"The Shape and the Violence": Modernity and the Human Condition in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in English at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

January 2010

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-67151-1
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-67151-1

ABSTRACT

"The Shape and the Violence":

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Through a close reading of Timothy Findley's 1977 novel *The Wars* this thesis explores the various ways in which modernity and the Great War (1914-1918) irrevocably altered the human condition. The seemingly instantaneous ubiquity of new technologies in the early twentieth-century (the mechanical, the electrical), mass production and the mass scaling of both industry and warfare changed life for everyone in the West. Commodification and mass consumption altered human relationships and behaviour, as did the arrival of the mechanical – especially in the form of the automobile – in the domestic sphere. The experience of time itself became corrupted, mutating the nature of sleep both at the front *and* at home while also accelerating personal relationships. Findley's novel also throws light upon the heightened fusion of sex and violence in the modern era. Most interesting, however, are the various human responses to modernity and the Great War which *The Wars* exhibits and the complex prognosis for humanity Findley delivers through a menagerie of fragile characters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Peter Webb for his patience and persistence in seeing this project to completion. His intimate knowledge of Findley's oeuvre and the surrounding critical field, not to mention his unflagging generosity with his time and insights, as well as his unfailing ability to keep the 'overall picture' in view all contributed greatly to the final work. Bonnie-Jean Campbell in the English office must also be thanked for her prompt (and correct) answers to one-thousand and one tiny questions.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, the lovely and wise Sarah Low, and of course, my brother, Andy, for his part in our endless discussions of *The Wars*.

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INTRODUCTION

Timothy Findley's 1977 novel *The Wars* contains numerous illustrations of the ways in which humanity was altered by the arrival of the modern age and its most significant manifestation, the Great War (1914-1918). The sudden ubiquity of new technologies in the early twentieth century (the mechanical, the electrical), mass production and the mass scaling of both industry and warfare changed the very nature life for everyone in the West. Findley's novel is remarkable not only for the light it throws upon the various phenomena which afforded the West's painful upheaval into modernity, but also for its disturbing and vivid portrait of the resulting human condition. Before turning to the many effects of this upheaval which Findley exhibits, it is perhaps useful to note that the modern West, which we see emerging during Robert Ross's brief lifetime, stands apart from all other cultures and civilizations due to its monstrously disproportionate relationship with the earth vis-à-vis capitalist production. As David Cayley has pointed out in discussion of Karl Polanyi's work, the situation the West finds itself in today, otherwise known as modernity, is both terrible and terribly unique:

> [C]ultures, throughout history, have in fact carefully limited economic competition and set strict limits to exchange relationships. And they have done so, Polanyi says, with the conscious intention of keeping social life free of the envy and rivalry that arise when goods are perceived as scarce. Subsistence was embedded in social life and it was only disembedded . . . after a prolonged and painful struggle to liberate markets from social control...Our situation today, in which "the economy" contains and rules

> society, is a profound reversal, therefore, of the historical norm. (20 *Rivers*)

In fact, one might reasonably argue that for the modern West "the economy" has come to fill the vacuum left by organized religion and, thereby, become a pseudo-religion itself. If so, this development represents something previously unknown to human culture.

In *The Wars* the Ross family lives (and disintegrates) at the end of this "painful struggle to liberate markets from social control." That is to say, they live at the beginning of the chaos which ensues from a capitalist system unmitigated by tradition, or indeed restrained by any force. This "profound reversal...of the historical norm," this unprecedented exaltation of the economic above all other aspects of life which Polanyi identified, gives birth to the many wars – emotional, physical and spiritual – wreaking havoc in Findley's novel. Those many wars rolled together in one bundle called: modernity.

By using animals, particularly horses, as signifiers of the past, *The Wars* repeatedly highlights the fact that the arrival of the modern age constituted a great transformation. For example, at one point Findley speaks directly to the horse's changing role in war: "'I wanted to join the cavalry, but the cavalry is sort of on the outs' said Levitt. 'The only other place I could be with horses was in the Field Artillery'"(98). Indeed, this does mark a significant change. In the modern age, horses no longer carry men and women for the purposes of agriculture or recreation – they pull large guns through mud and are viewed as expendable as any other raw material the war consumes. Gone is the high romantic resonance of the cavalry, and its attendant notions of chivalry, honour and glory. Similarly, the horse as an emblem of the agrarian spirit and a sign of slower times lived in harmony with the rhythm of the earth is also wholly absent from Findley's presentation of modernity. *The Wars* presents the age of horse as both passing

and already past so as to announce that proportionality between all living things – man not least of all – is itself vanishing. The consequences of such a development are as staggering as they are numerous, and *The Wars* stresses this point empathically with a host of diverse, interrelated examples. Simply put, Findley shows us that, in the modern world, everything natural is increasingly "on the outs." The devastating effects of the arrival of new technologies on the home front, particularly that of the mechanical in the form of the automobile, provides just one such example of modernity pushing humanity and nature aside which I will explore in my first chapter. The role of Taylorism in shaping the twentieth-century will also be considered in this chapter, alongside Ford's emphasis upon standardization, which helped entrench mass production within Western society. The effects of commodification and mass consumption upon human behaviour and relationships will also be discussed.

Chapter Two concerns itself with another of modernity's universal effects, namely, the corruption of time and tradition. Disorientation arising from the annihilation of circadian rhythms at the front will be examined, in addition to the mutated nature of sleep for those both in the trenches and at home. The disruption of the traditional Christian calendar, not to mention the accelerated nature of personal relationships and the novel's sophisticated presentation of these themes, will also be closely studied. What are the effects of such unprecedented bewilderment and loss of tradition?

That sex is increasingly wed to violence is another disturbing hallmark of the modern age, one I will explore in my third chapter. Findley not only reveals sex as having less and less to do with emotional solace and ever more to do with violence in the modern era, but he also reveals how it is co-opted by militarism as a homosocial bonding device. The various complex ways in which repressed sexuality can lead to violence will

also inform this discussion as will the role of sex in helping individuals hide from the awful truths of modernity.

Taking as its starting point the notion that humanity was forever altered by modernity, the Great War, and their many attendant transformations upon the human condition, Chapter Four will explore how individuals define themselves in such an age. Amidst tremendous massacre and upheaval, are people able to find, as Leonard Cohen once put it, a "decent place to stand" (341), or do they resign themselves to the horrors of modernity, joining its ranks with enthusiasm? Perhaps, for better or worse, do they take some other path? Resistance in such a traumatizing era is no small feat, for, as we will see, the sum of modernity's horrors results in a overarching corruption of the human condition so profound even the most basic sense of order and human relations becomes jeopardized. That is not to say, however, that Findley views resistance as impossible. This brings us to perhaps *the* question regarding *The Wars*. What, in Findley's view, does the rise of the modern age mean? Where exactly are we according to *The Wars*? Since its publication Findley's novel has elicited a steady stream of diverse, high-quality critical work. That is to say, diagnoses of various aspects of the human condition as Findley sees it have been performed by his critics, but as of yet few have dared name the novel's implied prognosis for humanity. In other words, is *The Wars* a fundamentally hopeful novel? I believe the answer is yes, for although Findley's prognosis for Western civilization is gloomy at best, *The Wars* displays genuine hope for the courageous and imaginative individual struggling within civilization. Imagination is, after all, the sole attribute Findley bestows upon all those resisting the many brutalities of modernity, and, moreover, no two responses of imagination in the novel are alike.

CHAPTER ONE

'What Were All These Fires':

Mass Production, the Mechanical and Modern Warfare in *The Wars*

The Wars exposes a number of ways in which capitalism, along with its many technological innovations, changes the fabric of both life and war. Robert Ross grew up in a world where the full implications of the capitalist system had not yet manifested themselves and social relations had not suffered the arrival of the mechanical in the domestic sphere, particularly in the instance of the automobile. Just as mass-production of the mechanical would change the nature of war, so, too, would the modern consumer era fundamentally transform people's behaviour and attitudes. In sum, everything – either at home or abroad – became accelerated and immodest. This also characterized the outright vulgarity late moderns see as their lot. In making animals symbolic of a kinder, gentler, slower and even more innocent age of which Robert Ross witnesses the passing, Findley shares insights about the nature of capitalism, its love of war, and the effects technological changes have upon human lives, including Robert's. I will also examine the devastating effect modernity has upon Rowena Ross, Robert's hydrocephalic sister.

The Wars is highly critical of the distinctly modern phenomenon of Taylorism which helped shape the early twentieth-century in particular. Developed by Fredrick Winslow Taylor in the 1880s and 1890s, Taylorism is a theory of management that analyzes and synthesizes workflows, with the unwavering objective of improving labour productivity and efficiency. As Bernard Doray has explained, Taylorism, also known as scientific management, not only "came to define our epoch's organization of work," it also "divided workers from each other and from their creativity" (iv). Or, as Antonio Gramsci put it, Taylorism aimed at:

> developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy, and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect. (Boggs 183-184)

In other words, Taylorism sought to reduce workers to obedient automatons and, as we will see, Fordism's emphasis upon standardization contributed greatly to this end, thus entrenching mass-production in Western society. Clearly, it is an age of accepted Taylorism, emerging Fordism and mass-production in which *The Wars* is set. Young men are consumed by the Great War like raw material being fed into a factory, precisely because that is the only way capitalism unrestrained by tradition can understand them.

The juxtaposition of the rising modern age with the Edwardian period (1900-1910) which preceded it concerns Findley from the outset of the novel. As early as page four we are being told that in 1915 the modest and more reverential character of the Edwardian period still persisted. Snapshots from that year reveal people who are "timid" (4) and shy: "Women turn away [from the camera] suspicious. They still maintain a public reticence" (4). However it is precisely during these early war years that such culture "falters" (4) and "[w]omen abandon all their former reticence" (5). The modern age, with its penchant for glamour, has arrived.

An ever increasing production of consumer goods, acting in concert with the advent of new media, namely photography, begat the notion of glamour which is itself inseparable from the modern age. It is this to which Findley wishes to draw our attention. A new emphasis upon the individual, and in particular the individual's visual image, arose from this combination of historical factors. Thus, style became valued over

substance, and the public sphere – the emerging theatre of individuality – was soon perceived as more important than the private. The growing importance of the public sphere undoubtedly had to do with mass-production and what Marx called exchange value – the value commodities resulting from alienated labour possess – as well as the fact that "commodities have the capacity to enhance desire" (191). These factors, in turn, lead to what Marx called commodity fetishism which has a mesmerizing effect upon people, turning them into ever more rapacious consumers.

For Findley, however, the consumer's interest in commodity-bestowed glamour, which we see reflected in the day's fashions, also betrays the nascent brutality of the early modern world. In a word, the new consumer ethos and modern brutality are one and the same: "Ladies no longer wear their furs: they drape them from their arms with all the foxtail trophies hanging down like scalps" (4). The once "timid" are now "posed aloof" (5) and there even seems to be a latent hedonistic violence to this new, individual-focused age – everyone wants, somehow, to be *the* one: "More and more people want to be seen. More and more people want to be remembered. Hundreds – thousands crowd into the frame" (5). The strain of impossible expectation which conspicuous consumption places upon society Findley clearly alludes to here.

A Gentler Age

Before turning to what is *the* technological innovation key to the modern age – the automobile – let us first consider the manner in which Findley demarcates the Edwardian period from its monstrously original successor. Throughout *The Wars* Findley associates animals, and horses in particular, with a gentler pre-war world. When Mr. Ross recalls the day he first met his wife, we are told she had "driven round and round the park in a

shiny black phaeton pulled by a spotted horse," and that he "had gone to stand beside the water trough, thinking she must surely stop before the afternoon was out. He was just eighteen and she twenty-two" (153). In this instance, the horse is both the fulcrum of a courtship as well as a symbol of a more idyllic age, one where the young have occasion for romance free from war. Like his father, when Robert recalls a precious, pre-war memory it also involves animals, in this case the pony, Meg, and family dog, Bimbo:

> Robert was briefly gentled back to the screened-in porch at Jackson's Point where, even now, his family might be seated staring off across the lake at a late spring storm...while Meg stood stoic over by the cedars with her ears laid back and her eyes half-closed. Bimbo would be lying on the glider while his father and Peggy scratched behind her ears – one on either side. (182)

In each of these examples we can see how, whether the individuals involved are aware of it or not, animals provide a guiding principle of tenderness, restraint and proportion to their human relationships.

The d'Orsey family is also presented enjoying the Edwardian period in the company of animals, particularly horses. We are told that before the war, "Barbara always tagged along when Clive and Jamie took the horses out" and that "Clive's only sport was riding" (111). Aboard the *S.S. Massanabie* horses continue to function as symbols of this gentler age. We are told there is no escape from the cramped and degrading conditions on board the ship, "unless you were one of those who were put on picket duty with the horses" (58). Here horses provide reprieve, albeit temporary, from the brutality of the rising modern age. The pre-war idyll represented by the horse and enjoyed by families such as the Ross's and d'Orseys however is interrupted by the sudden advent of the automobile in the nineteen-teens.

As Marshall McLuhan reminds us in *Understanding Media,* "any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus trance. But the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact, as in the first bars of melody" (15). In *The Wars,* Findley shows us the spell of a new medium, namely the automobile, occurring "immediately upon contact" as it intoxicates individuals with notions of glamour. Suddenly we are presented with "families, sitting overdressed in Packards – posed aloof in the backs of Chevrolets and Russell Knights. Everyone, it seems, is journeying around the block" (5).

McLuhan understood that the characteristics of any given medium have specific social effects – hence the phrase "the medium is the message" – and Findley illustrates this point at the level of personal relationships as well. McLuhan's declaration that any new medium is capable of "reshaping and restructuring... every aspect of our personal life" (*Medium is the Massage* 8) could hardly by more applicable than it is in the case of Robert Ross and his sister, Rowena, vis-à-vis the automobile. Previous to the Ross's acquiring their Reo Runabout, the floor of the stable where "Rowena would sit with the [hutch] doors wide open and take the rabbits...on her lap" had been "just hard packed earth" which "smelled of hay and oats and pony manure" (16). Robert had built this hutch in the family's stable especially for Rowena's rabbits and frequently took her there so she could pet them. Once the Ross's car arrives, however, this earthen play area must be covered with concrete "so the Reo Runabout could share the stables with Meg and the rabbits" (16). It is this unforgiving surface which Rowena meets on her fatal fall. Rowena suffers death, as opposed to injury, as a consequence of the Reo Runabout's (perceived) need of concrete. That is to say, the new medium of the car has characteristics specific to

it, for example, a need of concrete, which, in this case severely alters Robert and Rowena's relationship. It is not an exaggeration to say that in this instance the new medium, in fact, destroys a personal relationship. While it was a "miracle" that Rowena had "lived so long as she had" (15), hers is a miracle undone by the advent of the automobile.

Indeed, for Findley all the horrors of modernity, be they experienced at home or abroad, are synonymous with mass-production, and particularly that of the automobile: "Ammunition wagons, guns and limbers, lorries and motorcars, motorbikes and ambulances vied for a place in the traffic" (187). The term "traffic," employed here to describe a scene near the front, purposely links the war with domestic society –both are, after all, now quite familiar with the ceaseless and dangerous phenomenon that is traffic. Findley repeatedly stresses that "this is the age of motorized portation" when "over one-thousand makes of motor car can be had" (4), because for him the mass-produced automobile is a key ingredient of the horrific twentieth-century. So much so that even though figures in a photograph of the early modern period are static it seems as though "the dark machines that fill the road [behind them] move on" (4). Findley literalizes his argument that the automobile is integral not simply to *the* war, but to the many wars that populate the novel in one brief passage: "The only signs of war were the ruts in the road" (183-184). Indeed, thanks to Henry Ford, the automobile, mass-production and all which the latter entails would prove unstoppable in the twentieth-century. Through the standardization of components and processes, Ford was able to dramatically cut the price of his automobiles to the point where even his own factory workers could afford to buy one. Thus, mass-production came to have the support of the masses as Fordism ensured mass-consumption. Put simply, Ford's greatest impact upon the modern age undoubtedly lay in his combining mass-production with mass-consumption, thus firmly establishing

the latter and accounting for much of modernity's ethos of disposability.

