

Deromanticizing War:
John Dos Passos's Critique of Theodore Roosevelt in 1919

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戦争を脱ロマン化する —
『1919』におけるジョン・ドス・パソスのセオドア・ローズヴェルト批判

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Summary

World War I was the first modern war of advanced technology fought among the world powers. John Dos Passos (1896-1970) is one of the Lost Generation writers who is defined by coming of age during WWI. His experiences of the war allowed for no illusion about warfare being an arena for valor, glory, and manly achievement, as the previous generation conceived. Dos Passos in *1919* (1932) reconfigures the meaning of war for his generation.

Dos Passos's sarcastic representation of Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) in "The Happy Warrior" section of *1919* serves as the focus of this paper and illustrates how Dos Passos reassesses his conceptualization of war. "The Happy Warrior" is a strong statement against America's older generation who could afford to romanticize war and make their entire life a battlefield to prove their honor and manliness. Furthermore, Dos Passos's contrast between the jingoistic Rough Rider and the "gentlemen volunteers" of the ambulance corps in WWI represented in *The Camera Eye* (32) discloses the failure of the morale of the ex-volunteer cavalry leader in the modern world. The greatest irony is revealed in the author's contrast between the happy amateur warrior and the unknown soldier in "The Body of an American," as the nameless Everyman illustrates deprivation of individuality in the name of war. By investigating how Dos Passos deromanticizes war through his critique of Theodore Roosevelt in the context of WWI, we are able to clarify the nature of modern war as the writer saw it—that Roosevelt, the faded war hero, failed to discern.

Keywords: John Dos Passos, *1919*, Theodore Roosevelt, World War I

要 旨

第一次世界大戦は近代的兵器を導入した列強国による史上初の総力戦であった。ジョン・ドス・パソス (John Dos Passos 1896-1970) はこの大戦下で成人したいわゆる「失われた世代」の一員である。ひとつ前の世代が戦争に名誉や男らしさの具現を見出したのとは対照的に、彼らはこの不毛な大量殺戮の前に、いかなる幻想を抱くこともできなかった。ドス・パソスは『U.S.A.』三部作の第二部『1919』(1932)において、自らの世代にとっての戦争の再定義を行っている。

ドス・パソスは『1919』において、第26代大統領セオドア・ローズヴェルト (Theodore Roosevelt 1858-1919) の伝記的スケッチを「幸せな戦士」("The Happy Warrior")と銘打ち、その戦争観を鋭く風刺している。彼はまず、戦争をめぐるローズヴェルトのロマンティズムを誇張することでその独善性を揶揄する。そして、米西戦争における好戦的愛国主義者ローズヴェルトと、第一次世界大戦における語り手の体験を並置することで、ローズヴェルトの戦争観が近代戦争においていかに無効であるかを強調している。さらに彼は、ローズヴェルトとの対比において、無名戦士の伝記を「アメリカ人の遺体」と題し、20世紀の戦争の本質を描いている。つまり、モダニティの負の先鋒としての戦争は、個人の固有性を無化し、人間の生を否定するものに他ならない。ドス・パソスは『1919』においてローズヴェルトの戦争観を厳しく批判することで、戦争をめぐるロマンティズムを徹底的に糾弾し、「幸せなアマチュア戦士」の時代は終わり、誰もが「無名の戦士」とならざるを得ない新しい時代の戦争観を提示したのである。

キーワード: ジョン・ドス・パソス、『1919』、セオドア・ローズヴェルト、第一次世界大戦

World War I was the first modern war of advanced technology fought among the world powers. Its devastating impact on human life was unprecedented. The number of casualties soared over eight million (“World War I”), giving rise to the alias “the Great War.” Looking back on the times of WWI, John Dos Passos recalls in 1968 that “[l]ike many others of my generation I got most of my education from the first war” (“What Makes a Novelist” 29). Born in 1896, Dos Passos is one of the Lost Generation writers who are defined by coming of age during WWI. Although he was a pacifist, Dos Passos was a curious, excitable young man and wanted “to see the goddam war before the whole thing went bellyup,” as one of his characters professes (*U.S.A.* 348).¹⁾ As soon as the U.S. entered the war, he went to Europe to witness the historic massacres at first hand by serving as a volunteer ambulance driver with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in 1917 and later with the Red Cross. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1918 to spend a few months as a common soldier in a training camp before sailing to France. His experiences allowed for no illusion about warfare being an arena for valor, glory, and manly achievement, as the previous generation conceived.

