single unfolding story. There are, as I have said, almost no officers in *All Quiet*; in *Paths of Glory*, officers are featured and decisive for the plot; in *Company K*, there are only officers of average rank. In spite of these relevant differences, the war represented in the three novels is the same and displays the same features: technology overwhelms the soldier; skill, excellence, or prowess, as a fighting man do not assure either survival or reward; faults and mistakes do not necessarily extract a price; men feel trapped in an environment they cannot master.

In *Company K*, the feeling Baumer expresses that he is a “condemned man” and that “the front is a cage”, is echoed by Private Walter Drury when he refuses to shoot some German prisoners: “[t]hen I saw the truth clearly: ‘we’re prisoners too: We’re all prisoners’” (129). Like Baumer, Drury feels condemned to endure the war and sees his own will overwhelmed by the conflict. There is nothing he can do and he has no choice. The only choice left, it seems, is to adopt Hemingway’s Frederick Henry’s solution and escape the war. In the postwar period, Private Howard Bartow admits: “I never fired my rifle a single time. I never even saw a German soldier except a few prisoners at Brest” (March 207). He says he evaded war by always coming up with excuses, going for training, or volunteering for other tasks when he knew an attack was imminent. He was never on the front during the battles. What Baumer, Frederick Henry, and, in *Company K*, Walter Drury and Howard Bartow, show is that there is no way of coping and dealing with the war – one cannot act as a soldier in the Great War: one is either a prisoner or an evader, a deserter. It is not possible to be a soldier in the old sense, in the Homeric sense of fighting.

Another reminder of Frederick Henry is found in the words of Private Sylvester Wendell. Wendell decides to write an honest letter to the mother of a deceased soldier. Wendell tells the mother that the man who died “had learned long ago that what he had been taught to believe by you, his mother, who loved him, under the meaningless names of honor, courage and patriotism,

were all lies” (March 102). Like Hemingway’s character, Wendell exposes the meaninglessness of the big words used to convince men to fight; the hollowness of the abstract, grandiose concepts when they are placed against the harsh realities of modern wars. General Assolant, in *Paths of Glory*, does not share Henry’s or Wendell’s opinions. In a tour on the front, Assolant, “petulantly” (82), wants to have the names of the places changed: “[w]hy can’t we have names with some inspiration to them, names that express the offensive spirit of the troops? But it is always something about death, almost a defeatist propaganda” (82). As a general who never places himself in harm’s way, who has soldiers executed for not taking an impossible objective, and who agrees on an attack because a medal is offered, Assolant can still afford to cling to the grandiose concepts and call for “inspiration” in the names of places.

Though the previous observations about the representation of the Great War in *Company K* link it to the other narratives of the conflict, the main reason for the novel to be herein discussed lies in its having “The Unknown Soldier” as one of the hundred and thirteen narrators. After being entombed, the Unknown Soldier is given a voice in the Myth of the War. As with the other chapters of the novel, this one is narrated in the first person: in five pages, a soldier describes both how he is wounded during a “quiet” night after a wiring party and his last hours alive. The chapter is closed by the words of a German sentry who crawls near the agonizing man and tries to calm him down: “‘Hush,’ he said. ‘Hush!...Hush!...Hush!...’” (182).

Company K’s Unknown Soldier is hit by machine gun fire, falls down, and gets entangled on the barbed wire. As he realizes he is going to die, he remembers his childhood on his grandfather’s farm and how he had pitied the rabbits that were killed by the hired man for having eaten the cabbages and other vegetables: “*I had pitied the rabbits!- I, of all people*” (179). He remembers his home town:

Then I heard the mayor of our town making his annual address in the Soldiers’ Cemetery at home. Fragments of his speech kept floating through my mind: ‘These

men died gloriously on the Field of Honor! . . . Gave their lives gladly in a Noble Cause! . . . What a feeling of exultation was theirs when Death kissed their mouths and closed their eyes for an Immortal Eternity!’ (179)

He sees himself as a boy in the crowd, trying to hold his tears, “listening enraptured to the speech and believing every word of it” (180). In the speech of the mayor we find all the grandiose, abstract concepts that came to be unaccepted after the war; the old world rhetoric whose words had become meaningless: gloriously, Honor, Noble Cause (in capital letters). The Unknown Soldier claims he understands why he lays dying on the wire. In the morning, after hours in No Man’s Land, when the German sentry approaches, he pictures the ceremonies in his honor and the homage which will be paid to him:

In a few years, when war is over, they’ll move my body back home to the Soldiers’ Cemetery, just as they moved the bodies of soldiers killed before I was born. There will be a brass band and speech making and a beautiful marble shaft with my name chiseled on its base The mayor will be there also, pointing to my name with his thick, trembling forefinger and shouting meaningless words about glorious deaths and fields of honor And there will be other boys to listen and believe. (180-181)

He panics and starts to weep. He cries to the German sentry that he does not want to hear “high sounding words again” and that he wants to be buried where nobody will ever find him. He thinks he has found a solution: he takes off his identification tags and throws them into the wire; he tears his letters and photographs to pieces; throws his helmet away so that no one can guess his identity from the serial number (181). He lays back “exultant”: “I’ve beaten the orators and the wreath layers at their own game! I’ve beaten them all! – Nobody will ever use me as a symbol. Nobody will ever tell lies over my dead body now!” (181). He dies assuming he has succeeded in the purpose of not becoming a symbol: “I have broken the chain I have defeated

the inherent stupidity of life” (182). The Unknown Soldier is the last man to die in the war: the conflict ends in the following chapter (183).

In this chapter of *Company K* we find all the elements previous associated with the Great War summarized and headed by a term that symbolizes the conflict: a leaderless war where men had no power (there are no officers in this passage); the enemy is not viewed as a menace as much as technology (the German sentry comes to calm the soldier down); words previously associated with the practice of warfare become hollow; merit or the lack of it mean nothing (death is a matter of chance); something different must come out of the war’s useless waste of lives (the soldier does not want the old practice to continue – the chain must be broken); and, finally, the anonymity of death.

The Unknown Soldier in *Company K* thinks he has defeated the wreaths and the orators - little does he know that he is turned into the Great War’s greatest symbol. Instead of preventing his usage as a symbol, the soldier whose identity is not known becomes the very epitome of the war that turned potential heroes into nameless victims. Though realizing, and rejecting, as much as Paul Baumer and Langlois, what Cooperman calls “the absurd role of the individual soldier” (47), the Unknown Soldier fails in his attempt to prevent his death from being used. In another narrative of the Great War, American writer John dos Passos’s *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), we find what happens to the unidentified body of the soldier who thinks nobody will ever use him “as a symbol.” Dos Passos’s passage reads almost like a sequel to the Unknown Soldier passage in *Company K*: it is the fulfillment of the *Company K*’s Unknown Soldier’s worst fear.

The final chapter of Dos Passos’s novel is called “The body of an American” (756-761). It reads almost like an “impressionist short story” made up with a “collage” of several texts (Burns 148-149): quotations from the congressional resolution, newspaper reports, speeches, and a brief biography of the soldier – the things the Unknown Soldier in *Company K* wanted to avoid, and assumed to have done so. Dos Passos writes such biography by giving the character the

anonymous name “John Doe” (756); another time, he is named “John Doe and Richard Roe and other person or persons unknown” (758), and by building him a life story with “multiple occupations . . . listed as if in a catalogue of a Walt Whitman poem” (Burns 149). John Doe is born and raised “in Brooklin, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland, Ohio . . . in Alexandria Virginia . . . in Portland” (757). The Unknown Soldier comes from every part of the USA and is thus a fitting representative for all those who died in the war: “the plurality of the American people [is] expressed in a single . . . anonymous figure” (Burns 149).

In the beginning of the passage, an unidentified voice asks “to make sure he aint a dinge . . . a guinea or a kike” (756). However, the identity of the Unknown Soldier cannot be established: “how can you tell a guy’s a hundredpercent when all you’ve got’s a gunnysack of bones...?” (756). If the man to be buried is truly unknown and his body is disfigured beyond recognition, not even his ethnicity can be established. In Dos Passos’s *Nineteen Nineteen*, the American Unknown Soldier may be a Jew, an Afro-American, or a Hispanic.

