The Wars

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TIMOTHY FINDLEY

Timothy Findley was raised in the affluent Rosedale district of Toronto, Ontario. He attended St. Andrew's College, the same boarding school Robert Ross and Clifford Purchas attend before enlisting in the army in *The Wars*. As a young adult, Findley was a successful actor before he became a writer. He was part of the original company of the Stratford Festival (a world-renowned Shakespeare festival in Ontario) in the 1950s, and appeared on several popular Canadian television programs. In 1962, Findley met Bill Whitehead, a writer who eventually became his domestic partner and artistic collaborator. Ruth Gordon, a friend of Findley's who was a screenwriter and playwright, encouraged him to try writing, so Findley retired from acting in the 1960s in order to pursue writing full-time. Though his first two novels were rejected by Canadian publishers, his third novel, *The Wars*, received great critical acclaim and won the Governor General's Award. Findley went on to publish seven additional novels, as well as several short story collections, plays, and memoirs. He was also a founding member and chair of the Writers' Union of Canada. Findley achieved high prestige as a writer before his death at age 71, having been awarded the Trillium Book Award among many other literary honors, appointed as an Officer of the Order of Canada, and inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Wars takes place primarily between 1916 and 1922 during World War I, a conflict of unprecedented scale and brutality that collectively traumatized the Western world. New modern weaponry such as machine guns, artillery, bombs, mustard gas, and flamethrowers changed both the physical and psychological implications of battle, as these powerful, long-range weapons caused destruction on a massive scale while distancing and dehumanizing enemy sides from each other. This passive style of warfare has detrimental effects on the bodies, minds, and spirits of the soldiers in *The Wars* and is critiqued in *Clausewitz on War*, a military strategy book that Findley references in the novel. Beyond its direct effects on soldiers, World War I also had a profound impact on society as a whole, as humanity struggled to reassemble their traditional belief systems and perceptions alongside this mass-scale conflict that created both personal, cultural, and geopolitical fragmentation. Young people like Robert Ross who came of age during this time came to be known as "The Lost Generation," as they were rendered traumatized, disillusioned, and aimless by the horrors of the Great War that claimed the lives of 40 million people.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Wars is a work of Southern Ontario Gothic literature, a regional Canadian genre that was first coined by Findley. Southern Ontario Gothic draws on the American Southern Gothic tradition popularized by writers like William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, portraying the grotesque, disturbing aspects of the human experience in a realistic manner. It is also heavily influenced by the theories of psychologist Carl Jung in its dealings with mental illness, violence, and sexuality. Other popular Southern Ontario Gothic writers include Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, and Robertson Davies. The disorienting narration, participatory involvement of the reader, and unreliable mythology in *The Wars* is characteristic of other postmodern war novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon and *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. The novel also explores the social upheaval, shame, and trauma caused by war, motifs that are commonly tackled in modernist works such as the poem *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, the short story collection *In Our Time* by Ernest Hemingway, and the short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" by J.D. Salinger.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Wars*
- **When Written:** Unknown
- **Where Written:** Canada
- **When Published:** 1977
- **Literary Period:** Postmodern
- **Genre:** War novel, Southern Ontario Gothic
- **Setting:** Canada, England, Belgium, and France during World War I
- **Climax:** Robert Ross disobeys orders to free his company's horses and mules, kills Captain Leather, and deserts the army.
- **Antagonist:** Captain Leather
- **Point of View:** First, second, and third person

EXTRA CREDIT

What's in a Name? Findley was known by the nickname "Tiff" or "Tiffy," an acronym of his full name, Timothy Irving Frederick Findley.

Family Business. Much like Thomas Ross's company, Raymond/Ross Industries, in *The Wars*, Findley's grandfather was the president of Massey-Harris, a Canadian farm machinery

company.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Wars follows a young Canadian soldier named Robert Ross who is fighting in World War I. Although the main storyline takes place between 1915 and 1922, the narration occasionally switches to interviews with Juliet d'Orsey and Marian Turner (who knew Robert during the war) during the novel's contemporary time period, roughly sixty years after World War I. Additionally, Findley inserts the reader into the narrative by making them a participatory character who is looking through archives of Robert's family photographs and other old documents in the present day.

Robert is a shy, intelligent, athletic young man who comes from an affluent family. In April 1915, when Robert is eighteen, his beloved older sister Rowena falls from her wheelchair and dies. Robert, who has always viewed himself as his handicapped sister's "guardian," blames himself for the accident. After his mother, Mrs. Ross, has Rowena's beloved pet rabbits killed, Robert enlists in the Canadian army in order to escape the guilt and trauma of his sister's death. At military training, he meets Captain Taffler, a heroic soldier whom he hopes will teach him how to fight courageously and kill without fear. The other soldiers convince Robert to go to a nearby brothel, where he has a humiliating encounter with a prostitute named Ella and is horrified to see Taffler having sex with another man.

After training, in December 1915, Robert is promoted to Second Lieutenant and turns nineteen years old before embarking on the *S.S. Massanabie* to England. On the journey, Robert befriends another young soldier named Harris and takes over his job of overseeing the **horses** on board when Harris contracts pneumonia. Robert is forced to shoot one of the horses when it breaks its leg during a rough storm, an act that traumatizes him and begins the gradual loss of innocence he faces at war. Robert falls and hurts his knees during the same storm, an injury that causes him and Harris to be disembarked to an infirmary together when they arrive in England, where they become even closer. After Harris's illness worsens and he is transferred to a hospital in London, Robert meets Barbara d'Orsey, who is there with Taffler to visit a wounded soldier named Captain James Villiers. When Harris eventually succumbs to his pneumonia and dies, he is cremated, and Robert scatters his ashes the River Thames with the help of Barbara and Taffler.

As new soldiers, Robert and his fellow young men glorify the war and are fixated on the notion of fighting and dying honorably. Thomas, Mrs. Ross, and Robert's siblings Peggy and Stuart treasure the letters that he sends them from overseas. Robert travels from his post in France to Belgium, losing men along the way as they are either shot by German troops or fall into sinkholes where they drown in the **mud**. Just as he blamed himself for Rowena's death, Robert continues to struggle with self-blame in his leadership role as a Second Lieutenant. Despite this guilt, Robert is observant and clever, and even saves his men from a chlorine gas attack by utilizing simple information he learned in his high school chemistry class.

In Belgium, Robert's dugout is bombed in the devastating Battle of St. Eloi. He and his fellow soldiers, Poole, Levitt, Rodwell, Bates, Devlin, Bonnycastle, and Roots have first-hand experiences with trench warfare and witness the horrors of modern war; mustard gas attacks, flamethrowers, and long-range explosives are common, and many men die torturously painful deaths. Those who survive often suffer severe wounds or shell shock from the violence. The men's Officer Commanding, Captain Leather, takes an entirely hands-off approach to the war, while Levitt, a junior officer who is a devout reader of the military strategy book *Clausewitz on War*, decries the passive mindset that Leather's outlook embodies, and that modern warfare encourages.

While Robert and his fellow soldiers fight for their lives on the European battlefront, their families on the home front and Western society at large are also struggling to reconcile the mass brutality of World War I with their former notions of faith, tradition, and morality. Juliet d'Orsey and Marian Turner's present-day interviews provide insight on these broad shifts as they reflect on how the war changed society. Between January and June of 1916, while Robert is at war, Mrs. Ross rapidly declines into alcoholism and increasingly erratic behavior over the guilt and stress of having a son who is risking his life overseas. Despite their physical and emotional distance, her struggles parallel Robert's, showing the wide-reaching effects that the war has on both soldiers and civilians.

After the Battle of St. Eloi, Robert goes to rest at St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital, which is owned by Barbara d'Orsey's family. Here, he first meets Barbara's younger sister, Juliet, who immediately falls in love with him. She is made envious when Barbara and Robert begin an affair and is traumatized when she accidentally walks in on them having violent sex. Juliet also saves Taffler's life during this time, as he is recovering at St. Aubyn's after losing both arms in the war and attempts suicide by rubbing his wounds on a wall to make them bleed.

In June 1916, following his time at St. Aubyn's, Robert is sent back to France and journeys onto Belgium. On his way there, he is raped by four of his fellow soldiers, an assault that robs him of the last shred of his innocence that has been gradually corrupted by the war. He joins up with an ammunition convoy in Belgium and witnesses the most brutal combat yet, as Allied troops are devastated by German bombs and shellfire in the trenches. Growing increasingly disillusioned with the war and its trivialization of both human and animal lives, Robert asks Captain Leather to let him save their company's horses and mules from the impending fire that is consuming the battlefield.

When Leather refuses, Robert and Devlin disobey orders and set the animals free. Leather shoots Devlin, and Robert retaliates by killing Leather.

This incident causes Robert to desert the army and wander on his own for days, during which time he frees a train full of horses and allegedly kills an unarmed soldier named Private Cassles who tries to prevent him from passing through a wooded area. This act causes Major Mickle, Cassles's superior, to pursue Robert and order his men to set fire to the abandoned barn where Robert and the horses are taking shelter in order to smoke him out. Robert, however, is unable to open the doors in time, and is trapped inside the burning barn. He barely survives the fire and is severely deformed, and all the animals burn to death. Robert is treated by Nurse Marian Turner at a French hospital, where he refuses her offer to help him commit suicide. After he is tried in absentia for his war crimes, he is transferred to St. Aubyn's in the fall of 1916, where he lives out the rest of his bed-ridden life with Juliet by his side. Robert's fellow soldiers, as well as most of his family, view him as a traitor and disown him for his actions. His father is the only member of his family to see him buried when he dies in 1922 at age twenty-five.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Robert Ross – The protagonist of the novel. Robert is a handsome, intelligent, athletic young Canadian man who comes from an affluent family. He is the second child of Mr. Ross and Mrs. Ross and the brother of Rowena, Stuart, and Peggy Ross. Robert is shy, sensitive, and empathetic. He is extremely close with his beloved handicapped sister, Rowena, and blames himself when she dies in a tragic accident. In the spring of 1915, at eighteen years old, Robert enlists in the army to escape the guilt and pain of his sister's death. In December of that year, Robert turns nineteen and ships off to England to fight in World War I as a Second Lieutenant, where his observant, clever nature is an asset to him and his fellow men. Throughout 1916, Robert and his fellow Canadian and British soldiers wage war against the Germans, primarily in France and Belgium. Although Robert has his heart set on fighting and dying honorably, he experiences a gradual loss of innocence and is driven to near-madness by trench warfare and the other horrible acts of violence he experiences at war. After his dugout is bombed in the Battle of St. Eloi, he goes to St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital in England (owned by the wealthy d'Orsey family) to recover. Twelve-year-old Juliet d'Orsey falls in love with Robert during his stay and is distraught over her older sister Barbara's sexual relationship with him. From here, Robert is again stationed in France. Along his journey there, he is brutally raped by his fellow soldiers, an assault that further erodes his sanity. Gradually, Robert becomes completely disillusioned with war and reaches the point where can no longer stand the incessant, senseless violence. Robert kills Captain Leather, his Officer Commanding, and commits a series of war crimes which ultimately result in him and a large number of **horses** being trapped in a burning barn. The incident leaves him badly disfigured, and he is branded as a traitor by his fellow soldiers as well as his family. After living out his last few years at St. Aubyn's with Juliet by his side, Robert dies at age twenty-five.

Lady Juliet d'Orsey – The fourth child of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's, who own St. Aubyn's abbey in London. She is the sister of Barbara, Clive, Michael, and Temple d'Orsey. As with Miss Turner, the narration features several transcripts of interviews with Juliet in the novel's contemporary time period, roughly sixty years after the events that take place during World War I. At twelve years old, Juliet is a bright, curious child who often eavesdrops on people and meticulously records her life in a diary. During the war, Robert Ross and Captain Taffler come to stay at St. Aubyn's, which is converted into a convalescence hospital for soldiers. Juliet immediately falls in love with Robert and is jealous of her older sister, Barbara, who begins an affair with him. In the midst of this fixation on Robert, Juliet inadvertently walks in on Taffler trying to commit suicide and saves his life. Soon after this, she decides to pull a prank on Robert and Barbara by dressing up as Lady Sorrel (the ghost who supposedly haunts St. Aubyn's) and sneaking into Robert's bedroom at night. This joke backfires, however, when she is traumatized to find Robert and Barbara having violent sex. After Robert leaves St. Aubyn's, Juliet remains in love with him. A few months later, Robert returns to St. Aubyn's to heal and live out the rest of his life, having committed several war crimes and been badly burned and disfigured by a **fire**. Juliet rarely leaves his side until he dies five years later.

Lady Barbara d'Orsey – The third child of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's, who own St. Aubyn's abbey in London. She is the sister of Juliet, Clive, Michael, and Temple d'Orsey. Barbara first meets Robert Ross at the hospital in London where she and Captain Taffler are visiting Jamie Villiers and Robert is visiting Harris. Barbara is serially attracted to athletic, heroic men and jumps between romantic affairs with several different soldiers throughout the story. Before the war, she is envious of her brother Clive's close friendship with Jamie, and eventually steals him away from another women when he comes home as a decorated hero. After Jamie returns to war and his entire body is burned in a **fire**, Barbara acts cold and disinterested in him during her hospital visits. She moves onto relationships with Taffler and Major Terry, and begins an affair with Robert when he comes to stay at St. Aubyn's, which is converted into a convalescence hospital during World War I. As with Jamie, she ceases to care for Robert after he is disfigured by a fire.

Captain Eugene Taffler – A soldier whom Robert Ross and Clifford Purchas meet on the prairie during their training in Lethbridge, Alberta. He is a decorated hero who is renowned among Robert's fellow soldiers, having returned to Canada after being wounded in France and been assigned to supervise the military **horses** before being reposted overseas. Robert admires Taffler's unbridled confidence and athleticism, viewing him as a role model who might teach him how to fight courageously. His romanticized image of Taffler is shattered, however, when he sees him having sex with a man (the Swede) at a brothel. Later, once Robert has shipped off to England, he sees Taffler with Barbara d'Orsey (who he is presumably dating) visiting Captain Jamie Villiers at the same hospital where Harris is staying. Taffler and Barbara help Robert scatter Harris's ashes after he dies of pneumonia, and Robert does not see him again until he receives an invitation to stay at St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital bearing Taffler's forged signature. Here, he finds that Taffler has lost both of his arms in battle. Soon after, young Juliet d'Orsey walks in on Taffler trying to commit suicide by unraveling his bandages and rubbing his wounds on the wall. Though Juliet knows that Taffler does not want to live, she calls for help and he receives an operation that saves him from bleeding to death.

Harris – A young soldier from Sydney, Nova Scotia, whom Robert Ross meets on the *S.S. Massanabie* from Canada to England. Harris oversees the section detail that cares for the **horses** on board. He has a wistful, poetic soul and often gazes out of the ship's porthole, hoping to see a whale. On the journey, Harris contracts pneumonia, and Robert is assigned to take over his job of overseeing the horses. After Robert injures his knees during a storm that rocks the ship, he and Harris are disembarked together and form a close friendship during their stay at the infirmary. Harris's pneumonia worsens and Robert takes his leave in London so that he can continue to visit him, feeling inexplicably drawn to Harris in the same way that he was drawn to his sister Rowena. Juliet d'Orsey, in retrospect, believes that Robert was emotionally in love with him. After Harris succumbs to his illness and dies, Robert is unable to get in touch with his estranged family and, to his horror, Harris is cremated. Given Harris's love of the ocean, Robert, Barbara d'Orsey, and Captain Taffler decide to scatter his ashes on the River Thames as a makeshift "burial at sea."

Mrs. Ross – The wife of Thomas Ross and the mother of Robert, Rowena, Stuart, and Peggy Ross. Having lost both her younger brother Monty Miles Raymond and her daughter Rowena in tragic accidents, she is plagued by grief and self-blame that only worsens after Robert ships off to fight in World War I. Mrs. Ross fruitlessly pursues retribution for her personal traumas as well as for the war itself—she has Rowena's pet rabbits killed to avenge her daughter's death and cries out at God over the injustice of sending young men like Robert off to die in battle. Mrs. Ross becomes increasingly paranoid about death while Robert is overseas, obsessing over his letters and blaming herself for the dangers he faces as a soldier. She ultimately punishes herself by falling into alcoholism and forcing herself to take long walks in the harsh Canadian winter that mirror Robert's own struggle with the **elements** during war. Her close friend, Miss Davenport, moves in with the Ross family as Mrs. Ross loses coherency and becomes unable to fulfill her role as a wife and mother. When Mrs. Ross receives the news that Robert is missing in action, she is so distraught that she claims to go blind. Unlike her husband, Mrs. Ross does not attend Robert's burial after he passes away at St. Aubyn's.

Rowena Ross – The eldest child of Mr. Ross and Mrs. Ross and the sister of Robert, Peggy, and Stuart Ross. She is handicapped by a disease called hydrocephalus and spends her life bound to a wheelchair. Robert has taken a special liking to Rowena since she was a young child and he was a baby. As they grow up, he takes on the self-appointed role of Rowena's "guardian." At age twenty-five, Rowena accidentally falls out of her wheelchair and dies while she is playing with her beloved pet rabbits in the family's stable. Although Stuart was the one who was supposed to be watching her when she fell, Robert blames himself for Rowena's death and enlists in the army in order to escape his guilt and grief. He carries a photo of Rowena in his kit bag during his time overseas and is reminded of her by Rodwell's love of animals.

Mr. Thomas Ross – The husband of Mrs. Ross and father of Robert, Rowena, Stuart, and Peggy Ross. Thomas is the wealthy owner of Raymond/Ross Industries, a company that manufactures farm equipment. During World War I, his company is converted to produce military weapons. Thomas cares deeply for his family and does his best to remain supportive of Mrs. Ross after Robert goes off to war and she gradually spirals out of control. He is the only one of Robert's family members to come see him buried after his death.

Marian / Miss Turner – A French military nurse who takes care of Robert Ross at Bois de Madeleine hospital after he commits a series of war crimes and sustains severe, disfiguring burns. As with Juliet d'Orsey, the narration features several transcripts of interviews with Miss Turner in the novel's contemporary time period, roughly sixty years after the events that take place during World War I. When Robert arrives at her hospital, she is outraged that a Military Police officer is required to stay by him at all times, even during surgery. Miss Turner hoards morphine for Robert and offers to assist him in committing suicide, but he replies, "not yet," a statement that profoundly affects her and becomes her life's motto. In addition to sharing her memories of Robert, Miss Turner's interviews hold retrospective wisdom about the war's harmful effects on society and culture.

Captain Leather – Robert Ross's O.C. (Officer Commanding) from Wytsbrouk. Robert first meets Captain Leather after his dugout is bombed in the Battle of St. Eloi. Leather unsympathetic toward his men and detached from the dangers

of the war, making haphazard strategic plans and careless orders from a distance and leaving his subordinate soldiers to fend for themselves. He is quick to criticize others for their actions despite his own cowardice. When Leather refuses to let Robert save their company's **horses** and mules from impending shellfire, Robert and his fellow soldier Devlin disobey his orders, and Leather kills Devlin. Robert avenges this act by shooting and killing Leather.

Rodwell – A visiting soldier from Lahore who is one of Robert Ross's bunkmates in the dugout at St. Eloi. Rodwell shares Robert's love of animals and keeps a pet toad and other small creatures in cages under his bed to protect them from the fighting. This compassion reminds Robert of his sister Rowena and her pet rabbits. Rodwell is a sweet, innocent soul who illustrates children's books with realistic sketches of animals. After the Battle of St. Eloi, he is sent to join another company and leaves Robert his toad, sketchbooks, and a letter to his daughter for safekeeping. Rodwell is driven to suicide when the men in his new company (who have been driven mad by trench warfare) force him to watch them torture small animals.

Levitt – Robert Ross's fellow junior officer who becomes one of his bunkmates in the dugout at St. Eloi. He is helpful and resourceful, risking his own life to save Robert and Willie Poole from drowning in the **muddy** ditches. Despite this, Robert reflects that Levitt acts out of cold practicality rather than genuine courage. Levitt's knapsack is full of books; he is particularly obsessed with reading *Clausewitz on War*, a military strategy book which Findley quotes in the epigraph of the novel. After the dugout is bombed in the battle of St. Eloi, Levitt is driven mad and becomes catatonic.

Willie Poole – A bugler assigned to Robert Ross in Belgium. Though, like Robert, he is nineteen years old, Poole looks and sounds young for his age. He is described an "uncomplicated" and has an innocent demeanor that endears him to the other soldiers in the dugout at St. Eloi. After Robert is raped at Asile Desolé, Poole delivers him his missing kit bag and Robert wishes that he could embrace him.

Corporal Bates – An officer from Regina, Saskatchewan, who is in charge of the Mortar Squads in St. Eloi, whom Robert Ross is paired up with him after his dugout is bombed. Robert leads Bates and the other men on an operation to reposition the guns in the forward trench. He appreciates Bates because, unlike other soldiers, he has not been become jaded or detached from the horrors of war. When the Germans attack them with chlorine gas, Robert saves the lives of Bates and the other Mortar Squad men by having them cover their faces with urine-soaked rags in order to neutralize the chlorine with the natural ammonia in the urine.

Stuart Ross – The youngest child of Mr. Ross and Mrs. Ross and the brother of Robert, Rowena, and Peggy Ross. Like other young boys his age, he glorifies war and is even excited at the thought of Robert dying honorably in battle so that he can share the news with his schoolmates. After the incident with Captain Leather and the **horses** at the end of the novel ruins Robert's reputation, Stuart becomes one of his brother's detractors.

Peggy Ross – The third child of Mr. Ross and Mrs. Ross and the sister of Robert, Rowena, and Stuart Ross. Peggy is a popular young woman who has many boyfriends. She dates Clinton Brown from Harvard before he is killed in World War I. Peggy cherishes Robert's letters while he is at war, but, like Mrs. Ross and Stuart, disowns him after the incident with Captain Leather and the **horses** brands him as a traitor.

Miss Davenport – A close friend of Mrs. Ross who comes to stay with the family during Mrs. Ross's gradual deterioration after Robert goes off to war. She maintains a charitable and patriotic public image, handing out candy bars to departing soldiers as a way to support the war effort. Miss Davenport supports Mrs. Ross even as her friend's behavior becomes increasingly erratic, joining her on walks in the harsh Canadian **elements** and wheeling Mrs. Ross to the park in Rowena's wheelchair when she is too intoxicated to walk.

