

Critical Stories about the Nature of War in American and British Literature

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General Robert E. Lee once reflected during a battle: “It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it.”

- Spoken on the occasion of the Confederate victory at Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862 where the army of Northern Virginia won a rare and very one-sided battle against the Union army (*Civil War Quotes*).

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

It appears that as a country we have grown fond of war, or least we have forgotten in the 140 years since the Civil War, what it means to have war on our own hallowed ground—9/11 notwithstanding. As a citizen of these United States, as a woman with a 21-year-old son, and as a teacher of American and British literature in two separate Advanced Placement (A/P) courses, I am perplexed and frightened about this whole notion of war and the reality that we are at war. That’s why I want my students to examine the pertinent and timely issues involved in both the history and the current events of *America at War*. Grappling with the big questions and the big ideas in ways both abstract and concrete, my students in A/P literature and A/P language will have a chance to examine the macrocosmic and microcosmic implications of violence on earth.

What are these implications? I am not completely sure, but my approach will be to apply the concept of *Weltschmerz*, which is a German term meaning “world pain.” It describes a sense of anguish about the nature of existence, usually associated with a melancholy, pessimistic attitude. Since I suspect that most wars grow out of pessimism and “fear and trembling” about a lasting peace, I think understanding world pain as a part of the condition in societies and individuals is critical to understanding the nature of war through stories.

The other components to understanding organized violence involve our human instinct for survival and the age-old problem of vendettas or vengeance, what was in the Old Testament understood as law: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Human beings are socialized so that their sense of reason overrules basic instinct, and yet in the most organized civilizations in the world, violent aggression is rampant—in the streets, in the cities, on television, and at the dinner table. Despite advances in human psychology and medicine, we still cannot curtail the kind of violence we do to each other, much less the more large scale escalations which we consider war.

I have never understood why anyone would want to fight someone else. I do understand the necessity of self-preservation, but the issues and the politics elude me. I have students who are nearing draft age and the thought of these young men and women having to go halfway around the world to protect me, (us, all of us) helps me to understand what a tenuous grip it is we have on our freedom. “I can’t completely define what this freedom is,” one of my students wrote, “because I have nothing with which to compare it, but I’d like to hold on to what I’ve got.” His words spoke to me, perhaps more than September 11, 2001 did; more than Vietnam did thirty years ago. The difference is that then, I was a child and some of my friends went to war, but I was young and they were young; today, these are children thirty years my junior—the age of my own children—and *it is hard* to conceptualize that a child, maybe even one of my own children, could die on a faraway battlefield.

Today, my children are inheriting a world where terrorism is the norm. They cannot tell night from day or good from evil, and perhaps this is the problem with our strictly relativistic society. In discussing war, Ernest Hemingway’s main character in *A Farewell To Arms* addresses the problem with our singular and collective visions—this particularly holds true since the context is war. The title itself implies a goodbye to armament, to fighting, and to love. War conquers love; more profoundly, it ends a life—Hemingway implies.

In *A Farewell To Arms*, Hemingway wrote the following words, which say so much about the times we live in, how we end up broken in our pursuit of dominance, and how, one way or another, the world tames us:

I know that the night is not the same as the day: that all things are different, that the things of the night cannot be explained in the day, because they do not seem to exist, and the night can be a dreadful time for lonely people once their loneliness has started. But with Catherine there was almost no difference in the night except that it was an even better time. If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them, to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward, many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break, it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these, you can be sure it will kill you too, but there will be no special hurry. (249)

This statement addresses most of what we know about the pain of the human experience, both in times of war and in times of peace. If wars grow out of aggression, terrorism, pessimism, and the failure of faith, then it is worthwhile to examine what some of the great philosophers and novelists have said about war; therefore I will teach about war through the stories of war in American and British Literature.

The Precise Focus

To clarify, I want students to read about war through literature. Understanding that literature is not history, but can deliver a greater truth, I wish to use the literature to help students arrive at their own understanding and personal truths about the nature of war, and their personal commitment to a lasting peace, however possible. I will give them the following quotes to jump start their writing and thinking about war, prior to assigning the required readings at each grade level. Their responses to the quotes will become journal entries. Students will continue to bring other quotes and ideas they research about war as our discussion and reading continues. This unit will be taught at appropriate times during the year where it fits into the district curriculum. The initial phase will last six weeks, beginning with the opening of school in August. As we progress through our literary school year, the lessons and strategies developed here will build on and enhance other materials designed both by me and others for use in these courses.

Beginning Lessons: Initial Quotes for Journalizing with Questions

“Every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace.” (St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 19, Chapter 12).

1. What is Saint Augustine saying about the paradox inherent in waging war and seeking peace? Possible Answer: He appears to comment on our motives, on human nature. Augustine indicates that to seek peace is the antithesis of seeking war, and that all efforts to seek peace by waging war are fraught with problems in the initial premise. He is also saying that it is a fallacious assumption to think that one can ever under any circumstances seek peace by waging war.
2. Is this complicated or does it just seem that way? Possible Answer: Students will be allowed to debate these possibilities. Students will be asked to apply Augustine’s ideas to current conflicts in the world and to evaluate them in lieu of this philosophy. Lively discussions are expected since a major goal is to allow students the opportunity to become self-directed learners, while simultaneously collaborating and sharing information, opinions, and resources.