Dos Passos repeatedly takes up the theme of the war, especially in early works such as *One Man's Initiation—1917* (1920), *Three Soldiers* (1921), and *1919* (1932), the second volume of *U.S.A. Trilogy*. His first novels are charged with personal indignation against futile massacres and frustration at dispiriting military bureaucracy. On the other hand, *1919* presents more detached sarcasm portraying war as a metonymy of the negative aspects of modernity whereby capitalism, technology, and media rule human endeavors. War remained an irrepressible motif for Dos Passos, and WWI in particular became a formative element of the self as a man and a writer.

1919 is a namesake for an era of après-guerre euphoria surrounding the Paris Peace Conference that was quickly overtaken by disappointment with the failure of Woodrow Wilson's idealistic “Fourteen Points” for world peace and justice. The same spring also saw aborted revolutionary engagement by the proletariat, to which Dos Passos was sympathetic. Thus, the betrayal of the hopes of common men resonates throughout the novel. The volume opens with a section entitled *Newsreel* where lines from an army song laud the fortitude of infantry soldiers and headlines from newspaper tell of the state of the European war in 1916. As if paired with the opening, the novel closes with the biographical sketch of an unknown soldier entitled “The Body of an American,” who received a ceremonial burial in Arlington National Cemetery in 1921. The structure suggests that the fate of a common soldier lies at the bottom of the novelist's concern.

The year 1919 also coincides with the death of Theodore Roosevelt (b. 1858), the 26th U.S. President. Besides serving as President and working variously as writer, historian, hunter, rancher, and explorer, Theodore Roosevelt was a celebrated military hero in the 1898 Spanish-American

1) William H. Rogers aka. Doc in *42nd Parallel*.

War in Cuba. Famously referred to as a “splendid little war,”²⁾ the conflict was easily won by the United States and paved the way to U.S. imperialistic expansionism in the twentieth century. For Roosevelt, his military achievements brought him immense popularity that led him to political stardom as the governor of New York from 1899 to 1901, and subsequently as President from 1901 to 1909. Even so, by the time the European war broke out in 1914, he could not understand the new system of warfare and his expertise was obsolete.

Interestingly, however, if we are to investigate how Dos Passos evaluates war in *1919*, it is his biographical portion on Theodore Roosevelt entitled “The Happy Warrior” that draws our attention. Between the accounts of anonymous soldiers at the novel’s beginning and end are the sections, *Newsreel*, *Camera Eye*, fictive narratives, and biographical sketches of those who made history. Other public figures Dos Passos acknowledges include Randolph Bourne, Woodrow Wilson, and J. P. Morgan, but when it comes to war, no one pursued it with so much passion and ardor as Roosevelt did. He romanticized war and even dreamed of giving his life for the cause.

Dos Passos’s sarcastic representation of Roosevelt in *1919* serves as the focus of this paper and illustrates how Dos Passos reassesses his conceptualization of war. First the paper discusses Dos Passos’s definition of Roosevelt as a warrior of life who equates war with manliness and further explores the representation of Roosevelt during the Spanish-American War, which reinforced Roosevelt’s concept of the romance of war.³⁾ Second, we will examine, in contrast, Roosevelt’s irrelevance during WWI vis-à-vis the narrator’s personal account of WWI in *The Camera Eye* (32). Finally, to compare with this representation of Roosevelt, I will analyze the biographical sketch of an anonymous soldier in “The Body of an American.” By investigating how Dos Passos deromanticizes war through his critique of Theodore Roosevelt in the context of WWI, we are able to clarify the nature of modern war as the writer saw it—that Roosevelt, the faded war hero, failed to discern.

The title of Dos Passos’s “The Happy Warrior” reminds us of the Wordsworthian poem, “Character of the Happy Warrior” written in 1806:

Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to be?
—It is the generous Spirit, who, when brought
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought

2) John Hay, then U.S. ambassador to England and later Secretary of State, described the war as “a splendid little war; begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by that Fortune which loves the brave” in his letter to Roosevelt on July 27, 1898 (Thayer 337).

3) Discussion of Roosevelt in “The Happy Warrior” is based on Misugi, “Re-assessing War and Manliness—Dos Passos’s Critique of Theodore Roosevelt in *1919*,” The First Biannual John Dos Passos Conference, Oct. 11, 2014, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. On Theodore Roosevelt and the Spanish-American War, see also Misugi, “Anti-War Criticism of Mark Twain and Dos Passos.”

Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought:
Whose high endeavours are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright.... (341)

Wordsworth enumerates requisite qualities of excellence, such as discernment, perseverance, and resilience against pain and fear. In short, the poet portrays the ideal man, be it at war or in peace. In abject contrast, Dos Passos fills his portrayal of the happy warrior Roosevelt with derision.

