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*The Disillusionment of American society after  
World War One*  
*Case study: William Faulkner's "Soldiers' Pay"*

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of Master Degree

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## Dedication

*To MY Beloved family,*

*Respected Teachers*

*and Dear friends*

## Abstract

Many of the works immediately following World War One created portraits of individual's and cultural devastation. Similarly, post war writing as "*Soldiers' Pay*" announces the discovery of a generation that has been sold and is lost. Faulkner's novel shows a world forever changed by the war. A world in which sustaining illusions have been shattered and old certainties dissolved. The purpose of the present thesis is to demonstrate the fundamental changes that were taking place in American society in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The intended changes are the changes of every individual psychological state and the beliefs towards every aspect in life. The study reveals that life in the United States of America during the decade following World War One was unbearable. Western youth were rebelling, angry and disillusioned with the savage war. Thus, that terrible scare in the novel symbolizes the traumatic effect of mass violence, disillusionment and denial that marked a whole generation. A whole era of confidence and idealism went down in the after math of the war.

**Key words** Disillusionment, William Faulkner, "*Soldiers' Pay*", American society

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**GENERAL  
INTRODUCTION**



World War One erupted in Europe and United States involvement was decent and brief. It was thought that this war would be a war to make the world safe for democracy. Soldiers were happy and enthused to fight believing that they are going to enjoy their time. However, what they really experienced in the trenches changed their views about the war. World War One was referred to as “the war to end all wars”. However, afterwards Americans’ experience was the evidence to learn that that war cannot end wars. Thus what war can make is to destroy and harm people and countries.

The optimism of the 1900s of global peace entirely vanished. Subsequently, those who fought in the war became known as “the Lost Generation” because they never fully recovered from their experience. Certainly a sense of disillusionment and cynicism spread. The period between the two world wars was a traumatic age for America. Many authors expressed America’s post war disillusionment in their novels like William Faulkner’s novel *Soldiers’ Pay* which is the case study of this dissertation.

Many studies have dealt with the topic of this dissertation which is the disillusionment of American society after World War One. Their main focus was William Faulkner’s “Soldiers’ Pay”. This novel made the interest of a group of authors and critics as it interests the researcher greatly. Interestingly several books have dealt with the literature of war that studied basically disillusionment as the first concept spreading after the Great War. Examples of these were the many books on literature and the Great War 1914 -1918 that were written by Steven Randall.

The purpose through working on this topic is to find out the changes that took place in the American society after World War One in terms of the psychological states of individuals and their beliefs towards government, life, and religion. Thus the present thesis will try to answer the following fascinating questions: How was Americans’ psychological state after the Great War and what about their beliefs towards every aspect in life? Has the American society before the war remained the same as that society of the 1920s? What does William

Faulkner's "*Soldiers' Pay*" demonstrate about modern American society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

This research paper has been divided into three chapters. The first one deals with World War One political, economic, social and psychological effects on Europe as well as on the United States of America. The second tackles American literary trends after the Great War i.e. the literature of war and disillusionment that really expressed the horror of war. The key chapter, chapter three examines disillusionment in Faulkner's novel "*Soldiers' Pay*", the psychological trauma, a devastated psyche of its characters who are unable to express themselves. The return of a soldier to his home front by the end of the war as an unwanted guest to a corrupted society drove him to recognize the absurdity and meaningless of his sacrifices and his life.

It has been clear that the methodology selected to study and analyze the idea of post war America is new historicism which is a theory that aims to understand the literary work through its historical context. In addition to Freudian psychological theory in which characters of "*Soldiers' Pay*" are presented by the author through their psychological states.

Despite modernity and unparallel prosperity, it is hypothesized that young Americans of the 1920s were disillusioned and lost generation; without a stable, traditional structure of values, supportive family life. The familiar community, moral values uncalculated by religious beliefs...all seemed indeterminate by World War One and its aftermath. Faulkner's "*Soldiers' Pay*" which is the story of the return soldier the lieutenant Donald Mahon ,a fighter pilot who was shot down in Europe. He has a horrible scare on his face, and lost his memory and soon after dies from his wounds. Donald symbolizes a whole generation or whole era of confidence went down after World War One. Faulkner presents his apprehension of modern life through literature.

In many ways, life in the United States of America during the decade following World War One was unbearable. Western youth were rebelling, angry and disillusioned with the savage war.

Finally, despite the obstacles and limitations that encountered the researcher while conducting this research such as lack of sources due to the unavailability of library to depend on; the researcher strived for the success of this humble research.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**WORLD WAR ONE AND ITS  
AFTERMATH ON EUROPE AND  
USA**

**Introduction**

In the words of both Professors Zhou and Liu, World War One is completely different from previous wars, and is thus a dividing line in human history. The impact of this war is long lasting. Referred to as the Great War was thought to be war to end all wars and turned out to engender a century of conflicts, hot and cold on the global scale. Moreover, it was during WW1 that the unprecedented technological massacres of human beings took place by artillery shells, tanks, gas bombs and other weapons causing an estimation of 13 million military deaths within four years. And for Americans especially, WW1 brought about a great shift in the belief of people towards life (116).

Although the United States of America had not entered the war until 1917, it was the country that lost the same casualties as the European countries. One obvious cost of the war was the huge number of deaths, which led to the growing use of the term total war. Death spread across the combatant countries. Germany suffered the most casualties in absolute numbers, although a number of countries sustained heavier losses as a percentage of the population including France. WW1 resulted in huge numbers of dead and injured people and was also decisive at the economic, social and emotional levels.

## **1. World War One: the war that ended all wars**

### **1.2 Historical view of World War One**

It is important to note that World War One was called the Great War with regard to its casualties and shocking aftermath. It was generally expected to be only a conflict that would be quickly resolved. Consequently, it lasted four years; causing enormous loss of life and human suffering. Its greatness lies in the fact that it affected Europe entirely.

#### **1.2.1 The outbreak of World War One**

The American historian and research professor at Northern Illinois University, David Kyvig clarifies in his book *Daily life in the United States* that on June 28, 1914, a Serbian nationalist named Gavrilo Princip<sup>1</sup> assassinated Franz Ferdinand, the archduke of Austria. Exactly one month later, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The war divided Europe into two armed camps. One side was the triple Alliance made up of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Their enemy was the Triple Entente of France, Russia and Great Britain. It did not stay stable. However, countries began to join, and the Triple Alliance became known as the Central Power and the Triple Entente became the Allied Forces (4).

#### **1.2.2 Life in the trenches**

According to Kyvig, the majority of actions took place in the trenches. The latter were dug deep in the ground as a long channel to protect soldiers from their enemies. Soldiers spent a long period in the trench approximately eight days where they were under threat of attacks from shellfire, snipers and different diseases. They experienced very difficult times in the trenches full of dirt thrown in it causing infection on feet that could result in amputation (4).

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<sup>1</sup> He was a member of Yugoslavist organization seeking an end to Austro- Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **1.2.3 Fighting on the front**

According to many scholars and researchers, WW1 was extremely different from any previous war because of the powerful weapons used by soldiers like machine guns, artillery, tanks and air force. The military operations began in three major areas in Europe: the Western front included France and Belgium, the Eastern front included Russia and Serbia which presented the Southern front. Many of the fatal battles took place during WW1, including Ypres, Vimy, Ridge, Somme and Gollipoli. As a result, thousands of soldiers died during these battles; although, they were necessary events that helped the Allied forces win WW1. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, Germany requested to stop fire. Finally the war ended on 11<sup>th</sup> month, when the armistice was signed by the parties which agreed to stop fighting (kyvig 5).

## **2. The First World War erupt in Europe**

Kyvig notices that in the early 1900s, the National spirit was strong. Britain, France, Germany, and Italy wanted to be world powers. They owned more colonies and made big armies. On the one hand, countries formed Alliances: France, Russia and Britain made one Alliance called the Allies. On the other hand, Germany and Austria-Hungary made another alliance in which they were called the Central Powers. In 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Other countries joined the Allies and Central Powers declared war on each other. So World War One began (6).

Almost all people in Europe agreed on the eruption of war believing that their country would be victorious. However, by the end of 1914, over a million soldiers of different nationalities had been killed on the battle field of Europe. However, there was no final victory for both.