“War is not an adventure. It is a disease, like typhus.” (Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Flight to Arras*, Chapter 10).

1. What is Saint-Exupery saying about war as disease? How is this a disease of the human condition, of human civilization? Possible Lectures: Disease spreads and destroys without inoculation or antibodies. If this is the same for war, then what constitutes inoculation? Socialization different from our violence-prone commercial culture? Are there any antibodies for war? Plato seemed to think that the cure for war was death. Students will be asked to research and debate these issues after the initial journaling and discussion.

2. Why is it that the media and toy manufacturers depict war as a great adventure? Possible activities will include research on “Teens and Shopping,” and the showing of a film by the same name to help students understand that to the marketing community they are a vast source of wealth and uncharted territory often compared to the rich resources of Africa.

“War {...} does not escape the laws of Hegel. It is in a state of perpetual becoming.” (Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Time Regained*, Chapter 2, p. 943).

1. What are Hegel’s Laws? (This is presented as a PowerPoint presentation to the junior classes). The focus here will be on Hegel’s ideas about reason as God, and its fulfillment throughout history. We will then discuss what the implications of this assertion and philosophy are in terms of the history of war on earth.
2. What is it about the nature of war that makes Proust say that it is in a state of perpetual becoming? Is he suggesting that human civilizations cannot avoid war? Do you accept or reject this assertion? Explain your answers with evidence from your readings and discussions about war.

These questions will draw on students’ prior knowledge before they begin their intensive reading and writing about wars in the literature. I readily defend the use of quotes and the exposure of these students to the ideas of great thinkers and soldiers of former wars because as AP students, they must be able to elaborate and write in-depth commentary about excerpted information, often with little or no prior knowledge.

So this approach as an initial strategy is one that works. It provides students with a way to fine-tune their thinking and their writing in a safe venue, before having to defend ideas in larger, whole class discussions.

The reasoning here is that if they can write a pertinent, in-depth paragraph from one or two lines of quoted material, then this will help them practice writing a longer analysis of two and half to three pages (timed) in response to the College Board’s released Advanced Placement essay prompts for both AP Language and Composition and also AP Literature and Composition.

The Literary Teaching Strategy

The philosophical issues of love and hate, good and evil, the nature of war, and the nature of peace, are too broad and unwieldy to be treated in the scope of this dual junior year to senior year unit, but I intend to explore these issues within the context of the literature I teach—literature in which the reality of war serves as a backdrop for these most compelling stories within the human experience.

The current conflicts in which America, and to a lesser extent her allies, are involved, include the wars on terrorism, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq. These issues will be discussed

through periodical literature and electronic and print news reports, which will also serve as opportunities to teach media literacy.

Over a period of two school years, I generally see the same students, first as juniors and then as seniors, so I want this unit to have dual applicability. It will have a component for each set of students, and will allow them to progress in their thinking about war and peace as they grow into more thoughtful and critical readers and writers.

I will begin with the junior course in American Literature, AP Language and Composition. The previous Hemingway excerpt will be placed on the overhead and students will read it and write about it prior to reading the novel in its entirety. Because this statement sums up the main strengths of a course like this from my perspective, I will use it to introduce the literature of war and offer my students these questions. So the questions I pose are these: “What literature can I teach you? What ideas can I offer you? What consolation can I give to you children who are inheriting an America that has changed its vision (or I think it has)? How do we preserve our foundation? How are we broken as a result of war? And has any war ever resolved anything?”

My basic issue as an educator involves my own self-questioning of my teaching, and whether or not I am reaching these children in a way that will effectively influence their behavior; whether that is by their consistently casting a vote, choosing to make peace in a street fight, or analyzing and reading with a critical eye. So what do these children need to know that will help them fight the real war, the one that Jefferson fought and Lincoln fought, the one which struggles to ensure that the “government of the people shall not perish from the earth?”

The Initial Teaching Strategies

Truthfully, I enter this undertaking with more questions than answers, but my idea for a curriculum unit is to organize a seminar using short excerpts and group discussions based on the readings where I utilize the Socratic method and facilitate the dialogues with new information as appropriate. My model is experimental. It will contain an extensive research/discovery component designed for the kinds of students I teach, students who are independent learners to some extent, but who are most definitely independent thinkers. This lecture/discussion model is my proposed teaching approach. For student-centered instruction, the research unit I design will involve group work, individual work, panel discussion and a media component. I want to give students an opportunity to express themselves creatively by creating artwork, music, and literature of their own.

More than anything else, I want to help my students know how to negotiate their futures, a time I may not be here to witness, but one in which they will most certainly have to rely on the lessons and wisdom of the past, just as I am relying on them to understand better these uncertain days.

