FIVE

The Great War

Midwife to Modern Memory?

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KEMPER: I'm Crosby Kemper, the director of the Kansas City Public Library, and it is my pleasure and my honor to welcome you to this symposium cosponsored by the Liberty Memorial and the National World War I Museum, the Truman Library and Truman Library Institute, and the Kansas City Public Library.

WINTER: Thank you, Crosby. I do want to say a word or two about the venue, where we are, and the proximity of the museum to it. Crosby's work and that of his colleagues in creating a space in which intellectual and cultural life can gravitate towards a major library is a remarkable achievement. As someone who lived and taught in Britain for thirty years—I know this kind of municipal library functions as an icon of urban pride. There is no such thing as a major city without a major library, and you've helped extend a long and distinguished tradition.

The second point that I'd like to draw to your attention is that when I first saw the memorial and the museum, it struck me as extraordinarily

British, probably unintentionally so, although cities—Kansas City and let's say, Birmingham or Liverpool or Leeds—these cities have very powerful memories of the Protestant voluntary tradition, where it is not the state, not the federal government or the regional authorities, that create institutions of significance, institutions which last; it is civil society. And it is for that reason that I have an answer when people ask me, as they have done many times, why is it that there's a museum and a great national memorial in Kansas City—why here? The answer to that question is that local and urban initiatives last. When things are done from on high, when Congress proposes or even disposes or provides money, which I gather they have not done in this case—what they've done is to legitimate a museum, to give it its seal of approval. But in the 1920s and yet again today, it was and remains the citizens of Kansas City who made it happen. It was the same in British cities, and it remains so today. The most powerful commemorative act in Britain is still the purchase of poppies—red poppies, which are sold by the millions in November every year. When they buy the poppies, people wear a little war memorial on their lapel. And the money goes to a charitable foundation which provides for the families of veterans, veterans of all the wars of the twentieth century and the twenty-first as well as for their families. This is an act not of the state, but of the people.

Now this notion that commemoration comes from below is a very powerful point to raise at the outset of our discussion. Today we are in the middle of what I call a memory boom. Everybody outside the academy and thousands in the academy are obsessed with memory. And one reason why I think this is so is that in war, family history and national history come together. Families know what war is. We have to distinguish between national narratives told and sold by those in power and the stories people remember about their kith and kin. The length of wars matter here. The First World War did not leave a deep trace on family histories since, fortunately for the United States, this country experienced only eighteen months of bloodshed. The Second World War was worse: four years of combat for American soldiers and sailors, less than the six most of Europe knew. The fighting in Vietnam lasted longer, though the surge in troop numbers came in 1967. This meant that the five years of combat until the administration recognized the war was lost roughly approximated the length of time American men spent in uniform in World War II. My father was drafted in 1942 and came home

in 1947. American casualties were much lower in the Vietnam War than in the Second World War, but the bitterness of soldiers returning home after 1972 separated their and our experience of war from that of "the Great Generation" coming home after 1945.

For us, the Vietnam War was one of the great stimuli of First World War studies. Here was a war which in 1975 was ended on terms which varied emphatically from those American administrations and propagandists had framed in the previous decade. The United States left Vietnam, and no dominos fell. The Soviet empire or the Chinese empire were not enlarged. Puncturing the lies and illusions of a sequence of American military and civilian leaders was easy enough. The problem remained, if the official meaning of the war was nonsense, then what sense did it have? A war without sense, without logic, with huge casualties, albeit overwhelmingly on the side of the Vietnamese, drew the attention of scholars away from the Good War, the war against Hitler, the war to avenge Pearl Harbor, and turned it towards the 1914–18 conflict.

At the same time, by the 1970s and 1980s, there were audiocassette and videocassette recorders available to preserve the voices of those millions of people who went through war, whether or not in uniform. Now the Internet adds another gigantic repository to the ways we already had to keep hold of the voices and the stories of the survivors.

Some survivors wore uniforms; most did not. And here the slow but inexorable appearance of the survivors of the Holocaust as witnesses for our time made remembering a moral obligation. So to a degree, the memory boom is a product of twentieth-century warfare. It's been amplified and necessarily so, by the transformation of war from the clash of arms between those in uniform to what we now call asymmetric warfare, the clash of arms between armies and insurgents who rarely wear uniforms.

There is another element in the memory boom we should consider here and in the Liberty Memorial Museum. Anyone who visits such a museum, anyone who comes to a conversation like this one, is engaging in an act of commemoration. We are part of the story we are here to talk about. So in an extraordinary sense, you who have come here today are part of a conversation about what war is. That conversation is an act of commemoration, invoking fundamental questions of human values. That is true in all history, but it is much more so in a history of a set of events that took nine million lives and God knows how many arms and

legs and minds and dreams. The reason why the cultural history of the Great War is such a popular and evocative subject is that it opened the twentieth century.

In 1975, Paul Fussell famously said that the war produced a series of novels, poems, plays which shared a very special outlook, a very special, ironic voice. He put these works under the umbrella of the word "modern memory." Why did he write the book? Many years ago he told me that he wrote it because he was fed up with cocktail parties at Princeton where people were talking about body counts without knowing a thing of what they were speaking. He knew. He still has, I believe, some fragments of shrapnel in his leg from service during the Battle of the Bulge in the Second World War. The Vietnam War was the American First World War, a war which turned innocence into experience, naivete into irony, noble language into the visceral expressions of disillusioned soldiers.

Reading poetry and fiction, or the memoirs that stand between fiction and fact is a critical way we know about war. Reading a novel about war may be a commemorative act. Coming to a conversation between scholars of war may be a commemorative act. It strikes me that one way to understand why we're here together today is to think and feel the force of this question: what is commemoration? And how do you honor, glorify those who die in war, who need to be honored, without glorifying war itself? How do you do that? That question is a profound one, and, to a degree, the cultural history of the First World War is a quest to find that answer.