In Dos Passos's view, Roosevelt was a warrior with imperialist and expansionist inclinations suffusing every corner of life. His attitude is most eloquently revealed in his famous 1899 speech "The Strenuous Life," as Dos Passos quotes: "*I wish to preach not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife*" (481). In the midst of the Philippine-American War proceeding the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt equates "personal manhood and national greatness" (Rotundo 236), claiming, "A life of slothful ease, a life of that peace which springs merely from lack either of desire or of power to strive after great things is as little worthy a nation as of an individual" (*Strenuous Life* 1).

In contrast to the tone of this "doctrine," Roosevelt, as is well known, suffered from a weak constitution when young. Dos Passos characterizes Roosevelt as "a sickly youngster, [who] suffered from asthma, was very near-sighted; his hands and feet were so small it was hard for him to learn to box" (480). Historians and biographers have pointed out that Roosevelt's very fragility became the drive that fueled his obsession with manliness. In the introduction to Roosevelt's *Pocket Diary, 1898*, John Morton Blum writes: "A frail and asthmatic child, at the urging of his father Roosevelt had dedicated himself to developing his body and to manly pursuits—boxing, riding, shooting, hunting wild game. He had a horror of the effete. The ultimate test of masculinity, so he believed, was war" (n. pag.). Likewise, upon reviewing Roosevelt's biographies by David McCullough and Edmund Morris, Gore Vidal concludes, "Theodore Roosevelt was a classic American sissy who overcame—or appeared to overcome—his physical fragility through 'manly' activities of which the most exciting and ennobling was war" (n. pag.). Roosevelt's gender anxiety and emphatic assertion of virility formed two sides of the same coin that epitomized a jingoistic figure of the period.

Just as Blum and Vidal have noted, Dos Passos highlights how Roosevelt overcame his physical weaknesses: "he got to be a good shot in spite of his glasses, a good walker in spite of his tiny feet and short legs, a fair horseman, an aggressive scrapper in spite of his short reach" (480-81). Whatever physical limitations the man faced, he challenged them all. From attacking and surpassing his enemies to "having pillow fights with his children" (485), he was the master of his domain; life was full of strife and he thrived on its struggles.

However, Roosevelt's endorsement of a life of struggle at the end of the century was hardly original in the face of discourse espousing that "[h]uman life is not a playground but a battlefield" (Rotundo 232).⁴ Rapidly growing corporate society had robbed men of economic opportunities to

advance themselves, and tougher competition encouraged men to develop physical strength in team sports and pursue virility. Roosevelt was an embodiment of the male passion for manhood in a more complex and industrialized world where manly self-realization became increasingly difficult to achieve.

The highlight of Roosevelt's ostensible vocation as a professional warrior was the battle of San Juan Hill that took place outside of Santiago, Cuba on July 1, 1898 during the Spanish-American War. The event established him as Colonel Roosevelt, "a manly advocate of virile imperialism" (Bederman 171). As a young New York Assemblyman in Albany back in 1882, Roosevelt was derided as a "weakling," "Jane Dandy," "Punkin-Lily" or "Oscar Wilde" for his effeminacy (Bederman 170). After a streak of family tragedies, however, he went to the West and came back as a so-called "Cowboy of the Dakotas" in 1886 (Bederman 171). He effectively transformed himself from an effeminate wimp to a virile frontiersman. When the war broke out, he resigned from his post as an assistant secretary of the U.S. Navy, and led an amateur volunteer cavalry unit known as the Rough Riders.⁵⁾ In the Cuban mission Roosevelt found his drive for both personal manhood and national supremacy in the global arena beautifully integrated.

Popular history notes that Roosevelt undauntedly led the Rough Riders to score a crucial victory over the Spanish army. On the contrary, Dos Passos ridicules Roosevelt's famed triumph as a quixotic gesture, an irrelevant military maneuver, and a self-advertising political campaign. He mocks Roosevelt's histrionic rhetoric:

This was the Rubicon, the Fight, the Old Glory, the Just Cause. The American public was not kept in ignorance of the Colonel's bravery when the bullets sang, how he charged without his men up San Juan Hill and had to go back to fetch them, how he shot a running Spaniard in the tail. (482)

Such lofty metaphors for the war aimed to link one's manhood to the face of peril. And Roosevelt is represented like a romantic hero from the tales of Sir Walter Scott, a noble and gallant man of courage.

