

**TRUTH IN FICTION:  
DISILLUSIONMENT OF CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS IN THE  
STORIES OF AMBROSE BIERCE**

**BY JILL BOSSERMAN**

*Jill Bosserman is a sophomore majoring in History and English Literature at Purdue University. While taking a course on the Civil War and Reconstruction with Professor Robert May in the fall of 2013, Jill found herself intrigued by the short stories of Ambrose Bierce, a soldier in the Union Army who later became a journalist and writer. Combining her passion for history with her enthusiasm for literature, Jill examines in this paper what Bierce's stories reveal about the attitudes of soldiers and civilians in the Civil War.*

A small child laughs delightedly at the bloodied faces of wounded soldiers, unable to comprehend the horror of the battlefield before him. Next, dark water swirls ominously below a man who is about to be hanged for his foolishly impulsive attempt to burn a Union bridge. Finally, a Union soldier pulls the trigger of his rifle after internal moral deliberation, sending his Confederate father to the grave. These three scenes are drawn from the short stories of Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, a writer and former Union soldier whose works look beyond romanticized notions of the Civil War to reveal the horrors of the battlefield. Although Bierce has been obscured by literary giants of the period, such as Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, the significance of his writing should not be overlooked. As Bierce's short stories reveal the atrocities of the war, they also explore how Civil War soldiers' romanticized notions of war transformed into disillusionment. In his stories, Bierce's soldiers attempt to reconcile their disappointed expectations with reality, a common struggle for returning soldiers. In particular, Bierce's stories explore these soldiers' discovery that the romantic mythos of war with which they had been indoctrinated had no basis in reality. Written from his own experiences as a soldier in the Civil War, Ambrose Bierce's short stories suggest that Bierce believed the horrors of the war were masked by the romantic idealism and patriotism of his fellow soldiers.

Understanding Bierce's literary works requires some knowledge of his background. In 1862, Ambrose Bierce enlisted as a private in the Ninth Indiana Regiment, which joined General William Nelson's Fourth

Corps of the Army of the Ohio, commanded by General Don Carlos Buell.<sup>1</sup> One of Bierce's first experiences as soldier was fighting at Shiloh, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. In fact, Bierce's regiment suffered the most casualties of all Union regiments on the second day of fighting.<sup>2</sup> In his essay "What I Saw of Shiloh," one of several autobiographical pieces in the first part of his *Collected Works*, Bierce describes his experiences at that battle. He begins the narrative by recalling the almost mystical quality of the call to assemble before the battle: "[T]his call...goes to the heart as wine and stirs the blood like the kisses of a beautiful woman. Who that has heard it calling to him above the grumble of great guns can forget the wild intoxication of its music?"<sup>3</sup> The assembly call invokes sensations of patriotism and duty, ideals that can lead men to commit otherwise unthinkable acts. Yet this eagerness to fight, invoked by the call to assemble, fades into gloom in the aftermath of the battle. After the fighting, Bierce comes upon a group of tents full of dead and wounded soldiers:

The kind of comfort they supplied was indicated by pairs of men entering and reappearing, bearing litters; by low moans from within and by long rows of dead with covered faces outside....It was as if the helpless had been carried in and murdered, that they might not hamper those whose business it was to fall to-morrow.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, as Bierce passes Shiloh Chapel, he finds it ironic that a Christian church has given name to the battle, which he refers to as a "wholesale cutting of Christian throats by Christian hands."<sup>5</sup> It is clear the battle of Shiloh gave Bierce a powerful early impression of war. Shiloh taught Bierce to wonder at the mystic power of the call to fight, but it also taught him to marvel at the atrocities and paradoxes of war.

After Shiloh, Bierce fought in the battle of Chickamauga, which took place September 19-20, 1863. This time, Bierce served as an acting topographical officer under Colonel William Babcock Hazen, a post he held from 1863-1864.<sup>6</sup> In "A Little of Chickamauga," Bierce hides none

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Fatout, "Ambrose Bierce, Civil War Topographer," *American Literature* 26, no. 3 (1954): 392, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2921693>.