The ceremony of his entombment is attended by the president Warren Harding himself. In his speech, the president says the soldier “fought and died believing in the undisputable justice of his country’s cause” (758). We have seen how “fighting”, according to the novels and the studies herein analyzed, cannot be easily applied to the Great War. *Company K*’s Unknown Soldier dies no longer believing in the causes that lead men to war and that, in his assessment, have ultimately caused his own death. Whereas the *Company K*’s Unknown Soldier throws his tags away in the wire, *Nineteen Nineteen*’s tags are “in the bottom of the Marne” (760). The Unknown Soldier of Dos Passos has eleven medals and wreaths pinned “[w]here his chest ought to have been” (760). Everything the Unknown Soldier of *Company K* assumes to have defeated materializes in the Unknown Soldier of *Nineteen Nineteen*: the glorious speeches, the usage as an example, and the awards. The lottery of *Paths of Glory*, and the French bullet that has Langlois number on it come

to mind when it is said that Dos Passos's Unknown Soldier died because "the shell had his number on it" (760).

The only thing both Unknown Soldiers share in these two narratives is anonymity: the soldier in *Company K* succeeds in keeping his identity unknown. But, despite some attempts in official commemoration, the Unknown Soldier of the Great War does not become a hero:

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. The anti-hero, the victim, the passive man – these became conventions of post-war English writing; and it does not seem fanciful to argue that they had their literary beginnings on the Western Front, in the war that overwhelmed individuals, and denied them the power to be agents in their own lives and deaths. (Hynes 306)

Hynes speaks of "English writing" but, as all the works here discussed show, the calling into question of the concept of the hero is more widespread. The challenge of the concept of the hero is not restricted to English writing but can be found in examples from writers of other nationalities, set in different armies. The war actually "overwhelmed individuals" because "[w]hat had changed most was the sense of the difference in scale and in power between the individual soldier and the war in which he was caught . . . individual men could only suffer" (Hynes 208). The Great War soldier, exemplified by Paul Baumer, Langlois, and the Unknown Soldier, among others, is a suffering prisoner.

The *Iliad* stands as the greatest monument to the Trojan War. Brandão explains that "[n]o contexto de uma cultura ágrafa . . . um texto como o do catálogo cumpre a mesma função que os monumentos de guerra sobre os quais se inscrevem os nomes dos que combateram" ("in the context of an oral culture . . . a text like the catalogue plays the same part of war monuments on which the names of combatants are inscribed"; *Épos* 5). The Catalogue of Ships in Book 2 of the epic (II.484-877) lists all the heroes who go to Troy and the heroes who fight to defend the city. In

fact, the whole of the epic is what preserves the memory of that war and what celebrates the feats of these men: it is both the symbol and the monument of the Trojan War. The monument *par excellence* of the Great War, and its most telling symbol, is the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It tells us that the millions who died could neither be listed in a single monument nor exemplified by a single named man. The Unknown Soldier monument metonymically stands for countless, faceless victims.

We have seen in the second chapter that Achilles is the foremost warrior in Homer's *Iliad*, the one who possesses *areté* (excellence and prowess) and is thus provided with power to make a difference in the result of war – Achilles can settle the Trojan War. As a man with power, Achilles can choose: he can either go back and live a long life without glory or he can stay, fight, die young but covered in glory. Achilles stands between what the Greeks call *nostos*¹¹ (homecoming) and *kléos* (glory). This is exactly what he tells the men who come to convince him to resume fighting: “If I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans, / my *nostos* is gone, but my *kléos* shall be everlasting; / but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers, / the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life / left for me” (IX.412-416). Achilles has power over his fate – he is not at the mercy of the gods, of chance, or of luck. Even his doom is not a matter of chance: he knows he is going to die after killing Hector but he holds himself responsible for the death of Patroclus. Achilles accepts the responsibility for his acts, or for his inaction. Achilles is a hero; and heroes, as stated in the second chapter, are not playthings to the whim of gods. By staying at Troy, killing Hector, and settling the war, Achilles performs the heroic deeds which confer him glory and a place of honor in the epic as the man Gregory Nagy calls “the best of the Achaeans.”

We are here reminded of an issue that is addressed in the chapter on the *Iliad*: names. A warrior's name is relevant in the *Iliad* and the hero must struggle so that his name becomes worthy of respect and praise. The name is what will be preserved and a hero's deeds will be remembered

¹¹ For more on the concept of *nostos* and its relation to epic tradition, see Nagy (1981).

when his name is uttered. It is through his name that the deeds of Achilles are recalled. In the other epic of Homeric tradition, the *Odyssey*, the ghost of Agamemnon makes this point clear when he meets the ghost of Achilles: “even now you have died, you have not lost your name, but always / in the sight of all mankind your fame shall be great, Achilleus” (*Od.*, xxiv.94-95). In chapter 2, on the *Iliad*, I ask the following question: How can a hero be sung if his name is unknown? A hero must be known in order to be sung. If he is unknown, he is not a hero.

On the other hand, the soldier in the Great War narrative has his power denied – there is no way for him to display *areté*; unable to display *areté*, the soldier has no choice. He does not stand between *nostos* and *kléos*. He can only hope, as Paul Baumer says, to make it back home alive – he cannot choose a *nostos*. Even Frederick Henry, who escaped the war, did not freely choose to leave: he was about to be executed and deserted, becoming a fugitive. Without *areté*, the soldier cannot perform great feats and have *kléos* conferred upon him. In order to win glory, to be sung, in order to find his way into the *kléa andrôn* (the glories of men), a warrior, or soldier, must have his heroic deeds acknowledged – his name then becomes known. The song (literature) that stems out of the Great War cannot sing of any man’s name because no man had a chance to display *areté* and win *kléos*: the men featured in this song then become nameless. In the song of the Great War no name is preserved and no man wins everlasting glory: the Unknown Soldier takes Achilles’s place in war narrative.

In the epigraph to this chapter, there are two statements taken from Frenchman Jean Dutourd’s Second World War memoirs *Les Taxis de la Marne* (1956). Dutourd intercalates his memories of the time he spent wandering in the French countryside as a demobilized soldier after the 1940 defeat with comments on French history and his conclusions about what had led his country to be so easily beaten by the Nazis. In order to make his point that France had lost all its strength and glory in the interwar years, Dutourd uses a metaphor: at the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, France “was still Achilles”; however, until the 1940 defeat, it had “chosen the part of

Nestor” (88). He argues that, in order to have averted the humiliating defeat, France “needed an Achilles” (56). Dutourd’s conclusions, in light of what we have so far analyzed, may be deemed both right and wrong. On one hand, in 1914, at the outbreak of war and before the technology overwhelmed individuals in the practice of warfare, being an Achilles was still a synonym for power and strength, and still assured victory in the battlefield. On the other hand, not even an Achilles would have made much difference against the technological weapons of the two world wars. Achilles would have been just another Unknown Soldier.

Chapter 4

“The Common Field of Troy, of the Somme, and of Verdun”

“An unending circle of pain . . .
That would be the picture of war”
Private Joseph Delaney
in *Company K* (14).

“War makes the prosecution of war the *only* value”
Samuel Hynes (25).

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the different roles individuals have in the representations of war provided by the *Iliad* and by the Great War novels. The powerful heroes of Homeric epic, warriors such as Hector, Patroclus, and, above all, Achilles, give way to the faceless, powerless soldiers embodied in the figure of the Unknown Soldier. In the two preceding chapters, I have strived to demonstrate how novel the experience of fighting the Great War was for those involved in it and how difficult it was to try to convey the novel nature of the conflict, in both historical and fictional narratives. By comparing the Trojan War, as it is represented in the *Iliad*, and the Great War, other differences become noticeable.

One of the most striking differences between the Trojan War and the Great War is, undoubtedly, the weaponry and firepower available. In the *Iliad*, war is fought in chariots with bows, arrows, and spears as offensive weapons; shields and armor for defensive purposes. A warrior had to be reasonably close to his opponent in order to kill him. Face to face combat is therefore virtually inescapable. The bow, an alternative that may allow a certain distance from an enemy, is viewed as a coward’s weapon – hence Diomedes’s scorn of Paris when the Trojan wounds him with an arrow: “this is the blank weapon of a useless man, no fighter” (XI.390). A warrior is supposed to face his enemy with sword or spear in close combat. A fighting man sees whom he kills and who may kill him.