WOHL: Yes, one of the problems today will be, I tend to agree with most of the things that Jay is saying, and so there may not be as much contention up here as would be ideal, but I should really give it a little bit of background here. He and I got into the cultural history business at more or less the same time, I think. When both of us went to graduate school to learn how to do history, we were not taught cultural history, at least I wasn't. I had an embryonic interest in it, although I couldn't have named it—I mean I had no word for it, exactly, because in those days, there was more of a tendency to talk about intellectual history. And when I think about the way that the writing of history has changed during the decades when I have been a historian, beginning in the late 1950s and really in the early 1960s—when I think about the dramatic

way in which the writing of history has changed, I find it just extraordinary that this happened and, of course, this in itself requires an explanation. It's connected, probably, with the memory boom and I think that Jay is right about that, but it's connected to other things as well. When I first started studying the history of the First World War, it was common to claim that wars could not have any cultural dimension to them at all, that they destroyed culture. And I spent a lot of time arguing, beginning in the 1970s, that we may find it horrific, but whether we like it or not, the First World War was an extraordinarily important cultural event and its cultural impact took many, many different forms which people are studying today.

In the late 1960s, I set out seriously working on the generation of 1914, after finishing my first book on French Communism in the making. That was during the Vietnamese War, and I think that Jay is absolutely correct to establish a connection between what he calls the memory boom—I would call it the flowering of cultural history—and the beginnings of the American involvement in Vietnam. It coincided with the youth rebellion as well in this country. And that was really what convinced me to write a book organized around the concept of a "generation," because I discovered such a youth rebellion in late-nineteenth, early-twentieth-century Europe as well, and many of the people who later fought in the war of 1914–18 had been a part of it, or had been influenced by it in various ways. Now, it's no accident, as the Soviets used to love to say, that Paul Fussell's book appeared in 1975. It's no accident that it appeared at that time, and this is a book that has stood up very well, has stood the test of time very well. I can attest to that because I give it to my undergraduates, who are not slow to tell me about books that they don't like reading or that they find useless. They find Paul Fussell's book complex, demanding, but never boring.

Now, when I give classes on memory in the First World War—what I call Remembering the First World War—Paul Fussell's book is the first book that we read in that class. I use it as a kind of opening to the topic, and so I start out with my students in seminar situation—in good Socratic manner to have a discussion with them—and they start talking about chapter 1, naturally. And I always say, "Wait a moment, we're not going to start with chapter one." And I ask, "How many of you have read the dedication to this book?" And believe me, not many of them have. And the dedication to this book says everything about what's going to

come. "To the memory of Technical Sergeant Edward Keith Hudson, ASN 36548772, Company F, 410th Infantry, killed beside me in France, March 15, 1945." And what that means is that this is a book about war and I've been to war, I know what it means, to see people dying next to me. And that was one of the things, I think, that made this book so moving. It has many different themes in it, many different arguments, some of which I disagree with—we should get into that issue. But it is a passionate book, and it is a book that is written out of personal experience. The connection is there, between the Great War and the Vietnamese War. The Vietnamese War triggers memories of the past, or of selected episodes of the past.

Now I'd just like to, before I give the floor back to Jay, I'd just like to add one thing to what he said about what cultural history means to him. I agree and maybe I'll put it in a slightly different way—cultural history is the study of meanings that people give to their experience. Now, this sounds like a fairly simple statement. But in fact, it isn't simple at all, because now we have to break this down and think seriously about how cultural memories come into existence. We would all agree, I think—most of us here would agree—that people have experiences, that we all think we have experiences, right? But we don't have access to all of the experiences that we've had. What we have is the memory of certain of those experiences that we've chosen to remember. Now, we all know this from our own lives, as a matter of fact. The way we choose to remember those experiences changes as the world around us changes, which further complicates the situation. The book Paul Fussell wrote in 1975 is not the book that he would have written in 1965 and it's not the book that he would have written in 1985 or 1995. It's a book that bears the marks of that period. Now, you have experience, you have the memory of experience, which is highly selective and undependable—we all know that—and of course, as we get older, it becomes even more undependable. My experience is also that young people's memory is pretty undependable—at least the memory of my son's is pretty undependable. We have the memory of that experience, which is highly selective, but how can we turn that into some kind of cultural phenomenon? That's yet another step. And it doesn't matter whether we're writing a novel, or we're writing a memoir, or we're writing a piece of music, or we're creating a war monument, we've got to choose a form through which the memory of that experience is going to be expressed, channeled, funneled.

And there are a finite number of those forms. And very few of us invent forms, cultural forms, maybe a few very unusual people, but most of us draw on forms that already exist. And then when you think of this process that I've been describing, you begin to realize why the use of memorial literature, let's say memoirs, the use of all types of memory in various forms is such a tricky thing for historians. All these operations have gone on and at the end, we have a cultural product which is very much a product of its time.

One of the best examples of this is Erich Maria Remarque's famous novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front.* This is often called the greatest war novel ever written. It certainly is often called the greatest novel of the First World War. But a funny thing about this book is, that it tells you more about what was going on in Europe in the late 1920s than it does about what was going on in the war—or at least it tells you as much. I don't know if you agree with that. I'm trying to find something that we will disagree on.

ALL: Laughter.

WINTER: I'll take that up. Interestingly, Paul Fussell's book that you've mentioned—and I share enormous admiration for it—was written by a professor of English literature, not a historian formerly or professionally. It is my view that that matters not at all. We historians have been forced to live with the neighbors, and doing so has created a new kind of cultural history full of anthropology, full of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and perhaps above all, of insights drawn from literature and literary scholars. What's critical about Paul Fussell's book, entitled *The Great War and Modern Memory,* is that it is entirely based upon English letters, and it doesn't really tell us much about German or French writing. And the reason is, you need to live in England, I think, to really appreciate how fecund, how fruitful, and almost iridescent is the word "irony." It connotes not just a way of writing about war, but a way of living in a world that is full of absurdities. And one of the absurdities which never left Paul Fussell is embedded in the dedication you mentioned a few minutes ago. During his service in the Second World War, his sergeant led him around as a young twenty-year-old from Pasadena, near your hometown, Robert. Fussell had a heavy responsibility for the lives of his men and was understandably terrified of that responsibility.

