

Guy Quenneville  
Friday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003

*The Wars* by Timothy Findley:  
Pre-Writing Notes

Secondary Sources

“*The Wars* remains Findley’s most-discussed book. Based partly on the wartime correspondence of his uncle, Thomas Irving Findley, and on family photos, he wrote the novel in guise of a researcher trying to reconstruct the story of Robert Ross, a soldier of the Great War. The book explores many of the obsessions that color all his writing: **violence, loneliness, a concern for animal rights, and the survival of the individual in a world of madness.** Findley believes that a writer has a responsibility to speak out about **what is wrong with society.**” (National Library of Canada @ <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/3/8/t8-2008-e.html>)

“In Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, one of the ways in which he conveys his feelings about the war is through the mention of songs, works of literature and various works of art. These aspects all help reinforce the **romantic misinterpretations** of war that are held by the people that went to fight, as well as those people waiting for them upon their return. The following is a list of some of these references, their page numbers as well as a description of their significance to the story.” (Acadia University class website @ <http://ace.acadiau.ca/english/rmorriso/findley/Findley2.htm>)

“Prior to the writing of *The Wars*, it was unheard of for any writer who had not experienced it first hand to write about "The War to End All Wars". However, Findley, with his direct and shocking style, was able to surpass this barrier and create one of the most acclaimed novels about World War I. With 'wars' being plural, it indicates that the novel is not only about the Great War, but also about **internal battles** that Robert Ross is fighting with himself as he struggles to adapt to a new way of life in the army and without his sister who he loved very much.” (Acadia)

“Findley refers to the people prior to World War I as calm and shy, tending to stay away from the public eye as much as possible. Photographs reveal that "everyone at first seems timid - lost - irresolute. Boys and men stand squinting at the camera. Women turn away suspicious. They still maintain a public reticence." (Findley, p. 11) However, the war causes an upheaval in the lives of everyone, not just the soldiers and their families, and makes people's opinions in different areas make a complete reversal. For example, you get praise and for killing people, and more people are desperate to get into the view of the public.” (Weiss, p. 93) [Acadia]

On the coyote:

“Robert learns from this run, that a hunter kills when it has to survive, but is generous when it is not a hunter.” (Acadia)

“Never that which is shall die.”  
EURIPIDES

## Chapter One

### Prologue

- a dog and a horse by railroad tracks (1)
- Robert is a soldier, his uniform is tattered, and he is in a daze. “He had wandered for over a week.” *Something horrible has happened*
- “Robert appeared to be the sole survivor.” *Is it a train wreck?*
- “It was as if both dog and horse had been waiting for Robert to come for them.” (2)  
*Possible connection to animals?*
- “This was when the moon rose – red.” *A premonition, red could symbolize blood – BAD OMEN*

### 1

- all this happened a long time ago (3)
- “The occupants of memory have to be protected from strangers.” *Memory has to be preserved and hidden from those who seek to exploit*
- differences of opinion about Robert – *obviously did something bad that polarized opinion*
- “sometime, someone will forget himself and say too much or else the corner of a picture will reveal the whole.”
- Euripides killed by dogs – *link to opening quote?*

### 2

- told in second person, impersonal. Beginning at photo archives
- “Spread over table tops, a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamp.” *Sets atmosphere, as though we are unearthing a past that has long remained dormant*

### 3

- “1915. The year itself looks sepia and soiled – muddied like its pictures.” (4) *atmosphere*
- description of people very shy and unassuming.
- pictures alter as war goes on – people are waving at camera (5)
- on the picture of the dazed Robert: “You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning – here.” (6)
- Robert “doubts the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is inarticulate.” *That Robert opposed the war says a lot about the circumstances – Rowena’s death, his mother – that drove him to enlist*
- Rowena not seen in pictures because people in her state were hidden from society and looked down upon
- Robert doesn’t think his mother should be so forward. “Such things have to be done...someone has to do them.” (7) *A patriotic duty.*
- Mrs. Ross performs her wartime duties because of dreams.
- Robert seems to reject petty schoolboy crushes (8)
- the picture of the dotted iceberg. *Evidence of a curious, pensive individual.*
- “Shuffle these cards and lay them out: this is the hand that Robert Ross was born with.” *Does this suggest Robert may have been dealt a rotten life???*
- Marian Turner cared for Robert in the hospital after his arrest (9)

