

## Introduction

# DR. OTTERNSCHLAG GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

Vicki Baum introduces the anomic Doctor Otternschlag in the first few pages of her 1929 novel *Menschen im Hotel* as if she is describing the automaton movements of a ghost. “A tall gentleman in the Lounge got up stiffly out of an easy chair and came with bent head towards the porter’s desk. He loitered for a bit round the Lounge before approaching the entrance hall. The impression he made was emphatically one of listlessness and boredom.” He is not a ghost; the Doctor is a wounded veteran of the Great War. Baum casually ties his behavior to his physical appearance and, in an economy of understatement, provides a characterization of the Doctor as the human debris of the trenches.

His face, it must be said, consisted of one-half only, in which the sharp and ascetic profile of a Jesuit was completed by an unusually well shaped ear beneath the sparse grey hair on his temples. The other half of his face was not there. In place of it was a confused medley of seams and scars, crossing and overlapping, and among them was set a glass eye. ‘A Souvenir from Flanders’ Doctor Otternschlag was accustomed to call it when talking to himself.<sup>1</sup>

Her description provides the novel with a pervasive sense of post-traumatic ennui, a matter-of-fact-ness that loads the phrase “nothing ever happens” that he repeats throughout the novel with a symptom, a trace of an unimaginable past. The “Jesuit” half of his face provides evidence of a past devotion to duty that the scarred and misshapen other half abnegates. He is removed by his experiences to a condition beyond carelessness and cynicism—he is described as “cut-off from life.” As *genius loci* of the novel he acts as the still axis around which the stories and the characters in the Hotel revolve. He watches them commenting “It’s a ghastly business . . .

This is no life. No life at all. But where is there any life? Nothing happens. Nothing goes on. Boring. Old. Dead. Ghastly. Every object around him was a sham.”<sup>2</sup> Each of the characters’ motivations and actions are depicted and understood through his attitude, his *Weltanschauung*, as if seen through the dead lens of his glass eye. Paradoxically, it is his static torpor that animates the novel.

Such an attitude seems antithetical to the kind of positivist, energetic “Americanism” of the Hollywood studio cinema of the post-war period. Yet in early 1930 Irving Thalberg and MGM bought the rights to the novel, retitled *Grand Hotel* in the English translation, and co-produced the Broadway play. He then enlisted Baum’s services in the adaptation of the film and made the innovative decision to make it a multi-star production casting MGM’s biggest stars—Greta Garbo, Wallace Beery, John Barrymore, Joan Crawford, and Lionel Barrymore—in the major roles, with the venerable Lewis Stone as the Doctor. What in this novel, apart from the pre-marketing assurance of having been a success, attracted Thalberg? What

**FIGURE I.1.** “Every object around him was a sham.” From left to right: Ferdinand Gottschalk as Piminov, John Barrymore as The Baron, and Lewis Stone as Dr. Otternschlag in *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932). Digital frame enlargement.



did he see in this that suggested enough potential to justify a major production investment of capital and star power? Most certainly it was the rhythm of the hum and bustle of the hotel lobby, the jazz playing in the tea room, the potential for rapid cutting between storylines, and the modern décor of the Grand Hotel itself that drove the novel and the play. These elements could be taken to spectacular extremes cinematically through camera movement and editing and the new and by now fully integrated technology of sound. The art deco-inspired sets of Cedric Gibbons and the costumes by Adrian would provide an elegant and sumptuous mise-en-scène. Against this background each star could be shown to their advantage in keeping with the studio's strategy of star development. These were all compelling reasons to take the project to production, and indeed Thalberg and director Edmund Goulding's final film version did exploit all of the technical and creative possibilities of the studio system. Yet from the first scene of the film *Dr. Otternschlag* remains the hollow center of the piece. The publicity, reviews, and fan magazine stories highlighted the romance of Garbo as the aging and disillusioned ballet dancer Grusinskaya and John Barrymore's broke Baron-turned-jewel-thief. But still the characters circle around the mysterious and profoundly disfigured Doctor.