Why did this sergeant, who was like a father to him or an uncle, certainly a benevolent spirit, who made sense of his—Paul Fussell's—life as a young officer in the Second World War—why was it that when the shell burst over their heads and they both hit the ground, why was the sergeant killed and he wasn't? That question lay at the heart of Fussell's understanding of a world which is absurd and dominated by mass death and arbitrary survival. Such a world is conveyed by one form of storytelling which is called ironic. And that is the form in which much Great War literature appeared.

Irony means many things. In the Greek, irony means that you say one thing and you mean another—"All Quiet on the Western Front": The hero dies on the day in which there is no news—his death is meaningless, it literally says that the war meant nothing because the message "All Quiet on the Western Front" savagely avoids denoting the extinction of the life of the one human being who is at the center of the novel. What is the appropriate form of writing to use to express the notion that war had no meaning? How do you write fiction which challenges the notion that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end? How do you express the uncanniness of millions of people going to a war who wound up being confronted by Pandora's box and by opening it, having to fight another, much crueler, war entirely? Irony is one way to do it. Perhaps all wars are ironic in being worse than people think they will be. I think in fact, that's what happened in Iraq—whatever your political outlook. Iraq is an ironic war. It started off to remove certainly a cruel and sadistic dictator, but to get rid of weapons of mass destruction that weren't there. The anticipation and the outcome are radically different.

But irony means something else, too. It means an English way of looking at the world. The best example I know of this is an episode which recurred during two battles—the Battle of Loos in 1915 and the Battle of the Somme in 1916. In both there were British soldiers who kicked off the battle by kicking a football into no-man's land. One of these footballs survives in the National Army Museum in London, but none of the men who kicked off survived the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

Is it anything other than ironic to say that war is a sport? Usually people go home after a sporting match, but in 1914, someone changed the rules. Nine million men did not get to go home. This isn't war, this is bloody slaughter; this is what constantly comes up in the usage of the term, "modern memory" that Paul Fussell has given us. What he says is

that this way of writing—this form, the creative cultural form—is the way we have come to look at the First World War, but not only that. Irony is embedded in the way we look at all war throughout the twentieth century. We stand on the shoulders of the poets of the First World War who created a new kind of ironic writing. We are not alone there. Think about Heller's *Catch 22,* in which someone says to Yossarian, I think when a Japanese attack is happening, "Don't worry, Yossarian, they're not trying to kill you, they're trying to kill everybody."

ALL: Laughter.

WINTER: Or the images of war in *MASH* where the only sane man is out of his mind. What does courage mean under such circumstances? Most soldiers who died in the First World War—80 percent—were killed by artillery; did it take courage to be blown up by a shell fired ten miles behind the lines? Did it take courage to fire it? Something has happened to language here. Words don't seem to fit experience. A courageous man, like the sergeant standing next to Paul Fussell, and a coward in his unit, had equal chances of getting blown to pieces. What Fussell has done is to tell us that noble language was blown up during the First World War. Meaning, like most soldiers' lives in the war, went underground. Meaning is to be found between the lines.

Let's go in another direction. What's wrong with the thesis of modern memory is as important as what's right with it. The first is, it doesn't belong to women. The cultural form we term irony is deeply gendered. It is a masculine point of view. Or is it? Here we need to go beyond Fussell. It has become ridiculous to say that war is boys with their toys. It isn't. And it never was.

WOHL: Let me add something to that, because the more I read and teach the *Great War and Modern Memory,* the more surprised I am that Fussell scarcely mentions the name of Vera Brittain, even though she's a very good example of the things that he's talking about. I mean that will give you an idea of how blind historians were to these issues. One of the most absurd notions about the First World War is that only men were deeply involved in it. Women were also deeply involved in the war. We don't have time to go into all the different ways that they were deeply involved, but they were deeply involved in the war—emotionally

and practically and all kinds of ways. Now, when I wrote my book, *The Generation of 1914*—my book came out a few years after Paul Fussell's book—I was writing my book when his book came out, which almost caused me to abandon my book because my first reading was such that I thought, my God, he said it all. I mean there's nothing left for me to add to all that. But I somehow pulled myself together.

ALL: Laughter.

WOHL: Because I was a young professor and I didn't have any alternative.

ALL: Laughter.

WOHL: And Jay knows what I'm talking about. I had to publish something and because Paul Fussell was an English professor, I could always hope that nobody in my department . . .

ALL: Laughter.

WOHL: . . . would read him or know about him, which turned out not to be the case, by the way.

KEMPER: Robert, could I break in and ask you this question? Fussell says that the dominating form of modern understanding is that it is essentially ironic. And as Jay has said and you've said, essentially, that's an English view of the world. You write in *The Generation of 1914* about Ernst Jünger and many others in Germany, about Ortega in Spain, about Drieu La Rochelle or Malraux in France—all of whom, in writing in the twenties and thirties, were very un-ironic. How do you square this with Fussell's claim that the war set in motion a specific mode of writing dominating the interwar period and after?

