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W. P. Albrecht

## WAR AND FRATERNITY: A STUDY OF SOME RECENT AMERICAN WAR NOVELS

**V**ALUES ARE always being tested, but war makes the process more urgent. As war approaches, such words as *patriotism*, *sacrifice*, and—in democracies—*freedom* and *brotherhood* brighten with a new attractiveness which may be quickly lost when or even before the killing is over. In *A Farewell to Arms*, one remembers, Frederick Henry “was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice. . . .” Part of this disillusion is a matter of seizing the abruptly shortened day, but a more philosophical contemplation of the difference between good and evil also takes place. Many people are being hurt or killed, and many wonder just what it is that is worth getting hurt or killed for.

War fiction is a good measure of the permanence and flux of

values. American novels of World War II are particularly concerned with the values of a nation at war. The motives and performance of soldiers, leaders, and civilians are scrutinized and measured—usually in ironical contrast—against war aims, while combat with the enemy may be left out altogether. Of course, such introspection is not new. It is evident in *War and Peace* and, among World War I novels, in *The Three Soldiers*, *Soldier's Pay*, *The Enormous Room*, and others. In fact, the imaginative literature of war, from its beginnings, has frequently stressed motives and ideals, and correlative ironies, more than battles; and as war has ramified from single to global conflict, this introspection has become more searching and cynical.

In dramatizing what it already seems old-fashioned to call the struggle between democracy and fascism, the American novelist has found both of the opposing forces within the nation, within the armed forces, and within the individual; and it is the enemy within the ranks that receives his closest attention. This enemy, broadly speaking, is what the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries called tyranny; as to motive, it is the self-love that denies fraternity. In a war violations of fraternity are inevitable. When a democracy wages war, it justifies these violations as necessary to preserve the liberty, equality, and fraternity of its citizens. When the violations cannot be so justified and are, indeed, perpetrated not against the enemy but against one's comrades, there is a double irony. For among liberty, equality, and fraternity, fraternity is the emotional impetus needed for realizing the other two: it recognizes equality and stops liberty short of license.

This enemy, one surmises, has never been absent from even the most holy campaigns. The crusades had their murderers and plunderers, and members of the Colonial Army and the Grand Army of the Republic must frequently have succumbed to the urgency of self-interest. A good many additional experiences have combined to make twentieth-century man look unheroic in his own eyes. He has shrunk in relation to the physical universe,

while psychology and sociology have denied his free agency. Technology has even provided less heroic roles for the individual soldier. For most soldiers, and for all soldiers most of the time, the immediate quarrel is with their officers or the man in the next sack—in short with the Army—or with the draft board or the landlords; the immediate end, not to defeat the enemy but to provide themselves with a modicum of comfort, perhaps promotions, and certainly, at one time or another, liquor and women. The modern novelist, although not unsympathetic with human frailty, makes the most of these animosities and ends, finding in the more flagrant examples—such as black marketing, race hatred, personal ambition, and sexual license—a mockery of democratic aims.

In the World War II novels considered in this article,<sup>1</sup> free enterprise runs wild to the devastation of equality and fraternity. Especially in *The Crusaders* and *The Gallery*, which recount the war in Europe, where the opportunities were most numerous, it is a rare American soldier who is not eager to dispose of government property at his own profit. But insofar as they may be separated, the violations of human rights are more disturbing to the novelist than the violations of property rights. It would be surprising, of course, if American soldiers, who after all are not much different from American civilians, should generally consider peoples of different races, nationalities, and religions to be created equal. The prejudiced and their victims include, probably, the majority of the characters in these novels; in fact, the characters who elicit very much in the way of sympathy are likely to be the victims, although their "racial" faults may not be spared. At best the soldier of a different race is, like Jake in *The Wine of Astonishment*, only tolerated by many of his fellows: "... You'd never think Levy was a Jew. . . . I don't know how many times I said to my officers that Levy was a real white man." At worst he is tormented, beaten, or—like Roth in *The Naked and the Dead*—murdered. Even without the complication of ra-

<sup>1</sup> See bibliography.

cial differences, the feeling among comrades-in-arms often refutes fraternity. In *The Friend* and *An Act of Love* sacrifice for another is refused, or apparent sacrifice turns out to be selfishness.