### **2.1. The road to war**

Peter Bosco the author of “*World War One*” shares the same thought about the outbreak of The First World War. He believes that the war began with a mistake, an unexpected event, which is the assassination of Archduke Franz

Ferdinand who was heir of the throne of Austro-Hungarian Empire with his wife Sophie. This took place on June 28<sup>th</sup> where they were visiting the province of Bosnia. The latter had been part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and then when the empire fell apart, Bosnia broke free. However, instead of getting full independence, it was taken over by Austria-Hungary and committing the crime was a way to show their dissatisfaction and a sign of rebellion to get their freedom. Austro-Hungarian believed that it was supported by Serbia and decided to attack it. A chain of reactions began when Russia reacted to help but Germany tried to stop Russia but it failed and then declared war on Russia. France, Russia's ally mobilized her forces in response; what happened is that Germany declared war on France. Britain entered the following day to help France. As a consequence, European powers got involved in (7).

Still, theorists had debated about the complexity about who caused war to begin. And some believed causes were considered the responsible of the conflict. One of the main complexities is the long period of the tensions between European countries. Beginning with the unification of Germany by Bismarck and increasing from there on, it was sure that Germany's misguided foreign policy contributed to the outbreak of war. However, the extent to which it contributed to the explosion is the debated issue (Bosco 8).

There were many scholars and historians who discussed the root of WW1. According to Ross Collin, a professor in communication, there were many contradictory suggestions that condemn Germany. On the one hand, some historians blamed Germany to be the responsible of outburst of war. However, others suggested that Germany felt forced to go to war at that time. On the other hand, others suggested that the war started because of poor leadership while others argue that the war happened by accident. Subsequently, Europe fell into war due to tension between Alliance countries. Finally, some historians argue that WW1 was a result of historical development in Europe. This argument states that war was mainly between Austria and Serbia and that imperial expansion by Russia Eastward was also what caused war (9).



## 2.2 The Alliance system

Michael Howard a British author on esoteric topics confirms in his book, “*World War One: A masterly introduction to the Great War*” that the main factor behind the conflict in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which is the Alliance system. It is obvious that the European nation were always allied with each other. However, these alliances were done secretly. Consequently, the secret alliances which were encouraged by Bismarck resulted in the hatred that characterized the relations between each other. What made things worse is the transformation of the alliances because it was secret. For example, we can mention the case of Germany that allied itself with Austria-Hungary. But found that it was allied with Italy too. Then, the Central Powers were known as the “Triple Alliance”. Meanwhile, France after its depression decided to have friendship with Russia (16).

## 2.3 American involvement in World War One

Jennifer Keene who is a specialist in American military experience during WW1 and author of American history textbooks confirms that “*The United States and the First World War*” that unlike Europe which rushed to war in 1914, the United States of America was really late to enter the conflict. As the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, it subsequently needed to raise supply, and transport its army overseas. This, consequently quickly reshaped the American society. The government assumed new powers to direct the economy, and control, reject, and conscript men. Workers, women, and blacks who were encouraged by their sudden economic importance demanded recognition of their rights as citizens. At the same time, American armed forces effectively worked hard to master its lack of preparation and an army that could contribute to the final victory as an attempt to provide the United States with an important word in the final peace settlement (508).

## 2.4 The path to war

During his presidency Woodrow Wilson<sup>2</sup> had stressed on the domestic reform issues that interested most Americans. He won reelection with the slogan “he kept us out of war”. The official policy of neutrality in World War One was becoming difficult to maintain. Talking about American trade with European countries, American trade with Germany was not that big as represented one percent of what it had been in 1914; by contrast, it had remarkably developed with Britain and France (Keene 509).

Knowledgeably, Wilson directly protested against Germany’s declaration of submarine blockade over British waters and warned all ships among them the neutral to stay out of war zone. But Wilson denied that Germany held the rules of international law. Secretary of state William Bryan argued by declaring American ships would be safe as long as they stayed far from the British waters.

Keene clarified that the real crisis in American-German relation began in May 1915 when Germany sank the Lusitania. The attack killed 1,198 passengers, including 127 American. Wilson demanded paying damages by Germany and accepted the right of Americans to travel on any ship they wanted. Under this situation Americans were convinced that Wilson’s first concern was to protect the rights of those neutral after convincing America of that (106).

The scholar John Horn asserts the real factors behind America’s involvement in war. According to him, Zimmerman proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico against the United States of America. However Britain succeeded to decode the telegram and showed it to the American administration first and then spread to the public opinion. In the same month, German boats sank three American ships and this convinced Wilson to declare war against Germany to protect America from the economic and physical threat caused by Germans and this was in April 6, 1917. America entered war against Austria-Hungary until December 7, 1917 but never declared war against the Ottoman Empire or Bulgaria (49).

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<sup>2</sup> The 28th United States president, (1913 to 1921). He proposed proposal peace which is the “Fourteen Points”.

### **3. The effect of World War One on Europe**

Tim MacNeece, a professor of history and political science points that although WW1 was over, it had a lasting effect on the world for many decades. The effect touched different fields: economics, politic, culture, and public opinion. And many countries had chosen the liberal government. Furthermore, countries affected by the war ordered Germany to pay for looses since it was considered the one which caused the outbreak of the war. Consequently, this led to a Second World War. Under all these circumstances peoples' optimism turn to pessimism and their hope of prosperity vanished in a blink of an eye after people's experience of in the cruel war (2).

#### **3.1 The political impact**

Keeping the same line of thought, Stewart Ross, a British leading author and teacher of history and politics acknowledges the political impact caused by WW1. The end of the latter gave birth to a socialist revolution in Germany. The German Revolution of 1918-1919 resulted in the creation of the left leaning Weimar Republic, which remained until Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party grasped power in the early 1930. Many historians believed that the harsh act imposed by treaty of Versailles and Germany's defeat in WW1 led directly to the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party. After its defeat, Austro-Hungarian Empire was divided into several independent states. Among the most noticeable were Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Austria (6).

It was the same case for the Ottoman Empire, where portions of the Empire were taken under the control of France and Great Britain such as Syria and Palestine, while the rest of the Empire emerged as the republic of Turkey. Russia was not far from the Great War's effect, in which WW1 helped the explosion of the Russian Revolution of 1917. In this revolution, the Russian Empire was replaced by a socialist government led by Vladimir Lenin and new states emerged in the northern Europe, had been part of the Russian Empire, and among them were Estonia, Finland, Latvio, and Lithunia (Ross 7).

Professor Robert Zieger notes the spreading of the political changes. Thus, it is worth to emphasize that these political changes as the mandates, territorial concession, and independence movements took place all over the world not only in Europe. For example, the League of Nations ordered the colony of German East Africa to be divided between Belgium, France, and Portugal. However, it is quite complex to know how post-world nation states war emerged. The significant facts to remember is that after the Great War, the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires despaired and new independent nations appeared (12).

### **3.2 The economic impact**

Consequently, after WW1 war was a harsh experience for France and the United Kingdom, nevertheless these countries were able to develop economically without too much difficulties. However, it was Germany that suffered the most. Under the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was obliged to make a payment to the Allies, called reparations. These heavy reparations in addition to the wrecked economy throughout German and political pressure under the Weimar Republic, led to an economic depression (Bosco 59).

Unemployment and hyper inflation in Weimar Germany spread. In the mid to late 1920s, the German economy stabilized in somehow. But after the American stock market crash in 1929, the Great Depression spread in Germany. It wreaked havoc on German society. Consequently, these conditions led the Nazis to get power.

### **3.3 The social impact**

Similarly, professor Peter Bosco has admitted in his book, “*World War one*”, that the war had a variety of effects. WW1 had a great impact on Europe’s social structure, economy, human and demographic existence than any revolution fought before. Its transformation in the first half of the twentieth century is mainly caused by the experience of war. Its consequences were catastrophic and decisive. The war resulted in the death of millions of people, both civilians and military. The number of dead men is twice than the number who died in European wars since 1790 till the

beginning of the Great War. Approximately, ten million soldiers were killed and another twenty million suffered wounds. For civilians, it is about five million lost their lives during the war (76).

People immediate reactions translated the political and ideological consequences of the war. As men in Europe were at war, it was necessary for the rest of the population to replace them at work. As a result of peasant involvement in the armies, huge lands were unused what caused a decline in the production of grain over one third the following years (Kolko 19).