In the Great War narrative, on the other hand, the firepower available was far more murderous and effective. We have seen how Paul Baumer dreads a bombardment. The German army opened its offensive against the French in Verdun with 1,220 pieces of artillery (Horne, *Price* 42), some of which firing shells over a ton in weight. These shells and machine guns, gas, and tanks, mean that one's enemy can be killed at a great distance – hence Eksteins's remark that “the enemy became increasingly an abstraction” (135). The new technology made combat a much more impersonal experience: a soldier did not need to see an enemy in order to kill, and one might be killed without knowing who, or what, hit him. The Unknown Soldier in *Company K* says that two machine guns open fire and he suddenly feels something shove him and takes his breath away (178): he neither sees who shoots him nor what hits him. In *Paths of Glory*, during the failed attack, Charpentier's body falls decapitated into his own trench (130) – the reader is not told who or what hit him. Soldiers can spend long periods of time without seeing a single enemy soldier, but this circumstance in no way decreases the danger of being killed at any time by a shell fired hundreds of meters away. In terms of weaponry, the Great War is utterly different from the Trojan War.

Another difference between the two representations of warfare regards the scale of the conflicts. The Catalogue of Book 2 lists a total of 1196 ships in the Greek fleet that sails to Troy. The first men to be listed, the Boiotians, carry a hundred and twenty men in each ship (II.510). The men from Thaumakia and Methone carry fifty oarsmen in each ship. These men are also “skilled in the strength of the bow” (II.720). If we adhere to the highest possible number, that is, hundred and twenty men in each of the 1196 ships, we reach a figure of over 143,000 men in the Greek army. In the opposing army, those who actually live in Troy are estimated to amount to less than ten per cent of the Greeks (II.123-128). Agamemnon, however, admits that the Trojan allies greatly increase this number and make a Greek victory more difficult (II.130-132). When the Trojan army is encamped outside the city walls, it is said that a “thousand fires were burning . . . and beside

each / one sat fifty men” (VIII.562-563) – what amounts to fifty thousand warriors on the Trojan side. A very high estimative would then consider that no more than a quarter of million men battle before the gates of Troy. By contrast, in 1916, the battle of Verdun alone claimed almost 750,000 casualties. It is believed that between eight (Fussell 7-8; Burns 18) and ten (Keegan 3) million people died in the Great War. The Trojan War is fought for, and around, a single city. The Western Front alone stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss border, approximately 450 miles long. The war of 1914-18, as its other denominations in the English language attest – First World War and World War I – was a global conflict. The Trojan War is waged by peoples who inhabit the area of the Aegean Sea only; the Great War is therefore much larger in scale than the Trojan War. In view of this staggering difference in scale, the Great War’s anonymity of death comes to mind: one’s death is more noticeable when it takes place in a conflict waged by hundreds of thousands of men for a city than it does in a worldwide conflict involving tens of millions of people, for this reason the Great War is more impersonal than the Trojan War. Besides, one must always bear in mind that these two conflicts are separate by at least 2,700 years.

These introductory remarks, along with the arguments of the previous chapters, lead to the conclusion that the war in the *Iliad* is totally unlike war as found in the Great War narrative. However, it is my contention that the *Iliad* and the Great War narrative share what I would like to term war’s inherent unpredictability, a feature that is best formulated by Fussell in his seminal work *The Great War and Modern Memory*: “[e]very war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends” (7). That is, wars are always worse than expected because it is almost impossible to foresee everything that will take place once a war breaks out – wars, as they progress, seem to escape men’s control. Once a war begins, it tends to escalate and to become grimmer and more brutal than initially conceived - the means applied to win a war eventually seem to outweigh, and to cloud, the reasons for fighting it. Though Fussell’s statement is primarily

concerned with the Great War, he also mentions the Second World War as an ironic conflict, but no others. In the following pages, I shall try to provide evidence that both the Great War and, more revealingly, the Trojan War, as it is represented in the *Iliad*, are unpredictable events whose means are also “melodramatically disproportionate” to its presumed ends and whose outcome is worse than expected. I shall also briefly discuss the personalization of war as one solution that writers find in order to deal with and convey war’s inherent unpredictability.

The presumed end of the Trojan War is to bring Helen, Menelaus’s wife, back to Sparta. However, in Book 7, after a day of battle, when the Trojan herald Idaios proposes a truce (a passage to which I shall return), Diomedes says that “[n]ow let none accept the possessions of Alexandros [Paris], / nor take back Helen; one who is very simple can see it, / that by this time the terms of death hang over the Trojans” (VII.400-402). Diomedes employs the word “now,” which means that after the day of battle he senses victory is near and that the conditions of the war have changed: he now believes the Trojans are lost. This employment of the word “now” is ironic, because it is the Greeks, not the Trojans, who are close to defeat “now” that Achilles has withdrawn. Diomedes is grossly misinterpreting the contours of the war. He no longer cares for rescuing Helen and refuses to contemplate the prospect of ending the war: he now wants the Trojans dead. Instead of reminding him of what the end of the war is, the other Greeks “shouted / acclaim for the word of Diomedes” (VII.403-404). We have already seen in chapter 2 how inflated and arrogant Hector becomes once the Trojans get the upper hand and how he neglects his duties and favors glory over the ends of the war. After nine years of combat, it is not surprising that the end of the war has been neglected, even forgotten, and the prosecution of the conflict seems to become the only goal.

Tatum observes that “[t]he *Iliad* builds on the conflict between what war leaders desire and the unforeseen twists and turns that every war takes” (55). Be it noted that Tatum affirms that every, not just the Trojan, war takes unforeseen twists and turns. Diomedes’s overconfident, and

ill-advised, remark together with the acclaim of the other Greeks can be seen as a desire rather than an analysis of the situation. The “melodramatic” gap between means and ends in the Trojan War is made even clearer when it is considered that the conflict lasts ten years because of a single woman – who is set aside by Diomedes’s remark. Almost two thousand ships and a quarter of a million men are mobilized to rescue a woman. We have already seen in chapter 2 how Achilles reveals this gap: “why was it the son of Atreus [Agamemnon] assembled and led here / these peoples? Was it not for the sake of lovely-haired Helen?” (IX.338-339). Achilles questions whether he should keep on fighting a nine-year long war and have his status as a hero challenged by Agamemnon for the sake of Helen alone. The means, and the progression of the war, have outweighed the reasons and ends of the war.

One of the sentences that serve as an epigraph to this chapter, written in relation to the Great War, may now be rightfully applied to the Trojan War: “[w]ar makes the prosecution of war the *only* value” (Hynes 25). James Holoka, in the introduction to his translation of Simone Weil’s controversial, yet influential, essay “*The Iliad or the Poem of Force*”¹², proposes that “war expunges every concept of a goal, even the goals of war. It expunges the idea of an end of war” (59). We now see two authors, Hynes and Holoka, commenting on the narratives of two different wars and saying the very same thing: the prosecution of war outweighs and clouds the presumed goals, or ends, of war.

Turning to the Great War, the gap between means and ends becomes even broader. Fussell, in the sentences that follow the above mentioned citation about war’s irony explains that “[i]n the Great War eight million people were destroyed because two persons, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his consort, had been shot.” Fussell then compares the Great War with the Second and concludes that “the Great War was more ironic than any before or since” (7-8). Historians still argue why the Great War erupted and why it was fought: “[t]he First World War is a mystery. Its

¹² For more on the debate about Weil’s essay, see Holoka’s introduction to his translation in Weil (2005).

origins are mysterious. So is its course” (Keegan 426). The war broke out, lasted for four years, and no country ever stated what the conditions for ending the conflict were. In the Second World War, for example, the Allies explicitly stated that their goal was Germany’s unconditional surrender. In *All Quiet*, there are no references at all to the ends of the war. It is as if Baumer and his colleagues fight for no purpose or objective. In chapter 3, it has been seen how pointless the conflict seemed since there was no progress in the struggle. The Battle of Verdun, once again, provides a good example: it is agreed among historians that had the Germans taken the city the French would still be able to hold their line; had the French withdrawn they would have saved hundreds of thousands of soldiers and avoided a breakthrough. The Germans did not actually aim at taking the city; they wanted to bleed the French army to death. The French resisted because of Verdun’s symbolic importance¹³. The goals of the war had been expunged and the prosecution of the war had prevailed.