Like race hatred sexual license is a sin against the dignity of man. Despite somewhat divergent ideas with respect to marriage, democratic tradition has always opposed compulsion in sexual matters and, premising mutual respect, has repudiated mere animalism; in conjunction with Christian-Puritan tradition, it has established a monogamous relation, sanctified by legal marriage, as the ideal professed by most professing Americans. Granting some liberal difficulties in drawing the line between sexual license and sexual liberty, one cannot miss a contrast between the democratic ideal and the rape, prostitution, perversion, and bestiality offered in great abundance by these novels. More equivocal are those extramarital affairs that are both voluntary and the product of mutual regard; but although such affairs—like those of Joe Cable and Liat in *Tales of the South Pacific*, Yates and Thérèse in *The Crusaders*, and the Colonel and Renata in *Across the River and into the Trees*—are regarded more sympathetically by the novelist, as at least understandable in the condition of war, each is spoiled in some way on account of the evil condition that brought it to fruition. The contrast with marriage is usually marked.

THESE are the usual crimes against fraternity. The criminal is self-love, and the aggravated cases are ubiquitous. Sometimes the enemy of democracy seems to reside particularly in the professional military class, but the generals' tyranny is shown to be an extension of evil shared by civilian soldiers and by civilians, too.

In *The Naked and the Dead* General Cummings is a philosophical as well as practicing fascist, and, exactly like the German generals in Theodor Plevier's *Stalingrad*, he is ambitious to lead his nation to world conquest in World War III. But General Cummings' attitudes are generalized and shaded in other char-

acters, so that the fight with the Japanese becomes incidental to the conflict within and among the American officers and men on Anopopei—a conflict symbolical of stresses within the whole nation and the world. General Marvin, armored-force commander in *A Bell for Adano*, “showed himself during the invasion to be a bad man, something worse than what our troops were trying to throw out,” but civilian-soldier Captain Purvis is no better friend of democracy. In *The Crusaders* the central irony is that suggested by the title: the contrast between the ideals of the “crusade” in Europe and the motives of many of the characters. General Farish is an accessory rather than a chief villain; more despicable are the civilian soldiers who find in the Army new and splendid opportunities for brutality, graft, and fornication.

Not only the generals, not only the civilian soldiers, but American society itself is found to be deficient in democratic values. Americans, according to Mailer’s general, have “an exaggerated idea of the rights due themselves as individuals and no idea at all of the rights due others.” Black marketing, corruption in military government, race prejudice, and sexual license are all paralleled by activities on the home front.

In *The Naked and the Dead* flashbacks called “The Time Machine” trace the characters’ denial of democratic values to their conditioning by life in America. The segregation of Negroes in Florida is the problem about which the action of *Guard of Honor* centers. To the progressive corruption of Germany under Hitler *The Young Lions* suggests numerous parallels in America. It is in Santa Monica, California, just after his father died, that Noah finds out that the crematory “don’t burn kikes.” In *Repent in Haste* Naval Aviator Boysie Boyden is the perpetual boy produced by American schools and colleges. Although a good and brave flier, he and his unfaithful wife Daisy have accepted a set of values which repudiate the very basis of Boysie’s valor and which have made it impossible for their son to have the kind of family and boyhood that Boysie is willing to die for.

The corruption in American business and politics likewise discourages mutual liking and respect among human beings. In *The Crusaders* Loomis' and Willoughby's crooked deals are clearly a projection, in a condition of greater opportunity, of their activities as American business men, and Dondolo's brutality a similar projection of his activities as a ward politician. In *Across the River* what Colonel Cantwell dislikes most about the modern Army is its infusion by the methods of American business and politics. War, according to *An Act of Love*, is simply an extension of the usual economic conflict:

... What about the way people killed each other in peace, too? Maybe they didn't kill each other dead. There was a law against that. But they killed each other's natures and lives. And what was the difference between killing an affectionate nature with a bullet or with a struggle for money?

If war were only an insanity, a fit, a tantrum, a sickness, it would not be so bad. It could be lasted out, and then, if one remained alive, one could go about his normal business. But what was the normal business of an American if not war—if not struggle, struggle to remain alive, struggle to keep what you had and take what your neighbor had, struggle to win in a competition?