### **3.4 Post war Britain**

Again, MacNeece adds that “the Great War brought great destruction and death to people of Europe. After the defeat of Germany which was the leader of the Central Powers, the nation that won a great victory tried to return to live as they were living before war”. However, the war changed some countries and that resulted in the creation of new states. As for Britain and France, the leaders of democratic states, they both attempted to preserve their democratic system (4).

According to the same author, Britain after war experienced psychological traumatic shock. It was not really easy for this country nearly one million British troops had been killed during the war and twice were wounded. The British experienced hard life after the war. Taxes remained high and almost a generation of British young men had been destroyed through their service and sacrifices. A mood of cynicism and frustration expanded for more than ten years after the war ended (McNeese 4).

In the same way, economically, Britain faced many problems. After that the national debts spread quickly. It faced also serious national movement within its empire from Ireland, Egypt and India. The most serious one was of Irish movement. The Irish to get independent fought for separation from Great Britain, led by Eamon de Valera. South Ireland continued to fight for complete independence, and it gained it in 1949. Despite the political problems, economy was the major concern. The British people suffered greatly; unemployment manufacturing did not expand

their production. In a country of 40 million people, between 1921, 1939, one of three million was unemployed (McNeese 5).

### 3.5 War's psychological effects

Carter, Findly and Rotheny note that after the end of the Great War, all the major powers as France and Britain except Russia were experiencing literacy and male suffrage by 1914. For people who could read and know their right to vote felt that they are not obliged to obey blindly the government. They have the right to ask for reasons of the sacrifices that the national cause demanded (68).

Thus, each government during WW1 tried to seek a solution to persuade its public to believe the propaganda which made people after the war disillusioned. The propaganda is by showing the justice of the government causes and kindness of the enemy. In spite of damages, the positive slogans by propagandist: Those soldiers were fighting for the defense of civilization against barbarism or for democracy against military, or for abolition of war, post war reality showed the fallacy of this slogan. Post war disillusionment was a direct reaction to war time.

Ultimately, after the Bolsheviks' publication of the secret Entente treaties, the public was aware of the lies brought by leaders. The mood of post war reflected a change in human view. Since 1914-1918, all generations lost confidence in progress. The destructiveness after the war seemed to prove false beliefs lived before the war. In Remarque's novel "*All Quiet on the Western Front*", some soldiers clarified "it must be lies and of no account, when the culture of a thousand year could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out (Carter et al. 69).

Carter, Findly and Rotheny confirm that Dadaist<sup>3</sup> movement of artistic rebels changed the culture of the past by offering a copy of Monalisa wearing mustache. By this way, this painting may reveal no sense, but as the war had just proved, neither did anything else. First World War politically helped in the growth of executive authority and government power. Economically, it spread its

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<sup>3</sup> It is a literary and artistic movement reflecting the horror of war. Its artists were against Nationalism, materialism, rationalism resulted from war.

concentration of economic power, and on the other hand, it destroyed the idea that money is a constant value. The war caused the social distinctions between groups and destroyed other groups entirely (69).

Similarly, war gave greatest status for the working men and women. We can say that war greatly affected the faith that people before 1914 believed in; after the war everything changed. The mood of doubling faith spread and they were unsatisfied by peace that had been made.

#### **4. The impact of World War One on America**

Henry F. May, an intellectual historian and a professor of history in California University asserts that WW1 had devastating effect, not only on Europe but on the United States too. The Great War demolished the Austria Hungary Empire and the Russian Empire. There were new states established from these Empires as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland. France and Britain gained many new territories from the defeated nations. For Germany, Austria, Turkey lost the majority of their lands and resources. However, the effect of war was also across the Atlantic Ocean in America. The industry of the United States of America grew due to war. The right of women progressed and government adopted new diplomatic policies. However, the Great War affected the American society, and almost all areas of life, and continued to have its effects for a long term after the war (413).

Subsequently, the number of military death counted by the United States of America by the end of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1918 was 116,516, which include 53,402 battle deaths and 63,114 non combat deaths. The United States guard lost an additional 192 dead. For graves in Europe, there were 75,212. And for civilian losses, it included 128 killed on RMS Lusitania as well as 629 Merchant Marine personnel killed on merchant ships.

With regard to the participation in war in 1917, the production of industry in America progressed. And aiming at producing more in a short period of time, new technologies were developed to help manufactures increase their product according

to the needs of the government and people alike. In addition, more opportunities of work were offered as well as to African American. During this time, the economy improved. However, when the war ended, and soldiers started to return home, the industry production began to be reduced, there were no needs for workers in factories. Many women stopped working. And even there were no enough jobs for the men returning from Europe. This consequently, raised unemployment after a time of economic prosperity (May 413).

It is worth mentioning that during the growth in industry, women replaced men by holding jobs in factories because men were at war. When women began to work in factories in order to support their families, this created many problems. This independence on working women led to many problems after WW1.

According to the same author, the Great War became dangerous because of the unsafe weapons and technologies used. They replaced fighting with traditional weapons as the heavy fires, with biological weapons. So this war with its weapons caused casualties to the United States of America and government. And Americans' reaction towards war changed. After the war, Americans believed that it is useless for America to join this war with Europeans and thus they should not be part of. This sentiment caused the United States of America to be isolated from any other war. This anti war sentiment lasted until the 1940s when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and then the United States of America entered into World War Two. Clearly, the new diplomacy of not engaging in European affairs and the anti war sentiment was an effect of WW1. Certainly, the war was destructive to America as well as to the entire world (May 413).

Besides, the consequences of the Great War on America were huge. One fact that cannot be denied is America's benefit from the war. The latter gave America economic strength. However, the destruction brought by this war was unimaginable. Thus, it created several problems such as immigration troubles and the new policy of isolationism. Moreover, the fear of Radicalism and Race Riot were additional problems. Too, the war has resulted in the Communist Revolution in Russia and in 1919 communist parties spread and were established in America (May 414).



In the same vein, the Race Riots took place in twenty three cities across the United States of America. A large number of black people who had moved to the Northern cities from the South were facing problems and were attacked by the white communities. The Riots were also a response to the discrimination and poor economic state that black communities faced after war.

McNeese Tim claims that immigration problems increased since the war. The vast majority of Americans wanted to put an end to open door policy that brought millions of people. In the nineteenth century, the United States of America experienced rapid inflation, labor strike and economic recession. Rapid demobilization produced social unrest in the United States of America. In the 1920's, Afro-Americans were primary victims of urban Race Riots, and they were target of the Red Scare<sup>4</sup> (20).

#### **4.1 Post war recession**

Stewart Ross the British writer for children and adult notes that the war ended very soon than almost any body had expected. Without warning or planning, the nation entered into the difficult task of economic reconversion. From 1919, 1920 prices rose at an average of more than 15 percent a year. And in late 1920, the market for consumer goods began to fall down. Between 1920 and 1921, the gross national product declined nearly ten percent, 100,000 businesses went bankrupt, and nearly five million Americans lost their jobs (89).

#### **4.2 Labor unrest**

Once more, Stewart Ross confirms that before the recession began, labor unrest increased in a surprised way. The raging inflation of 1919 erased the modest wage gains workers had achieved during the war. Many workers worried about their jobs' security as veteran return. The year 1919 saw an unprecedented strike wave. In January, a work out by shipyard workers in Seattle, Washington, evolved into a general strike that brought the entire city to virtual standstill. In September, the

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<sup>4</sup> It is widespread fear of Communism in the USA during the 1920'. As it concerned the threat of the Labor movement, anarchist revolutions and political Radicalism.

Boston police force struck to demand recognition to its union. Governor Calvin Coolidge called the National Guard to restore order by declaring that there is no right to strike against the public safety (89).

### **4.3 Rise of Radicalism**

In the words of the professor Stewart Ross, much of the public regarded the industrial warfare and racial violence of 1919 as frightening situations of instability and Radicalism. After the Russian Revolution of November 1917, Communism was no longer a theory but the basis of an important regime. It grew in 1919 when the Soviet government announced the formation of the Communist International whose purpose was to export revolution around the world (92).

In America, there were small groups of radicals who were responsible for a series of bombing in the spring of 1919. Later, eight bombs exploded in eight cities within minutes suggesting a nationwide conspiracy.