This word “end” may, in the context of the war narratives herein analyzed, be understood in two senses: as an objective or a purpose and as a final resolution or termination point. We have already seen how the ends, understood as goals, are clouded by the prosecution and the development of the conflict. An end as a final resolution seems to be clouded, or perhaps even negated, as well. It is interesting to note that the war neither begins nor ends in the *Iliad*, in *All Quiet*, and in *Paths of Glory*. In *Company K*, some prewar and postwar episodes are narrated. The chapters before the war are dominated by the feeling of anxiety before the conflict; and all the characters of the postwar chapters are still gripped by the conflict and cannot lead their lives without remembering it – it seems as if the war goes on in their minds, constantly reenacted, or relived. In the three other works, the *Iliad*, *All Quiet*, and *Paths of Glory*, the reader is immediately thrown into the war and never does see the end of it. These narratives depict a war world: a setting where only war exists. “The world of the *Iliad*,” says Redfield, “is an inhabited battlefield . . . a

¹³ For more on the Battle of Verdun, see Horne (1993) and Ousby (2002).

world in which warfare has come to be, not an adventure or occasional crisis, but the ordinary business of life” (*Nature* 186). Hynes, commenting on *All Quiet*, sees an ironic war world as well: “[t]his war-world with . . . its quiet fronts on which men die violently, is ironic in its essential nature” (425). Regarding the Great War, we find the following words:

One did not have to be a lunatic or a particularly despondent visionary to conceive quite seriously that the war would literally never end and would become the permanent condition of mankind. The stalemate and the attrition would go on infinitely, becoming, like the telephone and the internal combustion engine, a part of the accepted atmosphere of the modern experience. (Fussell 171)

We are then reminded of the soldier in *Paths of Glory* who says that wars are “part of life” (117). In the narratives herein analyzed, there seems to be no other reality but war, and life outside of it seems far and unnatural – what is near and natural in life is war. Paul Baumer cannot stand his leave and feels anxious and detached from his family (Remarque 168-172) – family life is no longer natural to him. I have already pointed out how the characters of *Company K* behave in the postwar years. There is no glimpse of a world outside war in *Paths of Glory*. The *Iliad* provides us with such glimpses when Hector meets Andromache – their words and actions, however, are dictated by the condition of war: Andromache fears for the life of her husband, for her future and for their son; Hector imagines his son’s future if he dies (VI.400-500). After nine years, their only concern is with the war and with what will happen to their lives. There seems to be nothing else but war in the lives of all those involved in it.

The end of the *Iliad*, observes Tatum, “is as wise about how wars stop as it is about how they start ‘Start’ and ‘stop,’ advisedly; not ended or begun, nor won nor lost. Such terms as *triumph*, *defeat*, *victory*, *fall*, *armistice*, *surrender*, and that all-purpose word *peace* are what we use to mark a moment in war that is as arbitrary and elusive as its beginnings” (158). These remarks about the *Iliad* are also applicable to the Great War narrative. In chapter 3, it was seen

how the war challenged grandiose concepts like triumph and victory, and how winning and losing were deprived of their previous, clear-cut meanings. It is also possible to link Tatum's remarks to the comments about the challenge upon the concept of history after the Great War: the moments of beginning and ending of a war, in historical writing, are both elusive and arbitrary. Wars do not begin at an exact date, nor do they finish on an exact day. The causes of a war may stretch decades into the past and its consequences may be felt long after an armistice has been signed. France wanted to go to war in 1914 to regain the territories lost forty-four years earlier in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Hitler always stated he wanted to avenge the defeat of 1918 – the Second World War is, in part, a consequence of the Great War.

The verbs Tatum uses for the *Iliad*, “start” and “stop”, are also applicable for the Great War narratives we have analyzed: the narratives begin and end but the war goes on. In the *Iliad*, in *All Quiet*, and in *Paths of Glory*, war does become a part of life. Fussell even discusses how the Great War may be viewed as the beginning of a literally unending condition of war: after 1918, there have been the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the Greek War, the Korean War, the Arab-Israeli War, and the Vietnam War (Fussell 74), to name a few. Published in 1975, Fussell's list cannot possibly include some of the bloodiest civil wars in Africa, the civil war in Yugoslavia, and the two Gulf Wars. The fact that the conflicts do not end in the narratives herein discussed only mirrors the reality that wars indeed become, as Fussell contends, “part of the accepted atmosphere of the modern experience.” Men have always waged wars and it seems that they will always be doing so.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the gap between means and ends in wars, a feature Fussell locates in the Great War, is also found in the Trojan War as it is represented by the *Iliad*. The narratives selected show how the initial reasons for the commencement of war are neglected once the conflict drags on and the means applied to winning outweigh the supposed ends. I have tried to use the word “end” also in the sense of a termination point in order to illustrate how the

narratives provide endless conflicts – the wars do not end in the selected narratives. Having discussed the means and ends, I now move on to discuss another aspect of what I term war's inherent unpredictability, that is, the fact that every war is worse than expected.

By asserting that there is a gap between means and ends in war, we reach the conclusion that the beginning of a war greatly differs from its progression – what is initially conceived does not come to be fulfilled. Every war is worse than expected because what men encounter in war is different from, and worse than, what they had previously imagined. War, when it is idealized, may be viewed as glorious and romantic, providing men with opportunities for glory and fame. However, once it is actualized, a war shows itself to be uncontrollable. The idealization of war cannot resist its actualization. In the following pages, I provide evidence from the works analyzed, and from the theoretical studies, that shows that the Trojan War and the Great War are worse than expected, laying bare an irony between what men expect and what they actually encounter once they are engaged in the practice of warfare.

The outbreak of the Great War was met with neither fear nor resignation: many men even welcomed the opportunity to prove themselves in the battlefield. The feeling was one of consent, and not only amidst those who volunteered but in society in general (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 140-141). Fussell explains that “[o]ne reason the Great War was more ironic than any other is that its beginning was more innocent” (18). Fussell employs the word “innocent”; Cooperman calls this mood “naiveté” (55). Whether innocent or naïve, men actually believed that they were about to be engaged in a short conflict fighting for glory, in favor of civilization, with a view to defending their nation. Cooperman, like Fussell, also uses the term irony to define the conflict, and to reveal the gap between idealization and realization: “[t]he ultimate irony was not that national leaders – and populations, for that matter - ‘wanted’ a war, but rather that they did not want the war they got” (Cooperman 59). Men had wanted an idealized war but encountered a real one instead.

In *All Quiet*, through the experiences of Paul Baumer, one can witness the whole process from the idealization of war to its actualization. At first, he volunteers: “[d]uring drill-time Kantorek gave us long lectures until the whole of our class went, under his shepherding, to the District Commandant and volunteered” (11). He volunteers “still crammed full of vague ideas which gave to life, and to the war also an ideal and almost romantic character” (21). With the benefit of hindsight, that is, when he is already in the trenches, he admits that “no one had the vaguest idea what we were in for” (11). Baumer believes he is doing the right thing, that Kantorek and the elders are guides and mediators; he trusts them, “[b]ut the first death . . . shattered this belief” (12); “[t]he first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces” (13). Baumer realizes that, when he set off, he “still knew nothing about the war” (168).

The words of Baumer, and the plot of *All Quiet*, are a clear example of the gap between what one expects of war and of what one actually encounters at war. This gap and the realization that no opportunity for glory is supplied lead to the disillusionment discussed in chapter 3: “[f]or many men the essence of their disenchantment was the stark contrast between their images of the glories of war and the reality they encountered” (Ellis 175-176). The anonymity of death, the lack of any progress in the conflict, the long duration, and the filthy conditions in the trenches, all these features combined revealed how unlike what they had imagined the Great War turned out to be.

In *Company K*, during the first chapters, that is, before the characters witness any combat, the idealization of war is noticeable. The second narrator, Private Rowland Geers, before being shipped to France and while still training, says: “[b]ring on the whole German army! Bring them all together, or one at a time. I can whip them all!” (18). Private Archie Lemon also claims that they “were crusaders who had dedicated our lives and our souls to our country and to our god that the things we revere and hold sacred, might not perish” (22). As soon as the soldiers arrive in France, Private Samuel Updike retorts that the civilians are all wearing black and that “you’d think

they'd just come from a funeral" (26). Updike's comment reveals how naïve and innocent he is toward the situation of war he is about to encounter: the French civilians are wearing black because they are actually living during a lethal war – the war is killing people in an hourly basis, it is like an unending funeral, and the newcomer cannot realize it. The first narrator, the one who is supposedly writing the novel, defines war as "an unending circle of pain That would be the picture of war" (14). In *Company K*, through its narrative technique of following members of a single unit from the prewar to postwar years, the change of perception of what war really is like becomes very explicit: the reader is provided with the newcomer's innocence or illusions and with the disillusion of the veterans. The dreams of glory and the illusions that the German Army can be "whipped" are turned into the realization that war is a "circle of pain."

