Military Fictions

Stories about Soldiers, 1914-1930.

A thesis submitted by
George Simmers
in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Oxford Brookes University
2009.

ABSTRACT

Much criticism of the fiction of the Great War has relied on certain assumptions: that Britain's involvement in the War was futile, and that good writing about it must necessarily be ironic; that only fighting soldiers knew War's truth, while civilians were kept ignorant by censorship and propaganda; and that the disillusioned fiction of the late twenties belatedly revealed the 'truth about the War'.

This thesis asks what the literature looks like if these propositions are not taken for granted. It finds in wartime Britain a 'culture of consent' regulated more by public opinion than by official interference, and argues that reticence need not imply ignorance. The dominant representation of the soldier, as controlled and responsible, did not necessarily lead to endorsement of unthinking patriotism, but is found in texts whose aim is to regulate war enthusiasm. Some unorthodox accounts of soldiers were written and published during wartime; some of the institutions of the literary world hampered writers' expression more than official censorship.

During the twenties, representations of War and soldiers were often determined by the time's anxieties, and by a need to understand the War's place in history; the conflict was rarely shown as futile, even in fiction tackling the difficult subject of military executions. Stories about ex-soldiers sometimes presented them as victims, sometimes as a disturbing presence in post-war society. Other ex-soldiers were seen as the answer to society's problems in the years before the General Strike.

The war books published at the end of the twenties are more varied than has often been suggested, though many contemporary readers wanted them all to preach a message of war's futility. These and later fictions tell us as much about the times in which they are written as about the War itself. There is more to Great War fiction than, for example, the narrow selection found on current educational syllabuses.

Chapters

Introduction

In 1915, Sir Douglas Haig, the newly appointed Commander-in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, told the corps of newspaper war correspondents that he understood their needs: 'You want to get hold of little stories of heroism, and so forth, and to write them up in a bright way to make good reading for Mary Ann in the kitchen, and the man in the street.' Philip Gibbs, correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, later recorded 'the quiet passion with which these words were resented' by the journalists:

> We took occasion to point out to him that the British Empire which had sent its men into this war yearned to know what they were doing and how they were doing, and that their patience and loyalty depended on closer knowledge of what was happening than was told them in the communiqués issued by the Commander-in-Chief himself.[1]

In conflict are two opposing views of war reporting. The journalists present themselves as unbiased transmitters of information, faithfully conveying 'knowledge of what was happening', confident that truthful accounts can only enhance the 'patience and loyalty' of the whole British Empire. Haig is more aware of the difference between the confusions of war and the simplifications and shapings of narrative, possibly recalling the Duke of Wellington's comment: 'Write the history of a battle? As well write the history of a ball.'[2] His phrasing offended, but his comment points towards a truth that journalists were perhaps avoiding. [3] As Hayden White has convincingly argued, all historical narratives must be seen as verbal fictions, whose explanatory effects depend on the operation of 'emplotment', by which he means 'the encodation of facts contained in chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way [that] is the case with

---

1 Philip Gibbs, *Realities of War* (London: Heinemann, 1920), 24.

2 Quoted in Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (London: Cassell, 2004), 9. Haig's own war diaries are remarkably non-narrative; typically a day's entry outlines the current position, with little elaboration of how it came about. The professional soldier has to be more interested in tactical opportunity than in fitting past events into a narrative.

3 Haig must also have seen some point to the journalists' claims, however, since after this meeting he allowed the correspondents to report more fully (especially concerning the names of troops) — which helped them to write stories that appealed more directly (to Mary Ann and others).

fictions in general.[4]

This thesis will examine the ways in which writers of many kinds converted the War into stories between 1914 and 1930, paying particular attention to the roles given to soldiers in such fictions – roles that were remarkably varied. In his 1927 novel, *Young Orland*, Herbert Asquith described the British soldiers who fought during the Great War as men of unsophisticated integrity, with the power to revivify the nation:

> 'Most of these men had had lives of toil: most had found it hard enough to keep themselves and their families, and had not had much time to think of other things. But now, when she called for defenders, England seemed suddenly to live.'[5]

Three years later, Helen Zenna Smith would consider the same men 'as senseless as a flock of senseless sheep obeying a senseless leader'.[6] The poet John Oxenham believed them to be 'Christs all!'[7] yet novelist James Hanley depicted them as 'mad dogs'.[8]