WOHL: I would dispute that point about some of them. Take the French writer Drieu La Rochelle, who is a very well-known French writer, an intellectual in the 1920s and '30s and on into the Second World War when he got involved in collaboration with the Vichy regime. He wrote one book—well, he wrote several books that impinged on the

First World War, but he wrote one novel that could be considered to be a First World War novel that could be compared to *All Quiet on the Western Front.* It came out a few years later. There's a lot of irony in that book as well, I think. You know, Jünger's sense of humor has been vastly underestimated by people. I knew Ernst Jünger, even though my wife tells me that I shouldn't admit it because he was considered to be a forerunner of Nazism (though there's a dispute about that). But I knew him, and one of the things that impressed me most about him was his irony, precisely. I asked him once if he had any occasion to change his mind about any of the things he'd written about the First World War in the 1920s, which is when he wrote most of his books about the First World War. He said, "No." He said that, "The only thing I regret . . ." then he moved to the present situation—he said, "The only thing I regret about the present situation is that we can't have any more wars in Europe, we'll have to fight them outside of Europe through surrogates." Was he being serious when he said this? I mean he said it with a twinkle in his eyes, certainly—his bright blue eyes. So, I think we should come back to this issue of irony—and this is an argument that Jay has made—and whether irony is a specifically English characteristic, or a more generally European state of mind and form of writing. He may be right, although I would be more inclined to say that the English have a particular kind of irony; you see it in their movies and various forms of mass culture and so forth. To argue that the ironic voice didn't exist in other countries, I think, is a mistake. I don't believe this, and now maybe we can have a real argument, finally.

Let me be clear though. I think that in one sense the basic argument of the *Great War in Modern Memory* is mistaken. I cannot accept the notion that it was the Great War that shaped modern forms of life, however we want to define those things after 1918. A thing that has always surprised me about Paul Fussell is that he was writing his book precisely at a moment when historians had begun to break with the notion that the First World War had changed everything in Europe; they started going back to study the prewar period in depth. Precisely at a moment when they were finding the roots of modernism and of many, many other things—of political ideologies of various kinds, fascism, everything, Fussell said no, it was the war which formed the real rupture in history. And yet many scholars found that contemporaries discovered all those things in the late nineteenth century during the years before

the war. There's scarcely a trace in Fussell's book of an awareness, an acknowledgment that this had been going on. Now, what makes it serious, from my point of view, is that he was writing precisely at the moment when there was a kind of renaissance in pre-1914 studies. I don't think that there are many historians around who would argue that the war experience of a very selective group of upper-middle-class English officers whose writings Fussell examines can lead us to conclude that the war transformed modern sensibility when lots of other things were transforming modern sensibility as well. It is always dangerous to say this year is the big break in cultural history, since someone is bound to say, what about the year before? But that's a very big issue.

WINTER: On that point, I think the critical choice is between a view that the Great War was revolutionary in cultural life and my perspective which is the exact opposite, that the Great War was a counterrevolutionary moment. The central reason I have come to this conclusion, counter to Fussell's point of view, was that the people during and after the war needed to find languages within which to express mourning and mass bereavement on a scale the world had never seen before. And what were the languages ordinary people or writers used? They're the ones that they used before the war—religious motifs, romantic motifs, classical ones, and Jünger, of course, goes back to the *Iliad* in a lot of his writings.

WOHL: Right.

WINTER: Now the point is, that a war as complicated as that and as global as that, is bound to have everything—is bound to have both movements forward and movements back. But if cultural history is the study of signifying practices, the practices that people develop—what they do, not just what they think—then the cultural history of the war must go beyond poets to look around at family practices and those in small villages and market towns as well as in the great intellectual centers. And if you do that, then you see not modern memory but older forms of remembrance when people do the work of mourning.

To some degree, we are still there, still at the moment, when the optimism of the nineteenth century came to an end, and we had to realize, as the great French writer Paul Valéry said of them and of us, we now know that our civilization is mortal. There is that wistful air, that sense

that a world has been lost in all kinds of commemoration, including the site in Kansas City we honor today. Here we are still engaged in an act of commemoration, just as the war's survivors did nearly a century ago. Perhaps one of the things we mourn is the notion that war has meaning because good people die in it. Nine million men died; thirty million were wounded. These numbers are so vast that they challenge the notion that war or history has any meaning. This kind of skepticism appears to me to be very remote from Ernst Jünger, who loved studying insects, who viewed many people in the same way as he viewed the insects on his wall, and who used that kind of arrogance—he was too much of a snob to be a Nazi . . .

WOHL: That's true, to be sure.

WINTER: . . . and used that kind of arrogance to distance himself from a set of events that had very little meaning. We have to look at these writers over time to make sense of what they had to say. What Jünger did was to change the original text of *In Stahlgewittern (Storm of Steel)* because political organizations of veterans needed a book that could be sold at their meetings and signed after them. At the end of the sixth edition of the book—which is the one that got translated into English—there appears the phrase, "Germany lives and Germany will be great." That wasn't in the first edition, but it is there in the sixth; times change and so do editions. I don't see much irony there.

WOHL: Of course it wasn't.

WINTER: Yes, it wasn't there. So, the first thing I think we should do is to broaden the time period we examine and increase the kind and variety of texts we study. Perhaps we cultural historians need to go beyond the intellectuals. I think nowadays cultural history places intellectuals within much broader communities than they were located in the old German tradition of *Geistesgeschichte*—the history of ideas as the spirit of the age. That is where I began with Fritz Stern, my great teacher from Columbia. Cultural history moves out of the realm of the artists and intellectuals of the period to the public at large, and this is a real advance.

Cultural history has a very broad appeal, and cultural history of the Great War touches people in ways that make sense to them. Fussell

wrote about writers, but he spoke to those outside of the academy, he said something that mattered to people who were not academics. That's why the book has sold so well for so many years, and through him and Sam Hynes and others, the cultural history of the First World War has become a matter of general knowledge, much more so in Europe than here, but even here this is more the case than it was thirty years ago. Cultural history is not only exponentially richer than it was thirty years ago, but it has become a way to bridge the gap between the academy and the educated public. And that's why, Crosby, you can't get off the hook by saying that you're not part of this conspiracy called the cultural history of the war—you're deeply implicated in our activities and through events like today's, in our achievements.