Clive d'Orsey / Lord Clive Stourbridge – The eldest child of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's, who own St. Aubyn's abbey in London. He is the brother of Barbara, Clive, Michael, and Temple d'Orsey. Growing up, Clive is a close friend of Jamie Villiers, whom he rides **horses** with. Juliet believes that Clive and Jamie were emotionally (but not romantically) in love with each other, and Barbara is jealous of their relationship. Clive becomes a Cambridge poet and a soldier in World War I; his writing draws on his experiences in the war. On his leave, he comes to rest at St. Aubyn's, which is converted into a convalescence hospital during the war. Here, he invites over a group of pacifist friends whose beliefs offend Michael. Once he returns to war, he is killed in the Somme offensive on July 1, 1916.

Captain James / Jamie Villiers – An old friend of Clive d'Orsey and ex-lover of Barbara d'Orsey. Juliet d'Orsey believes that Jamie and Clive, who grew up riding **horses** together, were emotionally in love with each other in the same way Robert Ross loved Harris. Barbara was intensely jealous of their relationship and stole Jamie away from another woman after he returns on leave from World War I as a decorated hero. After returning to war, Jamie is badly burned and has his vocal cords destroyed in a **fire**. Robert sees Jamie encased in bandages when Barbara and Captain Taffler come to visit him at the same London hospital where Robert is visiting Harris.

Monty Miles Raymond – Mrs. Ross's younger brother who is killed in a trolley car accident when she is a young woman about to be married to Mr. Ross. Monty's death is the first of many personal traumas she experiences. It seems to Mrs. Ross that the world is "full of trolley cars" and other threats, causing her

to become paranoid of death and slip into alcoholism.

Clifford Purchas – A former classmate of Robert Ross at St. Andrews boarding school, who also becomes a soldier and trains with Robert in Lethbridge, Alberta, as part of a detail that breaks wild mustangs to use as military **horses**. He accompanies Robert on a mission to find two horses that have gone missing, where they inadvertently meet Captain Taffler. Clifford is naïve and immature but takes the war seriously, believing that it is his opportunity to become a man. Near the end of the novel, Robert happens upon Clifford's dead body lying in the middle of a road near Wytsbrouk.

Devlin – One of the soldiers, along with Lieutenant Bonnycastle, whom Robert Ross and Levitt relieve of their position in the dugout at St. Eloi. Devlin dreams of owning an antique shop and collects valuables from war wreckage that he uses to furnish the dugout. At the end of the novel, Devlin helps Robert disobey Captain Leather's orders and free their company's **horses** and mules from shellfire. This act of defiance causes Leather to shoot and kill Devlin.

Lieutenant Bonnycastle – One of the soldiers, along with Devlin, whom Robert Ross and Levitt relieve of their position in the dugout at St. Eloi. He argues with Levitt over *Clausewitz on War* and with Robert over the guns that were left in No Man's Land after the Battle of St. Eloi. When Willie Poole comes to Asile Desolé to deliver Robert his kit bag, he delivers the news that Bonnycastle has been killed.

Major Mickle – The commanding officer of the troops who are stationed near La Chodrelle when Robert Ross passes through with the large number of **horses** that he has freed from the Military Compound. After Robert allegedly kills Mickle's soldier, Private Cassles (who tries to prevent Robert from passing), the C.F.A. assigns Mickle the duty of capturing him. Mickle finds Robert and the horses in an abandoned farmyard and the orders his men to set **fire** to the barn in order to smoke him out, ultimately trapping him and the animals in the flaming building. Robert is badly disfigured by the fire, and all of the horses perish.

Battery Sergeant Major Joyce – The officer who supervises the **horse** detail aboard the *S.S. Massanabie*. After Robert Ross takes over Harris's job of watching over the horses, B.S.M. Joyce is the one who delivers the news that one of the horses has broken its leg and that Robert must shoot it. He is compassionate and understanding toward Robert, who becomes physically ill at the mere thought of killing the animal.

Ella – A prostitute who works at Maria Dreyfus's brothel, Wet Goods. She pairs up with Robert Ross when his fellow soldiers at the army training camp pressure him into going to the brothel. During their night together, Ella alternates between compassion and frustration toward Robert's sexual inexperience and hesitance, since she is only paid if the man has sex with her. Her own nonchalant attitude toward sex is what convinces Robert to look through a spy hole into the adjoining room, where he is horrified to see Captain Taffler having sex with a man (the Swede).

Regis – A young picket from Regina, Saskatchewan who cares for the military **horses** in the hold of the *S.S. Massanabie*. Regis is only sixteen, having lied about his age in order to enlist in the army. He is skittish and childish, and even tells Robert Ross that he promised his mother he would not drink during his time overseas. Regis is the last remaining picket present when Robert has to shoot a horse that breaks its leg, and, like Robert, is deeply upset by the incident.

Major Ralph Terry – One of the soldiers recovering at St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital. Major Terry initially has a romantic relationship with Barbara d'Orsey, but Barbara loses interest in him when Robert Ross arrives. Juliet d'Orsey mischievously puts a Pin the Tail on the Donkey game under Major Terry's door after she overhears Barbara call him a jackass. Major Terry, thinking this was Barbara's doing, is humiliated and leaves St. Aubyn's soon after.

Michael d'Orsey – The second child of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's, who own St. Aubyn's abbey in London. He is the brother of Juliet, Barbara, Clive, and Temple d'Orsey. Like Clive, Michael fights in World War I and returns to St. Aubyn's to rest. He finds Clive's pacifist friends detestable, believing that they ruin the morale of the war effort.

The Marquis of St. Aubyn's – The aristocratic owner of St. Aubyn's abbey in London. He is the husband of Lady Emmeline d'Orsey and the father of Juliet, Barbara, Clive, Michael, and Temple d'Orsey. The Marquis is a miserable man who loathes his family and is unfaithful to his wife. At the urging of Lady Emmeline, he agrees to have St. Aubyn's converted into a convalescence hospital during World War I.

Lady Emmeline d'Orsey / The Marchioness of St. Aubyn's – The wife of the Marquis of St. Aubyn's and mother of Juliet, Barbara, Clive, Michael, and Temple d'Orsey. Her husband owns the St. Aubyn's abbey in London, which she convinces him to convert into a convalescence hospital where soldiers can rest and recover during World War I. Lady Emmeline adores her children and takes pride in being a wife and mother, but longs for a simpler life.

Clinton Brown – One of Peggy Ross's many boyfriends. Clinton attends Harvard University before he enlists in World War I and eventually dies in the battle for Belleau Wood in 1918. Seeing Clinton in his military uniform at Rowena's funeral in 1915 is what first gives Robert the idea to enlist in the army.

The Reader – Findley occasionally refers to the reader from a second-person point of view, creating the sense that the reader is a direct participant in the story. At the beginning and end of the novel, the reader is looking through archives of Robert's family photographs and other documents in the present day.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Private Cassles – The soldier whom Robert Ross allegedly shoots and kills when he tries to prevent Robert from passing through La Chodrelle. This act is what gives rise to Major Mickle pursuing Robert and trapping him in the burning barn.

Heather Lawson – A young woman whom Robert Ross dates before he goes off to war. Heather confuses Robert, and he is not nearly as interested in her as she is in him. They have a falling-out after she yells at him in the middle of a Ross family party.

Captain Ord – One of the men who shares a stateroom with Robert Ross, Clifford Purchas, and Harris on the *S.S. Massanabie*. On the second day at sea, he claims to have lost his voice and spends the rest of the voyage drinking brandy and reading G.A. Henty novels in bed.

Temple d'Orsey – The youngest child of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's, who own St. Aubyn's abbey in London. She is the sister of Juliet, Barbara, Clive, and Michael d'Orsey. At five years old, Temple is twelve-year-old Juliet's only playmate.

The Swede – A large, mute Swedish man who greets Robert Ross and the other soldiers at the door on their way into the Wet Goods brothel. Robert is later shocked to see the Swede and Captain Taffler having intercourse wherein they role-play as a **horse** and a rider.

Maria Dreyfus – The madam of the Wet Goods brothel outside of Lethbridge, Alberta, where Robert is training for the army. She is a small Jewish woman with frizzy red hair, a German accent, and an intimidating presence.

Roots – A man who is assigned to convoy duty with Robert Ross in Belgium and goes through the battle of St. Eloi with Robert and the other soldiers.

Teddy Budge – An employee from the Raymond/Ross Industries factory whom Mr. Ross hires to kill Rowena's pet rabbits after her death.

TERMS

Hydrocephalus – A condition in which excess spinal fluid builds up in a person's brain cavities, creating internal pressure and potentially causing headaches, cognition problems, physical impairments, and other severe health issues. **Robert Ross**'s older sister, **Rowena**, is afflicted with this illness. She is bound to a wheelchair and has exceeded her life expectancy by a decade when she dies in an accident at age twenty-five.

Mustard gas – A toxic gas used as a chemical warfare agent in World War I. It caused severe chemical burns and painful blisters on the skin and inside the lungs, as well as eye damage. In the long-term, it led to genetic mutations and cancer among war veterans who were exposed to the gas.

The Allied Powers – The coalition of countries who fought in opposition to the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey) in World War I. The Allied Powers included Canada, Britain, and France, among many other nations.

Trench warfare – A style of combat in which troops are stationed in trenches dug into the ground as a means of protection from gunfire and artillery. Trench warfare in World War I was grueling and traumatic for soldiers, as men spent long stretches of time in these mud-filled trenches and often developed waterborne diseases or drowned if they were not wounded or killed by enemy fire.

Huns – A derogatory epithet for the German forces in World War I that was coined by British propaganda. The term is a reference to Attila the Hun, a leader who ruthlessly invaded the ancient Roman Empire throughout the 4th century A.D.

Dugout – Shelters dug into the sides of trenches in World War I to protect soldiers from shellfire. Dugouts often contained simple furniture such as tables and bunkbeds where men could eat and rest.

No Man's Land – A military term used to describe unoccupied land that has been devastated by battle or poses uncertain threats. There were various reasons why an area might be deemed "No Man's Land" during World War I—it may have been heavily defended by enemy forces, riddled with craters, or contaminated by chemical weapons like mustard gas.

Convalescence hospital – Homes and other private buildings that were converted into auxiliary hospitals for soldiers in World War I, due to the military's underestimation of the war's casualties. At these makeshift hospitals, soldiers would either heal from injuries or rest on leave. The d'Orsey family's abbey, St. Aubyn's, is converted into a convalescence hospital in the novel.

Shell shock – A term first coined during World War I that referred to the slew of painful mental symptoms that many soldiers grappled with. Common symptoms include intrusive flashbacks, dissociation, and nightmares. It can also lead to poor emotional regulation, substance abuse, and suicide. Shell shock was rampant among soldiers in World War I, who were left traumatized by the violence they experienced. It is likely that **Levitt** and **Captain Taffler**, among others in the novel, suffer from shell shock. Shell shock is clearly what contemporary readers know as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but the name PTSD didn't become widely used until after the Vietnam War, so the book never calls it as such.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in

black and white.

TRAUMA AND WAR

As a work of postmodern literature, *The Wars* is characteristically disorienting. Findley rapidly switches among different points of view and narrative structures, a stylistic choice that parallels the traumatic, fragmentary nature of World War I at the center of the storyline. The novel examines the war both from the European battlefront and the Canadian home front, showing the visceral pain of war inflicted on the bodies and minds of soldiers, as well as the residual effects on their families and societies. The horrors of war drive Robert Ross's fellow soldiers to self-destructive madness, while Robert's family in Canada and Western society as a whole similarly deteriorate. By portraying these multiple scales of trauma alongside one another, Findley sheds light on the disorienting senselessness of World War I and its far-reaching ability to physically and mentally fragment individuals, as well as the broader groups to which they belong. In doing so, the novel seeks to understand and humanize the inherently dehumanizing effects of war.

In the novel, the foremost victims of World War I's traumatic effects are Robert's comrades, particularly his friends Levitt and Captain Taffler, who directly experience the war's violence. This manifests physically, as the bodies of the soldiers are literally fragmented by unprecedentedly destructive modern weaponry. It also results in mental strife, as their minds and spirits are left disoriented and traumatized by shell shock. Robert, a Second Lieutenant in the Canadian Army, loses countless men throughout his time at war. The lives of these soldiers are "obscured by violence," as millions die torturous deaths such as drowning in the **muddy** trenches or being consumed by the infernos of flamethrowers. This mass trivialization and destruction of human life fragments not only the soldiers' physical bodies, but their mental wellbeing.

While Robert grows somewhat desensitized to this constant violence, many men are driven to the brink of insanity, including Robert's fellow junior officer Levitt. Levitt is a devout reader of *Clausewitz on War*, a military strategy book that decries the use of "passive" modern weapons such as artillery, as they also make men passive and turn war into a disorienting experience where enemies are separated and depersonalized from each other. Levitt embodies this reality on a personal level, as he becomes catatonic with shell shock after their dugout is bombed by Germans, demonstrating the futility of trying to make sense of a war that fundamentally fragments the battlefield as well as the men who fight on it. Captain Taffler is another soldier who is physically and mentally devastated by the war. Although Robert initially looks up to him as a model of masculine confidence and competence, Taffler falls from glory after he loses both arms in battle and becomes mentally ill. He is sent to St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital to heal, where he attempts suicide by unwrapping his wounds and rubbing them on a wall to make them bleed. Taffler's terrible injuries and subsequent descent into madness show war's ability to irreparably shatter soldiers' bodies and minds into disparate pieces.

In addition to devastating those characters in *The Wars* who directly participate in battle, the war also wreaks havoc on the families of soldiers, epitomized by the gradual physical and mental decline of Robert's mother, Mrs. Ross. The structure of the Ross family has already been fragmented by the accidental deaths of Rowena (Thomas and Mrs. Ross's oldest child) and Monty Miles Raymond (Mrs. Ross's younger brother). This initial layer of tragedy leaves the family weakened and terrified when Robert enlists in the army, reflecting war's ability to further harm already traumatized individuals. Mrs. Ross, already well-acquainted with the random senselessness of death, is particularly affected by the stress of having a son overseas. Her acute awareness of the war's horrors leads her to descend into alcoholism, paranoia, erratic behavior, and eventual **blindness**. This all-encompassing incapacitation, compounded by Robert's absence, fragments the Ross family into dysfunction as Mrs. Ross is unfit to fulfill her role as a wife and mother. The Rosses' collective decay demonstrates the war's potential to destroy the lives of families on the home front as well as those of soldiers fighting overseas.

The horrific fates of Robert's comrades, as well as the decline of the Ross family, show war's far-reaching ability to destroy people's lives. Throughout the novel, the geopolitical devastation of World War I, reinforced by the widespread trauma of individuals and families, radiate outward to reshape Western culture as a whole. The narration frequently references this reality alongside Robert's story, describing the "muddied" and somber atmosphere of Canadian society during the war as well as the immense swaths of farmland and entire towns devastated by European battles. By acknowledging these broad social and geographic changes alongside more individualized examples, the novel highlights the war's complexity in its ability to disrupt normalcy on both large and small scales.

This radical restructuring of society has a circular relationship with individual and familial trauma, as people's personal experiences are both a cause and an effect of the changing Western world. The collective disillusionment of individuals causes Marian Turner, a military nurse who takes care of Robert, to hold the belief that ordinary people are the ones who make the world "monstrous, complacent, and mad." This sentiment reflects the multilayered crises of the West during this time, as people struggled to piece together former notions of faith, tradition, and meaning that were fragmented by the evil, destructive nature of humanity brought out by World War I. Findley's disorienting entanglement of these various scales of trauma reinforces the novel's title, *The Wars*, which implies that

there are numerous personal "wars" being fought beyond the battlefield during any given conflict, and that these parallel struggles are often indiscernible from one another. By constructing the narrative outwardly from its central focus on the direct experiences of soldiers, Findley humanizes the pain that these men and their families experienced in World War I and contextualizes their struggles within the era's broader historical shifts.

BLAME, REVENGE, AND JUSTICE

In *The Wars*, Robert Ross and his family experience profound tragedies, many of which cannot be logically blamed on any individual or singular force. Throughout the novel, Robert and his mother, Mrs. Ross, engage in parallel struggles of guilt over their personal grief as well as the horrors of World War I, and each try to create an artificial sense of justice. Mrs. Ross's ongoing search for retribution causes self-destruction, while Robert's causes him to act as a moral arbiter on the battlefield and exact revenge in a manner that destroys his life as well as the lives of innocent beings. Robert and Mrs. Ross's guilt-fueled attempts at finding meaning in loss ultimately fail and cause more harm than good, demonstrating the destructive futility of trying to shoulder blame or seek justice for senseless tragedies, particularly within the context of war.

The first tragedy to strike the Ross family is the loss of their handicapped child, Rowena, who falls from her wheelchair to her death. Though clearly a freak accident, Mrs. Ross and Robert both blame themselves for her death, internalizing their guilt in a manner that causes additional suffering, rather than alleviation, for the family. Mrs. Ross, who also lost her young brother Monty in an accident, is jaded by loss. After Rowena dies, she tells Robert that "no one belongs to anyone" and that "I can't keep anyone alive." This attitude implies that Mrs. Ross's self-blame and perceived failure as a sister and mother now manifest outwardly in a bitter resignation toward life itself. As a result, she decides to seek revenge on an innocent party, demanding that Rowena's pet rabbits be killed. No real sense of closure comes about from this act, however, and it only adds to the family's trauma. Robert, by contrast, has always felt like Rowena's "guardian," and blames himself for the accident because he believes that he should have been watching her when she fell. Rather than seeking external vengeance, Robert internalizes his guilt and decides to punish himself and escape the pain of his sister's death by enlisting in the army. Though different from his mother's response, his reaction is a similarly futile expression of self-blame, as it fails to imbue an inherently senseless tragedy with meaning and further fractures the Ross family.

Rowena's death serves as the initial layer of the self-blame that plagues Mrs. Ross and Robert throughout the novel. Once Robert goes off to war, his struggles with guilt continue to parallel his mother's as they each try and fail to gain a sense of justice for the traumatic violence of World War I. While her community is deeply patriotic, Mrs. Ross experiences a crisis of faith and demands to know "What does it mean—to kill your children?" As the citizen of a country that sends young men like her son off to war, she feels a sense of guilt by association. Mrs. Ross takes this out on herself by enduring long walks in Canada's harsh **elements**, akin to Robert's own struggles in trench warfare. As with her revenge on the rabbits, Mrs. Ross does not achieve any kind of meaningful retribution from this self-inflicted punishment, showing the senselessness of trying to shoulder the blame for a problem as massive and complex as war. Robert, too, feels guilty by association as a soldier despite the fact that he did not cause the conflict in which he is fighting. He particularly blames himself over the deaths of the soldiers he oversees as a Second Lieutenant, as well as the young German soldier he mistakes as a threat to his men and needlessly kills in their defense. Robert is haunted by guilt over these losses; rather than giving him a sense of resolution or justice, this self-blame only eats away at Robert and makes his time overseas all the more emotionally trying.

Robert's ongoing internalized self-blame only dissipates at the end of the novel when he is confronted with a direct injustice that contrasts the otherwise indirect, depersonalized violence he has experienced in World War I up until this point. Robert's murder of Captain Leather serves as his ultimate act of retribution against the horrors of war, but his decision to exact revenge only culminates in his own suffering and the deaths of innocent animals. Robert shoots and kills Captain Leather after Leather refuses to let Robert save their company's **horses** and mules from shellfire and shoots Devlin for disobeying orders. Robert then sets the animals free and saves an additional train car full of horses from an approaching fire. Although his actions are driven by empathy and a sense of justice, his efforts are ultimately in vain, as his own choices lead him to be trapped with the animals in a flaming barn. In disobeying orders to free the animals and committing a war crime by killing Leather, Robert believes that this is the morally right course of action in spite of disobeying orders and going against the army's code of conduct. This decision to act as a moral arbiter could be construed as either heroism or betrayal, but his motivations ultimately do not matter, as all of the animals perish in the fire and Robert is left near-dead and badly disfigured. Robert's acts of retribution do not bring about any peace or resolution, as they only cause more tragedy (the deaths of Devlin, Captain Leather, and the animals) rather than bringing about justice.

Through Robert and Mrs. Ross's parallel experiences with guilt and revenge, Findley highlights tragedy's ability to instill a desire for retribution. Though motivated by empathy, Robert's final decision to act as a moral arbiter is a violation of Carl von Clausewitz's prophetic warning in the novel's epigraph: "In such dangerous things as war the errors which proceed from a spirit

of benevolence are the worst." Robert's self-perceived act of justice ultimately causes more harm than good and demonstrates the futility of trying to avenge the innocent in the midst of an inherently unjust situation.

LOSS OF INNOCENCE

The Wars takes place during World War I, when Western society's idealism gradually turned to disillusionment. When Robert Ross, a young Canadian soldier, passes through his hometown on the way to military training, he does not recognize his once quiet, wholesome neighborhood's transition into a hotbed of the industrial war effort. While the novel frequently alludes to these broad cultural and economic changes, Findley focuses primarily on Robert and his fellow soldiers' personal loss of innocence in order to provide a more humanized context for the corrupting effects of war on society. By detailing soldiers' gradual loss of moral innocence alongside Robert's loss of sexual innocence, Findley demonstrates how forcing young men to witness and commit terrible acts of violence on the battlefield robs them of their virtue, and ultimately threatens to destroy the moral fabric of humanity.

Before the war, Robert and his fellow men are still distinctively boyish despite the adult role they are undertaking as soldiers, a contrast that shows just how innocent the young men are in contrast with the sobering trauma of World War I. After his sister Rowena's tragic death, Robert's mother tells him that he is a "grown man" and must kill Rowena's pet rabbits. While the family eventually hires Teddy Budge to kill them instead, this traumatic incident (in combination with Rowena's death) is Robert's first significant departure from childhood at age eighteen, as Rowena and her rabbits were the ultimate embodiment of purity and innocence. Although Robert's enlistment in the army marks an acceptance of his fleeting childhood, he and his compatriots remain relatively innocent and immature. Robert's timidity, insecurity, and sexual inexperience are exemplified by his mortifying night at the brothel during military training. Here, he has an awkward encounter with a prostitute named Ella and is horrified to witness Captain Taffler having sex with a man (the Swede). Fellow young soldiers like Clifford and Regis also behave like adolescents rather than men, contrasting the harrowing conditions of war that will inevitably rob them of their boyhood.

Once they have shipped off to war, Robert and his men lose all remnants of this childhood innocence, as they are forced to witness and commit acts that tarnish their formerly naïve view of the world. The extreme moral atrocities they are faced with as soldiers show the traumatic nature of their transition into adulthood in comparison with their former notions of morality. Robert's forced shooting of an injured **horse** on the ship journey from Canada to England marks the beginning of his descent into lost innocence. This passage is ironic because the killing of Rowena's rabbits is what solidified Robert's decision to escape his family and enlist in the army, yet here he is made to commit the same act that so distressed him. There is no escape from this obligatory transition into manhood, whether from his family or from the military. Robert's killing of the German soldier whom he mistakes as a threat is another example of how young men lose their moral innocence in war. While Robert is exceptionally empathetic and kind, his preemptive murder of the German in defense of his men again demonstrates how war renders society's moral norms irrelevant, as he is essentially forced into a terrible act that he would never have committed otherwise.

