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Writing about the War.

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WRITING ABOUT THE WAR

Who is going to write the great novel about this War? Is there a great novel about this War likely to be written? Not a novel about the ~~social~~ present social and political crisis in general, I mean, or a novel about the underground movements in Nazi-occupied countries; but a novel about the War itself -- the real thing as we experience it over here; a novel about the fox-holes and the destroyed villages, the deafening noise of artillery explosions and the sickening smell of dead horses, about the dust and the mud, the jeeps and the pop-tents, the C+Rations, the MPs, the boredom, the fear, the agonies, the lightless nights, the air-raids, the dirt, the wounds, the loneliness; a novel, in short, about the at once sinister and dull reality of modern warfare.

Of course, ~~these~~ all these things are being written about... War correspondents do a remarkable job...

Ernie Pyle.... Steinbeck... Hemingway... ✓ 14

..... But what about the writers actually in the army? ... ~~are~~
~~they too busy? Have they renounced literature for the duration?~~
Is it just too early? Maybe -- for a finished work of great dimensions. But there should be signs, promises --- short stories, poems... Maybe I have missed something; but I can't remember having read...

Why is that?

Are they too busy? Do they have renounced literature for the duration? But a writer never can renounce literature... not even in the Army. Dostoevsky spoke for all real writers in the world when he ^{was} told his brother Mihail, in his celebrated farewell-message, before leaving for Siberia: "Yes, if I am not allowed to write, I shall perish. Better fifteen years of prison, with a pen in my hands!"

Naturally, a writer remains what he is -- in a training camp, in the battle field... Being a ~~writer~~ lit'rary man, he cannot help reacting to

This is a difficult war to
write about.

Diana Trilling, in *The Nation*, (Jan. 21. 44):

"I have not come across a single
American novel which tries to say
a word of truth about this war:
those of our novelists who are
concerned with the war either
write elaborate fictions about this
happy land worth dying for or take
out their patriotizing in former
generations of the past, intended
to prove that America through all
its history has been whole —
modern of the purest idealism."

whatever happens to him in a literary manner. That is to say, he will consider all his experiences as potential literary material...

Now, ~~to most writers~~ as for the particular experience ~~of~~ of the battle field -- it is excitingly and upsettingly new to ~~most intellee~~ every civilian and, more especially, to every intellectual....

Yet they are reluctant to express this experience...

I am a writer myself, and I have seen quite a bit of this War; yet I am reluctant to write about it -- which has not primarily to do with censorship restrictions or any other technical difficulties..

So I try to understand -- to analyze my own reluctance...

ABOUT WAR BOOKS

....
~~Writer's material -- current history, personal and general...~~

Will there be a great book about this War? The question may seem of secondary importance, compared with the more vital issues...

Yet, if literature is the mirror and mouthpiece of any civilized epoch... ^{the} matter is not without its significant implications --

~~not only~~ ^{not only} for a professional writer.

Especially for a writer who happens to be ~~on~~ in the war himself --

as a soldier... For ~~any~~ to a writer, any personal experience is potential material for literary work -- let alone ^{an} experience so ^{modern} profound and upsetting as ~~the~~ ^{life} front...

I have been wondering a great

Now, I venture to express my doubts whether a great book about this war ^{is likely to} will be produced. One thing is certain: the literary

harvest of this war has been rather meagre compared with output of the last world conflict... ^{curiously, or changing} even in comparison with Spanish

~~the~~ Civil War... ^{WW}

Why is that?

Last war -- first enthusiasm (Rupert Brooks, Peguy, etc) : patriotic inspiration... ^{books of protest -- idealistic...} Then, pacifism and "debunking" -- from Barbusse to Richard Aldington, John Dos Passes, Hemingway, Remarque, etc...

Have been doing quite a bit of thinking about it, in my time off... Discussed it with many others soldiers who have literary interests and abilities...

I am not speaking of the "other side" of Nazism and Fascism but of the "other side" of the industrial civilization...
No do I speak of oppressed nations, speaking of "underdog" life. ^{one side is the U.S.}

w

This is not a good war for
writers. ~~Not that~~ any writer
of course,
with common sense and ...
must consider it his war
and will be passionately interested
in its course and outcome.
But from a literary point of
view, he will be somewhat
frustrated ... ~~There has~~

V*

In the field of creative
writing, the Sarah Wood
has so far been more
productive. I may have
missed something, but at
I don't remember a single
book, not indeed, not even
a single short story of that
really impressed me ...
I think it has to do with
the attitude of the individuals
forward for War.

The human-interest stories" are competently and cordially told by such ~~men~~ ^{competent and respectful observers} as Ernie Pyle, who articulates the G.I.'s ~~little~~ worries and and But does he communicate the whole drama? Others are more ambitious -- Ralph Ingersoll, for instance, whose "The Battle is the Pay-Off" is a more serious effort to ~~dramatize~~ describe and dramatize one particular moment... Yet even his book..... glorified journalism... does not belong strictly into the sphere of creative writing...