In light of this ethos, it is perhaps not surprising that even before getting to the front, Robert Ross cannot help but observe the mechanized features of nascent modernity with a distinct sense of apprehension:

> Robert stood alone to one side, watching the engine... He was watching the stoker feed the flames with rattling shovelfuls of coal. He watched with his hands in his pockets – shoulders hunched and his toes pressed hard against his suitcase. At school he'd been taught that hunching the shoulders was an ungallant posture; still he maintained it while the engine bellowed and hissed. (11)

Unconsciously, Robert understands that the mass-mechanical has already destroyed much of the previous age, that humanity has crossed a threshold into a very different era wherein, if one wishes to survive, outdated notions such as gallantry must be jettisoned.

The proliferation of the mass-mechanical, even in familiar, peacetime settings is a source of terror not only to Rowena and Robert, however, but to Mrs. Ross as well. We are told that her brother, Monty Miles Raymond, was killed suddenly while walking home one night: "A wayward trolley left the tracks to strike him down" (72). Findley's particular phrasing here, granting the trolley agency, ushers us into the world of Mrs. Ross's fear of the ubiquitous mechanical. Now she finds the world to be "full of trolley cars" that "jump the tracks in all her dreams" (72). She believes that if she ever tries to cross the tracks "then she and everyone she knows will be struck down" (73). In both of these examples – Rowena and Monty – we find that as one transportation medium gives way to another, that is to say, as the horse-drawn gives way to the impersonal severity of the mechanical, human lives are changed dramatically.

While *The Wars* is of course concerned with war's immediate victims, Findley clearly does not want us to forget those who died from the mass-mechanized action of the home or those who were simply too sensitive to withstand this new, harsher age. They are victims of the capitalist, modern world as well. At one point in the novel we are suddenly reminded: "So far, you have read of the deaths of 557,017 people – one of whom was killed by a streetcar, one of whom died of bronchitis and one of whom died in a barn with her rabbits" (180). Monty Miles's streetcar death, Harris's bronchial death and Rowena's death-by-concrete are singled out because they, too, are war deaths. Had Harris, Robert Ross's friend, not been on board the *S.S. Massanabie* where he caught a cold which quickly developed into bronchitis, he would not have died in a London hospital. Monty Miles and Rowena, while respectively many years and many miles removed from the war, nonetheless succumb to the ever-increasing ubiquity of the mechanical without which the mass-death of modern warfare would be impossible. Findley makes explicit his belief that the violence of the latter and the violence of the mass-mechanical, wherever it may be found, are equivalent through his description of the Ross family following Rowena's death: "She died on the Monday, never regaining consciousness. Mrs. Ross wore a large, black hat. Robert wore an armband. People who only knew them from a distance saw them walking down the street and thought they must have lost someone they loved in the war" (15). Indeed, long before Robert enlists, the Ross's are surrounded by the war in everything but name.

Wartime Capitalism

The Wars is, of course, not solely interested in the effects new technologies such as the mechanical have upon humans, but in a broader critique of capitalism as well. As John

Ralston Saul has noted, we in the West now live in the midst of a "permanent wartime economy" (141) where the single most important capital good is armaments. Findley anticipates Saul's insight. Through various devices, Findley reveals the extent to which everything may be reduced to cannon fodder or commodity, whether man, beast or material. Robert Ross is glimpsed coming to terms with a capitalist system whose fundamentally horrific nature only begins to fully manifest itself both at home and abroad during the war years. Furthermore, if the Great War proved anything, it was that man is no longer the measure of all things – industry provides the world its scale, particularly machinery and technology. Findley consistently illustrates this sad truth.

Like any other expendable commodity, horses are brought aboard the *S.S. Massanabie* "by a gigantic crane and lowered into the hold like cargo" (49). These will join the "long trains of horses and mules being herded up as replacements for those at the front" (187). Findley describes the supply road that feeds the war as "a gigantic conveyor belt that ran between the front and Bailleul" (199). Thus the war is likened to some sort of immeasurably large open-air factory, a continuous process demanding ever-greater production. This process extends far beyond the front lines and has everything to do with the industrial machinery that feeds the war its requisite mammals and goods. Truly, war is the ultimate capitalist gear. Fully engaged it spends, that is to say wastes, all it has gathered together and operates on its own frightening and utterly inhuman rate. Following the attack on the supply line, we are told that "[n]othing could be buried – nothing could be salvaged. There was neither manpower nor time between the attacks for this" (199). This maximized form of consumption, in turn, necessitates further maximized production.

On a related aside, horses, the novel's quintessential symbol of a more humane era, are purposely shown being consumed by the mechanical in the midst of this process. Consider the horse with the broken leg in the hold of the *S.S. Massanabie* which cannot

rise due to the "metal plates" upon which its hooves can "gain no purchase" (66) – not because it is too weak to stand. The old age is incompatible with the new one and the fate of the horses found throughout *The Wars* dramatizes this point. Findley is also conscious of the extent to which horses are consumed by the material preparation for war. The mattress Robert tears apart in a fit of desperate pain toward the end of the novel is stuffed with "great loops of horsehair" (194). Robert is elsewhere disgusted by the leather skin of his army-issued boot which appals him with its "human feel" (44) and by the horrific irony of naming a gun used to kill a horse a "colt" (67).

Perhaps most distressing is Findley's suggestion that we have entered an era where everything may be reduced or transformed into a commodity for exchange; an age where anything, even the profoundly, irreplaceably human can be assigned a value. As Marx pointed out, commodification occurs when people come "to value each other mainly as producers...of commodities" which, in turn, leads to "people themselves becoming commodified" (191). This brings to mind Stuart Ross's relationship to the letters his brother sends home from the front: "Some he saved to trade at school for other artifacts of war sent home by other elder brothers like his own – but only the letters mailed from France were worthy of this exchange. They had to have the smell of fire" (74). This passage suggests that even a loved one's traumatic war experiences may be commodified.

Between a Car and a Soldier

It is telling that the quintessential consumer good, the automobile, and modern warfare are presented as arriving simultaneously in *The Wars*: "Everyone, it seems, is journeying around the block. Children vie to blow the horns. Then something happens. April. Ypres.

Six thousand dead and wounded" (5). The novelty of the automobile is swiftly and sharply undercut by the unspeakable reality of modern warfare. It would seem that the capitalist mass-mechanical and modern warfare's mass-death are two sides of the same coin. Nowhere does Findley urge his reader toward such an understanding more compellingly than in the chapter dealing with Robert's attempted rescue of the rabbits. At the outset we are once more reminded of the harshness, the merciless, unnatural hardness of Rowena's death: "Rowena was buried in the morning. Under the trees in frozen earth they had to split with axes" (18). The earth itself is now presented as unforgiving as concrete, that corollary of the automobile, upon which Rowena died. When Robert realizes why Teddy Budge has been summoned it is telling that the former, in his mad dash to save the rabbits, not only falls "against the side of the car" but, having done so, glimpses a "soldier" just standing there, "lighting a cigarette" (20). The connection between capitalist production and modern warfare is brought into still sharper focus. The soldier, Peggy's beau, is indifferent to the senseless slaughter about to take place, and it is through this brief tableau that Findley manages to literalize the bind in which sensitive spirits find themselves in the modern age: on their knees between the mass-mechanical as represented by the car, and modern warfare as represented by the soldier.

That Robert is badly injured (by Budge) in the intimately familiar, pastoral setting of his own home *before* his actual war experience is indicative of the growing erosion of the distinction between war zones and any mechanized capitalist society. Findley is saying that the brutality of fully manifest capitalism reduces all society to a veritable No Man's Land. Senseless killing may occur at home just as it does in the trenches. Mrs. Ross's experience, which I will later explore fully, has also borne this out. It is not surprising that Robert feels closer to the war while at home in Toronto than he does in the English countryside. Writing to his father he remarks, "I think perhaps you'd like this

place where we are. It's in Kent. There's a grand country house with open fields on every side and an old, chalky town down below the cliffs. The war seems awfully far away. Even further off than when we were at home" (71). To Robert, both the war and home seem far away in this English setting because he has not suffered loss there. The pastoral landscape of Kent, free of any previous association for him, can serve as a pleasant reminder of earlier, more tranquil times at home with Rowena or at the family's cottage.

There is a terribly tragic irony in Robert's deciding to enlist as a result of Rowena's death. With his home shattered, it is during Rowena's funeral that "the first inkling came that it was time for Robert to join the army" (18). He envies Peggy's beau who he imagines will be able to "go away" and "surround himself with space" (18) following the funeral. Hence, Robert rushes head-long into the horrors of trench warfare as a means of escaping the creeping horrors of the modern age at home. Even before he sails for Europe, however, the world he has known and loved will darken monstrously, and thereby Findley highlights the ubiquity of modernity's violence.

'What Were All These Fires'

Following Robert's military training in the prairies, Findley transports us through a flowing picture postcard description of Canada directly into the industrial furnaces of war-time Toronto. Robert is bewildered and disturbed by the changes fully-fledged capitalism has wrought upon his home town:

> Then he could smell the city of his birth – even though it lay about him in the dark – and he stood and he stared as he passed the fires of his father's factories, every furnace blasting red in the night. What had become of all the spires and the formal, comforting shapes of commerce he remembered

> – banks and shops and business palaces with flags? Where were the streets with houses ranged behind their lawns under the gentle awnings of the elms? What had happened here in so short a time that he could not recall his absence? What were all these fires – and where did his father and his mother sleep beneath the pall of smoke reflecting orange and red and yellow flames? Where, in this dark, was the world he'd known. (45)

The short answer is that this *is* the world Robert has known and loved, only the true nature of its governing system has finally begun to find full expression. A feverish wartime economy creates a reality, even in a landscape not directly touched by war, eerily similar to a death camp or the traditional Christian conception of hell: a world of smoke and industrial proportions with little to offer by way of reassurance, a world both dark and fearful even to its ruling class - in effect, another No Man's Land. While Robert grew up amidst business during the pre-war years, at that time it wore a smile and moved at a more leisurely, if even then accelerating pace. It is telling after all that the Ross family's 1914 summer vacation also fulfilled business purposes: "One summer the Rosses crossed to England on the *S.S. Minnetonka* in order to spend a holiday with the *Raymond/Ross* British representative" (8). It seems that in the modern age, business never ends – not even on family vacation. In wartime, however, capitalism shifts into an even higher gear – in fact its absolute highest – and the diverse and brutal implications of this system become unavoidable. Fire now reigns over Toronto.

Similar to Robert's lost city, Wytsbrouk, France is another town that has been significantly altered by the war without an explosion or single shot being fired within it: "Robert's destination was a place called Wytsbrouk, now entirely emptied of its civilian population and occupied by the forward supply depot for the 18th, 19th and 20th batteries of the 5th Brigade. This was about a mile from the front" (77). Although Wytsbrouk has

not been destroyed by the war, *per se*, it has nonetheless undeniably been consumed and transformed by it.

Where Big Guns Dance

The most vile blossom of the capitalist system is undoubtedly modern warfare, a terrifying reminder of the world's revised sense of scale wherein the individual is insignificant and expendable. Findley incorporates Clausewitz's saying that war between artilleries can be carried out "as a serious, formal minuet" (100), not only to draw attention to the naivete of such thinking, but mainly to illustrate the shift in proportion from the human to the industrial. In 1916, people no longer dance - warring artilleries do. Not only does a conception of trench warfare as a formal minuet sublimate and thereby deny the horrific fate of thousands of young men, it also attributes elegance as well as a certain stylized sense of beauty and even civility to what is really mass murder. We know Rodwell has rightly sensed the anachronistic naivete of Clausewitz's simile when, following days of bombardment, he remarks to Levitt: "Some minuet" (120).

Ultimately, Robert cannot help but sense that the Great War has everything to do with mechanization and capitalism whether they are found befouling his beloved Toronto or consuming horses and men on the battlefield. How could he not notice the bizarre fact that his is now a world more hospitable to *Raymond/Ross*, the corporation, than it is to Robert Ross, the man? His own father's company is profiting from the war in which he finds himself struggling to survive: "Robert even saw a pair of RAYMOND/ROSS steam-driven tractors dragging a 12-inch howitzer" (188). When the concierge at the hotel where Robert is staying before his final journey to the front tells him that the chicken dinner on the menu will cost him dearly, Robert responds that he would "pay the

earth" for it (187). With tremendous economy, Findley crystallizes his persistent critique of modernity in *The Wars* through this passing remark. The implication is unavoidable: under the capitalist system we already *have* paid the earth for our so-called civilization.

As we have seen, fully manifest capitalism and its ever-proliferating technologies not only have the power to change the fabric of life, they can leave it destroyed or in tatters, too, especially in times of war. In the course of *The Wars* Robert loses his mother, Harris, his home town as he knew it, the men he huddled beside in the mud, countless animals and, of course, Rowena and her rabbits. Did Robert ever meet his uncle Monty or had the age begun to rob him of meaning and relation even before he was born? Why does Stuart, who valued his brother's war letters so highly, not come to his funeral? The full measure of what has been lost to the capitalist, mechanical age both at home and abroad may be unknowable, but, as we will see, this does not stop Findley from approaching the question from a variety of angles.

CHAPTER TWO

'No More Midnight': Time in *The Wars*

During his first convalescent stay at St. Aubyn's, Robert Ross is often spied upon by the precocious Juliet d'Orsey who observes that sometimes he "would throw things down and break them on the ground. He broke his watch this way. I don't know why" (174). At first glance, Robert's destruction of his watch seems to betray little more than a sudden need to dispel anger. A closer look at *The Wars*, however, reveals this act to be highly symbolic of the novel's overall view of time itself, and, in particular, of the disruption time undergoes with the advent of the modern age. That a profoundly different – one might say broken – relationship to time is perhaps the salient feature of the modern age is made clear by *The Wars*. Unlike its Edwardian and Victorian predecessors, the modern era exists very much in what Hannah Arendt calls "the gap between past and future" (14), which has resulted from a number of factors, including an abandonment of tradition brought on by devastatingly powerful technological innovations.

While it is not surprising that Robert Ross suffers a complete loss of any orienting sense of time whilst in the trenches, it is Mrs. Ross who seems to understand the dark implications of time's disruption for civilization as a whole. The corruption of circadian rhythms, particularly in regards to the question of sleep, is understood by her as well as other characters and amply displayed throughout the book. As I will show, Findley's stance in *The Wars* is clear: time has been unwound. With the arrival of modernity and the Great War, Western civilization crossed a threshold and lost a great many of its anchoring traditions, time amongst them. That time has become fundamentally unhinged is also suggested by the novel's bewildering chronology.

Time in No Man's Land

As Robert's experience of the front attests, modern warfare is almost inexpressibly disorienting in relation to time: "[Robert] had no idea how long it had been since the mines went off, but it must have been hours. (In fact, it was twelve minutes)" (125). Throughout *The Wars*, Findley persistently puts forth the view that modern warfare has corrupted both the natural laws of time as well as the laws of cause and effect. "There was a lot of noise but none of it seemed connected with what one saw. The driven, ceaseless pounding of the guns (from both sides now) had nothing to do with the bursting of the shells and the bursting of the shells had nothing to do with the thudding of the earth beneath one's feet. Everything was out of sync" (126). An immediate and continuous result of modern warfare is a disorientation bound up with a corruption of the base rules of creation. And parenthetically there is, of course, a world of difference between this sort of hellishly bewildering experience and losing all sense of time in an activity one loves, such as, in Robert's case, running. At the front, time is torn violently from him or, as in the case of the bursting shells, seems simply broken. These are decidedly modern experiences with enormous implications for all of humanity, which I will discuss later. Suffice it to say, however, Robert's experiences at the front are not at all comparable with the gentle parting from time one experiences when immersed in pleasurable activities.

