

Soldiers Once and Still



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As the world enters a new century, as it embarks on new wars and sees new developments in the waging of war, reconsiderations of the last century's legacy of warfare are necessary to our understanding of the current world order. In "Soldiers Once and Still, Alex Vernon looks back through the twentieth century in order to confront issues of self and community in veterans' literature, exploring how war and the military have shaped the identities of Ernest Hemingway, James Salter, and Tim O'Brien, three of the twentieth century's most respected authors. Vernon specifically explores the various ways war and the military, through both cultural and personal experience, have affected social and gender identities and dynamics in each author's work. Hemingway, Salter, and O'Brien form the core of "Soldiers Once and Still because each represents a different warring generation of twentieth-century America: World War I with Hemingway, World War II and Korea with Salter, and Vietnam with O'Brien. Each author also represents a different literary voice of the twentieth century, from modern to mid-century to postmodern, and each presents a different battlefield experience: Hemingway as noncombatant, Salter as air force fighter pilot, and O'Brien as army grunt. War's pervasive influence on the individual means that, for veterans-turned-writers like Hemingway, Salter, and O'Brien, the war experience infiltrates their entire body of writing--their works can be seen not only as war literature

but also as veterans' literature. As such, their entire postwar oeuvre, regardless of whether an individual work explicitly addresses the war or the military, is open to Vernon's exploration of war, society, gender, and literary history. Vernon's own experiences as a soldier, a veteran, a writer, and a critic inform this enlightening critique of American literature, offering students and scholars of American literature and war studies an invaluable tool for understanding war's effects on the veteran writer and his society.

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