Ousby, in his study of the Battle of Verdun, quotes from several passages written by veterans and comments how these men "saw the battlefield in a different light and took a different view of what it was like to be a hero" (*Road* 256) – a concept whose change we have discussed in the previous chapter. Like many other commentators we have studied, he also views these texts as "narratives of disillusionment": "[t]hey record the disparity between the war as it had been imagined or expected . . . and the war as it had actually been experienced. On the one hand, there was the myth, romantic and glorious, and on the other, the reality, miserable and squalid" (*Road* 257). The idealization gives way to the actualization.

In *Paths of Glory*, the opening scene, the meeting of Langlois and Private Duval, shows the disparity between the view of a seasoned veteran who has already witnessed the harsh conditions of war and the illusion of a newcomer who is eager to listen to the "Orchestration of the Western Front" (7), how Duval calls the continuous roar of the bombardments, which makes it immediately clear that he has only heard of bombardments, never actually been under them. Duval is also "excited to go up to the front and all that" (6); Langlois tells him to wait, that there is no reason for hurry. The contrast between experienced and inexperienced soldiers is reiterated in another

passage. Once it is announced that an attack is about to take place, a soldier boasts that “‘if we attack, the Boche’ll never know what hit him.’ Didier looked up and found, as he expected, that the remark had been made by one of the new class” (87). Didier, a veteran, knows that only a newcomer may believe that an attack catches the Germans unprepared and brings an easy victory. Didier knows that attacks, in the Great War, mean more deaths on the attacking side and seldom provide victory, let alone an easy one.

The failed attack also provides evidence for the gap between idealization and actualization. After it is decided to attack, General Assolant thinks that “[t]his was going to be war as it should be fought” (102). He pictures how the offensive will proceed, what targets will be bombarded and how they will be taken, he forgets that “[e]ven with the greatest clarity in command, war’s outcome is bound to be messy and unpredictable” (Tatum 62). Assolant does not possess clarity in command, and so the outcome is even messier and more unpredictable, at least for him. Tatum’s cited observation, however, is not intended for the Great War; it is made about the Trojan War as it is represented in the *Iliad* because, in his assessment, “[t]he *Iliad*’s war progresses the way most wars progress, in a manner so flawed and accidental that it seems a miracle the war ever gets won” (58). Having now discussed how the unpredictability of war is conveyed in the Great War novels, I move on to Homer’s epic.

All the commentaries and citations that I have been using and that make reference to an idealized war, a war where heroism, glory, and fame are possible, in one way or another refer back to the *Iliad*. Homer’s epic, as I have already pointed out, is the archetype of war narrative and its influence cannot be fully estimated. Whenever men think of war, sooner or later, the *Iliad* comes to mind. The names Troy, Achilles, Hector, and others, abound in countless poems, plays, novels, historical books or essays written on the subject of war. The *Iliad*, as I have discussed in chapters 2 and 4, does provide an arena for heroism in warfare; Achilles and Hector make a difference to the result of war. However, it is my contention that even in the representation of the *Iliad* war is worse

than expected and unpredictable. In addition to the examples provided in the second chapter, which are more focused on the powerful heroes, I now would like to offer some more instances that more closely resemble those cited about the Great War narrative.

In the beginning of the epic, on the first day of combat, battle is thus described: “now battle became sweeter to them than to go back / in their hollow ships to the beloved land of their fathers” (II.453-454). Later on, when the tide of war changes, battle is thus felt: “so now / before Aineias and Hector the young Achaian warriors / went, screaming terror, all the delight of battle forgotten” (XVII.757-759). Sweet battle becomes terror and the delight is forgotten. The Greek warriors are also defined as young – they are like the newcomers of the Great War narrative who dream of one war and encounter a rather different one. This sort of comparison is possible with two other passages (Tatum 137). The Greek army is, at first, viewed “[a]s obliterating fire lights up a vast forest / along the crests of a mountain, and the flare shows far off, / so as they marched, from the magnificent bronze the gleam went / dazzling all about through the upper air to the heaven” (II.455-458). This is an ideal army: dazzling to be beheld, proud, likened to a fire on the mountain. As combat gets grimmer:

So these, straining, carried the dead man out of the battle
 And back to the hollow ships, and the fight that was drawn fast between
 Them was wild as fire which, risen suddenly, storming a city
 Of men sets it ablaze, and houses diminish before it
 In the high glare, and the force of wind on it roars it to thunder;
 So, as the Danaans made their way back, the weariless roaring
 Of horses, chariots, and spearmen was ever upon them. (XVII.735-741)

The once proud and dazzling army is routed back to its ships. Fire that was beautiful to the eyes is now menacing, the wind roars and the simile is of a city being stormed – the fate that awaits Troy. These examples illustrate in what ways the narrative of the *Iliad* shows the process from an

idealized to an actualized war: the dazzling army, made of eager, young men – not heroes in the passage, be it noted - never predicted it would be routed in terror. Redfield says that “[t]he duel between Hector and Ajax is a chivalrous affair, with covert blows ruled out; declared a tie by the heralds, it concludes with an exchange of gifts. . . . Before the plan of Zeus has begun, the Trojan War is still something short of total, still allows some respect for the opponent” (*Nature* 167). It is noticeable that Redfield states the Trojan War was “still something short of total” – which implies that it eventually does become so. “Total war” is an expression coined to define the wars of the twentieth century; most historians agree that the Great War was the first of its kind, but here the term is applied to the *Iliad*'s war. Taking into consideration the evidence of the second chapter; the words of Diomedes, who no longer cares for the rescue of Helen; the questioning of Achilles; and the passages illustrating the change in the mood and attitudes of the Greek army, one has to agree with Redfield that the Trojan War does become total once it is actualized. Let me try and provide more examples.

Returning to the above cited visit of the Trojan herald to the Greek camp – the one that evokes Diomedes's boast – we find that, besides offering a truce, the herald proposes “to stop the sorrowful fighting until we can burn the bodies / of our dead” (VII.395-396). The Greeks refuse the offer but, regarding the corpses, Agamemnon says: “about the burning of the dead bodies I do not begrudge you; / no, for there is no sparing time for the bodies of the perished, / once they have died, to give them swiftly the pity of burning” (VII.408-410). There is respect for the dead and the ritual of burning the bodies is to be observed. However, in Book 10, after two days of combat, during the incursion of Diomedes and Odysseus into the Trojan camp, the Greek heroes make their way “through the carnage and through the corpses” (X.298). The dead are no longer buried (Malta 275-276). Odysseus acknowledges that it is impossible to honor all those who die: “[t]oo many fall day by day, one upon another, / and how could anyone find breathing space from his labour? (XIX.226-227). In an idealized war, all bodies are buried. When the Trojan War is actualized, and

becomes worse than expected, unpredictable, the dead cannot be mourned and the bodies are left between the two opposing camps – in what may be called, *avant la lettre*, the No Man’s Land of the Trojan War.

The representation of war in the *Iliad*, which is sometimes viewed as glorious, can provide us with passages that bring to mind a Great War narrative with their explicit depiction of brutality and carnage:

Achaians and Trojans

Cut each other down at close quarters, nor any longer

Had patience for the volleys exchanged from bows and javelins

But stood up close against each other, matching their fury,

And fought their battle with sharp hatchets and axes . . . and many magnificent

Swords were scattered along the ground . . . so the ground ran black with blood.

(XV.707-715)

The magnificent swords, symbols of heroes, lie on the ground that runs black with blood once the war becomes total. It gets so brutal that “[n]ot Ares who rallies men, not Athene, / watching this fight could have scorned it, not even in some strong anger, / such was the wicked work of battle for men and for horses” (XVII.398-400). It runs with red, not black, blood when the armies fight for the body of Patroclus (XVII.360-361) – a fight that is against the rules of the warrior code. The fight that ensues after Sarpedon is killed is so bloody that “[n]o longer / could a man, even a knowing one, have made out the godlike / Sarpedon, since he was piled from head to ends of feet under / a mass of weapons, the blood and the dust, while others about him / kept forever swarming over his dead body” (XVI.637-641). This is not the description of an idealized, glorious war, but an actualized, brutal war where bodies are disfigured. The body of Sarpedon in this case, however, is saved by his father Zeus (XVI.666-679) and the warrior is not disfigured beyond recognition – he is spared the fate of becoming unknown.

