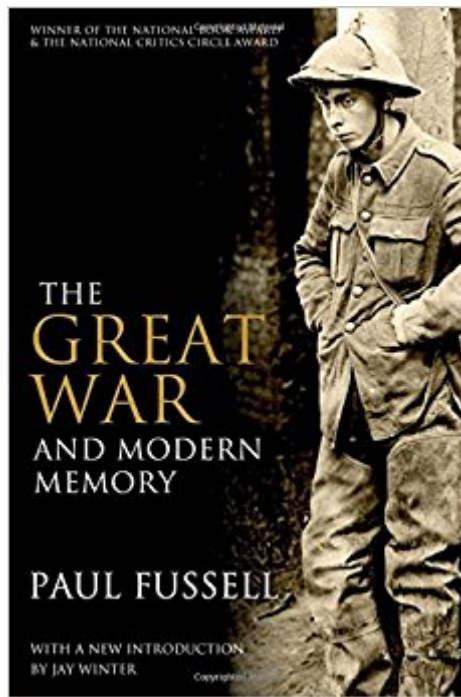


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# The Great War And Modern Memory



## Synopsis

Winner of both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award and named by the Modern Library one of the twentieth century's 100 Best Non-Fiction Books, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* was universally acclaimed on publication in 1970. Today, Fussell's landmark study remains as original and gripping as ever: a literate, literary, and unapologetic account of the Great War, the war that changed a generation, ushered in the modern era, and revolutionized how we see the world. This brilliant work illuminates the trauma and tragedy of modern warfare in fresh, revelatory ways. Exploring the work of Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, David Jones, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen, Fussell supplies contexts, both actual and literary, for those writers who--with conspicuous imaginative and artistic meaning--most effectively memorialized World War I as an historical experience. Dispensing with literary theory and elevated rhetoric, Fussell grounds literary texts in the mud and trenches of World War I and shows how these poems, diaries, novels, and letters reflected the massive changes--in every area, including language itself--brought about by the cataclysm of the Great War. For generations of readers, this work has represented and embodied a model of accessible scholarship, huge ambition, hard-minded research, and haunting detail. Restored and updated, this new edition includes an introduction by historian Jay Winter that takes into account the legacy and literary career of Paul Fussell, who died in May 2012.

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## Customer Reviews

Still relevant discussion of how the war was fought affected those in the trenches and everyone else. "Troglodyte World" is one of the most vivid descriptions of trench warfare you can find, and very readable. Have been assigning this to undergraduates for more than 15 years, and still find it very useful. Buy the book.

This by Paul Fussell is one of the great modern books on WWI. I read it long ago and ordered a new copy for the intro and new final comments. The links between literature of the era and its politics were one of Fussell's big contributions that deepened our thinking about the meaning of it all. Recently he has been criticised for being overly Anglo-centric, but I can't see that fault in the book. He was of his era. Anne Fuller (Ph.D.)

I purchased his book after reading through my great-grandfather's WWI diary for a better understanding of the war itself from the perspective of the average foot soldier. The book is composed mainly of poetry, biography, and reviews of the war as they appear in popular culture. Despite not being a poetry enthusiast, I enjoyed the literature even when presented in a very academic form. It expresses the vivid details of trench warfare that are often overlooked in films and novels. While not an exciting read, it is very engrossing and informative.

Arguably one of the most diverse and interesting books about WW1 and its continuing impact into the 21st Century. At the times, the author is repetitive, making laundry lists of titles or authors to enforce his point. The last chapters dealing with the Englishman's love of garden and the "homoerotic" aspects of WW1 are, I believe, overstated. In particular the "homoerotic" aspect needs to be re-thought. Although the author has passed away, he would have benefited from Sebastian Unger's book "War" on men in combat in Afghanistan or Andrew Wiest's "The Boys of '67." Both excellent books that deal with the strong bonds forged by men in combat. As a veteran himself, I was surprised at the author's take on that issue. The afterword in the latest edition is a "must" read. An excellent book; one I've read twice.

A stunningly original work showing how the unimaginable horrors--and the resulting literature--of World War I entered into and changed European (and American) consciousness forever after. Paul Fussell is brilliant at making those natural-seeming yet never-before-stated connections which let us know we're sharing in the awareness of a genius. It's gripping reading--and I'm an unlikely reader of books on war (well, this is an unlikely book on war), having grown up a Quaker girl in Greenwich

Village.

The Great War, and Modern Memory is not a military history or a literary history. It draws from history and from literature mostly to help the author comprehend the experience of war. In the afterward he will describe this book as elegiac, meaning it is similar to an elegy. Elegy, meaning writing mourning the dead. It is very respectful of these many millions of dead, but this is incomplete. What Fussell does is to lead us into the special horrors that was trench warfare in WWI and try to explain to us, and himself how humans cope, internalize and respond. The reader should know that Paul Fussell was a junior Army officer in WWII. He was in action, including "going over the bags: and defending from night attacks. He survived the loss of people he acknowledges were better soldiers than he. . That this book is focused almost exclusively on the British soldier's enrolment in close modern combat and the main reference will be the mostly young officer class who survived, or at least survived long enough to publish books and poems about their experience. In nine chapters he will explain how combat divides people between those who have been there, and the rest of us. He will force readers to contemplate the degrading, horrible place that was a WWI trench and the special demands this life makes on retaining your humanity. For me, the image that I had to carry was of a soldier crouched behind a parapet that was made, in part from the rotting corpse of a shot up horse and identifiable parts of fellow soldiers. Such a barcade has to stink, but so does much of the rest of this "battle space" it has to be soul destroying to have so manifestly present, "In your face". And ultimately, it stops the bullets or shrapnel that would otherwise kill you so that soldier will simply put these facts out of mind. Just as ultimately these facts have to become part of what the survivors will have to become. Stark as this image is. What is the psychic weight of an attack by a battalion of almost 900 men that ends with 80 men alive? As a reader you will have to take in these images, the hammer blows of the static nature of trench warfare.