KEMPER: Let me take that as a cue to ask you a question from my experience of commemoration of World War I and war, generally. I remember—I went to Andover, the prep school, and there used to be a great Memorial Day parade—there may still be—and it always struck me as being very different in its purpose and its meaning than virtually anything I read about war. And people who were veterans of World War I, there were still in the mid-sixties veterans of World War I, they would march in the parade, Korean War veterans, World War II veterans, there were about to become Vietnam War veterans—I think there were a couple of Vietnam War veterans—and usually lining the streets in the late sixties, as I was about to graduate from Andover, there would be protesters of the Vietnam War; respectful protests—black armbands, that kind of thing—and it struck me that the purpose of the parade was very different than anything English literary figures or German literary figures were doing—the purpose of the parade was to bring the community together. It ended at the Bell Tower at Andover, which was much like the Cenotaph in London or maybe Liberty Memorial itself, the tower at Liberty Memorial—and it had—to use a word that you use—or a phrase that you use, Jay, in your book, the sense of a community of bereavement. If this wasn't quite bereavement, it touched on the same general idea: it was a way of bringing the community together to honor the dead and to honor the living who'd gone through the experience of war.

WINTER: And it was done at the local level. I think that's a critical point and why being here in Kansas City is so important to emphasize.

This is not something that happens at the centers of power alone. We don't need George Bush or Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton to tell us what war is. Democracies fight war in which every loss is equal to every other: that's what war memorials are all about: the names. That's what Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial is all about—the names, and every name has the same value as every other one. She, by the way, took it directly from a war memorial done by the great English architect Sir Edward Lutyens, at Thiepval on the Somme. She conjured up her design in a paper she wrote at Yale, for which she got a B+, I might add.

ALL: Laughter.

WINTER: And one of her teachers, whose name I will not mention, also sent in a design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; he got nowhere, and she won it instead. I think the critical point is that what we're doing today and what people do every time anyone goes to the museum, is de-centering commemoration. It doesn't happen only on the Mall in Washington. It happens all over the place. The critical issue, in my view, is how to form an open conspiracy of academics, veterans, and the public to study a subject which won't go away.

I spent most of my academic life in Europe. Anyone who wants to understand the integration of Europe, this extraordinary creation of the last fifty years, has to understand the disintegration of Europe. That disintegration really did happen between 1914 and 1918. Here I would say that the prewar period is less significant than the shock of destruction in those years. What changed was not only the capacity for destruction, which expanded geometrically, but the extent to which, as Edmund Blunden, one of the great war novelists, put it in his *Undertones of War,* that whoever comes out on top in the war, the only winner was the war itself. That notion of 1914 as the opening of Pandora's box and the letting out a monster was in the minds of those who after 1945 created the new Europe.

Although there were lots of other reasons for doing it, the European vision of this story is, to a degree, different from the American vision. They have gone a different way after 1945, and kept war out of their lives, to be sure with the exception of Yugoslavia, but even that catastrophe has come to an end.

To understand Europe today, you need to feel the power of the cultural legacy of the Great War. That's why Jünger matters and why Paul

Fussell, I think, has to be praised and criticized. He lets us into the English version of that notion that something dreadful happened in 1914 and it must never happen again, a notion which made it necessary for the British, late and reluctantly, to join the European Union. They didn't want to get together or get in bed with the French and Germans, nothing of the kind. But the avoidance of war is so deep a cultural necessity, that when Tony Blair took his country to war over Iraq, he didn't take his countrymen with him. Whatever sources you cite, it is clear that 80 percent, 90 percent of the population felt the other way.

So to return to the question of whether 1914 was a caesura in European history, the answer must be yes and no. When we look at commemoration, the language and forms used come from the past. I think the critical point is that every nation creates its forms of commemoration and they frequently do so by going backward. Very rarely do we find really exciting breakthrough work. Picasso, so far as I know, in the First World War, didn't do much that had the war in it. He designed cubist masks for the first surrealist ballet *Parade* in 1917, but not much more about the world in which he lived than that. Twenty years later, he painted his *Guernica* in 1937; that's a different matter, that's later.

Picasso lived in Paris and survived a war in which the losses in human life mounted to a point no one had ever seen before. What the First World War created was a gigantic mountain of corpses and a question without an answer, which is, what meaning do you attach to it? What would you say, Robert, are the culturally explosive or creative facets of those men and women who went through war that would complicate and qualify this story, because no one interpretation of the First World War can be true, it's just too big.

WOHL: Absolutely. And there is no such thing as a narrative of the war, a story of the war. There are stories of the war, individual stories and then some stories which sometimes come together collectively. And that's why one historian has called the First World War a cubist war in part, because it's got all these jagged pieces that don't fit together. Now, I didn't mean to argue that the First World War didn't have a major impact on European life and European culture, European politics—far from it, as a matter of fact. I think it did, and if we wanted to restrict our discussion to culture alone for the moment, leaving aside the political issues and so forth, I think that one of the major results of the war—and

Jay may have to go along with me on this one—was to discredit the official culture that had existed before 1914 in various ways. This was not a complete discrediting, but movements that had been tiny, un-influential gatherings of intellectuals before 1914, after 1918 began to reach a larger audience at that time.

And I've argued too that one of the impacts of the war was to accelerate the diffusion of what we call modernism and modernist culture in the 1920s and 1930s. The war seemed to support the modernists' claim there was going to be a cultural break in Europe and that everything was going to be different in the future than it had been in the past. The war was a spectacular example of that. And there are many other ways, I think, that the war affected culture, but surely one of the most important impacts that it had was that modernism and official culture, too, high culture generally, which had tended to be optimistic before 1914, became pessimistic. I think that was a very important change, if only because it suggested the need for radical remedies of various kinds. And both Communism and Fascism were the beneficiaries of that feeling that there needed to be some kind of a radical change, particularly, if we think of Fascism, as many historians have argued, not simply as a political movement, but as a cultural phenomenon as well and, of course, that's the argument that Modris Ecksteins makes in his book *Rites of Spring.* Eksteins's book is full of outrageous statements, but it is very exciting, very exhilarating to read, and very provocative, wouldn't you agree with that?