When Hector heads for the ships, the Greeks are held by shame and fear (XV.657-658) and Nestor actually begs them to hold fast: “I supplicate your knees for the sake of those who are absent / to stand strongly and not be turned to the terror of panic” (XV.665-666). Panic and terror take hold of the Greeks; they face a war they had not envisaged because “[e]ven after a first taste of it, war does not instantly cease to seem a game . . . a day comes when fear, defeat, the death of beloved comrades make the soul of the warrior succumb to necessity. War then ceases to be a game or a dream; the warrior finally understands that it actually exists” (Holoka 58 in Weil). The Greeks, who once were eager and boasted they could easily take on the Trojan army (VIII.229-234), are now before circumstances they are not prepared to face.

The passage when Agamemnon scolds his troops – “[w]here are your high words gone, when we said that we were the bravest? / those words you spoke before all in hollow vaunting at Lemnos . . . how each could stand up against a hundred or even two hundred Trojans / in the fighting” (VIII.230-234) – echoes the words of Private Rowland Geers, in *Company K*, who says he can whip the whole German army and the words of the newcomer in *Paths of Glory* who says the Germans will never know what hit them. Before the actualization of war, both the Greek soldiers in the *Iliad* and the soldiers in the Great War novels boast they can face the enemy and beat him easily. Afterwards, when war is viewed with different eyes, panic and terror take over these men and the unpredictability is recognized because “tous les mortels sont sujets à ces changements imprévisibles de la situation de guerre” (“All mortals are subjected to these unpredictable changes of a situation of war”; Assunção 246). Assunção’s remark, as others we have seen, is intended for the *Iliad*, but it perfectly suits the narrative of the Great War as well.

If war, as it progresses, reveals a gap between means and ends, comes to seem endless, and turns out to be unpredictable and worse than expected, it is then viewed, at least for those involved, as uncontrollable. What takes place once a war begins is not subjected to the intentions, predictions, wishes, or even orders, of those who are caught up in it. I shall address this issue by

approaching one feature common to both the Great War and the *Iliad*, namely the personification of war. In order to convey the sensation, or maybe the fact, that war is not under men's control, the narratives of war oft times resort to depicting the conflict as a being ruling over the battlefield.

In the *Iliad*, Ares, a son of Zeus, is the god of war. He is referred to, by the other gods, with the epithet “manslaughtering, blood-stained, stormer of stronger walls” (V.31) and he is, obviously enough, “violent” (V.35). Athena also says he is “that thing of fury, evil-wrought, that double-faced liar” (V.831). Zeus, his own father, tells him that he is “the most hateful of all gods who hold Olympos / forever quarrelling is dear to your heart, wars and battles” (V.890-891). After analyzing several examples and epithets used in the narrative, Gregory Nagy comes to the conclusion that, in Homer's epic, “[n]o matter who the immediate killer may be in any given narrative of mortal combat, the ultimate killer is Ares as god of war”; the god is the “divine embodiment of murderous war” (294). Menelaus attacks and it is the “fury of Ares [that] drove him onward” (V.563). When Hector puts on Achilles's armor, “Ares the dangerous / war god entered him” (XVII.210-211). Be it noted that the adjectives applied are violent, murderous and dangerous; not glorious or any other positive term. Defining the embodiment of war as violent, murderous, and dangerous is expected; however, the absence of any positive terms and the scorn and hate voiced by other gods make Ares a whole despicable and negative figure. The embodiment of war is not cherished in the *Iliad*.

Moreover, instead of becoming more powerful with Ares inside him, Hector comes closer to his own death, as ironically recognized by Zeus: “Ah, poor wretch! / there is no thought of death in your mind now, and yet death stands / close beside you as you put on the immortal armour / of a surpassing man . . . you will not come home out of the fighting” (XVII.200-207). Although Hector can drive the Greeks back against their own ships and bring fear and terror, control over what happens at war is not in his hands. The narrator of the *Iliad* comments on Hector's misinterpretation of the war. When Poulydamas advises him to go back into the city, a passage already mentioned in chapter 2, and Hector says no, “the Trojans thundered to hear him.” This is

followed by the remark that they are “fools, since Pallas Athene had taken away the wits from them” (XVIII.310-311). Hector and his army, like Achilles and Agamemnon, have “flawed visions of what war can be” (Tatum 57), as do General Assolant and the newcomers in *Paths of Glory*, the American soldiers in *Company K*, and Paul Baumer and his colleagues when they volunteer.

When it comes to the Great War, Eksteins says that, by 1916 – the year of Verdun and the Somme - the war “seemed to have developed its own rationale, devoid of interpretation in rational terms . . . the war had developed a momentum of its own” (183); therefore it “seemed to have passed long ago from human hands” (232). Like god Ares, the war had acquired an independent existence, empowered with will and desire, and had detached itself from the will of men. Commenting on the Somme offensive, the poet Edmund Blunden observes that “[n]either race had won, nor could win, the War. The War had won, and would go on winning” (qtd. in Fussell 13). The word war is capitalized, personified, becoming the ultimate, and sole, winner in the conflict that is regarded as a senseless slaughter. Representing the war as a being is one alternative to try to cope with the reality of the conflict because “[t]he difficulty was in admitting that the war had been made by men and was being continued *ad infinitum* by them” (Fussell 170). Hence Paul Nash’s conclusion: “[e]vil, and the incarnate fiend alone can be master of this war” (qtd. in Ellis 9). Given its destructive power and apparent meaninglessness and endlessness, an experience such as the Great War cannot be considered as made by men – it seems unconceivable that men would willingly engage in such a bloodbath and let it last for years. The image of an evil being ruling over the war is also found in historical accounts:

In the last days of peace, there had seemed to come a point where the collective will of Europe’s leaders had abdicated and was usurped by some evil, superhuman Will from Stygian regions that wrested control out of their feeble hands And once the fighting had started, one also senses repeatedly the presence of that Evil Being, marshalling events to its own pattern. (Horne, *Price* 242-243)

A historical account resorts to the evil being imagery in order to try and explain the outbreak, and progress, of the conflict that Keegan calls “mysterious.” In *All Quiet*, Paul Baumer acknowledges that “[t]he war swept us away” (20). A solution is suggested in Barbusse’s novel *Under Fire*: in the closing passage, after a heavy bombardment, one soldier reaches the conclusion that “[w]ar must be killed; war itself” (332). War has become the enemy to be defeated.

The examples provided above, from the *Iliad* and from the Great War, share the feature of having war personified as a hateful, despicable being whose existence is neither cherished nor glorified. The personification of war seems to be one alternative for conveying the ultimate lack of control men exert over the conflict once it is started – it is a solution for representing how war is uncontrollable and war’s inherent unpredictability. Besides, as wars are always worse than expected, this personification could not be defined in positive terms – it becomes evil.

Evil may be the right term for defining war, at least in the narratives herein studied, because in the four works only one single character seems to end up satisfied or happy with what he has encountered in the conflicts: Private Colin Wiltsee in *Company K*, who tells a group of schoolchildren about how beautiful it is to die for one’s country and how their lives belong not to themselves but to “the Creator of the Universe and President Hoover” (235). It must be noted that this single exception is approached ironically: the character preaches in favor of all the grandiose concepts that are criticized throughout March’s novel. All other characters, including the powerful heroes of the *Iliad*, find war worse than expected, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and with the means disproportionate to the presumed ends.

On the Trojan side, Hector, who thinks he can handle even Achilles, becomes cruel, arrogant, and dies ashamed of his misinterpretations of the conflict, fleeing before his enemy. King Priam ends up grief-stricken by the death of his most loved son and the prospect of the fall of his city. On the Greek side, after the common troops are routed by panic and terror and witness the actualization of war, Patroclus, who disregards Achilles’s advice and thinks he can storm Troy by

himself, dies. Achilles, indispensable and invincible, resigns himself to his coming death. In the Great War novels, Paul Baumer and all his colleagues, who volunteer to fight for the fatherland, die; in *Paths of Glory*, French soldiers are executed and general Assolant does not receive his medal; the characters of *Company K*, those who survive, come back home either haunted by the memories of the war or maimed. Not one of them achieves what they had imagined in the way they had anticipated – war defeats them all.