This loss of moral innocence is a collective one that affects all of Robert's fellow soldiers and serves as a parallel to Robert's loss of sexual innocence. This shift shows war's ability to cause not only death and destruction, but to encourage a pervasive tendency for violence among soldiers that can pervert sex into an act of domination rather than an expression of love. When twelve-year-old Juliet d'Orsey tries to sneak into Robert's room at St. Aubyn's convalescence hospital to pull a childish prank, she is instead horrified to see Robert and her sister Barbara having alarmingly violent sex. This moment represents how Robert's experiences at war have changed him. Just a few months before, he was terrified of sex and disturbed by what he saw in the brothel. Now, the roles are reversed, as Robert's desensitization to sex parallels his desensitization to the war, and he indirectly corrupts Juliet's innocence in the same way Taffler corrupted his. Soon after this passage, Robert is brutally raped by four men at Asile Desolé, an insane asylum where soldiers take refuge to bathe and rest. Realizing that his assailants were soldiers (as opposed to the asylum's "crazies"), Robert burns his only photo of Rowena, as he cannot bear the thought of her purity existing in such a perverse world. This horrific assault demonstrates the moral depravity of war in its potential to corrupt soldiers' moral standards and degrade fundamental elements of the human experience.

Robert and his comrades' gradual loss of moral and sexual innocence, culminating in Robert's rape, is an embodiment of Western society's collective degradation during World War I. The changes in Robert's character, as well as his fellow soldier's willingness to commit this atrocity against him, ultimately demonstrate war's ability to strip men of their virtue and demoralize the very essence of humanity.

HONOR, DUTY, AND HEROISM

In *The Wars*, nineteen-year-old Robert Ross and the other young men of his generation are tasked with defending their countries in World War I. As a result, their sense of honor is not defined by their individual accomplishments in life, but by their capacity for obeying orders and achieving victory in the war. Rather than going to college, starting careers, or having families, they long for the

imminent danger of the battlefield that they believe will imbue their lives with meaning and allow them to leave behind valiant legacies. This desire to fight and die honorably leads Robert and his fellow soldiers to glorify battle and self-sacrifice, an all-consuming motivation that ultimately costs Robert the heroic reputation he so desperately desires.

Although Robert and his fellow soldiers are notably young and innocent when they ship off overseas, their involvement in World War I causes them to glorify otherwise violent and tragic acts. Before Robert joins the army, his sense of duty comes from his role as the self-appointed "guardian" of his disabled sister, Rowena. After Rowena's death, however, Robert loses this sense of purpose, and enlists in the military out of both guilt and a desire to reclaim his role as a protector. Even before Robert ships off, he has romantic notions of war, fantasizing about his legacy as a brave soldier worthy of remembrance. In training, he aspires to find a masculine role model who can teach him how to kill enemies "as an exercise of the will." As a sensitive, empathetic young man, Robert would likely never have considered killing people or dying young as admirable traits of manhood, were it not for the war. Many of Robert's fellow newcomers feel similarly about fighting and dying in war; Clifford Purchas, an old classmate of Robert's, views battle as "a deadly serious and heaven-sent chance to become a man." Levitt, another junior officer in Robert's company, also longs to see combat, feeling that he is not a real soldier unless he is in immediate danger. Their collective glorification of fighting demonstrates war's tendency to create a violent, self-destructive mindset in young men.

As the war progresses, Robert and the other soldiers continue to be motivated by a sense of duty to fight and die honorably. On the battlefield, young soldiers dutifully help their fellow men and often risk their own safety in order to save one another. As a Second Lieutenant overseeing dozens of soldiers, Robert is often forced to think and act under extreme pressure to keep them safe, as when he saves his men from a chlorine gas attack during the Battle of Eloi using urine-soaked rags. His fellow soldiers, too, put themselves in jeopardy to save one another. At one point, Levitt braves a road riddled with dense fog and deadly sinkholes in order to guide Robert and Poole to safety. This pervasive self-sacrificial mindset shows that the soldiers are focused on duty and honor above all else—including their own safety.

This sense of duty leads Robert to take justice into his own hands at the end of the novel, driving him to an act of self-perceived heroism that ironically robs him of the honor he craves. Robert kills Captain Leather after Leather refuses to let Robert save their company's animals and Leather shoots Devlin, another soldier, for disobeying orders. This decision ultimately leads to Robert and the **horses** he tries to save being trapped in a burning barn, where Robert is badly injured, and all of the animals perish. Although Robert believes that these drastic measures are what is most honorable and morally correct in the situation, others do not view him as a hero—his fellow soldiers (and his own family) disown him as a traitor. By going against his prescribed duty of obeying orders in order to stand up for what he personally believes is right, Robert ultimately brands himself as dishonorable in the public eye. While Robert and the other young soldiers in the novel are hyper-focused on serving their countries, families, and fellow men honorably, this motivation proves to be self-destructive for Robert in the end. Though the men's self-sacrificial actions are honorable in the context of World War I's harrowing violence, Robert's disgraced downfall shows the danger of trying to achieve glory by violent means.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HORSES

As horses are a traditional symbol of freedom, Robert Ross's exposure to their captivity and mistreatment as military animals parallels his gradual loss of innocence throughout the novel and highlights World War I's devaluation of both human and animal lives. Before shipping off to Europe, Robert is assigned to a detail that breaks wild mustangs. During this time, he witnesses Captain Taffler and the Swede sexually role-playing as a horse and a rider at Wet Goods brothel, a sight that perverts Robert's innocent association with horses and one of many instances that tarnish his moral and sexual innocence while at war. Another incident occurs on the ship journey to England, when Robert takes over Harris's duty of overseeing the horses on board. The animals are kept in filthy, cramped conditions on the ship, causing one of them to break its leg. Both Robert and Regis the picket are deeply disturbed when Robert is forced to shoot this horse in order to end its suffering, highlighting the injustice of forcing horses to be military animals, as the horse would not have been needlessly injured or killed this way in the wild. And, much like Mrs. Ross's killing of Rowena's pet rabbits, Robert's shooting of this horse further distances him from his childhood naiveté.

Just as Rodwell is traumatized and driven to suicide when he is forced to watch soldiers torturing small animals, Robert feels pushed to commit drastic measures as he witnesses the army's ongoing cruel treatment of military horses. During the war, as soldiers sink into the **mud** and drown to death in the trenches, their horses die along with them. Robert is horrified by the senselessness of forcing these inherently nonviolent creatures into the brutality of a manmade conflict, believing that "If an animal had done this—we would call it mad and shoot it." When Captain Leather refuses to let Robert free their company's

horses and mules from shellfire, Robert takes justice into his own hands by disobeying orders, killing Leather, and committing a series of war crimes in attempts to free these animals from their fate of being burned alive. The suffering and painful deaths that horses are forced to endure as military animals demonstrate the inhumane reality of dragging animals into manmade conflicts in which they have no understanding or stake. Their mistreatment is a symbolic representation of the war's trivialization of life, a reality which spurs Robert's loss of innocence as he becomes disillusioned and maddened by the violence and moral corruption around him.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

Throughout the novel, Robert Ross and his fellow soldiers continually encounter water, air, earth, and fire in various forms. As the men experience the violence of World War I, these four elements come to represent their ongoing struggle between life and death. Water signifies the life-altering changes that war brings about, as Robert either bathes or comes into contact with this element just before many of his major transitions as a soldier. For example, he soaks in the bathtub before he enlists in the army, crosses the ocean on his journey to Europe, and bathes at Asile Desolé before he is raped by fellow soldiers. Air represents the men's lack of control and fleeting optimism amidst the ongoing fight for their lives, as chlorine and mustard gas attacks often disrupt otherwise peaceful moments, filling the air with suffocating fog and depriving them of oxygen. Earth reflects the dehumanization and gruesome death inherent to trench warfare, as thousands of soldiers die unceremoniously by drowning in the muddy trenches. Similar to earth, fire represents the all-consuming pain and destruction of war. Many soldiers die torturous deaths in infernos caused by flamethrowers and bombs. Fire is what finally destroys Robert's life at the end of the novel, as the incident with the **horses** in the burning barn disfigures his body and brands him as a traitor.

While these harrowing events are taking place in Europe, Robert's mother, Mrs. Ross forces herself out into the harsh Canadian elements (rain, snow, wind, and mud) and is captivated by the news of a fire that destroys the Ottawa Parliament Building. This fascination seemingly occurs because coming into contact with the four elements bridges the gap between what soldiers are experiencing on the battlefront and what she and other civilians are experiencing on the home front. These natural forces—water, air, earth, and fire—are powerful in their ability to disrupt lives and bring about change, serving as a parallel to the all-encompassing societal disruption that World War I brings about. The four elements ultimately symbolize the ongoing struggle for life and the destructive alterations of mind, body, and spirit that Robert and the other soldiers experience at war.

EYES

Eyes represent the intrinsic connection and vulnerability that human beings share, as well as the dehumanizing guilt and shame associated with World War I. After having to shoot and kill a **horse** with a broken leg aboard the S.S. Massanabie, Robert Ross does not want to turn on a lantern for fear of seeing Regis the picket's eyes, knowing that he will see his own shame reflected back at him in the young man's eyes. During the war, just before Robert mistakenly kills an unarmed German soldier in preemptive defense of his men, the soldier lowers his binoculars and Robert looks directly at him. This eye contact is a simple but significant moment of vulnerability shared by two young men, as they are both able to put a face to the depersonalized enemy they have been fighting throughout the war. This humanization makes Robert's mistake of shooting the soldier all the more guilt-inducing and shows the enduring connection between people even in the midst of a violent conflict.

Mrs. Ross's eyes also play a significant role in the story. After Robert goes off to fight in Europe, she begins wearing dark glasses and closing her eyes when she passes by people on the street, an outward representation of the guilt she feels over her country sending young men like her son off to die in the war. When she receives the news that Robert is missing in action, Mrs. Ross is so distraught that she claims to go blind. Even though she and Robert left each other on bad terms before he enlisted in the army and are now thousands of miles away, the shame-induced covering of her eyes and the eventual loss of her eyesight show that she has remained viscerally connected to his struggles.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Australia edition of *The Wars* published in 1995.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ What you have to accept at the outset is this: many men have died like Robert Ross, obscured by violence. Lawrence was hurled against a wall—Scott entombed in ice and wind—Mallory blasted on the face of Everest. Lost. We're told Euripides was killed by dogs—and this is all we know. The flesh was torn and scattered—eaten. Ross was consumed by fire. These are like statements: "*pay attention*!" People can only be found in what they do.

Related Characters: The Reader, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the first few chapters of *The Wars*, Findley references the reader directly and makes "you" a participatory character who is looking through archives of Robert Ross's old family photographs and other documents in the present day. The reader's interest in the details of Robert's civilian life is ironic, since Findley implies just before this passage that people who knew Robert tend to focus solely on his military service and the gruesome circumstances of his death. He references T.E. Lawrence, Robert Falcon Scott, George Mallory, and Euripides (all of whom were honored historical figures who died similarly painful deaths) in order to show that Robert's fate is not unique—many other men's legacies have been overshadowed by a dramatic demise. This notion is emphasized by his assertion that "people can only be found in what they do," which coincides with Robert and his fellow young soldiers' obsession with fighting and dying honorably. Rather than being judged based on who they were before the war, soldiers like Robert are only remembered for what they do during the war, particularly the sense of duty and self-sacrifice (or lack thereof) that they display during battle. By imploring the reader to "pay attention," Findley asks that the reader consider Robert's actions carefully as the narrative unfolds and implies that there may be more complexity to his story than his dishonorable reputation suggests.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "He was unique. But you have to be careful, searching his story out. I've been through it all, you know…the whole of this extraordinary century—and it's not the extraordinary people who've prevailed upon its madness. Quite the opposite. Oh—far from it! It's the ordinary men and women who've made us what we are. Monstrous, complacent and mad."

Related Characters: Marian / Miss Turner (speaker), The Reader, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

The novel includes occasional present-day interviews with Marian Turner, a French nurse who took care of Robert Ross after he was severely burned during World War I. In this transcript, she recalls the grim circumstances of Robert's death and warns the reader to be careful in searching for information about his story. Her description of Robert as "unique" suggests that he was somehow extraordinary compared to other people, and that his uniqueness is what made him particularly vulnerable to the horrors of war. Miss Turner's outlook on the war is different from most of her contemporaries and traditional historical narratives. Rather than elevating leaders from World War I and World War II to the status of greatness, she believes that they are just ordinary men who appealed to the "basest instincts" of malevolence that exist within everyone—not just within infamous historical figures. This outlook implies that all people, regardless of their status or influence, are equally susceptible to moral corruption and capable of perpetuating violent atrocities. Rather than placing sole blame on the military or political elites, Miss Turner places the onus for World War I on society as a whole.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ All these actors were obeying some kind of fate we call "revenge." Because a girl had died—and her rabbits had survived her.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ross, Mr. Thomas Ross, Teddy Budge, Robert Ross, Rowena Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

After the tragic death of Robert Ross's older sister Rowena, Mrs. Ross insists that Robert must kill Rowena's pet rabbits. He refuses, so Mr. Ross hires his employee, Teddy Budge, to kill them instead. By defining this cast of characters as "actors" and characterizing the act of killing the rabbits as fated revenge, Findley implies that loss has the ability to create an all-consuming blame that causes people to senselessly seek out retribution. Rather than acting rationally, Mrs. Ross is consumed by grief and raw emotion. Killing the rabbits does not bring about any sense of justice, however, and only further traumatizes the already grief-stricken Ross family, demonstrating the destructive futility of seeking revenge for an accidental tragedy for which no one can logically be blamed.

This incident has a particularly devastating effect on Robert, who was extremely close with Rowena and viewed himself as her "guardian." Mrs. Ross's initial insistence that Robert must kill the rabbits because he is a grown man indicates a symbolic end to his childhood, as he is expected to personally destroy his only remaining connection to

Rowena, whom he spent his entire upbringing unconditionally loving and protecting. In this sense, the killing of Rowena's rabbits marks the beginning of Robert's gradual loss of innocence throughout the novel, as the animals are the last tangible embodiment of his sister's pure, kind spirit.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Nothing he'd read had covered this situation. Whores, of course, had been discussed at school but no one actually ever said *this is what you do*. They'd made it all up. But what they'd made up was not like this. At all. They'd flown from trapezes and made love in bath tubs and ravished several women to the bed posts, but no one had ever sat in a room with lilac wallpaper and been asked if there was "nothing special you'd like."

Related Characters: Ella, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39-40

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of his army training in Lethbridge, Alberta, Robert Ross's fellow soldiers convince him to go to the Wet Goods brothel. Due to his sexual inexperience up until this point, Robert is extremely nervous when he is paired up with a prostitute named Ella and taken to one of the bedrooms upstairs. The contrast between Robert's anxiety in this moment and the wild stories his schoolmates told him about prostitutes suggests that both Robert and other men his age are innocent and naïve of the adult world into which they are transitioning. Sex was a socially taboo topic in the early 20th century, an ironic reality considering that young men were expected to forfeit their innocence in other ways—namely, by voluntarily enlisting in a violent war. Meeting Ella shatters Robert's former romanticized notions of sex, as his discomfort and uncertainty in her presence feels worlds away from the fabricated exploits of his friends. In addition to disrupting his sexual naiveté, this passage demonstrates Robert's general lack of life experience as an eighteen-year-old and implies that his military training has not prepared him for the traumatic loss of innocence he is sure to experience at war.

Part 1, Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ 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 and where he was being taken to so fast there wasn't even time to stop?

Related Characters: Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

On the train ride from Lethbridge, Alberta to Kingston, Ontario for additional military training, Robert Ross passes through his hometown. He is unsettled by the ways in which his familiar surroundings have changed during his time away, as the idyllic suburban setting he grew up with has been transformed into an industrialized landscape concentrated on the war effort. Beyond superficial changes, this cultural shift of his hometown has a profoundly disorienting impact on Robert. Having already experienced the changes of losing his sister, Rowena, and leaving the rest of his family behind, the transformation in his surroundings mirrors his internal transformation as he abandons the innocent comforts of childhood to become a soldier.

This passage also holds implications about World War I's broader societal impacts. In 1915, when this part of the story takes place, the world was becoming increasingly industrialized as modern technologies such as automobiles and telephones started to become mainstream consumer products. This large-scale shift toward industrialization was only magnified by World War I, as Canada and other nations involved in the war were forced to meet the demand for weapons and ammunition on the battlefront. Military triumph, patriotism, and nationalism took precedence over the local cultures of small towns. The transformation of Robert's hometown was not unique, as the trauma of the war forced many formerly peaceful communities to undergo a shift in values and priorities.

Part 1, Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ Oddly, too, he didn't feel like sending love to anyone. It seemed unmanly. What he did do was enclose a photograph (official) and say to his father: "This will show you that my draft makes a brawling, husky lot of men. Not quite gunners or drivers yet—just as I can't quite feel that I am a soldier myself."

Related Characters: Robert Ross (speaker), Peggy Ross, Clifford Purchas, Mr. Thomas Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Just before he ships off to England, Robert Ross writes his father, Thomas Ross, to thank him for coming to see him in Montreal and to tell him that the Colt revolver his father had given him was the wrong type. Clifford suggests that he also "send his love" to his sister Peggy, but Robert feels that this would be a sign of weakness. This belief signifies a loss of innocence, as Robert's role as a soldier leaves him feeling disconnected from his family and disillusioned with the pleasantries of civilian life. Robert's boasting tone and emphasis on the toughness of his fellow men in his letter also shows his desire to appear formidable and masculine, particularly in the eyes of his father. This attitude is pervasive among Robert's fellow soldiers before and during war, suggesting that the young men of Robert's generation share a common motivation: earning an honorable reputation and the respect of their fellow soldiers, families, and countries.

Part 1, Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "I do not understand. I don't. I won't. I can't. Why is this happening to us, Davenport? What does it mean—to kill your children? Kill them and then…go in there and sing about it! What does that mean?" She wept—but angrily.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ross (speaker), Robert Ross, Miss Davenport

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

On the same day that Robert ships off to England, Mrs. Ross's close friend, Miss Davenport, attends church with the Ross family. On this particular day, there is a military regiment in the church parade and the bishop's sermon is "bloodthirsty" in its support of the war. Mrs. Ross is so disgusted by this that she walks out of the service, accompanied by Miss Davenport, to smoke a cigarette and drink from a flask. Her outburst asking Davenport what it means "to kill your children" implies that Mrs. Ross is harboring self-blame over the fact that Robert is fighting in the war. It also shows that she cannot make sense of how the war effort can logically be supported by Christians like herself, who traditionally advocate for nonviolence and the sanctity of all life. As the mother of a soldier, Mrs. Ross is struggling between patriotism and guilt, as she knows she is socially obligated to support the war yet cannot reconcile sending young men like her son off to die with her Christian sense of morality. These crises of self and faith are indicative of the broad societal shift that occurred during World War I, as both soldiers and civilizations were forced to make sense of the traumatic violence of war in the context of their traditional Western belief systems.

Part 1, Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ Ord said hoarsely that since he was going to do a boy's work he must read the "stuff of which boys are made" and smiled. Clifford didn't appreciate the humor. To him, the war was a deadly serious and heaven-sent choice to become a man.

Related Characters: Captain Ord (speaker), Clifford Purchas, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59-60

Explanation and Analysis

On the ship journey from Canada to England, Robert shares a stateroom with Captain Ord, Clifford Purchas, and Harris. Though the oldest and most experienced of the four (the rank of Captain typically requires several years of service as an officer), Ord does not put on airs of being more mature than his young companions. On the second day out to sea, he claims to have lost his voice and spends the rest of the journey in bed reading the novels of G.A. Henty, a late-19th century author whose books were geared toward young adults. Ord's decision to retreat to his room and read these novels suggests that he, unlike Robert and Clifford, is disillusioned with war and immerses himself in nostalgic childhood innocence as a temporary escape from thinking about the violence that he and the other soldiers will soon face. The fact that even older, more experienced soldiers are seeking refuge in the comforts of their childhood shows

just how traumatic war can be. Ord is no longer concerned with appearing tough or heroic—he simply wants to escape the trauma he has surely experienced throughout his military service.

Clifford, by contrast, is comparatively young and naïve. Having never experienced combat, he has romanticized notions of war and cannot understand why Captain Ord would want to retain a boyish mindset rather than willingly embrace manhood. His belief that war has the ability to turn a boy into a man shows that he is aware of war's ability to rob young men of their innocence, yet he does not view this as a negative. This attitude foreshadows his fate at war, as Robert eventually finds him dead in the middle of a road after several months of fighting. Clifford's willingness to put himself in danger and sacrifice himself while at war is ultimately what kills him, cutting his transition into manhood short.

Part 1, Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ But Mrs. Ross just stood at the windows of the private car and was afraid to go outdoors. Her mind was full of trolley cars and she knew that if she tried to cross the tracks, then she and everyone would be struck down. Instead, she waved from behind the glass and she watched her boy depart and her husband standing in his black fur coat—it seemed for hours—with his arm in the air and the snow falling down around him. *"Come on back to the raf', Huck, honey."* And this was what they called *the wars*.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ross (speaker), Rowena Ross, Monty Miles Raymond, Robert Ross, Mr. Thomas Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Robert Ross's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ross, take a train to Montreal to see him before he ships off for war. On the morning of their arrival, Mrs. Ross drinks a third of a bottle of scotch and is too intoxicated to go out with Mr. Ross to meet their son. Having lost both her daughter (Rowena Ross) and her younger brother (Monty Miles Raymond) in accidents, Mrs. Ross is tortured by grief and has slipped into alcoholism and mental instability during the months Robert has been away. Monty was killed by a trolley car many years before, and the fact that Mrs. Ross's mind is now "full of trolley cars" implies that the physical loss of Rowena and the symbolic loss of Robert have reawakened her repressed trauma over this incident and caused her to become paranoid. This reality shows the persistence of grief and trauma's ability to detrimentally affect both the mental and physical health of individuals.

Robert's enlistment in the army seems to be what triggers this deterioration in Mrs. Ross, demonstrating the far-reaching effects that war can have, not only on soldiers, but on their families. Knowing that Robert is risking his life by fighting overseas, she feels that she has lost another loved one in addition to Monty and Rowena, a reality with which she is unable to cope. Findley's reference to the novel's title, *The Wars*, in this passage suggests that Mrs. Ross's pain is a personal "war" that is analogous to the literal conflict in which Robert is fighting, implying that there are multiple levels of struggle taking place during any given war.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ The mud. There are no good similes. Mud must be a Flemish word. Mud was invented here. Mudland might have been its name. When it rains…the water rises at you out of the ground. It rises from your footprints—and an army marching over a field can cause a flood. In 1916, it was said that you "waded to the front." Men and horses sank from sight. They drowned in mud. Their graves, it seemed, just dug themselves and pulled them down.