The aim of this thesis is to understand these extremely various representations as responses to the times in which they were written. It will also examine them in the light of the controversy during recent years about a disparity between the history of the War and its literary history. Historians such as Brian Bond and Gary Sheffield have accused literary critics of being highly selective in the choice of texts that they have analysed and endorsed. Bond has suggested that by concentrating on the literature of disillusionment critics have risked falling into 'the trap of believing that two conflicting views of the war existed in British society between 1914 and 1918, the "true view" stressing waste and horror, belonging to the fighting soldiers, and the "false view" that of deluded civilian belief in patriotism and the nobility of sacrifice."[9]

---

4 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Baltimore University Press, 1978), 83.
5 Herbert Asquith, *Young Orland* (London: Hutchinson, 1927), 224.
6 Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (London: Newnes, 1930), 29.
7 Published in *'All's Well!': Some Helpful Verse for these Dark Days of War* (November 1915); included in , (eds) Dominic Hibberd and John Onions, *The Winter of the World: Poems of the First World War* (London: Constable: 2007), 82.
8 James Hanley, 'The German Prisoner' in *The Last Voyage and Other Stories* (London: Harvill, 1997), 75.
9 Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 2002), 12.

The most influential critic whose work has encouraged the emphasis on disillusionment is Paul Fussell, whose groundbreaking *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) has set the tone for much of what has been written about the War in recebt decades. Some of the book's most important contentions and assumptions are these:

1. The important writing about the War is that which describes the experience of the individual soldier in combat. The crucial experience is that of soldiers in the trenches on the Western Front.
2. There was an impassable gulf between the soldiers' knowledge of the war in which they were engaged and the ignorance of civilians, and 'even if those at home had wanted to know the realities of the War, they couldn't have without experiencing them.'[10] 'Rigid censorship'[11] of the press and of all letters home contributed to civilian ignorance, as did the 'high' diction of propaganda.[12]
3. The soldiers were fighting for no good reason. Fussell's only comment on the reasons for Britain's entry into the conflict is the trivializing claim that: 'In the Great War eight million people were destroyed because two persons, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his consort, had been shot.'[13] He does not mention that Britain declared war on Germany as a response to the unprovoked invasion of Belgium, whose neutrality was guaranteed by treaty, and that the strong and continuing commitment of the British people to the war effort was largely impelled by reports of atrocities committed by German troops in Belgium during the early days of the War
4. The most important mode of writing about the War is the ironic, since industrial warfare has robbed the individual soldier of agency. Minimising the moral justification for the War allows Fussell to suggest that the only significant war writing is the literature of 'futility'.

---

10 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Second edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 87.
11 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 87.
12 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 21-23.
13 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 17-18.

5. The 'catastrophe' of the Somme was crucial in the progress from idealism to disillusionment,[14] and the Battle of the Somme 'can stand as the type of all the ironic actions of the war.'[15]
6. It was a 'literary war', and the important literature it produced was typically by young officers whose writing was infused with memories of the classics and the English poetic tradition.
7. The Great War was exceptional, different from all previous wars in quality as well as scale: '[T]he machine gun alone makes it so special and unexampled that it simply can't be talked about as though it were one of the conventional wars of history.'[16]
8. The significant prose writing about the War was published a decade after the events. By this time writers had managed to cope adequately with their memories and write about the War with objectivity. The prose of this time most worthy of analysis is that by poets (Graves, Sassoon, Blunden, Aldington).[17]

Though Paul Fussell's book gave most persuasive expression to these ideas, a similar powerful interpretation of the War as essentially an ironic narrative is at the heart of two 1963 texts, A.J.P.Taylor's history *The First World War* and Theatre Workshop's play *Oh What a Lovely War*. Many of Fussell's assumptions also underlie another very influential text, Brian Gardner's poetry anthology, *Up the Line to Death* (1964), which has featured

---

14 'The innocent army fully attained the knowledge of good and evil at the Somme on July 1, 1916.' *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 19.

15 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 19.

16 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 153.