- Robert in her opinion “someone extremely well made who cared about his body.”
- Robert’s fragility – “like glass” (10) a hero
- “He did the thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing.”\*\*\*
- “It’s the ordinary men and women who’ve made us who we are.” *While it was the politicians that shaped the events that led the war, it was the individual men and women who made up the country who pledged their lives and ultimately determined the outcome of the war.*
- “The passions involved [in bringing about the war] were as ordinary as me and my sister fighting over who is going to cook dinner!” (11) *War is an integral part of the human condition*
- “That’s what binds us together. They appeal to our basest instincts.”
- Robert no Hitler, precisely his problem. *Robert was not a prominent individual like Hitler, so his achievements went unnoticed.*

#### 4

- stepping back from the fire as he descends the train (12)
- Robert shy of girls
- confused over Heather Lawson situation – *naïve/impatient in matters dealing with girls (13)*
- Robert is easily bruised. (14) *fragility of innocence, how easily it is corrupted*
- “The melting snow began to turn to mist and the mist was filled with rabbits and Rowena and his father and his mother and the whole of his past life – birth and death and childhood. He could breathe them in and breathe them out.” (14) *Changing seasons reflect changing times.*
- dog watching Robert at the train station (15) *A companion to Robert.*

#### 5

- Rowena’s death “Robert’s fault”, “her guardian”. *He broke his promise to save her, causing him to feel responsible.*

#### 6

- playing with rabbits when she died (16) *Rabbits share the same characteristics as Rowena: small, gentle, fragile, precious to those who love them.*
- holding them one by one in her lap
- “Will you stay with me forever?” (17) *Broken promise that will be Robert’s undoing.*

#### 7

- Mrs. Ross insists that Robert kill Rowena’s rabbits...

#### 8

- Mr. and Mrs. Ross have a cold relationship at best (18). *Perhaps this arises from the fact that Mr. Ross is more generous in his affections towards his children, whereas Mrs. Ross is more reserved and guards her emotions strongly.*

#### 9

- Mrs. Ross refuses to wallow in grief. Clings to Miss Davenport.
- Robert envies Peggy’s army beau because he could “surround himself with space.” *A space to escape his problems.*

- why must Robert kill the rabbits? "BECAUSE HE LOVED HER" (19) *Perhaps by killing the rabbits, that which Robert so closely associates with his sister, Robert will overcome his grief, and move on.*

- Robert pushes aside his father. *Though they have a strong bond, they do differ on some points.*

- yelling to Teddy Budge, "You bastard! What are soldiers for?" (20)???

- "All these actors were obeying some kind of fate we call 'revenge'. Because a girl had died – and her rabbits had survived her." *A punishment for the rabbits for having outlived a superior species, for allowing Rowena's spirit to live on and bring more grief to the family.*

## 10

- Mrs. Ross's hair – *duality of character* (21)

- Mrs. Ross a drunk

- "Do you want me to...help in any way?" *Rare moment in which she sincerely reaches out to her son.*

- "He hated the way she used his childhood – everyone's childhood as a weapon."

*Tension between mother and son.*

- "You think Rowena belonged to you. Well I'm here to tell you, Robert, no one belongs to anyone. We're all cut off at birth with a knife and left at the mercy of strangers. You hear that? Strangers. I know what you want to do. Well – you can go to hell. I'm not responsible. I'm just another stranger. Birth I can give you – but life I cannot, I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more." (23) *Mrs. Ross is unable to express her emotions in a comfortable, soothing way, instead lashing out in a way that only results in alienating those she loves.*

## 11

- "What Robert wanted was someone else who had acquired that state of mind: who killed as an exercise of the will." (24)

- Robert runs on the compound (25) *Trying to escape his problems.*

## 12

- On the coyote: "Robert learns from this run that a hunter kills when it has to survive, but is generous when it is not a hunter." (Acadia)