Related Characters: Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

In early 1916, after finishing his initial leave in England, Robert Ross is posted in Belgium. It rains heavily throughout the winter season, and he and his fellow men are forced to battle the elements on their way to the front. Throughout the novel, the copious amount of mud on the battlefield and in the trenches is an ongoing symbol of World War I's trivialization of human life. During this time, modern developments in long-range projectiles and chemical weaponry created a sense of both physical and emotional distance between enemies, allowing all sides to dehumanize one another. Just as enemy forces passively and unceremoniously killed each other, the mud and other natural elements indiscriminately ended lives, as thousands (if not millions) of soldiers fell into sinkholes and drowned. The sheer scale and brutality of these deaths shows that the

trauma of the war was inescapable for soldiers, as they were forced to constantly witness the pain and death of their fellow men. In the novel, the men's horses often die along with them, demonstrating the inhumane conditions that military animals are forced to endure. Mud, while normally harmless, is personified as an agent of violence, showing just how perilous the everyday challenges of soldiers in World War I are.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

Poole said: "You needn't worry about the Germans here, sir. They're a long ways off yet. At least as much as two miles or more."

Levitt said: "Oh." He seemed somehow demoralized by this news. Perhaps he thought you weren't in the war unless the enemy could shoot you. In this he was much like everyone else who'd just arrived. You weren't a real soldier unless you were in jeopardy.

Related Characters: Levitt, Willie Poole (speaker), Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

In Belgium, junior officer Levitt walks through a mud-filled, fog-obscured landscape in Belgium in order to reach Robert Ross and his bugler, Willie Poole. He comments that he was glad to have Poole's bugle as he walked because it meant German troops would not shoot him since it could have been anyone blowing the instrument. When Poole assures him that the Germans are still some distance away, Levitt is disappointed rather than relieved. This mindset is common among many of the young soldiers who are fighting for the first time and echoes Clifford Purchas's sentiment in Part 1 about war being "a deadly serious and heaven-sent choice to become a man." Levitt's initial decision to ford a dangerous gap in a dike to help Robert and Poole demonstrates his conviction toward dutiful self-sacrifice, and his "demoralized" attitude toward the lack of Germans indicates that Levitt, like so many other young soldiers, believes that danger is synonymous with honor. This outlook suggests that war has become the sole source of meaning and indicator of manhood for young soldiers in World War I, who are missing out on a more traditional coming-of-age in the civilian world.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

From the gap, when Robert's eyes had cleared, he cast a single look back to where the man had been. He saw that the whole field was filled with floating shapes. The only sounds were the sounds of feeding and of wings. And of rafts.

Related Characters: Willie Poole, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

As he leads his men toward the Belgian front, Robert Ross falls into a sinkhole and nearly drowns to death. Through the fog, he sees another man lying on his side in the muddy field. Immediately after this, Robert is blinded by the natural chlorine gas emanating from the mud. As eyes are a symbol of human vulnerability throughout the novel, the fact that he is blinded directly after seeing the soldier lying in the mud implies that he is overcome with empathy toward the other man's pain. Once Robert's eyes clear, he sees dead bodies (which are being eaten by crows) all around him. This moment is one of many instances in which Robert is forced to acclimate and desensitize himself to the trauma of war. As a Second Lieutenant, Robert is the superior officer in his company, yet he asks Willie Poole's opinion on whether or not they should stop and bury the man he saw. This concern shows Robert's relative innocence at this point in the war, as individual deaths have significant impact on him due to his inexperience with violence. His gradual realization that there are hundreds of other men in the field who suffered the same fate is a visceral representation of World War I's massive scale and shows the hopelessness of trying to save fellow men during war, or of attempting to pay each fallen soldier the respect they deserve.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

All he wanted was a dream. Escape. But nobody dreams on a battlefield. There isn't any sleep that long. Dreams and distance are the same. If he could run away…like Longboat. Put on his canvas shoes and the old frayed shirt and tie the cardigan around his waist and take on the prairie…But he kept running into Taffler. Throwing stones. And Harris.

Related Characters: Harris, Captain Eugene Taffler, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

In his dugout in St. Eloi, Robert Ross struggles to fall asleep because he knows that he is unalert and vulnerable to unforeseen danger while unconscious. His desire to "run away" in a dream is both literal and figurative—he wants to physically escape the war, as well as to mentally distance himself from the traumatic violence he has witnessed thus far. Running is an ongoing symbol of freedom for Robert, as he idolized Longboat (a marathon runner) as a child and experienced a sense of peace while running with a coyote on the prairie during his army training. The fact that Robert's exhausted mind drifts to his childhood hero suggests that he longs for the innocence that he had before becoming a soldier. Yet, his intrusive thoughts of Harris indicate that his boyhood is fleeting, and he is unable to prevent his struggles at war from consuming him. His insomnia also shows just how significantly the trauma of his friend's death has affected him. Harris's unfortunate fate ultimately highlights the unjust senselessness of World War I, as he caught pneumonia due to the *S.S. Massanabie*'s uninhabitable conditions and died before ever seeing battle.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ You live when you live. No one else can ever live your life and no one else will ever know what you know. Then was then. Unique. And how does one explain it? You had a war. Every generation has a war—except this one. But that's beside the point. The thing is not to make excuses for the way you behaved—not to take refuge in tragedy—but 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. Think of any great man or woman. How can you separate them from the years in which they lived? You can't. Their greatness lies in their response to that moment.

Related Characters: Lady Juliet d'Orsey (speaker), Harris, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel, the narration includes occasional interviews with Juliet d'Orsey in the story's present-day time period, roughly sixty years after World War I. As she shares her memories of Robert Ross's close friendship with Harris, Juliet reflects that no one can properly understand their relationship in the present, since it is impossible to separate it from the context of the war. Her outlook parallels that of Miss Turner, who also believes that "great" historical figures are just ordinary people who lived through extraordinary circumstances. Juliet's comment about greatness lying in "response to that moment" foreshadows Robert's drastic actions at the end of the novel. Whereas his family and most of his fellow soldiers brand him as a dishonorable traitor for killing Captain Leather and causing a large number of horses to be killed, Juliet's commentary encourages the reader to view Robert's behavior from a different perspective. Rather than assigning judgment or blame from a modern-day perspective, the actions of Robert and other soldiers should be considered in the context of the specific circumstances they were facing in World War I.

❝ And what I hate these days is the people who weren't there and they look back and say we became inured. Your heart froze over—yes. But to say we got used to it! God—that makes me so angry! No. Everything was sharp. Immediate. 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.

Related Characters: Lady Juliet d'Orsey (speaker), Captain James / Jamie Villiers, Captain Eugene Taffler, Lady Barbara d'Orsey, Harris, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

In a present-day interview about sixty years after World War I, Juliet d'Orsey reflects on Robert Ross's friendship with Harris as well as her sister Barbara's relationships with Captain Taffler and Captain Villiers. She recalls that these relationships were magnified, rather than dulled, by the war, refuting the notion that people who lived through World War I ever became desensitized to the ongoing trauma they experienced. The war caused large-scale changes in society,

challenging people's former notions of meaning, faith, and tradition as they were forced to reckon with the evil potential of human beings. Juliet, however, refutes the commonly held belief that this societal upheaval made people act coldly to one another—rather, stripping away the "long drawn-out propriety" brought people together and facilitated closer relationships. This mindset suggests that the bonds between individuals, though strained by the trauma of war, served as a means of escape for both soldiers and civilians, and gives clarity as to why Robert is quick to form tight-knit relationships with Harris, Barbara, and Juliet throughout the story.

Part 3 Quotes

In another hole there was a rat that was alive but trapped because of the waterlogged condition of the earth that kept collapsing every time it tried to ascend the walls. Robert struck a match and caught the rat by the tail. It squealed as he lifted it over the edge and set it free. Robert wondered afterwards if setting the rat free had been a favour—but in the moment that he did it he was thinking: here is someone still alive. And the word alive was amazing.

Related Characters: Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

After Robert Ross's dugout is bombed in the Battle of St. Eloi, he must make his way across the devastated trenches to the Signals office so that he can contact his Officer Commanding. Having lost all of his men in this sudden attack at 4 a.m., Robert is traumatized and disoriented. The rat, like other animals he interacts with throughout story, is a comfort to Robert—it is a symbol of the simplicity and innocence of life in spite of the terrible devastation that surrounds them. The fact that Robert has the clarity of mind to save the rat even in the midst of this chaos shows that his respect for all lives has been deepened, rather than diminished, by the war. This compassion, however, goes against Clausewitz's warning from the epigraph about performing acts of kindness during war, and foreshadows Robert's downfall at the end of the novel when his grand act of heroism (freeing an abandoned train full of horses from a fire) ends up causing more harm than good.

This—to Bates—was the greatest terror of war: what you didn't know of the men who told you what to do—where to go and when. What if they were mad—or stupid? What if their fear was greater than yours? Or what if they were brave and crazy—wanting and demanding bravery from you? He looked away. He thought of being born—and trusting your parents. Maybe that was the same. Your parents could be crazy too. Or stupid. Still—he'd rather his father was with him—telling him what to do. Then he smiled. He knew that his father would take one look at the crater and tell him not to go.

Related Characters: Captain Leather, Robert Ross, Corporal Bates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132-133

Explanation and Analysis

During the Battle of St. Eloi, Captain Leather assigns Robert Ross and Corporal Bates to the dangerous mission of repositioning the guns at the forward trench. Realizing that he is taking orders from Robert, who is young and inexperienced, Bates reflects on the absurd nature of his role as a soldier, as he is expected to forgo his own judgment and personal safety to fulfill his duties. Thinking fondly of his father in this moment shows that Bates, too, is still innocent, and feels that bravery is being demanded of him. This mindset suggests that he does not share his fellow soldiers' self-sacrificial motivation for glory on the battlefield. Bates's doubt of Robert's competence proves to be ironic, however, since Robert's youth is what ends up saving the lives of Bates and the rest of the Mortar Squad—his ability to remember his recent high school chemistry class allows him to prevent the men from being suffocated by a chlorine gas attack.

Robert sagged against the ground. It was even worse than that. Lying beside the German was a modified Mauser rifle of the kind used by snipers. He could have killed them all. Surely that had been his intention. But he'd relented. Why?

The bird sang.

One long note descending: three that wavered on the brink of sadness.

That was why.

It sang and sang and sang, till Robert rose and walked away. The sound of it would haunt him until the day he died.

Related Characters: Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

After Robert Ross and his men takes shelter from a chlorine gas attack in a crater, he spots a young German soldier looking down at them from the crater's edge. Thinking that he sees the German reaching for a gun, Robert shoots and kills him. To his horror, Robert realizes that the soldier had a sniper rifle the entire time and could have shot them but chose not to. This moment proves that soldiers' duties at war are often morally complex, as they are sometimes forced to sacrifice one life for the intended benefit of many. Robert's obligation to defend his men goes against the intrinsic respect for all life that he has displayed throughout the novel, particularly toward animals. And, though he shoots the German in preemptive defense of his fellow soldiers, he does not feel any sense of honor or heroism from the act. Rather, Robert is haunted by guilt for years to come, suggesting that soldiers' own actions are often just as traumatizing as the violence that is committed against them.

> Robert sat on his bed in the old hotel at Bailleul and read what Rodwell had written.
>
> To my daughter, Laurine;
>
> Love your mother
> Make your prayers against despair.
> I am alive in everything I touch. Touch these pages and you have me in your fingertips. We survive in one another. Everything lives forever. Believe it. Nothing ever dies.
>
> I am your father always.

Related Characters: Rodwell (speaker), Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150-151

Explanation and Analysis

After the Battle of St. Eloi, Rodwell is reassigned to a new company. He leaves his pet toad, sketchbooks, and a letter to his daughter with Robert Ross for safekeeping. The men in his new company have been traumatized and shell-shocked by the horrors of trench warfare, and now find amusement in torturing small animals. Rodwell, who loves animals and has saved many throughout the war, is horrified by this cruelty to the point that he commits suicide. After Rodwell's death, Robert reads the letter to his daughter, Laurine. The traumatic effects of the war rob Rodwell of his innocence (and, ultimately, his will to live), yet he clearly holds out hope for the future, as he encourages Laurine to love, pray, and believe in the persistent goodness of the human spirit. Rodwell's loss of innocence is different from those of other characters in the novel, as many of his fellow soldiers become morally corrupted by the war, yet he would rather die than enact cruelty on other living creatures. His convictions are only made stronger by the violence he witnesses, showing that individuals ultimately have a choice in whether or not they succumb to moral perversion—a message that is both empowering and ominous.

Part 4 Quotes

> Robert I discovered was a very private man. His temper, you know, was terrible. Once when he thought he was alone and unobserved I saw him firing his gun in the woods at a young tree. It was a sight I'd rather not have seen. He destroyed it absolutely. Other times he would throw things down and break them on the ground…he had a great deal of violence inside and sometimes it emerged this way with a gesture and other times it showed in his expression when you found him sitting alone on the terrace or staring out of a window.

Related Characters: Lady Juliet d'Orsey (speaker), Mrs. Ross, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

After the Battle of St. Eloi, Robert Ross is invited to rest at St. Aubyn's abbey in London. The abbey, owned by Juliet d'Orsey's family, is converted into a convalescence hospital for soldiers during World War I. Twelve-year-old Juliet, who immediately falls in love with Robert, notices the deleterious effects that the war has had on his mental health. Having blamed himself for the deaths of his orderly on the way to Belgium and the German soldier in St. Eloi, Robert is tortured by guilt. This behavior shows just how traumatizing the war has been for Robert; the tragedies he has witnessed have fundamentally changed his personality from the timid, innocent young man he was before the army into a violent, resentful person. He expresses his self-blame outwardly, seeking vengeance on the world around him. Yet, he does not experience any lasting relief from this violence.

Juliet's observation of Robert's desperate behavior highlights a similarity between Robert and his mother, Mrs. Ross—he is now attempting to create an artificial sense of justice in the same way that Mrs. Ross sought revenge on Rowena's innocent pet rabbits in Part 1 of the novel. This parallel demonstrates a human tendency to place blame and blindly enact revenge for senseless tragedies—and, given that no lasting benefits arise from Robert and Mrs. Ross's actions, suggests the destructive futility of reacting in this manner.

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Lady Juliet d'Orsey (speaker), Clive d'Orsey / Lord Clive Stourbridge

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

In a present-day interview with Juliet d'Orsey (who is now in her seventies), she shares memories of her life during World War I. She recalls someone asking her older brother, Clive, whether their generation could ever be forgiven for the atrocities of the war. His response, much like the mindset Juliet expresses in Part 2, discourages the reader from placing undue blame on the novel's characters given that they did not live through the same events. While both Juliet and Clive acknowledge the harrowing trauma of the war, they recognize that trying to place blame on individuals for large-scale tragedies (as Robert Ross and Mrs. Ross attempt to do throughout the novel) cannot change the past, and ultimately causes more harm than good. Rather than being consumed with guilt for his actions as a soldier, Clive holds a similar belief to Juliet—that the moral judgment of people's actions cannot be separated from the particular situation they are facing, and that human beings are imperfect. Learning this lesson from Clive at a young age is likely what leads Juliet to be compassionate toward Robert at the end of the novel, when everyone else has disowned him. She is able to look at his actions from a more nuanced perspective, believing that he is not a monster, but simply an ordinary person who was faced with extraordinarily trying circumstances.

Part 5, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Robert thought of a Saturday crowd at a football game where everyone would link hands on the cold, fall afternoons and the long chains of singers would weave back and forth in the stands till the whole arena would be swaying from side to side.

Related Characters: Robert Ross

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

After his time resting at St. Aubyn's, Robert Ross is reassigned to fight in Belgium. A long, circuitous journey takes him to Bailleul, France on the Belgian border, the same area he and his men passed through in Part 2, Chapter 2. The center of town is crowded with military personnel who are singing battle songs, which reminds Robert of the football games he used to attend as a child. Having just marveled at how old he looked in the mirror a few pages before (despite having been at war for less than a year), this lighthearted memory suggests that Robert has experienced a great deal of trauma in a short period of time, causing him to lose his former sense of innocence. Though he was able to heal his wounded knees at St. Aubyn's, his time there clearly did not alleviate his psychological pain. His focus on his childhood in this moment suggests that those traumatized by war tend to seek escapism in the past rather than looking forward optimistically to the future.

Just before this passage, Robert wakes up to from a long sleep at his hotel, realizes that it has rained, and bathes. Water is an ongoing symbol of transition throughout the novel, as Robert often bathes or comes in contact with sea water, rain, or snow just before something changes in his life. This passage's nostalgia therefore takes on a foreboding tone and implies that a significant change will soon happen to further disrupt Robert's innocence, foreshadowing the trauma Robert experiences when he is raped in Part 5, Chapter 5.

Part 5, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Robert sat on the mutilated mattress and opened his kit bag. Everything was there—including the picture of Rowena. Robert burned it in the middle of the floor. This was not an act of anger—but an act of charity.

Related Characters: Rowena Ross, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

At Asile Desolé, an insane asylum in Bailleul, France, soldiers are allowed to leave their belongings in abandoned cells while they bathe in the asylum's bathhouse. As water serves as a symbol of significant life transitions throughout the novel, the fact that Robert is bathing (particularly in this dangerous place) foreshadows the violence that he will soon experience. After his bath, he comes back to his cell to retrieve his clothing, where he is ambushed and brutally raped by three of his fellow soldiers. This assault is incredibly traumatic for Robert, robbing him of his last shred of innocence and showing the tendency for war to encourage dehumanizing violence among men.

After Willie Poole brings him his lost kit bag, Robert burns his only photograph of his late sister, Rowena. Rowena, like the animals Robert meets throughout the novel, is a symbol of innocence. Robert always adored his sister and felt a duty to protect her when she was alive; the memory of her pure, kind spirit has been a comfort for him throughout his time at war. Defining this choice as "an act of charity," rather than one of anger, suggests that Robert is not concerned with avenging the violence he suffered, but still feels a duty to ensure that Rowena's memory is untainted by the terrible perversion he has witnessed at war.

Part 5, Chapter 8 Quotes

He got out the Webley, meaning to shoot the animals not yet dead, but he paused for the barest moment looking at the whole scene laid out before him and his anger rose to such a pitch that he feared he was going to go over into madness. He stood where the gate had been and he thought: "If an animal had done this—we would call it mad and shoot it," and at that precise moment Captain Leather rose to his knees and began to struggle to his feet. Robert shot him between the eyes.

Related Characters: Devlin, Captain Leather, Robert Ross

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Having returned to fight in Belgium after his time in Bailleul, Robert Ross and the rest of his convoy are brutally attacked by the Germans. He asks Captain Leather, his Officer Commanding, if he can free their horses and mules from the impending shellfire. When Leather refuses, Robert and Devlin disobey orders to free the animals, and Leather retaliates by shooting Devlin just before an explosion hits the battlefield and fatally wounds all of the animals they were trying to save. This passage is the climax of the plot, as Robert is finally broken psychologically by the war and can no longer passively accept its atrocities. The fact that the suffering of horses and mules is what caused this shift in Robert is significant, since animals have been a symbol of innocence and freedom throughout the novel. Seeing these helpless creatures so callously mistreated and involved in a conflict that they cannot understand marks a total loss of hope for Robert and parallels his own loss of innocence, as this moment fully awakens him to the moral corruption of the war.

Robert's decision to shoot Captain Leather suggests that he has been so thoroughly affected by the traumatic violence of war that, rather than becoming desensitized to it, he is nearly driven mad by it. As a result, his role as a soldier becomes more morally complex than simply obeying orders. Robert's disillusionment with the war causes a change in his motivations; he no longer feels beholden to the prescribed duties as a soldier or to societal standards of honor—rather, he is driven by the same desperate search for justice that consumed Mrs. Ross at the beginning of the novel. And, like his mother, Robert is compelled to commit a violent act in hopes of avenging the senseless suffering around him. Killing Captain Leather serves as a grand symbolic protest against the horrors of war, yet the murder does not do anything to help the animals that are suffering. Robert's desperate actions ultimately exemplify the destructive effects of violence on the human psyche and the futility of trying to assign blame and enact revenge in the midst of tragedy.

Part 5, Chapter 13 Quotes

Robert called out very distinctly (and there are twenty witnesses to this): "We shall not be taken."

It was the "we" that doomed him. To Mickle, it signified that Robert had an accomplice. Maybe more than one. Mickle thought he knew how to get "them" out.

Related Characters: Robert Ross (speaker), Major Mickle

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 210-211

Explanation and Analysis

After Robert Ross kills Captain Leather and deserts the army, he rescues over one hundred horses trapped in an abandoned train car. He allegedly shoots a soldier named Private Cassles who will not let him pass through a certain area, causing the soldiers Major Mickle, Cassle's Officer Commanding, to pursue Robert. Mickle and his men attempt to force Robert out of the abandoned barn where they find him and the horses, but Robert responds that "we shall not be taken." This conviction is subtle, yet significant, as his use of "we" implies that he allies himself with the animals and sees himself as one of them. Throughout the novel, military horses and other animals have their lives devalued and trivialized in the midst of a manmade conflict. Like these animals, Robert and his fellow young soldiers have endured the traumatizing, dehumanizing effects of war. Having gradually lost his own sense of moral innocence throughout his time at war, Robert is committed to preserving the innocence of these defenseless creatures. Like his decision to shoot Captain Leather, this act shows that Robert has come to feel disillusioned with his role as a soldier, and has forgone the standards of duty and honor put forth by the military.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, PROLOGUE

The novel begins with an epigraph quoting Carl von Clausewitz, who warns against the error of performing seemingly benevolent acts of kindness in the midst of war.

By opening with this quote from Clausewitz on War, *Findley foreshadows that characters in the novel will try to act as heroes, and that doing so will cause more harm than good.*

Robert Ross, a soldier who has been wandering alone for over a week, sits watching a **black mare** who is standing in the middle of some railroad tracks with a black dog at its feet. Robert's nose is broken, his face and hands are streaked with **mud**, and his uniform is torn and burned. In the background, a medical supply warehouse has just caught fire.

Robert's disheveled appearance and solitude implies that he has suffered a traumatic experience at war. Black animals like the mare are often seen as omens of death—their presence here could foreshadow additional suffering for Robert.

Robert comes across an abandoned train with cattle cars full of **horses**. In anticipation of the encroaching **fire** from the warehouse, Robert sets the one hundred and thirty horses free. He rides behind them on the black mare, with the dog following alongside.