Junior Year American Literature Texts

For the juniors, my goal is to allow students to self-select from among the books I think they might like to read. My assigned reading listed includes *Company Aycht*, *Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, *A Farewell To Arms*, and at least one excerpt from the American Revolution. Students will also read the text of Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address*, and *The Declaration of Independence*. These selections will serve as an introduction to the founding principles that are guideposts in American History. This particular rhetoric preserves and sustains the America Idea, the one we willingly choose to give up our lives to preserve because our past has taught us this is still the best place to be on earth. My students' studies of the American wars will parallel their studies of various periods in American history and literature, which is taught chronologically (at least that is the way the textbook is arranged). After they make their selections, I will organize them into reading groups with specific project goals, which will involve extensive research in order to address some of the questions posed here. Specific lessons on each book will cover the themes, plot, implications, and relevance to wars past and present. I will also choose excerpts from the media of current wars that students will read for accuracy and discuss in class. We will then present our lessons on war orally, simultaneously commenting on the current state of affairs in America and abroad.

By selecting their own literature from a list of possibilities, I want to provide my students, many of whom are second generation immigrants, with some contextual reference points, some common ground, to help them understand who we are as Americans, and what America means to us. They are very clear about what America means to the world: from streets lined with gold to vast stores of wealth, America immediately translates in my students' minds to mean comfort, safety, and opportunity.

Again, *A Farewell To Arms*, *Company Aytch: A Classic Memoir of the Civil War*, and *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* are the texts for my junior AP Language and Composition classes. Using the excerpt from *Farewell to Arms*, this story will become the focal point for our beginning of the year discussion of American literature. Students read the novel as summer reading, so they will be tested over the basic plot, characters, and themes the second or third week of class. Normally, the American experience in literature is treated chronologically so the first war to be studied will be the American Revolution.

Students read *The Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Paine's *The Crises I and II*, and Patrick Henry's *Speech in the Virginia Convention*. Juniors generally read about the Civil War before Christmas and the textbook selections include: Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, Robert E. Lee's *Letter to His Son*, Mark Twain's *A War Prayer*, and the film version of *The Red Badge of Courage*. To this I will add excerpts from *Company Aytch*, which we will read, analyze, and discuss in class. Based on the experiences I have had

with the visceral imagery of this book, I know it will be an extraordinary representation of one of the bloodiest wars ever fought on America soil.

In terms of substance, we will address the internal conflicts of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and their social, political, and economic implications. A major lesson component for these junior level students, who are also taking American History, will be for them to examine the historical implications of the *Gettysburg Address* and its relevance today. The students will also read and analyze an excerpt from Abraham Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address*. Students will have access to websites, and their history and literature books, which will give them the facts of the Civil War. I would like to have them collect pictures, songs, and read and discover other first-hand accounts of the Civil War, once we have finished *Company Aytch*.

A Note about Transitional Teaching Strategies

Generally my junior students progress to my senior class. I would like to build on the foundation I have laid the previous year, by challenging them to move from American historical and literary accounts of war to a much more profound frame of reference—the nature of war and the human situation.

The Senior Year Texts in British Literature

As they proceed to their senior year, I will add *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to my students' reading lists, with a focus on particular parts of the text in combination with the recently produced classic films of J.R.R. Tolkien's novels. I will also use the classic Joseph Campbell film, *The Power of Myth* with the seniors as a prequel to their reading and viewing of the stories. Campbell said that we re-create ancient legends in our daily lives to release human potential. With this fact as my premise, I will, along with my students, explore J.R.R Tolkien's trilogy as a legend created to help us understand the nature of war, and to help us understand the concept of a just war versus will to power. According to critic Lin Carter, quoted in Joseph Pearce's biographical work, *J.R.R. Tolkien, Man and Myth*, Tolkien, "like Dante, was concerned with 'the eternal verities of the human soul'"(177). She adds that what was important to both Dante and Tolkien, "was not the accidental trappings of everyday life, but the essential nature of everlasting life, not what human society was becoming, but what humanity was being, not the peripheral, but the perennial." I would add that war and heroism, struggle and the triumph of the human spirit are part of these perennials; for indeed the human experience is the story of war and conflict.

It has been my observation that war itself is a human inheritance and part of a long history of related ideas. Anthropologists have observed that on earth, only ants, chimpanzees, and human beings wage war. After my seniors have reviewed the early tribal wars in British history, *Beowulf* and *Grendal*, and the medieval stories of *King Arthur* and the *Canterbury Tales*, they often observe that most of the literature reflects

the conflicts of history. They begin to note for themselves the nature and prevalence of war in the human story. They are then ready for Campbell's *The Power of Myth*, and prepared to examine the current events, the media, and the literature from a more philosophical perspective. Clearly, my answers (or my consolations) have always been found in the books I read; therefore, I can offer them no better prescription to heal their psyches and perhaps their lives.