WINTER: Absolutely.

KEMPER: The technology of remembrance changes dramatically in the twentieth century. Film, for instance, becomes an important medium of interpretation. Jay, one of the most interesting passages in your book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* is about Abel Gance's film, *J'accuse!* Could you describe that?

WINTER: The one reason I think your use of the word medium, Crosby, is perfect, is that various forms of belief in the paranormal emerged during the First World War. And at the same time, entirely independently, there was an enormous expansion of the size of movie houses, too. It

was an accident that the war happened at the very moment that film became the center of popular culture, mass entertainment, in Europe and beyond. So you have to imagine movie theaters holding four thousand to five thousand people—the big Gaumont theaters in Paris did that—and the lights going down, and you have a pianist at the front playing scary music. Then a film appears, and the audience goes through what we might describe as a collective séance. Imagine such a scene, and then it might be possible to understand why the cinema was a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of the idea that the dead might come back to ask a simple question of the living. What did we die for? Was it worth it, when I went off and got my mortal wound; did you, my neighbor, take advantage of my business, or you, who lived one street away from me and my wife, while I was away and maybe before I died, did you take advantage of my wife and her loneliness? Was our death something that contributed to anything that was worthwhile? Were the living worthy of this sacrifice?

The filmmaker Abel Gance asked these questions on film, by visualizing a moment in the vast cemeteries scattered on the battlefields of Verdun in northern France. That moment is a dream of a soldier who had gone mad; did it happen? Maybe; maybe not. But the dream takes on a life of its own. He calls the dead of Verdun to rise and go home, and see if their families had been worthy of their sacrifice. And one by one, they do. They rise, and join together, helping each other along, covered with bandages, and march through the country on their way home. Gance was not a man for modest statements. This is the apocalypse, the day of judgment he has filmed, using, by the way, hundreds of soldiers loaned to him by the French army to make his film for the propaganda effort of France. Many of those soldiers playing the dead on film became the dead in real life; they fell in combat in the last bloody months of the war. The madman tells this story to civilians in his village, and warns them to get ready; their dead are coming home. And what do they see when they reach their villages? The dead find the living, filled with remorse for the ordinary sins they committed—foreclosing mortgages; letting a business fall into debt; committing adultery. Just an ordinary town, like Kansas City. Then the dead return to their graves and the film ends.

Now this was so successful a film that Gance did it again in 1937, and this time, it was a talkie. This time the same man, poet, visionary, whatever, is a chemist who discovers the neutron bomb—it's not called that,

but that's what it is, a weapon that can destroy people without destroying property. And this time, he goes to Verdun to call all of the dead of the First World War from all the armies, not just the French ones, to march home and tell their loved ones that there must never be war again. This was Gance's second attempt to imagine the dead of the Great War returning home, this time from everywhere, and to every land, saying that war is an abomination that can never be allowed to happen again.

That pacifist element in the interwar years is something that was carried by film and not only by film. Now let us leave the cinema and go to the homes of the bereaved. Nine million men died in the war, and God knows how many of their loved ones found conventional religious support useful. Many, many people did not. And thus they turned to the pagan perimeter of Christianity and sought the help of mediums and of the séances they led. These are people who believed that they really had to have a word with their son who died in the war. If you can imagine radio waves carrying messages across distances, why not say, maybe the electrical or chemical traces of the brain might be left, even after death and might facilitate communication with the living? And the form of this communication is a séance, led by a woman who is the medium, in which parents or relatives try to ask these questions of their departed: are you all right? Is it okay? And the answer almost always is "Yes, I'm here with my friends who were killed as well. You can go back to your lives again. It's all right. Life can go on. It doesn't have to stop in the shadow of our deaths." That extraordinary imagery of the magical, the mysterious, the otherworldly, in séances is also there in other kinds of images. It is there in spirit photography, which through double exposure, convinced the gullible that they could see the clouds of spirits above the living. It is there in experimental film, too, and I'm thinking of the great 1920 silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* with its madman's dream, and the invocation of insane asylums after the Great War.

WOHL: Yes indeed.

WINTER: Now, the reason why I think this is important to mention in answer to your question is it raises the issue of shell shock right away. The basic question in circulation at the time and beyond is whether anyone could say that the world is sane when it engages in a war of that kind. And if the word "sane" doesn't apply to a confrontation

in which nine million people died and thirty million were wounded, then how did soldiers go through that unbelievable experience and retain their sanity?

The answer is, quite a few didn't. What are we going to call their condition? doctors asked each other. We're going to call it "shell shock," one British physician replied, because 80 percent of the men killed were killed by artillery. But soon enough he saw the error of his invention, since people went mad far away from the artillery. The term stuck even though its author disowned it. The term "shell shock" endured, but in part it became a metaphor for a revolution in warfare, for the war turned insane those men who before joining up had been perfectly normal.

Now, is it surprising that experimental film picked this up as much as popular film? Gance's *J'accuse!* was a romantic film, because it started out with a banal love triangle and then it turned into something entirely other when its director started to think about all those people coming back from war who not only had no arms and no legs, but no minds, or rather they had no minds that they could control. Their stories took over their lives.

Shell-shocked men had lives paralyzed by stories that kept coming back. The British novelist Virginia Woolf, who knew a thing or two about madness, wrote *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1923. Here is a fictionalized version of the true story of her husband's brother, her brother-in-law, who inspired her creation, Septimus Smith. In that novel, he jumps out a window because he was constantly being followed by the ghost of the man blown up next to him during the war.