- water satisfying Robert's thirst (27) *Water as a plentiful source.*

## 13

- Eugene Taffler a war hero who's been to France, was wounded, and then returned to Canada (30)

- "All you get in this war is one little David against another." (Taffler) (31)

- Did Taffler want "the war to pit him against Goliath?" (32)

- Taffler accompanied by a dog. *Companion motif.*

- "Taffler was just a dot on the horizon. Dots were anonymous." *The individual men who served in the war are but anonymous figures in a war that involved the lives of millions, and are thus rendered insignificant.*

- Robert thought "he'd found the model he could emulate – a man to whom killing wasn't killing at all but only throwing... A man to whom war wasn't good enough unless it was bigger than he was."

## 15

- Robert forced to go to whorehouse, doesn't want to go, but sees need to conform (34)
- smell of alcohol reminds him of his mother (35) **First of many triggers that will remind him of home life**
- encounter dogs and horses on the way. **Companions to Robert on his journey.**

## 16

- Robert anxious. "Part of Robert's panic was his fear of what his own hands would do. It seemed they were magnets, drawn to his groin, and he had to fight to stop them from moving." (39)

## 17

- Robert's naiveté in face of prostitute
- "His body hadn't waited for his mind. It did things on its own." (40) **Following his animal instinct.**
- Robert's privacy being intruded upon by the sound coming through the walls. **His fragile core is slowly being eroded.**
- description of intercourse horse-like (43) **animal-like behavior**
- "The man being ridden was Taffler. The rider was the Swede. Goliath." (44)

## 18

- Robert homesick. "Where, in this dark, was the world he'd known and where was he being taken to so fast there wasn't even time to stop?" (45)
- "After the Great War for Civilization – sleep was different everywhere..." (46) **Evidence of the sweeping changes that the war brought to society.**

## 19

- Robert promoted to second-lieutenant.
- "And now, the leaves had fallen twice. It was not for nothing he'd stood beneath the wide marquee that summer day. It would fill and fall on everyone." (47) **Changing seasons/ changing time motif**

## 20

- [Robert] would go upstairs into the attic, when he was ten, and take off his clothes in front of an old, dark mirror and wish that he was red."
- Robert's father used to tell him stories. **Bond between father and son.** (48)

## 21

- Horses on board the ship.
- sight of his father lifts Robert's spirits immeasurably (50) **father-son bond**
- doesn't send love to anyone; too unmanly. **Like his mother in that he struggles to reveal his emotions – or simply refuses to** (51)

## 22

- Miss Davenport more of a companion to Mrs. Ross as she becomes more estranged from her own family (52)
- "If I fall down – I fall down." **Mrs. Ross strong-mindedness**
- Mrs. Ross's negative view of church (53) **Is Findley promoting an anti-Church worldview?**

- "What [Mrs. Ross] needed was an empty cathedral in which to rail at God." (54)
- Can't reconcile celebration at church with killing of the children at war. ***Mrs. Ross sees the Church value system as being false, a tremendous lie.***

### 23

- "Any storms that troubled it got there by way of Joseph Conrad and the *Boys' Own Manual*." ***Romantic notions of the sea/war ruined by what he actually comes to see.***
- To Clifford, "The war was a deadly serious and heaven-sent chance to become a man." ***Speaks to the idyllic and romantic view of the war that many young soldiers possessed at the beginning of the war.***

### 24

- "The place was alive with flies.' (62) ***Wretched atmosphere.***

### 25

- shooting of the horse/shooting of the rabbits. ***Will he do it?***

### 26

- "...his hand haunting his holster." ***Gives us the impression that Robert is conflicted about what he should, that he is hesitating.***

### 27

- "A chair fell over in his mind." (68) ***Meant to convey the state of confusion in which Robert finds himself.***
- "No thank you, sir. I promised my mother I wouldn't drink." (69)

### 28

- Robert and Harris' relationship to end "in ashes" (70) ***Foreshadowing. Will Harris die or Robert die?***

### 29

- Mrs. Ross began to wear dark glasses so her eyes could not be seen (72) ***Illusion vs. reality. Eluding the reality of her life, difficulty coming to grips with her situation.***
- *Huckleberry Finn*
- Mrs. Ross too drunk to come see Robert (73)
- "Come on back to the raf, Huck honey." ***Perhaps, deep down, this is a longing on Mrs. Ross' part for her son to come back home, one that is never expressed.***