Participants could be taken away injured, returned to England for long recoveries only to return to the same line. Whatever the hopes of high command that the next attack would break through and turn the war into a mobile effort with cavalry in the lead, this would not happen for years. Meantime friends beyond count would be reduced to blood and memories. All of this with no one who can understand except those who had been there. In brief: Words alone cannot explain the arbitrary and messy facts of wartime death. Military censorship prohibits too much truth from spilling out. Polite conversation precludes these kinds of topics and especially the brutal words that best describe brutal events. There is little reason to want to talk about these things in the time you get to be away from them. And so the soldier's own limits conspire with the military need for and the civilian's

dependence on the soldier's own preference for discretion. He does not want to talk, and we do not want to hear about it. How then does the human who has been there put an end to all that? Fussell is not sure he has any answer. Having oriented the reader towards the reality of trench warfare, he then turns to the literature of this time and these people. The British Army was remarkably well read and its officer corps included a number of writers, poets and novelists. It will be through selected members of this group that we will find some of the common themes and literary conventions that will attempt to answer this question. Among the most lingering and least remembered cultural effects of WWI was the replacement of a mostly optimistic and trusting population with one more leery and disbelieving. Numerous specific new cultural expressions would inhabit our language, from "over the top" to the ubiquitous form called by the soldiers the "Quick Fixer". In the latter case, one of the first universal experiences of filling in a form would be The Field Service Post Card, Form A 2042 which allowed the soldier sender to check one of a few blocks to complete one of a few sentences to at least tell his family he was still alive. A soldier could report that he was in hospital, but only to say he was recovering, not that he was recovering from a lost limb. Moving from the more general experience to the specific, Fussell gives us short reviews of several writers. The first two, Sasson and Graves are given in unexpected contrast with themselves. Sasson will write a fictional trilogy of the war. Fussell will make it clear that nearly every person and fact has a biographic true counterpart. Graves will write a memoir, and Fussell will insure that we understand that it is not to be taken as literal truth and in fact is too pat, too perfect and is otherwise to be treated as fiction. Much of this book is devoted to poets. Indeed both Graves and Sasson were poets more than novelists. He will link the battlefield to the older British themes of gardening and to the common birds and flowers of home and the battle field. (Larks, and Nightingales, Roses and Poppies.) Perhaps because so many of the writers and poets of this period were homosexual; or that so many had their sexual awakening in all boys British schools, or because the forced all male existence of trench warfare, Fussell devotes a chapter to the homosexuals and homoerotic. He makes a distinction between homosexual practices, and the emotional love ties between soldier, the more popular officers and the especially between people who depend on each other for elemental survival. This is his weakest chapter. Much of it is devoted to a pre-war, Victorian movement to promote public expression by homosexuals. The latter experience he can only call homoerotic. The word choice places too much emphasis on the possibility of physical sex and seems dismissive of what is for many in uniform intense brotherly love. Again too much of this chapter is about the nearly universal WWI literary device of soldiers bathing naked and being admired and wondered at by their officers. Fussell's conclusions tend to the sweeping and seem strained. There are many who would agree that WWI

was, as is quoted from historian John Keegan, Mysterious and pointless. Many agree that WWII is something of a continuation of WWI. But an assertion that all post war literature is war novels takes more explanation. Stating that war, because of WWI has become the natural state of the modern world is a bit too literary and not sufficiently justified. If we accept that the last 50 years have been virtually constant war, that does not make WWI the cause. It also tends to forget the many wars of the Victorian era and so on back into the pre WWI era. There is a case that everyone should read The Great War. It is not overly academic in style. Much here can promote both war veteran self-understanding and appreciation by those who have not "been there". I can wish that all might read this book, but this is not a book for everyone. Not everyone will want to envision rotting flesh as a part of a day's work. War poetry is not a subject many can appreciate. I am not sure I did so, fully. There is more here attempted than achieved. This is not a criticism as he is attempting something great and almost unique. What has been achieved is worth serious attention. Full disclosure: This book was a gift, I think bought from . Given by a friend specifically not the writer, publisher, book seller etc, with no expectation of any review.

I had Fussell as a professor of Literature and War and of course he used this book of his as the cornerstone of the class. It was a life altering experience. If there is one aspect of Fussell that sticks with me it was his standards. The man was all about excellence. This book is often cited as a cultural touchstone and for anyone interested in the influence of war on culture, this is a masterpiece. The writing is simply sublime. The clarity and insight achieve standards that few can match. GET IT. I'll go beyond saying you won't regret it, you may even consider it one of the greatest nonfiction books you've ever read.

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