ALTHOUGH evil is traced back to the society that produced the soldiers, it is not merely social evil in the sense that social institutions are the cause of personal evil. Contrary to the concept of natural goodness once influential in determining the theory of democracy, evil appears imbedded in nature, human and otherwise; and the collective implication seems to be that, with evil so deeply seated, democracy will do unexpectedly well to hold its own.

A century and a half ago, strengthening the concept that "nature" is on the side of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, political economy held that even selfish economic enterprise "naturally" results in happiness for all. What was really "natural," since it was supported by self-interest, was the resulting con-

fusion of moral with material progress. Let it be said to the credit of imaginative literature that it was never much taken in by a proposition which today is repudiated at every traffic light. Like most modern novels of any sort, these war novels attack selfish materialism, seeing it as a cause of endless wars. As if in mockery of the optimism of the nineteenth-century liberal with his belief that man's natural impulses make for general happiness and that material progress is correlative with moral progress, a frequent character in these novels is the ineffectual liberal, whose opposition to tyranny is feeble or ridiculous and who is permitted to become a hopeful figure only when (and if) he makes the sacrifice of self that fraternity demands. Although the modern war novel generally proposes no substitute for the traditional democratic values—although these values remain the basis for whatever hope the novelist may have—they have been wrested from the context of nineteenth century liberalism and its belief in progress.

Three degrees of pessimism may be distinguished. In the most pessimistic group of novels, evil clearly has the upper hand in the struggle with good. The second group shows democracy limited rather than defeated. In contrast to the first and second groups, which respectively emphasize defeat and limitation, the third may be said to emphasize consummation—but only a limited and difficult one.

The first group includes *Across the River*, *The Naked and the Dead*, *Repent in Haste*, *Lost Island*, and *From Here to Eternity*. Within the limitations imposed by an evil world, the ideal of fraternity still persists in *Across the River*, but it is the fraternity of those who have faced up to the horror of life, usually, it seems, as combat infantrymen. Although this kind of fraternity cuts across national and political barriers, it is not the one-world type of fraternity that is supposed eventually to prevent war. The Colonel, although he likes the Russians "very much," is ready to fight them or anybody else he is ordered to. In a world that destroys love there can be no farewell to arms but death, but even so it is



worth dying bravely. This can be man's only victory, and it is not one for democracy.

*From Here to Eternity* is an assertion of individuality; but since democracy implies a love or respect for others that limits individual freedom, *From Here to Eternity* is also a denial of democracy. It presents a world of people inevitably isolated from each other, where love brings destruction rather than salvation. Private Prewitt loves the Army, but, jailed for insubordination, he is forced to watch a fellow prisoner beaten to death by a guard. Upon his release, he murders the guard, deserts, and after Pearl Harbor is shot by M.P.'s while trying to rejoin his company. It is First Sergeant Warden's integrity rather than his life that is threatened by love, but Warden falls out of love with the Captain's wife in time to avoid the double ignominy of a commission and marriage. The tough prisoners in the Stockade approach a kind of fraternity in their mutual respect (like the fraternity of Hemingway's combat infantrymen), but their usual disregard for others' rights almost equals the Army's disregard for theirs. Socialist Jack Malloy, who speaks for love as a social good, admits his inability to practice it. As far as the relation between man and woman is concerned, selfishness asserts itself as soon as the physical novelty has worn off, the only positive implication being that men and women should be free to find carnal pleasure (Jones uses a simpler term) where they wish. Middle-class values of material success and prudish morality destroy some people's integrity and drive others to crime, but the elusive "real enemy" that makes one man fight another appears, basically, to be the fact of human existence and its inexorable pattern of cause and effect. The best one can do is to enjoy what life has to offer and to die—like Prewitt when he stops running and turns his chest to the approaching slugs—without compromising his integrity.