Through *Doctor Otternschlag* the Great War lingers over *Grand Hotel* as a presence, an embodied memory of the cultural impact of the first catastrophic global war of the twentieth century. Neither highlighted by the MGM production nor removed as a distasteful reminder to an entertainment-minded public, the Doctor represents the subject of this book, the representation of the Great War in the Hollywood cinema between the wars and its contribution to American cultural memory as it ebbed and flowed across the 1920s and '30s. I will argue that the memory of the war, like the Doctor, permeates the post-war Hollywood system as a mnemonic, an aid to processing the traumas not only of the war itself but of the broader shifts in cultural and social practices wrought by consumer capitalism and modernity. *Grand Hotel* is often cited as a salient example of the incorporation of modernism and its association with "luxury, glamour and affluence" and "the perfect visual style to complement Thalberg's urban strategy of producing pictures based on contemporary sources and themes."<sup>3</sup> It is also an example of the excessive or surplus meanings, references, and cultural currents that run alongside the cooptation of modernism as spectacle and backdrop for romance. The denizens of Baum's world are part of the traumatized population of Weimar Germany. Thalberg's film relies on that as a means of providing a setting for the European glamor and gloom of Greta Garbo, the old-world nobility of

John Barrymore's Baron Geigern, Wallace Beery's bourgeois brute General Direktor Preysing, and Lionel Barrymore's pitiable and terminally ill clerk Kringelein. Along with Doctor Otternschlag these characters, their pasts, and their motivations demonstrate the war's latent presence in the film's visual style.

Thalberg and his team's revisioning of Baum's novel and play acted to suppress the post-war malaise and ennui through spectacular sets, camera work, and high-profile stars to enhance the romantic tragedies of the characters' lives. The war's impact on them is muted in favor of spectacle, motivations, and character traits that serve and enhance the personas of each star. Greta Garbo's identifying line from the film, "I want to be alone," remained with her for her entire career. The economic imperatives of the Hollywood studios were paramount in such adaptations and in this way, different from official forms of memorializing the war such as monuments and public holidays, Hollywood's contribution to the memory of the Great War is largely the product of the distortions and selectivity created by the various commercial and regulatory restraints under which the industry operated during the interwar period. Consequently, Hollywood's contribution to the broader public memory of the war in America is reactive, or responsive within those boundaries.

The specific nature of the memory of the war in Hollywood films can be understood through how it differs from another approach to film and the Great War. Anton Kaes's study of Weimar cinema incorporates the phrase "the lingering effects of the war" to refer to what he calls "shell shock cinema." In Kaes's incisive analysis he sees the war's "tragic aftermath" refracted through the films' visual motifs and narrative structures. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1920), *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922), and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) lies "the shock of the war" expressed in fantastic scenarios as a means of uttering Germany's national experience of the trauma of war and defeat.<sup>4</sup> Through mechanisms of displacement and latency that mimic Freudian psychic responses to trauma, Kaes argues that these films "document distressed communities in a state of shock."<sup>5</sup> The key word for my purpose here is his use of the term "aftermath," which connotes the consequences of catastrophe. Kaes's concern is not only with the films' evocation of the real consequences of the war but also with how they connected with the widespread grief and loss that pervaded German everyday life in the 1920s. The trauma of loss and the sheer numbers of dead and wounded suffered by Germany meant that the war was an inescapable but also unspeakable experience. His contribution to the enduring question of what role cinema played in articulating this

and in the descent into fascism that came later is to focus on the Weimar culture's trauma and the way in which specific films "allude to, displace, and relive the experience of war and defeat."<sup>6</sup>

The term *aftermath* is as appropriate for Kaes's study of a nation traumatized by loss and defeat in the Great War as it is inappropriate for a study of that war's impact on Hollywood. The United States' experience of the Great War in terms of the length of time involved and the cost in dead and wounded does not match that of Germany or the Allied countries of France and Great Britain. Although considerable in terms of losses and returning wounded—approximately 117,000 dead and 205,000 wounded—it amounts to 0.13% of the population, compared to almost 4% of that of Germany, 2% for Britain, and over 4% for France. In the years that followed the war its effects in Europe were publicly visible in the prevalence of wounded veterans and the public ceremonies of remembrance and privately in the grief and suffering of veterans and the bereaved families of those lost. Kaes notes the significance of the "twelve million soldiers [who] came back physically disabled, and untold numbers [who] endured long term psychological damage."<sup>7</sup> The Weimar years were marked by the cultural humiliation of defeat, and the films that Kaes focuses on differed from the main body of films the German industry produced. Kaes's subjects of analysis, the expressionist cinema, were artistic endeavors that recast that sense of "doom and despair." His study reads these films for cultural forces that were suppressed and never explicitly articulated publicly. In that sense he is dealing with an artistic movement that is responding to the effects of defeat and cultural trauma, the *aftermath* of the war.