Conclusion

“Ares is just and kills those who kill”

“No one is fool enough to choose war instead of peace –
in peace sons bury fathers, but in war fathers bury sons”
Croesus to Cyrus (Herodotus 49).

“Never try to console me for dying.
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
Man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
Than be a king over all the perished dead”
Achilles to Odysseus (*Od.*, xi.488-491)

Herodotus, in Book 1 of his *Histories*, tells the story of Croesus and his defeat before the Persians – a tale that reveals how men behave when they are bent towards engaging in war. Croesus goes to war sure of his victory because he has been told by the oracle that “if he attacked the Persians he would bring down a mighty empire” (Herodotus 51). He does not bother to ask which empire: the Persian or his own. Moreover, he finds no fault in his actions: “[t]he god of the Greeks encouraged me to fight you”, he tells his opponent Cyrus, “the blame is his” (Herodotus 49). The tale of Croesus opens this conclusion, and is used in the epigraph, with a view to illustrating the unpredictability of war and the gap between what men expect of war and what they actually encounter – the gap between the idealization and the actualization of war. Taken from a historical narrative – the first of its kind – the words of Croesus reveal that only after war, and, more importantly, only after undergoing the misfortunes and miseries of war, does one come to see what war is really like, how unlike what one imagines it turns out to be.

In spite of saying that “no one is fool enough to choose war instead of peace,” this is precisely what Croesus does: he chooses war because he has idealized it – he thinks that the mighty empire he will bring down is his enemy’s. In this sense, Croesus joins the fighting men studied in this thesis: Agamemnon (who thinks the Greeks can win without Achilles); Patroclus

(who thinks he can storm Troy by himself); Achilles (who thinks he is safe from the unforeseen twists of war); Hector (who thinks he can face Achilles); Paul Baumer of *All Quiet*, as well as the newcomers of *Paths of Glory* and *Company K* (who think they will fight a short, glorious war). Croesus also joins the men who volunteer in 1914 to fight a war for glory, for civilization, for the motherland, and find themselves in a seemingly endless conflict, trying to avert one-ton heavy shells, surrounded by rats, and drowning in mud. Men, at least in the narratives we have analyzed, indeed are fool enough to choose war because they assume that what they imagine will come to pass.

Men are fool enough to choose war, at least in part, because they fail to understand the meaning of the sentence that furnishes the title to this conclusion - a line taken from the *Iliad*: “Ares is just and kills those who kill” (XVIII.309). This sentence in English is Holoka’s translation to Weil’s “*Arès est equitable, et il tue ceux qui tuent*” (Weil 27). Fitzgerald translates it as “the battle-god’s impartial, / dealing death to the death-dealing man.” Lattimore’s translation is “[t]he war god is impartial. Before now he has killed the killer.” The original Greek is “*xynòs Enyálios, kaí te ktanéonta katékta*”, which, literally, means “Enyalios is impartial and also kills those who kill.” The text does not name Ares: he is referred to by one of his epithets, *Enyálios*. The adjective *xynos* means “impartial”, “one who does not take sides”, as well as “indifferent” (Brandão, *Personal Communication*). The idea conveyed is that the god of war, war personified, makes no distinction when it comes to bringing death to those who have brought death.

This line is chosen for the title of the conclusion because of its meaning and its position in the epic. As a close to Hector’s rebuke to Poulydamas’s advice to retreat into the city as Achilles is about to fight again, this line foreshadows how bloody and cruel the war will become with the Greek hero fighting with rage and opens the way for the greatest *aristeia* (display of valor on the part of an individual) of the epic, Achilles’s – after this sentence, the reader is presented with two elements discussed in this thesis: the actualization of war and the epic display of excellence on the

part of a single warrior. It both announces the end of Hector's drive and his coming death. The Prince of Troy cannot yet realize that the tide of war has changed, but he recognizes that the god of war is impartial when it comes to killing killers.

In a Second World War narrative, Stefan Heym's *Crusaders* (1948), we find Hector's conclusion voiced in strikingly similar terms by a character whose name echoes the *Iliad*. After a friend dies, a soldier comments that "[i]t's the wrong guys that die"; Captain Troy then says: "[n]o, the institution is rather impartial We just notice it more when it happens to people whose job is living" (Heym 99). Men, engaged in war, sooner or later come to realize how impartial Ares is. As already noted, the characters in the Great War novels also come to acknowledge the impartiality of war: they view the conflict as a lottery.

The conclusions that men are, to use Croesus's words, fool enough to choose war instead of peace and that Ares is impartial, are related to one aspect of this thesis – that which I address in the chapter 4: war's inherent unpredictability. Chapter 1 is fully dedicated to the *Iliad* and tries to approach both the excellence of the heroes and the unpredictability of war as they are represented in the epic. As I have pointed out in the introduction, Homer's epic is not usually studied as a war narrative and has not been commonly been compared to the Great War narrative. I believe it was then necessary, for the purpose of analyzing the *Iliad* singly as a war narrative, to first dwell on the epic separately and then compare and contrast it to the Great War narratives. In the second chapter, on the Great War, I analyzed how inaugurating and novel the experience of the conflict was and how historical and so-called fictional narratives have tried to cope with the challenges it imposed upon being represented in a narrative frame. By adopting Samuel Hynes's term "The Myth of the War" as a synonym for the narratives that have survived and for the way we today imagine the Great War, I discuss in what ways the Great War has been inscribed in our cultural memory and how it has shaped our imagining both past and present wars – it may well be that it will still shape the way we will imagine future wars.

The unpredictability of war is, as I have said, one aspect of this thesis: the similarity between the Great War novels and the epic. The other aspect - the main difference between the two narratives - is the role of the individual in warfare and it is discussed in the fourth chapter. I believe a short clarification is now required. Stating that the powerful heroes of the *Iliad* do make a difference in the practice of warfare and are able to assure victory, if not properly formulated, may go against the contention that even in the epic war is unpredictable and hence worse than expected. Achilles and Hector, as we have seen, have the necessary skills, courage, and strength, to change the tide of war in favor of their respective sides. Moreover, the *Iliad* provides a hierarchy of prowess, not only in the Catalogue of Ships where this is explicitly stated, but in the development of the plot as well. Achilles fights and the Trojans are held inside the city; he leaves and Hector pushes the Greeks back to the ships; Patroclus enters and repels the Trojans until he is killed by Hector; Achilles returns, brings havoc to the Trojans and kills Hector. However, even though he is able to decide the result of war, Achilles is not able to control what takes place in war. He can settle which side wins but not how this victory is achieved. Victory comes at the cost of the life of Patroclus – and Achilles resents and grieves over the outcome of war for him. The war is unpredictable for Hector and Patroclus, not only because they end up dead – death is not so unpredictable once one enters a war - but mainly because their deaths are the consequence of their mistakes and miscalculations: they assume that they are better warriors than they actually are.

In the Great War novels, the hierarchy of the *Iliad* is unimaginable and no displays of *areté* are possible. In the age of modern technological war, a man's skill as a warrior (if such term is suitable) counts for very little. Paul Baumer, his colleagues, the characters of *Paths of Glory* and of *Company K*, mostly the Unknown Soldier, all become faceless victims. Instead of inflicting pain on the enemy, these soldiers suffer pain; they do not fight, they only suffer. The technological advances in the practice of warfare have rendered individuals powerless – mere men are overwhelmed by the murderous capability of the twentieth century weaponry. In addition to the

supersession of the hero, understood as a warrior of excellence in warfare, the Great War also implies unpredictability and the realization that war is always worse than expected. By comparing the expectations and feelings of the soldiers before they witness war to their feelings once this experience is actualized, I believe that the thesis has been able to locate war's inherent unpredictability in the Great War novels analyzed. In short, whereas the Great War novels convey a conflict without heroes and worse than expected, the *Iliad* represents a conflict with heroes, though still worse than expected.