Nevertheless, Dos Passos's appraisal of the famed battle is utterly anti-climactic: "It was too bad that the regulars had gotten up San Juan Hill first from the other side, that there was no need to get up San Juan Hill at all" (482). While historians agree that it was Kettle Hill, not San Juan

4) E. Anthony Rotundo remarks that Rev. William Whitmarsh thus explained why the Knight of Pythias, a fraternal order in which he was an active member, wore military outfits (324, note 34). Rotundo does not identify his source.

5) Biographers note that Roosevelt felt urgency to compensate for his father dodging military conscription during the Civil War by being ready to serve as a capable soldier himself (see, for example, McCullough, ch. 2, Morris, *Colonel*, ch. 1, or Ward 7).

Hill, that they charged first, there is confusion about who reached there first.⁶⁾ And although it is difficult to assess the historical accuracy of Dos Passos's view, his intention to dismiss the self-congratulations of the war hero is deliberate.

For all its outdated strategies and weaponry, the Spanish-American War was the first war where mass media played a crucial role to shape popular perception of the event. It was yellow journalism that contributed to promoting a larger-than-life portrait of Roosevelt. Therein lies a curious irony between traditional values as defined by Roosevelt and the modern mode of mass media that circulated his values.

The publicity was mostly due to Richard Harding Davis (1864-1916), a prominent journalist and correspondent for the *New York Herald* at the time. Davis would write from Cuba with headings such as: "Dashing Bravery of Rough Riders: Colonel Roosevelt led his men through the lines of regulars at San Juan and their splendid charge inspired the Army" (4).⁷⁾ Later in the same year, his account of the battle in *The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns* reads: "I speak of Roosevelt first, because... he was, without doubt, the most conspicuous figure in the charge... Roosevelt, mounted high on horseback, and charging the rifle-pits at a gallop and quite alone, made you feel that you would like to cheer" (217).

Historians today, however, point out that Richard Harding Davis, an imperialist and fiction writer as well as a first-rate journalist, was prone to aggrandize his war reports. John Seelye says that "it is difficult in RHD's account of the Spanish-American War to distinguish between fact and fiction" (263), and that Davis did not shy away from romanticizing the young Colonel as his war hero. Interestingly enough, Stephen Bonsal, a diplomat and distinguished war correspondent of the time, praised Roosevelt's leadership in the skirmish at Las Guasimas in an earlier stage of the campaign, but hardly mentions the Rough Rider's feat at Kettle Hill.⁸⁾ Seelye observes that Davis's approach was to report only what he witnessed firsthand, whereas Bonsal tried to present an inclusive picture of the war. Accordingly, Roosevelt identified many flaws in Bonsal's accounts in *The Fight for Santiago* and makes an ardent protest in his own writings.⁹⁾

Moreover, Roosevelt himself fueled the imaginations of both Davis and his readers. Military historian Mitchell Yockelson writes:

Davis transcribed what Roosevelt told him, then added his own twist to the story. In addition to the newspaper articles, magazines and books picked up his story. Davis depicted a fearless Roosevelt, wearing a blue polka-dotted bandanna, charging up the hill mounted on his horse, Texas. Thus the legend of Theodore Roosevelt was created. (n.

6) See Yockelson.

7) The article reports on the incident on July 1, 1898, but was signed July 4 by Davis.

8) See Bonsal, ch. 5 and 6.

9) See Roosevelt, Appendix D to *The Rough Riders*.

pag.)

Roosevelt, in short, made Davis his private publicist. Additionally, he reinforced the myth in his own narrative, *The Rough Riders*, published in 1899. The then contemporary satirist Finley Peter Dunne found Roosevelt's book so solipsistic that he dubbed it "Alone in Cuba" (18), but with Davis as his "body guard" (15), rendering Roosevelt as "a modern miles gloriosus" (Seeley 263). Therefore, though what Roosevelt advertised was a self-image of an old-fashioned war hero with a romantic flare, he at least deserves credit for making use of public relations, in the manner of J. Ward Moorehouse, a professional modern-day publicist and arch-villain in the narrative sequence of *U. S. A.*

Overall, Dos Passos assesses the whole dramatization of Roosevelt's Spanish-American War expedition as a well-contrived political enterprise to help him ace the 1899 New York gubernatorial election: "It was a successful campaign. T.R. charged up San Juan Hill into the governorship of the Empire State" (482). That is to say, for all of Roosevelt's romanticizing and ennobling war, he was ultimately a shrewd politician who knew how to finesse public opinion.