The United States' experience was fundamentally different. While the war effort and return of veterans had a high profile in terms of media visibility, the effect was in many ways the converse of that of Germany. Rather than being defeated, the country emerged from the war an enormous economic powerhouse. Wages rose steadily from 1917 and continued throughout the 1920s until the crash of 1929. The social impact of new technologies such as the telephone and the automobile added to a sense of the increasing rhythm of modernization. Cinema culture through the films, the fan magazines, the press, and the social space of the cinema theatres developed alongside these phenomena and became a primary, and very public, visual manifestation of modernity. From 1900 and throughout the war years the American film industry had developed along the lines of the rest of the nation's industrial transformation by incorporating Taylorist "scientific management" techniques and a variation of Fordist

principles of serial manufacturing, which standardized production practices but still allowed a flexibility among craftsmen and creatives.<sup>8</sup> As with other forms of American industry, these practices, along with protectionist policies toward imports and extensive distribution networks worldwide, resulted in the dominance of the domestic market, which in turn aided the predominance of Hollywood product internationally.<sup>9</sup> Outside of the boundaries of the United States this phenomenon offered a different version of modernity than that of post-war Europe. In Europe this American modernity of mass production and consumption offered a competitive contrast to European versions and had the effect of superseding “the dichotomously understood assault on traditional culture” of modernity with a discourse of “Americanization.”<sup>10</sup> But within the boundaries of the United States the dichotomy persisted. With the rise of the studio system the basis of most Hollywood narratives lay in a response to the challenges of modernization for traditional social mores. Throughout the narratives of the films, the stories in the magazines, and the “real life” stories of the stars, the primary conflict remained to an extent the traditional versus the modern, whether it lay in sensational melodramas set in urban environments, in the encroaching of civilization (modernity) on the wilderness in Westerns, or in the prevalence of dramas concerned with the behavior of the “new woman.” The war in Hollywood cinema was incorporated into these broader concerns as a setting as in war films or as a motivation for character behavior and conflict in films featuring veterans and relationships affected by the war. Rather than the war’s cultural impact and trauma being expressed through strategies of displacement that articulated its *aftermath*, its consequences, or indeed a national unconscious, the memory of the Great War in Hollywood cinema culture acted as a storehouse of motifs and tropes able to be drawn on in the service of an industry actively seeking to produce clearly told, entertaining stories to paying audiences.

In considering how cultural memory persists and changes across public spaces, Joan Ramón Resina has used the term *after-image* in his work on urban environments and architecture to refer to “a visual sensation that lingers after the stimulus that provoked it has disappeared.”<sup>11</sup> Resina invokes after-image to refer to a way of conceiving the ongoing development of urban spaces by underscoring their fluidity across historical and social frameworks. Incorporating “image” in a wider semantic sense, he expands the “image” metaphor beyond the optical to a “general sense of ‘visuality,’ which includes tropes, mental arrangements of spatial information and the effects of perceptual organization.”<sup>12</sup> He sees image-like

structures that emerge at points in the urbanizing process as “precipitates from social and historical solutions” and as solid manifestations or imprints of their historical and social moment. Moreover, these precipitates influence and affect those that follow and perpetuate, shape, and distort the original stimulus. Architecture shares with cinema the goal of organizing space and creating narratives with preferred meanings, and this nuanced concept of after-image allows a means of understanding how a historical event, like the Great War, is co-opted by and incorporated into the processes of cinema culture. After-image conceived in this wider way affords a means for accounting for the processes and phenomenon associated with the Hollywood industry, where repetition of successes prompts production cycles and where receptions help to shape and distort the original event and its consequences, giving rise to further, reshaped versions. Films, then, are not only texts but part of events in the same way as those “solid” architectural objects that arise as moments from the flow of their social and historical processes. In this way it is possible to account for the shifts, refractions, distortions, and concealments that shape the memory of the war in specific films, their stars, the advertising and framing stories that surround them, and the critical responses to them.

Seeing films as not only texts but “events” helps to extend the available evidence for their contribution to public memory of the war beyond the text. Demonstrating how specific films, their advertising campaigns, and instances of critical and popular reception mobilize broader discursive trends has provided a rich field for investigation, if not a complete account of a national memory. This is critical for understanding the way films are situated within their historical moment and offers a means of diachronic comparison with other films within previous and subsequent time periods. It is also effective in allowing for a productive selection of texts. The Great War is referred to in numerous ways throughout many films in the interwar period. There is an abundance of choice of texts in this period, and each would provide an important nuance, however slight, to the broader trends and trajectories of how the memory of the Great War developed in Hollywood productions across the two decades. However, in order to trace the often contradictory currents of the cultural memory of the war in the United States in depth I have had to make specific choices. The controlling criteria here for selection operate slightly differently with each chapter. For part I, “Kleos: Glory,” the choice of war films selected was guided by their presentation as memorials to those who experienced the war. From *The Lost Battalion* (1919) to *The Fighting 69th* (1940), the films I have chosen to focus on in one way or another offer themselves up as a