By performing this act of kindness, Robert goes against Clausewitz's warning in the epigraph. It is unclear whether this choice will prove to be an "error," as Clausewitz suggests.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Flashing forward to the present day, the narrator says that the scene in the prologue "happened a long time ago," but not so long ago that everyone involved is dead. In the present day, when other soldiers who were there are asked what happened, they avoid answering. These men will sometimes weep or exclaim "that bastard!" when asked specifically about the **horses**. It is revealed that Robert Ross somehow died in a **fire**. Many other soldiers also succumbed to violent fates that tend to command people's attention.

Rather than remembering Robert as a hero, his fellow soldiers still harbor blame toward him decades after the scene in the prologue took place. Clausewitz's warning in the epigraph seems to be a prophecy that Robert fulfilled, yet what happened to horses and what led him to die in a fire is left a mystery for the reader.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

The narration switches to the reader's point of view: you are told that you are looking through Robert's old family photographs that are kept in the public archives, along with maps, letters, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia from the war. These "fragments" symbolize an entire age, and the past seems to disintegrate as you sort through the materials.

The fragmentary memories in the archives are a symbolic representation of the World War I era. During this time, people's personal lives, societal structures, and belief systems were fragmented by the traumatic violence of the war. Findley also employs postmodern techniques like using the second-person tense as ways to disrupt the narrative.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

In the public archives, the photographs from 1915 appear **muddied**, and everyone in them looks lost and serious. Despite people's somber attitudes toward Word War I, there was a lighthearted social climate during this time. Robert appears in a photo of a parade in honor of departing soldiers. At this time, eighteen-year-old Robert was old enough go to war but was vaguely skeptical of doing so. Findley then describes the image of Robert on the **black mare** from the prologue intruding into the frame of this photograph (and into the reader's mind), his uniform on fire as he rides toward the camera.

In the spring of 1915, Canada had been involved in World War I for less than a year, and people on the home front were still trying to uphold a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives. The surreal, disturbing image of Robert intruding into this otherwise peaceful memory on an ominous black horse shows the futility of trying to ignore (or forget) the gruesome reality of the war.

The narration shifts to a series of the Ross's family photos. The snapshots feature Robert, his parents Thomas and Mrs. Ross, and his siblings Peggy, Stuart, and Rowena. The Rosses were a wealthy family who upheld a charitable public image and excluded Rowena (who was wheelchair-bound with hydrocephalus) from most photographs. She is featured in one photo, holding a white rabbit in her lap. Robert, who was a popular athlete and scholar, loved his sister and saw himself as her "guardian."

Robert's protection of Rowena shows that he has always been motivated by a sense of duty and empathy. His wholesome, privileged upbringing before the war is entirely different to the infamous reputation he has in the present day, suggesting that his time at war caused him to undergo an extreme loss of innocence.

The narrative then switches to a transcript of a present-day interview with Marian Turner, a nurse from World War I who remembers treating Robert after he was arrested and hospitalized. She muses on how young and handsome Robert was, and alludes to the horrible circumstances of his death by **fire** and "the story of the **horses**." She warns the interviewer to be careful in searching out Robert's story, warning that it is ordinary people (rather than extraordinary figures) who made twentieth-century society "monstrous, complacent, and mad."

Robert's actions after the scene in the prologue continue to be alluded to, but not explained. Miss Turner does not blame Robert for whatever led him to be arrested and hospitalized. Instead, she blames society for going to war in the first place; were it not for the collective actions of ordinary people, Robert would not have been put in the position to commit extraordinary acts.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

On Good Friday (April 2, 1915), Robert stands at a train station in Ontario, feeling shy and uneasy amidst the crowd. He is annoyed to see a young girl watching him from down the platform and reflects on his fallout with Heather Lawson, who made a scene at a Ross family party when Robert refused to fight another boy who she claimed was in love with her.

At eighteen years old, Robert's timidity and confusion toward women show that he is innocent and naive, making the knowledge that he will go on to be arrested for a war crime all the more mysterious.

Robert continues to stand immobilized on the train platform, catching the attention of the Station Master. He asks Robert if he has come to Ontario to join the Field Artillery, and Robert answers yes. He then leaves the train station and walks in the **rain** through the town, imagining that the mist from the melting snow on the ground is filled with the memories of his life. He is unsure of which direction go in and feels that he is paralyzed because Rowena was buried the day before.

Rowena's death has left Robert in a disoriented state between childhood and adulthood; the serious nature of his decision to join the army only emphasizes his youthful inexperience. The melting snow symbolizes this internal change that Robert is undergoing, as his childhood innocence seem to be similarly disintegrating.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Rowena falls on a Sunday, when Stuart is supposed to be watching her. Robert, however, blames himself because he was his sister's "guardian" yet was masturbating in his bedroom when he feels he should have been there to save her.

Although Rowena's death is an accident, Robert blames himself. Having always felt a duty to protect his sister, he has lost his sense of purpose. The trauma of Rowena's death marks a symbolic end to Robert's childhood, as he is now forced to grow up and find meaning elsewhere. It's also notable that when she died he was masturbating—that is, exploring his own sexuality as part of coming of age—which adds further complexity and trauma to his process of growing up.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

The novel flashes back to the days leading up to Robert's departure. Rowena's fall happens during her beloved pastime of holding the rabbits that the family keep in their stable, while Stuart is in the yard playing with Meg, the family's **pony**, instead of supervising his sister. Rowena fails to regain consciousness and dies on Monday, the day after the fall. Though they loved Rowena, Mr. Ross and Mrs. Ross are emotionally prepared for her death since, at twenty-five, their daughter had already outlived her hydrocephalus prognosis by ten years.

The fact that Rowena was playing with her pet rabbits when she died makes her death all the more tragic—she was clearly a gentle, sweet young woman who was adored by her parents and siblings. Though they were mentally prepared to lose Rowena at a young age, the shock of her death still has a significant impact on the Rosses, demonstrating the ability of tragedy to fragment both individuals and families.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Mrs. Ross insists that the rabbits must be killed since they belonged to Rowena, and Robert objects vehemently. He begs his mother to give them away or let him take care of them, but Mrs. Ross tells him not to be ridiculous and reminds him that he is a grown man. She gives Robert the task of killing the rabbits.

Mrs. Ross's conviction that the rabbits must be killed reflects the human tendency to seek revenge in the wake of tragedy. By placing this responsibility on Robert, she further robs him of the innocence he lost when his sister died.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

After arguing with Robert, Mrs. Ross retires to her bedroom and refuses to open the door when Tom knocks.

Mrs. Ross uses alcohol as an emotional crutch for her grief, foreshadowing an inability to cope with negative emotions and an ongoing struggle with substance abuse that stems from the deeply traumatizing effects of losing a child.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

At Rowena's funeral the following Thursday, Tom and Mrs. Ross are stoic. Peggy's boyfriend, Clinton Brown, is there in his soldier's uniform, and Robert thinks that it must be nice that he can escape when the funeral is over. Robert's hands feel empty as he subconsciously reaches out for Rowena's wheelchair.

Seeing Clinton in uniform is what first gives Robert the idea to enlist in the military. By reaching out for Rowena's wheelchair, he is both literally and figuratively grasping to replicate the sense of duty that he felt as Rowena's protector, and the army is one outlet that could potentially provide this.

Back at home, Robert sits in his bedroom while the funeral guests are in the parlor. After they have left, he can hear his family arguing about the rabbits. Mrs. Ross continues to insist that Robert must kill them because he loved Rowena, and eventually becomes frustrated and goes off to drink in her bedroom.

Mrs. Ross's relentless vengeance toward the rabbits shows that people tend to desperately seek out justice in order to cope with senseless tragedies. She continues to rely on alcohol to dull her emotions, again showing the destructive effects of trauma on the family unit.

Eventually, a worker from Mr. Ross's factory named Teddy Budge is called in to kill the rabbits, and Robert races to the stable to stop him. He dashes outside, sliding in the **mud** as he runs, and attacks Teddy. They wrestle until Tom and Clinton separate them. Mr. Ross signals Teddy to go ahead with killing the rabbits.

Robert feels inclined to protect the rabbits because they are his last tangible connection to Rowena, and thus also to his childhood innocence. Trying to create an artificial sense of justice only leads to further tragedy, as killing the rabbits is a senseless act of revenge that perpetuates the family's trauma rather than resolving it.

PART 1, CHAPTER 10

After the fight with Teddy, Robert soaks his aches and bruises in the bathtub. Mrs. Ross, coming into the bathroom with a cigarette and empty glass, sits on the toilet and tells Robert how his bruises remind her of when he was a child and would hurt himself skating.

As water is an ongoing symbol of change, Robert's bath suggests that he is transitioning into adulthood and breaking away from the childhood that his mother remembers.

Mrs. Ross breaks into a fit of laughter, but Robert can see that she is not hysterical. She explains that Robert was a comically serious child who was endearingly intent on playing hockey even though he would come home covered in bruises. Mrs. Ross reflects that he had persevered and eventually became captain of the team. She comments that it is funny how most people are not hurt when they fall, but that others bruise easily.

Having lost a child, Mrs. Ross is eager to hold onto her innocent, comforting memories of Robert. Her comment about bruising implies that, despite enacting revenge on the rabbits, she still feels a sense of injustice about Rowena's death, since most other people would have easily survived the fall that killed her. Having the rabbits killed ultimately did more harm than good, as the act only further traumatized Robert and did not change the fact that Rowena is dead.

After a period of silence, Mrs. Ross suddenly turns on Robert. She tells him that Rowena did not belong to him because "no one belongs to anyone." Mrs. Ross accuses Robert of wanting to enlist in the army and tells him to go to hell. She says that she is just a stranger who is not responsible for Robert because she is incapable of keeping anyone alive. The next morning, Robert is gone before his mother wakes up.

Like Robert, Mrs. Ross blames herself for Rowena's death. Whereas her guilt manifests into outward resentment, Robert internalizes his self-blame by enlisting in the military as a means of both punishment and escape. These different reactions demonstrate the varied effects that trauma and self-blame can have on the individual.

PART 1, CHAPTER 11

After his admittance to the army, Robert is dispatched to join the 30th Battery, C.F.A. (Canadian Field Artillery) in training at Lethbridge, Alberta. Aiming a gun seems foreign to him, and he wishes that he had a "model" who could teach him how to kill. Robert feels that the culture of the army is a lot like his time as a cadet at St. Andrew's College, where he was nicknamed "Blush" because he was shy and would blush with embarrassment when he raised his voice to give commands. At the army training camp, Robert goes on runs in the evening where he loses all sense of time and his surroundings.

Robert's timidity as a cadet in boarding school shows that he is gentle and innocent at heart. This disposition contrasts with the strict and grueling duties of being a soldier. His desire to find a role model who can teach him how to fight courageously shows that at this point, he glorifies war as an opportunity to showcase his maturity and masculinity.

PART 1, CHAPTER 12

One night while Robert is out running, he sees a coyote ahead of him. He decides to follow the animal, and it does not seem to sense his presence or react to the gophers it passes. Suddenly, the coyote speeds up and vanishes. Robert runs after it and is led to a valley with a small lake, where the coyote has stopped for a drink of **water**.

Robert voluntarily enlisted in the army, yet his proclivity for running shows that he already yearns to escape the rigidity of his new life. He follows after the coyote because this wild animal roaming the prairie embodies the freedom that he craves.

Robert thinks to himself that he would like to go for a swim, reflecting that he did not go swimming last summer at his family cottage in Jackson's Point and momentarily losing himself in a memory of Rowena.

While Robert made the decision to leave his family behind, he still longs for the innocence of his childhood, particularly the moments he shared with Rowena. He experiences an internal conflict because, although he finds comfort in these memories, they also remind him of his grief.

The coyote scales the bank of the valley and looks directly at Robert as it howls and barks. Robert thinks that maybe the animal knew he was there the entire time, and that it was now signaling to him that the valley was vacant and safe. Later that night, Robert is late getting back to the barracks and is confined there for two weeks as punishment. He spends his evenings sitting on the roof and staring out at the prairie, "wishing that someone would howl."

Robert's harsh punishment indicates the strict standards that military personnel are expected to uphold. Having run with the coyote and experienced a sense of total freedom, Robert feels even more stifled by his duties as a soldier.

PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Over the summer of 1915, Robert is assigned to a detail whose job is to break **wild mustangs** who are intended as mounts for Canadian officers in France. After the horses are corralled, they discover that two are missing. Robert and Clifford Purchas, a former classmate of his at St. Andrew's, volunteer to ride out into the prairie and look for them. As they ride, they playfully sing old hymns that they learned at school.

The detail's role of breaking wild horses parallels their own transition from free civilians to enlisted soldiers. Although the young men are eager to prove themselves in war, Robert and Clifford's lighthearted singing shows that they are not fully ready to surrender their adolescence.

Suddenly, Robert and Clifford come upon a shirtless figure throwing stones at a row of bottles, with a **horse** and a dog by his side. Clifford tells Robert that the man is Eugene Taffler, a Captain who had been wounded in France and was sent back to Canada. Taffler offers to help them look for the mustangs, but Robert declines. As Taffler throws stones, Clifford muses that it is a shame they are not playing football.

The difference between Clifford and Taffler shows how young men are forced to mature while at war. Though relatively close in age, Taffler is a decorated hero, while Clifford still longs for his innocent pastime of playing sports. This meeting foreshadows that Clifford, too, will undergo a similar transition from boyhood to manhood.

Taffler tells them that there are only one hundred yards between Canadian soldiers and the enemy lines, likening both sides to "one little David against another." As Robert and Clifford leave, Robert wonders if Taffler really wants the challenge of a Goliath. While they ride away, Robert reflects that distance is the only safety in war.

Taffler's comment is Robert and Clifford's first insight into the harsh reality of war. Although they have imagined it to be glorious and have longed to be on the battlefield, Robert begins to feel sobered by the danger he will soon be up against.

Eventually, Robert and Clifford find the missing **mustangs**. On their way back, Robert thinks that Taffler may be the "model" he has been looking for to teach him how to be a David—someone who welcomes a powerful opponent and is not intimidated by killing.

Robert idolizes Taffler as the heroic soldier that he, too, hopes to become. His desire to learn how to kill without remorse shows that he is eager to make the transition from an innocent teenager to a formidable man.

PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Throughout the autumn of 1915, it **rains** heavily in North America and Europe. Tom and Mrs. Ross shower Robert with gifts of winter clothing and food. Since the Canadian forces are a "people's army" who must supply much of their own equipment, Robert's parents also send him military gear such as compasses, riding boots, and field glasses. Additionally, Robert writes his father asking him for an automatic pistol.

Both the brutal natural elements and the struggle of being a "people's army" reflect the hardships that soldiers like Robert were forced to endure during war. The willingness of troops to supply their own equipment shows the sense of duty and patriotism that many of these young men held for their countries.

PART 1, CHAPTER 15

Robert is pressured by his fellow soldiers to go to a brothel in Lousetown, a hamlet twelve miles from Lethbridge. The brothel, run by a madam named Maria Dreyfus, is colloquially known as Wet Goods, since it sits between a general store that sells "dry goods" and a landfill full of "spoiled goods." On their way into Wet Goods, Robert is surprised to see Taffler's **horse** and dog hitched outside the brothel.

Robert is timid and inexperienced with women, as evidenced by his reaction to the girls on the train platform in Chapter 4 and his confusing relationship with Heather Lawson. His excursion to Wet Goods will likely serve as a coming-of-age experience that challenges his innocence.

PART 1, CHAPTER 16

A large, mute Swedish man greets the soldiers as they enter Wet Goods. Maria ushers them all into a private room and urges the soldiers to mingle and dance with the women, and a prostitute named Ella forces Robert to pair up with her. Everyone continues dancing, and Clifford eventually falls down drunk and is carried upstairs by the Swede.

The fact that the soldiers have to be encouraged to mingle with the prostitutes demonstrates how young and inexperienced they are despite the supposedly mature undertaking of being a soldier. This loss of sexual innocence also marks the beginning of the loss of moral innocence that they will experience at war.

As the men begin to retire upstairs with different prostitutes, Robert is shocked to see a cowboy fondling a prostitute's breasts under her dress. Robert is terrified that they might have sex in front of everyone and is also alarmed that his own hands seem uncontrollably drawn to his groin. Overwhelmed, he agrees to go upstairs with Ella.

In early-20th-century Europe and North America, sex was still very socially taboo. Robert's terrified reaction to watching the cowboy touch a woman's breasts makes sense, given that many young people during this time grew up sheltered from anything sexually suggestive.

PART 1, CHAPTER 17

In one of the bedrooms upstairs, Ella is vexed by Robert's hesitance. Robert reflects on what he's heard about prostitutes in the past compared with his current unglamorous surroundings. Frustrated, Ella urges him to have sex with her, reminding him that she will only get paid if she makes him "happy."

Though Robert's schoolmates bragged about their exploits with prostitutes, he finds that his own experience with Ella is much less exciting than he imagined, shattering his former romanticized notions of sex.

Ella asks Robert if he wants to touch her, and he thinks that he both does and does not. Ella puts her hand down Robert's pants, and he remembers how inept he felt when Heather Lawson laid her hand on his thigh one night. Realizing that Robert has prematurely ejaculated, Ella removes her hand and cleans him up. Though she is kind, Robert is humiliated and refuses to respond as she speaks to him, frustrating Ella again.

Robert's mishap is mortifying, as his inexperience with women is put on display. The contrast of this moment with Robert's memory of Heather Lawson shows how much his life has changed during the few months he has been away from home, as he has gone from innocent dates to spending the night with a prostitute.

Robert and Ella hear thumps coming from the next room, and she beckons him over to look through a spy hole cut into the wall. He sees two men having intercourse, role-playing as a **horse** and a rider. Robert looks away in horror, realizing that the man being ridden is Taffler and the rider is the Swede.

The sight of Taffler having sex with a man disrupts Robert's sense of innocence, as this role-playing is presumably his first real-life exposure to sex. It also challenges Robert's preconceived notions about Taffler as a heroic masculine figure, as his sexual orientation goes against their era's societal standards of masculinity.

PART 1, CHAPTER 18

In November 1915, Robert is sent back to Kingston, Ontario to study military law and trajectory mechanics. On the train ride there, he is struck by the sight of native Indians standing on **horses** by the railroad track and wishes that the passengers would wave to them. Passing through his hometown, Robert finds that he does not recognize his surroundings, as its former comforts have been increasingly industrialized to support the war effort.

The changes in Robert's hometown demonstrate the significant impact that World War I had on society, as many quiet, idyllic towns like his changed to become more industrialized and focused on military triumph. In addition to reflecting the broad cultural shifts of the early 20th century, Robert's disorientation is further evidence of his personal loss of innocence, as he cannot reconcile his childhood memories with his new surroundings.

In another transcript from a present-day interview with Marian Turner, she says that the Great War changed sleep for people everywhere, and that those who were born after World War I will never experience a silent, peaceful night in the city.

Miss Turner's reflection suggests that Robert's hometown is not the only place that was altered by World War I, as she believes that society as a whole became permanently less peaceful after the war.

PART 1, CHAPTER 19

The war worsens while Robert and his fellow soldiers are in Ontario, creating a need for more Canadian troops. Robert is promoted to Second Lieutenant. On December 18, 1915, he and the rest of the 39th Battery, C.E.F. (which he joined in Kingston) embark on the *S.S. Massanabie* ship for England. Three days before, he and the other soldiers celebrated his nineteenth birthday, drinking a bottle of wine provided by Clifford Purchas and drunkenly singing songs in the latrine after lights out.

The lighthearted celebration of Robert's birthday is a stark contrast to the worsening conflict overseas. The soldiers are happy to hold onto this last shred of adolescent innocence as they prepare to face the certain violence of the war.

In August 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm promised that the troops departing at that time would "be home before the leaves had fallen from these trees." When Robert embarks for war, the leaves have already fallen twice.

August 1914 is when Canada first became involved in World War I. At this time, Kaiser Wilhelm was the Emperor of Germany, one of several countries that Canada was fighting against in World War I. His broken promise to the troops implies that the war has become much more serious (and deadly) than expected over the past two years.

PART 1, CHAPTER 20

Robert's childhood hero was an Indian marathon runner named Longboat. Wanting to emulate his idol, Robert wished that his own skin could be red, or "any color but pink." At twelve, Robert decides to complete his own marathon by running around the block twenty-six times after supper. Mrs. Ross and the maid are sure that he will die, but Tom encourages his son.

This flashback serves as a contrast between Robert's current circumstances as a soldier and the innocent mindset he had as a child. It also shows, however, that Robert has always been motivated by a desire for honor and status—just as he now idolizes Taffler for his heroism, he wanted to embody Longboat's athletic prowess.

Robert faints with jaundice on his twenty-fifth lap, and Tom helps him through his illness by telling him stories every evening. He watches as Robert takes off his pajamas and smiles at his yellow skin. Tom smiles, too, and thinks of when he climbed a church steeple when he was ten and saw "the world spread out around him like a gift."

Again, this passage shows how innocent and free Robert was as a child compared to the regimented, dangerous life he now faces in the army. It also demonstrates the danger of being consumed by a desire for glory and foreshadows Robert's tendency to take this motivation too far.

The narrative shifts to describe a photograph of nineteen-year-old Robert, looking posed and serious in his army uniform. In the photo, Robert seems to be imagining the romantic glory of his own death if he is killed in battle, conveying the message that "dead men are serious."

This photograph is another contrast between Robert's adulthood and childhood, as he has grown from the carefree child in the flashback into a serious man. The fantasies of his own death suggest that Robert now glorifies fighting and dying honorably in the same way that he glorified athleticism as a boy.

PART 1, CHAPTER 21

As the *S.S. Massanabie* prepares to embark, Robert is placed in a stateroom with Clifford Purchas, Captain Ord, and a young soldier named Harris. A storm appears to be brewing, and there is a commotion on deck when **horses** are unexpectedly crane-lifted onto the ship as cargo.

The horses on board are taken out of their natural habitat and forced into the dangerous role of being military animals, demonstrating how the trauma of war has life-altering effects on all living creatures, not just human beings.

Robert writes one last letter to Tom. He tells his father that he had been surprised and comforted to see him in Montreal when Tom came to see him off, but that the automatic Colt revolver Tom had gotten him was the wrong one. Clifford suggests that Robert should "send his love" to Peggy, but Robert feels that this would be "unmanly." Instead, he describes the toughness of his fellow soldiers to his father and expresses excitement to be leaving for war.

Robert's letter to his father indicates that he is eager to make a clean break from his childhood and is likely underestimating the horrors he will witness in the war. His desire to make himself and his fellow soldiers sound formidable shows that he (like many other young men in his era) believes that going to war is his only means of attaining honor in the eyes of his family.