Findley's suggestion that modern warfare has destroyed the traditional sense of time, at least for the soldier experiencing it, is subtly reiterated in several passages. In one passage vaguely evocative of Salvador Dali's surrealist painting "The Persistence of Time", Findley subtly connects mechanized warfare with the corruption of this fundamental concept: "The barrage was bursting to the rear and seemed to be a long way off. Robert's footsteps and the water oozing from the wrung-out earth fell into puddles

loud as clocks" (131-132). Findley's description suggests that time itself is but another casualty lying twisted in the Flemish mud. Since time cannot exist independent of one's perception of it, it is worth indicating that while a bombardment may last for "twelve hours" (91), an assault of such power and duration might easily constitute a subjective lifetime, bending and warping any human mind that endured it. Imagine, for example, the subjective duration of Robert's experience between the shelling of the Stained Glass Dugout beginning at "4 a.m....28 February" (121) and when he first dares to lift his face from his urine-soaked cloth after the gas attack at "1 p.m." (141) the following afternoon, not to mention his subsequent shooting of the German sniper. It is telling that it is only after Ypres that our narrator claims humanity has come to "the edge of wharves and time" (5), as if to say, following such unprecedented calamity time itself has in some way been surpassed.

It is no coincidence that Findley includes sentences such as "The sun – at its zenith –died" (141) immediately after the gas attack which is, after all, a culmination of scientific ingenuity and as such a marker of Western civilization's 'progress.' That the ultimate chronometer has "died" suggests not merely how devastating the attack has been to all involved, but in fact for all humanity.

While time is not emptied of all meaning at the front, its traditional features suffer an inversion just as surely as circadian rhythms are being altered and nature corrupted. Night is now "lit up" just as the day is "impalled with smoke" (146-147). And while the dawn, a time of day long associated with hope, peace and renewal, remains significant to the soldier, it is only for its heightened chances of attack. We are told that for Robert and the others, the "only orientation at night was the guns, whose emplacements were more or less constant" (199). In such an unprecedented hostile environment, one can hope, at best, to be alive to his disorientation and not unlike the nightingales Robert overhears

who "sang in the wood at noon" (182).

Stripped of the circadian rhythms inherent to nearly all life forms, existence at the front quickly comes to resemble the pseudo-eternity of factory production where neither morning nor noon nor night is of consequence. "One day bled into the next. They melded. Day and night became inseparable...[t]roops were obliterated and the others brought forward" (146-147). Like a factory operating on a twenty-four hours per day, that is to say, unrestrained, work schedule, the war is a continuous activity indifferent, if not hostile, to natural rhythms. Findley's distaste for the legacies of both Taylorism and Fordism is palpable here. Each of these theories of managing people, time and production have after all contributed directly not only to the horrors of modern warfare, as seen above, but also to the hollowing out of the domestic sphere.

Time Beyond Tradition

Time is not only corrupted on the battlefield however – all of civilization reverberates with the effects of modernity and unfettered capitalism gone to war. The familiar and grounding experience of the seven days of the week, religious tradition and custom have all been rendered virtually meaningless by the conflict:

> But the Station Master said there were no more cabs. Just the standard quota and these days that was never enough, what with everyone coming and going all hours of every day and any day. The week had no more meaning. Even holy days of abstinence and sober significance like Sundays and Easter, the trains came and went and the people got on and off laughing as if the world wasn't going to end. (13-14)

Not enlisted, and therefore presumably an older gentlemen whose youth belonged to the Victorian era, the Station Master clearly laments the unwinding of the weekly clock and traditional Christian calendar. His remarks to Robert, paraphrased by the narrator, suggest that he perceives a distinctly tragic irony in sacrificing a fundamental aspect of one's society to its defence. Moreover, his comments suggest that without the restraining influence of religion emanating from the calendar, people will quickly become consumed by their own pleasure, which, in turn, will result in an increasingly selfish and hardened society.

The Station Master's dismay at the unwinding of the traditional Western clock reflects even more darkly in the thoughts of Mrs. Ross who keenly senses that humanity has crossed a terrible threshold. Consider, for example, her tub-side diatribe at her son, Robert: "I know what you want to do. I know you're going to go away and be a soldier. Well- you can go to hell. I'm not responsible. I'm just another stranger. Birth I can give you – but life I cannot. I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more" (23). This passage raises an obvious question: what's changed? Why can't Mrs. Ross keep anyone alive *anymore*? Although her reaction to the horrors of the modern age will be fully examined in a moment, suffice it to say Mrs. Ross perceives the encompassing nature of the encroaching modern darkness so clearly that it threatens her sanity. More specifically, she grasps that the age has thrown a wrench in the gears of time itself.

Upon reading that fire has gutted Canada's parliament buildings, Mrs. Ross is "impressed by the fact that when the bells in the centre tower fell they were in the process of striking twelve o'clock – but had only tolled eleven times when they crashed to the ground. She wrote in the margin alongside this information – '*No more midnight.*' It was like a prayer" (152). While of course Mrs. Ross's comments can be interpreted literally regarding the chiming of the hours on Parliament Hill, more is clearly intended not

simply by Findley, but by her as well. Why *does* Mrs. Ross feel the bells' failure to strike midnight worthy of mention in her news clipping diary? If Adorno was correct when he declared that "because the world has outlived its own demise it [now] needs art as its unconscious chronicle" (xvi), then perhaps prayer must function in a similar manner? Like any modern person for whom tradition has faltered and then shattered in the face of loss, all Mrs. Ross can do is shore up a darkened prayer from its broken pieces. That is to say, recording the enormous loss of an orienting source of meaning – in this case, time – does something for the spirit which silent witness does not. It also validates the perceived depth and darkness of her own personal tragedies.

Specifically regarding time, however, it is telling that the bells fail to chime twelve, the hour of diurnal completion. Twelve is a highly symbolic number in most cultures and particularly in the West. There were, for instance, twelve apostles of Jesus and twelve days of Christmas. The Olympians of Ancient Greek mythology were twelve in number and there are twelve months in a Christian calendar year, just as there are twelve signs in both the Western and Chinese zodiacs. Indeed, the basic units of time – sixty seconds, sixty minutes and twenty-four hours are all multiples of twelve. In this light, Mrs. Ross's pronouncement – '*No more midnight*' – can be read as a declaration of the Western code's broken spine. If there is '*No more midnight*' then there is, in effect, no more Western civilization since so much fundamental to the West rests upon this number and its role in the clock and the calendar. In other words, if midnight has been destroyed then a vital component of the West's skeletal frame – time itself – has also been seriously fractured.

The loss of traditional time also figures in the novel's representation of sleep. At the front, for example, its meaning is reversed from being a source of rest and grace to being a likely source of death: "Sleep was dangerous. The animal memory in you knew

that. No matter what your mind said, your body didn't listen. Part of you always stayed awake" (101-102). Findley further highlights the inversion of this fundamental human activity by adding that "[m]en had died in their sleep down the line in a dugout with no ventilation" (101). Sleep is presented perhaps not as a direct killer of soldiers, but certainly as a most important accomplice. Indeed, everything about sleep at the front seems to suggest danger and imprisonment which could lead to death: "Robert's pillow was his haversack, with its buckles turned down and caught in the wire" (101). The sense of physical restriction contained in this passage further contributes to a suspicion that for the trench-bound soldier sleep is but another foe. Robert's eyes will "not close" and his lying down and thinking in the Stained Glass Dugout is "as near to sleep as he'd get" (101) because in such an environment sleep itself has become all but tantamount to death.

The Wars is also concerned with the ways in which sleep has changed for everyone in the West:

> 'What you people who weren't born yet can never know is what it meant to sleep in cities under silent falls of snow when all night long the only sounds you heard were dogs that barked at trains that passed so far away they took a short cut through your dreams and no one even woke up. It was the war that changed all that. It was. After the Great War for civilization – sleep was different everywhere.' (45-46)

Inherent in this passage spoken by Marian Turner is a two-fold implication, the first being that the Great War irrevocably altered natural circadian rhythms. Sleep, arguably the most graceful, gentle and merciful of all common human denominators, no longer nestles softly into night. The second implication is that this profound change applies not only to those involved in the conflict itself but to *everyone* on the planet. In other words, the human condition itself has suffered mutilation as a fundamental good, presumed

inalienable, is seen to have gone permanently astray. Sleep, a time when we are both in and out of this world, has become yet another site of trauma.

A Shattered Chronology

That time has become fundamentally unhinged with the arrival of modernity is also suggested by *The Wars'* bewildering chronology. As Josef Pesch points out, following the novel's prologue, the reader's dizzying back and forth time travel begins:

> Narration begins (again) with a reference to time – "All this happened a long time ago" [Findley 3] – and immediately the reader is rushed forward in time to the 'now' of the early seventies, to the time of the researcher's frame narrative, where the novel starts again: "You begin at the archives" [Findley 3], only to be taken back in time, first to '1915', the horrors of the war and then, to the vision of the scene in which Robert, burning, rides out of the flames [Findley 5], and further back in time to the pre-war family life of the Rosses. This chronological starting point is yet again disrupted deliberately by the introduction of Miss Turner, who nursed Robert after the fire, and "whose importance lies at the end of this story, but whose insights throw some light on its beginning" [Findley 9]. Time is clearly out of joint here and confusion reigns. (87-88)

Indeed, time *is* out of joint here. And so it remains for much of the novel. Even after the introduction of Marian Turner, *The Wars* does not settle easily into a reassuring linear narrative. Instead, the reader is again transported back in time to Robert's joining the army, then further still back in time to Rowena's burial. As Pesch points out, it is only

"after some five 'false' starts and considerable shifts across time and places [that] some kind of linear narrative emerge[s] which takes Robert through basic training to France" (88).

It is obvious that Findley wishes his reader to experience some disorientation in regards to time similar to what Robert experiences. The shattered and shuffled chronology of *The Wars* perhaps literalizes his view of time in the modern age more than any other aspect of the novel. There is one other effect, however, pertaining to time and modernity which Findley is eager to throw light upon, namely, the way in which the war alters the conventional experience of time in matters of the heart, accelerating almost every relationship. Lady Juliet explains: "Men and women like Robert and Barbara – Harris and Taffler...you met and you saw so clearly and cut so sharply into one another's lives. So there wasn't any rubbish. You lived without the rubbish of intrigue and the long-drawn-out propriety of romance and you simply touched the other person with your life. Sometimes to the quick" (115). While the genuine and immediate intensity of relations under such conditions may be attractive to late moderns, as we will see in both Chapters Three and Four, although intense, these deeply penetrating relationships are not always beneficial or enriching – they are simply impressive. An immediate recognition of others may be, on the surface, a positive development, but all that which war mixed with modernity has also ushered in, namely, the acceleration and distortion of time, be it in the trenches, at home or between individuals, clearly has devastating human consequences. The world is made strange, confusion reigns and in the resulting bewilderment, sorrows multiple. The manifold effects of time's dislocation upon humans is just one way in which *The Wars* approaches the unique darkness of modernity, and as I will show in Chapter Three, Sex, Death and Violence in *The Wars*, not the last. Intimacy of all kinds is

also transformed. The significance of time's corruption cannot be overstated and it is this awareness that prompts Findley to remind his reader that "1916 was a leap year" (147).

CHAPTER THREE

Sex, Death and Violence in *The Wars*

In his article "Buggering With History: Sexual Warfare and Historical reconstruction in Timothy Findley's *The Wars,*" Shane Rhodes makes the argument that "during wartime, sex and violence become one and the same and fellow soldiers become rapists" (46). While I believe Rhodes' claim is correct, a close reading of Findley's novel suggests it may not go far enough. The very nature of sex itself is altered by the arrival of modernity and the Great War and, as I will show, *The Wars* plainly bears this out. Regardless of proximity to the front, a link between sex and violence is depicted throughout the novel suggesting that modernity has altered the former just as severely as it has other fundamental aspects of human existence. Obviously, the significance of such a development in the human condition cannot be overemphasized. Sex is so integral to human identity and experience, not merely in the act itself of course, but as it belies even our simplest perceptions and relationships, that the effects of its corruption could hardly be anything less than catastrophic. Diana Brydon has written that "[i]n *The Wars,* everything seems to flow into its opposite, as earth into water in the muddy trenches, fire into air in the skies above, and love into violence everywhere" (79). Indeed, at a time when humanity is filled with unprecedented fear, self-loathing and shame for what we have done to the world and ourselves, perhaps violent sex becomes a natural response to sexual desire. I will also explore at length how this link between desire and destructiveness is intensified for Robert Ross by virtue of his repressed homosexuality.

Almost all sex depicted or referred to in *The Wars* involves Robert Ross in some way. It is the particular nature of his character, which I will later examine, that is vital to Findley's exposure of the mysterious bond between sex and violence in the modern age,

and this holds true from the outset of the novel. The first of Robert's sexual experiences – masturbation – becomes unfortunately associated with the death of his beloved sister, Rowena, and with guilt at not having been there to protect her from the accidental violence of her fall: "[Rowena's fall] was Robert's fault. Robert was her guardian and he was locked in his bedroom. Making love to his pillows" (15). Rhodes notes that "this association between violence, death and sex becomes the filter through which Robert reads any ensuing sexual activity" (40). In fact, however, Robert also experienced a strange coupling of the violent and the sexual even before Rowena's death – Heather Lawson's request that he fight for her hand: "Did Heather Lawson love [Bryant]? 'No,' she had said, 'of course not.' 'They why should I fight him?' Robert had asked. 'Because he *loves* me,' she said" (Findley 13). Although comparatively benign, this exchange represents the very first association of love or sex with violence Robert experiences. Disregarding this oversight, however, Rhodes' claim remains otherwise accurate. The association between sex, violence and shame forged in Robert's mind by his sister's death is strengthened throughout the novel by numerous experiences, not the least of which transpire on the prairies during his military training.

At the Alberta brothel, *Wet Goods,* for example, Robert encounters sex comingling with violence on many levels. Not only is Robert "coerced into going" (34), the entire ordeal is rife with several forms of violence, sex and menace subtle, explicit and above all psychological: "On entering *Wet Goods*, you were greeted by a large, male mute who was said to be Swedish" (36). The primarily physical nature of the "large, male mute" Swede - who Robert will soon witness having violent sex with Captain Taffler - aligns this character with Terry Budge, a man of similar strength and size who Robert has himself recently struggled with violently. Moreover, we are told that the Swede's "eyes were the colour of steel and [that] he had killed three men" (36). Not only does menace

fill the air at *Wet Goods* there is also something decidedly militaristic – and therefore violent – about the trainees' visit; it resembles a mandatory military procedure: "[Ella] put both her arms around [Robert's] neck and pressed her pelvis hard against his groin. Robert was immobilized. 'Move,' she said and pushed" (37). Findley's use of military language here underlines both the military's exploitation of sex as an expedient homosocial bonding device and Robert's compromised position within the grips of such a device. Ella's command that Robert "'move'" must be obeyed just as promptly as if it had come from a superior officer. And indeed, at *Wet Goods* sex is a militarized ritual not merely for the soldiers, but also for the young women who work there and must obey Madame Dreyfus without question: "'We ain't workin' if we don't [have sex], she says. Don't ask me. It's just her rule" (41). It is also stressed that the dancing between the young women and their soldier-clients has "a kind of crazy, marching formality to it – everyone locked in military pairs – round and round and round – straight-backed and stiff-legged" (38). Sex in this scene is assuredly but another military "procedure" (36) Robert must learn. Once again we see Robert's association between sex and violence deepening, keeping in mind these are among Robert's very first sexual experiences. It is also worth noting that the first time Robert's genitals are touched in a sexual manner – by Ella, the prostitute – the act is part of this commercial-military transaction: "And [Ella] put her hand inside his pants. Right inside – past his drawers. No one else had ever touched him there before" (40).