cinematic memorial to the war. Not all of these are specific to the American experience; critically, two films that profoundly affected the way Hollywood remembered the Great War, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and *Journey's End* (1930), are not about the American experience. But they were central to the articulation of pacifism and anti-war sentiment that was pervasive in the later part of the 1920s and into the mid-'30s. In many ways these films were able to present a harder-hitting treatise against war precisely because they were not centered on the American Expeditionary Force's experience. Similarly, the choice of war-in-the-air films was driven by their presentation as memorials, such as *Wings* (1927), and similar to *All Quiet* and *Journey's End* were often set with not the American Expeditionary Force but the Royal Flying Corps. *Hell's Angels* (1930), *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), and *The Eagle and the Hawk* (1933) are all examples of using the British flying experience. These films differ from the war-on-the-ground films in that they hold within them the contradictory appeal of the pity of war and war as laboratory for technological progress and the source of cinematic thrills. My choice of the war-nurse cycle was driven not by a criterion of popularity, as these films in this short-lived cycle were modest successes at best, but by an attempt to demonstrate how the studios were "trying out" scenarios that would appeal to wider audiences, in this case women. Here a close look at the production history—for example the various script versions of *War Nurse* (1930) annotated by Becky Gardiner, or the reception of *The Mad Parade* (1931)—reveals, through the changes imposed on Gardiner and the resistant critical responses to wisecracking women, the important contribution women script writers had been making throughout the 1920s and '30s in demonstrating, however coded, gender power imbalances not only in the military but in American society more generally.

Veterans as characters make up part II, "Nostos: Home." I found the more films I considered, the more I found traces of veterans. The basis of the second part of this book is that the veteran as a character was, and remains, a malleable figure in a narrative system built on requirements of plausible actions with identifiable motivations. The Hollywood narrative system developed through the need to tell stories clearly and efficiently to paying audiences. The veteran is a particularly useful type for this system in that veterans are unpredictable and the very fact that they have been in war makes them so. The way that veterans are written into films and how they are responded to by other characters indicates the shifting currents of the memory of the war. Veterans are in fact the embodied memory of the war and its impact and consequences, either mental or physical. The Greek



term *xenos*, which refers to stranger but also to guest-friend, applies here not simply because it outlines the veteran as stranger in his own land but because they are familiar, uncanny. The veteran comes home changed, the same but different. Kate McLoughlin points to the veteran as serving as “a gauge for a community’s attitudes towards those who are different, those who are vulnerable, those who are threatening and even those who pose problems because they exceed normal standards of fortitude, strength and bravery.”<sup>13</sup> McLoughlin’s attribution of those traits lines up with the way veterans function in the Hollywood system. They illuminate the nature of the other characters around them. Their unpredictable behavior, whether threatening or not, provides narrative information and character development across a range of films. The veteran’s ability to prompt attitudes in other characters provides a guide to how the memory of the war functions within the Hollywood system. The three chapters in part II are concerned with veteran characters as they functioned in the Hollywood system in three ways. The first is as central characters: Leon Kantor in Frank Borzage’s *Humoresque* (1920), Kenneth Wayne in two versions of Jane Cowl and Jane Murfin’s *Smilin’ Through* (1922 and 1932), Hilary Fairfield in George Cukor’s *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932), and Dr. Otternschlag in *Grand Hotel*. Each of these films was chosen because the veteran characters in their different manifestations display the evolving memory of the war, illustrating the conflict between traditional and modern ways of living, one of the main preoccupations of the Hollywood narrative system in this period. The second chapter demonstrates the way the veteran character was incorporated by the studio star system and shaped the star persona of Richard Barthelmess, which in turn illustrates the changing and contradictory nature of the memory of the war in American culture. Finally, the veteran was the main criterion for choosing the films in the last chapter, on production cycles. Gangster films and social-problem films often incorporated veteran characters; less common were veterans in horror films. However, there is considerable scholarly writing about the way that horror films feature a return of repressed war trauma via the disfigured features of monsters. While I take that scholarship into account I limit my discussion of horror films to two that feature veterans: *The Black Cat* (Edgar Ulmer, 1934) and *The Old Dark House* (James Whale, 1932).

Because this study is limited to Hollywood production, the representation of race—particularly that of African Americans—is present by its absence. The representation of ethnicity was central to the development of the war film, but precisely in its exclusion of the African American experience. Instead the “melting pot” myth that is apparent in *The Big Parade*

(1925), *The Lost Battalion* (1919), *What Price Glory?* (1926), and *The Fighting 69th* (1940) focused on those of white European origins and mapped across specific immigrant populations in the urban areas of Chicago and New York. African American representation was limited to the portrayal of servants or minstrel figures like the character of Molasses played by Ray Turner in *The Patent Leather Kid* (1927). African American filmmakers did, however, take the Great War and its impact on the African American community as topics in films such as *The Flying Ace* (1926), written, directed and produced by Richard E. Norman for Norman films, and *Absent* (1928), a story of a returning shell-shocked veteran who is helped on the road of recovery by a woman and the American Legion. This was produced and directed by Harry A. Gant for Rosebud Film Corporation.