### 30

- "But only the letters mailed from France were worthy of this exchange. They had the smell of fire." (74) ***Fire is a symbol for the brutality of war.***

## Chapter Two

### 1

- "There is no good picture of this except the one you can make in your mind." (75) ***Illusion vs. reality.***
- "The mud. There are no good similes." (76)

- "Men and horses sank from sight. They drowned in mud. Their graves, it seemed, just dug themselves and pulled them down."

### 3

- "The birds, being gone, had taken some mysterious presence with them. There was an awful sense of void – as if the world had emptied." (81) ***Birds are symbols of impending doom, of mourning.***

- "You weren't a real soldier unless you were in jeopardy." (84)

### 4

- Robert nearly drowning in the mud (86)

- Robert blinded (87) ***Foreshadowing of his own mother's eventual blindness.***

### 5

- "The water was washing him free of the mud." (89) ***Water as a symbol of purity, cleansing.***

- "Above them, the sky was breached by a wavering of wings. The crows were following." ***Ominous symbol, harbinger of impending doom.***

### 7

- "It gave the war some meaning if you knew that the men who took your fire (and returned it) wore blue scarves or had gray mittens like your own." (92) ***The man firing at you front the enemy line is no different from you; we are all fighting for our own survival.***

- the door leading to the trench with a panel of glass (93) ***contrast of beauty vs. brutality of trenches***

- "The glass, in spite of the fact that it came from a house, as Devlin had said, nonetheless depicted a saint – or at least someone holy enough to warrant a halo." (94) ***An ambivalent attitude towards religion on Robert's part. Did he get it from his mother?***

- Devlin: "I'm devoted to fragility. Glass has a certain fineness and brittleness that a man with my bones appreciates." ***Could be speaking for Robert, as well.***

- Rodwell's animal collection – the rabbits, especially – ***immediately remind Robert of Rowena*** (95)

- *Clausewitz on War*. He wrote: "Rather than comparing it [war] to art we could more accurately compare it to commerce, which is also a conflict of interests and activities." ***War is business: a competition between organizations. Ironic because Clausewitz stressed strategy; in WWI there seemed to be no strategy at all.*** (Acadia) (96)

### 8

- "Clausewitz says the true basis of war is man to man." (97)\*\*\*

- "Any man whose love of horses is stronger than his fear of being an absurdity is all right with me." (Rodwell) (98) ***Rodwell, like Robert, is one with nature.***

- *Abide with Me* – speaks to feelings of alienation of the soldiers, which war songs like this one often reflected (Acadia) (100)

### 9

- "Everyone is strange in a war I guess. *Ordinary* is a myth."

- "Sleep was dangerous. The animal memory in you knew that. No matter what your mind said, your body didn't listen." (101) ***Animal instincts of humans.***

- “But nobody dreams on a battlefield. There isn’t any sleep that long. Dreams and distance are the same.” (102)

## 10

- on Harris: “No one since Rowena had made Robert feel he wanted to be with them all the time.” (104)

- “They aren’t any friendlier – the fish, you know. But they accept you there. As you might belong, if you wanted to. It’s not like here. It’s not like here at all.”

- Harris’ silent agony in the hospital (107)

## 11

- Lady Juliet’s love of Mass (109) *Amusing contrast to Mrs. Ross’ dislike of Church.*

- she is proud of Robert Ross. “It’s as if Robert did something evil.” (110)

## 12

- on Barbara: “For as long as I can remember she had a taste for heroes and athletes.” (111)

- “It may be pedestrian to say so – but the truth is often pedestrian and I think the fact is that extremely physical men like Robert and Jamie and Taffler are often sensitive men as well.” (113)

- “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.”