17 This way of thinking had previously been strongly articulated by Herbert Read in 1930: 'All who had been engaged in the war, all who had lived through the war years, had for more than a decade refused to consider their experience. The mind has a faculty for dismissing the débris of its emotional conflicts until it feels strong enough to deal with them. The war, for most people, was such a conflict, and they never got 'straight' on it. Now they feel ready for the emotional reckoning and *All Quiet* was the touch that released this particular mental spring. ('Books of the Quarter', *Criterion*, Vol 9,July 1930, 764.)

Here Read discounts all the writings about the War produced and published during the previous sixteen years, including his own earlier work, such as *In Retreat* (writen 1919, published 1925). Getting 'straight' on the subject presumably means dismissing accounts of the conflict that might previously have seemed convincing, and therefore narrowing the range of permissible interpretations, which must risk endorsing a simplified view both of history and of the literature. Read is implicitly appealing to dubious Freudian concepts of repressed memory, a reference made explicit by later writers such as Elaine Showalter, who writes of the bulk of the 1920s as 'a "latency period" in which male war experience was forgotten.' (*The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* [London: Virago, 1995], 191.)

continuously on school examination set-book lists since its first publication; this defines the War in terms of a shift from mindless patriotism to extreme disillusion, as though this were an intellectual and spiritual journey followed by every soldier.[18]

The extent to which ideas shared by Fussell and Gardner have formed the current literary understanding of the War is shown by the specification for the AQA AS-Level English Literature syllabus first examined in 2009; this offers an insight into how Great War literature is perceived today, and how it is being transmitted to new generations. The War is thought important enough (or as attractive enough to teachers and students) to be the subject of an optional paper, which is a popular choice. There are no compulsory prose or drama set books, but a lengthy list of recommended texts, from which teachers can choose which their students will study; [19] of these, remarkably few were written before 1928, [20]and almost none treat the War as anything but pointless slaughter. The Drama section especially is dominated by works that insist on the War's futility, ranging from *Oh What a Lovely War* to *The Monocled Mutineer* and *Blackadder Goes Forth.* The general tenor of these works is close to Cyril Falls's 1930 caricature of books published in the wake of of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front,* as texts that 'have set themselves. [...] to prove that the Great War was engineered by knaves or fools on both sides, that the men who died in it were driven like beasts to the slaughter, and died like beasts, without their deaths helping any causes or doing any good.'[21] Students will encounter very little of the prose literature written between 1914 and 1928 which typically combines a positive view of the War's moral purpose with a recognition of its cost, and at its best is more morally complex than much of the work that

---

18 Brian Gardner, *Up the Line to Death* (London: Methuen, 1964.) Later updated editions have revised the biographies, but have not changed the nature of the anthology.

19 *GCE AS and A Level Specification: English Literature A: AS exams 2009 onwards:A2 exams 2010 onwards* (Manchester: AQA, 2007), 18-20.

20 Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and Ford's *Parade's End* are among the prose selections, although these are not popular choices. The long Drama selection includes Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and *O'Flaherty V.C.*, and Malleson's *Black 'Ell*, in addition to many 'anti-war' plays of recent years. The examiner's report for June 2009 revealed that 'The most popular prose texts by far were *Regeneration* and *Birdsong*, whereas *Journey's End* dominated the drama.' The most popular poetry anthology is *Up the Line to Death. LTA1B World War One Literature: Report on the Examination: 2009 examination – June series* (Manchester: AQA, 2009), 4, 7.

21 Cyril Falls, *War Books: A Critical Guide* (London: P. Davies, 1930), xvi

succeeded it; Claire Tylee's comment on May Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven* (1918) is clearly applicable to much World War One literature: 'The very reason for its wartime success, its idealistic patriotism, may have been sufficient reason for it also to be forgotten.'[22]

Fussell's representation of the War has been strongly criticised by some military historians, especially Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, who see his account of the Army as a caricature of the actuality:

> The army which he portrays consists only of two elements: irresponsible commanders who keep well clear of danger while sending their foot-soldiers to purposeless graves; and their victims who endure misery and maiming and — if they survive — grow increasingly disillusioned with the war and with those on their side who direct or applaud it.[23]