## METHOD

My method incorporates the production histories, the critical receptions, the advertising campaigns, and the film texts as a means of tracing the process of change in the Hollywood studios' interpretation and contribution to the American memory of the Great War. This entails connecting specific films, the "solid objects" of cinema culture, and their industry and reception histories with the broader cultural history of the memorialization of the war in the 1920s and '30s. Throughout this period, the war was a consistent theme and setting for many Hollywood productions as the industry anticipated and responded to audience demand. From big-budget epics such as *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *Wings* (1927) through the Warner Brothers' social-problem production cycle of the early '30s, this "dialogue" between producers and audiences was influenced by the broader cultural changes in the American public's attitudes about the war. Through specific examples, the book traces the industry's perception of those attitudes and charts the decisions that shaped the types of stories chosen for production, the choice and creation of specific stars, and the ways in which new demands both gave rise to new production cycles and also adapted pre-existing ones.

This book explores three interconnected and overlapping areas: story selection and script development, production design, and the generation and reception of production cycles. It places these within the context of wider cultural and historical trends and events. For example, the representations of returning veterans alter considerably between the early to mid-1920s and the early 1930s. In films from the '20s, injury and mental illness

often appear as afflictions that are dealt with in the private realm. In *The Enchanted Cottage* (John S. Robertson, 1924), for example, the wounded veteran Oliver Bashforth finds resolution in a fantasy world and the love of the “plain” woman he meets in his country retreat. But a mere decade later the veteran of the social-problem and crime film emerges as the “forgotten man” and is seen as a potential threat to social order. This shift from personal conflict to social problem is evident in the motivations that the classical style attributes to veterans, who often operate as a “shorthand” for narrative clarity. When a veteran commits a crime, for example, as in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932), the motivation is unspoken and recognized as driven by an inability to return unaffected to civilian life. Often, too, as in William Dieterle’s *The Last Flight* (1931), these characters exhibit symptoms that reflect the current medical debates concerning “shell shock.” In this way the character motivations attributed to veterans relate directly to broader social issues and discourses around mental illness, social dis/functionality, and political division.

In selecting stories, the main studios each had slightly different approaches as they constructed their annual production schedules, but these were broadly similar. For example, they all acquired pre-marketed material in the form of stories from popular magazines, from literature, and from successful theatre productions, thus tying their particular responses to the war to a range of pre-circulated narratives. Here I look in detail at key examples of such adaptations, including plays such as Arthur Wing Pinero’s *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922) and Clemence Dane’s *A Bill of Divorcement* (1920) and novels such as Vicki Baum’s *Grand Hotel* and John Monk Saunders’s 1929 stories for *Liberty* magazine, “Nikki and Her Warbirds,” which were adapted for Warner Brothers as *The Last Flight* in 1931.

Script selection was also developed in house, where studios generated their own material, creating stories of wartime romances and adventures out of previously unpublished scripts. For example, John Monk Saunders sold his story *Wings*, from which the highly successful 1927 production was adapted, directly to Paramount. This influential film initiated the popular aviation production cycle, which included Saunders’s work *The Eagle and the Hawk* (1933) and *The Dawn Patrol* (1930). Studios who lost out in acquiring successful novels and plays generated original stories that were clear derivations. The war is a central setting for some high-profile examples. Laurence Stallings was brought in by Thalberg to write an original story and script for *The Big Parade* (1925), following on the heels of his success with the play *What Price Glory* on Broadway in 1924, for which he subsequently co-wrote the film version for Fox (1926). Darryl Zanuck,

well known for his predilection for hard-boiled stories drawn from newspapers, exploited the plight of veterans and events such as the Bonus March and Roosevelt's "Forgotten Man" speech in his commissioning of the original screenplay for *Heroes for Sale* (1933).

One of the key areas of focus here is the role that women scriptwriters played in constructing the cinematic memory of the Great War in this period, during which the studios' conversion to sound meant a new attention to scripts and new opportunities for writers. Almost half of all of the films with a war setting or theme made between 1919 and 1939 were scripted or coscripted by women. Part of the work of this book is in addressing the impact the coming of sound had on the development of an American female vernacular language in cinema through the work of Anita Loos, Hope Loring, and Becky Gardiner, all professionally successful and highly influential during the move from intertitles to soundtrack. I maintain that this vernacular also offered a means by which the social, sexual, and physical conflicts and disruptions brought about by the Great War as experienced by women could be expressed within the developing aesthetic parameters of the war-film production cycle, and that this was often achieved through the efforts of women scriptwriters. Little previous scholarly work has been done on these women's contribution to a nascent cinematic language, and none at all on the fact that among their most common subjects was the effect of war and its returning veterans on civilian life.