PART 1, CHAPTER 22

The day after Robert ships off for England, Mrs. Ross's friend Miss Davenport accompanies the rest of the family to church. Mrs. Ross refuses anyone's help as she treks through the **snow**. She is annoyed that there is a military regiment on church parade that day, and that the sermon will therefore be "militant" and "blood-thirsty." Inside the church, she is struck by the fact that she and the rest of the crowded, stuffy congregation had once been children together.

Mrs. Ross's refusal to let anyone help her implies that she is still harboring guilt over Rowena's death and wants to punish herself. Her unsettled reaction to the military presence at the church is likely because she is worried about Robert and feels that it is distasteful to glorify the war when so many young soldiers like her son are risking their lives.

In his sermon, the bishop compares the troops fighting in World War I to holy wars and ancient Empires, and Mrs. Ross leaves in outrage when he speaks about Christmas. Accompanied by Miss Davenport, Mrs. Ross goes to outside to sit on the church steps, smoke a cigarette, and drink from a flask. Weeping, she asks Davenport what it means to kill your children and then sing about it.

Mrs. Ross's reaction to the sermon goes against the societal norm of prioritizing a sense of duty to one's country over the wellbeing of individuals. While the bishop and others glorify battle, she cannot reconcile the war with Christian morality. In the midst of such senseless violence, Mrs. Ross is unsure of where to place the blame—on others, on herself, or on God.

Mrs. Ross notices a little girl staring at her as she weeps. Realizing that she should not scare her, Mrs. Ross composes herself and invites the child back into the church with her and Miss Davenport. The congregation sings a hymn together and Mrs. Ross can only think of how she was married in this same church. She smiles at the **snow** melting beneath everyone's feet.

Though she is emotionally distraught, Mrs. Ross composes herself because she does not want the trauma of the war to spill over onto an innocent child. Rather than focusing on her troubles in the present, she loses herself in thoughts of the past, demonstrating the human tendency to cling to youthful memories in the midst of tragedy.

PART 1, CHAPTER 23

Though Robert has always loved the **sea**, the conditions on the *S.S. Massanabie* are grim. The ship rocks violently as it moves through cold, stormy waters. The men are crowded together in small bunks and makeshift latrines that lack any privacy, and the stuffy, polluted air causes some of them to pass out. Robert and the other officers try their best to prevent mutiny as the soldiers resort to fighting for entertainment.

The men's struggle with the rough sea water and polluted air is symbolic of the larger struggle between life and death that they will soon face at war. The poor conditions on the ship also suggest that the military does not value the soldiers' lives enough to prioritize their safety.

Captain Ord, one of Robert's cabinmates, claims to have lost his voice and spends the rest of the journey in bed reading G.A. Henty novels. Clifford, on the other hand, takes the trip seriously, viewing the war as "deadly serious" and his chance to become a man.

G.A. Henty was a 19th century English author who wrote adventure novels for young adults. Whereas Ord is content to lose himself in the nostalgia of these books, Clifford is eager to shed his childhood innocence. Like Robert, he believes that becoming a war hero is his path to manhood, showing the self-sacrificial mindset that war can create among young men.

Harris, another one of Robert's cabinmates, catches pneumonia and is sent to the infirmary. Ord, who is Harris's company commander, appoints Robert as Harris's successor in overseeing the detail that cares for the **horses** onboard.

Harris's illness further demonstrates the army's trivialization of their soldiers' health and show that the more mundane aspects of war can be just as dangerous as battle.

PART 1, CHAPTER 24

Robert is horrified by the cramped, manure-filled, fly-infested stalls in the hold where the **horses** are kept. The Battalion C.O. is outraged that men and animals are being transported in the same vessel, since the soldiers risk contracting diseases from the horses. Despite these unsavory conditions, Robert finds that spending time in the hold cures his seasickness and he soon disengages from "the other life" on the upper decks.

The Battalion C.O.'s anger is ironic—whereas he is concerned only for his men, it could be argued that the true injustice is that the horses were forced on board in the first place. The horses' living conditions are even worse than what the soldiers have been enduring, further demonstrating how war belittles the both animal and human lives.

PART 1, CHAPTER 25

As the *S.S. Massanabie* approaches land, a violent storm overtakes the ship. All of the soldiers are brought up to the upper decks for safety and forced to remain silent and without light. One night, Battery Sergeant-Major Joyce comes to Robert's bunk to tell him that one of the **horses** has broken its leg. Robert will have to shoot the horse, since he is a Second Lieutenant and only the officers have guns.

Robert's obligation to shoot the injured horse shows that young men tend to overly romanticize war; while the idea of attaining honor and glory in combat is appealing, the reality of Robert's duties as a Second Lieutenant is anything but glamorous. The fact that Robert is the one that will have to shoot the horse is ironic, since he was so disturbed by the killing of Rowena's rabbits. It seems that he cannot escape the trauma of death, no matter how his environment changes.

PART 1, CHAPTER 26

Robert panics and becomes ill over the thought of shooting the wounded **horse** because he has never killed a living creature. He wonders why B.S.M. Joyce, who is a much more experienced soldier, cannot do it instead. Joyce is compassionate toward Robert and leads him down to the hold in the dark, telling Robert to grab onto his suspenders like reins.

Robert's defense of Rowena's rabbits in Chapter 9 proved that he is sensitive and empathetic toward animals. Now, the mere thought of killing the wounded horse is traumatizing. This is the first of many experiences during the war that will gradually erode Robert's innocence. Again, the duties that he is faced with as an officer do not live up to the glorified image he had of military service before shipping off.

PART 1, CHAPTER 27

Robert and B.S.M. Joyce reach the *S.S. Massanabie*'s hold, where the **horses** are packed in tightly and given no exercise besides trying to maintain their balance. The horse with the broken leg had fallen after the soldiers were commanded to let the animals fend for themselves during the storm. Regis, the last remaining picket, weeps as the fallen horse cries.

The horses' inhumane living conditions are traumatic not only for the animals, but for the soldiers who take care of them. Regis's reaction to the horse with the broken leg shows that he has been deeply affected by watching this animal suffer.

The ship begins to crash violently, and Robert is surprised by his own authority when he assures Regis that they will not drown. Thinking that his military exploits may one day be written in a book, Robert resolves to be decisive and effective. Remembering a picture he had seen as a boy of a cowboy shooting its **horse** behind the ear, he positions himself and shoots the fallen horse in the head.

Although he is terrified of taking the horse's life, Robert's resolve to put on a brave face for Regis and fulfill his duty shows that he is committed to acting honorably. This attitude demonstrates Robert's willingness to sacrifice himself for a higher purpose.

Robert's first shot fails to kill the **horse**. B.S.M. Joyce advises him to be "cool and quick," but he panics and shoots the horse repeatedly until Joyce pulls him away. The other horses are spooked and nearly trample Regis, so Joyce runs off to commandeer more men to help them. Robert declines Regis's offer to light a lantern because he does not want to see his **eyes**.

The act of shooting the horse is clearly traumatizing for Robert, as he panics and loses control of his reflexes. Although he was only fulfilling his bound duty as an officer and was only putting the horse out of its misery, Robert is left feeling too guilty to even look Regis in the eyes.

PART 1, CHAPTER 28

The next morning, Robert and Regis emerge from the hold as the *S.S. Massanabie* approaches the harbor, crashing through the stormy **water** and narrowly missing the surrounding rocks. Robert falls on the steps, badly bruising his legs, so he and Harris are disembarked together on stretchers.

Like Harris's pneumonia, Robert's injuries demonstrate the grueling conditions that soldiers are forced to endure in war. The fact that he and Harris have suffered before even seeing combat implies that their time in battle will be even more harrowing.

From the quay, Robert and Harris watch the soldiers round up the **horses** and drive them toward the nearest street. The townspeople excitedly run out of their houses and shops to see the animals. In a letter to Tom and Mrs. Ross, Robert minimizes the negative aspects of the voyage and writes that the war seems "even further off than when we were at home."

Although Robert was forced to endure terrible living conditions aboard the S.S. Massanabie *and was traumatized by the horse incident, he is hesitant to reveal any sign of weakness in the letter to his parents. This mindset demonstrates Robert's ongoing fixation on acting honorably and earning respect.*

PART 1, CHAPTER 29

When Mrs. Ross was a young woman about to be married to Tom, her brother Monty Miles Raymond was hit by a trolley car and killed. Now, Mrs. Ross feels that the world is "fully of trolley cars" which haunt her dreams, and she begins to wear dark glasses to hide her **eyes**. As Mrs. Ross deteriorates, Miss Davenport moves into the Ross's home to support her friend.

The revelation of Monty's death explains why Mrs. Ross lashed out at Robert after Rowena's accident—she has clearly become jaded by her trauma. Eyes are an ongoing symbol of human vulnerability throughout the novel, and Mrs. Ross's decision to cover her eyes imply that she is ashamed of herself and feels guilty over the deaths of her loved ones and her bitter encouragement of Robert to join the army.

Once Robert is stationed overseas, Tom has the idea of going to meet his son in Montreal before he is shipped off. Mrs. Ross comes along on the train and Tom reads her *Huckleberry Finn*. The next morning, Mrs. Ross drinks a third of a bottle of scotch and is too intoxicated to join her husband to meet Robert. Tom gives Robert a hamper full of food and the Colt revolver while Mrs. Ross stays on the train, afraid that if she goes outside everyone will be "struck down" by trolley cars.

This passage shows the deteriorating effects of trauma on both individuals and families. Mrs. Ross's descent into alcoholism coincides with Robert shipping off to war; while her son will be fighting a literal battle, she, too, is fighting a personal war.

PART 1, CHAPTER 30

From his post in Europe, Robert writes formal letters to Tom, Mrs. Ross, Peggy, Stuart, and even the family's dog, Bimbo. The letters are laid in a velvet box in the Ross's parlor, next to Robert's framed portrait. Peggy treasures her letters from Robert, while Stuart makes his into paper airplanes or trades them with schoolmates.

The image of Robert's portrait and letters in his family's parlor is visually similar to an altar where people pay tribute to the dead, suggesting that his family is already beginning to grieve him. Having already lost Rowena, they are preparing themselves for the trauma of losing Robert as well.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

In February 1916, Robert has been stationed in France for two months and is heading toward Belgium on a road obscured by **fog** and smoke. The conditions are terrible, as the soldiers are surrounded by the mud-filled flats of Flanders. Men and **horses** frequently sink into the mud and drown to death, contaminating the water in the ditches on either side of the road.

The mud in France is a likely result of the exceptionally wet autumnal season mentioned in Part 1, Chapter 14. Though the soldiers have yet to see combat, the natural landscape in Europe is an enemy in and of itself, disorienting the new soldiers and showing the wide variety of dangers that caused troops to suffer in World War I.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Robert and his men depart from a town called Bailleul, which they call "the last place in civilization." Here, there is a hotel where the soldiers can sleep, and an insane asylum called Asile Desolé where the officers bathe. As they get closer to Ypres, the culture becomes increasingly less French and more Belgian. Robert cannot understand the locals, who mainly speak Flemish. When he requests that a peasant speak to him in the English, the man assumes that Robert is a British soldier and yells at him, exclaiming that the English are all murderers.

The Belgian peasant's reaction to Robert indicates the cross-cultural effects of the war. Though the customs and traditions of many European countries have a great deal in common, the mass scale of World War I has completely fractured the continent, causing people to view outsiders as enemies by default and thus encouraging senseless animosity between strangers like Robert and the peasant.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

Robert rides with a bugler named Willie Poole, who chose active duty over joining the military band. The **air** becomes contaminated with a thick, foul-smelling green fog that disorients the men and causes them to lose their bearings. Robert wonders if it is a mustard gas attack, but Poole tells him that it is probably chlorine emanating naturally from the clay in the ground.

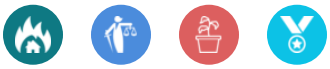
The soldiers' deprivation of something as basic as breathable air shows the constant danger they face at war. The similarity of mustard gas to the natural gas from the ground implies that the enemy forces, like nature, are impartial and unstoppable in their warfare tactics.

Suddenly, massive flocks of birds begin to fly out of the ditches around Robert and Poole, adding to the disorienting, ominous atmosphere of the **fog**. Robert tells an orderly to go back and look for the other men, and Poole gives him his bugle as a means of signaling to them through the fog.

The presence of the birds, combined with the dense fog, foreshadows uncertain danger for Robert and his men, again highlighting the unpredictable risks that soldiers face while doing something as simple as riding down a road.

Eventually, junior officer Levitt emerges with Poole's bugle and tells Robert that the orderly and his **horse** drowned to death because Robert had led the men on a wrong turn through a gap in a dike. While Robert is ashamed of his error in judgment, Levitt jokes that he is glad to have the bugle because, since it could be anyone blowing it, the Germans will not shoot at him. Poole tells him that the Germans are still far away, and Levitt is disappointed because he, like most soldiers, does not feel like he is really at war unless he is in danger.

Robert's tendency for self-blame manifests again, as he feels that he is responsible for the orderly's death. This is the first of many losses that Robert will experience at war—his reaction to this one shows that he has not been desensitized to the trauma. Levitt's disappointment at not being in danger suggests that the orderly's death has not affected him in the same way, and that he too is motivated by a desire for a heroic legacy.



PART 2, CHAPTER 4

As Robert rides ahead of Poole and the rest of the convoy, he accidentally puts his foot down in a sinkhole and falls in the **mud** up to his waist. Terrified of drowning, he desperately thrashes and claws his way out. Through the fog, Robert spots another soldier lying nearby before he is **blinded** by the mud's natural chlorine.

Like the constant threat of gas, the random threat of sinkholes suggests that all external forces are potentially violent in war. Even when the enemy is far away, as Poole assured Levitt in Chapter 3, there is no opportunity for the soldiers to let their guard down or rest.

Eventually, Poole and Levitt catch up to Robert and help him up. Once his **eyes** have cleared, Robert looks back and realizes that the entire field is full of dead bodies floating in the **mud**, and that the sounds he and Poole had heard earlier were crows feeding on the corpses.

Robert's realization that the body he saw is only one of many reflects the immense magnitude of World War I. While tragedies like the man lying in the mud initially feel personal and immediate, the sheer scale of the war means that Robert and the other soldiers will have to desensitize themselves to violence in order to stay sane.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

The gap in the dike has widened to the point that the soldiers and their horses must swim across. When they reach the other side, Robert falls off his **horse** into the **water**, but his men pull him up the bank. The soldiers warm themselves and sing songs around a fire, spending the night in the middle of the road. In the morning, they set off along the muddy path and Robert realizes that the crows are following them.

Though Robert's men are aware of the danger posed by the gap in the dike (the orderly having drowned here in Chapter 3), they do not hesitate to jump in to save Robert. This self-sacrifice suggests that the soldiers are eager to fulfill their duties, even if that means putting themselves at risk. While the men seem to be safe from immediate threats the next day, the persistent presence of the crows foreshadows more danger on the horizon.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

The Second Battle of Ypres took place in April 1915, around the time Robert first enlisted in the army. After the battle, Ypres remains in Allied possession. Most of the Canadian troops are deployed after this time and are assigned to objectives in trenches in towns, villages, and the surrounding woods.

The fact that Ypres, West Flanders has been in Allied possession for nearly a year explains why the Belgian peasant was so hostile toward Robert in Chapter 2. Believing him to be a British soldier, the man was reacting to the trauma of his country being overtaken by enemy forces, showing the devastating effects of war on civilians as well as troops.

Robert, Levitt, and the other junior officers alternate between convoy and battery duties. Robert and another man named Roots start on convoy, where each officer oversees seventy-five men and ninety-five **horses**. When there is fighting (a "show"), the soldiers form columns to transport the ammunition. The size of the order depends on the duration of the gunfire—two hours is considered important, while thirty minutes is called "nuisance firing."

As the men reach Belgium and begin combat, the reality of war is different from the dramatic battles that Robert and many others expected. The description of "nuisance firing" suggests that many of the soldiers' duties are mundane and operate much like an assembly line—a far cry from the glorious heroism they envisioned.

The Huns begin a mission on the Meuse River against the French, aiming to create a "zone of death." They fly planes overhead (which mesmerizes Robert) and make a **gas** attack at the Ypres Salient, but it is far enough away that Robert's men only taste the gas on the snowflakes.

The German forces' use of aircrafts and chemical weaponry demonstrates the unprecedented destruction made possible by modern technology, as they are able to rapidly devastate entire swaths of land from a distance rather than engaging in close-range combat.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

Robert and Levitt oversee the men who are fighting in trenches with mortars. The fighting has been continuous for the past week, devastating the trenches and leaving the troops exhausted. On a clear day, Robert and Levitt can see the German lines from the Observation Post, and Robert feels that being able to observe the enemy in greater detail gives the war more meaning and importance.

In addition to the new weaponry of World War I, the trench style of warfare also caused mass casualties, as many men caught diseases or drowned during long stints in these trenches. Despite the grim reality he is witnessing, Robert feels pride in his role as a soldier, experiencing a renewed sense of purpose as he is able to put a face to the elusive enemy forces.

Robert and Levitt relieve two other men, Devlin and Bonnycastle, from their position in the dugout. Devlin, who dreams of owning an antique shop, shows them the valuable pieces he has been collecting from houses along the warpath. Levitt points out a toad housed in a small cage in the corner of the dugout and Bonnycastle tells him that it belongs to a visiting soldier named Rodwell who saves injured animals like birds, rabbits, and hedgehogs and keeps them under his bed. Seeing these animals reminds Robert of Rowena and her rabbits.

Both Devlin's antique collection and Rodwell's makeshift menagerie of animals reflect a deeply-rooted desire among soldiers to preserve innocence and beauty of life in the midst of war. Rodwell's compassion toward animals implies that he will likely be a kindred spirit of Robert, who has felt a deep connection with Rowena's rabbits, the coyote on the prairie, and the injured horse on the S.S. Massanabie.

Changing the subject, Robert empties his knapsack full of food and cigarettes to share with the other men. Devlin and Bonnycastle are delighted. They ask Levitt what he has in his sack, teasing him when they find out it is full of books. Levitt tells them he brought *Clausewitz on War* because "someone has to know what he's doing."

While most soldiers are eager to find simple pleasures and distractions from the stress their duties, Levitt (much like Clifford Purchas) is unrelentingly serious about the war. His interest in Clausewitz on War *parallels Findley's reference to Clausewitz at the beginning of the novel and foreshadows that the other men's mockery of his reading may come back to haunt them, just as the quote in the epigraph proved true for Robert.*

PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Poole makes chicken stew for the men in the dugout, which is well-furnished, "civilized," and "proper" compared to most. Over dinner, Levitt insults Bonnycastle by quoting Clausewitz's suggestion that the artillery is absurd. Rodwell defuses the tension by changing the subject to animals and bonding with Levitt over their shared love of **horses**. Rodwell, who illustrates children's books, thinks of his toad as a companion and jokes that its military rank is Field Marshal.

Findley uses Levitt's interest in Clausewitz's military strategy to make a commentary about war's absurdity. Though Levitt has previously exhibited dutiful self-sacrifice in saving Robert and Poole, he clearly views World War I (and modern warfare in general) as a senseless, needlessly violent conflict. This offends Bonnycastle, who, like many other men, finds meaning in his role as a soldier. Rodwell's ease in diffusing this ideological conflict shows how eager the soldiers are to find an innocent escape from their troubles.

PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Lying in his dugout bunk, Robert thinks about how strange Levitt and Rodwell are, reflecting that everyone is strange in war and that "ordinary" must be a myth. Levitt, reading *Clausewitz on War*, again brings up the artillery and how it creates a "passive character" in men.

Robert's analysis of Levitt and Rodwell hearkens back to Maria Turner's commentary in Part 1, Chapter 3. Like Miss Turner, Robert believes that war can bring out the extraordinary in ordinary men, suggesting that war has a tendency to change people on a fundamental level. Levitt, too, echoes Miss Turner, believing that war makes people "passive" just as she believes ordinary men made the world "complacent" during World War I.

Robert feels instinctively afraid of sleeping and is unsettled by the surrounding sounds and smells of the dugout. He longs to escape into a dream or run away like Longboat, but thoughts of Taffler and Harris keep him awake.:"

Though Robert had romantic notions of war before shipping off, the reality of his duties as a soldier are traumatizing, rather than fulfilling; the life of a soldier is turning out to be more than he bargained for. Robert regresses to memories of Longboat, his childhood hero, because he longs for the innocence and freedom of his youth and the simple escape of running away.

PART 2, CHAPTER 10

The novel flashes back to January 1916. Arriving in England on the *S.S. Massanabie*, Robert and Harris are sent to an old country house where the C.F.A. keeps its reserve brigades. They become close friends during their stay. Once Robert's legs heal, he takes his embarkation leave in London because Harris is sent to a hospital there after his pneumonia worsens. Robert is Harris's only visitor, coming to see his friend nearly every day. This experience confuses Robert, since he has not felt called to support someone in this way since Rowena died.

Robert forms a close bond with Harris, likely because the young man's debilitating illness reminds him of his sister Rowena's condition. Having lost his sense of identity as Rowena's "guardian" after she passed away, he feels a renewed sense of purpose in his role as a friend for Harris, and therefore feels that it is his duty to give him moral support.

One evening at the hospital, Robert runs into Taffler and a woman named Lady Barbara d'Orsey, who are there to visit a man encased in bandages. Taffler briefly says something to the man while Barbara watches with a blank expression, after which they abruptly leave. Robert senses that the bandaged man is screaming in silent agony. A nurse tells him that the man is Captain Villiers, whose vocal cords were destroyed when he was trapped in a **fire**. She comments that she does not know how Barbara "dares to come here."

The nurse's reaction to Barbara suggests that she is somehow to blame for Captain Villiers's pain, or is mocking him by visiting him with another man. As a new soldier, Robert is horrified by the man's terrible injuries, a reaction that foreshadows the trauma he, too, will experience once he enters combat. Robert's intrigue here is ironic, considering that his death by fire was revealed early on in the story.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11

In the present day, Barbara's sister, Lady Juliet d'Orsey (now in her seventies), still remembers Robert vividly. She is the fourth of the Marquis and Marchioness of St. Aubyn's five children and the sole survivor of the family, still residing at their London address. Juliet is proud of Robert and angered by the mention of his detractors, including Robert's brother Stuart.

This passage reveals that Robert's own family, in addition to his fellow soldiers, still blame him for whatever act he committed, and view him as dishonorable many years after the war has ended. By gradually revealing details like this, Findley creates an air of mystery and mythology around what happened to Robert before and after the scene in the prologue, allowing for a full contextualization of Robert's time in the war before making judgments about his final actions.