Despite such caveats from historians during the decades since its first publication, *The Great War and Modern Memory* has, in the words of Santanu Das, become 'the defining narrative of the First World War' for literary scholars.[24] For example, the fullest study of the period's war literature, *A War Imagined* (1991) by Samuel Hynes, has a more measured tone and refers to a wider variety of sources, but essentially reinforces much of Fussell's interpretation, and adds a teleology by showing the progress of war writing to a culmination in the disillusioned works of the late twenties and early thirties.[25] Some of the most original and valuable work on Great War literature during the past two decades has been the critical writing (usually from a feminist perspective) that looks beyond what Claire Tylee calls Fussell's "'men only" construction of the Great War'[26] to show that the effect of the First World War on women's consciousness 'is a matter of supreme importance to the history of women, and thus to the proper understanding of British society.'[27] The writings

---

22 Claire Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 131.
23 Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, 'Paul Fussell at War', *War in History* (1994, 1).
24 Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10. Despite some reservations, Das endorses Daniel Pick's praise of Fussell's book as 'compelling' and 'deeply evocative' (10).
25 Hynes, Samuel, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture.* New York: Atheneum, 1991.
26 *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 8.
27 *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 14.

of such scholars include consideration of the experience and writing of women, including nurses, war workers and the bereaved. This has enlarged the field of study by drawing attention to a range of significant texts, and examining ways in which the impact of the War spread far beyond the trenches.[28]Even more than Fussell's work, however, most of this feminist criticism, influenced by the voices of nurses and the bereaved, depicts the soldier as the passive victim of industrialised slaughter, and assumes the futility of the War.

Similarly, a critical work which is among the most original of recent years, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* by Santanu Das, takes the analysis of soldiers' experience into new territory, but he is close to Fussell in his professed aim, which is to provide insight into 'the phenomenological and emotional world of the First World War' and to show 'literature's close engagement with the world of the senses'.[29] He discovers subtleties of meaning beyond Fussell's range, but essentially covers the same range of texts.

Other literary scholars have challenged the approach in a more thoroughgoing manner. Martin Stephen, in *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War*, while acknowledging that 'Fussell's is a very great book' asserts that 'it is seriously and gloriously wrong in some of the claims that it makes.'[30] Stephen draws attention to historical simplifications (especially Fussell's crude account of social class) and shows that much of the worthwhile poetry of the War evades Fussell's categories. Also writing mainly about the poetry of the War, James Campbell has objected to the exclusive concentration on the experience of combat made by Fussell and others, arguing that it usually echoes the valuation of battle implicit in the texts themselves. He has identified a 'combat gnosticism', an approach based on 'the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of existence that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an

---

28 As well as Tylee's work see: Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

29 *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, 8.

30 Martin Stephen, *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), 230.

identical experience';[31] writing is valued according to how successfully it achieves this goal. To privilege work that demonstrates its closeness to battle is to privilege one view of the War. As this thesis will show, the battle narrative was only one of many genres in which the War and the figure of the soldier were represented; its superiority cannot automatically be taken for granted.

One radically different approach to Great War literature is Vincent Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), which argues that the most penetrating responses to the War are to be found in the works not of soldiers, but of a few modernist authors writing for coterie audiences.[32] Sherry's thesis is that because they were committed to war by secret pre-war understandings, 'English Liberals had to maintain support for a war which, by precedent and convention, by partisan tradition and intellectual principle, they ought to have opposed.'[33] He claims that politicians and their apologists were implicated in systemic hypocrisy, which resulted in a crisis of language: 'a deep mainstream of established attitudes — call it public reason, call it civic rationality — was convulsing under the effort to legitimise this war.'[34] The theory on which he bases his claim, that British involvement in the War was compelled by secret treaties previously entered into with the French and Russians, is historically dubious.[35] It was the invasion of Belgium that was the British *casus belli*, and the treaty that made Britain a guarantor of Belgian neutrality was no secret. *Realpolitik* of course played its part in the decisions made by Asquith's cabinet in early August, 1914, but Sherry, like Fussell, ignores the fact that, whatever the doubts about those decisions, they were, for the vast majority of the British people, superseded by the German atrocities in Belgium during the autumn of 1914, which for most of Britain made the

---

31 Campbell, James, 'Combat Gnosticism:The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History* (Vol 30, No 1, Winter 1999), 203.

32 A similar approach is found in Allyson Booth's *Postcards from the Trenches* (1996), which grants other writers the status of accurate reporters, but finds insight and valid interpretation almost exclusively in the work of the modernists.