(114)\*\*\* *The war changes men in that it demands extraordinary things from otherwise ordinary men...* (see below)

- “And he said that after a while you saw them everywhere [dead bodies] and you sort of accepted it. But the acceptance made him mad and he said this marvelous thing: *I still maintain that an ordinary human being has a right to be horrified by a mangled body seen on an afternoon walk.* So what it was we were denied was to be ordinary. All our ordinary credos and expectations vanished.” (114)

- dying by bomb preferable – *quick, painless* (115)

- “But Robert said: *we were always men.* He didn’t believe all that stuff about fish and frogs. He said he believed that everything was what it was.” (116) *Is Robert not consciously aware of his relationship to animals?*

- “It was the first time he’d truly thought of himself as *being* a soldier.” (120)

## Chapter Three

### Feb. 28, 4 a.m.

- Robert’s hole caves in (121)

- Levitt can’t stand being sworn at (123)

- Levitt seems to go mad. “You’re messing everything up!” (125) *Psychological effects of the war on a young soldier’s mind.*

- Rodwell slaps him, seems to have seen this kind of thing before

### 4:25 a.m.

- “The dark was pitted with holes and he kept falling down. He fell down once and put his hand in someone’s face. He apologized – even thought he knew the man was dead.” (127)

- the rat squirming to get out. "Robert wondered afterwards if setting the rat free had been a favor – but in the moment that he did it he was thinking: *here is someone still alive*. And the word *alive* was amazing." ***Animals are much like humans in that they strive for one essential thing: survival.***

#### 5:30 a.m.

- the soldier gushing, "Isn't it *marvelous?*" (128) ***The reaction of a perhaps beguiled, confused soldier.***

#### 8:15 a.m.

- "The dead all lay with their faces in the mud – or turned to the walls of the trench. This was the only way they could be told apart from the wounded." (131)

- "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?" (132) ***Reminds me of Oliver Stone's Platoon, a Vietnam War movie in which the main character begins to question the sanity of his commanding chief, a cold-blooded war hawk for whom killing becomes a formality.***

- "He thought of being born – and of 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." (133) ***Parallel to "This is the hand your death" quote at beginning. Also reaffirms bond between Robert and his father.***

#### 8:50 a.m.

- the men grappling for the gas mask (138). ***Every man for himself, survival first instinct.***

#### 12:15 p.m.

- "The Sun – at its zenith – died. The crows began to call to one another." (141)  
Impending doom?

#### 1 p.m.

- "A bird sang, something like a white-throated sparrow: one long note descending; three that wavered. This was the bird that had sung before. He waited for it to sing again. It didn't... The bird had made him extremely nervous." (142)

- the dead German. "The bird sang and sang and sang, till Robert rose and walked away. The sound of it would haunt him to the day he died." (146) ***The bird a symbol of mourning, a reminder of death.***

#### Feb. 29<sup>th</sup> – March 2<sup>nd</sup>

- "One day bled into the next. They melded. Day and night became inseparable." (146)

- the flame thrower. ***Man is ingenious at finding new ways to kill one another.*** (147)

- Rodwell's toad is saved by putting it in a pail of drinking water. "The water was pure." (148)

#### March 5<sup>th</sup>

- Rodwell shoots himself after being forced to watch the killing of cat (150) ***There is no place in the war for men who have a respect for the sanctity of life.***

- Rodwell's letter to his daughter: "I am alive in everything I touch. Touch these pages and you have me in your finger tips. We survive in one another. Everything lives forever. Believe it. Nothing dies." (151)

### Jan-Feb-March-1916

- Mrs. Ross begins to seek out storms, taking pleasure in rain and snow (151) ***Is Mrs. Ross slowly losing hold of her sanity?***
- “She believed her country was being destroyed by fire.” (152) ***Fire a symbol of brutality.***
- ***Mrs. Ross walking in the mud. Parallels journey her son is taking.***
- Mr. Ross misses Mrs. Ross terribly, but never says so. (153)
- To Mrs. Ross, “The fact of being loved was difficult: almost intolerable. Being loved was letting other feed from your resources – all you had of life was put in jeopardy.” ***Mrs. Ross does not allow anyone to penetrate her outer shell – war has perhaps numbed her emotions.***
- Mr. Ross “became a portion of [Mrs. Ross’] silence. He was just another room through which she passed towards the dark.” (154) ***Perfectly encapsulates Mrs. Ross’s growing estrangement from her husband.***

