Every war introduces a new kind of war fiction. But each war’s fiction looks back over its shoulder at the fiction of previous wars. The fiction and the poetry of the First World War set the terms for war fiction and poetry for the rest of the century, but they also set up a paradigm to be contested. The course will begin with Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*. Crane did not fight in the American Civil War, yet it is his book, rather than novels written by actual veterans such as John W. DeForest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, that people now turn to for fiction about that war. They do this because Crane was able to anticipate how war fiction would develop, particularly during and after the First World War. We will then read Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, which stands in the American canon in the place occupied in Britain by the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves. Hemingway’s conception of the First World War underlies later treatments by John Dos Passos and Dalton Trumbo. But Hemingway had to modify his approach to deal with the different political realities of the Spanish Civil War in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The political realities of the Second World War would have seemed to call for a more wholesale revision (Herman Wouk, in *The Caine Mutiny*, modelled his villain on Hemingway and practically blamed Hemingway for American unpreparedness for the war). This revision, however, seems to have been more important in film than in fiction (except in popular fiction). The canonical fiction of the Second World War seems (with the exception of Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*) was written during the Cold War, and reflects attitudes toward the Cold War (and distaste for the society that emerged from the Second World War) as much as attitudes about World War II. We will read two classic novels of World War II, Heller’s *Catch-22* and Jones’s *The Thin Red Line*. (I regret not including Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, but I will assume that many students will have read it, and expect to discuss it.) Brandeis’ own Ha Jin’s *War Trash* concerns the experiences of Chinese soldiers on the battlefield and in South Korean POW camps during the Korean War. We will also look at the classic novel of the Viet Nam war, O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* and a recent, highly regarded contender, Marlantes’ *Matterhorn*, as well as a novel about female soldiers in the Iraq War, Helen Benedict’s *Sand Queen*. The course will conclude with William T. Vollmann’s *Europe Central*, a book concerned not with Americans at all, but with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union at war; I put this book last because it seems to sum up all of the moral ambiguities and complicities of war fiction.

This course will fulfill the English Department’s new research paper requirement, and students will develop a research paper in this course in several stages, with drafts, conferences, and revisions along the way.

**Texts**

2. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribner) ISBN: 978-1476764528
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Prelude

**Week 1** (January 18, 19, 23)
*Reading:* Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*
Although Crane did not serve in the Civil War, his combat novel is the paradigmatic text from which most 20th century combat novels derive. You may have read this book in High School. You will find it is a different experience to read this book as a college student.

**Five Wars**

**Week 2** (January 25, 26, 30)
*Reading:* Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*
Almost every theme in American war fiction of the 20th and 21st centuries is first developed in this book; not only political themes such as the emptiness of justifications for war and the irrationality and brutality of military hierarchies, but formal themes such as the slipperiness of abstract language and the primacy of face to face relationships over collective ones. But some of these themes demanded rethinking later in the century. Hemingway himself had to eat many of his fine words during the Spanish Civil War, and his *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, while developing many Hemingway themes from *A Farewell to Arms* had to revise the earlier novel’s claim that all fighting is pointless and that individual loyalties always trump collective ones.

**Week 3** (February 1, 2, 6)
*Reading:* Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*
The classic novel, first published in 1962. Its manuscript is in the Brandeis special collections department, as is the large sheet on which Heller kept track of the many plot lines in play in the novel. Often seen more as a novel written in reaction to 1950s culture (and presaging the culture of the Vietnam era).

**Week 4** (February 8, 9, 13)
*Reading:* Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (continued)

**Week 5** (February 15, 16, 27)
*Reading:* James Jones, *The Thin Red Line*
Another novel of 1962. This brutal, but extremely psychologically plausible novel about an episode in the Guadalcanal campaign in which Jones himself took part was designed to be a sequel to his famous *From Here to Eternity*. Since Jones killed off some of the central characters at the end of *From Here to Eternity* they appear in *The Thin Red Line* under other names. This novel starts with all of the characters already knowing, or believing they know, all the things the First World War novel had to teach, and it asks how one proceeds in the face of that kind of knowledge. Yet despite everything, it is also a novel about learning how to fight. Warning: the beautiful Terrence Malick film has almost nothing to do with this novel.

**Week 6** (March 1, 2, 6)
*Reading:* James Jones, *The Thin Red Line* (continued)

**Week 7** (March 8, 9, 13)
*Reading:* Ha Jin, *War Trash*
Ha Jin came from China to the U.S. (to earn a Ph.D. at Brandeis) in 1988. (He now teaches at Boston University.) His novels are mostly set in China, but by now it is fair to call him an American novelist. *War Trash* is a novel about the horrific experience of the Chinese army during the Korean War, and the conflicts in U.S.
administered POW camps between Chinese soldiers who weigh defection to Taiwan and those who wish to return to China.