Accordingly, in response to these operations, the Red Scare began. For approximately thirty states treated new laws imposing harsh penalties on the provokers of revolution. Automatic acts of violence against radicals occurred in some universities and other institutions to separate Radicals. Later in 1920, a bomb exploded on Wall Street, killing thirty eight people and no one was convicted of this bombing (Ross 95).

### **4.4 Post war disillusionment**

Henry F. May agrees that World War One had a great psychological effect on American people. There was a growing sense of distrust of political leaders that spread in the minds of people who had experienced the horror and destruction of war. Many citizens were angered that peace makers had not expressed their ideals, and people began to wonder why the war was fought. And a feeling of disillusionment spread in America. The loss of loved ones on the battle field was especially disturbing. The future certainly did not look bright for families of those

killed in the war. Pessimism replaced optimistic dreams of those in decades past (420).

Keeping the same thoughts, the military, both the United States navy and army were affected by the end of the Great War. American people were not interested in the Democrats and Wilsonian idealism. The majority of Americans wanted a return to peace time and they were less interested by the progressive reform movement. The joy of WW1 victory soon transformed into disillusionment. Many Americans came to question participation in World War One, even before the end of the war because of British propaganda and greedy bankers. The numbers of men wounded and killed were important despite the fact that American units were in combat less than a year. America in 1910s did not seem to feel that the German domination was a threat to Europe (May 420).

Subsequently, many Americans opposed the treaty making process that followed the war. There was not only a rejection of war, but a growing feeling that industrialists were responsible for America's involvement in war. After the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s, it became increasingly clear that Europe was moving into a second war. Many decided that America should avoid war at any cost. The anti war sentiment of Americans and their bad experiences in war convinced them that America must not involve in any future European war (May 424).

#### **4.5. Psychological trauma**

McNeese May confirms that American people whether soldiers or civilian experienced traumatic events that shaped their views of the world and of themselves. According to many factors, some people's reactions from war had lasting effects. In America for example, it is estimated that more than 10% war zone veterans experienced a chronic condition known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (427).

#### **4.6. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

In his book, Peter Bosco defines PTSD “as a psychological response to the experience of traumatic events, practically those that threaten life”. It can affect people’s life at any age, culture or gender. In American Civil War, it was referred to as soldier’s heart; in the First World War, it was called Shell Shock and in the Second World War, it was known as war neurosis. Many soldiers were classified as having combat fatigue when experiencing symptoms associated with PTSD. During combat in the Vietnam War; this became known as “combat stress reaction”. And in 1980, it became known as PTSD (30).

#### **4.7. Shell Shock**

World War One was seen as “war to end all wars”. Young men were dreaming to enter the war and gain experience. The war was seen as the great adventures that they would not forget. They would get the chance to travel the world and meet girls at the same time. But the adventure that soldiers met was a harsh reality not a fantasy as they thought to be when they made their decision to go to war. The latter would change their lives in a way or in another and the experiences they would have stay with them for the rest of their lives (Bosco 32).

Meanwhile, Trench warfare during WW1 caused wounds not only of the body, but also to the mind. Soldiers in the trenches experienced tragedies that only they can understand. They were under fire and explosions that left their ears ringing. If the soldier were not injured, they had a chance of having life long memories about horrible experiences. So they did not experience only physical wound, but also psychological trauma known as Shell Shock (Bosco 34).

#### **4.8. The economic effect: the Great Depression**

Cory Gideon, author of children’s and young adult books reports in his book “*The Great Depression*” all what concerns America’s economic problems. After the end of WW1, the United States of America benefited from the economic development. This period was shaped by Jazz music, and people started investment

in stocks which allowed people to have the best life after the rise of the value of stocks. For example, they started to drive cars and to attend Movie Theaters. However, this prosperity did not last long because of the economic crisis that took place between 1929 and 1935 which was called “the Great Depression” (54).

As the author has pointed out, when the Wall Street stock market in New York collapsed on Thursday, October 24 and on Tuesday, October 29 in 1929, the Roaring Twenties were suddenly over within one week. Those days were also called “Black Thursday” and “Black Tuesday” (Gideon 56).

Michael Burgan author of the book “*the Great Depression*” contends that the Great Depression lasted for a whole decade, but it was not just about low stock prices. There were also banks which closed and many people who lost their money savings lost their farms and homes because they had a mortgage that they could not pay. That caused layoff and consequently, people suffered from problems as hunger, illnesses, and poor living conditions. By 1929, an average of \$3 billion worth of securities in investment trust was being marketed to the public, and investors were willing to pay premiums for those securities over the offer prices (4).

Burgan has likewise noted that the Great Depression was not only economic declined in United States history. But the suffering of American citizens during the Great Depression was so sever as it can be classified as the worst in United States history. During that period, people lost their homes, farms and business. Many people died from diseases and malnutrition. Jobs became rare and poverty troubled the nation (5).

**Conclusion**

World War One is completely different from previous wars, and is a dividing line in human history. The impact of this war is long lasting. It was proclaimed to be the war to end all wars. Also it is in World War One that began the unprecedented technological massacres of human beings by artillery shells, tanks gas bombs and other new weapons. The average of military death was 13 million within four days. Despite that World War Two surpassed the first in the scope of fighting, the degree of destruction and the volume of killing in the first war caused to be called the Great War.

For Americans especially, the Great War brought about a great transformation in peoples' beliefs. Although the United States of America did not enter the war until 1917, it was the country that lost the same casualties as the European countries. WW1 impact in addition to the huge dead and injuries was the economic, social, and emotional consequences.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**AMERICAN LITERARY TRENDS**  
**AFTER WORLD WAR ONE**

**Introduction**

The twentieth century reality gave new form to literature work at that time. Writers were inspired by the event of the century and their desire to present their works different from the traditional one. Using new techniques helps creating new literature. The aftermath of the war was incomprehensible and the past war era was a period of decline in every aspect. As a result, people lost their faith in all the values and traditions. The existed human relations transformed to be absurd. People experienced isolation and they believed that life was without meaning. They felt the void existed in their lives.

Taking into consideration what was happening; many writers looked for new ways to present these new realities. Literary modernism search for new beautiful art distinguished from the previous one because modernist writers saw traditional way of writing as inadequate. According to writers of literature, the world had gone through an experience that caused people's peace time and their relation with each other meaningless and fragmented. So what was written could change and the style of writing must change and this is what really happened to American literature of the twentieth century.



## 1. America in the 20th century

Michael O’Neal, author and editor of young adult books thinks that although the war had ended, the world was troubled by the destruction and loss of life. In addition to the misery lived in America, flu was epidemic of 1918 resulting in the death of 20 million lives all over the world and a half million lives in the United States of America (12).

In many ways, life of 1920s in the United States of America was not easy. And there were many reactions against these events. Americans tried hardly to forget the bad memories of the war by denying that it had taken place. People who shared Wilson’s beliefs of sacrifices during the war became more pessimistic and materialistic. A generation of young writers and thinkers who experienced war was having the same goal of telling its horrors and brutality (O’Neal 12).

The community spirit of the war gave way to what president Hoover calls “rugged individualism”. Americans were disturbed by the turmoil, uncertainty and fear brought by war and its immediate effects. They were ready to have fun, to enjoy and by the end of the decade everyone was singing the words of Eddie cantor’s famous song, “ Making whoopee” (O’Neal 13).

### 1.1 The Roaring Twenties times

Again O’Neal thinks that the 1920s was perhaps the first period in American history that saw radical changes, and the decade produced a great number of expressions describing the 1920s. These words became popular during the decade and are still used such as Joe College, blindate, screwy, veet blanket, ritzy, jeepers creepers ... (14).

Edmond L. Volpe who is an author and editor of fifteen scholarly books on literature points out that America’s changes from rural nation to an urban industrial one were one of the characteristics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was about 54 percent of the American population was urban. Without doubt, America at that time became an industrial country and people preferred to live in what was known as the big city as James H. Shidler sustains when claiming that during the twenties, the big city became a sign of modernization (14).

Economics in the 1920s was developed. So business was big and was developing by time. There were new products existed such as asters, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. Also, there were new cars possessed by almost every citizen. Even the music of 1920 was new, which is the jazz music that was popular in the night clubs spread in all American cities (Main 154).