PART 2, CHAPTER 12

In an interview from the present day with Lady Juliet d'Orsey, she recalls that her sister Barbara met Robert because of Harris and Jamie Villiers, the bandaged man Barbara and Taffler visited in the hospital. Jamie was a close friend of Julie and Barbara's brother Clive, as they both loved to ride **horses**. Juliet says that Barbara was attracted to Jamie's heroism and athleticism, and that she was an unsophisticated snob who tagged along with Clive and Jamie until Clive told her to stop interfering in their friendship.

The image of Jamie riding horses as a teenager is a stark contrast to his current immobilized state in the hospital; the war has completely altered his life by physically devastating him, as well as robbing him of his boyhood innocence. Barbara's attraction to heroic men like Jamie suggests that civilians, as well as soldiers, view duty and self-sacrifice as honorable qualities.

Juliet reflects that Jamie and Clive were in love and remembers that Barbara stole Jamie away from another woman when he returned from war as a decorated hero. Clive, who became an accomplished Cambridge poet, was killed in the Somme Offensive on July 1, 1916. Juliet says that Robert was in love with Harris in the same way Jamie and Clive loved each other—not erotically, but emotionally. She believes that athletic and artistic men seek each other out because they share a similar appreciation for aesthetic beauty and perfectionism.

Again, Barbara's attraction to Jamie shows the intoxicating effects that a heroic legacy can have on both soldiers and their loved ones. Given her reaction, it makes sense why young men like Robert, Clifford Purchas, and Levitt yearn to put themselves in danger. Juliet's observation about Clive's relationship with Jamie and Robert's relationship with Harris suggests that men are drawn to the very qualities they lack, perhaps explaining why young, inexperienced soldiers are eager to feel mature and formidable on the battlefield.

Juliet says that every generation has a war, and that the great men and women of any given time are defined by their response to their era's particular set of challenges. She acknowledges war's ability to normalize death for ordinary people, but angrily rejects the notion that society became cold and complacent in the midst of trauma. Rather, World War I brought people closer together as the romance and propriety of life was stripped away to reveal humanity's raw vulnerability and foster deep connections. Juliet reflects that this reality is what made Barbara's silence in Jamie's presence at the hospital so cruel—she refused to give anything of herself to him.

Juliet's perspective on guilt is much different from other characters in the novel—while people like Robert and Mrs. Ross are consumed by self-blame over the trauma they experience, Juliet believes that this mindset does more harm than good. Rather, everyone's actions are merely reactions to the circumstances they face, and nothing is solved by trying to cast judgment or seek justice. Much like Miss Turner, Juliet believes that ordinary people made the war what it was, and that the only way to cope with the trauma was to seek out the companionship of others, rather than to treat people harshly.

Harris, who had a poetic soul, loved to tell stories about men lost at **sea** and whales singing to each other in the ocean. Juliet says that, after Harris succumbed to pneumonia and died, Robert tried and failed to get in touch with Harris's parents to give him an honorable burial. Harris was cremated instead, which horrified Robert. In lieu of a burial at sea, Robert, Barbara, and Taffler decided to scatter Harris's ashes on the Thames River.

The loss of Harris is yet another event that solidifies Robert's transition from childhood to adulthood. Harris is the last friend that Robert makes before going off to fight in France. Given this reality, in addition to the symbolic significance of the sea water as a marker of transition, Harris's death is a final goodbye to Robert's adolescence.

PART 2, CHAPTER 13

Close to midnight on February 27, 1916, Robert finally falls asleep. At 4 a.m. the next morning, the Germans set off a string of land mines in Ypres. The trenches around Robert's dugout are blown up, and he takes shelter under his bunk with Rodwell's animals. In a battle that stretches out over five days, 30,000 men are killed, yet no ground is won.

The sudden shock of this attack is a disorienting contrast to the lighthearted evening the soldiers had just hours before. The fact that 30,000 men are killed, with nothing to show for it, shows the grueling hopelessness of the men's duties as soldiers. It also proves Levitt's previous observations about the absurdity of modern warfare to be correct.

PART 3

Robert's dugout is bombed by the Germans. After the roof caves in, he, Rodwell, and Levitt are disoriented and surrounded by debris. Levitt clings to his copy of *Clausewitz on War* while Rodwell collects his animals (who all survived in their cages). Robert frantically digs through the debris, certain that Poole has suffocated and died. Robert is angry but relived when Poole appears behind him from outside, alive and well.

This passage demonstrates the stressful and traumatic instability that is inherent to the life of a soldier. One moment the men are asleep, and the next moment their dugout is completely destroyed. Even though Robert is disoriented by the explosion, Poole's wellbeing is still at the forefront of his mind, showing the sense of self-sacrificial duty that he has as an officer, even in the midst of utter chaos.

Robert struggles to survey the devastated trenches amidst the **fire** and smoke from burst shells. He climbs through the debris-ridden, waterlogged trenches toward the Battalion Signals Office, where he hopes other survivors will congregate. On his way there, he saves a rat trapped in a hole, marveling at the presence of something alive amidst this devastation. It takes Robert over an hour to trek a quarter of a mile.

Seeing the rat trapped in the hole indicates the war's tendency to trivialize life, as even the most innocent, defenseless creatures are dragged into the violence around them. Robert's concern for this animal demonstrates his empathy and sense of duty to protect those who are more vulnerable than himself, hearkening back to his former role as Rowena's "guardian."

Robert reaches the Signals Office but cannot get through to his O.C. (Officer Commanding) for orders, as most of the wires are down. The wounded are being led back to Wytsbrouk by a **horse** railway. German shells continue to land nearby as he waits to send his message. These close calls cause several soldiers to exclaim "Isn't it marvelous!"

The men's enthusiasm about the chaos reinforces the notion that many of Robert's fellow soldiers are still exhilarated by danger, rather than afraid of it. The men view violence as an opportunity to prove their manhood, a testament to the self-destructive mindset that war encourages and that encourages war.

Captain Leather, Robert's company commander, arrives from Wytsbrouk and asks Robert to explain the situation. Leather continually repeats "just so" as Robert delivers his report, even as he shares his fear that all of his men have been killed. Leather studies a map and lays down a new course of action for positioning the guns, which Robert silently believes is crazy because they will sink in the **mud**. He then introduces Robert to Corporal Bates, who is in charge of the Mortar Squads. After warning Robert that these men are troublemakers, Leather wanders off to have some tea.

Captain Leather's attitude toward the war is one of detachment—his repetitive response to Robert indicates that he is not genuinely empathetic toward the trauma his men have been through and does not wish to become directly involved in the conflict. His irresponsible plan only reinforces this carelessness. Whereas many of the young soldiers are motivated by a desire to sacrifice themselves for their countries, Leather is only concerned about himself, foreshadowing the fact that those under his command will be forced into precarious situations down the line.

Robert and Bates lead twenty-two men through the remains of the trenches. Robert likes Bates because his attitude toward the battlefield is one of genuine awe rather than detachment. They arrive back at Robert's dugout, where Levitt is disturbingly calm. Robert tells him to help Poole fix the brazier so they can make tea later. Rodwell, who is caked with **mud**, hopes that the raincloud will pass so that the ground will freeze. Like Robert, all of Rodwell's men were killed.

Bates's genuineness is a contrast to Captain Leather's cynicism and carelessness, a difference which suggests that more experienced soldiers eventually become desensitized to the violence they witness. Levitt's dulled emotions, on the other hand, imply that he is experiencing shell shock. These different reactions to the bombing show the varied effects of trauma on individuals.

When Robert, Bates, and their men reach the remains of the forward trench, they find it still full of dead and wounded soldiers. Only the wounded are allowed to turn back and stay with other wounded men, so Robert and the others press on. Bates thinks that the most terrifying part of war is having to trust orders from strangers (like Robert and Captain Leather) who might be mad, stupid, or crazy.

Bates's concern about following orders implies that soldiers are often forced to prioritize their sense of duty above their own sensibilities or physical wellbeing. His worry about trusting Robert foreshadows uncertain danger for the men wherein they will have to rely on each other to survive.

Robert spots an object in the distance and tells Bates they will head toward that. He instructs Bates to wait to enter the crater until he finds a foothold. Robert falls down the crater's slippery, **muddy** sides and injures his knees before struggling his way into a standing position. Bates and the other men drop down into the crater after him. There is no sign of the enemy, so Robert climbs up to the rim of the crater and signals the men to come up and start digging.

The fact that Robert is hurt even before they reach the site of the mission proves that his skepticism of Captain Leather's plan is warranted. Regardless, his role as a soldier forces him to obey orders even at the risk of injury for himself and his men, showing the inherent danger he is willing to accept as part of his duties.

The men dig out a site to set up the guns according to Captain Leather's orders. Robert notices one of the gunners throwing **mud** into the pools below like a child playing in a park. He begins to make calculations but suddenly realizes that the fighting has stopped as they hear birdsong overhead. The silence means that the Germans are going to attack again. The residual smoke from the shells has begun to dissipate along with the clouds overhead, destroying their cover.

The image of the soldier playing with mud takes on a dark tone considering how harrowing their situation is in the wake of the bombing. The boyish gesture highlights just how significantly their lives have changed from their relatively recent days of childhood.

Suddenly, a pale blue **fog** appears overhead. Robert orders the men to put on their gas masks, but Bates tells him they were not issued any due to the hasty nature of the operation. Without thinking, Robert orders them to jump, and the men land on top of one another in the water below. The situation quickly becomes a nightmare, as some of the men cannot swim and one breaks his legs in the fall. Corpses that had lain against the sides of the crater fall down into the water. The soldiers forgo all protocol as they desperately try not to drown, and Robert has to kick his men away as they try to steal his gas mask.

Like the bombing of Robert's dugout, this sudden attack shows that the soldiers must live in constant anticipation of the next violent attack; there is rarely a moment to rest physically or mentally. Although Robert is an officer and has a responsibility to look out for his men, this role is not always morally straightforward. While his decision to keep his gas mask for himself could be interpreted as selfish, it is also necessary—he knows that he must stay alive in order to help the other soldiers.

Robert remembers being in chemistry class with Clifford Purchas years ago and learning that the natural ammonia in urine could turn chloride into a harmless powder. He commands his men to tear the tails off of their shirts, urinate on them, and wrap them around their faces. Bates's terror prevents him from urinating, so Robert pees on the cloth himself and slaps it over Bates's face.

Robert's quick thinking in this dire moment shows that his inherent courage and resourcefulness are just as honorable as his romanticized notions of killing the enemy without remorse. Though he idolized Taffler's ability to kill in Part 1, Chapter 13, Robert's actions here suggest that there is more than one way to be a hero.

The **gas** gradually dissipates, but the men wait with their faces buried in their hands for three hours, playing dead and praying as it begins to snow. Finally, Robert eases himself up and commands the other men to stay still. He hears the same bird from earlier singing, and it makes him nervous because it reminds him of a cowboy signaling the presence of an Indian in the woods.

As in Part 2, the birdsong here is an ominous sign of danger, showing the war's ability to turn ordinary sights and sounds into triggers of panic and relived trauma for shell-shocked soldiers.

Robert freezes as he spots a German soldier lying at the edge of the crater, looking at him through a pair of binoculars. He can see the German's **eyes** when he puts the binoculars down, noticing that the soldier is around his age. At first Robert quietly orders Bates and the others to stay silent and covered under the **snow**, but the German seems to signal that he is unarmed. Robert tells Bates and the rest of his men to get up and climb out of the crater.

Robert's realization that the German soldier is his age is a surreal moment, as he is finally able to personify the vague, faceless enemy that he and his men have been fighting all along. The similarity between Robert and the German shows war's ability to rob young men of their innocence, as these two soldiers who may have been friends in another situation are forced to become mortal enemies in the context of war.

Robert begins to climb out, too, but thinks he sees the German reaching for a gun. Robert impulsively shoots and kills him, but is horrified to realize that the German was only reaching for his binoculars, and that he had a sniper rifle the entire time and could have killed them but chose not to. Robert hears the bird singing again and thinks that this sound will haunt him for the rest of his life. On their way back through the trench, Robert and the other soldiers find that everyone else is dead, having either been gassed or frozen to death.

Robert's impulsive decision to shoot the German soldier is a testament to the moral complexity of war, as he feels it is his duty as an officer to take one life for the sake of saving several others. Although he kills the German in preemptive defense of his own men, and this act could be interpreted as heroic, Robert is still tortured by guilt for years to come. This reality suggests that the violent acts soldiers are forced to commit can be just as traumatizing as the violence enacted against them.

The next few days seem to bleed together as the Germans continue to attack. Countless troops are lost as **fire** storms burn and explode men and their **horses** along the front. It is rumored that the Germans have invented a flamethrower that is "the ultimate weapon," able to vaporize entire trenches of men into dust.

The invention of the flamethrower is an extreme example of the "passive" modern warfare techniques in Clausewitz on War *that Levitt has referenced to the other men. The gruesome, destructive nature of the flamethrower allowed for the killing of huge numbers of men from a physical and emotional distance, a stark contrast to the close-range weapons that were used in war up until this point.*

The men try their best to regroup in the midst of this chaos. Rodwell and Poole repair the roof of the dugout, while Levitt goes mad and sits immobilized with his books piled up on his knees. Devlin, Bonnycastle, and Roots make forays from Wytsbrouk, and Robert and Bonnycastle fight in confusion over the fact that all of the guns were left in No Man's Land. Rodwell, having saved his toad during the gas attack, disappears. The rabbit, hedgehog, and bird all asphyxiated. No one is sure of Rodwell's whereabouts, or if he survived.

The soldiers' different reactions to the bombing (distraction, madness, and anger) demonstrate how traumatic events can have varied effects on different individuals. The deaths of Rodwell's animals in the bombing show that the war also has wide-reaching consequences for those who are not directly involved in the conflict, even the most innocent and defenseless of creatures.

One day, it begins to **rain**, and the fighting seems to be over as the fire on the ground is extinguished. Rodwell reappears and says goodbye, as he is being transferred. He entrusts Robert with his toad, sketchbooks, and a letter addressed to his daughter for safekeeping. Captain Leather finally makes an appearance, commanding Robert, Levitt, Poole, and Devlin to return to Wytsbrouk while Bonnycastle and Roots stay with the men. He says that it is a pity Robert lost the guns in the crater.

Captain Leather again proves to be an ineffective leader. Despite the reality that Leather sent the men on a dangerous, irresponsible mission and Robert was forced to save their lives as a result, he only acknowledges the mistake that Robert made by leaving the guns in No Man's Land. This attitude suggests that soldiers are not always praised for their courage or heroism—rather, they are judged solely on their ability to follow orders and unjustly blamed for the mistakes of their superiors.

A few days later, Robert receives word that Rodwell shot himself. He was assigned "down the line" to a company who had been in the trenches and driven to madness during the **fire** storms. These men forced Rodwell to watch them torturing small animals by burning them alive, which drove him to suicide. Robert reads the letter that Rodwell wrote to his daughter Laurine, in which he told her that nothing ever dies and that he would always be her father.

Rodwell's suicide encapsulates the devastating psychological effects that war can have on an individual. From this passage, it is clear that trauma has a cyclical effect, as soldiers who are traumatized by violence are driven to commit senseless violence of their own against animals. While these men have clearly been morally corrupted by war, Rodwell refuses to lose the innocent spirit that he has managed to preserve throughout the war, and chooses to end his life rather than witness or perpetuate cruelty against defenseless creatures.

The novel flashes back to January 1916, from the perspective of Robert's mother. Mrs. Ross begins to seek comfort in **rain** and snow, forcing Miss Davenport to walk outside with her during storms. She closes her **eyes** when she passes by acquaintances she knows on the streets and walks with a stick instead of an umbrella.

Throughout the novel, eyes represent human vulnerability. Mrs. Ross's habit of closing her eyes when she passes people on the street suggests that she is harboring self-blame over spitefully encouraging Robert to join the army in Part 1, Chapter 10, and is afraid that others will cast judgment on her. She also feels simply vulnerable as a mother with a son at war, and doesn't want others to see that vulnerability.

In February, the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa are burned down, and Mrs. Ross pores over the news. She tells Miss Davenport that her country is being destroyed by fire. In March, Mrs. Ross braves the harsh **wind** to walk in a muddy ravine, with Davenport following behind. On some days, Mrs. Ross gets drunk and Davenport wheels her in Rowena's wheelchair to the park. She dreads falling asleep, and the bumping of the wheelchair keeps her awake.

Although Robert and his mother are separated by distance, Mrs. Ross's confrontation of the brutal Canadian elements is similar to Robert's own struggle at war, as he faces sinkholes, poison gas attacks, and explosions, among other threats. The parallel experiences of mother and son draws on the title, The Wars, *implying that there are multiple wars happening during any given conflict. While soldiers on the battlefront fight a physical battle, families on the home front fight their own battles as well.*

Mrs. Ross obsessively rereads, memorizes, and catalogues Robert's letters. She writes him rambling, illegible responses. Tom feels distant from his wife and misses her terribly, but never says anything, instead losing himself in memories of their early days as a couple. Tom loves Mrs. Ross but fears her, feeling as if he is "just another room through which she passed towards the dark."

Mrs. Ross's erratic behavior again suggests that she blames herself for Robert's dangerous situation overseas. Portraying the weakening of the Ross family unit alongside the violence that Robert and the other soldiers face again shows that the war has wide-reaching effects, not only on soldiers, but on civilians.

On March 8, 1916, Robert is sent from St. Eloi to England. On the train ride there, he flips through Rodwell's sketchbook and is shocked to see a several drawings of himself mixed in with the other sketches of toads, birds, rodents, and other animals. Although the likeness of Robert is good, the drawings seem vaguely inhuman, as if he had somehow been "modified and mutated" to become one of the animals. Early that morning, Robert had released Rodwell's toad, as promised, near a hedge. As the toad burrowed in the **mud**, Robert touched it with his fingertips and told it to "be well."

Rodwell's drawings suggest that he viewed Robert as more akin to an animal than a man, implying that Robert has the same inherent gentleness and purity of spirit that he has admired in animals throughout the novel. This special quality in Robert hearkens back to Part 1, Chapter 3, when Miss Turner implied that it is ordinary people who cause the horrors of war. The fact that Robert is perceived as extraordinary foreshadows the possibility that the "monstrous" actions of ordinary people will play a role in his downfall.

PART 4

The narration switches to another interview with Lady Juliet d'Orsey in the present day, in which she shares memories from her childhood diaries from World War I. Flashing back to this period of time, the d'Orsey family owns an abbey called St. Aubyn's in the idyllic English village of Stourbridge. Juliet's father, the Marquis of St. Aubyn's, despises his family and reluctantly allows his wife, Lady Emmeline, to convert their abbey into a convalescence hospital for soldiers. Around March of 1916, Robert returns from the Battle of St. Eloi and receives an invitation (bearing Captain Taffler's forged signature) to go stay at St. Aubyn's.

Because the casualties of World War I were greatly underestimated, it was common for private homes and other buildings to be converted into hospitals for wounded and mentally ill soldiers. The willingness of citizens to open their homes to the troops suggests that the public generally venerated soldiers as heroes and were sympathetic to the trauma they experienced at war—a sentiment that was not as common in the Vietnam War era, when Findley published The Wars.

Twelve-year-old Juliet is a curious, precocious child whose only playmate is her five-year-old sister Temple. She takes an immediate liking to Robert and admires his physical appearance. The two chat about their families, and Juliet tells Robert that his room at St. Aubyn's is haunted by a ghost named Lady Sorrel, instructing him to blow out the candles in the room if the ghost lights them. Robert inquires about Taffler several times, and when he is finally taken to Taffler's room he is shocked to discover that his acquaintance has lost both of his arms in battle.

Juliet's intelligent, observant nature is similar to Robert's, a parallel that highlights how the war has caused him to stray away from the innocent child he used to be. Seeing Taffler's terrible wounds reinforces this reality, as Robert has gone from an inexperienced adolescent who admired Taffler's heroism to a soldier who has experienced the traumas of war firsthand.

Juliet's sister Barbara, who is interested in another soldier at the abbey named Major Terry, is also drawn to Robert. Juliet sees Barbara leaving Major Terry's room one night, and hears her sister call him a "jackass." Juliet decides to slip a Pin the Tail on the Donkey game under Major Terry's door as a prank; he assumes that it is from Barbara and leaves St. Aubyn's soon after.

Juliet's mischievous practical joke further highlights her innocence and serves as a contrast to the chaos around her. Despite the violence, trauma, and death that is rampant in the war, she is one of few characters in the novel who is able to retain her whimsical spirit.

Juliet and Barbara's brother Clive arrives at St. Aubyn's with a large group of friends, all of whom are pacifists. Their other brother, Michael, hates these friends and fights with Clive because he believes they are hurting the morale of the war effort.

Clive's friends are yet another example of the varied reactions that the trauma of the war brought about for civilians—whereas some were driven to madness (like Mrs. Ross) and some were patriotic and supported the war effort (like Miss Davenport), others opposed the war and refused to support the troops. This reality shows that war is a nuanced experience that has diverse effects on the general population as well as soldiers.

One afternoon, Juliet picks daffodils to take to Captain Taffler. She sees Robert and Barbara come out of Taffler's room and embrace. A short while later, Juliet goes into Taffler's room to give him the flowers and finds him kneeling on the floor with his bandages unraveled and blood spurting from the stumps where his arms were amputated. The walls are streaked with blood where he had rubbed his wounds to harm himself. Juliet calls for help and Taffler is taken to have an operation. Juliet, knowing that Taffler did not want to live, feels both guilty and glad that she saved him from bleeding to death.

Seeing Taffler in this state is an example of the metaphorical wars being fought by both soldiers and civilians during World War I. Although Juliet does not experience combat directly, she is traumatized by the effects she witnesses through Taffler's injuries and mental illness. Her actions are undeniably heroic, yet, like Robert's dilemmas during the war (such as saving the trapped rat and shooting the German soldier), her decision to save Taffler is morally complex. Although Juliet knows that saving him will doom him to a life that he does not want to live, she also has an inherent respect for life that prevents her from letting him die. Her lingering guilt after the incident shows how traumatic events can cause individuals to blame themselves.

Barbara's attraction to Robert quickly develops into an affair. Juliet is jealous of her sister because she, too, is in love with him. She notices that Robert has a bad temper in private and has "a great deal of violence inside him." Robert goes to have an operation for the knee injuries he sustained during the Battle of St. Eloi and returns to St. Aubyn's for two weeks of convalescence.

Both Robert's relationship with Barbara and his newly-developed tendency for violent outbursts suggests that the horrors he has witnessed at war have forced him to mature and abandon the sexual and moral innocence he had as a new soldier.

