

EN 2225 War Stories  
Spring 2017  
Stokes S 476

[judith.wilt@bc.edu](mailto:judith.wilt@bc.edu)  
Stokes S487, 2-3702  
Office hours: Tues. 12:30-2  
Wed. 11-12:30

Shakespeare told stories about war, and so did the Greeks. Common themes abound, and contradictions too. Battle traditionally can test, or even produce, honor/ horror, courage/carnage, endurance/madness. War arises from love of country or cause...or from lies. Or The Human Condition. A 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century specialty is consciousness of war's aftermath --PTSD.

The course opens with Hemingway's short story "Soldier's Home" (1925: pdf to be emailed for advance reading). We continue with a short novel set during World War One and a longer novel set during World War Two, and finish with three short stories and two short critical pieces about more recent wars. (Two of these will be available later in the course for purchase from the bookstore; the others will be given out in class.) We'll also consider an occasional war poem and invite conversation on war films and other popular culture versions of war: for this purpose the site [movies@bc.edu](http://movies@bc.edu) is currently streaming video of three films for discussion – "Saving Private Ryan," "The Deer Hunter," and "Eye in the Sky," available on computers on campus. Writing: two short reflection papers and two take-home final essay questions. Grading: participation 30%, papers 40%, final essays 30%. **This one-credit course meets Wednesdays 3-4:20 through the final class on Wed. April 5: at this class the final exam questions will be given out, for return the next week.**

### **Schedule of readings, writing, discussion**

#### **Twentieth Century Wars**

**Wed. Jan. 18:** Introduction: "How to Tell a True War Story." What does Hemingway's "Soldiers Home" suggest about this? What are we reading in the course, and why? What else have we each read/seen/experienced about war? Some practice in-class reading.

**Wed. Jan 25:** "The Accidental/Inadvertent War": Read, take notes, bring notes to class for discussion on Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) –first five chapters.

**Wed. Feb. 1:** finish final chapter of *The Return of the Soldier*: **reflection paper (2 pp) due in class to facilitate discussion.**

**Wed. Feb. 8:** "The Good War": Begin Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961). War and the "Absurd"; reading satire. (handout on keeping track of key themes/characters and finding sources of personal interest).

**Wed. Feb. 15:** Continuing with *Catch 22*. **(Required conferences this week** on the experience of reading the novel, and on possible interest in special projects to replace Question 2 of final Exam.)

**Wed. Feb. 22:** continuing with *Catch 22*. Try to see "Saving Private Ryan" by now so we can feed it into discussion.

**Wed. Mar 1:** (Ash Wednesday): final chapters of *Catch 22*: **reflection paper (2pp) due.**

**Spring Break** (please take a look at “The Deer Hunter” now or before Mar. 15)

**Wed. Mar. 15:** “The Bad War.” Vietnam. Tim O’Brien’s Vietnam war story “The Sweetheart of Song Trabong” from *The Things They Carried* (handed out in class Mar. 1).

### **The Wars We Live Now**

**Wed. Mar 22:** Two critical/biographical pieces by teachers of English, who are close, in very different ways, to the experience of war. Read sections from Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016) and Elizabeth Samet’s *No Man’s Land: Preparing for War and Peace in Post-9/11 America* (2014). Both handed out in class Mar. 15.

**Wed. Mar. 29:** Two short stories about the Iraq war: Phil Klay’s “Prayer in the Furnace” from *Redeployment* (2014) and Siobhan Fallon’s “Camp Liberty” from *You Know When the Men Are Gone* (2011). Both in course pack available in bookstore Mar. 1.

**Wed. Apr. 5:** Final class, discussing the (required) film “Eye in the Sky” and other war films; poems from Kim Garcia’s *Drone* (2016: poems to be handed out). **Also: I will hand out two essay questions as a final assignment – essays to be turned in by the following Wednesday, April 12. Class members who have previously discussed with me any special project they wish to substitute for the second exam question may do so.**

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I trust you are all familiar with the University policy on Academic Integrity:

<http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity>

The policy defines plagiarism as “the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source and presenting them as one’s own.” There is no reason to do this for the reflection papers and chosen essay questions in this course.

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“‘The first casualty of war is truth’ is often credited to the classical Greek playwright Aeschylus (525-456 BC), but there’s no evidence that he ever wrote it.... This is often attributed to US Senator Hiram Johnson, but does not appear anywhere in his speeches. First recorded use is from Arthur Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* (1928). American etymologist Barry Popik, Big Apple blog January 2 2011

[http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new\\_york\\_city/entry/the\\_first\\_casualty\\_of\\_war\\_is\\_truth](http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/the_first_casualty_of_war_is_truth)

“War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth a war, is much worse. ...As long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever-renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of mankind human beings must be willing, when need is, to do battle for the one against the other.” John Stewart Mill, “The Cause in America,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (Feb. 1862)

“Now we can no longer risk emergency improvisations of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions.... In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” President Dwight Eisenhower, Farewell Speech, January 17, 1961.

