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## The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment

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extremely costly under normal political circumstances. Perhaps the role of the West's conventional forces is one of deterrence; if so, Middleton's definition of victory needs reconsideration and the reader needs a discussion of the feasibility of that mission.

Middleton recognizes that domestic factors within the United States preclude building a force large enough to achieve "victory." He has not provided a prescription for overcoming public attitudes and making necessary changes in our military forces, and he does not discuss the probability that the Soviets would view such an expansion as a threat to what they see as an acceptable balance of military forces.

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Aichinger, Peter. *The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment*. Ames: Iowa University Press, 1975. 143pp.

Reading Mr. Aichinger is like overhearing a Canadian explain to a European the character, as it pertains to military matters, of his southern neighbor. The speaker is never quite sure whether to ascribe literary or military "tradition," that prolific European grande dame, to his American cousins. Mr. Aichinger, whose succinct, idea-laden book I read with great delight, is a Canadian, a professor of English at the Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean, and his "outside" perspective adds a pleasing and perceptive dimension to this book.

Mr. Aichinger identifies five main characteristics within the American military experience: pragmatism, a "team" syndrome, a persistent democratic-aristocratic tension, idealism, and a general lack of experience and psychological preparation for combat. Only pragmatism and the team mentality persist to the present day. The other elements, argues Mr. Aichinger, have

either evolved new forms or they have disappeared altogether. Within military fiction these elements—their reasons for being, their agonizing mutations, their intricate interrelationships, and their influence on civilian attitudes toward the military—come to life. Mr. Aichinger serves his readers well by extracting and organizing these elements from the themes of the greatest American military novels.

*The American Soldier in Fiction* is not mere literary criticism. It is, as the author writes, an attempt "to discuss works of literature in relation to the historical, economic, and political events that accompanied or preceded their appearance on the scene." The discussion moves along briskly from the idealism and belief in heroic action expressed during World War I to the bitter disillusionment of that war's aftermath; from the realistic and consistent attitudes of World War II to the cold war's outpouring of black humor in the literature of the absurd.

To show how attitudes toward warfare and the military establishment vary, Mr. Aichinger contrasts American military fiction with that being written in Europe at the same time. He concludes that the American novel distinguishes itself from its European foil by the frequent use of the enlisted man, not the officer, as the protagonist. Our egalitarianism makes all the difference. It accounts for the pre-1952 American perception of war-as-the-enemy, tracing itself back to the work of Stephen Crane, as well as the American failure to accept war as an integral part of life.

In American fiction before 1952, war remained an aberration, a disease in need of a cure, so that an authoritarian military organization's steel grip on the citizen-soldier's liberty and individuality could be broken. World War II was a hateful thing, mostly bereft of ideals for the average GI, but the war had to be won so that he could go home and live the life he loved best.

The cold war, as Morris Janowitz points out, led to a blurring of the distinction between civilian and military organizations. This "blurring" variously affected the development of American military fiction until the publication between 1957 and 1962 of a small but controversial group of novels: Mark Harris' *Something about a Soldier*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, and James Jones' *The Thin Red Line*. Mr. Aichinger is at his best when he places these novels within the "tradition" as well as within the pop-art culture and New Frontier optimism of the early sixties.

His intriguing analysis of these novels includes a chapter on the "nonhero," that quintessentially modern man who has the illusion of acting when he is really being acted upon. The nonhero is torn between two conflicting drives. The one, the nonhero's own selfishness; the other, his intense concern for human values. The one, his realization that life is the fundamental condition for significant action; the other, an inherited set of moral values transcending "survival at all costs." But here again the American novelist separates from his European counterpart by believing in the possibility of a "tertium quid," a mode of existence that is neither heroic nor cowardly, an escape from this modern dilemma.

What is the escape? For Captain Stein in *The Thin Red Line* it is the fleshpots of Washington; for Jacob Epp in *Something about a Soldier*, a quiet career as a high school history teacher. For these men paradise is a place outside the dilemma, and the peculiar trait of American "absurd" literature is that each man, if he knows what he is looking for, can find his paradise. "'The territories' still exist for the American nonhero, as they did for Huckleberry Finn."

Mr. Aichinger, however, does not forecast a long life for the literature of the absurd. Already, like a diligent

disciple of his compatriot, the literary critic Northrup Frye, he sees irony striving to turn itself into myth, with James Bond (perhaps) playing Achilles in the new Heroic Age.

This, I am sure, is farther than Mr. Aichinger would wish us to go, but my point is that his ideas are suggestive as well as sound; hence his book is not only ideal, but essential reading for those who love military fiction, want to get the most out of it, but lack some of the requisite conceptual and historical framework.

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Dickey, John Sloan. *Canada and the American Presence: The U.S. Interest in an Independent Canada*. New York: Council of Foreign Relations, New York University Press, 1975. 202pp.

Twelve years ago, President John Sloan Dickey of Dartmouth College edited an American assembly volume of papers on Canadian-American relations that has become a classic. When he retired a few years later he became a Visiting Senior Fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations to update and extend that work. This new book, written in 1971-72, and apparently brought further up-to-date a few years later by insertions at specific points, is a sympathetic study of recent Canadian nationalism and a convincing discussion of its relevance for the United States. It shows clearly that American-Canadian relations have become more delicate and more difficult since Dickey first surveyed the problem, and it offers guidance for future American attitudes and policies.

American pressures on Canada in the economic, cultural, and defense fields have brought vigorous reactions in Canada in all three spheres. All these developments are objectively examined in detail in this book. Dr. Dickey