Taffler: Violently Sexual, Sexually Violent

Undoubtedly one of the events with greatest significance for Robert connecting sex and violence is his encounter with Taffler on the prairie followed by his witnessing of Taffler

being ridden by the Swede at *Wet Goods*. Eugene Taffler clearly represents the sort of man Robert Ross wants, wants to be, and in many ways is but is unwilling to recognize. As Heather Sanderson has noted, "Taffler hovers on the edge of Robert's conscious sexual desire" (87). The first time we meet the captain he is clearly presented as Robert's double, as a mirror image of the latter's repressed sexuality. Findley suggests as much by introducing him to us (and Robert) "stripped to the waist, with his braces hanging down" and flanked by a horse and a dog "seated with its ears erect, watching [Robert]" (30). In an uncanny way, this image reflects our first glimpse of Robert, who is presented in the prologue with a horse and dog. Unlike Robert Ross, however, Taffler makes for a more virile, sexualized image: "His mouth, his eyes and his nipples looked as if someone had been sculpting him and left their thumbprints behind" (30). The issue of Robert's repressed sexuality I will return to presently. What is specifically significant at this juncture is that Robert's introduction to Taffler is also tainted by simple physical violence, namely, in the latter's destructive act of "'killing bottles'" (31), complaining that the war is beneath him and finally, deciding to "kill some rattle snakes" (32).

We can see that when Ella forces Robert to watch Taffler being ridden by the Swede, what Robert sees confuses him because, among other things, and despite his earlier associations of sex with violence, our protagonist does not believe the latter should have any place amongst the former. As I will later explore in depth, Robert Ross belongs to a gentler era than the modern one, and as such, he does not take easily to the growing affinity between sex and violence: "He'd never even dreamed of such a thing – of being hit and wanting to be hit...How could it possibly be fun" (43). But to be sure, however physically brutal it is, consensual sex *is* what Robert observes Taffler and the Swede enjoying. Robert may hear "the sound of someone being slapped" (42), and witness "hitting," "pummelling" and someone "striking out with all their force" (43) but these

acts are not simple assault – they are part of a consensual sexual act. This raises a pertinent question: can Robert call what he is seeing through the wall 'making love'? Such a phrase seems distinctly misplaced here for, as Findley exposes relentlessly in *The Wars*, increasingly sex in the modern age has less and less to do with physical or emotional solace, and ever more to do with violence.

The link in Robert's mind between sex, violence *and* shame becomes deeply engrained following this scene because of the repressed desire Robert brings to it. Robert leaves his first encounter with Taffler not wishing to look back in the captain's direction because the desire he has begun to feel terrifies him. Similarly, the next time Robert sees a dog and a horse – outside of *Wet Goods* – their shapes "disturb" him (35) since, as he quickly realizes, the beasts in question are Taffler's and thus portend another upsetting encounter with the captain. That is to say, another upsetting encounter with his repressed homosexual desires. The mirrors which populate *Wet Goods* – upon entering "the first thing you saw was yourself" (36), as well as the mirror in Ella's room – also serve to underline the denial of self Robert engages in throughout the brothel scenes. Upon witnessing Taffler in the thrall of gay sex, Robert's boot appals him with its "human feel" and he responds by shattering "the mirror" (44) with it.

Harris: Prophet of the Repressed Self in an Age of Horrors

Robert Ross's repression of his homosexuality is an ongoing theme within *The Wars* that Findley subtly but consistently weds with violence and the Great War itself. Simply put, Robert's sexual repression not only leads to violence in the case of the shattered mirror, but also during one of his most horrific war experiences. As I will show, it is Robert's friend, Harris, who articulates the mysterious parallel between Robert's struggle with his

sexual identity and his struggle for survival in the war, particularly in the muddy crater, the latter experience culminating in Robert's murder of his German double.

Upon arriving in England, when Robert and Harris are both patients at the Shornecliffe infirmary, as well as later when Harris is moved to London and Robert comes to visit him frequently, the former passes the time uttering strange pronouncements and telling "tales" (116). These episodes are not merely the inconsequential ramblings of an ailing patient, however, but in fact are instances of veiled prophecy. Harris's dreamy utterances are intended for Robert alone and amount to the following message: 'overcoming your repression of your homosexuality will be every bit as hellish as what awaits you at the front, but it is possible – accept yourself.'

Violence, Repression and the Muddy Crater

The lengthiest of Harris's entranced pronouncements is prophetic because it prefigures with uncanny accuracy the swimming/crater experience Robert will have when he arrives at the front. Consider Harris's two-part waking vision / recollection:

> 'Where I swam, there was a shelf. I used to walk to the edge of the shelf and sit with my legs dangling down. I've no idea how deep it was. Sitting on the shelf at low tide, my head was just above the water. Then I'd slide. Like a seal. Out of the air and into the water. Out of my world into theirs. And I'd stay there hours. Or so it seemed. I'd think: *I never have to breathe again.* I've changed. It changes you. But the thing was – I could do it. Change- and be one of them. They aren't any friendlier – the fish, you know. But they accept you there. As if you might belong, if you wanted to. It's not like here. It's not like here at all.' (104)

> 'Once I got lost. In a school of mackerel. Silver. Blinding. Every time they turned, I was blinded by their scales. We swam into seaweed. Kelp. Long, slippery arms, like horses' tails. It caught round my neck and I thought I couldn't breathe – that I was going to drown and die. Until I began to swim again – and once I began to swim again I realized the kelp was coming with me. See? In that place – there – in *that* element – somehow I was safe – even from choking. The kelp just slid away – let go of its roots and came with me.' (104-105)

Now consider the account of Robert Ross's struggle for survival in the muddy crater:

> Robert lay out flat and started to swim on his belly through the mud...He cursed his gas mask which was in a canvas bag around his neck. It kept sliding under his chest and pressing up against his breast bone. His field glasses beat against his ribs...Then he just let himself go and began to slide towards the bottom. The gas mask came up under his chin and he thought it was going to break his neck or puncture his windpipe...At last his knees struck something hard. It was a Lewis gun...so far embedded [in the earth] he could push himself upright against it. This gave him a sort of ledge to stand on. (133-134)

Although perhaps not readily apparent, the number and nature of the similarities between Harris's marine experience and Robert's struggle in the crater is truly uncanny. Both men find themselves at various points "just letting go," sliding and swimming and supported by a ledge or shelf of some kind. Both, ultimately, must entrust themselves to a foreign, alien element, ostensibly hostile. I say ostensibly because Harris, despite being in the sea, discovers himself to be free "even from choking," while Robert, although mere yards

from the enemy line, encounters a German sniper who will not kill. Harris's new element is the sea, Robert's, a muddy hole on the floor of what once was the sea. Remember that the "whole of St. Eloi district" where the fighting is taking place, was, at one time "well below sea level. Before the age of dikes it might have been an inland sea" (132). Of his time in the sea, Harris claims he would "stay there hours" while Robert, once gas descends upon his crater, does the same.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between these episodes is that the two friends also both experience some sort of external physical constriction upon their throats. For Harris the cause is kelp caught around his neck, for Robert, the gas mask about to "puncture his windpipe." Both men think they are going to "drown and die." Both men do not. Both men find a ledge they can stand or sit on to keep them from being swallowed by their respective foreign element. What can the twin identity of these at first glance highly-disparate scenes possibly mean?

The Blue Scarf and the Failure of Harris's Prophetic Advice

Aside from his love of the ocean one of the first things we learn about Harris is that he wears a scarf of a "wistful shade of blue" (60). By invoking the emblematic garment of the hopelessly romantic protagonist of Goethe's famous novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), Findley not only underlines Harris's sensitive nature but also imbues his character with loads of metafictional resonance. Findley is up to a few tricks with this metafictional scarf. For one, he is pointing out that imaginative, sensitive men live and die on all sides in a conflict. When Robert takes Levitt to see just how real the enemy is, the German they catch sight of also has a "blue scarf round his neck" (91). Secondly, it is interesting that Findley has Juliet don "the blue scarf that Wilson gave me for Christmas"

(177) before attempting to masquerade before Robert and Barbara as Lady Sorrel. We begin to see that within *The Wars* the blue scarf functions as an indicator of romantic, sensitive individuals who share a great deal with Robert. Perhaps most importantly, however, Findley employs the garment to return us to Harris's prophecy. After the gas attack wherein Robert orders his men to urinate on their clothing and hold it to their faces to neutralize the gas, we are suddenly told that Robert has "Harris's scarf" (145).

Truly, however, Harris is with Robert in the muddy crater not only tangibly in the blue scarf, but more importantly, through the prophetic tales of the sea he told his friend so as to equip Robert with a veiled survival guide to his own sexual repression. Harris never elaborated upon the mysterious and intimate things he said to Robert, trusting rather that they "went somewhere inside him and didn't come back out" (104); that they would become a part of his friend and thus help him in some way. And it seems that whether Robert is conscious of it or not, Harris's story *has* helped him. It is telling that one of the soldiers in the crater has "strangled on his shirt tail" (145), unlike Robert and Harris who managed to survive the restraints on their throats. Harris's love for Robert is clearly folded within his veiled prophecy. He implores Robert to "see" what he is saying about survival in a foreign element, be it a muddy crater in No Man's Land or in the murky realms of his own sexual repression – both of which are marked by violence. Ultimately, Harris is speaking to Robert about accepting his *entire* self, homosexuality included. Findley further underlines the connection between Harris's prophecy and Robert's sexuality by describing the bed on which Robert masturbates at Bailleul as "a shelf" (186) similar to the shelves Harris sat upon in the sea and that Robert made of the Lewis gun in the muddy crater.

Similar to the shattering of the brothel mirror upon witnessing Taffler and the Swede having sex, wherein, as Sanderson has noted "the broken mirror suggests Robert's

refusal to see his own desires reflected in this homosexual act" (89), Robert's killing of the merciful German sniper in the muddy crater scene can also be understood as an act of repression of his homosexual self. The foreign element Robert must survive of which Harris speaks is not simply the muddy crater, but also the modern, patriarchal world itself, dominated by heterosexual discourse. That Robert survives his crater experience suggests he has assimilated much of his friend's message. However, the fact that Robert ultimately panics and kills his doppelgänger – the merciful German – suggests that Robert remains too fearful to face himself fully. That is to say, Robert fails to embrace the essence of Harris's message, namely, that he must accept himself as he is in spite of the hostility of the surroundings. I should add that even though Robert turns away from self-acceptance, it is nonetheless still likely that Robert somehow does sense the merciful German is his double. How else do we explain sentences such as: "All this while the German was watching him but Robert felt entirely safe" (145)? In light of Harris's ubiquitous presence throughout the crater scene Robert's failure becomes doubly tragic. His killing of the German becomes not simply a denial of his homosexual identity, but also a denial of his love for Harris. Robert thinks the German "suddenly moved against him" (146) but he did not. That was only Robert's natural fear speaking. That Robert does not need to fear, that Robert *can* give himself over to a foreign element, be it the unknown depths of his own sexuality represented here by the unknown double watching him, and that this element will not kill or destroy him although there seem so many good reasons for fear, is the crux of what I have been calling Harris's prophecy. Robert's murder of the merciful German constitutes a failure to heed this knowledge which Harris has attempted to share with him.

Finally, Findley provides an overt clue as to these otherwise hidden meanings within the novel by capping the crater scene with an embrace fraught with homosexual

undertones and by placing it, ironically, immediately after Robert's murder of his uncanny double:

> The shot that killed [the merciful German] rang around and around the crater like a marble in a bowl. Robert thought it would never stop. He scrambled for the brink only in order to escape it and Bates had to pull him over the edge, falling back with Robert on top of him. The warmth of Bates's body was a shock and the two men lay in one another's arms for almost a minute before Robert moved. (145)

Throughout all of these scenes – at *Wet Goods*, killing the German in the muddy crater – we see that where Robert is unable to accept his sexual identity, violence rooted in fear quickly comes to express itself. The marriage of sex and violence in the modern age, fused in so many of Robert's experiences, is perhaps too strong to be overcome.

Raped By the Earth and Men

Findley never stops uniting sex and violence in *The Wars*. Even Robert's falling through the dike when he first arrives at the front is sexually charged in its depiction:

> He began to push again and to lift – thrusting his pelvis upward harder and harder – faster and faster against the mud. His hat fell off. The wind and the fog were dabbling in his hair. The back of his head went all the way down and into the slush. In and out in and out in and out. With his buttocks clenched and his knees...He began to realize his knees were spreading wider and wider and his groin began to shudder. Warm. (86)

The poisoned, war-torn mud itself seems to be ravishing Robert; it holds him fast in a sexualized death-grip he narrowly frees himself from:

> [He] locked his hands behind his right knee. Then he began to rock. His fingernails gouged his palms. He rocked from side to side and back to front. His leg began to move. Then he locked his hands beneath his left knee and rocked from back to front again. Both legs slid further out till only the ankles were held and his knees touched his chin. He fell back all the way and lay on his side. He reached above his head and shoved his hands down hard through the mud until he could curl his fingers deep in the earth. He pulled himself forward with his legs like twisted ropes and then he gave a violent, sudden spasm and flopped face down in the slush. He was free. (87)

This muddy encounter wherein Robert's "knees were spreading wider and wider and his groin began to shudder...[w]arm" concludes, fittingly, with a "violent, sudden spasm" reminiscent of ejaculation. It is also telling that following his escape from this sexualized sinkhole, Robert is glad of the cold water rushing through the breach in the dike because "[t]he water was washing him free of the mud" (89), that is to say, it washed him clean of any trace of the perpetrator that had held him so violently. Finally, just as Robert feared looking back in Taffler's direction after encountering him on the prairie, Findley suggests that this violent and sexualized experience has been similarly traumatic: "Robert did not look back towards the field where he'd nearly drowned" (89).

This scene oddly foreshadows the gang rape Robert later suffers at the hands of his fellow soldiers. In both scenes Robert is suddenly set upon, his life imperilled and his body subjugated. What can one say, however, about Robert's being gang raped in the baths at Bailleul? The account of the assault is as lengthy– three pages (191-193) – as it is excruciatingly detailed and yet plumbing its depths for buried significance yields next to nothing. Rather, it seems that at this point in *The Wars* sex simply *is* violence and

violence, sex; the multi-rape itself being the logical culmination of all Robert's horrible sexual experiences thus far, as well as the means through which Findley makes his argument about sex and modernity explicit.[1]

Ultimately, one must agree with Brydon's argument as put forth in her article "A Devotion to Fragility: Timothy Findley's *The Wars*" regarding this disturbing scene: "Writer and reader become implicated as voyeurs in the general collapse of meaning. Could it be that the rape means nothing beyond itself? It simply happens, and happens again every time it is read" (80). Indeed, Findley's depiction of this horrible act seems in-step with Arendt's once infamous insight that evil is banal. That is to say, unlike goodness, evil has no depth or profundity – it is simply a result of the absence of thought. Just as darkness is nothing *in itself* but an absence of light, so, too, is Robert's violent rape nothing *in itself* but the result of an absence of imagination and empathy on behalf of the perpetrating collective. Therefore, not only is the substance of Robert's rape entirely present at a glance, it cannot warrant any analysis whatsoever.