The war's impact on production design lay both in the aesthetic changes and strategies adopted by production teams and in the input of particular personnel, many of whom were European émigrés who had experienced the war first-hand. For example, the production team for F.W. Murnau of Karl Rosher, Edgar Ulmer, and Rochus Gliese had a considerable influence on other directors and their production teams at Fox, such as that of Frank Borzage. The example of some of these Weimar émigrés who brought a "trauma aesthetics" to Hollywood demonstrates that the aftermath of the war in Germany triggered in their work in Hollywood a memory of the war, refracted through the studio system for audiences and an American cinema culture with different expectations and experiences. The expressive set designs and intricate camerawork for Borzage's films with war themes such as *7th Heaven* (1927), *Lucky Star* (1929), and *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) exhibit these influences in terms of cinematography and mise-en-scène, particularly in the visual rendering of the characters' interior states. For example, Jean Negulesco, himself a veteran, created a modernist montage of the retreat from Caporetto in *A Farewell to Arms*. This incorporation of visual techniques associated with modernism and

expressionism as a means of cinematically rendering Hemingway's celebrated prose offers a clear example of the interconnection between film aesthetics and the wider palette of cultural forms that were influenced by the war or were products of it.

## PRODUCTION CYCLES

The war film is only the most obvious example of a type of film that used the war as a centerpiece, however, and this book considers the production and reception of other production cycles that incorporated the war and its social impact into their narratives in less overt ways. I offer detailed examinations of the crime and social-problem film, the aviation or "flying film" cycle from 1927 to '36, and the horror/thriller cycle from 1930 to '34. The war-film cycle covers the entire interwar period and will chart the shift in emphasis from adventure films through the anti-war or pro-pacifist films led by films such as *Journey's End* (1931) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1932) to films that reinvigorate the cycle in the late 1930s such as William Keighly's *Fighting 69th*, filmed in 1939 and released in January 1940. The crime and social-problem cycle also extends across this period. The focus here will be on the subject of characterization and the depiction of the returning veteran character. The emphasis of the study of these films is on script development and the use of the veteran and the war itself as plausible motivating characteristics. I will explore the persistence of this character as a marker of the intersection of medical and public discourse concerning the issues of shell shock and mental illness more broadly.

The chapter for the aviation cycle roughly follows the career of novelist and playwright John Monk Saunders, who wrote *Wings*, is credited with *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), and wrote eight other aviation films with the Great War as their setting. The exploration will not be solely confined to Saunders's work, but his career from *Wings* up to the remake of *The Dawn Patrol* in 1938 offers a central guide to the development of the cycle as well as to the film industry's relationship to publishing and theatre trends.

## THE STRUCTURE

The book is divided into two parts, "Kleos: Glory" and "Nostos: Home." These are Greek terms used to describe the themes of "glory" in the *Iliad* and of "homecoming" in the *Odyssey*. Part I, "Kleos: Glory," is concerned

with films that are set at the front, while part II, “Nostos: Home,” considers those films concerned with the aftermath of the war on those who returned and on the families and communities they returned to. Chapter 1, “The War on the Ground,” introduces Charles Chaplin’s *Shoulder Arms* (1918), a remarkable film that through comedy presciently depicts the sense of futility that becomes more fully realized in the later films of the period. The chapter then focuses on the war-on-the-ground production cycle that immediately followed the war with *The Lost Battalion* (Burton King, 1919), D.W. Griffith’s *The Girl Who Stayed at Home* (1919), and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Rex Ingram, 1921), early attempts at ennobling the memory for the war through more traditional tropes of glory and sacrifice. Chapter 2, “The War in the Ground,” represented by *What Price Glory* (1926), *The Big Parade* (1925), and *The Unknown Soldier* (1926), offers a set of competing versions of the war’s memory in the interwar period as romantic sacrifice and/or grim reality. I incorporate Jay Winter’s concept of a “geometry of memory” as a means of charting the way these films move from casting the war as a heroic and glorious enterprise to one of futility and melancholy:

At any single site, remembrance of war can move in many directions, but its center of gravity, its core, is grief mourning and bereavement, described as such in so much of Western art through an emphasis on the horizontal axis. The vertical is the language of hope, the horizontal the language of loss.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the ‘20s there is a discernible shift toward putting the blame for the war onto militarism itself. This move, developed through *What Price Glory* and *The Big Parade*, reached an apotheosis with *Journey’s End* (James Whale, 1930) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930). The chapter examines this shift as it manifested itself through the studios’ story selection and choices of source material, particularly the relationship between concurrent examples in literature and theatre. This continues with the sound films of the early 1930s, and specifically *Journey’s End* (1930) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). The shift toward the anti-war sentiment highlights the relationship between the Hollywood industry and literary modernism.