33 Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003),9.

34 *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, 9.

35 It receives no support, for example in Hew Strachan's account of Sir Edward Grey's 'moral and high-minded, but [...] also shrewdly realistic foreign policy in *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

prosecution of the War an overwhelmingly moral issue. It was not bogus arguments, but reports of war crimes that convinced the public that the British war effort was a 'Great War for Civilization'.[36] These atrocities go unmentioned in Sherry's account of the War, in which the greatest crimes are linguistic ones; like Fussell, he presents the mass of the British public merely as victims of dishonest rhetoric, bamboozled into supporting the War by 'the verbal perfidy of the war government',[37] but without questioning why such overwhelming support had not been manipulated into existence during the divisive Boer War a few years earlier. If his historical premises are not accepted, it is hard to accept his conclusions.

Sherry's book is an extreme example of the divergence between the work of twenty-first century literary critics and the trend of recent historical writing. During the past decade, Gary Sheffield and others of the revisionist school have argued that 'The First World War was a tragic conflict, but it was neither futile nor meaningless. Just as in the struggles against Napoleon and Hitler, it was a war that Britain had to fight and had to win.'[38] Far from seeing the British Army as 'lions led by donkeys',[39] these historians see the British Army as the most successful of the War, gradually developing 'careful battle techniques'[40] which coordinated infantry, tanks, artillery and aircraft in ways that were 'logistically sustainable'[41] and enabled the spectacular victories of the last hundred days.

Adrian Gregory's *The Last Great War* (2008) has applied a similar spirit of revisionism to the social history of the War, questioning many of the

---

36 For accounts by modern historians of German atrocities in Belgium, see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2001) and Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War One* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

37 Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41.It is difficult also to accept Sherry's representation of literary modernism as drawing 'its content and depth in some large respect from the set of conventions against which it positions itself' – by which he means the linguistic practices of wartime Liberals, when the aesthetics of Pound and Eliot had largely been formed before the War, and owed much to nineteenth-century French models for whom the language of English Liberalism was not a major issue.

38 Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001), xvii.

39 This often-used quotation, says Gary Sheffield, 'continues to defy reputable attribution.' (*Forgotten Victory*, xiv.)

40 *Forgotten Victory*, 255.

41 *Forgotten Victory*, 247.

assumptions of influential social historians of an earlier generation, such as Arthur Marwick. Many issues related to the Great War remain the subject of heated debate (the quality of Haig's leadership and strategic decision-making, for example) but most historians have now moved on from the assumption of futility that is still the basis of much literary criticism.

This thesis is an investigation into what fictions about the War look like if, while acknowledging the appalling tragedy of slaughter on such a scale, one does not make Fussell's assumptions; if one does not take it for granted that the deaths were meaningless, and if one is willing to accept that the mass of writers, especially civilian ones, who produced work during the War and in the years immediately afterwards, and who actively endorsed the project of the War, were not necessarily naïve victims of false consciousness, or swayed by propaganda, or dishonest. Its aim is deliberately inclusive, since most previous critical writing about the period has been marked by exclusions of various sorts: Sherry excludes non-modernists; Fussell excludes non-combatants. Certain writers are singled out as exemplars of authenticity, and the rest are classified as inauthentic non-literature, of a manifestly lower status. [42] Chris Baldick sums up the current literary reputation of early wartime writing:

> The writings generated by the first seventeen months after 4 August 1914 scarcely belong to what we now accept as the literature of the First World War. They are for the most part propaganda and patriotic effusion, of historical interest only.[43]

'What we now accept as the literature of the First World War' is clearly a highly restricted selection, whose restriction may say more about 'us' than about the literature of the War.

Different critics have restricted their choice of acceptable literature in different ways. David Trotter, for example, identifies 'the paradigmatic war novel' with the combat novel, in which 'existence before and after the war has

---

42 See, for example, Claire Tylee's remark that 'Galsworthy, Bennett and Conan Doyle simply scribbled puff for the government's case' (*The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 103) or Paul Fussell's dismissal of Hilaire Belloc as 'a typical kept correspondent' (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, 87).