So my point is simple. The media of the time dealt with issues of huge significance to contemporaries. I think it is true to this day. The mass media of the Great War period helped to break down the barrier between high art and low art or popular culture and high culture, so that what is experimental engages in what is popular and flows, as it were, into a stream that is enormously powerful in affecting us all. So what the Great War did was, to a degree, to democratize artistic expression and bring out lots of voices that spoke in different ways about the catastrophe of their time.

To be sure, art follows its own rules and rhythms. But even artists live in the world. Picasso himself was said to have told a friend in Paris, after watching a parade of camouflaged artillery go by, that artists invented the Great War because cubists invented camouflage. What would the

naval war be without cubism? Because all the ships would have been sunk unless they looked like waves, or whatever, to avoid the U-Boats.

Here I touch on a puzzle I have never resolved. A great deal of commemorative art is allegorical in character. Yes, the fact of mass death is ubiquitous. No one could have missed it. But what do these different commemorative statements mean? Take the Liberty Memorial here in Kansas City. What do the sphinxes represent on either side of the tower? Maybe the sphinxes are there because they can't answer the question, how do you honor those who die in war without glorifying war itself? Maybe that's the question—the riddle within the sphinx within the war. Maybe that's it. But think about that. These are Egyptian forms, even the plinth—that is, an extended Roman form—but none of it is Christian, none of it. Maybe I've missed it, but so far as I can tell, the one thing that's extraordinary about that memorial and thousands of others is that they go back before Christianity to find the forms in which to express their views about a global disaster. This was a Christian world—it still is, to a degree, in this country, and it certainly was in Europe at the time. Then why not more Christian forms? The great cenotaph in the middle of London, Sir Edwin Lutyens's Cenotaph of 1919–20—it's not Christ's tomb, it's a Greek tomb, an empty tomb. Lutyens went back before Christ to express something about loss of life in war.

You can see my difficulty in fitting together these forms of remembrance with your argument, Robert, about the extraordinary assimilation and amplification of radical notions of change with this equal and maybe even more powerful movement culturally and intellectually towards an older, archaic, even counterrevolutionary direction. How would you put all that together?

WOHL: Yes. I'm prepared to answer that, although not perhaps to your satisfaction. I have been dissatisfied for a long time with the view of culture that sees one kind of culture replacing another kind of culture, so that you have a kind of succession of cultures over time. Now, maybe that makes sense if you're working on the middle ages or the renaissance, although I'd like to look at it carefully before I agree to that, but it certainly doesn't work in the twentieth century. I absolutely agree with Jay that there was a turning back to older forms in the 1920s and 1930s in the aftermath of the war. I don't think that there's any question about that, but I see a coexistence of various types of culture, or maybe you

might want to call it a struggle that was going on between various types of culture, in which they were vying for hegemony, but none really exercised that hegemony. Now, Jay has talked about a popular culture and older cultural forms that I would tend to associate, maybe, with official culture as it existed in the late nineteenth century in Europe. I've talked about modernist culture which had an agenda of its own and which I would argue was much stronger after the war than it was before, although it changed its nature, also to a great extent, because of the war. That's another issue.

But there's another type of culture that further complicates the picture and that's mass culture. The entertainment industry, the culture industry, becomes very important in the postwar years. And there is a very strange relationship between modernism and that culture. Actually you just touched on it when you mentioned *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* as a matter of fact. There was a lot of interaction between modernist culture and the new mass culture. And as a matter of fact, many people who had been involved in small literary cultural groups before 1914 moved over into the mass cultural realm in the years following the First World War. And there are many interesting examples of that. So I would simply try and complicate the picture. We don't have to choose between going back—culture looking backwards or culture looking forwards. However, one of the points that Jay made with which I would totally agree, and I don't think that there's any question about this, is the ways people dealt with the trauma of the war, which was a major issue after 1918 for all European countries that had been involved in the war, and Jay has written very eloquently about this. In dealing with the trauma over the war, it was much more effective to go backwards in terms of culture—to look backwards rather than to look forwards. I'll use the term that Jay uses in his book—you seldom saw effective mourning going on or even commemoration going on in highly experimental forms, and I think there was a reason for that. People have always been a bit mystified by the fact that the English writers of the First World War—especially the ones that Fussell talks about and others as well—people have been mystified by the fact that they seem to be quite conservative in their choice of forms in their work, and again, I think there was a reason for that. One reason, of course, is that they wanted to reach a larger audience, and the person who was most open about this was Robert Graves in explaining why he

wrote *Goodbye to All That,* maybe to make money after a difficult divorce. He put a little bit of everything into it—everything he thought people would find interesting so that it would become a best seller.

Many people who have written on the connection between war and European culture in the 1920s and 1930s have been surprised by the conservatism of some of the writers who dealt with these issues. And I think that you've done a lot to explain why they were conservative. I mean why they did often look back to older forms. Although then, when you look more carefully, sometimes it becomes more complex, I mean even with the people that Fussell talks about. Siegfried Sassoon, the English poet, for instance: he did look backwards, but at the same time, he broke with his pre-1914 Edwardian style. It's a very complicated issue, but I think the central point here is that they and we cannot avoid the immense problem that bereavement and mourning presented for Europeans in the 1920s and 1930s. I don't think that we have even yet thoroughly understood the impact of the war refracted through this process. We haven't thoroughly understood how that process affected political decisions, for example, encouraged pacifism—we haven't talked about the various veterans' movements and so forth yet. We haven't talked about the atmosphere that made possible Neville Chamberlain's Appeasement Policy in 1938.