Juliet reflects that everything she has learned has been a consequence of spying on people and "blundering" into places where she does not belong. When she sees Barbara go into Robert's room one night, she decides to pull a prank on them by dressing up as the ghost of Lady Sorrel and sneaking into Robert's room to scare them. Opening the door to the room, Juliet is shocked to see Robert and Barbara having violent sex. To Juliet, it looks like Robert hates Barbara and is trying to kill her. She runs away and feels traumatized, reflecting that "I know things now I didn't want to know."

The fact that Juliet's innocence is disrupted by Robert and Barbara having violent sex is tragically ironic, given that Robert was similarly disturbed when he witnessed Taffler roleplaying as a horse and a rider with another man in Part 1, Chapter 17. Having gone from the one losing his innocence to the one who causes another person to lose their innocence, this passage shows that Robert's sobering experiences at war have changed him from an inexperienced boy who was terrified of sex into a man with violent sexual impulses.

The next day, Juliet feels terribly guilty and cannot stop crying. Clive comes to sit with her, and she asks him why Robert and Barbara are so afraid. Clive replies that it is because "everyone they've loved has died." After healing from his surgery, Robert departs from St. Aubyn's, leaving Rodwell's sketchbooks behind for Juliet. As a gesture of apology for intruding on him and Barbara, Juliet gives Robert a package with Lady Sorrel's candles and a box of matches.

Again, Juliet's guilt demonstrates the tendency for traumatized individuals to blame themselves for what they have witnessed. Her question to Clive suggests that despite her innocence, she is wise beyond her years, since she has clearly reflected since the night before and come to believe that Robert and Barbara's intense relationship stems from fear rather than hatred. This significant incident likely informed the opinions Juliet holds as in adult, such as in Part 2, Chapter 12, when she states her belief that the war stripped down people's propriety and brought them closer together.

Finishing up her story, Juliet reflects that Clive did not think the Great War generation would ever be forgiven for their actions, but he hoped people would at least remember them as human beings. The narration shifts away from this interview with Juliet and states that the reader has read the deaths of 557,017 people thus far in the novel, including Monty Miles Raymond, Harris, and Rowena Ross.

Clive's opinion about the war is another echo of Juliet's sentiments in Part 2, Chapter 12. Rather than harboring blame, denial, or resentment, Clive is honest about the atrocities of the war and believes that people's actions are merely reactions to their particular circumstances.

PART 5, CHAPTER 1

Robert takes a train from London to Southampton and boards a ship to the Canadian Base Depot in Le Havre, France. He finds that his kit bag containing his clothing, binoculars, and pistol has been mistakenly sent to a different station and feels naked and vulnerable without it.

Robert's missing kit bag foreshadows potential danger for him down the line, as he is returning to war without his pistol. His discomfort shows how weapons become normalized in the midst of war, and being without his gun is akin to a civilian being without their wallet.

The next day, Robert takes a long train ride to a town called Magdalene Wood, reflecting on childhood memories of Jackson's Point during the journey. Magdalene Wood is still a ways from Robert's final destination in Bailleul, but he decides to walk there in order to get a room at the hotel rather than wait for the wagon detail to bring his luggage. On the way there, Robert cannot believe that there is a war going on as he passes through the peaceful French countryside.

Robert's regression into his childhood memories suggests that he longs for the innocent life he had before becoming a soldier. The peaceful countryside is such a contrast to the horrors he has experienced that he is unable to reconcile the two realities as existing simultaneously, implying that there is usually a sharp divide between the experiences of soldiers and civilians during war.

PART 5, CHAPTER 2

Robert, exhausted from his convoluted two-hundred-mile journey from Le Havre to Bailleul, falls into a deep sleep at the hotel and wakes up groggy and disoriented. He has not bathed, shaved, or changed his clothes in days. He undresses and looks at himself in the mirror, surprised at how disheveled and old his reflection appears. Still exhausted, Robert collapses back on the bed as he hears people dancing and laughing in the dining room downstairs amidst the distant sound of gunfire. Feeling "appallingly alone," he masturbates before drifting back to sleep.

This passage demonstrates the toll that the war has taken on Robert. Although he has been given time to recover at St. Aubyn's and transition to his next station in Belgium, he is unable to rest or feel at ease. The fact that Robert notices how old he looks (despite having only been at war for a few months) suggests that the stress of fighting and the atrocities he has witnessed have affected him both physically and mentally.

PART 5, CHAPTER 3

Robert wakes up to find that it has **rained**. An old woman brings him a jug of warm water and some tea. He shaves his face and looks forward to washing the fleas out of his hair at Asile Desolé, the insane asylum where he and his men bathed when they passed through months before. Robert leaves the hotel and walks through the town, which is full of troops singing military songs, and is reminded of a Saturday crowd at a football game.

Water is an ongoing symbol of change throughout the novel—the rain, bathwater, and tea in this scene all foreshadow a significant change in Robert's life. Given that he is focused on memories of his childhood in this passage and in the previous two chapters, the water here signifies that Robert will undergo a further loss of innocence.

PART 5, CHAPTER 4

Robert arrives at Asile Desolé and undresses in one of the abandoned cells. He hurries out of the small room and into the large, open bathhouse, having become claustrophobic since his dugout in St. Eloi collapsed. Robert scrubs himself and soaks in one of the bathtubs for nearly an hour. As he is toweling himself dry, a group of the asylum patients in the bathing room start a commotion with the attendants, and some of the other soldiers get involved. Robert ignores the situation and walks back to the cell for his clothes.

Robert's panicked reaction to the small cell implies that the trauma he experienced in the Battle of St. Eloi may have caused him to develop shell shock (or PTSD, as it is now known). As in the previous chapter, Robert's bath is symbolic of a transition in his life, and the eerie setting of the insane asylum only adds to this sense of foreboding suspense.

Back at the cell, Robert realizes that the lantern has been extinguished and that someone is in there with him. The door closes behind him before he can react, and he hears at least three men surrounding him in the dark. They yank his towel away and proceed to violently rape him. After the assault, he hears one of the men speak and realizes that his assailants, who he had thought were "crazies" from the asylum, were actually his fellow soldiers.

The loss of sexual innocence Robert experiences from this assault parallels the broader loss of moral innocence that he has experienced throughout his time at war. The brutality of Robert's fellow soldiers demonstrates the tendency for war to encourage violence and degradation toward strangers; just as the enemy sides dehumanize each other on the battlefield, so do the men belittle and abuse Robert.

PART 5, CHAPTER 5

After his rapists have left him alone in the cell, Robert tears the room apart, wanting clean clothes and his pistol. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door—Willie Poole has come to deliver Robert his missing kit bag. He begs Poole, who is only passing through on leave, to stay for a moment. They have an awkward conversation and Poole tells him that Bonnycastle died but that the other men from their dugout are fine.

In lieu of being able to defend himself or avenge his rape, Robert takes out his anger and trauma on his surroundings. The fact that Robert begs Poole to stay, despite being his superior officer, shows how vulnerable he feels in the wake of his assault, as he yearns for the simple comfort of a familiar face.

Robert thanks Poole for bringing his kit bag and wishes that he could embrace him. They say goodbye and Poole leaves. Looking through his bag, Robert finds his only photograph of Rowena and burns it in the middle of the cell floor.

Robert's decision to burn Rowena's photo implies that his rape has stripped him of his last shred of innocence. Embittered toward the cruelty and trauma he has experienced, Robert feels that it is unjust for Rowena's pure, innocent spirit to exist in a world that is so morally depraved. This passage is similar to Rodwell's suicide in Part 3—just as Rodwell would sooner end his life than lose his innocence, Robert would rather let go of his only tangible memory of Rowena than have it be perverted.

PART 5, CHAPTER 6

The next morning, Robert joins an ammunition convoy riding to the front with thirty-five mules and one hundred **horses**. They pass by the marshes where Robert nearly drowned the previous winter. At a fork in the road, Military Police are stationed on the lookout for deserters and spies, and Robert's convoy takes the fork leading to Wytsbrouk. Within ten minutes, they reach another fork that leads to St. Eloi, and Robert feels "as if he had come home."

Although Robert is forced to relive his trauma by passing through areas where he nearly died, he feels a sense of homecoming rather than dread. This emotion, combined with his restlessness during his time away from the war, suggests that he has lost all sense of his identity apart from being a soldier, and that the battlefield is now where he feels the most comfortable.

Robert looks up and realizes that there are no birds flying overhead. Suddenly, a bomb explodes, and he is thrown off his horse. Men and animals run in every direction as planes fill the air and bombs fall all around them. The attack dissipates into silence and the survivors gather: seven mules, fifteen **horses**, and twenty-three out of sixty men. Kneeling down to collect his kit bag, Robert notices Juliet's candle wedged into the ground and set alight by the bombs. He blows it out, puts it in his pocket, and starts to help the other survivors "extricate themselves from the dead."

This ambush, like several other attacks that Robert has experienced, demonstrates the unpredictability of life as a soldier. Despite this constant, uncertain threat of death, Robert's reaction to the incident is measured and routine as he focuses on his duty to help survivors, suggesting that he has become somewhat desensitized to the stress and fear of his role as an officer.

PART 5, CHAPTER 7

Robert spends the next six days riding with the supply wagons. They are constantly shelled and bombed, and the ditches alongside the road are piled high with corpses. Robert has not yet fought in the trenches because all of his time is spent with the convoys. Although the British are gaining ground, the Germans have counter-attacked and taken prisoners, causing many British and Canadian troops to surrender. The Military Police shoot the occasional deserter.

The unrelenting attacks that Robert and his convoy experience indicate that the war is worsening, rather than approaching a resolution. The presence of the Military Police suggests that the men are becoming increasingly worn down by the constant violence they face, causing them to forgo their duty as soldiers in desperate attempts to escape the conflict, even at the risk of dishonor or death.

One night, Robert rides as part of an ammunition train. It is raining, and the **mud** forces him walk alongside his **horse**. Suddenly, the horse stops and refuses to proceed, and Robert sees an officer's dead body in the middle of the road. Robert rolls the man over and discovers that it is Clifford Purchas.

Clifford's death is darkly ironic, considering that he was adamant in Part 1, Chapter 23 that the war would make him into a man and earn him an honorable reputation; now, his adulthood has been taken away from him completely. It also shows the utter loss of innocence that Robert has experienced throughout his time at war, having gone from being Clifford's classmate in boarding school to coming across his dead body in the mud.

PART 5, CHAPTER 8

One week into his return to the front, the Germans execute a fourteen-hour barrage on Robert's convoy. Robert is delirious after sleeping only eight hours in three days and subsisting on chocolate bars, tea, and rum. He asks Captain Leather if he can make a strategic retreat with his new supply of **horses** and mules so that the animals can be saved from certain death in the incessant shellfire, but Leather refuses.

In the midst of this terrible violence, Captain Leather's refusal to let Robert free the horses and mules is particularly cruel and shows that Leather, unlike most of his subordinates, is not motivated by self-sacrifice or a sense of duty to his fellow men. Rather, he is focused on portraying a contrived image of resilience and valor to the enemy.

As shells begin to land in the barnyard, Robert can no longer stand it. Devlin agrees to help him disobey orders and save the **horses** and mules. Captain Leather sees them releasing the animals from his office and runs outside, screaming at them to shut the gates. Devlin continues to drive the horses out, so Leather shoots him.

This passage marks an important shift in Robert's character, as his and Devlin's actions here are motivated by their own individual sense of what is morally right in the situation, as opposed to the dutiful obedience Robert has otherwise exhibited during his time at war.

As Robert comes out of the stable Captain Leather yells that he is a traitor and threatens to shoot him. Shells continue to fall as Robert runs for the gates, and an explosion blows him into the road. He looks up to find that the entire barnyard and Signals Office have been reduced to rubble, and that all of the animals are either dead or dying in the **fire**. Robert appears to be the only survivor.

Robert's attempt to free the horses and mules proves to be futile, as the shellfire devastates the battlefield and kills the animals. This reality demonstrates the unjust helplessness and senseless violence that animals, like their human counterparts, experience in war.

Robert looks out over the scene and is so angry that he fears he will go insane. He thinks that any other animal causing this terrible destruction would have been called mad and shot. Just then, Captain Leather begins to struggle to his feet and Robert shoots him between the **eyes**. Robert spends the next half-hour killing all of the mules and **horses** who are suffering, after which he tears the lapels from his uniform and leaves the battlefield.

As horses are symbolic of freedom and innocence, the suffering of these defenseless creatures robs Robert of all hope and drives him to the brink of madness. By killing Captain Leather, Robert takes on the role of moral arbiter, as he believes that enacting revenge on Leather will bring about some sense of justice for the deaths of both Devlin and the animals. This act, coupled with his desertion of the battlefield, shows that Robert has completely forgone his duties as a soldier and will rely on his own standards of honor from this point forward.

PART 5, CHAPTER 9

On June 16, 1916, Robert's family receives word that he is missing in action. Mrs. Ross refuses to get dressed and wanders around the house, crying out in a drunken stupor. Miss Davenport, Mr. Ross, Peggy, and Stuart are alarmed by her behavior. Stuart does not wish Robert ill, but is exhilarated at the thought of his brother receiving the Victoria Cross and sharing the news of his death at school.

Mrs. Ross's disturbing reaction to the news of Robert's disappearance is yet another example of the detrimental effects that war has on families, as well as soldiers. The fact that Stuart is still focused on impressing his classmates with Robert's achievements shows that heroism is a high ideal for young men, to the point that dying honorably in battle is still viewed as a triumph rather than a tragedy.

That evening, Mrs. Ross stands on the landing of the stairs, drops her bottle of alcohol, and lets out an "agonizing cry." She calls out for help and tells Mr. Ross that she has gone **blind**. The narration describes Robert's framed portrait in the family's drawing room fading into darkness.

As eyes are an ongoing symbol of guilt and vulnerability, the fact that Mrs. Ross goes blind suggests that she is completely overcome by the internalized self-blame she feels over the danger that Robert is in. The surreal image of Robert's portrait fading away suggests that his family is already mourning him—they, like the soldiers on the battlefield, have come to expect the worst.

PART 5, CHAPTER 10

On the night of June 16, the road to Bailleul is crowded with troops. It is now clear that the Germans intend to completely raze the area. The British army has sent their entire reserve of troops, and the shellfire causes mass panic. Drums of gasoline spill out and cause the **fire** to spread through the town where men, **horses**, and equipment all go up in flames.

This violent, chaotic scene mirrors the inner turmoil that the Ross family is experiencing at the news that Robert is missing in action. Like Robert and Mrs. Ross's similar experiences with battling the natural elements, this parallel suggests that both soldiers and civilians experience their own personal wars.

PART 5, CHAPTER 11

The novel returns to the opening passage from the prologue. Having wandered alone for a week since the incident with Captain Leather, Robert sits watching the **black mare** and the black dog on the railroad tracks. He walks with them down the road and sets the twelve cattle cars full of horses free. At 1 a.m., a red moon rises as Robert rides on the black mare with the rest of the horses and the dog toward Magdalene Wood.

Although this passage is nearly identical to the prologue, it takes on new significance given that the reader now has insight into the events that led up to this scene. Freeing the horses from the train is another attempt to seek justice for the atrocities that Robert has witnessed. With no one left to be the target of his revenge, he is now motivated to save the lives of innocent creatures as a means of retribution.

PART 5, CHAPTER 12

According to the narration, the mythology of the events after this point is "muddled." Some say that Robert galloped through La Chodrelle like a "raving cowboy" with the **horses** and deliberately trampled a cordon of soldiers. This account does not match up with Robert's court martial transcript.

The differing accounts of Robert's actions suggests that the blame he receives for his actions may not be fully warranted and shows the subjectivity of individuals' judgments. Whereas Robert is seemingly motivated by a sense of justice for Devlin and the animals, others view his actions as antithetical to a soldier's duty to obey orders.

A more likely version of events is that Robert and the **horses** made a detour around the woods near La Chodrelle and woke the troops of Major Mickle, whose bivouac was nearby. Witnesses claim that a soldier named Private Cassles went out unarmed to prevent Robert from passing and that Robert shot and killed him. Ultimately, it is uncertain what happened up until the point that Mickle sent word to Bailleul that a C.F.A. officer had killed one of his men and made off with a large number of horses toward Magdalene Wood.

Again, Findley intentionally obscures the truth of Robert's actions, preventing the reader from being able to make a clear judgment of his morality. The reader's experience of this parallels the blurring of moral lines that soldiers experience while at war, as they are often forced to commit terrible acts for what is deemed to be the greater good.

Due to the chaos in Bailleul, it takes some time for them to discover that the horses are indeed missing and that no one had been given permission to remove them. Mickle is assigned to capture Robert, and within a few hours he and forty men set off to pursue him on foot.

Having taken on the role of moral arbiter in shooting Captain Leather, Robert is now on the receiving end of justice. The reader already knows that Robert will not get away with his actions (given that he is eventually arrested and court martialed), a reality which suggests that enacting revenge in the context of war is futile, and will only come back to haunt the individual.

PART 5, CHAPTER 13

The men find Robert, the **horses**, and the dog in the abandoned barns that he had first seen while walking to Bailleul. Major Mickle deploys his men around the barns and orders them to shoot to kill if Robert opens fire. Mickle tells Robert that he will be taken by force if he does not surrender willingly, and Robert retaliates by taking a shot at him.

Robert is clearly willing to risk his life in solidarity with the horses and dog. It is unclear at this point whether or not Robert has succumbed to madness or if he is acting out of genuine conviction. Regardless, he is committed to saving the lives of these animals, likely in an attempt to make up for the horrors that he has both witnessed and perpetuated during the war.

Mickle, believing that Robert has gone mad, decides to "dispense not only with mercy—but with reason." Robert fires again and calls out that "we shall not be taken." Mickle tells his men to set **fire** to the barn, intending to smoke Robert out. Robert, however, cannot open the doors in time, and is trapped in the inferno with the animals. He barely makes it out alive and is badly disfigured by the fire. Just before losing consciousness, he says "The dog. The dog." The dog is never found.

This is a crucial moment in bringing the novel full-circle, as it fulfills Clausewitz's prophetic warning in the epigraph in which he cautions against performing acts of kindness during war. Robert's attempts to bring about justice do more harm than good, as the war crimes he has committed (killing Leather and Cassles and freeing the horses) have indirectly led to immense suffering for both him and the animals.

PART 5, CHAPTER 14

In a final interview with Marian Turner in the present day, she remembers that Robert was brought to the hospital where she worked on June 18, 1916. Because Robert killed Captain Leather (and possibly Private Cassles), a Military Police officer was kept with him at all times, even during surgery. Miss Turner was outraged at the absurdity of this, questioning where Robert could have possibly escaped other than sleep or death.

Miss Turner is one of the few characters who is sympathetic toward Robert. Whereas the military has branded him as a dishonorable criminal, her perspective as a nurse allows her to view him as a complex human being. This difference in opinion shows that, like the war itself, Robert's actions are not easily categorized as right or wrong.

In the hospital, Robert was barely able to speak due to his injuries. Miss Turner hoarded morphine for him from their low supply. She offered to assist him in committing suicide, but he replied, "not yet." Miss Turner reflects that these words are the essence of life.

Robert's comment is an optimistic response to trauma—although he has suffered immensely, he still has a will to live. Throughout her interviews in previous chapters, Miss Turner suggests that she does not blame Robert for his actions; based on this response, Robert does not blame himself, either, and believes that his life is worthy of living despite his actions. This sentiment echoes Clive's hope in Part 4 that people will remember that those who fought in World War I were only human beings reacting to their circumstances. Robert's actions, though drastic, could potentially be justified given the unrelenting trauma to which he was subjected as a soldier.

PART 5, CHAPTER 15

Robert is held under arrest at Bois de Madeleine hospital for two months before he is moved to England near the end of August. In September, he is tried in absentia and is allowed to go to St. Aubyn's for convalescent treatment since he cannot be kept in prison. There is "virtually no hope" that he will ever be able to walk, see, or function normally again. Barbara d'Orsey only visits Robert once, but Juliet rarely leaves his side as he recovers from his burns, bringing him flowers every day and leaving an unlit candle by his bed.

The destruction of Robert's body is a stark contrast to the handsome, athletic young man he was at the beginning of the novel and serves as a permanent reminder of the loss of innocence that he experienced during his time in the war. The fact that Juliet still loves Robert in spite of everything shows that she, like Miss Turner, does not blame him for his actions. Rather, she views him as a complex individual who merely reacted to the circumstances that he was dealt.

Robert dies a few years later in 1922, at twenty-five years old. There is a photograph taken a year before his death of Robert holding Juliet's hand and smiling despite his disfigured face. Mr. Ross is the only member of Robert's family to come see him buried. Juliet inscribes his tombstone with the following: "**Earth and air and fire and water**. Robert R. Ross. 1896-1922."

Unlike Miss Turner, Juliet, and Mr. Ross, Robert's fellow soldiers and his other family members view him as a dishonorable traitor rather than a hero. The novel presents the full context of Robert's military experience bookended by his final actions in order to allow the reader to make their own assessment of his character. The moral ambiguity and "muddled" mythology of Robert's actions reflect the overall disorienting, traumatic nature of war in its ability to normalize violence and death.

PART 5, EPILOGUE

In a photograph from the spring of 1915, Robert is pictured in his army uniform, sitting on a keg of **water** with a campground behind him. He is holding a small animal skull in his hand, either of a rabbit or a badger. In reference to this photo, Findley quotes the Irish essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan, who says that "the spaces between the perceiver and the thing perceived can…be closed with a shout of recognition. One form of a shout is a shot. Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as killing it."

Findley's reference to this quote expresses one of the novel's central ideas: that the techniques and weaponry of modern warfare allow enemies to be physically and emotionally separated from one another. By removing any direct recognition or physical contact between enemies, the trauma of war becomes disorienting and senseless. Findley's ongoing criticism of this reality alongside Miss Turner and Juliet's empathy for Robert advocates for a more humanized view of war that considers all people as complex individuals.

The narration again switches to the reader's point of view. Back in the public archives from the beginning of the novel, the archivist closes her book and rises, momentarily distracted by the sound of birds outside the window. She begins to turn out the lights and tells you that it is time to leave. You gather your research into bundles, and the last thing you see before putting on your coat is a photograph of Rowena on the back of the Ross family's **pony**, Meg, with Robert holding her in place. On the back of the photo is written "Look! You can see our **breath**!" And you can.

Robert and Rowena's breath in this photograph suggests that the innocence that was seemingly lost with the deaths of these two characters still lives on through memory. By contrasting a gunshot in the previous passage with the notion of a photographic snapshot in this passage, Findley ends the novel on an optimistic note that hearkens back to Rodwell's letter to his daughter in Part 3. While ordinary people are capable of terrible atrocities, the inherent goodness of humanity—and at the very least, their "breath" and aliveness—still carries on.

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