Even the greatest American novelists approach this War as-- newspaper correspondents -- Hemingway and Steinbeck, for instance -- to name only the two most illustrious ones. True, Steinbeck's reports were full of insights..... Hemingway's detailed account of the his "Voyage to Victory" across the Channel, on June 6, 1944, read almost like a Hemingway short story -- but not like one of his best...

It is characteristic that the most popular American "war" books and "war" shows have nothing to do with the War whatsoever -- or is there any trace of the great event in "Look Here, Private Hargrove," or in Irving Berlin's "This is the Army." No, this is no the Army...

Why is that? Are those writers who have become soldiers too busy to write? ... Or is it just too early?

Fascists think war is wonderful;
So if there were great Fascist
writers, they might be able to produce
great war books; but there are no
great Fascist writers -- naturally not.

Debunking heroism, romanticism of the battle field... Revealing realistically the brutal ugliness and monotony of modern warfare...

This job has been done -- admirably, in many cases. There are no illusions left... ^{By now,} Everybody knows that war is a bore and a horror

Yet there was another wave of ^{militant} ~~war~~ enthusiasm during the Spanish Civil War... Inspired Malraux, W.H. Auden, Hemingway, and many others... The spirit of a crusade... the anti-Fascist struggle... The heroism of the Spanish people and of the International Brigades... against overwhelming odds... The Spanish Civil War -- a true revolutionary theme...

And this time?

The fervent patriotism of Péguy and Brooks does not seem to express the feelings of our generation... Maybe it is not true of the cou European countries that were occupied by the Nazis. In ^{Russia} Norway and Poland, France and Belgium, Greece and Yugoslavia, there are perhaps poets whose voices ring with the same pathos... In fact, we have ~~see~~ already seen samples of this art in which nationalism and ^{But this underpinned lit. written in war} love of freedom merge... But this kind of inspiration is missing in British and certainly in American literature...

On the other hand, there is hardly any need or any inclination to "debunk" reveal the horrors which are only too familiar even to those back home who have not experienced them directly... Nor can any progressive author consider it his function to "debunk" the hollowness of patriotic phrases... Patriotic slogans play a secondary role, anyhow... There are no illusions to refute, for there are no illusions. ... ~~There is no crusading spirit...~~ Nobody within the army or outside expects paradise to result from the present war... I ~~betray~~ no military secret ~~when~~ by saying that

~~to war~~

disulge

most soldiers, as most civilians, are rather skeptic, if not worried about the peace... No, there is no crusading spirit of the kind we found in Spain, in 1937... *Some of our most officiating soldiers hardly know what they are fighting for.*

~~Everybody knows that this War could have been avoided if the democratic governments had been more far-sighted and more....~~

This is not a primarily anti-Fascist war... Yet every anti-Fascist realizes that it is a necessary war... Necessary not in the sense that it could not have been avoided with a little more ~~a~~ good will and wisdom; but necessary under the circumstances as they actually were in 1939...

So this is not a war against which any reasonable intellectual could protest, nor is it a war which can be glorified... ~~I~~ This war -- Arthur Koestler put it -- is not a mission but a duty... Something that has to be accepted and endure but not praised... An atonement, perhaps -- not an adventure...

... This is not really a time for wars. Wars are outdated and therefore no suitable theme for a contemporary writer.

"Wars will drop through the spider's web," said the Czech poet, Vladislav Vancura (murdered in a Nazi concentration camp). "The time of dominion is broken up, and the time of the workers begins... The wars are lost..."

War is an atavism....

Of course, there are, and will be, literary testimonies... Mostly journalistic... ~~War correspondents are the real bards of this war.~~ *A. Sometimey politic. But not one representative novel so far...*

~~one of the most popular books dealing with military life --~~

~~"Look Here, Private Hargrove!" -- has as little to do with the~~

Typical, the popularity of Ernie Pyle -- simple chronicle of G.I.'s life... V W

The

Magazines of war grass ...
fast - War, or fast ...
" escapism " which is
just a name of for

...
Poetry — reaching the
dilemmas of last year
to point out ... (Pitt
Vivian — Selden Rodman is
just thinking of the two, because
both are American soldiers —
both happen to be friends of
mine.)

Audrey ... refers to ...
Glenwood ...

Stephen Spender — most the foreign
crisis than War as said ...

John Hersey's. "A Bell for Adano" -- nice job, if unpretentious and by no means exciting from a literary point of view --: really a post-War subject...

Post-War -- occupation of Europe with all the human problems it involves -- may prove a source for literary inspiration. As for the War itself....

Maybe I am all wrong. Maybe some writer will overcome, or is already overcoming, all these difficulties...

It just seemed worthwhile to me to point out those obstacles -- now, with the War approaching its hand end.... Maybe only because I hope that, by pointing them out, I ~~am~~ may be rather become able overcome them myself...