In addition to the economic changes, America witnessed women's life style changes. Unlike the old woman, new woman became freer and have enough time to enjoy life. She did not need to do all her work at home by herself since she could buy most of her needs at near grocery stores. Also, the new woman changed her style of clothes as wearing short skirt. Most interestingly, the new American woman had more political power. The nineteenth Amendment to the united Constitution gave right of voting to women (Lindop 6).

Subsequently, Americans in the years following WW1 changed their behavior which results in a decline in their moral values. As it was stated earlier, women took a great advantage and succeed to bring radical changes (Lindop 14).

Volpe adds that in the 1920s American government prohibited the consumption of alcohol. The Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution prohibited to sale or transport alcohol. However it was not illegal to buy or drink this liquor (1).

O'Neal adds that many people agreed on the prohibition Amendment. But it did not succeed because it was impossible to force people respect the amendment. And there were a group of business men worked as bootleggers who continued to sell alcohol. At the same time, many areas in America continued drinking especially in the big cities (15).

Similarly, another characterization of urban America emerged which was the wave of immigrants. A huge number of immigrants from all over the world had been coming to North America for hundreds of years. Employers particularly liked immigrants because they worked for low wages. However, the majority of Anglo-Americans disliked them. Thus the notion of Nativism spread; which means that Americans consider themselves superior to immigrants. And they asked government to limit the number of immigrants. It was a time of hysteria and hate against foreign

settlers. Consequently, in 1921 “Quota Act” was passed to limit immigration (Volpe 17-18).

So the Ku Klux Klan represented the spirit of Nativism that supported prohibition and traditional religious values. Klan operation worked secretly, they dressed in white robes and sneaked hats, with mask covering their faces. The Klan of 1920s was a terror organization, that beat, threatened those who opposed Anglo-American superiority. They focused on African American and Jews and Catholics (O’Neal 19).

### **1.1.1 Jazz and flapper**

Women in the 1920s adopted new identities that were completely different from the previous generation. With new hair style and clothing different from the traditional one, the flapper epitomized the new fashions related to the 1920s. Many fashions were new such as: A young woman with bobbed hair, wearing slim dress, drinking and dancing to the jazz music. They smoke cigarette, work and enjoy attending parties (kyvig 3).

Historically, the 1920s were named differently: the Roaring twenties, the jazz Age, as it was called the Dry Decade, and most of the times this decade was known as the flapper generation. Although it was characterized by many names, what is important is that these years shaped modern America. Many writers as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner presented in their works distinct literary vision of the jazz era (Drown 30).

## **2. American Literature: 1914 -1945**

Drown agrees that after the conflict known as World War I, America became industrial nation and no longer a nation of small towns and farmers. Although immigration, the majority of Americans were English and German. This majority was against international politics, and after the end of the war, they decided to return back to the old mode of life. However, for others war was considered a positive path towards political and social changes (1177).

The same author adds that there was much debate about the future of American nation especially what concerned the Great Depression which was an economic crisis. American involvement in another European conflict which is the

Second World War helped the nation to be strong economically. The United States of America became both an industrial society and a global power (Drown1177).

As stated previously, the United States of America became a modern nation. American Literature in these decades saw an era of struggles and debates, aiming to find out the real meanings of modernity and expressing it using suitable techniques that referred to it appropriately.

The First World War brought many changes to American literature which was called American literary modernism. The first issue is related to the usage of literary tradition. On the one hand, there is a work which appreciates literary tradition through illusion. On the other hand, others saw that it is inadequate to use traditional poetic forms. The third vision believed that a work is incompetent when it does not appreciate the literary work. (Drown1178).

Modernist work always criticized old literature as inappropriate. There were much debates about the role of literature in discussing politics and social problems and the way literature could interpret social changes of the after war decade.

As discussed earlier, the 1920s saw significant changes in sexual matters. These changes were discussed by the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud who developed the idea of the unconscious. The latter was defined by Freud as a mixture of Taboo, trauma, and unwanted emotions that people tried to deny. Americans were influenced by Freudian's philosophy which enabled to better understand the literature of war. Writers were mainly interested to describe the conflict between American ideal and American realities in the 1920s as the Sacco -Vanzetti case (Drown 1178).

### **2.1 American Modernism**

Trudy Tate a lecturer in English at the university of Southampton states in his book "*Modernism and History of World War One*" that literary modernism brought a radical shift in art and culture which is obvious in the art of literature produced after the great war. It is basically about modern thoughts, modern characters, modern styles or practices that took place after the changes that affected human life relationships. Modernism in literature was a reaction to every aspect related to tradition. It rejected the 19<sup>th</sup> century optimism while presenting profound

pessimistic attitudes about the turmoil that happened to American nation after the war (17).

According to the same author, Modernist writers argue that modern life did not have one stable mood. It is characterized by gloom and sadness. People experienced hard times due to war which resulted in making them feel loneliness in their own country. Consequently, modernist style celebrates fragmentation and artistic freedom. They considered life as strange and without meaning. As they found themselves living far from the traditional life. Modernist really interested to present life in its decadence and ugliness. Interior monologue and stream of consciousness are the predominant devices of modernist writing and man is depicted as being disillusioned, confused in a world that lacks peace (Tate 20).

The large cultural wave of modernism which emerged in Europe and then spread to the United States of America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century expressed a sense of modern life through art as a break from the past. Modernism had changed the atmosphere and the appearance of daily life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so many artist and writers with different degrees of success try to forget about traditional art forms and tried to find new ones (Vanspanckere 29).

Culturally, modernism in literature was related to modernism in the visual arts. Artists were influenced by modern art. Works of Picasso Kandinsky Matisse was presented to American audience for the first time, having the aim of challenging conventional representation.

The instrument of art differs from novel, poem, canvas to the play and even music was new. Pound's fundamental imperative was: "make it new". It is a rejection of cultural inheritance (Phillips 4-5).

## **2.2 The Lost Generation**

*"That's what you are all....you are a Lost Generation"*, these are the famous words by Gertrude stein to Hemingway describing authors' situations at that time. It is used by Fitzgerald in the title of his novel, *"Tales of the jazz"* (1922) (Bercovitch 109).

Similarly, the most popular symbols of American literary modernism are without doubt those writers known as "the Lost Generation", a group of writers

whose works took place in the decadent era of 1920s. Many of them had an experience of World War I. Some of them were part in the ambulance corps in Paris, and others went into combat service after the United States entered the war. They experienced war differently; John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway saw the full horrors of the war when working in ambulance corps and Hemingway was imprisoned in France in 1917(Bercovitch 109).

To emphasize the same idea, the Canadian literary and cultural critic Bercovitch confirms that World War I greatly affected the Lost Generation not only what is related to death and suffering, the futility of idealism and nature of civilization was affected too. Their participation in the war meant exile, which was the central of their experience. Dos Passos, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Cummings were joined in European exile by Gertrud stein, Edith Wharton, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Archibald Macheich, Djuma Barnes, Minaloy, Langston Hughes, Sherwood Anderson, all left the United States of America in early 1920s (148).

Catherin Morley, a senior lecturer in American Literature at the university of Leicester (UK) writes that some expatriates left to find new values and new art forms which were absent in the USA. More interestingly, their desire to make something 'new' in the literary art united them as a generation (Bercovitch148).

Professor of history Peter High in his book "*An outline to American Literature*" confirms that the uncertainties of 1919 were over; there was little doubt about what was going to happen. "America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history", it was what Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) expressed in his words about America. His best book is a kind of spiritual history of the "Lost Generation". Many young people in the past World War I period had lost their American ideals and America lost many fine writers. Fitzgerald's first novel "*This side of paradise*" (1920) describes this new generation. They grown up in time when all gods were dead and in a post war period as well as all faiths of men were disconnected (142).

### 2.2.1 Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway is a Lost Generation writer. He develops in his writing emptiness into a concept of 'Nada' (nothingness in Spanish). It is seen as the loss of hope or the inability to become active in the real world. It is the model of Hemingway hero must always fight against the Nada of the world. He must never give up trying to live life as possible as he can. His fiction is characterized as simple and has a careful structure. The aim of his style was to get the most out of the least. He impoverished his writing through the experiment of short story. His early short collections are in *our time* (1924) and *men without women* (1927) which deals with psychological realism and symbolism. He is seen as one of the great American novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is best known for his work as "A farewell to arms" and "The old man and the sea" (High142).