'The Shape and the Violence'

Although the physical rape of Robert Ross may be *The Wars* most explicit union of the violent and the sexual, Robert's relationship with Barbara D'Orsey keeps the theme in sight to the novel's very close. Juliet d'Orsey observes her older sister and Robert Ross engaged in an instance of the disturbing phenomenon of sex in the modern age:

> This was a picture that didn't make any sense. Two people *hurting* one another. That's what I thought. I knew in a cool, clear way at the back of my mind that this was 'making love' – but the shape of it confused me. The shape and the violence. Barbara was lying on the bed, so her head

> hung down and I thought that Robert must be trying to kill her. They were both quite naked. He was lying on top of her and shaking her with his whole body...Robert's neck was full of blood and his veins stood out. He hated her. And Barbara's hand was in her mouth. (178)

Juliet says that at the time she thought Robert and Barbara were hurting one another and in many ways she is right. They *are* hurting one another. What she was only just realizing then of course, as a child, is that modernity had already stood humanity on its head, inverted and corrupted beyond recognition so much of what it previously meant to be human. As Juliet's own remarks hint at, humanity has lost something both precious and difficult to name: "I feel a dreadful loss. I know things now I didn't want to know" (178).

Findley employs the fresh, positive outlook of a twelve year-old girl as a way of reminding his reader of just how dark the world has grown. Having witnessed her sister and Robert's violent sex, Juliet does not begin to cry until the following day, until it becomes clear that darkness and brutality can and do live under pleasant, familiar facades:

> Just about noon, I started to cry, I don't know why. It made no sense. I was sitting in the ballroom all alone and the doors were open to the garden and Barbara had ordered pots and pots of freesia from the greenhouse for tomorrow (*she must have been giving a party)*, and they were sitting on the floor in the sunshine. I was sitting on one of the little gilt chairs with Amanda (*my doll*) and the tears just started and wouldn't stop. (178-179)

It is not simply the violent images burnt into Juliet's mind that finally reduce her to tears, it is their jarring incongruity with the world as she otherwise knows it. Juliet begins to cry

because she cannot understand how the violence she has witnessed can exist in the same world as the freesias "sitting on the floor in the sunshine:"

> The things inside my head were the shape of Robert's shoulders and the whiteness of Barbara's skin...Amanda's face and the stitches coming open where her hands were undone – me in the mirror looking at my breasts... and Temple's stare. I don't know why. I don't know why. And the golden hairs on Michael's legs. I don't know why. And Barbara's head thrown back. And the dark surrounding everything. (179)

All of these images are of or relate directly to the human form. Some are uncanny, some mutilated, while others cannot be comprehended. The human form has been corrupted before young Juliet's eyes. She has seen that the wars we roll into a bundle and call modernity creep into the home and manifest themselves between otherwise loving bodies. Following Taffler's suicide attempt, and Barbara's subsequently intensified play for Robert's attention, it is strangely fitting that Juliet mishears her brother, Clive, such as she does: "I asked where Barbara was and Robert Ross – I don't know why – and Michael said that they were walking in the park and I said: 'How can they walk in the dark?' and Clive said: Not in the dark. The *park.*'" (173). Juliet's miscomprehension is oddly closer to the truth of the age than she may know. Whether in its sexual aspect or otherwise, Robert and Barbara's relationship is akin to a "walk in the dark."

As we have seen, sex and violence simply cannot be kept apart in the modern world. Whether at home, in a brothel, at the front itself or out on the prairies in the sunshine, the human condition under modernity has warped and wrapped the sexual in violence. Consider, in closing, Robert's second masturbation scene wherein Findley clearly ties sex to the violence of the war:

> Lying there... he slid his hand across his stomach and down between his legs. Bang-bang-bang! went the guns at the front... He made a fist around his penis...A sudden vision of obliteration struck him like a bomb... He slept with his fist in its place and the cold, wet blooming of four hundred thousand possibilities – all of those lives that would never be – on his fingertips. (185 -186)

Again, note how the natural order has been inverted. Orgasm is no longer a source of pleasure or beauty so much as it is a harbinger of visions of obliteration and destruction. Instead of life, all Robert can think of when faced with sex is death. Juliet d'Orsey concludes one of her meetings with the researcher with a comment of her brother Clive's germane to this discussion:

> *Someone once said to Clive: do you think we will ever be forgiven for what we've done? They meant their generation and the war and what the war had done to civilization. Clive said something I've never forgotten. He said: I doubt we'll ever be forgiven. All I hope is – they'll remember we were human beings.* (180)

Clive d'Orsey's comment touches directly upon the Great War's transformative effect upon the human condition and that transformation is nowhere more deeply felt than in regards to sex. As I will show in the next chapter, Findley's characters in *The Wars* reveal a multitude of responses to the horrors of modernity, and some of these draw upon the sexual exclusively.

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[1] Findley, in fact, faced extreme pressure to remove the scene from the novel but insisted on its inclusion. He states his argument for doing so in his writer's memoir *Inside Memory*: "It has to be there because it is my belief that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war. Basically, their fathers did it to them" (151).

CHAPTER FOUR

'To Clarify Who You Are': Responses to Modernity in *The Wars*

At one point in her meeting with the novel's unknown researcher, Juliet d'Orsey suddenly declares a prescription applicable to all humanity: "The thing is... to clarify who you are through your response to when you lived. If you can't do that, then you haven't made your contribution to the future" (114). This is not merely Juliet d'Orsey's view but clearly also Findley's. The remarkable array of human responses to the rise of modernity and the Great War his novel offers proves as much. That the human condition was forever altered by the advent of modernity is perhaps *the* foundational assumption of *The Wars* and leads directly to the question: How *do* individuals define themselves in light of the horrors of the modern age? Do they hide from the era's disturbing truths in fantasy? Do they join its darkness gleefully or unwittingly? Do they go mad? Or, against impossible odds, do they somehow salvage a scrap of their humanity through courage and imagination? All of these responses occur in *The Wars*, some far more often than others and, as I will show, although Findley's prognosis for civilization is decidedly bleak, he nonetheless holds out real hope for the struggling, sensitive and above all imaginative individual confronting modernity.

Of the numerous characters *The Wars* proffers, all either roost comfortably within the modern age or they do not. In this regard Findley's novel is unambiguous and as I will show, those who by one means or another come to celebrate the horrors of modernity all share at least one thing: a lack of imagination.

Consider Robert's younger brother, Stuart. At first glance, he seems to be quite simply a mean little boy. While he is supposed to be watching over Rowena lest she fall, he is instead terrorizing Meg, the pony, "making her ears lie flat by whirling the baseball

bat above her head" (16). (This sharply and immediately contrasts Stuart with Robert whose association with animals will only deepen throughout the novel). As *The Wars* unfolds, however, we see that there is more to Stuart than simple male adolescent cruelty. Although he comes upon it both blindly and honestly Stuart Ross's response to the modern age is essentially to celebrate its darkness, to unwittingly deny its horrors by revelling in romantic notions of war: "Master Stuart made his letters [from Robert] into paper darts and launched them page by page from the roof of the house – watching them descend and fade into the green ravine below while he muttered *rat-a-tat-tat! Boom! Boom! Rat-a-tat-tat! Boom! Boom! Karoom!*" (74). As we saw earlier, Stuart also barters with his brother's war letters for "other artifacts of war sent home by other elder brothers like his own" (74). Stuart is captivated by the presumed glory of war. Findley tells us that one year he renovated his wagon to be a "roman chariot" but "[t]his year it would doubtless be a tank" (182-183). So thoroughly romanticised is Stuart's view of warfare, he will not (or cannot) bring himself to imagine backward from Robert's wildly insubordinate act of freeing the 130 horses to any of the horrific realities that prompted it. And thus he becomes not only ashamed of, but in fact even hateful toward his brother for perpetrating what he believes to be embarrassingly unmanly, unsoldierly behaviour. This is why of the few things that can cause Lady Juliet to stutter with anger before the researcher, the name Stuart Ross is one of them: "'Still,' she admits, when she's regained her composure, 'a brother is a brother. I had them myself. There are enmities in families that have to be foreborne. But oh...when it turns to hate. I gather he refuses to speak to you.' 'That's right'" (110). Stuart's reaction to the news that Robert is 'missing in action' again highlights the tremendous potency of this young boy's romantic conception of war: "[H]is brother's apparent death was strangely exhilarating news in itself. Not that Stuart wished Robert ill. But the thought of going to school and saying: 'Robert is dead. He'll

prob'ly get the Victoria Cross' – this was marvellous to contemplate and it sent a shiver down his back" (204). The presumed glory of Robert's war death is clearly more valuable to Stuart than his brother's life, and thus when the former refuses to die a conventional war death but worse, acts in an opaque manner which could be construed as cowardly, Stuart refuses even to attend his funeral.

Captain Eugene Taffler is another character through whom Findley illustrates a disappointing but altogether plausible reaction to the modern age in general, and the Great War in particular. Although he has already been to the front and undoubtedly witnessed the horrors of modern trench warfare when we are first introduced to him, Taffler is not disgusted with the war, *per se*, but rather, with the limited opportunities for personal glory it affords him: "'All you get in this war,' he said, 'is one little David against another...Just a bunch of stone throwers'" (31). Interestingly, despite having been "wounded" (30) in the war, the sole grievance Taffler retains from his first tour of duty concerns not the unprecedented waste of lives or goods or the very destruction of the earth itself but rather the war's failure to live up to his expectations. Taffler's curious remark sets Robert wondering if the captain "wanted the war to pit him against Goliath?" (32), and the answer is, after a fashion, yes. The familiar narrative arc of the underdog hero undoubtedly appeals to the former "Varsity all-round athlete" (30). Taffler obviously thought that the war – the battlefield! - would provide him with as clearly a marked path toward heroism and masculinity as the football fields of his native Toronto. One can only imagine therefore what a disappointment the front must have been for Taffler to behold. No Man's Land is fraught with far more perilous obstacles than anyone could hitherto imagine and the end zone in this analogy – the German trenches – represents only the beginning of any such hero's labours, not their victorious conclusion. In other words, even Taffler is able to recognize that the Western Front, 1914-1918,

constitutes a Goliath beyond any David – even one with Taffler's superiour aim – no matter how brave, lucky or blessed he may be. When, finally, the war severely mutilates Taffler, that is to say, when he sustains an injury from which he cannot hope to recover, the horrific nature of the modern age which thus far has failed to penetrate his imagination can no longer be avoided, and his bewildered response is an understandable and common one: suicide. As I will show in an examination of his companionship with Barbara d'Orsey in a moment, that Taffler dresses in a manner befitting the romantic conception of a soldier further reveals his unimaginative acceptance of the modern age.

Modernity Incarnate: A Look at Barbara d'Orsey

Shane Rhodes claims *The Wars* is arguing that the First World War "changed male relationships irrecoverably" (46). Although this is undoubtedly true, such a focus is too narrow. *All* of humanity was altered by modernity and its horrific coming out party, The Great War – not simply men – and as I will show, Rhodes's analysis completely elides the tremendous significance of Barbara d'Orsey in this regard.

Like Stuart Ross and Captain Taffler, Barbara d'Orsey is a character completely at home in the modern era. Her response to the age is nothing short of total unimaginative acceptance. Put simply, she does not define herself in response to modernity but rather allows it to define her. Beautiful, stylish and wealthy, not to mention vain, unimaginative and unquestioning, Barbara moves through the war years with ease, enjoying both "the stability of country life" and the "free and easy tenor of the life she led in town" (161). More particularly, Barbara is an avid tourist of various romantic myths and the Great War with its endless parade of leading men injects her fantasies with an exciting dash of realism. That she simply uses soldiers – much as the war does itself for a heightened

sense of romance and glory – is as clear as her pattern of consumption. And her pattern is unmistakable: once actual war touches the young men of her interest, once it burns their faces and tears off their limbs, she abandons them, uninterested in the reality they have suffered.

Fittingly, the novel's very first mention of Barbara d'Orsey groups her with a warship – "Barbara d'Orsey – the *S.S. Massanabie*..." (3) – and when we first actually encounter her she is "laughing" (105) in the corridor of an infirmary for wounded soldiers. She is there, ostensibly, to rally the spirits of a former beau, the severely wounded Jamie Villiers, but she arrives on the arm of a conspicuously striking soldier, Eugene Taffler. The duo appears in the ward as idealized versions of romantic types: he, the glorious war hero, she, his glamorous beauty:

> The effect of her sudden appearance was the same as always when you see someone materialize whose fame has kept them at a distance. You think how small they are and you wish they'd stand still...Her picture...was 'everywhere'...Taffler was looking more like a *Boy's Own Annual* hero than ever, dressed in his uniform with its green field tabs; carrying a swagger stick and groomed within an inch of his life. He'd just had his hair cut – a sure sign he was returning to the front...His head seemed enormous. His eyes and his mouth were like pictures of a mouth and eyes: static. (105-106)

As we later learn from her sister, Juliet, Barbara has an especial "taste for heroes and athletes" owing to the fact that "she enjoy[s] the spectacle of winning" (111). Accordingly, whilst in Barbara's company, Taffler is sure to appear as an immaculate embodiment of the boyhood conception of a soldier: trim, groomed, gallant – effortlessly capable. In other words, as a soldier not merely unsullied by war, but improved by it. One

gets the sense that whilst with Barbara, Taffler must be "groomed within an inch of his life" and "looking more like a *Boy's Own Annual* hero than ever," replete with "green field tabs" and " swagger stick" because Barbara would not have it any other way.

While it is difficult to imagine what it is Barbara thought she would find in the ward, it is clear that what she does discover disappoints. When Taffler leaves her momentarily in order to greet Robert Ross, Barbara does not approach Villiers, but stands "with her furs against one check, gazing from the windows and showing no apparent interest in anything" (106). Like a child, Barbara grows bored easily, is unable to appreciate the gravity of adult circumstance and attends to her own pleasure as incessantly as she does instinctually.

Although Barbara has brought a bouquet of freesia for Jamie Villiers, there is little doubt she is thinking of anyone other than herself throughout the visit: "She looked around the ward and then at Taffler much as to say: what am I supposed to do now? He indicated a figure in a bed at the farthest end of the room" (106-107). Despite this prompting, Taffler must physically urge Barbara toward Villiers' bed where she makes no attempt to hide her boredom before his plight: "Barbara stood at the foot of the bed and looked at the man without speaking" (107). We are also told that throughout the visit Barbara is "unsmiling:" "She held the flowers the way wreaths are held – as an emblem, not as a gift. Taffler went to the head of the bed and leaned down over the man to speak. Barbara took a deep breath and closed her eyes" (107). Ultimately, Barbara and Taffler leave the ward "quite suddenly without turning back" (107), the former with an expression "as blank as that of someone drugged" (107). Barbara does not even bother to give Villiers the flowers.

This scene raises a number of questions: why can't Barbara bring herself to say anything to this young man she presumably cares about? Why is she, at first, bored and

then finally stunned by the entire affair? Why do she and Taffler have to leave suddenly? And what does it say about Barbara that she holds the flowers not as a gift but "as an emblem"?

The answer to these questions lies in both Barbara's superficial understanding of what war is and in her chronic habit of exploiting its young recruits for her own personal melodrama. Both emotionally fraudulent and disconnected from, not to mention uninterested in, the realities of war, Barbara has nothing to say to Villiers because she is torn between her own desires and society's expectations of her. Presumably she agrees to visit Villiers because it is expected of her but, as we have seen, she lacks empathy and thus hasn't a clue what to say or do at his bedside. That she holds his flowers "as an emblem" and not as the gift they are supposed to be, betrays her fundamentally facile and romantic view of war even when faced with its atrocious outcome. It is, finally, the cognitive dissonance Barbara experiences as a result of being stuck between her fantasies of military glory and glorious romance, on the one hand, and war's very real, very ugly human face on the other, which demands she leave the ward "without turning back."