For my seniors, the focus of war will be on the larger philosophical questions about why wars exist, human nature as a causal factor, and whether we can find a lasting peace. My major vehicle for these lessons and discussion will center on the seminal work of J.R.R. Tolkien. His *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy begins with another novel, *The Hobbit*, a story in which Bilbo Baggins, the original hobbit in Tolkien's mythology, finds the "one ring to rule all rings" during his adventurous journey to slay a dragon (overcome his own fears and limitations), as he and Gandalf the Wizard leave the shire and go out into a very dangerous world.

This is an evolutionary story, both in the life of Bilbo and in the lives of all Middle Earth people as they come to understand that there is a "Dark Lord" who intends to enslave and distort all good people and things. This first book sets the stage for Frodo Baggins' adventures in the *The Lord of the Rings*, which begins some fifty years into the future, when Bilbo, weighted down by the evil power of a ring about to consume him, reluctantly passes on his ring and its responsibility to his young nephew Frodo, thus beginning the story of the Great War to defeat Sauron, the dark lord, and Sauron's first lieutenant. In a strong tale, peopled by good elves and bad elves called Orcs, dwarves, and a one-of-a-kind schizoid creature known by the names of Smeagol and Gollum, we see a tale unravel which defines the western understanding of God and the devil, of traps of pride, and the all-consuming and destructive implications of the pursuit of empire.

Senior AP Literature students will examine both the film and specific selections from *The Lord of the Rings* through the lenses of Brad Birzer's visionary book about the trilogy, called *Sanctifying Myth*. In this book, Birzer examines the redemptive power of this story and how it invokes our understanding of faith, and fighting, delineating what things are worth fighting, and ultimately dying for. But the early reviews of Tolkien, from 1954-1963 were not so kind. His work was sneered for its "simplistic, elitist appeal as an adult fairy tale" (Johnson 23). Many interpreted it as allegory, but everyone searched for its theme and according to Johnson, disagreed about their findings: "The effects of power, the response to the end of an age, freedom and responsibility, a search for stability. I hypothesize that these post WWII critics had enough of war and did not want to discuss this as a story about an unlikely warrior-hero and the mythology the story evoked for a western civilization that desperately needed a transcendent myth for the common man" (23). This is the theory I will propose to my students, as we begin to explore the story as myth and allegory, and make direct comparisons to the media presentations of current events over the past forty-to-fifty years since the publication of

The Lord of the Rings. It is certain that initially no one was exactly clear what this story was about and it was treated strictly as fantasy literature. By the time my students finish the Tolkien trilogy and *The Hobbit*, I will have taught them specific lessons from Birzer's text about the purpose and usefulness of this profound tale. Students will have also seen excerpts from the film, after which they will create characterizations and analyses of some of the most notable heroes of this mythological war.

Literature, War and the Media: An Uneasy Coexistence?

Why This? Because it must be said. Either we ignore the media or we address it.

In this tentative look at our free press, I will examine the media through news and magazine articles and attempt to point out discrepancies and contradictions. *On a larger scale I will promote a more literary approach to the subject of war, one that is both historical and timeless.* Is literature its own propaganda? If so, it is a powerful force for good in the world, in my opinion. But what about media itself, particularly electronic and print media? Until recently, I viewed the media as one of the most fundamental American freedoms. A free press seemed like the people's political policeman. It ensured that our elected officials and bureaucrats protected our interests.

Again, I sense that this is a naïve perception. Government-ruled media seems like something out of an Orwellian nightmare like the novel *1984*, but Big Brother is more than just science fiction and "we the people" are not alarmed by it. We acquiesce to everything because we have information overload; we work ourselves to death to get more things and we leave the real work of what to think to the people in power or the powerbrokers who sign our paychecks. I am a little disillusioned about how to teach my students media literacy when journalists practice doublespeak as often as politicians do.

I sometimes feel as a teacher that I do not know anything for sure anymore. My students ask whether we had a political coup in the presidential election of 2000. I tell them I do not know. Everyone has forgotten what happened. If it turns out that we did have a political coup, then our real enemies are not the foreign terrorists, but the partisan interest groups that would subvert democracy to their own ends. Then the terms of war must be redefined or changed: either we battle to preserve democracy from enemies within, and call this the real war, or we continue to create enemies in other countries by selling propaganda and arms to preserve the interests of some unseen powerbroker. This does not imply that there are not real enemies out there from whom we must protect ourselves, but that perhaps as secure, comfortable citizens, who bask in the luxuries of excess, we are our own worst enemies.

I remember my father discussing President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address at the end of 1959 when he warned Americans, particularly the newly elected President John F. Kennedy, to beware of the military-industrial complex. This was ironic coming from a man who, in the tradition of George Washington, was a famous war hero-general,

who became president. Is a military-industrial complex, which facilitates war to ensure its own interests, really running us? I hope not, but I do not know for sure whether or not we are drones. Perhaps I do think for myself, but I am dependent on a free press that is not as free as it once was. If there is a military-industrial complex dictating policy in this country, then we are a part of it, because it not only supplies arms to foreign countries, it also feeds us, clothes us, and lulls us into complacency as we slavishly enjoy our finely built homes and modern conveniences.