Chapter 3, “The War in the Air,” considers the aviation cycle beginning with *Wings* up to the mid-1930s. It focuses primarily on the work of John Monk Saunders and on Howard Hughes’s *Hell’s Angels* (1930). This enduring cycle offered the combination of aerial spectacle and the

underlying melancholy of the war films on the ground. *Wings* and *Hell's Angels* provided the template for depicting aerial combat, but the cycle was most fully developed in the work of Saunders. His stories for films such as *The Legion of the Condemned* (1929), *The Dawn Patrol* (both versions, 1930 and 1938), *The Eagle and the Hawk* (1933), and *Ace of Aces* (1933) explored the relationship between war and trauma in ways that resolved the commercial imperative for thrills with a corresponding reverence for sacrifice.

Chapter 4, "Forbidden Zones," concludes the "Kleos: Glory" section with an examination of the role of women scriptwriters in developing both this cultural memory and an influential American vernacular. It focuses primarily on the roles of Hope Loring in writing *Wings* (1927) and of Becky Gardiner in writing the sound film *War Nurse* (1930). The use of vernacular to render realism in the male adventure war films provides a turning point not only in the development of an anti-sentimental American voice but also in the modern American woman's voice.

The next three chapters make up part II, "Nostos: Home," focusing on the returning veteran. Chapter 5, "Veterans," considers the veteran as a motif in social dramas such as *Grand Hotel* (1932), *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932), and *The Last Flight* (1931). It examines Hollywood's relationship with adaptations from the stage, including their production and reception. Picking up on the insights from *Journey's End* and *All Quiet On the Western Front*, it examines the transnational nature of the representation of the war in these anti-war plays. The returning veteran is considered through the fantasy scenarios of *The Enchanted Cottage* and *Smilin' Through* (1932), which feature the traumas of the war played out in a bucolic England and negotiated through spiritualist fantasy.

Chapter 6, "War Relic and Forgotten Man," offers a star study of Richard Barthelmess. Across the interwar period the Hollywood industry's attempts to imagine the World War I veteran's experience on screen were characterized by tensions between traditional and modern versions. Throughout much of the 1920s the veteran was a "relic" of the past to be honored and feted. But during periods of social unrest and particularly the financial crises of the 1930s, the veteran became an unwelcome reminder of the war's cost and a threat to the social order, a "forgotten man." Richard Barthelmess was a star whose career traversed this period and this representational trajectory. His roles as a wounded flyer in *The Enchanted Cottage* (1924) and as a reformed addict in *Heroes for Sale* (1933) offer an example of the relationship between the construction and commemoration of the World War I veteran in American culture and Hollywood industry practice. By highlighting Barthelmess, the chapter explores the

policy of Daryl Zanuck at Warner Brothers in developing a realist, “hard-boiled” aesthetic and the role played in this by returning veterans and the deeper issues of war trauma in the 1930s. Such production decisions were directly linked to the wider debates that surrounded Great War veterans exemplified by events such as the Bonus March on Washington in 1932.

The final chapter is inspired by a 1927 novel by J.B. Priestley, entitled *Benighted*, which describes the unreliable and unpredictable behavior of the veteran characters that stand out as generic tropes in the gangster and the horror cycles that incorporated the war. The chapter, “The After-Images,” considers the war as a motivating force in the crime and social-problem films such as *The Public Enemy* (William A. Wellman, 1931), *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1931), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), and *Heroes for Sale* (1933). It focuses on setting and performance in the thriller/horror cycle from Lon Chaney through to the horror cycles of the early 1930s, considering whether the relationship between the development of the thriller in the '20s (and then the horror cycle in the '30s) and the impact of the Great War is as direct as some historians suggest. The chapter seeks to show the social function of the thriller production cycle as having an oblique connection to the war. While in the United States there was certainly a general social anxiety around the results of mechanized warfare on the human body, these films also need to be seen in the context of the variety of issues, public discourses, debates, and traditions of performance that, while related to the war, have a much longer and often neglected history. I will further suggest that the almost direct relationship between the war and the more highbrow film culture through expressionism, dada, and the European avant-garde—represented in part by the European émigré directors and personnel such as Paul Leni, F.W. Murnau, and Karl Freund and actors such as Emil Jannings and Conrad Veidt—is much less clear with Hollywood’s more lowbrow fare. This is the case with many of Chaney’s films, but particularly with the Browning-Chaney collaborations.