<sup>2</sup> Fatout, "Ambrose Bierce," 392.

<sup>3</sup> Ambrose Bierce, *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce: Volume I* (1909; HathiTrust Digital Library), 237, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015032119979;view=1up;seq=1>.

<sup>4</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works, Volume I*, 247.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>6</sup> Fatout, "Ambrose Bierce," 391.

of the horrors of the battle from his readers. He notes that after the cannons fired on the enemy, the fallen Confederates were so thickly covered with dust that “they looked as if they had been re clothed in yellow.” Bierce then conjectures that after these men were buried, they were dug up again, as some were likely still “partly alive.”<sup>7</sup> Bierce’s reference of the soldiers’ yellow color echoes his use of color in “Chickamauga,” one of his most celebrated short stories. In the story, a deaf-mute child stumbles upon the bloody aftermath of Chickamauga while pretending to be a soldier. The child mistakes the blood-stained soldiers he sees for painted clowns: “Something in this—something too, perhaps, in their grotesque attitudes and movements—reminded him of the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them.”<sup>8</sup> The boy thinks the men crawling on their hands and knees are simply playing a game, until he gets a clear look at a man with a missing jaw. Frightened, the child runs home, only to find his house in flames and his mother dead. In writing “Chickamauga,” Bierce drew upon his own experiences at that particular battle. In the conclusion of his essay “A Little of Chickamauga,” Bierce alludes to how deeply the battle affected him: “To those of us who . . . keep in memory the dear dead comrades whom we left upon that fateful field, the place means much.”<sup>9</sup> Both Bierce’s memoir and his short story reveal how deeply Chickamauga affected him. In particular, the short story “Chickamauga” provides one of the best examples of Bierce’s use of macabre images to convey a profound sense of despair in response to the devastating consequences of the war.

Chickamauga, like Shiloh, proved a highly significant event in Bierce’s experience of the Civil War; yet Bierce considered another minor battle, known as the Battle of Pickett’s Mill, important enough to include in his *Collected Works*, alongside his reflections on Shiloh and Chickamauga. Fought on May 27, 1864, in Paulding County, Georgia, Pickett’s Mill marked an attempt by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman to attack the right flank of the army of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston. As an officer, Bierce was privy to exchanges between upper level officers, and was appalled when he heard Sherman had ordered Bierce’s depleted brigade of 1,500 men, led by General Hazen, to attack

---

<sup>7</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works, Volume I*, 272.

<sup>8</sup> Ambrose Bierce, *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce: Volume II* (1909, HathiTrust Digital Library), 52

<<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4082716;view=1up;seq=9>>.

<sup>9</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works: Volume I*, 278.

the right flank of Johnston's army. In his essay, "The Crime at Pickett's Mill," written in 1881, Bierce scathingly recalls Union General Thomas J. Wood telling General O. O. Howard to "put in Hazen and see what success he has." He continues blisteringly, "In these words of General Wood to General Howard we were first apprised of the true nature of the distinction about to be conferred upon us."<sup>10</sup> Although the brigade fought so well that Confederate General Johnston thought his men were fighting the entire Fourth Corps, not just one brigade, the battle was a Confederate victory. Bierce believed that by sending a depleted brigade to fight, Wood and Howard were criminally negligent.<sup>11</sup> The Battle at Pickett's Mill was significant to Bierce because it showed him that the judgment of his superiors was not always infallible. Not only was this realization significant to Bierce's own military career, but it was one of many factors that shaped his perception of the war. These perceptions guided Bierce later in life as he penned his incredibly insightful short stories.