Mailer does not allow his characters even the satisfaction of dying well. The ultimate irony of *The Naked and the Dead* is the pointlessness of all the brutality and death. In parallel missions,

both the General and his fascistic counterpart, Sergeant Croft, are robbed of their victories, except of course over Hearn, the ineffectual and materialistic liberal. With a few exceptions the characters do not reveal moral qualities worth dying for. According to flashbacks, it is true, these soldiers might have had more admirable values if they had lived under different conditions; but there is no promise that the war is going to remedy the situation. Rather it promises only to be a prelude to World War III: to still greater encouragement of human selfishness and bestiality and still greater discouragement of human decency. *Repent in Haste* is resolved in a similar victory of sensuality over love, a victory that runs counter to the ostensible purpose of the war. *Lost Island* dramatizes technology triumphant over a happy life, as, to make room for an air strip, the serenity, friendliness, and peace of a Pacific island are done away with.

*Guard of Honor*, *The Friend*, and *Mr. Roberts* show how selfishness and ignorance limit fraternity. Democracy supposes a considerable degree of disinterestedness and reason or at least enlightened self-interest, but in *Guard of Honor* every moral or rational excellence is seen to be tempered by some defect, every skill by stupidity, every "virtue graded into the accompanying fault." Just as the higher strategy of war must be limited by a consideration of "the possible," so must the mature man become aware of the possible in all the affairs of life. To lay aside one's illusions is "the hard way," but the strong man goes on without them. This wisdom of conservatism has come to old Colonel Ross but not to liberal Lieutenants Edsel and Phillips, whose brashness and self-centeredness only complicate the problem that Colonel Ross finally solves, with an approximation of justice, through compromise. Filling out the pattern of excellences and compensatory defects are numerous sexual affairs ranging from complete degradation to monogamous devotion but each in some way falling short of the perfection of love or intelligence or human dignity and all adding up to the conclusion that human nature

strictly limits the possible. Similar to *Guard of Honor* in its theme of "virtue graded into the accompanying fault" is *The Friend* by Perry Wolff. Although friendship, under pressure, gives way before the urgency of survival, the ideal of fraternity is only confined.

There were limits to friendship. It was not love. It could be forgotten in danger and at distance. The Army could attack it, and the war could dissolve it. Nevertheless, it was not fragile. After life itself, it was the next necessity.

*Mr. Roberts*, for all its practical joking, is resolved about as grimly as any of these novels, although with a limitation rather than a denial of fraternity. Roberts' death suggests that in a world where most people are indifferent to his values—where fraternity can exist only within a narrow circle as scarcely distinguishable from self-interest—the best that the fighting liberal can look forward to is death, perhaps while doing nothing more heroic than drinking coffee. The immediate effect of Roberts' death is to stimulate the cowardly and Sybaritic Ensign Pulver to carry on Roberts' campaign against the Captain, but one cannot feel that Pulver, beyond this one tribute to his friend, will take any further interest in combatting tyranny.

The remaining novels—the least pessimistic ones—still do not look forward to any progressive realization of democratic values. From the French Revolution to the New Deal, liberal thought has frequently held that morality is conditioned by social institutions and, anticipating the improvement of those conditions, has looked forward to saying a farewell to arms. But even in the third group evil appears to be so deeply seated in man and nature that, apparently, any semblance to decent society may be achieved only through continual struggle. Although there is not a complete break with the tradition of society's responsibility, these novels show an increased recognition of the individual's responsibility for good and evil. What hope they hold out for a world fit to live in is based on the individual's recognition of that responsibility.

The consummation of values is never complete or easy. In *A Bell for Adano* the immediate victory is to the fascist American general and his collaborator Captain Purvis. But when Major Joppolo leaves the town where he has worked for the people's spiritual as well as material needs, the bell remains as a symbol of his accomplishment.

Although not without his share of human weaknesses, Joppolo is an effective democrat from the beginning. A more frequent pattern is the development of a character who learns the need for love and sacrifice. In *The Young Lions* Michael Whitacre is one of the liberals who would have his moral cake and eat it too. Michael is a stage manager and assistant producer well known on Broadway and in Hollywood, and it is through him, his wife, and his concubines that we encounter the seven deadly sins in glamorous surroundings. But Michael ends up at the front sharing "a community enterprise" to an extent to which his liberal theories had never impelled him. The ending of the novel has been considered sentimentally optimistic, but its optimism is indeed subdued. Noah Ackerman, the character in whom the ideal of human dignity is most nearly fulfilled, is killed by the German soldier Christian, who has come to symbolize a complete denial of humanity. "When the war is over," says Noah, "the human beings are going to run the world. . . ." At that moment Noah is shot. The resolution is not in Noah's optimism—for that is cancelled by Christian's bullet—but in Michael's compulsion to save his friend or at least destroy the evil that has struck him down. Having exterminated Christian, Michael (new leader of the warrior angels) carries Noah's body back to camp.