As we later learn from Juliet, Barbara, who was interested in Jamie Villiers before the war, felt compelled to pick up the thread again once he returned to England a hero:

> Barbara went through a lot of men and didn't get back to Jamie Villiers till the summer of 1915. That was when he got his first decorations and came home a hero and Barbara snatched him away from Diana Menzies. You can see that Barbara was possessive, to say the least. Once she set her cap – that was that. It couldn't matter less who got hurt. (112-113)

Following her romance with Villiers-the-war-hero, Barbara moves onto Taffler, as we have seen, and once Taffler loses both his arms, Barbara not only abandons him but in

fact uses him to lure her next interest. Robert Ross's invitation to St. Aubyn's is "issued in Taffler's name – but it bore a forged signature" (161).

By this point Barbara's pattern is being perpetrated consciously. That is to say, she appears to be lining up her romantic interests – perhaps having discovered that the front maims them quickly – for although her designs upon Robert are soon evident, she is not even at St. Aubyn's to greet him when he arrives. Rather, Barbara arrives late, unconcerned and moreover in the company of one "Major Terry" (165).

It is revealing that even at the age of twelve Juliet has such a keen sense of her older sister's habit of consuming healthy young men and discarding wounded ones. She even considers it obvious enough that Robert should figure it out despite his more limited knowledge of Barbara:

> I waited to see whether Robert Ross would make a move in her direction but he didn't. This time, the penny rolled towards the slot. I felt very badly. I could see he was dreadfully worried, wondering where Major Terry fit into the scheme of things and what it must mean he would find when he opened Captain Taffler's door. (166)

Taffler is indeed wounded – he's lost both his arms –and subsequently been dumped by Barbara, but in the case of Major Terry, Barbara does not even wait for an injury; she simply decides to upgrade. As Juliet tells us, "the affair between my sister and Robert Ross developed very quickly" (173) – in fact Barbara dumps Terry the night Robert arrives: "I distinctly heard her saying: 'Don't be such a jack-ass, Ralph, Goodnight.' Then she went along past me...and I saw her pause by Robert Ross's door" (167-168). Juliet tells us that she was "shocked" even "dismayed" by the way Robert and Barbara's relationship came about. It "seemed inhuman" to Juliet not because she objected to Robert, but because her sister "never went again to Taffler" (173).

In this instance however, Juliet is technically wrong; Barbara does visit Taffler once more but *with* Robert:

> Robert Ross came out of Captain Taffler's room...Then Barbara came around the corner –also from Captain Taffler's room...They stood together in the hall and Captain Taffler's door was still partly open. Neither one spoke. They were very tense. Then Barbara turned and took Robert's hand. She leaned against his side. At first, he didn't seem to know what to do – but finally he put both his arms around her shoulders and held her for a very long time with his chin on top of her head. At last they stood apart and Barbara put her fingers on his face and then he walked away. Her hand remained in the air and she put it against her lips when he was gone and then she closed her eyes. (172)

Barbara's attempted exploitation of the lingering emotional resonance between her and Robert following their Taffler visit fails here. Robert misinterprets her coy play for his affections as a request for comfort which he in turn provides before turning his back on her unawares. Or is he? As Guy Vanderhaeghe states in his introduction to the 2005 Penguin Modern Classics edition of *The Wars*, Findley's novel "jealousy guards its mysteries" (XVIII), and this scene provides just one such case. Is Robert truly oblivious to Barbara's romantic interest in him? Is he perhaps aware but uninterested, at least on this night, his thoughts bound up with a man to whom, as we have seen, he was once and may still be sexually attracted?

Around Barbara even more questions explode. Since Taffler attempts to commit suicide following her visit we know that Barbara was the last person to have any contact with him before the attempt. What, if anything, had she said to him – had she dumped him as curtly and abruptly as she did Major Terry? Had she made it clear to Taffler that

she was now going to pursue Robert Ross? And if so, is it not reasonable to assume that she may have provided the final blow to Taffler's will to live? Following the violent sex Robert and Barbara share, Juliet may be correct to surmise that the former hates the latter; after all, Robert may at that moment hold Barbara responsible for Taffler's suicide attempt. Perhaps it is while he is at St. Aubyn's that Robert finally comes to understand the insight into Barbara's character revealed by the unusual comment Jamie Villiers' nurse made to him: "'Just don't ask me about that woman. I don't know how she dares to come here'" (108). After all, what might Barbara's violent sexual experience with Robert amount to in her mind? Did he make known to her – through sex or otherwise – what he believes she has done to Taffler? Juliet notes the morning following her witness of Robert and Barbara's violent sex that "Barbara was pale, as if like me, she hadn't slept" (178). The question is why. When Robert leaves St. Aubyn's a short time later we are told Barbara merely "stood at the top of the stairs and watched him behind glass" (180). Why does she not see him off, face-to-face, as Juliet does? Ultimately, these questions cannot be definitively answered nor the suspicions which prompt them put to rest.

Finally, once Robert ends up at the Bois de Madeleine hospital, disfigured and under arrest, the glorious (and illusory) aura which Barbara beheld as encompassing Robert-the-officer has completely burnt away, so he too is passed over. She pays him "one visit" carrying an "armful of freesia" and is "accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Rittenhouse – an Australian who had won much praise and two decorations for valour at Gallipoli" (216). A bouquet of freesia is the hallmark of Barbara's waning interest in a young soldier and, moreover, a sure sign that any such young man is now, in fact, a disfigured veteran.

In the end, however malevolent Barbara may seem is in fact just the unintentional result of her wealth and romantically-fuelled appetites comingling with a rather complete

lack of imagination which might otherwise have helped her to coordinate some perception of war's reality. Her response therefore to this unprecedented age is, not surprisingly, no response. After all, without contemplation or interrogation of one's own intentions how can any individual help but to reflect the mean course of the era they find themselves in? The answer is they cannot and thus it is clear that Barbara – like the similarly unimaginative Stuart Ross and Eugene Taffler – fails her younger sister's imperative; she does not "clarify" who she is in response to the time in which she lives. She does not make a "contribution to the future" – Barbara simply is. And as such, she is very much a reflection of the modern age, more than any other character in *The Wars.*

Resisting the Modern Age

Since most of the characters in *The Wars* were born during the Victorian era it is perhaps not surprising that novel shows us so many individuals resisting the modern era in one sense or another. Of the five characters I will focus on in this regard, some of whom face the same ordeals, we will see that, nonetheless, no two responses are alike. Rather, Findley is interested in exhibiting both the many new species of darkness modernity has laid in wait for the individual as well as the infinite variety of human response with which these horrors can be met.

Juliet d'Orsey's resistance to the modern age through the particular nature of her witnessing of it provides just one such example of an imaginative response to the era. Tellingly, she is introduced to us immediately following Barbara and Taffler's visit to the ward where Jamie Villiers lies. Findley does this to bring the substantial differences between the sisters into high relief, for just as Barbara epitomizes the modern age Juliet, along with other characters, is symbolic of a previous one.

Juliet d'Orsey's response to the modern age is one of revulsion, anger and sadness, channelled into a life-long act of witness. As her detailed diaries and generous conversations with the researcher suggest, from a very young age she has met the horrors of modernity and the Great War with an unwavering eye. As she says at one point, "I was a born observer...ears and eyes and that was all" (162). In an age of such unprecedented violence this seemingly passive role requires considerable courage in and of itself and Juliet's devotion to Robert Ross in particular underlines the former's quiet courage.

Unlike Barbara who simply beds the protagonist, Juliet d'Orsey is very much in love with Robert Ross. She spies on him frequently and when he leaves St. Aubyn's to return to the front she gives him a gift: one of Lady Sorrel's candles. The legend of Lady Sorrel d'Orsey involves another soldier-lover – the Earl of Bath – who ultimately died of his wounds but not before being cared for every night by his wife and knowing a great love and devotion in her. In fact, so great was Lady Sorrel's devotion to the earl that "even after his death she continued to light the candles [at his bedside] and keep her vigil" (171). This is why her ghost haunts St. Aubyn's with a glowing candelabra in hand. Following the attack on the supply road which Robert survives, Findley tells us that "Juliet's candle was wedged in the earth in an upright position. Somehow – it had been set alight" (198). This solitary candle's miraculous ignition foreshadows Juliet's care of Robert following his terrible burns upon freeing the 130 horses and moreover suggests that in many ways Juliet is Robert Ross's Lady Sorrel. The pair develop a brief yet tender relationship which deepens tremendously following Robert's trial and right up until his death. Consider, as well, how similar Juliet's devotion is to Lady Sorrel's alongside the ailing Earl of Bath, a man who, like Robert, is not only also slowly dying of his wounds but is also in hiding from a hostile world: "She rarely left his side as he recovered from his burns. Every day she would take him flowers...And there was always an unlit candle

beside his bed" (217). This intended parallel further emphasizes Robert and Juliet's belonging to a world previous to the modern one. In light of this parallel it is also interesting that "Barbara has never believed in Lady Sorrel" (177) and moreover, admits she has "never seen her [ghost]" (177). This suggests Barbara is not even capable of the same sort of love and sacrifice Lady Sorrel represents and which Juliet duplicates in her relationship with Robert. Barbara is therefore again signalled by the text as both Juliet's opposite and emblematic of a more shallow modern age while her sister, conversely, stands for a slower age of more trenchant human ideals.

'Towards the Dark': Modernity and Mrs. Ross

Aside from Captain Rodwell and Robert Ross, whom I will turn to respectively, Mrs. Ross provides *The Wars* with its most compelling and disturbing portrait of the modern age's effect upon an individual. Her story illustrates yet another sadly plausible reaction to the modern age, for, like her eldest son, she also dies a spiritual death with Rowena's passing. Hers, however, sends her plummeting into a state of despair from which she will not emerge and which spawns some moments of truly unique darkness.

Mrs. Ross's despair is fuelled not only by her losses – her daughter, her brother Monty, Robert to the military - but also by her unnerving ability to see through civilization's thin veneer to the darkness manifesting about her. It is precisely this visionary aspect of her character that makes her depression ever more acute.

Were it to be plotted on a graph, Mrs. Ross's mental-spiritual odyssey would produce a line comparable to the profile of a particularly unclimbable Rocky mountain: severe plunges interrupted by the occasional sharp spike upwards. In other words, although her depression is dappled by rays of hope and tenderness, it nonetheless still

detaches her from her husband and remaining children, inspires her to inflict unusual punishment upon Robert following his sister's death and ultimately does claim her very spirit. That is to say, Mrs. Ross's graph line sinks quickly to zero and stays there.

To make matters even more complicated, however, Mrs. Ross has a latent psychic connection with Robert, which only seems to intensify while he is at the front. Unfortunately this phenomenon proves to be more of a burden than a source of strength and even contributes directly to her spirit's destruction. In addition to her depression, Mrs. Ross comes to suffer from a tremendous burden of knowledge. Thus, although in her own unique way, like so many characters in *The Wars*, Mrs. Ross is simply too sensitive to withstand the modern age.

Our introduction to the Ross family matriarch reveals a woman nothing like the one we come to know; initially she is a full believer in the society and civilization she belongs to. For example, every Thursday she hands out "chocolate bars to the soldiers who are leaning out of trains" (7). She believes in the nobility of the war effort – "The leaders of society are dutybound" (7) – and appears to be generally swept up in the change from modesty to glamour which is one of the hallmarks of the modern era – Robert thinks she "appears too much in public" (7).

Soon, however, Mrs. Ross comes to see the world quite differently. Once Rowena is dead and Robert has sailed for England, Mrs. Ross no longer hands out chocolate bars to soldiers for "it gave her the feeling she was mitigating bullets" (53). Her descent begins sharply with Rowena's death. She is immediately insistent not only that her daughter's rabbits must die but that Robert be the one to kill them and that "he must do it here" (19), at the family's stable. The question is, why?

Mrs. Ross seems to suddenly see and understand the horrific ways in which the world is changing and her response is to meet its cold stare dead in the eye. Hers is a

masochistic form of acceptance which is in fact not acceptance at all but rather an expression of fear and desperation subsequently also turned outward onto others, especially her son. Mrs. Ross wants the rabbits dead and for Robert to kill them on the very site where they were loved because through this process a perfect, if dark, symmetry will be achieved. Mrs. Ross sees that it is the mass-produced horrors of the modern age that killed her daughter and brother at home just as senselessly as they slaughter, through the machinery of modern warfare, young men by the hundreds of thousands. She sees this twin manifestation of the darkness of the age and, resenting its power, decides that rather than wait to be victimized yet again, she will instead embrace its senseless nightmare logic. Thus she ardently wishes to rob herself of what remains of her daughter (the rabbits) before some other modern horror descends upon her. Thereby does Mrs. Ross gain a vaguely comforting, if false, sense of control over the uncontrollable.

Interestingly, however, Mrs. Ross's depression becomes acute immediately following her informing Robert she wants him to kill the rabbits: "After he'd gone, she looked around the room and sighed. It seemed such a long, long way from where she sat to the other end...of everything" (17-18). Following this, Mrs. Ross retreats to her bedroom and cannot be reached: "Mr. Ross went up and knocked at the door. No, she said" (18).

The emotional and spiritual – one might even say moral – devastation which descends upon Mrs. Ross following Rowena's death is nowhere more apparent than in the bathtub scene following the slaughter of the rabbits. Once again we see Mrs. Ross's masochistic embrace of an age whose darkness she perceives so clearly that it threatens her sanity. Everywhere Mrs. Ross looks she sees death and horror – the ashes she taps from her cigarette appear to her as "mountain climbers tumbling to their death" (21) – and, in this scene, she wishes to convey her dark vision to Robert through various means.

She begins by recalling an episode from Robert's childhood with great affection. She tells a story about the time he walked home on his ankles, skates bent outward. After telling this story at some length – to explain to Robert that he is more sensitive than most, that he always "bruised so easily" (21-22) – Mrs. Ross, who has been watching her son with "Delphic concentration" (23), finally switches tactics and instead offers him the following non-verbal prophecy: "After a long, long silence Mrs Ross dropped her cigarette and used her toe to squash it out – grinding and twisting it into the tiles until it was just a mess of juice and paper, torn beyond recognition" (23). Mrs. Ross knows that her son is going to war and believes he will be utterly destroyed. She believes that Robert, like her cigarette, will be "torn beyond recognition". However, just in case Robert has failed to gather the meaning behind this tobacco-based gesture, his oracular mother switches tacks once more and speaks directly to the matter:

> You think Rowena belonged to you. Well I'm here to tell you, Robert, no one belongs to anyone. We're all cut off at birth with a knife and left at the mercy of strangers. *Strangers*. I know what you want to do. I know you're going to go away and be a soldier. Well- you can go to hell. I'm not responsible. I'm just another stranger. Birth I can give you – but life I cannot. I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more. (23)

The dark logic of Mrs. Ross's masochistic survival mechanism rubs Robert's face in the horror of their shared loss (Rowena) and her future loss (Robert). Telling her son to "go to hell" is this mechanism's inversion of her obvious love for Robert. Conflicted to say the least, and nearly "torn beyond all recognition" herself, Mrs. Ross attempts in this scene to both disown Robert and warn him about what the age has in store for him. Her final declaration - "I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more" - suggests that, at one time,

she could have saved her son, or Rowena, and maybe even Monty, but not from the dark powers that now stalk the earth.

Mrs. Ross is a woman who, by this point in the novel, has not completely died inside although a significant part of her wishes to. She can be seen making attempts to regain both her faith and sanity. Put simply, she tries and does fight back against the darkness gathering in her mind. Although she did not say goodbye to Robert when he departed for training camp – the bathtub scene constitutes "the last time they breathed in one another's presence" (24) – as soon as Robert arrives on the prairies *both* his parents send him "scarves and socks and mittens" (33). The son she forsook –"you can go to hell" – she now writes to "everyday" (153), preserving his letters to be "read and re-read – numbered and catalogued and memorized" (153). Mrs. Ross also accompanies her husband to Montreal to see Robert off to England, but cannot bring herself to leave the Ross's private train car: "When Mister Ross came in and said it was time to go [see Robert], Mrs Ross stood up – and fell down. 'I can't,' she said" (73). Just like the son she, ironically, loves too much to say goodbye to, Mrs. Ross also falls down a lot. Or is it the presence of train tracks similar to those associated with the death of her brother, Monty, that hobble Mrs. Ross at this point?