After being initiated to the war at Shiloh, living through the horror of Chickamauga, and observing criminal negligence at Pickett's Mill, Bierce recalled his impressions of the war in his work as a journalist, poet, memoirist, and most notably, a writer of short stories. These stories typically end with an ironically tragic revelation that reverberates with the reader. One such example is "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," one of Bierce's most well-known short stories. This story first appeared in Bierce's *In the Midst of Life: Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* in 1891, and was later published in Part II of Bierce's *Collected Works* in 1909. After a brazen attempt to burn a Union bridge at Owl Creek, a Southern civilian named Peyton Farquhar finds himself hanging from a noose above the bridge. He falls into the water, unbinds his cords, and swims to safety amidst a sea of snipers' bullets. After making his way home, he tries to take his wife in his arms, but she fades away into nothing—for Farquhar is swinging from a noose above Owl Creek Bridge.<sup>12</sup> Scholar Peter Morrone notes Farquhar's experience in "The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" echoes the experience of the child in Bierce's "Chickamauga." Just as the deaf-mute child of "Chickamauga" wanders into the aftermath of the battle while pretending he is a soldier, the Southerner in "The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" "enters the wilderness driven by dream-like delusions and idyllic aspirations only to be awakened suddenly by the reality of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works: Volume I*, 283.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works: Volume II*, 27-45.

hellish nightmare thrust upon him.”<sup>13</sup> In both stories, Bierce creates a

character whose romantic ideal of war blinds him to the gruesome reality of battle until it is too late. This use of irony, which is typical of Bierce’s works, gives his stories their edge and forces readers to acknowledge the brutality of battle in a society that romanticizes war.

Arguing that Farquhar is seduced into his foolish attempt to burn the bridge by a romanticized perception of war, Morrone calls attention to the forces of ideology and propaganda that drive Farquhar to action. Bierce writes that Farquhar “chafed under the inglorious restraint” of his civilian status, “longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction.”<sup>14</sup> Morrone calls this longing a “civilian’s fantasy of war.” He writes that the mission to burn the Owl Creek Bridge “entails espionage, danger, and courageous action”—all “romantic elements” of martial duty and heroism “manipulating an impressionable mind.”<sup>15</sup> Like so many new recruits, Farquhar is totally ignorant of what war is really like, and this ignorance leads him to his own demise. Next, Morrone posits that Bierce’s exposure to military propaganda shapes his description of Farquhar’s almost fanatic desire to participate in the war. He claims Bierce’s experiences as a soldier “supplied the propaganda-like slogans he interlaced seamlessly in his text.” Farquhar’s model for “martial masculinity,” Morrone continues, is based on his attraction to “chivalric abstractions.”<sup>16</sup> As a member of the slave-owning class, Farquhar would have been exempted from serving in the Confederacy.<sup>17</sup> However, although he had no obligation to fight, Farquhar felt the call of duty and desires to serve the Confederacy anyway. Driven by a misguided perception of war based on the abstract concepts of honor and duty, Farquhar represents the civilian population, which Bierce portrays as utterly ignorant of the realities of the war.

After fighting in the war, “Bierce translated the grim realities of battle into a literary corpus that rejects rhetoric romanticizing war,”

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Morrone, “Disciplinary Conditioning and Self-Surveillance in Ambrose Bierce’s War Fiction,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2013): 318, doi: A331082407.

<sup>14</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works: Volume II*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Morrone, “Disciplinary Conditioning,” 317.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>17</sup> Armstead L. Robinson, “In the Shadow of Old John Brown: Insurrection Anxiety and Confederate Mobilization, 1861-1863,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 65, no. 4 (1980): 283-284, 10.2307/2716860.

