

SOAR Curricular Material #14

The New Fiction (April 1918—Original Version)

The war has brought about many alterations and much that is new. Even we over here, far from the scene of battle, while the fiber of our national life yet remains the same, *feel the spirit of the times sweeping over us like a fresh, cool breeze, putting new life into our blood.* Magazines and periodicals, testing the pulse of the nation, are alive with the war, *so alive that one cannot lift a page without finding some new phase of the war in story form.* A new fiction has been established. It is not altered in form. Technique has not been changed. Indeed, the technique of the modern novel and short story has far surpassed the content and would be difficult of improvement. It is the setting, the characters, the action—the whole content—that is different. Story-writers, like preachers, wide as their range may be, are apt to run short of material and begin to iterate. In recent years, this has been increasingly true, for we see writers forced to the ends of the world in search of novelty. Even the apparently unlimited field of the human character seems to yield but imperfect reproductions, and many of these mere repetitions of types. But with the outbreak of the war has come a change. A wonderful new setting, aglow with the fire of battle, grim with suffering, the tread of oppression and the stubborn spirit of defense, and resplendent with heroism and sacrifice; a range of action, dealing with the countless incidents of camp life and the battle-field, and all the intricate parts of this greatest world-drama; and, above all, a new insight into human character, bared to the core, betraying all the hidden qualities which only the trials and opportunities of such a time can bring to light—these *are the attributes of the new fiction.* Writers have never had such an opportunity. And this is only the beginning. Perhaps there is danger that the war-stories may be overdone. Writing is too popular and too profitable an occupation nowadays to exclude all but the experts. Some are sure to exaggerate and to copy. But the scope of the new field is wide and the deep interest of the people demands the best that the real artist can produce. Besides, war cannot be described by proxy. Men must see and feel to write. The hosts of “word-artists,” the writers of the cheap romances, are excluded, because only the man of purpose, the man with a soul, who has been “over there,” can touch the hearts of the public. *We are entering upon a new era in fiction.*

~~J.M.S.

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Understanding the Text

- 1) What do you think the author means when he says that the public in our country and community “*feel the spirit of the times sweeping over us like a fresh, cool breeze, putting new life into our blood?*” How does this image reflect the public’s thoughts on WWI?
- 2) The last sentence of this article reads, “*We are entering upon a new era in fiction.*” What is this “new fiction” being mentioned here and what are some of its attributes according to the author? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
- 3) The author claims that the magazines and periodicals present in the nation at the time of the war were “*so alive that one cannot lift a page without finding some new phase of the war in story form.*” What does this statement tell us about the caliber of the war in this nation at the time this article was written?
- 4) Who is the intended audience of this article? What information in the article leads you to think this is so?
- 5) What is the purpose of this article?
- 6) Using your previous responses to the questions about the article, determine what the main idea of this piece is.