### 2.2.2 William Faulkner

Nicholas Fargnoni defines William Faulkner as a Southern American novelist, author and winner of the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, and a leading literary artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (3). In his writing, he used small numbers of characters; this represents the various levels of a single region: The South. Faulkner shared two things with the Lost Generation writers: Their strong dislike for postwar world and their beliefs in the value of art. His first novel "Soldiers' Pay" (1926) is about a wounded soldier who returns home to the wasteland of post war society. He is famous by his novels "Mosquito" (1927) and "Sartoris" (1929). His mythical Yoknapatawpha County became one of the most famous imaginable world in the twentieth century Literature. In addition, "The sound and the fury" (1929) is one of Faulkner's modernist masterpieces (High 152-153).

### 2.2.3 John Dos Passos

High notes that Dos Passos's first successful modernist novel was "Manhattan transfer" (1925), conveying the period from 1900 to World War I. Dos Passos was influenced by the techniques of the movies as the montage technique between individuals and large historical events in exactly the same way. However, by the end of the twenties, Dos Passos literature changed. For example, "Manhattan transfer" showed the purposeless of history. He was famous by the publication of



his first volume of the “*Trilogy*” 1919, 1939, that shows more anger towards the Great War. His style is unemotional and it is too realistic. In 1919, he describes the horror of war. He was famous by his novel “*One man’s initiation*” (1920) and “*Three soldiers*” (1921) (150).

### 2.3. The rise of modern American novel

Alfred Bendixen, a professor and the founder of American Literature Association notes that American novels during and after the First World War I were so concerned with the war. Basically, it would be unimaginable to discuss modern American novels without paying much attention to war novels of the same period. In the history of American letters, there had not been so many writers involved in any previous war as this one. And the war books they produced were amazingly large. Even the theme of war used by many writers published war books one after another: Arthur Train’s *Earthquake* (1918), Temple Bailey’s *The tin soldier* (1918), Della Thompson lute’s *My boy khaki* (1918) and Edith Wharton’s *The Marne* (1918). And after the end of the war, a collection of war novels appeared. Beginning with John Dos Passos’s “*One man’s initiation*” (1917) and “*Three soldiers*” (1921) which were well known, in addition to many others. Afterwards, there were a flood of war novels such as Lawrence Stalling’s “*Plumes*” (1924), Ernest Hemingway’s “*The sun also Rises*” (1926), William Faulkner’s “*Soldiers’ pay*” (1926) and so many others (60).

Stevenson Randal the author of “*Literature and the Great War*” admits that the majority of the Great War novels are autobiographical. Most of them include fiction by Henry Williamson and Ford Maddox Ford. In the 1920s and later, much of war fiction remained necessarily related with the single threat of autobiography. Some novels at that time wrote by some soldiers especially tend to show false presentation of propaganda (103-104).

Similarly, for literary scholars, the dominant movement between the two wars was Modernism. The central text for American novelists is T.S. Eliot’s great poem “*The waste land*” (1922) that influenced the major work of fiction including Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway and its rejection to conventional plot. These writers were the main figures but Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson deserve



recognition for the new ways invented to express human experience through the psychological side. And John Dos Passos enriched the modernist novel by mixing various forms of collage and stream of consciousness, particularly the “*USA Trilogy*” (1930-6) (Bendixen 77).

### **3.1 War: a suitable subject**

Both authors of fiction and nonfiction, Anna and Rosen point out that in the years following World War I, there was a great shift in the beliefs of ordinary people that leads to a completely new and different life style. For writers and authors, the major change was in their notion of war as a literary subject. Of course, there was much writing about war than peace through history of literature (892).

Once more, Anna and Rosen acknowledge that at the beginning of the 1920s literature, the subject of war appeared with poems. Then it shifted to fiction as far as American literature is concerned and it was called war fiction as illustrated in William Dean Howels’ novel “*Hazard of New Fortunes*”. In fact, through the history of the American literature, almost all American writers have dealt with the subject of war in their writings. And as an example, there is the case of the timid woman poet who spent almost all her life at home; tackled the problem of war in her poem ‘*My triumph lasted till the drums* and ‘*success is counted sweetest*’ (7).

Historically, America was known by its different experiences first starting war against the native Indians, then the colonies. And soon after it got its independence and found the nation of the United States of America through war against Great Britain. Then, America became a world power through the two world wars. So war has become part of the experience of life in America. And after the war, war novel has become the most reasonable way of writing about life in the twentieth century (Anna and Rosen 3).

#### **2.3.2 Language: a useful instrument**

David Minter is an editor of the Columbia literary history of the United States of America notes in his book “*A cultural history of American novel: Henry James to William Faulkner*” that World War I provided writers of that era an adequate subject to deal with as it provided a useful tool for them. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were much disillusionment and destruction caused by the war and

writers at the same time felt the importance of language because it was the only way which succeeded to reveal what was happening in the war and describe the propaganda of their politicians through their writing and they could invent a literature of their own. The European war had brought benefits to American literature particularly the appearance of modern American novel (83).

**Conclusion**

As it has been stated previously, the long lasting impact of World War I has brought a clear transition in people's beliefs. This war did not provide young writers during and after the war with a change in their notion of war as a literary subject only but, also helped realize the powerfulness of language. It is thanks to WWI which was a suitable subject to tackle that results in the rise of Modern American novel with new ways to write literature different from the traditional one.

When talking about American World War I writings in the twentieth century, we must show the importance of WWI in the entire American literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, War Literature cannot be limited to victims and veterans, also post trauma in literature is considered as important in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**DISILLUSIONMENT IN**  
**“SOLDIERS’ PAY”**

**Introduction**

In the years following World War I, America experienced painful years. Although it was late to involve in war and suffered fewer casualties than European countries, the war still had a destructive effect. Consequently, soldiers returning home from Europe found it difficult to turn to old ways of life after their traumatic experiences abroad. For many, modern urban life never seemed more attractive. In addition; the horror lived in battle field during the war was harsh on its participants. People began to recognize that human kind did not make any progress as it was hoped to make.

For many soldiers, the aim to settle down and create their families was strong. It is doubtful that many of these predictions and dreams came true for returned men, and for those who faced difficulties through employment or illness as Donald Mahon’s case in “*Soldiers Pay*” novel, the security of the family unit could be shattered in many ways. Ultimately, the reality of soldiers after World War I and veteran’s troubles to be accepted in their homes is what Faulkner tries to show in his novel.

### 1. “*Soldiers’ Pay*” summary

“*Soldiers’ pay*” is the story of an injured fighter pilot returning from the Great War, Donald Mahon and his homecoming to Charleston; Georgia. It revolves around the protagonist Donald, the son of an Episcopal rector in Georgia. Mahon is in the train accompanied by many soldiers going home. Lieutenant Mahon, a wounded pilot who was shot down in Europe and is believed dead has suffered a head wound, leaving a horrible scare that caused lost of his memory (Fargnoni 273).

On the train, Mahon meets Joe Gilligan, an army private who does not experience war time and Mrs. Margaret Powers a widow, whose husband was killed in the war by one of his soldiers. Gilligan with the encouragement of Powers feel obliged to help the wounded soldier return home, to Charles town, Georgia and take care of him especially, after recognizing his bad conditions.

Richard Maruis, a writer of fiction and nonfiction and a director of expository writing at Harvard University describes the feelings of both Mahon’s father and fiancée when first see him. Thus, in Charlestown Donald’s father, the priest Josef Mahon is surprised to know that his son is still alive as it is the case for Cecily Saunders, his fiancée before he went to war. She is a flapper who gives herself to a young man in the town George Farr. For Emmy the servant in the house of Mahon, who is in love with him secretly, is astonished because Mahon could not recognize her (30).

As stated earlier, Donald’s condition worsens. He returns from the war sick and with terrible facial scar. His return home where all his family considers him dead provides the central focus of the story. His fiancée Cecily faints when she sees the scarred face of her fiancée. However, his father accepts the situation, although he tends to be overoptimistic about his son’s chances to have a good health. And Emmy, the serving girl who had a brief romantic affair with Mahon before he left to war is heartbroken because Mahon is unable to remember her (Fargnoni 273).