Throughout this period the war’s impact on the bodies of veterans accelerated shifts in public perceptions of disability and mental illness through concerns for veterans’ rehabilitation. Categories of “lunatic” and “cripple” were already in the process of being redefined through public debate and legislation as well as in the cultural forms of literature, theatre, and eventually cinema. It is important to recognize the influence of and dialogue with European and British medical communities on both physical and mental disability. Some of these nomenclatures and medical taxonomies entered popular discourse, often in distorted and incomplete



ways. *The Enchanted Cottage* dealt with the return of a shattered flyer in a fantasy scenario. Pinero's play was designed to draw attention to the plight of those returning British soldiers and to offer an accessible account of their mental torment. J.B. Priestley's *Benighted* is the story of three people caught in a violent storm who seek shelter in an old manor house occupied by strange eccentrics. The trio is a couple and a single man. The two men are veterans, and the single man is "benighted" by his experiences in the war. The novel was retitled for the US market as *The Old Dark House* (1928). The title was an attempt by the US publishers to fit the novel as a smart satire of the "haunted house genre" of popular fiction and theatre of the '20s. It was then adapted in 1932 by Universal as a follow-up to *Frankenstein*, directed by British war veteran James Whale. The film was faithful to the novel and succeeds for the most part in imparting a sense of dread and, like Dr. Otternschlag in *Grand Hotel*, is imbued with a touch of the traumatic past. The plot's conflict in the novel and film is between the disenchanting trio, who act as representatives of the forces of modernity and the ancient and decaying aristocracy of the occupants of the house. For the film the replacement of the original downbeat ending was the only real change and this was made following test screenings to audiences. The placement of both novel and film within a larger production cycle and the decision to use it as a follow-up to Whale's *Frankenstein* demonstrates how marketing and aesthetic choices twist, reshape, and refract the image of the war and its effects. While Hollywood exploited European and British novels and plays dealing with the aftermath of the war, the industry's marketing and the films' receptions also contributed to wider cultural discourses concerning disability and mental illness. In this way, for the American market, these films construct and offer "solid" examples of the after-image of the Great War.

The chapter concludes with a focus on the legacy of the war as embedded memory to look forward to the returning soldier of World War II and the lessons learned from history. From there it points to the persistent after-image of the war in Hollywood up to the present day: from Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) through the cycle of Vietnam films in the 1980s, where the inheritance of the Great War lies as an underlying obligato of melancholy, futility, and irony. The returning veteran films of the post-World War II period also owe a debt to the almost-forgotten returning-veteran films of the 1920s and '30s. *The Men* (Fred Zinnemann, 1950), *Captain Newman M.D.* (David Miller, 1963), *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978), *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), *Dead Presidents* (Hughes Brothers, 1995), and *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007) all offer examples of

scriptwriting and characterizations that draw on the precedent of incorporating contemporary and popularized trauma discourse as a means of attributing causal motivations to veteran characters. The Great War's legacy lies not only in the generic traditions of the war film, the aviation film, and the crime film established in the interwar period but also in its role as a counterweight to prevailing discourses about the war's purpose. The Great War's after-image hovers over the post-World War II returning veteran film in the internal conflict the veteran characters confront. In some cases these characters are almost unchanged from some of the earliest examples, such as Oliver Bashforth in *The Enchanted Cottage*, which was remade by RKO with director John Cromwell in 1945. The later version updates the setting, but the anger and bitterness of the veteran remains curable only through his newfound vision of beauty in his "plain" wife and in himself. While his symptoms are recognizable as shell shock, his "cure" is in the whimsical magic of the cottage. It is not until the Hollywood Vietnam War film cycle that the explicit trauma discourse becomes evident as a recognizable character motivation.

At the end of *Grand Hotel* Dr. Otternschlag stands by the revolving door of the hotel, all the guests having left, the "Jesuit" side of his face to camera. He states the film's epitaph: "Grand Hotel. Always the same. People come, people go. Nothing ever happens." The camera pulls back and we see him through the glass of the revolving panels as he disappears into the hotel, an apparition destined to remain confined in the eternal ennui of the endless flow of the hotel's paying customers, a revenant of the Great War uttering blank judgments on their anomic existence. It is a surprising contrast to the celebration of the modern extravagance of the films' glittering set and yet it is an apt metaphor for the celluloid memory of the Great War. The Doctor could just as well be pronouncing on the parade of films, scripts, publicity campaigns, and reviews that make up Hollywood cinema culture. However, each film, like each hotel guest, holds its own difference, its own iteration of the interplay between fiction, history, and memory. It is the interaction between the memory of the war the Doctor represents and the diversity of Hollywood film productions and their receptions that is the subject of this book.