ABSTRACT

HANNAH K. WILLIAMS. Naming the Dead: Literary Memorials in the War Literature of Bierce, Graves, and Vonnegut. (Under the direction of Professor Allen Stein)

Since the mid-nineteenth century, memorial structures marking the conclusion of war have been used to construct unified national narratives while recognizing individual sacrifice by soldiers of every rank. Similarly, war fiction, written predominately by civilians, used sweeping epic structures and larger than life characters to emphasize the ideals of honor and noble sacrifice to create a national memory of war, one which urged future generations to prove their patriotism through similar martial exploits. However, the American Civil War marked a turning point in which veterans began to write their own war experiences, presenting conflicting political narratives which questioned the purpose of war, while examining the lives, and more specifically the deaths, of common soldiers. This paper examines how Ambrose Bierce, Robert Graves, and Kurt Vonnegut, writing about the American Civil War, World War I, and World War II respectively, combine fiction and autobiography to question nationalistic narratives of their wars while recognizing individual deaths of common soldiers. *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, by* Ambrose Bierce, an infantry officer in the Union Army, mark a dramatic shift from the war fiction of his day by highlighting the grotesque and brutal realities of combat. Robert Graves, a British Infantry Captain on the front line of the Somme during World War I, uses humor and theatricality throughout his memoir *Goodbye to All That* to contrast the performative expectations of a country at war with the overwhelming loss of life. Graves also attempts to unravel the complicated relationship between soldiers and their wars,

their desire to fight for their comrades in arms and their hatred of the war itself. Finally, Kurt Vonnegut leans on his experience as a prisoner of war during World War II in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to examine traumatic memory.