## 2. The great major themes of “Soldiers’ Pay”

### 2.1 The melancholy sense of loss

In analyzing the story, Maruis confirms that men in the story of “soldiers’ pay” are seeking for a world that they cannot express in words because these desires are huge and vague. Therefore, the characters transfer these desires to women; these longing for women are practiced in sexual intercourse.

This becomes perhaps the greatest theme of the novel, the melancholy sense of loss where the characters almost all of them lose something and were sad and depressed. Donald Mahon loses his memory and unable to know the world around him. He is one of Faulkner’s characters who came unconscious. He is like Eliot’s girl, neither living nor dead. And Slowly Mahon before he dies, he goes blind (Maruis 27).

Keeping the same line of thoughts, everyone looks at Donald and sees his or her own loss. Cadet Julian Lowe during his settling in the hotel with Donald Mahon, and although his case, the cadet is filled with envy towards the dying Mahon:

*He tasted his sour mouth, knowing his troubled stomach. To have been him! He moaned, just to be him. Let him take this sound body of mine! Let him take it, to have wings on my breast, to have wings, and to have got his scar, too, I would take death tomorrow (Faulkner 45).*

### 2.2 The absurdity of human condition

Thomas Inge is an American writer and an editor of more than fifteen books. He points out that Faulkner’s title indicates the irony he discovers in the post war situation. This irony is concerned to the return of soldiers, who came back sometimes completely changed and broken to discover a life which is no longer the old life that they left before war. Furthermore, they discover people as much as not touched by the war but by the development of technology. Such a discovery makes a man turn frustrated and depressed (53).

In the same vein, the soldier returning from the war finds himself disconnected. This situation of despair and disillusionment destroys high spirit, hope and consciousness. William Faulkner has recreated the modern return of yesterday from another war, which is World War I. With this return, they find different life not like the previous one which is completely changed and influenced by the changes of time (Inge 53).

The war absolutely divided age into two periods, before the war and after. It divided also people onto those who participate in war and those who did not. Those who went to war experienced difficult years. And when they came back they had several changes to do in order to live. Their feelings and what they expected will be an adventure to join war makes it hard for individual after war because that bad experience was not expected. The case of Donald symbolizes the picture of the dying man who returns to a world that is full of natural loveliness. This shows a complete destruction in individual's life. Moreover, soldiers faced a kind of rejection almost by all members of society. Even the conductor in the train shows a kind of ignorance to the drunken soldiers in the train. He is not satisfy with what is happening on the train and soldiers notice this and feel despair (Inge 55).

In the same way, the conductor addressed Lowe: "well do something with them. I cannot bring a train into Chicago with the whole army drunk on it". Yaphank responds: "men, he said he doesn't want us here. And this the reward we get for giving our flesh and blood to our country's need. Yes sir, he doesn't want us here, he begrudges us riding on his train, even. Suppose we had not sprung to the nation's call, do you know what kind of a train you would have? a train full of Germans' train full of folks eating sausage and drink beer, all going to Milwaukee, that's what you would have" (Faulkner 4).

So soldiers lost their hope and saw that they fought in war for nothing, and they find all people rejecting them, and the whole society.



### 3. Disillusionment in modern society

#### 3.1 The collapse of Christianity

Maruis adds that the figure of the rector, Donald's father is the priest in Camus's *La peste*, who believes in the existence of God although the suffering of the world might make ordinary people doubt. World War I and its destruction marked the beginning of a fundamental shift in the Christian worldview. So Americans after the war began to feel pessimistic about world affairs. The war produced disillusionment as they start drinking alcohol, taking drugs. So, young women's and men's morals collapse (28).

Subsequently, the rector has an innocent quality. He is too ordinary, having neither nobleness nor the ability to feel and desire that might makes him in a tragic situation. He wants everything to be normal. He is happy for Cecily Saunders to marry Donald no matter how strange the marriage may be because he cannot make himself believe that Donald is going to die. It is a symbolism of not accepting that religion is rejected by Americans and that they lose their faith in Christianity (Maruis 29).

Similarly, the rector lives a comfortable life where he is in his garden watering the trees and taking care of flowers. He eats his meals and drinks whiskey and lives a stable life without any problems. He does not know what is happening outside his garden until the coming of his son who is wounded, sick and nearly blind. By his return, his father discovers that life outside is full of death. Peoples live the meaningless of the world as innocent victims. The rector's garden is considered as paradise. But inside the rector's son, the world is dark and gloomy (Maruis29).

After Donald's death, Gilligan and the rector walked and stopped at a black church, where they listen to a pure voice without instrument, as Faulkner says "like a flight of gold and heavenly birds" (Faulkner 319). Although, the black are rejected in society, they kept their faith when all the whites have discovered the absurdity of life. They sing on:

*Taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote god and made a personal of him feed thy sleep, o Jesus. All the longing of mankind for a orness with something, somewhere. Feed thy sheep, o Jesus [...] the rector and Gilligan stood side in the dusty road. The road went on under the moon, vaguely dissolving with perspective. Wornout red gutted fields were now alternate splashes of soft black and them, which were sharp as bronze (Faulkner 319).*

So the men listening to the rise and fall of these voices of poor black people in the night may express a hope, whatever how bad the circumstances may be (Maruis 28).

### **3.2 The collapse of values: the collapse of true love**

In the story of "Soldiers' Pay", some of the sexual relations between characters have a dead feeling inside it. It is the satisfaction of animal desires and nothing more. People do not have feelings of romantic love. For example, Januaries Jones is described as having animal desires.

Through "Soldiers' Pay" Faulkner makes explicit references to sexual intercourse: "after lay in a coma in the street like a woman recently loved. Quit and warm: nothing now that the lover has gone away" (151). Cecily, Mahon's fiancée is awaiting him too. As a model of romantic novel, the fiancée is supposed to rush in the arms of her wounded hero. The case of Mahon with his fiancée is different. The rector helps him. However, Cecily Saunders a shallow and sexual woman who seems to have no ideas or purpose in life reacts as an unfaithful woman. She is horrified by his appearance, and runs away from him. Cecily is a flapper, and has her boyfriends. To one of them she engaged and eventually marries him (Inge 11).

### **4. Mahon's disillusionment and inability to cope with existence**

Edmond L. Volpe, a professor at the city college of New York and author of fifteen scholarly books on literature admits that Mahon finds it difficult to live after what happens to him. Donald is troubled and confused. He is alienated from the world of nature. His religion means nothing and his life is without meaning too.

And this is the same situation experienced by all characters of “*Soldiers’ Pay*”. What the characters really seek they do not even realize. This expresses a tragedy for themselves and their society. They are incapable to recognize their needs. They can only sense the void in their existence (50).

As it has been seen previously, the novel’s centre is Donald Mahon who is wounded because of his suffering during WW1. He is scarred and nearly blind, and has lost most of his memory. He exists only physically in the present and disconnected from his past. Mahon represents the injured veteran who lives a series of actions and reactions that touches immediately people surrounding him and the entire town of Charlestown (Volpe 50).

As Volpe has noted, Cecily Saunders the woman he was engaged with before the war refuses to marry him and prefers George Farr. Although her father pressure, she decides to marry Donald just because she fears Jones threatening. Then Cecily goes to marry George. Consequently, despite Mahon’s conditions Margaret Powers decides to marry him.

As stated earlier, the returning soldiers are lost generation. Mahon and the other soldiers in the train feel that they are no longer heroes but they are rejected and unwanted guests in their society. They spend all their time in the train drinking, without any hope to live for. In a word, they consider themselves as lost foreigners in a foreign country (Volpe 51).

Robert Hamblin, a professor and a director of the centre for Faulkner studies at Southeast Missouri state notes that Margaret powers, the one who decides to marry Donald Mahon remembers her previous husband Richard Powers when she sees Mahon. She feels pity and wants to take care of him because she regrets about what she did with her husband. Thus, Powers sent to her husband a letter just a few days after his departure to France telling him that she did not love him anymore. Then, after sending her letter she received the news of her husband’s death, what makes all her life in disorder (359).