according to Morrone.<sup>18</sup> Bierce's story "The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" reflects this rejection of traditionally romantic war rhetoric, as Farquhar's tragic act of patriotism ends in his senseless and unnecessary death. Indeed, every horrific image on the battlefield that scarred Bierce's psyche would come back to haunt his literary works on the Civil War. As Bierce rose to fame for his *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, the first version of his *Collected Works*, newspapers across the country took notice. On June 22, 1892, the *St. Paul Daily News* quoted one author's description of Bierce's style, calling it "as brilliant as his ideas are original and unconventional."<sup>19</sup> This verdict did not stand alone. The *Los Angeles Times* called Bierce "epigrammatic"—a reference to his short works, which characteristically end with an ingenious turn of thought—on January 15, 1890.<sup>20</sup> The Philadelphia newspaper *The North American* took this praise a step further on June 23, 1892, comparing Bierce's literary genius to Edgar Allen Poe's. The article, entitled "Ambrose Bierce: An American Genius Discovered at Sixty Years of Age," quotes the same author mentioned in the *St. Paul Daily News*, who commented that Bierce's stories "are unique in contemporary literature. If they suggest any influence at all, it is that of Edgar Allen Poe.... He has, too, like Poe, resolved the difficulty of creating an atmosphere of horror."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to praising his literary promise, the press recognized that Bierce's short stories were not only significant to the Civil War, but also to the Spanish-American War. On April 3, 1898, just twenty-two days before the United States declared war on Spain, *The Morning Oregonian* noted in its review of the second edition of Bierce's *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* that "[t]he book could not be received at a more opportune time, when there are so many who, in the excitement of the moment, forget that 'War is hell.'"<sup>22</sup> The author of this review positions Bierce's stories, which are largely critical of war, as a foil to the recent provocations of an incendiary press. Not only were Bierce's stories well

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>19</sup> "In the Library," *St. Paul Daily News*, June 22, 1892, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3008556201).

<sup>20</sup> "Browne's High Art: How It Strikes the Epigrammatic Bierce," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1890, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3002741623).

<sup>21</sup> "Ambrose Bierce: An American Genius Discovered at Sixty Years of Age," *The North American*, June 23, 1892, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3011552412).

<sup>22</sup> "New Books Reviewed," *Morning Oregonian*, April 3, 1898, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3017366181).

received by the press, but they also spoke to the psychological trauma experienced by soldiers who fought in the Civil War.

Although Bierce's Civil War stories are unique, his sense of disillusionment and disgust with the war are not. In *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, James M. McPherson explains that many recruits, both Union and Confederate, were motivated to enlist by a desire to "see the elephant"—a contemporary phrase that meant to experience something grand. McPherson notes that once "they had seen the elephant, few Civil War soldiers were eager to see it again. Whether or not they had passed this test of 'manhood' with 'honor,' their curiosity about the nature of battle was fulfilled."<sup>23</sup> Confronted with widespread death and destruction, soldiers quickly abandoned their romantic impressions of war. One letter written by a Union recruit reveals the traumatic impact and sense of disillusionment soldiers experienced. McPherson quotes the young man, a teenager who enlisted in the Ninth Indiana Cavalry in 1864: "I got to see the Elephant at last and to tell you the honest truth I don't care about seeing him very often any more, for if there was eny fun in such work I couldnt see it...It is not the thing it is braged up to be."<sup>24</sup> This letter exemplifies the reaction of a typical soldier after his first days in combat. Bierce alludes to this concept of "seeing the elephant" in his essay "What I Saw of Shiloh": "There was, I remember, no elephant on the boat that passed us across that evening, nor, I think, any hippopotamus. Those would have been out of place."<sup>25</sup> Although the allure of fighting for their country persuaded the men who fought in the Civil War to leave their homes and families in pursuit of a higher ideal, these men found that the realities of war did not match up with their romantic expectations.

McPherson also examines how first-time combat experiences impacted Civil War soldiers psychologically. To do this, he draws upon the reports of psychiatrists who studied soldiers in World War II. McPherson notes one psychiatrist's comments: "The men seldom have any real, concrete notions of what combat is like. Their minds are full of romanticized Hollywood versions of their future activity in combat, colored with vague ideas of being a hero."<sup>26</sup> McPherson argues that if

---

<sup>23</sup> James M. McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.