Throughout the novel Findley does much to suggest that so great is Mrs. Ross's love for her officer son, it in fact forges a latent psychic link between them. While Robert experiences "[f]ire storms [that] raged along the front" (148), we learn that "Mrs Ross began to seek out storms" (151). Does she do this in an attempt to be closer to Robert whose day-to-day reality she is somehow able to sense? Perhaps much like King Lear, Mrs. Ross, who needs to "rail at God" (54), goes out in storms driven by guilt and despair over the child she once thought traitorous but who she now sees, all too late, is true to her. (It is worth noting that Findley was a trained Shakesperean actor who loved *King*

Lear). Like Robert, Mrs. Ross also walks "in the mud" (152). Somehow she seems to know what her son and the other soldiers at the front know all too well: "She believed her country was being destroyed by fire" (152). Indeed, this belief verges upon clairvoyance; an entire generation of her country's young men *is* being destroyed by fire at this point in the novel. One suspects Mrs. Ross in fact deeply wishes to be with her son in France, to save him despite having declared it impossible to do so. On the way to church she seems to want to fall down, perhaps since it reminds her of Robert: "'If I fall down, I fall down,' she said" (52). When Robert sends a postcard to his mother informing her that his leave is over, we are told she "retreated with him into France" (181). As Robert makes his way back toward the front, his train of thought is suddenly interrupted by "[h]is mother" (183). All we learn immediately after this is that "it got dark" (183). Shortly thereafter Robert secures a room at Bailleul and falls asleep to the sound of what he believes to be "water lapping his mother's feet" (184). Perhaps Mrs. Ross and her son Robert were not quite "cut off at birth" from one another as Mrs. Ross once despaired.

Despite the steady inevitability of her decline which makes her become "less and less a companion to her husband and children" (52), Mrs. Ross does pass through moments of genuine solace and even hope. Findley shows us how the presence of a child can redeem a prophet from her madness if only momentarily:

> The child was watching her intently and Mrs Ross, in spite of the haze of brandy and the keen lightheadedness of her passion realized that the child was frightened to see her there – a grown-up lady, sitting on the steps in the snow with her furs thrown aside as if they were dead flowers. She realized she had to stand or else the child would think she was mad...Mrs Ross stood. The child seemed pleased. In standing, reason was restored. She smiled. (55)

Mrs. Ross brings the child into the church. But ultimately, this child who has brought hope to Mrs. Ross leaves her just as Rowena and Robert have left her. "The child let go of Mrs Ross's hand" (56).

Upon receiving the news that Robert is 'missing in action' Mrs. Ross, drunk and completely undone, is described as giving "a final agonizing cry" (204). Immediately following her cry she is struck blind and goes "cold" (205). There is "not a trace of emotion left in her voice" (205). Since Mrs. Ross does not die in the novel or attend Robert's funeral we might safely assume that this "final agonizing cry" represents the last time she is able to give voice to her pain. Also, we know that Robert wanders "for over a week" (208) before stealing the 130 horses and is thus 'missing in action' for that entire duration. Presumably therefore, by the time the good news that Robert is alive reaches Mrs. Ross she is too far gone to be revived by it. After all, the last thing Findley tells us about the Ross family matriarch is not that she physically dies upon hearing that Robert is 'missing in action' but rather that "[f]inally, she slept" (205). It thus seems reasonable to conclude that even if Mrs. Ross had heard of Robert's stealing the horses she, like Robert, was no longer capable of understanding by that point.

Shades of Robert Ross: Captain Rodwell

Like Mrs. Ross, Captain Rodwell is a character too sensitive to withstand the many horrors of modernity. Being a highly-sensitive young man like Robert and Harris, Rodwell's response to the worst of the unfurling modern age is ultimately suicide but this is not to suggest that he is anything like Taffler, who, incidentally, also opts for suicide. Rather, Findley makes Rodwell an obvious foil for Robert so as to underline the courage

the latter displays in *not* taking his own life, choosing instead to imagine and dare his way toward a resurrection of spirit.

Just as Jamie Villiers is a foil for Robert insofar as he is used by Barbara d'Orsey and later dies of his burns, so, too, is Captain Rodwell although in a more extreme fashion. The similarities between Robert and Rodwell are striking. Perhaps most significantly, Rodwell's sensitive nature also manifests itself in a particular affinity for animals. In the Stained Glass Dugout, for example, after the shelling has ceased, Rodwell soothes his little menagerie in precisely the same fashion Robert did his horse on the dike, cooing "so-so-so'" (124). Moreover, the very existence of Rodwell's menagerie links his character strongly with Rowena and the now lost Edwardian tranquility symbolized by her rabbit hutches: "Robert looked. There was a whole row of cages. Rowena. Robert closed his eyes" (95). Furthermore, following the shelling of the dugout, both Robert and Rodwell exhibit truly remarkable patience with Levitt who sees fit to attend to his books before attempting to free them from the collapsed structure (123-124). Nor does Robert's and Rodwell's shared experience end there. Just as Robert discovers that his own company has been entirely annihilated by the barrage, Rodwell also reports back that "[e]very last one of his men was dead" (131).

There are several elements of Rodwell and Robert's brief but meaningful relationship which betray these two gentle young men's unique view of the world and their subsequent recognition of one another. Most tellingly, Rodwell gives his sketchbooks to Robert and entrusts him with posting his goodbye letter to his daughter. Also, Rodwell knows he will not be laughed at or refused by our chief protagonist when he asks him to take the toad and "release him...preferably where there's something green" (149). He knows Robert will understand.

Rodwell's sketch of Robert captures the very essence of our protagonist, his sensitive spirit which unites him with the modern world's most vulnerable: animals: "The likeness was good. Unnerving. But the shading was not quite human" (155). Of course, this "not quite human" shading is not Rodwell's artistic blunder but rather his insightful triumph. His sketch lays bare Robert's animal spirit as well as the fact that Robert has absorbed much of Harris's prophecy and learned to survive, like the toad itself, in environments hostile to him: "In all of them – on every page, the drawings were of animals. Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert's was the only human form. Modified and mutated – he was one with the others" (155). To be sure, Robert has been damaged by his various war experiences and had to adapt painfully – at home, in brothels and ships, at the front. He is "modified and mutated" but he is also still, essentially, true to himself, true to his animal spirit and thus "one with the others."

That ultimately Rodwell kills himself despite his many profound similarities with our protagonist indicates that he is *the* foil for Robert Ross. To put this another way, Rodwell's fate would certainly have been Robert's fate as well, were it not for the latter's final act of spirit-resurrecting defiance, namely the freeing of the 130 horses. If Robert's new unit had "forced him to watch the killing of a cat" (150), as Rodwell's demanded of him, Robert's sensitive spirit might well have led him thereafter to wander "into No Man's Land and put a bullet through his ears" (150).

Clearly, Findley imagined a great many plausible reactions to the gathering darkness of modernity and the Great War and put them on display in *The Wars*. The most remarkable of these, Robert's, is partially reflected in the responses of all those dearest to him, namely, his father Tom Ross, Harris, and as we have already seen Juliet d'Orsey, Mrs. Ross and Captain Rodwell.

Perhaps more than any other character in *The Wars* Robert's father exemplifies the mannerisms and ideals Findley laments the loss of in the modern age. A gentle patience, understanding and above all faith define Tom Ross's behaviour toward both his wife and son. It is, after all, Mr. Ross alone of his entire family who manages to accept and forgive Robert his bizarre and seemingly mad act of freeing the 130 horses. He is the only family member who attends Robert's funeral. His unwavering faith and understanding is also particularly evident in regards to his troubled wife: "Mr Ross would look at his wife across the table at the evening meal and never ask her what she'd done that day. Though he missed her terribly, he never complained. Many nights they ate in silence" (153). Findley presents this man's faith as manifesting itself in an almost heroic patience.

Similarly, Harris, another sensitive spirit in *The Wars*, also exhibits a genuinely self-confident response to modernity in the novel. His response to the modern age is quite simply a silent refusal not only to acknowledge its scientific and reason-based claims of unqualified legitimacy, but moreover its very existence. The vaguely otherworldly nature of his personality attests to his deeply rooted refusal to cower before the presumed magnificence of the rational that is everywhere remaking (and destroying) the world around him. Put simply, Harris is a dreamer, and, as we have seen, a prophetic one at that. He is not concerned with the details of the changing world to say the least but first and foremost with the human spirit, particularly Robert's. To be sure, in the instance of Harris, Findley is not saying that this sort of response will protect you from modernity – after all, the modern age claims Harris's very life – but it does not succeed in remaking him in its image and therein lies a crucial difference. In sum, however, each of these admirable human responses requires but a shade of the imagination and courage Robert must find deep within himself amidst absolute ruin.

CONCLUSION

'Being a Little Candle': The Response to the Modern Age in *The Wars*

If we imagine *The Wars* as a wheel then Robert Ross is its hub. Like spokes, every character and theme Findley shows us finds passage through Robert. He is the centre of the novel, the lonely terminal all meaning passes through. His experience encompasses all of the significant ruptures with the past examined thus far – time, sex, the very feel and nature of a world altered by multiple new technologies. In light of this we can deduce from Robert Ross's incredible spiritual resurrection at the end of the novel that Findley's prognosis for humanity as contained in *The Wars* is something besides utterly bleak.

Of the many responses to the modern age which *The Wars* presents, Robert Ross's is undoubtedly the most harrowing, the most hard-won, and the most daringly beautiful. Given all that he witnesses, endures and is forced to take part in it is truly remarkable that Robert does not give up, go mad or kill himself but rather imagines and dares to make his final spirit-resurrecting gesture.

In essence, *The Wars* holds that while there is no hope for civilization as we have conceived it, there is still somehow, against all odds, hope for the individual struggling to salvage his humanity for the wreckage piling up around him. And it is precisely the immeasurable courage and imagination Robert Ross exhibits amongst the wreckage of the Western world that ultimately makes him such an unforgettable and inspiring character. How can any reader help but be inspired by his unexpected and defiant retort – the freeing of the 130 horses – to so much rationalized barbarity as constitutes the Great War? It is the unexpected vitality of Robert's "mad" gesture, its wild refusal to admit its futility, its sheer audacity staked on behalf of the innocent that makes the act *in itself* heroic regardless of the outcome. Robert's act in essence says 'no' to the slaughter of

everything taking place around him and such protest is not futile despite its practical consequence. Put simply, to the spirit, the gesture is all.

This brings to mind Ivan Illich's comment about setting an example in dark times: "As for practically answering your question about living in darkness, it's difficult to tell modern people, young people, that they shouldn't be afraid of being a little candle, a light that others light up in *their* life. People are used to electric bulbs and switches. The metaphor of light doesn't work without darkness" (*Ivan Illich in Conversation* 149). Perhaps Robert Ross's pre-electric childhood helped him to understand the wisdom and purpose in "being a little candle" metaphorically. That is to say, perhaps his experience of simple nightly darkness contributed to that appreciation of light he replicated throughout his life and most stunningly at its close. We know that Robert grew up during a time when the world did not yet hum with the mighty power of electricity, when Canada could not yet feel the accelerating and hollowing effects of mass-production. Robert remembers the "smell of winter living rooms where great blue chunks of cannel-coal had burned all day" and evenings "when someone held him in a knitted blanket almost asleep by a yellow flame" (101). Robert Ross not only belongs to a slower, gentler age, but also carries some of its subtlest, finest wisdom with him: the bravery of the candle. In other words, the wisdom of a vulnerable, even futile defiance against what one knows to be wrong. That Robert is able to hold on to this wisdom despite all he endures is the uplifting message of *The Wars*. Operating upon the premise that Robert's freeing of the 130 horses represents the resurrection of his spirit, the question then becomes at what point was Robert's spirit broken? As I will show, Robert dies in *The Wars* long before he even sees the front and his spirit is broken and resurrected not once but several times over the course of the novel. Findley does this so as to suggest that any war, but especially one in the modern capitalist age, in fact contains many wars, many struggles and encounters

which imperil not simply physical bodies and the earth, but which may extinguish the spirit itself.

Robert Ross's war truly begins at home, long before he thinks of enlisting, with the death of his sister, Rowena. A case could be made that her death in effect also marks the end of Robert's life. Upon hearing of her death, Robert recalls the promises he made to his sister which he now feels he has broken. He promised Rowena he would stay with her "forever" and that the rabbits could "stay forever, too" (17). Immediately following her death, however, he finds himself adrift in a meaningless "forever" where her rabbits have to be "killed" (17). He feels he has broken his promise. As we saw earlier, we also know that Robert blames himself for Rowena's death because he was masturbating at the time of her fall. However innocent, Robert cannot forgive his absence on that fateful Sunday.

If Robert's spirit does not die with his sister, it certainly does when his mother insists he kill Rowena's rabbits or, following that, when Robert is unable to save the rabbits from senseless slaughter. For Robert, the rabbits represent Rowena's spirit and moreover, he promised to protect them. Robert's brutal struggle with Terry Budge to keep that promise is arguably our protagonist's first true war, and, in many ways, the one that he keeps fighting in different guises throughout the novel. Consider, for example, the parallels between this scene and Robert's attempt to save mules and horses from German shelling. Here Robert also faces an insurmountable enemy, not in the form of German artillery but a man named Terry Budge, and finds another soldier - not Peggy's beau, but Captain Leather - to be the obstacle between him and his humane aspirations.

Once Robert has died a spiritual death at home, he enlists and whilst at military training camp, the sensitive young man who used to place rabbits on grass, now searches for "[s]omeone who could teach him, by example, how to kill" (24). And yet, while in

Lethbridge Robert encounters a coyote who mysteriously breathes life back into his spirit. One evening Robert runs with this coyote beyond the compound gates, imagining the animal is leading him to "some valley or slough that Robert hadn't yet discovered where there might be squirrels and rabbits" (25). Findley's mention of rabbits here, already so strongly associated with Rowena, provides a subtle but unmistakable clue as to the coyote's, and indeed all animals', potential to heal Robert's broken spirit. At the watering hole with the coyote, Robert is in fact described as an animal – he sits "on his haunches" (27) – and the sound of the canine's lapping of water "seems to satisfy his own thirst" (27). Tellingly, after this experience Robert's face is described as "a mirror to the sun" (28). He seems reborn as himself. That is to say, the coyote has somehow restored in Robert the faith that his relationship with Rowena and her animals established deep within him.

As reassuring as this development is, however, the damage Robert's spirit has sustained by this point is not truly vanquished. The portrait of "Robert Raymond Ross – Second Lieutenant, C.F.A", presumably taken after the completion of his training but before his voyage to Europe, reveals a young man of whom although "[n]othing is yet broken down" (48), there is no longer quite the same gentle spirit his ailing sister knew: "Only his left hand disobeys his will. Its fingers curl to make a fist" (48). Slowly but surely, the violence of the modern age and its fountainhead, the Great War, is seeping into Robert Ross.

Although following his training Robert seems flung across a borderline between his older, gentler, if still sexually-confused self, and a more hardened, fragmented and damaged self, he recognizes the necessity of the latter identity if he is to survive what lies ahead. Of his many letters home, we are told that "[o]ddly...he didn't feel like sending love to anyone. It seemed unmanly" (51). And so when Robert sails for England, he is not

broken but neither is he the same young man he was before Rowena. His mysterious communion with the coyote has brought him closer to a full recognition of his true self, has metaphorically resurrected him, but his spirit is about to endure another devastating blow, one which, arguably, matches the loss of Rowena and his failure to save her rabbits.