In contrast to Roosevelt's glorification of the war, Dos Passos illustrates Roosevelt's naïve view of warfare by referring to the so-called "round robin" affair. After the capture of Santiago, the health of American soldiers at the front became a serious problem. In response, commanders, among them Roosevelt, signed a letter of appeal to the Secretary of War in round-robin style, demanding immediate withdrawal. A copy of the letter found its way into the pages of American newspapers and caused a media scandal. While Dos Passos spares Roosevelt of the common charge that he himself was responsible for leaking the copy (Dyal et al 284), he points to the Colonel's disregard of the hardships born by regular soldiers over favoritism toward his men:

T.R. got up a round robin... and asked for the amateur warriors to be sent home and leave the dirtywork to the regulars
who were digging trenches and shoveling crap and fighting malaria and dysentery and yellowjack.... (482)

Dos Passos emphasizes that Roosevelt is only after the glory of war and combat, ill fit for the physical discomforts that accompanied war, with which Dos Passos himself was very familiar from his own experiences. The inglorious realities of conscripted regular soldiers were not to be considered in Roosevelt's romance with war. Once the war adventures were over, volunteers were ready to leave and bask in honor and praise at home.

The greatest irony of "The Happy Warrior" lies in its novelistic structure, where this sketch is inserted between *The Camera Eye* sections that deal directly with the narrator's experiences of

WWI. The contrast between the fading war hero and the circumstances of modern war is striking when we focus on the fate of American “gentlemen” and “volunteers” by comparing *The Camera Eye* (32) and the immediately following text, “The Happy Warrior.”

At the end of *The Camera Eye* (32), the narrator recounts the dismissal of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps, a Harvard-based volunteer unit in which Dos Passos was once a member. On the occasion of the dissolution of the organization for its incorporation into the American Expeditionary Forces, Richard Norton, one of its founders, nobly addresses the blue-blood young “gentlemen volunteers” for the last time.¹⁰⁾ Though the enemy bombardment of lyddite explosives was advancing and the Red Cross Majors abandoned the site out of fear, Norton did not seem flustered at all:

Wham Wham Wham like the Fourth of July the shellfragments sing our ears ring
the bridge is standing and Dick Norton adjusting his monocle is standing talking at
length about gentlemen volunteers and ambulance service and la belle France
... and that's the last we saw of the Red Cross Majors
and the last we heard of gentlemen
or volunteers (479-80)

In addition to his being a philanthropist, Norton impressed the young narrator with his poised composure as an ideal “gentleman volunteer.” Once the Norton-Harjes dissolved, the narrator witnessed the dual loss of a magnanimous leader and an institution consisting of high-minded volunteers.

Richard Norton, Harvard graduate and founder of Norton's Corps which later merged with the H. Harjes Ambulance Unit, was an archaeologist by profession. Observing the lack of a transportation system for the wounded in wartime France, Norton decided to organize a volunteer ambulance corps. Valuing autonomy of the institution and its members, he was opposed to excessive militarization of the ambulance service, and declined his commission as Major of the U. S. Army.¹¹⁾ As a man of an independent and impartial mind, he seems deserving of the title, the last of the “gentlemen volunteers.”

Inspired by Norton's address, the young Dos Passos found a particular ring to the phrase “gentleman volunteer,” which connoted aesthetic distance from immediate engagement in the war. Dos Passos later recalls that “[t]he volunteer ambulance service was after all a pretty comfortable way of getting a look at the massacres without really taking part in them. Even when we were in the front lines we usually had 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off. I spent most of my spare time reading” (“What Makes a Novelist” 29). The volunteers' remote position kept them away from full

10) See Carr 138-39, and Ludington 138.

11) For biographical information on Richard Norton, see his obituary, “Prof. R. Norton is Dead in Paris.”

commitment and allowed them to pursue their personal interests while still within a range of action on the battlefield. Under the immediate influence of Norton's address, Dos Passos wrote to his friend Arthur McComb: "What a wonderful phrase—'gentlemen volunteers'! particularly if punctuated, as it was, by a shell bursting thirty feet away... I have sworn solemn vows—to remain for the rest of my days a gentleman volunteer—" (Landsberg 67).¹²⁾

He further elaborates on the idea of the "gentleman volunteer" by referencing not only to the rollicking volunteer soldiers of the Elizabethan period but also to Chinese officers during a Mongolian invasion who insisted on continuing their artistic pursuits in the face of military conflict.¹³⁾ He writes that they "refused to fight, but went on... carrying out its avocations, writing poems and painting pictures and deciding contest of singers until the invaders broke in and slaughtered them all" (Landsberg 68). The young Dos Passos identifies this preposterous behavior as "the true courage, the courage to disregard all in life that did not suit their tastes, to prefer extinction to giving up what they considered worth while—" (Landsberg 68). He appreciated their commitment to art above all, and prized such indifference to self-preservation as the quality of "gentleman volunteer."