### March 8<sup>th</sup>

- “Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert’s was the only human form. Modified and mutated – he was one with the others.” (155) ***Animals and humans are intertwined in an intimate way.***

## Chapter Four

### Lady Juliet’s Journal

- “Robert Ross was mostly interested in Barbara and Captain Taffler...” (165)
- Taffler has lost his arms
- “[Barbara] wavered there quite a few moments and I saw here put her hand out almost as far as his door but then she withdrew it and held it behind her back.” (168)
- Robert excited at the sight of the three foxes during his walk (170)
- “Robert I discovered was a very private man. His temper was terrible. Once when he thought he was lone 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... He had 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.” (174) ***War is having a growing effect on Robert; his exposure to violence is leaving him in an increasingly fragile state***
- running with the horses. ***A haven for Robert.***
- “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.” (180) ***Like in William Golding’s Lord of the Flies, Timothy Findley seems to be suggesting that man was born with a predilection towards violence, that it is an integral part of the social fabric of civilization.***

## Chapter Five

### 1

- Robert departs a train. “The nightingales sang in the wood at noon.” (182)

- "Robert...let the rain beat down against his arm and his face." *Mirrors the actions of his mother when she goes outside in the rain. Is this meant to chart both Robert and his mother's gradual descent into madness?*

- "Robert saw a small white farm with a cow in the yard and he thought: there cannot be a war." (183) *Reconciling beauty of the world with the carnage it is sometimes capable of.*

- "He slept to the sound of water lapping his mother's feet and of nightingales in an unnamed wood." (184) *Water again.*

- Standing naked in front of the mirror. Mirrors Robert's actions when he was a child (186) *Possibly regressing into a child-like state?*

- "He slept with his fist in its place and the cold, wet blooming of four hundred thousand possibilities – of all those lives that would never be – on his fingertips."

## 2

- "He hated small rooms – he hated being enclosed. He'd grown afraid of walls that pressed too close since the dugout had collapsed." (189) *Effects of the war.*

## 4

- Robert is raped. "His assailants, who he'd thought were crazies, had been his fellow soldiers. Maybe even his brother officers. He'd never know. He never saw their faces." (193) *Perhaps the men were trying to root out the weaker men, like Robert. Perhaps news of Robert's failure at the whorehouse got around. Or maybe the men who did don't even know the reason themselves.*

## 5

- "Robert burned [Rowena's picture] in the middle of the floor. This was not an act of anger - but an act of charity." (195) *An act of charity towards himself, that is. Having been stripped of whatever privacy he had left following the rape, Robert succumbs to the misery of the war and does what he previously could not do – let go of the memory of his beloved sister, who until now was a comfort to Robert in his time of crisis.*

## 6

- the rabbit disappearing out of the corner of his eye. *A furthering of Robert's letting go of Rowena?*

- Juliet's candle lighting itself, in an upright position (198)

## 7

- the discovery of Clifford Purchase's body (201) *Clifford finally got the chance to prove himself – but paid with his life in the process.*

## 8

- "Robert's body was completely numb and his mind had shrunk to a small, protective shell in which he hoarded the barest essentials of reason." (201)\*\*\*

- Captain Leather shoots Levitt as he attempts to save the horses. (202)

- "Robert's anger rose to such a pitch that he feared he was going to go over into madness." (203)\*\*\*

- "If an animal had done this – we would call it mad and shoot it." (203)

- Robert kills the mules and horses as an act of mercy...or is it an act of insanity?

## 9

- Mrs. Ross seems to be going mad (204)
- She goes blind (205) *Having eluded reality for so long, perhaps God granted her her wish.*
- Robert's picture in the drawing room begins to fade, then goes black (206)

## 11

- restatement of prologue – Robert's story has come full circle (208)

## 13

- "Mickle was a brave man. He decided that, plainly, he was dealing with a man gone mad and that he must act in accordance with that interpretation. He must dispense not only with mercy – but with reason." (211)
- Robert: "We shall not be taken." (212) *An final expression of Robert's oneness with the animals*
- His last words: "The dog. The dog." (213)