Yet few of us know our legislators or feel empowered to affect the course of history, even on a small scale. How do we know that our ideas are solid when an embedded media is shaping them? How can we claim our lives are not vacuous when we luxuriate in our security and our aggression, when what we possess is not a fact of life for most humans on this earth? What do I teach the kids? How do I know it is the right thing for them to know? And how do I empower both them and myself to do something about it?

A Possible Response to the Uneasy Coexistence of Media in Wartime – A Narrative Alternative

Perhaps the beginnings of that empowerment will come through the literature. Writers Robert Coles and Joseph Campbell both place a high value on the ‘call of stories’ and their purpose in the literature of a people during great trials or tests. Using Cole’s *The Call of Stories* and Campbell’s film, *The Power of Myth*, I will focus on what the story does to us as citizens of a particular social milieu, particularly citizens who have never experienced a war except on television or through the eyes of our newly arrived immigrants. My solution to media manipulation is to meet the objectives of my courses and simply teach media literacy, but my plan to address such literacy is through classic literature. I will not attempt to resolve the issues posed in the previous sections, except by asking what the right questions are and presenting good stories. I honestly cannot pretend to have the answers.

Notes on the Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination (for use with students)

Robert Coles is a physician, scholar, and writer, who discovered, during his work with medical interns who treated psychiatric patients, that one of the best ways to discover how to help patients was not through traditional psychoanalysis, but by allowing them to tell their stories. He says, and I agree, that the story is primal. Students in my junior and senior level AP classes must learn how to internalize and synthesize the texts they read for future use. Using Coles’ theories to discuss the selected literature, students will examine in essay form how specific stories serve to illuminate our visions of war, its heroes, and our responsibilities as citizens to ensure that our government truly represents the people it serves.

Notes for Teachers of War Literature—about Robert Coles

Robert Coles, at the beginning of Chapter 3 of *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, quotes George Eliot from the last Chapter of *Middlemarch*. She says this: “Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after years?” (Coles 67). This was the same question I asked at the beginning of this unit. What do I leave with my students that will help them face the future? Again, I rely on Eliot (in Coles). George Eliot wrote, “The fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers may find their long-awaited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval” (67). This suggests to me that my students need to know that life is uncertain, but also wonderful, that there is still a chance for redemption, for them and for our world.

Robert Cole’s text is an excellent resource for my teaching life because he offers up his experiences on teaching literature to medical students, and my students are pursuing health careers in college. His justification for teaching Literature in Medicine helps me justify the rather difficult and profound issues – like war – that I will insist on them learning. There are many lasting arguments for infusing Fine Arts and Literature into science and math core curricula, but I can think of none better than the kind of people we are producing—people who will make hospitals places of healing, and not as British author Oliver Sacks illustrates them in his 1984 essay, “A Leg To Stand On,” where he describes them as prisons and himself as a prisoner of war.

Notes for Teachers of War Literature on Joseph Campbell’s Myth’s To Live By (for use with Tolkien)

In teaching Tolkien’s Trilogy, I intend to approach it as myth, necessary myth about the nature of war. If our legends and stories are themselves primal rituals, then stories like *The Lord of the Rings* are designed to help us formulate a modern conceptualization of how society must function in times of war and peace. Campbell claims that “the function of ritual . . . is to give form to human life” (44). He describes ancient times when every social occasion was ritually structured “and the sense of depth was maintained through the maintenance of a strictly religious tone, while today this tone is only reserved for exceptional sacred occasions” (44). It is no wonder then that our children do not have an understanding of the values and foundations upon which our world struggles to maintain balance. Children rarely eat dinner with their parents, yet ironically, one the major rituals which has survived from ancient times are the regulations of military life. If a child learns that the place to find structure and meaning is through the accoutrements of war, then it is no wonder that we have a world which appears to accept death and dying, and war itself as passé. It is not unusual that many children and adults in America are in denial, have a socially sanctioned form of amnesia, or some combination of both when it comes war. After all, “it’s just what’s on television,” as one student said.

One example of such alienation and indifference can be found by integrating Fine Arts into literary philosophy and analysis: In Breughel's painting, "The Fall of Icarus," the ships, the birds, even the people on the ground, appear not to notice that a boy is literally falling from the sky. Joseph Campbell says that "all life is structure . . . in the biosphere, the more elaborate the structure, the higher the life form . . . so likewise in the human cultural sphere: the crude notion that energy and strength can be represented or rendered by abandoning and breaking structures is refuted by all that we know about the evolution and history of life" (44). If Campbell is correct, then as society destroys old rituals, and constantly replaces old structures with new ones, we have to be careful that we are not fostering a youth culture that feeds on chaos and destruction, since that may be the only structure they comprehend. Some children believe in the concepts implied by the Matrix movie trilogy but are not convinced that the Iraqi War is real.