Ultimately, Dos Passos's youthful aspiration to remain a "gentleman volunteer" was short-lived. After his Norton-Harjes involvement, Dos Passos enlisted in the Red Cross, his experience of which would be reflected in *The Camera Eye* (33). The Red Cross demands more discipline and commitment to the cause of the war than Dos Passos could endure. His private correspondence was censored and he finally was sent home, expelled on the charge of disloyalty.¹⁴⁾ Hoping to return to the European theatre, he eventually chose to join the U.S. Army, thus abandoning his volunteer status altogether to experience what he perceived as abject humiliation of the individual will, later portrayed in his writings. For Dos Passos, the disbandment of Norton-Harjes marked the end of his personal status as a detached dilettante as well.

While Norton-Harjes was committed to life-saving operations over killing, for Theodore Roosevelt, the term "gentleman volunteers" would surely have reminded him of his glorious times with the Rough Riders. Dos Passos emphasizes first that Roosevelt was brought up to match the standards of an American "gentleman." He was trained in boxing and fencing because "an American gentleman should know how to defend himself," and was assigned to mission work because "an American gentleman should do his best to uplift those not so fortunately situated" (480). Thus, when Roosevelt left the post of an assistant secretary of the Navy to lead an amateur volunteer cavalry, he seemed to fulfill the duty of "gentleman volunteer." However, as discussed

12) Dated Sept. 12, 1917. Later in his 1966 memoir *The Best Times*, Dos Passos comments on the youthful claim that "[l]ooking back on it, it seems a not too disrepute ambition. I have come to see a certain value in snobbery" (69). Though the elderly writer admits a sense of superiority, he evaluates youthful aspiration favorably.

13) Melvin Landsberg notes that Dos Passos's account of the Chinese court is probably not historical fact but "distorted or fictionalized" (note 3, 70).

14) See Carr 146-50, Ludington 158-64.

above, Roosevelt proved to be more of a self-aggrandizing exhibitionist driven by amateur fervor for the war than a man of noblesse oblige, thereby undermining his claim as a “gentleman.” Moreover, his presidency was remembered for its “Big Stick” policy (483), whereby its “might makes right” approach fell short of the gentlemanly moral standard.¹⁵⁾

Whether he be a true gentleman or not, Roosevelt lost no time in proposing the idea of recruiting volunteer soldiers when President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) finally declared war on Germany in April, 1917. Roosevelt also wrote to a congressman, “we owe it to ourselves, to our national honor and self-respect. For the sake of our own souls, for the sake of the memoirs of the great Americans of the past” with the unflinching determination that he later revealed to a friend, “I would die on the field of battle, that I would never return if only [Wilson] would let me go!” (Morris, *Colonel*, ch. 25). In reality, the irrelevance of Roosevelt’s pompous diction and cavalier attitude in a modern era appears almost pathetic.

Dos Passos accentuates the fact that total war among the world powers in the twentieth-century had no room for the amateurism of Roosevelt:

the world war drowned out the righteous voice of the Happy Warrior in the roar of exploding lyddite.

Wilson wouldn’t let T.R. lead a division, this was no amateur’s war...

It wasn’t the bully amateur’s world any more. (485)

Circumstances of warfare had drastically changed since the turn of the century. WWI was a war of advanced death-technology, of new weapons and tactics. Tanks, airplanes, submarines, and poison gas were introduced for the first time. Rifles, machine-guns, and explosives became more efficient and deadly, stalemating soldiers by confining them to trenches. No longer a “splendid little war” where unprofessional volunteers could perform their stunts, U.S. officials would not listen to the “amateur soldier from the last century” (Morris, *Colonel*, ch. 25).

Instead, the requirements of the time were specialization and professionalism. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker (1871-1937) told Roosevelt that what they needed were regulars “who have devoted their lives exclusively to the study and pursuit of military matters, and have made a professional study of the recent changes in the art of war” (Morrison 1174-75). Roosevelt protested to Baker by reminding him of his proud history: “My dear sir, you forget that I have commanded troops in action in the most important battle fought by the United States army during the last half century” (Morrison 1176). To the contrary, Baker’s assessment of Roosevelt’s very record made him disregard “a repetition of the San Juan Hill affair, with the commander rushing his men into a situation from which only luck extricated them” (Johnson 253). Roosevelt’s prized bravery was

15) Roosevelt wrote to his ex-colleague Henry L. Sprague, “I have always been fond of the West African proverb: ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.’” (Morris, *The Rise*, ch. 28)

dismissed as mere recklessness in the mind of the civilian official.

