

2018

Introduction

Douglas Firth Anderson

Northwestern College - Orange City, firth@nwcsiowa.edu

Greta Breukelman Grond

Northwestern College - Orange City, ggrond@nwcsiowa.edu

Sara R. Huyser

Northwestern College - Orange City, sara.huyser@nwcsiowa.edu

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Introduction

Abstract

An introduction to this issue of *Northwestern Review*.

Introduction

This third issue of *Northwestern Review* appears in the last year of the centennial of World War I (1914-1918/2014-2018). By the time the “Great War” was over, at least 9 million soldiers and sailors had died, over 21 million had been wounded, and over 6.5 million civilians had died.¹ Moreover, an estimated 20 to 40 million people died (including soldiers and sailors) between 1918 and 1920 due to the influenza pandemic.² In addition, the war dislocated thousands of civilians, toppled the Ottoman Empire (and led to the redrawing of Middle East boundaries by Britain and France), toppled the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and led to the redrawing of the borders of much of Eastern Europe), toppled the German Empire (Second Reich, briefly replaced by the unstable Weimar Republic), and effectively replaced the Russian Empire with the U.S.S.R.

The war had engulfed Europe for over two-and-a-half years before the U.S. entered in 1917. After the April declaration of war, the entire country was soon engaged, including Midwesterners.³

Wisconsin-born Amos N. Wilder (1895-1993) was an undergraduate at Oberlin College when World War I began in 1914.⁴ In 1915, Wilder transferred to Yale. He put his formal education on hold, though, in 1916 to volunteer for ambulance service in France and later on the Serbian front. After the U.S. entered, he enlisted in the U.S. Field Artillery; promoted to corporal, he was assigned to A Battery, 17th Field Artillery, 2nd Division, American Expeditionary Force.



**National World War I Museum and Memorial
in Kansas City, MO.** Image from the author.

¹ Ingrid P. Westmoreland, “Casualties,” in *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 173.

² Jack McCallum, “Influenza Pandemic,” in *ibid.*, 360.

³ Kansas City, Missouri happens to be where what has become the National World War I Museum and Memorial was placed. Missouri was also the home state of General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force, and artillery Captain Harry S. Truman, later President.

⁴ The details on Wilder are drawn from Amos N. Wilder, *Armageddon Revisited: A World War I Journal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Wilder kept a diary of his war service; he also wrote poetry, as did many other veterans of the war (most famously, perhaps, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon). He did not experience “the fearful losses associated with trench warfare and the great attacks” in the ambulance service and artillery. Yet he maintained that “the experience of the Great War was in some respects indivisible.”⁵ “[E]ven less dramatic actions” have a “deeper import.”⁶ Ten years after his participation in the Allied offensive of July 1918, he published a poem entitled “Armageddon: Forêt de Villers-Cotterets, July 18, 1918.” Inchoate “deeper import” is indicated in two stanzas about the early morning advance:

Was it a dream, that rush through night to day?
Far in the depths of night we labored on,
Out of the core of midnight made our way
To meet the grandiose daybreak far away,
While unknown thousands brushed us and were gone,
Whence, whither, in that night’s oblivion.

Oaths, shouts and cries rose o’er the incessant din
Of wheel and hoof, and many a frantic blow.
The dazed beasts battle through that tumult in
The darkness at the driver’s lash to win
A goal unknown: nor do the thousands know
The event in course, but likewise blindly go.⁷

Wilder’s war poetry led, in a way, into his vocation.⁸ A Christian, following the war he returned to Yale and finished his B.A.—and then a B.D. and a Ph.D. After pastoring a Congregational Church for a few years, he then began a long career of teaching New Testament (ultimately at Harvard Divinity School) and writing books exploring the Bible, literature, and the imagination.⁹

Two other Christians (although not Midwestern Americans) who became academics and literary figures were also shaped by their experience of the Great War: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Michael Kugler’s article in this issue reminds us, “Both men were shocked and shaken by the massive, overwhelming, and ugly cruelty of combat at the Western Front.” World War I (along with other things) fed their suspicions of modernity. These suspicions in turn informed their particular takes on the anti-humanist tendencies of secularized technology and science.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

⁸ See Wilder’s *Battle-Retrospect and Other Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923) and *Arachne: Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928).

⁹ Wilder was one of 5 precocious siblings: playwright and novelist Thornton Wilder; poet Charlotte Wilder; actress and novelist Isabel Wilder; and scientist Janet Wilder Dakin. *Ibid.*, xiii.

Historian Kugler's article is, of course, not the only Northwestern faculty contribution to our 2018 *Review*. Also in Articles is a comparative history of local town and college founder Henry Hospers by Douglas Anderson. In Fine Arts, music faculty Juyeon Kang offers a piano performance and theatre faculty Drew Schmidt offers a performance of a different sort. Our Collaborative Scholarship section has a contribution directed by Laird Edman (psychology). Under Spiritual Reflection, political science faculty Jeff VanDerWerff offers a take on current religion and politics in the U.S. Finally, in the Conference Paper or Presentation section, Karie Stamer (nursing) offers material from her dissertation research.

In sum, we are delighted to bring you issue/volume number 3 of *Northwestern Review*.

Douglas Firth Anderson, co-editor
Greta Breukelman Grond, co-editor
Sara R. Huyser, associate editor