The implications of this for teachers of literature lies in our understanding that the stories we teach are primal structures for our students, and can offer them rituals that give form to human life. The story I'm offering them is Tolkien's life and his work, the fiction, the non-fiction, and the evolution of one from the other. The trilogy is a major war story that has a cast of characters who are both commonplace and transcendent. Joseph Campbell's theories on the value of myths and legends serve as a great rationale for a lesson plan, and can also be used as the content for the introductory lesson on "War, Legends, and Literature," which is a lecture I give early during my students' senior year before they read *Beowulf*, *Grendal*, and *Frankenstein*. Myths are the mental supports of rites; rites, the physical enactment of myths.

By absorbing the myths of his social group and participating in its rites, the youngster is structured to accord with his social as well as natural environment, and "turned from an amorphous nature product, prematurely born, into a defined and competent member of some specific, efficiently functioning social order" (Campbell 47). If students are to perpetuate the social order of the future, my stake in their future is to see to it that they can make their lives become, when necessary, what Henry David Thoreau suggested in *Civil Disobedience*, "the counter-friction against the machine of (a misguided government), one that perpetrates violence and war."

Campbell adds that the first requirement of any society is that its adult membership should represent the fact that it is they who constitute its life and being, and the first function of the rites of puberty, accordingly; and they must "be able to establish in the individual a system of sentiments that will be appropriate to the society in which he is to live, and on which that society itself must depend for its existence" (47). So in times of war, what are we teaching our youth to help them preserve our way of life? Our mixed media messages are confusing. So again, I offer them a transcendent truth that can be found in the mythopoetical stories of *The Lord of the Rings*. But the most profound messages of both Campbell and Tolkien concern the challenges of adulthood. We must teach endurance, acceptance, the physics and metaphysics of consequences, and the persistence of eternal truth. Adults must behave as adults, and teach by example;

otherwise children will internalize our falsehoods, both the ones we deliberately perpetuate, and the lies we unwittingly tell ourselves.

LESSON PLANS

A Note about the Sample Lesson Plans

Each of the lessons below is based on lecture, discussion, and students' outside reading of the novels for their respective classes. Separate lessons on the media, propaganda, and the elements of argument will be used in addition to lessons on the aforementioned novels.

Lesson # 1: *A Farewell To Arms*

Objective

After reading *A Farewell To Arms*, students will discuss the ways in which war affects the lives of the individuals it touches. Students will analyze an excerpt from the text to explore Hemingway's attitudes toward war. This lesson will also include the following activities.

Activity One

One issue I want students to explore is whether or not this book glorifies war, and whether there is something about WWI that makes it worthy of such awe and inspiration. Is Hemingway saying that war is just a natural outgrowth of the human situation? Aristotle, Locke, and Hobbes would agree that under certain conditions war is necessary. Where they differ is on what constitutes necessity. Students will read excerpts on war by these philosophers to build on their understanding of some of the classic perspectives on the will to power, which is the covert aim of every war.

Activity Two

Since this lesson contains a discovery component, the students themselves will research these philosophers and report their findings to the class.

Assessment

Working in groups, after all the resources and research has been completed, students will develop a war chart showing what constitutes war, according to Aristotle, Locke, and Hobbes.

Culminating Activities

They will also read excerpts from the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, by Thucydides. They will internalize the connection between war and our Western understanding of sin. Once created, our WAR CHARTS will be placed on the wall. They will also note that the ancients were just as concerned as we are about ending war. We will leave a column for our on-going research on the wars on terrorism, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq.

Lesson # 2: *The Lord of the Rings*

Objectives

Seniors will read excerpts from *The Lord of the Rings*. We will illustrate the war heroes and listen to the music of this great epic. (Music by Enya.)

Activities

Students will explore the history, the politics, and the various cultures of Middle Earth (Tolkien's mythopoetical world). After everyone has a better understanding of the context of the novel, we will examine the Great War between Sauron and his monsters, and the good creatures (men, hobbits, elves, and dwarves) who people Middle Earth.

Assessment

Our final study will be the treatment of Tolkien's work as allegory and how this war mirrors all human conflicts. After being given a list of essay topics, students will complete independent reading and research to explore the issues that create conflicts in human societies. They will define war, 'declared' versus 'undeclared' war, the nature of peace, and attempt to answer the critical (essay) question of whether or not any society can ever achieve a lasting peace without the use of coercion and force.