In other words, Roosevelt was not able to comprehend the nature of modern war, as President Wilson wrote to him, “[t]he business now at hand is undramatic, practical, and of scientific definiteness and precision” (Morris, *Colonel*, ch. 25).¹⁶⁾ Relying on highly-developed weapons and vehicles, modern warfare made Roosevelt’s pursuit of valor and glory utterly irrelevant. Dos Passos concludes his biographical sketch stating it this way: “It wasn’t the bully amateur’s world any more. Nobody knew that on armistice day, Theodore Roosevelt, happy amateur warrior” was taken to hospital and “died quietly in his sleep / at Sagamore Hill on January 6, 1919” (485).¹⁷⁾ In the modern world, Roosevelt had turned into a dinosaur of bygone days, unable to adapt to the changing environment and destined for extinction.

For Dos Passos, the death of the “happy amateur warrior” signifies the last debris of the romanticization of war. For his final image in *1919*, he offers us the picture of a corpse of an unknown warrior, “The Body of an American.” In the penultimate section of the volume, the anonymous corpse was haphazardly chosen in a French morgue for a ceremonial burial at Arlington National Cemetery. *The New York Times* reports on the memorial service on Nov. 11, 1921: “America buried her Unknown Warrior today—placed in the earth the body of that boy whose very namelessness symbolized 50,000 others who had given their lives for America on the field of battle in the World War” (“Solemn Journey”). In a different tone, Dos Passos depicts the occasion with verbal contractions that require some deciphering:

Whereasthe Congressoftheunitedstates byaconcurrentresolutionadoptedon the4th-dayofmarch lastauthorizedthe Secretaryofwar to cause to be brought to theunitedstatesthe body of an Americanwhowasamemberoftheamericanexpeditionary-forcesineuropewholosthislifeduringtheworldwarandwhoseidentityhasnotbeenestablished for burial inthememorialamphitheatreofthe nationalcemeteryatarlingtonvirginia (756)

Articulated through a corrupted sentence structure composed of language without spaces or punctuation, the news of the nameless corpse emphasizes the futility of hollow decorum and the falsehood of ceremony.

Unlike Roosevelt, the unknown warrior has no prominent family, no illustrious career, no legendary past to be proud of. Precisely because nothing is known about the identity of the dead, “[t]he symbolic corpse has become for Dos Passos the representative American” and “[h]e is

16) John Callan O’Laughlin Papers, 2.425 quoted by Morris.

17) The penultimate passage of the section reads: “and [Roosevelt] left on the shoulders of his sons / the white man’s burden” (485). All his sons served both in WWI and WWII, except for the youngest son Quentin who died in WWI, as if to fulfill the father’s wish to die for the country.

anybody—and (as Dos Passos thought in 1932) everybody” (385-86), as Alfred Kazin puts it. The novelist references the body with anonymous pseudonyms, such as “Richard Roe” or “John Doe,” and goes on to compose a collection of fictive biographies of common Americans to chronicle their life and death in the style of prose poetry. John Doe would be born and

raised in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland, Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old brick house in Alexandria Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a halftimbered Tudor cottage in Portland the city of roses,
in the Lying-in Hospital old Morgan endowed on Stuyvesant Square,
across the railroad tracks, out near the country club, in a shack cabin tenement
apartmenthouse exclusive residential suburb.... (757)

He could hail from any region in the country and of any background, though likely a modest one. Dos Passos continues to imagine the soldier’s growing up with a promising boyhood, John Doe’s first odd jobs and motley occupations, to illustrate an ordinary working-class youth. Yet, the narrative is punctuated by President Harding’s ceremonial eulogy at the burial: “*as a typical soldier of this representative democracy he fought and died believing in the indisputable justice of his country’s cause*” (758). While Dos Passos tries to present a generic biography of an American soldier through a compilation of numerous biographies, Harding takes an opposite approach by applying a formula for an ideal patriot to the unknown soldier. Highly resonant with Rooseveltian righteousness, the soldier’s stated patriotism rings hollow, highlighting instead the pointlessness of his immolation to maximize the irony.

In contrast to Harding’s attribution of strong convictions toward war and justice to the unknown warrior, Dos Passos allows for no illusions regarding individual will or personal belief. In his account of the inspection process for enlistment, Dos Passos emphasizes humiliating objectification of the human being: “Naked he went into the army; / they weighed you, measured you, looked for flat feet, squeeze your penis to see if you had piles, counted your teeth, ... charted your urine and your intelligence,” and provided you “an identification tag stamped with your serial number” (758). War not only reduces humanity to numbers and replaceable parts according to Dos Passos, but also, it denies one’s personality, the very essence of which Roosevelt relentlessly propagated. Consequently, in the repetition of the soldier’s interrogation, “*Say feller tell me how I can get back to my outfit*” (758), lies double entendre. On the surface, the soldier is asking how to be reunited with his unit, but his underlying quest seems to represent a pining for recovery of his lost individuality symbolized by his nakedness.