<sup>24</sup> McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works: Volume I*, 244.

<sup>26</sup> McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 32.

“Hollywood” were substituted here for “Currier and Ives,” a nineteenth-century printmaking company that produced images of patriotic and historical events (including Civil War battles), this psychiatrist’s report “would serve as an accurate description of Civil War soldiers.”<sup>27</sup> Just as soldiers in World War II served their country in pursuit of the ideals of patriotism and duty, soldiers who enlisted in the Civil War were guided by similar romantic notions. Yet the psychiatrist quoted by McPherson noted that these ideals failed to hold up in situations of actual combat: “They are not at all prepared for the nightmare experiences in store for them.

Combat is always a surprise and a shock, because there is no way of preparing for the emotional impact short of actual experience.”<sup>28</sup>

McPherson maintains that this period of shock, described by psychiatrists during World War II, was doubtless also experienced by Civil War soldiers. McPherson illustrates this psychological shock in a letter from by a private in the Sixth North Carolina Regiment to his father after the first battle of Manassas: “Sutch a day the booming of the cannon the ratling of the muskets you have no idea how it was I have turned threw that old Book of yours and looked at the pictures and read a little about war but I did not no any thing what it was.”<sup>29</sup> This reference to “look[ing] at the pictures” and “read[ing] a little about war” suggests that like many other soldiers, this private was disillusioned with the reality of war, which failed to meet his expectations. Another soldier from Ohio wrote to his wife, “Mary I went into the fight in good hart but I never want to get in another it was offal [awful].”<sup>30</sup> After enlisting with the hope of “seeing the elephant,” soldiers of the Civil War found the actual experience of fighting to be far less glamorous, and far more horrible, than they had anticipated.

Considering these psychological effects experienced by soldiers during the Civil War, Bierce’s dark short stories seem less exaggerated and truer to the bleak experiences of Civil War soldiers. In fact, Bierce’s short stories are a direct reaction to what Morrone calls “America’s enduring popular romance with war and military fiction.” Instead of reinforcing the image of the soldier as the “embodiment of our culture’s heroic ideals,” Bierce’s works counteract this image by exposing the horrors of war and exploring how men reconcile their conscience to the conflicting demands of wartime.<sup>31</sup> In “A Horseman in the Sky,” one of Bierce’s most famous short stories, a Union soldier sees a Confederate soldier astride a horse

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Morrone, “Disciplinary Conditioning,” 324.

overlooking a cliff. After hesitating to shoot the Confederate soldier because of the serenity of the scene and the man's noble appearance, the soldier eventually shoots. At the end of the story, it is revealed that the man the Union soldier shot was his father.<sup>32</sup> "A Horseman in the Sky" questions just how far a man will go to fulfill what he perceives to be his duty to his country. Although the soldier's shooting his own father in defense of his cause can be seen as noble, Bierce directs his reader's attention to the tragedy, and not the valor, of the act. Bierce is primarily concerned with the "psychological landscape and conditioning agents shaping a soldier's cognition," argues Morrone, and although his stories take place on the battlefield, "the true settings evident in his writing are situated in the minds of his protagonists."<sup>33</sup> Just as Poe exposed what he saw to be an innate spirit of perverseness in the subjects of his short stories, Bierce explores just how far a man's sense of duty will lead him in wartime. In the case of "A Horseman in the Sky," this sense of duty can even lead a soldier to kill his own father.