KEMPER: Can I ask—I think we want to go to questions from the audience and maybe get a summation from the two of you—but I want to ask one last question from my point of view about a figure that you disagree about a little bit in both your writings in getting to the idea of the impact on mass culture. This is an elite figure who became an icon of mass culture. I'm talking about T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, and Jay, you talked in *Remembering War* about Lawrence as a very alienated figure. You both use the same facts about his life—the illegitimacy, his involvement in languages in the Middle East, his disappointment with the Versailles settlement, et cetera, but your key word, Jay, is alienation—that he's an alienated figure. And Robert, the key thing you say about him is that he was always in search of a way to get out of inaction and in to action, I think is a phrase that you use—a search for commitment—and maybe it's opposite sides of the same coin, but you seem to have a different view of the meaning of Lawrence's experience in the war and after the war.

WOHL: I'd like to think that these two views could be reconciled because nobody could argue that Lawrence wasn't alienated after the war. People just disagree about the reasons for it. I mean there are psychological explanations and there are political explanations and cultural explanations, which is only to say that T. Lawrence was a very complex person and none of his friends really understood him. He was a man of a thousand faces. I think, if I did say that he was always looking for a chance to engage in action of various kinds—I didn't remember having said that, but if I did say that, I'm happy about it.

ALL: Laughter.

WOHL: It sounds like a promising line of argument. Let me just make a very simplistic argument in favor of that statement. After the war, Lawrence did not retire into an ivory tower, by any means. Since we've all seen the David Lean movie of his life, most of us think that his life was really over after Damascus was taken in 1918, but actually, he did a lot of things. He was very active in the attempt to refashion the Middle East, and he was very close to Churchill, who was British colonial secretary in the early 1920s. He joined the army and the air force and was thrown out of both, but he eventually was allowed to remain in the air force. And what he did when he was in the air force? He was testing various types of machinery. He loved fast machines. He of course was killed on a fast machine—he loved riding his motorcycle at high speeds, and it is true that he had a certain amount of political activity. At the end of his life, he was in very close contact with people who were involved or about to become involved in the British Fascist movement. So he was a very complex figure who cannot be encapsulated in a few sentences, even a few sentences written by me.

WINTER: The counterpoint to that argument is worth considering. I placed my reflections on T. E. Lawrence in a chapter of my book, *Remembering War,* on shell shock. It's not that he joined the army/air force, but he did so under two separate different names. He found different identities, which I think is extraordinary because the previous one or ones clearly were ones he could not bear, for whatever reason.

Here there is a story the full contours of which we will never know. Some say it didn't happen. I am not sure. It is the story that he was

raped as a prisoner of the Turks during war. Some people say he made it up, some people don't. But isn't that what is always said about rape? I deliberately chose to put this matter in a discussion of Lawrence in a chapter on shell shock, because it struck me that forms of what we now call PTSD—post-traumatic stress disorder—are anticipated in the First World War, and many people were well aware of it at the time.

So, I use Lawrence for a different purpose—first of all, to open up the question as to what is shell shock? It's when memory and identity can't fit together. You have a story to tell yourself about your life, who you are, it's your story—it may not be completely accurate, but it's the story you use to tell other people who you are and what you've done. And then there are certain memories about war experiences, not only war experiences, but frequently about the war, which can't be interpolated. So what do you do? You forget about those memories, you lie about them, you say they never happened, or you interpolate the story—you say it's part of your life, the way Fussell did about his Second World War experiences.

But there's a third option; the third option is needed when you can't interpolate it and you can't forget it. That's what we call trauma or shell shock—that point when identities fragment under the stress of intolerable memories. Once we have the notion of fragmented identities, we have a framework within which to place the life of T. E. Lawrence and millions of other people, too. In such a framework, we might interpret differently some of his proto-Fascist activities, or his restless search for something that seemed to be eluding him all the time.

I know this is a tricky interpretation. I'm claiming something I will never be able to prove. It doesn't matter ultimately, whether we resolve the question was he raped or not by Turkish policemen after he was arrested as a spy. What mattered was the fragmentation of his identity and that of millions of other people who couldn't put their memories into their stories. Instead the stories seemed to take over their lives.

In 1980, the syndrome of post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized by the American medical profession, and, therefore, it became a pathway to pensions and entitlement, no question about it. It was a very important thing for Vietnam vets who couldn't get their lives together after the war to be recognized and legitimated. Doctors are people with white coats who legitimate conditions. They say that's what you have, it's true, and it's an illness. It's not malingering, it's not cowardice. So, I put Lawrence in that long tradition that has finally accepted that war is even

crazier than the people who direct it, and that perfectly sane people go crazy in war. It's not because of family inheritance. It's not because of "Uncle Henry," whom we don't talk about, and the genes that get passed down or other biological explanations of insanity. It's because there are social and political practices which we call, collectively, warfare, which put people in places where they go mad.

I used that framework to try to understand what Lawrence of Arabia went through, and maybe my story is one in need of complication. I would agree with that entirely. But once we think of war as entirely a rational exercise, then we've lost any understanding of what it is. War is an experience that has so many facets, so many elements that the purely rational interpretation of tactics or strategy or operations or battles, has a certain insanity built into it. Therefore, I think it's utterly appropriate that we should invite our colleagues to consider whether commanders are sane or insane and whether the men who follow their orders are just as crazy as the ones who give them. In a way we are circling around the great question that John Keegan put in his classic work, *The Face of Battle,* published just one year after Fussell. The question is how is battle possible? How is war possible? Once we look at the Gorgon's face, how can we consider it to be something rational human beings do to each other? And yet they have.

WOHL: And just to tack a tiny coda on to what you've been saying, as well, is that the craziness of war and perhaps the craziness of some of the commanders raises the question of why so many men go ahead fighting when they realize that the whole thing is absurd. And there's a big debate now, and particularly in France, about this question. Obviously, Keegan addressed it in *The Face of Battle,* but it's always mystified me. A corollary of that is, why didn't statesmen negotiate an end to the war in 1915, 1916, or 1917, when they knew that no country would be the beneficiary of the war? Of course there's an answer to that, I suppose, in the sense that maybe some of them thought that, despite all of the terrible death and destruction, their country was going to benefit more than others. How wrong they were.