Nullification of individuality is also reinforced by clichés and propaganda. Dos Passos captures the soldier’s neglected selfhood through physical sense and bodily parts: “John Doe had a head / for twentyodd years intensely the nerves of the eyes the ears the palate the tongue the fingers the

toes the armpits, the nerves warmfeeling under the skin charged the coiled brain with hurt sweet warm cold mine must dont” (759). However, his awareness of personal perceptions is overtaken by “sayings [and] printing headlines”: “Now is the time for all good men knocks but once at a young man’s door... Suppose a hun tried to rape your my country right or wrong” (759). When the solider drops his identification tag while swimming in the Marne, he loses the last clue to his identity, and his anonymity is assured.

Even his death is uneventful. Dos Passos describes the scene in an objective almost scientific tone, devoid of emotion:

The shell had his number on it.

...

The blood ran into the ground, the brains oozed out of the cracked skull and were licked up by the trenchrats, the belly swelled and raised a generation of bluebottle flies, and the incorruptible skeleton, and the scraps of dried viscera and skin bundled in khaki (760)

His graphic language marks a sharp contrast with the ceremonious glossing of the soldier’s death: “Old Glory” placed over the coffin, a bugler playing taps, and the firing of ritual shots all in the solemn attendance of the President, diplomats, military high officials, politicians, and society ladies (760). The body is decorated with numerous medals from inside and outside the country, and everyone including former President Wilson brings flowers. The contrast between the nameless dead corpse and living celebrities reflects the narrator’s quiet accusation of the rich and the powerful for having subjected anonymous Americans to brutal combat.

Therefore, in comparison to “the amateur happy warrior” of the Spanish-American War, the unknown soldier presents an entirely different conceptualization of war. While Roosevelt pursued gallantry, the American soldier of WWI in his nakedness is usurped of any chance of manliness; if one was obsessed with the self, the other was not allowed to indulge in it. The difference between the two biographical sketches effectively illustrates how WWI changed the notion of war and forms part of a bigger picture of how modernity with its highly-developed technology and capitalistic exploitation transformed human life.

“The Happy Warrior” is a strong statement against America’s older generation who could afford to romanticize war and make their entire life a battlefield to prove their honor and manliness. Furthermore, Dos Passos’s contrast between the jingoistic Rough Rider and the “gentlemen volunteers” of the ambulance corps in WWI discloses the failure of the morale of the ex-volunteer cavalry leader in the modern world. The greatest irony is revealed in the author’s contrast between the happy amateur warrior and the unknown soldier in “The Body of an

American.” This nameless Everyman illustrates deprivation of individuality in the name of war.

Coming of age during WWI, Dos Passos and his generation had to reconceive of life in a new century as defined by the most immediate and compelling reality of the Great War. Dos Passos’s critique of the turn-of-the-century war hero advances his view that Rooseveltian romance over war is irrelevant and obsolete. However, we may surmise that the author’s realization did not yet surface at the time of the Colonel’s death, but was a position he became conscious of through his writing of *1919*. In 1932 when he published the volume, Dos Passos compares that time with 1919:

Today, though the future may not seem so gaily colored or full of clanging hopes as it was thirteen years ago... we can at least meet events with our minds cleared of some of the romantic garbage that kept us from doing clear work then. Those of us who have lived through have seen these years strip the bunting off the great illusions of our time, we must deal with the raw structure of history now, we must deal with it quick, before it stamps us out. (Introduction to *Three Soldiers* 868-69)

He claims that his experiences emancipated him from “romantic garbage,” or youthful literary pretension, and gained him the ability to carry out “clear work.” While Roosevelt channeled his romanticism into warfare and a life of strife, that of the young Dos Passos was directed toward his artistic predilections.

What the novelist achieves in *1919* offers insight into the meaning of war in twentieth century America and culminates in his lucid representation of the unknown soldier’s fictive biography as a negation of the romanticization of war. By deromanticizing the war hero of the last century in contrast to the unknown warrior of WWI, Dos Passos in *1919* reassesses the meaning of war as a metaphor for modernity. He thus confronts the burden of history upon his generation by asserting that modern war is nothing but the repudiation of individuality, heroism, and ultimately, life itself.

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