However, this sense of duty to one's country—a phenomenon Morrone calls Bierce's "warrior ethos"—may arise from something beyond the typical Civil War soldier's romanticized perception of war. Drawing upon the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, Morrone explains that "martial disciplinary efforts" indoctrinate Bierce's protagonists with a "particular ethos or mode of conditioning that Bierce characterizes as self-surveillance discipline."<sup>34</sup> This self-surveillance system instills within soldiers a habit of monitoring their own behavior, and judging whether it meets the standards imposed by the military system. In *For Cause and Comrades*, McPherson observes this phenomenon in American G.I.s during World War II, again comparing these soldiers with men who fought in the Civil War. McPherson notes that as these G.I.s prepared for their next mission after the Invasion of Normandy, they failed to show the enthusiasm or urgency they had demonstrated before D-Day. Yet, despite their reluctance to engage in combat again, "fight they did, again and again, sustained by grim determination and unit pride."<sup>35</sup> McPherson posits that these soldiers overcame their weariness of war, at least superficially, to respond to their country's military needs. In doing

---

<sup>32</sup> Bierce, *Collected Works—Volume II*, 15-26.

<sup>33</sup> Morrone, "Disciplinary Conditioning," 310.

<sup>34</sup> Morrone, "Disciplinary Conditioning," 311.

<sup>35</sup> McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 35.

so, Morrone would argue, these men subscribed to the demands of their military system's dominant ideology, which Gramsci would call "hegemonic." Just as these G.I.s were compelled to look past their weariness of war in order to continue serving their country, soldiers who fought during the Civil War made a similar choice. This is true of the many Civil War soldiers who wrote home that they never wished to see another battle, yet continued to fight with their regiments, often voluntarily enlisting for a second term of service. In Bierce's short stories, Morrone argues, the principal characters "reveal a behavioral pattern contoured by their immediate military power dynamic. Their psychological condition and subsequent physical responses to their environment are by-products of martial discipline."<sup>36</sup> After experiencing the horrors of war firsthand on the battlefield, these Biercian heroes look past their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the war to continue serving their country. This choice may seem illogical, considering the scenes of death and desecration witnessed by Civil War soldiers, and indeed, it is precisely this kind of military ethos that drives many of Bierce's tragic heroes to their deaths. In addition, this "warrior ethos" is precisely what Bierce seeks to expose in his short fiction. By exploring the soldier's romantic ideals, disillusionment, and self-imposed sense of duty, Bierce asks his readers to make a judgment about the nature of war and military service.

A talented writer and a perceptive humanist, Ambrose Bierce authored a series of short stories that confront some of the most difficult moral questions faced by soldiers during the Civil War. Anchored in his own experiences as a soldier during the war, Bierce's short stories, characterized by their distinctly ironic flavor, ask his readers to look beyond romanticized notions of war that pervaded Victorian Era ideology. After fighting in major battles such as Shiloh and Chickamauga, Bierce received a taste of the atrocities of war that would permanently color his view of the world, and this discoloration would become strikingly evident in his short fiction. Bierce's "Chickamauga" reflects the horrific experiences of the Civil War soldier; "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" considers the danger of overly romanticizing the cultural ideals of war, chivalry, and duty; and "A Horseman in the Sky" asks just how far a soldier will go to defend his cause. Bierce's darkly insightful writing did not escape critical notice, as newspapers across the country praised his striking short stories for exposing the horrors of war and probing the recesses of human nature. Yet Bierce was not alone in his disillusionment with the war. As James McPherson writes in *For Cause and Comrades*, soldiers in the Civil War suffered from shock after engaging in combat for

---

<sup>36</sup> Morrone, "Disciplinary Conditioning," 312.

the first time. Encouraged to fight for their country by romanticized ideologies and propaganda, these men experienced disillusionment after the promise of “seeing the elephant” proved a sham. Yet, just as the young soldier knowingly shoots his own father in Bierce’s “A Horseman in the Sky,” soldiers of the Civil War often looked past the horrific scenes around them in an act of willful allegiance to their country. In his Civil War fiction, Bierce not only seeks to contrast romanticized notions of war with war’s grim realities, but also strives to call attention to the consequences that can result from a soldier’s choice to ignore his moral doubts while serving his country. Casting a perceptive glance upon the American Civil War, the works of Ambrose Bierce not only claim artistic distinction but also make a significant contribution to the genre of literature concerned with the nature of war.