The erstwhile ineffectual liberals Yates in *The Crusaders* and Helianos in *Apartment in Athens* also discover that they can make no separate peace with evil. Also, although hardly liberals, Jake in *The Wine of Astonishment*, Harry in *An Act of Love*, and Chaplain Bascom in *The Gallery* achieve the sacrifice of self that fraternity demands. But there is no suggestion that the human

beings are going to start running the world. In *The Crusaders* the crooks and bullies continue to flourish in one way or another, and in *An Act of Love* the world remains "a place of animals who had raised themselves up on two legs to pit fear against love in themselves."

More in the tradition of progress than any of the other books that have been discussed is *Tales of the South Pacific*.<sup>1</sup> Usually Michener admires American democracy and technological progress along with it. He is ecstatic about the accumulation of equipment and men and the meticulous planning for the "landing on Kuralei."

Alligator was a triumph of mind, first, and then of muscle. It was a rousing victory of the spirit, consummated in the flesh. It was to me, who saw it imperfectly and in part, a lasting proof that democratic men will ever be equals of those who deride the system: for it was an average group of hard-working Americans who devised Alligator.

At best such an effort is under the direction of men like Commander Hoag, who "was from Atlanta, but he championed the Negro. He was a rich man, but he befriended the meanest enlisted man. He was a gentile, but he placed Jews in positions of command. He was a man tired with responsibility, but he saw to it that others got rest."

This sounds a lot different from *The Naked and the Dead*. But despite this triumph of democracy, of technology abetting and abetted by fraternity, there are dissonances. When Commander Hoag is killed, a "loud-mouthed bully" complete with race prejudice takes his place. When an air strip is needed on Norfolk Island, the beautiful trees, "the cathedral of the spirit" must be "knocked to hell." As in *Guard of Honor* the sexual enterprise of free Americans runs the gamut from bestiality to love in marriage, with the usual number of otherwise nice fellows who are unfaithful to their wives. There is even the suggestion that something is wrong in a society where two people who love each other

cannot marry because they have different-colored skins. Perhaps the form of the book may be a result of Michener's difficulty in integrating his feelings about democracy at war, just as a similar pattern in *Mr. Roberts* suggests a similar difficulty. Although one must not find fault with a book of short stories for not being a novel, it may be inferred that Michener is less sure of the realization of democratic values than a selection of his stories might indicate.

THE DESIRABILITY of traditional values, their repudiation among soldiers and civilians during World War II, and the improbability of their progressive realization—these are the constants in the novels that have been discussed. Only the extent of the denial and the degree of pessimism vary. With the possible exception of Hemingway and Jones, the novelists do not suggest any substitute for values of the democratic tradition: liberty as distinguished from license, the equality of all individuals, nationalities, and races, the superiority of human or spiritual values over material ones, and—what is basic to all—the sacrifice of self for others. Hemingway and Jones add a measure of hedonism, but each puts in his word for human relationships free from self-interested materialism.

So, when these novels suggest that values change in war time, the change is on the level of practice—of characters and action in the novels. Here, it seems, war-time soldiers and civilians violate these values because, having denied them on a smaller scale in peace time, they find more reasons and opportunities for denial during war. No quality is more marked in these novels than this low appraisal of American morality. A few characters, recognizing their individual responsibility for others' welfare, find a new consummation of such values, but even those novels that stress such consummation show it to be difficult and occasional. At worst, as in *The Naked and the Dead*, the novelist foresees a pro-

gressive decline of democratic values; at best, as in *The Crusaders* or *The Young Lions*, he suggests that through the leadership of a few enlightened and disinterested people democracy may take a stand against the enemy within its ranks.

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