The practice of war seems to be as old as man himself, and the urge to tell of war seems to be equally as old. Whenever a war takes place, a story of it sooner or later emerges. Such a chaotic and murderous event, in which men kill, are killed and maimed amidst shouts, confusion, dust and blood - and, nowadays, amidst shells, machine gun fire, and hovering airplanes and helicopters - such an event must be put into a framed, coherent format, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, so that one may understand and make sense out of it. Besides, wars affect the lives of many - today they affect the lives of millions - and their results have consequences upon the future of entire nations - such important events must be somehow registered and represented. Narrating the experience of war is an attempt at both making sense of it and remembering it, keeping the memory of it alive. Wars, after they are fought, and sometimes even during the fight, must be told. Besides, as cited in the introduction, Thomas Hardy's *Spirit Sinister* is not mistaken when he claims that war makes "rattling good history": the telling of war is compelling for both readers and writers.

In the analyzed attempts at representing and understanding war, in all the narratives herein studied, no one seems to be safe from the actualization of war, from Ares. In the Great War narrative the hopes and expectations of practically all characters - what in fact stands for the hopes and expectations of a whole generation - were shattered by a conflict whose consequences are still felt. One source of disillusionment, and one of the most important reasons that led men to

volunteer and fight from 1914 to 1918, was the belief in grandiose concepts such as honor, victory, motherland, and others. Glory is one of these grandiose concepts. To achieve glory on the battlefield and become a hero is a recurrent reason for going to war. The war of the *Iliad*, in spite of displaying the feature of unpredictability, is a site for achieving glory. However, what the men of 1914 failed to understand, and many others who went to war in other countless opportunities in search for glory also failed to understand, is that war by itself does not confer glory. It is the poem or narrative that emerges from war that confers glory. It is the telling of war that preserves the deeds of great men and makes them glorious.

The epic we have been analyzing does bestow glory upon the deeds of the great heroes. As noted in chapter 2, the glory of the epic is *kléos*: “what is sung”, “that which is listened to.” Therefore this glory can only be bestowed by a “song”: a narrative that tells of the deeds and that is heard (or read) by an audience. Ares does not bestow glory – the epic does. Nevertheless, the glory preserved by the epic is, first of all, reserved for a few men – the outstanding warriors. Most of those who fight, and die, are anonymous and remain so. Only the names of Achilles, Hector, and another handful of brilliant fighters are preserved and bestowed everlasting glory and fame. As I have shown in chapter 4, when the nature of war changes, the song that emerges from it no longer bestows *kléos* because what is listened to no longer tells of great deeds. When it gets impossible for a man to stand out on the battlefield, to display *areté*, names cannot be revered, and the hero becomes nameless: the Unknown Soldier is born and *kléos* is denied. Glory on the battlefield becomes virtually unreachable.

In the introduction, I state that this thesis is a study on the cultural memory of war based on a literary framework. Although resorting to historical accounts and to works of scholarship in order to illustrate the analysis and to make some points clearer, the core of this research is the literary works used as primary sources: the *Iliad*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Paths of Glory*, and *Company K*. Though not belonging to my primary *corpus*, Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to*

Arms and John Dos Passos's *Nineteen Nineteen*, two other novels, have been used in key passages: Frederick Henry's challenge of the rhetoric of war and the burial of the Unknown Soldier, respectively. All these works not only attempt at recollecting the past but also influence the way the past is remembered. What men today think of the Trojan War is mostly influenced by the *Iliad*, and the epic itself is an act of reconstructing a past sustained by the cultural memory - what men believed to have taken place before the city of Troy. It is a means for preserving the deeds of the great men of the past, for preserving the *kléa andrôn*. It is the monument, to use Brandão's word, for the war at Troy, a "*monumentum aere perennius*" (Redfield Foreword xiii) to the heroes of the Trojan War. It needs emphasizing that this thesis is not a study of the differences between historical and fictional discourses and that no attempt has been made to separate what is supposedly factual from what is fictional. Hayden White's theory of "Metahistory," though only explicitly cited in the introduction and in chapter 2, provides the background against which I have tried to develop my analysis.

Regarding the Great War, the novels herein studied are attempts at reconstructing what took place on the Western Front of the war of 1914-18 and they also influence the way we today view the Great War – they both shaped and are shaped by the conflict. They are shaped by the war because they were written in the postwar years, when men tried to understand and to convey what had just taken place. They shape the war because the way we today imagine the incompetence of the military leaders, the senseless slaughter, and the inhuman conditions of fighting are, to a great extent, influenced by what is present in the works of literature that are a part of the "Myth of the War." Even my choice of adhering to the term "Great War," instead of using the terms First World War or World War I, is associated with the concept of cultural memory: contemporary scholarship of the conflict adopt the term Great War because it encompasses not only the conflict itself but also its influence over our contemporary frame of mind. I have also tried, whenever it seemed suitable, to bring examples extracted from narratives of different wars, such as the Vietnam War

and the Second World War, in order to compare and to enrich the analysis – I have thus always opted for a citation extracted from a war narrative instead of another one taken from a different kind of text. In short, always bearing in mind how obviously narrow the scope is, my thesis is a study on the cultural memory of war because it has tried to shed some light over the subject of narratives of war, over the ways people remember, imagine, and tell wars; and, by using the archetypal war narrative, provide a brief analysis about how these narratives have changed or not.

In another, and final, attempt at bringing the Great War closer to the *Iliad*, I would like to return to the remarks of Wilfred Owen, who says that his subject is “war, and the pity of War.” Owen claims that “poetry is in the pity” (qtd. in Stallworth 266); and Hynes, paraphrasing Owen, says that, by 1933, in the establishment of the “Myth of the War”, “there was pity in the prose too – pity had become the standard, conventional attitude towards the war and its victims” (435). Pity is undeniable and explicit in the Great War novels we have been analyzing: these narratives tell pitiful stories. It is hard not to pity the disillusion and pain of Paul Baumer as he tells of his experiences, his detachment from his family, and the death of all his colleagues. There is pity in the lengthy death of the Unknown Soldier and in his realization of how meaningless and senseless the rhetoric of war is. The French soldiers who are butchered in the failed attack in *Paths of Glory* and those who are executed by their own incompetent leaders also evoke pity.

The *Iliad*, while famous for its battle scenes, also evokes pity. There is pity in the meeting of Hector and Andromache as husband and wife imagine what the future holds for their son if the city falls; one may pity Achilles when, told of Patroclus’s death, he dirties his face and hair with dust to hide the pain and shame for his mistakes. Pity is also present in the passage when Priam, knelt before the hero and kissing his hands, begs Achilles for the body of his son Hector. The king sees in the strong and powerful hero something of his dead son; the hero, beholding the bereaved king, is reminded of his own father, Peleus, who shall soon be also deprived of his son. Both the Great

War novels and the *Iliad* show that war, no matter how glorious it may be or how justified it may sound, generates victims and these victims are to be pitied.

One final question remains, which is the question of glory. Unlike the Great War narrative, the *Iliad* still provides *kléos*: everlasting glory. The soldiers of the Great War died; some came back home, but almost no one achieved glory, which is reserved for the few heroes that make a difference to the result of war. However, had prowess and excellence still counted in the Great War and the songs that tell of it still conferred glory, would it have been worth dying for? If modern technological war still had room for heroic deeds and the individual still played a decisive role, would this recognition be a fair price in exchange for one's life? In short, is *kléos* worthy of losing *nostos* (homecoming)?

The answer lies in the epic tradition and is provided by Achilles himself. However, it is found in Homer's second epic, the *Odyssey*, not in the *Iliad*. As Odysseus goes down to Hades, the land of the dead, he meets the ghost of Achilles. Odysseus starts praising him as "far the greatest of the Achaians," saying that "no man before has been more blessed," and that now Achilles has "great authority / over the dead." Odysseus's advice is clear: "Do not grieve, even in death" (*Od.*, xi.478-486). Achilles immediately rejects the praise and regrets the fact he is no longer alive to protect his own old father. Achilles's conclusion is as bitter as it is revealing: "never try to console me for dying./ I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another/ man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, / than be a king over all the perished dead" (*Od.*, xi.488-491). Achilles discards all the glory he has received and wishes he were still alive. To the best of the Achaeans, *kléos* is not worthy of losing *nostos*. If Achilles himself, the greatest of the heroes and the one who was granted most glory, a name that has inspired many a man to go to war in search for fame, regrets dying in war and acknowledges how hollow such glory is, how can we disagree? Achilles knows better, but it took death to make him realize it.

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