Essay Questions for Use with Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy

1. In what ways is this story a sanctifying myth? What does it teach us about ourselves? About the triumph of the human spirit?
2. In the J.R.R. Tolkien Trilogy, the main characters struggle to triumph over the forces of evil in Middle Earth for a time span of 4000 years. This roughly matches the history of human civilization on earth from the time of the ancient Greeks. Do we understand that in history, time represents a revealing of higher truth in each generation, according to Hegel? If this is true, then is Tolkien telling us that the struggle cannot be looked at from just one era, one perspective, or solved in one's own lifetime?
3. Is there a deeply religious component about this trilogy, even though the forces of good and evil are in constant conflict? What is the religious/philosophical theme of this text? Is there more than one? Explain what you think they are and why. Use textual evidence to support your assertions.
4. The rings of power in *The Lord of the Rings* are dangerous. The Dark Lord creates them. What, if anything, could these rings of power represent in our world? Is Tolkien suggesting that anyone who wields absolute power is susceptible to evil? He certainly provides a text in which those who succumb to such power become Ringwraiths, kings who have fallen into darkness. Are leaders inherently Machiavellian? If so, why? And is this inherently evil?
5. Finally, what do the implications of this tale tell us about the nature of war, how to triumph in war, and what is at stake in any war?

Lesson # 3: Using the Media

Objectives

Students will bring periodical literature and utilize articles from the teacher's collection, to read current media reports on our current conflicts around the world. Students will then reenact the media reports from different venues, like FOX NEWS and CNN in order to compare and contrast the different media treatments of the same issues.

Activities

Students will draw on teacher materials and their own reading selections from *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *Texas Monthly*. Each day for a week, several students will alternate between reporting the news and being a part of the media analysis team. Teacher tools on Media Literacy and the elements of argument will be used to teach students how to analyze the assertions made by various reporters. Students will answer questions about validity of sources, slant, perspective, and conflicts of interest.

Assessment

The final portion of this project will be an essay in which students document their own journey as consumers of media, from whatever point they began in their understanding of the free press, to their understanding of how it is manipulated by politicians, bureaucracies, and big business. Students will be asked to evaluate and discover ways to solve the problems of false representation of facts, events, and issues, or they will have an opportunity to defend our free press and all of its operatives.

Culminating Activities

Where possible, students will watch previously recorded media reports together; perhaps a taping of the McNeil Lehrer report from PBS will be used to contrast with a local news affiliate. Included in this curriculum will be excerpts from war films, like *Saving Private Ryan*, and the seminal Vietnam War films, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Black Hawk Down*.

Lesson # 4: The Essay Component

Using and teaching Coles' and Campbell's theories, while simultaneously exploring the proposed literary selections in my junior and senior classes, I will use the essay questions below to provide my students with a springboard to creative or editorial writing over the course of two school years. This is by no means a comprehensive list of questions, but they provide a beginning. The discovery, discussion, reading and writing processes, which are each a vital part of the teaching of English, will no doubt shed more light on this subject once these lessons are taught and tested in the real-world classroom.

These questions should inspire students to read, to research and to learn new terminology while exploring legend, ritual, literature, the media, and war. Such questions will also give them some consolation for an uncertain future. One thing I try to do on a

weekly basis is to bring in relevant sources of material from art, science, and music, and where relevant, the medical field, to help them understand that the world itself is not compartmentalized, although we often forget that as we create our own categories of understanding.

Sample Essay Questions

- What is the difference between a just war and a war of aggression?
- What does Manifest Destiny have to do with American War History?
- When did we become imperialistic and why?
- Why are we fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan today? What do we hope to achieve? What are our true motives?
- As Americans, do we truly understand our democracy?
- What have you learned from the media about war and peace? Which media do you consider a solid news source? Explain.
- Take one of the fictional pieces you've read, like *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* or *Company Aycth* and explore the underlying themes in one chapter from each book.
- Using these characters from Tolkien: Frodo, Sam Wise, Gandalf, Legolas, Arwen, Galadriel, or Gimli, explain the role of each in contributing to a lasting peace. If each character is a symbol for something in this allegorical tale, what does each symbolize? How is the trilogy itself a great allegory? Of what? Be specific.

CLOSING REMARKS

No Literary Unit Can End Without Poetry, Especially in Wartime

I foresee revising this course as my knowledge grows and things change, but ultimately I too, am more interested, like J.R.R. Tolkien, in “those eternal verities of the human experience.” So perhaps I will end my course by offering my students something timeless and relevant – this sonnet – as a way to say goodbye to friends they will no doubt lose to war or life. Another of my consolations in these uncertain times is Shakespeare. Here, he offers up a perfect farewell with “Sonnet XXX”:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

Dedicated with fond remembrance to Professor Ross Lence.

(Also dedicated to HTI Founding Director, Dr. Paul Cooke, who is ending his term with us—*Vaya Con Dios*, 2004.)

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

Brasington, Jr., Larry. *From Revolution to Reconstruction—an HTML Project*. University of Groningen, 1994-2003. 6 May 2004. <<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa>>.

This is another source of information on the web about the Civil War generals and key figures in this era.

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths To Live By*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc, 1972.

A valuable resource on myth, legend, and their worth in teaching social values.

Civil War Quotes. 2003. Otherground, LLC and Civil-War. 1 May 2004.

<<http://www.civil-war.ws/quotes/quotes3.php>>.