When Robert is forced to shoot and kill a lame horse in the hold of the *S.S. Massanabie* we are told that "a chair fell over in his mind" (68). This is the second time we have read such a description of Robert's mental state – the first concerned his mother's insistence that Robert kill the rabbits. In this initial instance the chair in question represents wheelchair bound Rowena, her fragility and all that she meant to Robert. By referring to it again here, Findley is indicating that the act of murdering the lame horse amounts, for Robert, to a form of spiritual suicide on par with the killing of the rabbits, from which he may never recover. Tellingly, when Robert falls for a second time in just a few minutes upon shooting the horse, he seems already in some way numb or deadened: "Robert got to his feet and said he was fine. He thought he was. He hadn't felt a thing" (69). Executing the lame horse has killed Robert's spirit and left him literally unfeeling. Findley places "a pale and frightened boy named Regis" (66) in the hold with Robert just before he must shoot the unfortunate creature in order to symbolize that the last of Robert's innocence is about to be lost.

As we have seen, the first section of *The Wars* contains Robert Ross's first two wars – Rowena and her rabbits and the shooting of the horse – as well as Robert's subsequent spiritual deaths. The novel's second section brings us to Belgium, and although Robert triumphs over the sinkhole that nearly takes his life, a strong argument could be made that our protagonist is borderline suicidal thereafter. How else can we

explain why Robert, a man we know to be both careful and thoughtful, would so heedlessly risk his life just to prove a point whilst at the front:

> 'Do you think we could walk a little faster?' said Levitt. 'No,' said Robert. 'That's the quickest way to get shot. Wait a minute,' he said. 'Watch this.' Robert stopped walking and turned and waved at the German lines. Nothing happened. He waved again. Still nothing happened. He called out: 'Hallo there!' Still nothing. 'Now,' he said. 'Watch this.' He ran. At once there was a shot. Robert fell. After a moment – he looked up out of the mud. 'Come on,' he said with a grin. 'But take your time.' (93)

Is the risk Robert takes here really worth proving a point to Levitt? Does not such behaviour seem out of character for Robert Ross? At no other point in the novel does Robert play the daredevil without cause; survival at the front already requires enough luck.

There is reason, however, to believe that Robert's spirit has somewhat recovered by the beginning of the novel's third section. This section opens with Robert trying to protect the animals in the Stained Glass Dugout, which were introduced only a short time before and which, as we have seen, are associated in his mind with Rowena: "He was lying on his stomach with the cages gathered into his arms" (121). That "all the animals [in the dugout]...survived" (124) the shelling indicates that Robert's and Rodwell's spirits have survived as well. After all, in the midst of the desperate pandemonium of the gas attack, Robert can clearly be seen to have maintained his humanity through the remarkable kindness and restraint he demonstrates. When one of his men panics, disobeys an order and begins to run, Robert fires at him but "misse[s] on purpose" (139). Robert then insists that the man with two broken legs be given the lone gas mask.

Arguably, it is Robert's relationship with the animals in the Stained Glass Dugout and Rodwell that is preserving his humanity through this frightful period.

And yet he is only ever hanging on to his humanity by his fingernails. The horrors of the front, the gas attack in particular, are taking their toll upon Robert. We are told that once he has wetted the tail of his own shirt with urine and pressed his face in the mud, "[h]is father's image deserted him" and that "[h]is mind went white" (140). As we saw in the discussion of Harris's prophecy, Robert's spirit finally does die a third time – when he kills his German double. Following this murder, we learn that the rabbit, the hedgehog and the bird, all indices of Robert's spirit, "had died – asphyxiated in the gas attack" (148). Only the toad has survived thanks to Rodwell's placing him "into the drinking water pail and placing sheets of Devlin's glass on top. It drank through its pores. The water was pure. It was a matter, Rodwell had said, of your element" (148). This uncanny statement of Rodwell's returns us to Harris's prophecy about Robert's own survival of various environments, be they physically or psychologically hostile. It would seem that if Robert is to survive not only the war outside but also the one raging within him, namely that of his conscious mind versus his sexuality, than he will have to give himself over to those elements within himself just as completely as Harris did in the ocean and the toad has the water in Rodwell's pail. That three of the four members of the Stained Glass Dugout menagerie are now dead, suggests not only that Robert has failed to give himself over to those frightening elements within himself, but also that his spirit is once again hanging by a thread. Robert's murder of the merciful German is, of course, the chief proof of his fear and resistance to those unexplored elements within himself.

Upon returning to the front following these experiences, Robert is significantly changed. When his kit bag is sent to the wrong station, Robert feels "as if he'd left his face behind in a mirror" (182). Is Robert's spirit not being smothered by the many wars

he is involved in? Although he does so softly, Robert finally begins to share in the jingoistic singing of his fellow soldiers: "Robert began to sing along with them under his breath" (188). Even more telling is the suggestion that he has begun to adopt war's central myth of glory: "Robert hadn't dreamt of glory since he was eleven or twelve. Now, it refreshed him" (188). Clearly, some profound (and disturbing) change is afoot in Robert Ross. However gradually, in order to survive, he begins to conform to the dominant myths which surround him. Taken together these changes amount to a suggestion that Robert's spirit, while although perhaps not dead, is now extremely weak and on the verge of collapse. Would the Robert Ross we know as Rowena's brother have been "vaguely amused by the sight of flailing arms and legs" (190) such as he is upon watching a psychiatric patient be retrained at the baths at Desolé? It seems unlikely. Ultimately, Robert is saddened by this spectacle – indicating that his spirit is still alive – but this is not his immediate response, nor does his sadness linger as long as we might expect: "Robert thought it would be a good thing if some more attendants were to come down and control the situation but his mind had already turned to thoughts of his chicken dinner..." (190). There is a sad irony in the fact that if Robert had chosen to assist the psychiatric patient or even taken a greater interest in his plight he wouldn't have "entered the corridor and turned towards his cell" (190) where his own assault takes place. Findley hints at this irony by referring to Robert afterword as "like a madman" (194).

The overarching question is: does the gang rape kill Robert Ross's spirit for a third and final time? The answer seems to be, 'No, but close.' Consider, for example, following the gang rape, when Poole shows up at Robert's hotel room door with his kit bag. Robert is not only unable to laugh, he is also unable to recognize his former batman as he wishes: "They stood there. Robert wished with all his heart that men could embrace. But he knew they couldn't. Mustn't" (195). Robert's spirit is certainly dying at this point.

His finer instincts go unheeded. That our chief protagonist burns a picture of Rowena following this encounter, not "as an act of anger – but an act of charity" (195), indicates that he is somehow conscious of what he has become. That he is, in short, now less than himself and more like other men. Robert is ashamed of what the wars, the various wars of the modern world have reduced him to. Be they waged in exploding mud or darkened cells, at home against his mother and Terry Budge or in the endless psychological entanglements of his own sexuality, modernity has all but completely snuffed Robert Ross. He cannot stand for his little sister to gaze upon him now, even from a picture.

Robert's spirit does die a third and final death in the Bailleul hotel room following the gang rape and Robert's failure to embrace Poole. This spiritual death is first signalled by the picture burning, but a few pages later Findley underlines the matter again; to Robert the front now feels like "home" (197). Along the road to the trenches Robert glimpses a "rabbit" which, following an explosion, Robert can only be sure has "disappeared" (197). That rabbits are synonymous with Rowena whom Robert took to be symbolic of all that is good in both the world and himself is clear. Thus, the rabbit's disappearance functions as a clear indicator of Robert's own disappearance, if not outright destruction. As if all this is not traumatizing enough, Robert then finds his schoolmate, Clifford Purchas, face down in the mud. That he is not only dead but has in fact been "shot in the back" (201) faintly echoes Robert's own victimization at the hands of unseen assailants. Upon his discovery of Purchas, Robert's body is now "completely numb" and his mind has "shrunk to a small, protective shell in which he hoarded the barest essentials of reason" (201).

And yet, almost immediately after dying his third spiritual death, Robert can be seen trying to resurrect himself. He never stops caring for animals. Following his discovery of Purchas he says to Devlin, "'I'm going to break ranks and save these

animals" (201). By this point, floundering as he is in a limitless sea of misery, unmeaning and absolute violence, Robert's connection to animals is truly the only lifeline his spirit has to cling to. Robert's failed attempt first to save the horses and mules in the vicinity of the Signal's Office foreshadows his eventual success in freeing the 130 horses.

Interestingly, as we saw with the flailing psychiatric patient whose plight Robert ignored to his own detriment, it is only when Robert follows the instincts of his true self that he is likely to avoid harm: "Robert...had begun to make his way towards the gates. The shells began to make direct hits at this moment. One and then another fell on the Signals Office" (203). Had Robert decided not to try to save the horses and mules he would have been inside the Signals Office and surely been killed. The chaotic scene outside the Signal's Office leaves Robert no choice but to kill dozens of maimed horses and mules, and we can only imagine the additional sorrow such an act places upon his already sputtering spirit? In such peril is Robert Ross's spirit that he has no choice but to imagine and then attempt a most unimaginable gesture of beauty and defiance, a gesture that somehow could dare to rival in hope all the unnameable horrors he has endured.

Findley foregrounds the unique resurrection of spirit Robert will attain with such statements as "Robert appeared to be the sole survivor" (208) and by suggesting that Robert's true spirit, which has such a strong affinity with animals, has always known what he must do: "It was as if both dog and horse had been waiting for Robert to come to them" (208). Although all animals in the novel are posited as symbolic of both slower times and gentler spirits, horses possess a heightened symbolic resonance particular to Robert. They do not simply signify the mutilation of the past and the consumption of the innocent by the war and modernity in general – although they do serve that function. Quite specifically, horses in *The Wars* also represent Robert's true and full identity, including his homosexuality. The violence Robert perpetrates against the lame horse on

board the *S.S. Massanabie* and the subsequent damage this act inflicts upon his spirit, not to mention the catastrophe which dismounting from his horse upon the dike proves to be, both betray these animals' specific symbolic relation to Robert. Horses are like a spiritual compass Robert strays from time and again throughout the novel but ultimately follows to a form of deliverance. Aside from his time with Rowena and Harris, our protagonist is arguably never happier than when he runs with the horses in his bare feet at St. Aubyn's: "[The horses] won – but Robert didn't mind. The running was what he wanted. You could tell that by the way he smiled" (174). The presence of horses beneath Robert's hotel window at Bailleul while he masturbates in his room further highlights the symbolic connection between these creatures and Robert's sexuality.

Before Major Mickle ignites the barn Robert has sequestered himself and the horses and dog in, we are told that he has about four and a half hours of freedom with the horses. As with *The Wars'* many horrors which we are forced to imagine, so too should we contemplate this untold scene. After all, Findley's novel is constantly imploring its reader to imagine beyond the facts, insisting that there is really only one meaningful picture of the past available to us – that one we make for ourselves with our hearts and minds – and thus we might be well-served by posing the question: what freedom and joy did Robert experience in those hours with the 130 horses?

The positive influence of his run with the coyote and his relationships with both Rowena's rabbits and Rodwell's menagerie, all suggest Robert's unfettered stampede with the 130 would have resurrected his spirit, but his connection with horses in particular, additionally symbolic as they are of his sexuality, goes further to suggest that Robert's final spiritual triumph also entails self-acceptance. After all, whilst cornered in the barn Robert declares "'*We* [emphasis mine] shall not be taken'" (212). This "we" suggests that Robert finally does accept himself fully, including his homosexuality. Put

another way, Robert's "we" indicates a newfound peace with all that horses symbolize for him. This, in a nutshell, is Robert Ross' remarkable two-fold response to the modern age. To reject its violence, its barbarity and waste while also accepting himself *as he is* despite the manifold hostilities surrounding him. Harris would be proud of his friend.

Ultimately, Robert Ross's defiant act defines who he is. As the narrator tells us early on: "People can only be found in what they do" (3). We know that Robert's rebellion saved his spirit not only because afterword, as Marian Turner tells us, "in his sleep, he would dream – and try to rise," but because her offer to him of euthanasia is met with an incredible response: "'not yet'" (216). For Marian Turner the hope flickering within this whisper, despite all the wars Robert has been through and the unspeakable condition they have left him in, is "the essence of Robert Ross" (216). Hope, despite all reasonable evidence to the contrary, is his response to the very worst of the modern age. And so, aptly, like the fires that defined much of his experience, in both his life, defiant final gesture and attempted convalescence afterward, Robert Ross himself constitutes a flame for those with eyes to see. As Marian Turner recalls, Robert "was delivered to us in darkness...we received Robert Ross. *Received.* The language again. Like a package. Or a message. Or a gift. We received him" (214). Like light itself, Robert Ross is experienced by those who comprehend his story as a source of inspiration, an inexplicable gift, in a world of darkness. And so he persists, remarkably, right up until his death: a little flame in a uniquely darkened world, an unexpected exemplar of the beauty and wisdom of hope surpassing all reason. Finally, we can be certain that Robert Ross's spirit has survived the many wars it has passed through if for no other reason than because although medical testimony has deemed that he will never "be capable of judgement again" (216) he is nonetheless capable of something far more important and primary to being human. In his final photograph with Juliet he can be seen "smiling" (217). Given that horses are *the*

corollary of Robert Ross's spirit it is fitting that "[n]o one knows how many horses died [in the Great War]" and also that "their inability to take cover made them even more vulnerable than humans to shell and machine gun fire" (Webb 232). Substitute horses for sensitive souls such as Robert's and the novel's position regarding the effects of modernity and the Great War upon the gentle and open-hearted becomes clear.

This is not to say, however, returning to the question of *The Wars'* prognosis for humanity, that Findley counsels despair. Although by the grimmest of margins and only in regards to the struggling, imaginative individual, *The Wars* is in its essence a hopeful novel. Rather than dwell upon the bleak fate of Western civilization itself, Findley instead preoccupies his novel with an extreme concern for fragility in all its forms, human or otherwise, and the near impossibility of fragile beings continuing to flower in such a radically transformed world. As we have seen, Findley articulates this manifold concern most dynamically through the character of Robert Ross, but also through Rodwell, Harris, Tom Ross, Rowena and her mother. We must remember after all, that it is not merely that the modern world is different from the Victorian and Edwardian ones which preceded it that presents such insurmountable difficulties for these individuals' attainment of sane, meaningful lives, but rather the *fundamental* nature of those modern ruptures which they must endure. As we have seen through Findley's keen eye for the mutilation of traditional conceptions of time, sex, and the domestic sphere, not to mention the sad fact of these transformations' mass acceptance, what modernity and the Great War ushered into being at the beginning of the twentieth century amounted to nothing less than a devastating flood. A flood which has torn the human condition from its traditional moorings and destroyed even the possibility of many of our most beautiful and sustaining

relationships whether they are between people, between people and animals, or between people and the earth itself.

The Wars is a sober and unsentimental survey of the harsh landscape in which modern individuals find themselves, but it is also an account of how a few green shoots might persist in such a charred and mechanized landscape. The novel makes it painfully clear that modernity has neither time, nor mercy, nor apology nor necessarily even remembrance for those fragile spirits and creatures it consumes and which, in Findley's view, invest our lives with the beauty and meaning that make them worth living. This is not to say, however, that there is no hope. Rather, it is precisely Findley's realist perspective that makes what genuine hope he holds out for sensitive spirits such as arris, Rodwell, Rowena, and Mr. and Mrs. Ross both believable *and* inspiring. In other words, although hope in *The Wars* is both extremely hard-won and entirely focused upon the sensitive individual it is precisely for these reasons that we can trust such hope as genuine, and, moreover, derive a truly significant and resilient, if conditional, sense of solace from the novel. This is nowhere more sharply felt than in the instance of Robert Ross, for, as Findley illustrates repeatedly through this battered young man, however unspeakable the circumstance, those invested with both courage and imagination will always have at least some recourse to meaning amongst ruin.

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