## 14

- Marian Turner, hospital nurse: "...I looked down the rows of platforms where the tents had been and there, at the edge of the step, sat a pure white cat we'd had as a mascot. It was cleaning its paws. Serenely cleaning its paws." (214) *Serenity in the face of war.*
- "That night – surrounded by all that dark – and all those men in pain – and the trains kept brining us more and more and more – and the war was never, never, never going to end – that night, I thought: *I am ashamed to be alive.* I am ashamed of *life.* And I wanted to offer some way out of life – I wanted grace for Robert Ross." (215) *Akin to Robert's final act of mercy.*
- "Not yet" – the essence of Robert Ross (216)

## 15

- photo of Robert one year before his death. "He is holding Juliet's hand. And he is smiling." (217) *Perhaps Robert found that which so eluded him during his entire life – happiness and understanding.*

## Epilogue

- Gravestone: EARTH AND AIR AND FIRE AND WATER

ROBERT TOSS

1896

1922

- one last photo: Robert holding a rabbit the palm of his finger (218)
- "*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 our killing of it.*" *Maybe the importance of Robert Ross has only made itself evident until he was gone.*
- "This is that last thing you see before you put on your overcoat: *Robert and Rowena with Meg:* Rowena seated astride the pony – Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: 'Look! You can see our breath!' And you can." *A final reminder of the serenity of Robert's previous life.*

## Possible Conclusions

- Throughout the book, Timothy Findley charts the gradual descent into madness of both Mrs. Ross and Robert Ross. Many of Robert's actions mirror those of his mother: Mrs. Ross' walking in the mud recalls her son's ordeal in the trenches; both Mrs. Ross and Robert expose themselves to the rain; and Robert's momentary blindness serves as a foreshadowing of his mother's eventual blindness, which is brought upon by a sudden realization that she may never see her son again. Both Robert and his mother suffer tremendous psychological effects from the war: the former from being exposed to the violence and brutality of his fellow man, the latter because of her estrangement from her son. As the book progresses, the reader sees how much of his mother is present within Robert. Like Mrs. Ross – who stubbornly refuses to grieve for her daughter Rowena – Robert closely guards his emotions, or simply refuses to express them. Mrs. Ross' strong reservations about religion are also evident in Robert's ambivalent, almost non-existent attitude towards religion. Clearly, though never alluded to explicitly in the novel, there remains a strong connection between Robert and his mother.

- In *The Wars*, several characters share an intimate bond with different animals, which serve to highlight different aspects of the characters' personality. Robert's kindred spirit seems to be the dog and the horse, which serve as trusted companions to Robert on his journey. Rabbits become a symbol for Rowena, not only because they were a prized possession of Rowena's, but because they resemble her, as well; they are small, fragile, and precious to those who love them. The emergence of a rabbit constantly evokes feelings of guilt from Robert, who feels responsible for his sister's death. Rodwell is an animal lover, as well, keeping several pets with him in the trenches. He is most useful in trying to understand what Findley was trying to convey to his readers about the relationship between animals and humans. When Rodwell includes a portrait of Robert in his animal sketchbook, it's an indication that animals and human beings are essentially one being, striving for survival amid a hostile world. Robert's triumphant cry at the end of the novel – "We shall not be taken" – is final, memorable expression of that belief. In the end, the animals – much like the many references to art in the novel – serve as the ultimate contrast to the brutality of war.

- The title *The Wars* seems to be referring not to the actual physical combats that took place during the war but to the internal, psychological battles that took place in the minds of the soldiers who suffered from the effects of violence and inhumanity during the war. (However, Findley is also successful in evoking the physical torment suffered by the soldiers in the trenches.) Robert's increasingly fragile frame of mind during the novel, and his difficulty in coming to terms with the world in which he finds himself, is indicative of this internal struggle. This struggle is also one that applies to those who remained behind on the home front, the families who made the ultimate sacrifices during the war. Robert's departure from his home town signals a significant change in his family, whose members – particularly his mother and father – become estranged from one another now that their connective thread – Robert – is no longer present. *The Wars* illustrates what can happen to men and women whose destinies are determined by circumstances that are beyond their power and understanding.