This is a very useful website and would make an excellent resource for teachers and students who need immediate facts about the Civil War. It is the source of the quote by Robert E. Lee, a quote that can also be found in standard biographies about Lee, and on certain famous portraits of the battle of Fredericksburg, in Virginia. The source of this quote is mainly anecdotal, I suspect, since I could not find a published print source for it.

Coles, Robert. *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.

A very useful book if you are making decisions about the value of literature in teaching history, culture, and social values.

Johnson, Judith A. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.

An excellent resource on Tolkien with varied views from literary critics.

St. Exupery, Antoine. *Flight to Arras*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1999.
A good source of quotes, which students and teachers may want to read for further information about this luminary philosopher-adventurer and his escapades.

Supplemental Resources

Books for Students

Butler, Robert Olen. *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*. Grove Press, 1999: 155-261.

These stories are all about the human stories involved in our most recent major war, Vietnam. The earlier stories evoke a certain bittersweet poignancy at the human frailties and triumphs that become evident both because of and in spite of war. Great stories!

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage* (1900):

This is considered one of the most compelling books ever written about the Civil War. It is about a young man, who in the middle of a war must face the fact that he is a coward. This tale evokes the fears that every person faces when forced into a Darwinian world, like war, where only the fittest survive.

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell To Arms* (1945):

I've read this several times and my students love the story. I am always amazed by its power to evoke thought about war, its uncertainty and what it does to human relationships.

Lee, Chang-rae. *A Gesture Life*. Riverhead Books, 1999.

I have not read this work yet, but it has been described by the Chicago Tribune as "a touching, multi-layered rumination of an uneasy psyche. It is also a tragic, horrifying page-turner, whose evocation of wartime victims is unforgettable..." It is a New York Times Notable book and its author was the opening speaker at the 2003 NCTE Convention in San Francisco, a clear indicator that this work is suitable of high school students.

Twain, Mark "A War Prayer" (1900):

This satiric piece of writing shows young people that a war is never just one-sided and that a prayer for victory is also and always a prayer for the death and destruction of the so-called enemy.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings* (1954)

A myth, an allegory, a fantasy, and possibly a parallel universe -- this story is now a major motion picture, but nothing evokes the profound message that good must triumph over the dark forces of the world better than this journey into Middle

Earth. It was named in one recent poll as the greatest literary work of the 20th century. In my mind, it is among the greatest value tales ever told.

Watkins, Sam. *Company Aytch: A Classic Memoir of the Civil War* (1881)
A starkly real look at the raw, gory details of the Civil War. A first-hand look from 1882.

Books for Teachers

Birzer, Bradley. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth*. ISI Books, 2002.
A commentary on the meaning of the Tolkien Trilogy and his life. I have read parts of the book. It is a wonderful work by an excellent historian and fan of Tolkien.

Burke, Jim. *Illuminating Texts: How To Teach Students To Read the World*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2001.
With an analysis of websites, texts, media, tests, and visual literacy, this is a must have for any teacher who desires to assist students with their literacy and ability to make meaning in the information and technology age. The accompanying website is <http://www.englishcompanion.com/illuminating>. There are additional resources at this site.

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths To Live By*. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc, 1972.
This is an excellent resource on the value of ritual and rites to maintaining and ensuring the transference of values in a society.

Coles, Robert. *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.
A vital resource for understanding the value of stories in sustaining cultural values.

Harvey, John, "Making Meaning from Images: Hollywood's Treatment of World War I." In *Hollywood Distortions of History*, vol. 3. Houston Teachers Institute, 1999.
A good learning tool. Also available online at <<http://www.uh.edu/hti/cu/1999/v03/06.pdf>>.

Moscowitz, John E. *Critical Approaches to Writing About Film*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.
An excellent resource for teaching students how to criticize and evaluate films.

Pearce, Joseph. *Tolkien, Man and Myth: A Literary Life*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998.
This is a valuable reference on the connection between Tolkien's art and his life.

Prince, Stephen R. *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film*, 2d edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001.
An excellent classroom resource.

Films

Apocalypse Now. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Zoetrope Studios, 1979. (153 minutes)
A film made in the 1970s about the Vietnam War that depicts the dark side of this conflict, and the psychological impact it had on the people of the time, and how it impact each individual's world view.

Birth of a Nation. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Republic, 1915. (154 minutes)
An excellent film for teaching students about the social and moral climate, and the conflicts of the early 20th century.

Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth. Public Broadcasting Service, 1988.
This film has been described as an exhilarating journey into the mind and spirit of Joseph Campbell, a legendary teacher and masterful storyteller. Television journalist Bill Moyers does a fine job in this highly acclaimed PBS series which contains six separate segments: The Hero's Adventure, The Message of Myth, The First Storytellers, Sacrifice and Bliss, Love and the Goddess, and Masks of Eternity. This one is wonderful!

Red Badge of Courage. Dir. John Huston. Turner Entertainment Company, 1951.
Students really like this film, which I show them after they have read the book. Most likely they will read an excerpt from *Red Badge of Courage* and tackle the more challenging Company Aytch.