Week 8 (March 15, 16, 20)
Reading: Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*
The best-known novel of the Viet Nam war.

Research Proposal Due March 16

Week 9 (March 22, 23, 27)
Reading: Karl Marlantes, *Matterhorn*
A recent novel (2010), although thirty years in the making. Widely considered the best Vietnam novel to date.

Week 10 (March 29, 30, April 3)
Reading: Karl Marlantes, *Matterhorn* (continued)

Annotated Bibliography Due March 30

Week 11 (April 5, 6, 19)
Reading: Helen Benedict, *Sand Queen*
A very recent novel (2012) about women soldiers (and women Iraqi civilians) during the Iraq War.

Coda

Week 12 (April 20, 24, 26)
Reading: William T. Vollmann, *Europe Central*
Vollman’s 2005 masterpiece is set mostly in those regions between the Elbe and the Volga contested by Hitler and Stalin and ruled at one time or another by both of them. The characters are all historical people whose biographies (with a few embellishments) Vollmann carefully follows. Principal figures include the composer Dmitri Shostakovich, the Soviet General Andrei Vlasov, who, forced into an impossible battle by Stalin, was captured and chose to serve the Germans, and the German general Friedrich Paulus, who, forced into an impossible battle by Hitler, was captured and chose to serve the Soviets. An excruciating study of moral compromise and moral surrender.

Week 13 (April 27, May 1, 3)
Reading: William T. Vollmann, *Europe Central* (continued)

Requirements

1. **Short papers** There will be short (two pages or so) writing assignments due every Thursday for four weeks, beginning January 26 and ending February 16. You will pick a passage of about 250 words from the reading for that day or the next and type it out. Be sure to pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point I have already made in the lecture, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a two page (or so) commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but
who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. I will not give particular papers letter grades, but I will comment upon them and give them either a check, a check plus, or a check minus. You are to turn the whole lot of them in again at the end of the term, and they will be the basis for your final grade.

2. Research Paper The principal assignment for this class will be a research paper, of 12 pages minimum, concerned with one of the texts this course will examine. To prepare this paper you will need to start with an overarching paradigm from literary study. Starting points for this might include Paul Fussell’s classic *The Great War and Modern Memory*, or Elizabeth Samet’s more recent *Soldier’s Heart*. Literary theory might provide you with paradigms to discuss issues of racial conflict, cultural conflict, colonialism, or gender and sexuality issues. You should also make yourself familiar with the critical literature on your chosen novel, which you can access using *The MLA International Bibliography* or *JSTOR Language and Literature*. You will find that there is an extensive literature on Hemingway, Crane, and Heller, but scarcely more than book reviews on some others. If you write about some of these others, you might seek out ancillary sources of commentary, such as for instance historical accounts of the conflict the novel discusses, comparisons with other novels for which more commentary exists, more thorough treatment of the theoretical issues the novel raises, and so on.

You will develop the papers in stages, which will include

- A one-page research proposal, giving your topic, developing your take, and outlining the stakes of your project, due on March 16
- An annotated bibliography, outlining what is to be learned from your key sources, due on March 30
- A conference with me, which will take place during the week of April 4
- A rough draft, which will be due to a writing group of your peers on April 20
- A completed research paper, due on May 1

**Learning Goals**

1. Develop the habit of independent critique, intellectual self-reliance, and self-confidence from the perspective of attentive reading and collaborative discussion

2. Become conversant with the major questions, concepts, theories, traditions, and techniques of humanistic inquiry about the fiction of war

3. Reflect on quality peer-to-peer interaction.

4. Develop and sharpen writing skills through rigorous assignments.

**Policies**

1. **Disability** If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.

2. **Attendance and Participation** Attendance in this course is required. A student with more than two unexcused absences should expect to fail the course. If you miss a class, I will expect you to explain to me why in writing at the next class. Participation in the class discussion is required, so come to class prepared to speak. There may well be classes at Brandeis in which you can coast for much of the term and recover yourself by heroic efforts at the end, but this isn’t one of them. It’s best to plan to work steadily.
3. **Extensions** You must contact me no later than the class before a paper is due to receive an extension. I will not grant extensions on the due date of the paper. Late papers will be docked in proportion to their lateness.

4. **Academic Honesty** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the *Rights and Responsibilities* handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

5. **Electronics** You are not allowed to have an open laptop in this class. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the class.

6. **Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

7. **Communications** The course will have a mailing list on LATTE. Information about snow days, changed deadlines, and so forth will be broadcast on that mailing list. We may make use of LATTE discussion forums as well.

### Assignment Weights

I view calculations using these values with suspicion, and I will not accept arguments about your final grade based on calculations from this table, but I include this table to give you a rough idea of how much each assignment is worth.

- Short Papers 15%
- Research Proposal 5%
- Annotated Bibliography 10%
- Research Paper First Draft 10%
- Research Paper Final Draft 35%
- Participation 25%