## 5. Emmy trauma and disillusionment

Emmy in the novel symbolizes the theme of disappointment and despair. She was in a state where she could not believe what was happening to her. By the return of her lover whom she loved and secretly engaged with him before the war, she had a heart broken because Mahon had lost his memory and then, he could not remember her or anything related to her. She could not realize her dreams. She considers herself nothing without Mahon. According to her, Donald of the past whom she spent with him her best time is never Donald of the present (Volpe 52).

As has been stated previously, Emmy's life is meaningless after the death of Mahon. After his death, she directly but without feeling engaged with Jones whom she did not love. She could not feel anything as she did not know what to do or how to think. In the evening of Donald's funeral day, she goes to the place where she used to meet Donald near a small lack and start remembering all what they lived with each other in the past beautiful days:

*"A dog saw it also and bayed: a mellow, low sound that slid immaculately down a hill of silence, yet at the same time seemed to linger like a rumor or of a far despair ...the dog bayed again, hopeless and sorrowful, dying away ...after a while she rose slowly, feeling her damp clothes, thinking of the long walk home. Tomorrow was washday" (Faulkner 208).*

Januaries Jones who is presented in the novel of "Soldiers' Pay" as a strong character; and he tries to seduce all women character in the novel. Basically, Emmy hates him and she rejects his proposal but, unfortunately this makes her more attractive to Jones. The latter, using all his power tries to possess her. Finally, Emmy finds herself helpless and powerless to resist Jones (Volpe 52).

## 6. Margaret trauma and disillusionment

Martin Kreiswirth notes that after the return of the dying Mahon, Cecily his fiancée refuses to marry him because of his wounds and prefers George Farr and marries him by the end. However, Margaret marries the dying veteran and after Mahon's death, she refuses to marry John Gilligan and leaves town. (37).

Following the same line of thoughts, Margaret Powers when sees the veteran Donald decides to help Joe Gilligan bring him to his home. But we have to know why she feels compelled to do such a path and what her reason revealed through the novel. Dick and Margaret married three day before he was prepared to go to France. They married although they were not in love and both were aware of that. They agree that each should live his own life while Dick was away. It is clear that her psychological state is in turmoil (Kreistwirth 38).

Kreistwirth points out that Margaret was lonely after her husband's departure. So she returned to the Red Cross canteen where she worked as hostess. Her loneliness was strong especially when she revived his first letters. She decided with all honesty to give an end to her relation with her husband writing a letter telling him her decision. But before he could receive her letters, he was dead.

Ultimately, when she meets Donald on the train, she is in a state of emotional disorder. She does not regret that she wrote such a letter to a man who soon died. She is disappointed, as if she is in a state of emotion that she cannot get out from it. She is not sure whether he had received her letter and then dies. She thinks that the separation between them completed not by death but by her letter (Kreistwirth 38).

Her decision to break out marriage was inspired by her experience during the three days of marriage to Powers. She remembers him as beautiful but ugly. He was her lover whom she did not love. When her letters fails to reach Powers, her emotions are frozen. She cannot love another; she can feel her sexuality but she cannot know desire. What she could feel is pity. And this really happens with her

marriage to Donald which unites two of the living dead, both victims of rotten luck (Volpe 53).

Margaret disappointment is represented in her sexuality and what really expresses the trauma that she experiences by the war. Her fear of war is clear in her attitudes and behavior. When her husband Powers died, she feels that she was faithful to him (Kreistwirth 39).

Again, Kreistwirth adds that Margaret and Mahon experiences were alike what makes them both seen as old than they really are. Margaret is as Joe Gilligan young, yet not young, as if she knows everything. Margaret and Mahon share the same painful experience and both are damaged. As the doctor exposes to Margaret, Donald's body is already dead. Margaret is convinced that she is cold by nature. Or perhaps she has spent all her emotions trying to please others without paying attention to her needs. She does not seem to feel things like others. This dead of feeling is mainly what leads her to look after the soldiers that she meets (Kreistwirth 40).

Undoubtedly, Margaret's condition is post-traumatic. Her life is unstable, she is scarred and sexless not because she is virgin but because she is traumatized. If Margaret can look after the wounded soldiers and bring them back to their ordinary life; it is because she as Joe has known disappointment. And thus we can identify their disillusionment through Margaret. Thus the psychic wounds of the white are presented through the experiences and memories of a female character (Kreistwirth 41).

Faulkner uses Margaret's memory of the time passed with her first husband Powers to refer to her compassion which is motivated by guilt about the way she broke off with her first husband. It is the source of the darkness she wants to deny:

*Dick, Dick, how young, how terribly young: tomorrow must never come. Kiss me through my hair. Dick, Dick. My body flowing away from me, dividing. How ugly men are, naked. Do not leave me, do not leave me. No, no we don't love each other !we don't!holde me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken ,unseeing :thank god my body cannot see. Your body is so ugly, Dick! Dear dick. Your bones, your mouth hard and sharp as bones: rigid. My body flows away: you cannot hold it why do you sleep, Dick? My body flows on and on. You cannot hold it, for yours is so ugly (Faulkner178).*

Inge confirms that even as war caused the threat of division (do not leave me, do not leave) the reality of sex seems to touch her internally (my body flowing away from me, dividing). So the object of horror, of darkness here is a ghost of tomorrow or the presence of her husband Dick, which like a helpless child in the dark, she is thankful, her blind body cannot see ( 59).

**Conclusion**

“*Soldiers’ Pay*” as a war novel describes the aftermath of WW1 and reveals American people as lost generation. Through his novel, Faulkner tries to show that war had changed the world. People’s confidence in their government and the propaganda of politicians and in life in general was destroyed. So what they believed in was just illusions that make Americans’ life fragmented and meaningless. Furthermore, the novel demonstrates disturbed desires of characters like the gap between Margaret and Gilligan, as well as unsettled sexuality as Januaries Jones case.

Each character in the novel seeks to find meaning to his or her life while moral values have no place in people’s life. Ultimately, Americans were disillusioned, lost and affected by the First World War.



# **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

The brutality of World War One caused philosophers, writers and thinkers to question accepted ideas about reason and progress. Disillusionment by the war caused many people to fear the future and express doubt about traditional religious beliefs. Some writers express their anxiety by creating disturbing visions of the present and the future. The southern American author William Faulkner expresses the trauma of war in his first piece of fiction “*Soldiers’ Pay*”; which emphasizes that those soldiers can never be rewarded for their sacrifices in war.

This thesis has found that every man who was away from his home during the Great War had simple dreams. The return to a life style the same as before the war i.e. living in security that lays in a job, in marriage, or within their family. However, all returning soldiers faced uncertainty when coming back from the war. Various factors made this more severe. Men found themselves in absolutely very different situations than the one they were dreaming of for the coming future such as joblessness, illnesses or loneliness. Sadly, some lack the ability to reintegrate and readjust to civilian life. On the whole, those soldiers were affected negatively and harshly.

Underlying all of the experiences described in this thesis is a great deal of uncertainty for these men. Moreover, there were anxieties over the illness of soldiers that could be spread over the general society. The war caused their lives to be put on hold. Some men could not marry, and for those who had families, illness could cause a great toll on their security and intimacy.

The findings of this thesis also give a wider understanding to the social behavior and attitudes of the 1920s. The beginning of the 1920s, did not spell the end of problems for these men. The public feared returned men becoming idle, useless members of society. The period between the two world wars was characterized as the traumatic age of the United States of America. Many authors who were known as the ‘Lost Generation’ reflected the literary climate of post war era by expressing American’s post war disillusionment in their works. They criticized this war and expressed their rejections.

Furthermore, these writers reflected a generation attitude towards post war modern life. For example, John Doss Passos novel "*Three Soldiers*" (1926), Ernest Hemingway novel "*A farewell to Arms*" (1929) and many others who participated in describing and criticizing it.

What the novels narrate about American life after the war is the hard reality witnessed by society. The disillusionment of the returning soldiers to a society from which they feel alienated. The veterans' feelings were full of awareness of the hypocrisy of the civilians and their bitterness toward women they left behind. They felt betrayed by politicians and civilians.

Modernity does not provide any comfort or guides to help the lost generation find their way, they are all left alone. What was known about the 1920s is that they were prosperous days. However, through this study the sad reality of the twenties has become crystal clear.

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Zou, Wen, and ping Liu. The First World War and the rise of modern American Novel: a survey of the critical heritage of American WW1 writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> c". 2011. Print