43 Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement (The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 10. 1910-1940.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 331.

a meaning only in relation to what happened in between: the microcosm of the trenches.'[44] Such a definition was by no means obvious to critics in 1916, when a reviewer in the *Westminster Gazette* gave a very different definition of 'real war novels':

> They do not give realistic and yet artful description of actual battle — that is journalism; and when it is glazed with a surface of fiction it is very hard to read. The real war novel tells us how non-combatants behave under this particular strain, and shows us the humour, the goodness, the heroism and the treachery of daily life.[45]

Even soldiers were non-combatants for much of their time, and an approach that concentrates only on moments when the soldier meets a violent sublime in combat risks forgetting Charles Carrington' s reminder that 'the soldier is a social animal, undergoing a particularly social experience'.[46] Fiction by civilians, and fiction about the interaction between soldiers and civilians, are therefore as relevant to an understanding of how soldiers were represented as stories that concentrate on combat alone.

The term 'fiction' can be a slippery one in discussions of writing of this period, because it is difficult to make clear distinctions between what is definitely 'war fiction' and what is not. As will be seen, many novels were very closely based on their author's wartime experiences, while texts presented to the public as factual frequently contained elements of fiction, and could be completely fabricated. The definition of 'fiction' used here is therefore a broad one, and the thesis will include as 'war fiction' any narrative that shapes the events of war into a story; there will therefore be references beyond the works of literary novelists, to fictional stories in popular magazines, to memoirs and histories, to plays and children's fiction and to newspaper stories and even some poems, though it is imaginative prose literature that is the main focus of the thesis. The assumption will be that all writers, however their literary

---

44 David Trotter, 'The British Novel and the War' in (ed.) Sherry, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35. The fiction that he praises most highly is James Hanley's brutal 1930 novella, *The German Prisoner*,discussed in Chapter 6.

45 'New Novels', *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (14 October 1916), 17.

46 'Charles Edmonds' (pseudonym of Charles Carrington), *A Subaltern's War* (London: Peter Davies, 1929),196.

stature is judged by a later generation, were faced with similar problems in organising the raw material of turbulent current history into a pattern that would make sense to their readers.

This shaping process involves the adaptation of material to generic norms, and the thesis will point to continuities between pre-war, wartime and post-war writing, as existing genres were adapted to new circumstances and new material. Genres, it will be assumed, are useful to writers and readers because they allow reference to shared assumptions and shared language, within which the writer and his or her assumed reader are comfortable. The skilled and active reader (and in this age when print was still the major medium of mass entertainment, there were many such) knows generic conventions well, and is able to respond when a writer subverts or goes beyond them, however subtly. For genres are always unstable; any text of interest will push, however slightly, at generic boundaries. This becomes very noticeable in wartime writing, when texts of all sorts are found moving beyond peacetime generic norms, and into the War. A story in the *Magnet* comic starts in the familiar atmosphere of Greyfriars school, but strays into occupied France, until schoolboys find themselves in front of a German firing squad;[47] John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* begins as a murder mystery, and ends as a tale of recruitment into the War; Arnold Bennett's *The Roll Call* begins as the story of an ambitious young man, told in the realistic style of his *Clayhanger* trilogy, but at the end moves into quite a different register when its hero is transformed by enlistment. As John Frow says, 'a textual event... is never fully defined by its genre',[48] but it is the deviations from pre-existing generic patterns that often indicate what is most interesting about a text.

Problems could be raised by this adaptation of existing genres to deal with the challenge of the historical situation – for example when treating (or avoiding) the actualities of trench warfare in styles more usually adapted to less harrowing material. There were limits to what could acceptably be included in wartime fiction, and most writers, editors and publishers felt constrained by taboos of various kinds. It will be argued that an informal

47 *The Magnet*, (7 November 1914). This story is discussed more fully in Chapter Two.
48 John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

setting of boundaries, dictated by sensitivity to the feelings of soldiers, and of their relatives and friends at home, was more of a limitation than any external restriction or censorship, and that the institutions of the book trade, and especially the commercial libraries, were the likeliest obstacles to an unconventional book's sales and circulation.

The books and stories to be examined are only a fraction of the huge output of the publishing industry during these years, but are generally representative of those that were available to readers of the time, and therefore contributions to the public conversation about the War. They include texts by writers whom a later consensus has awarded a place in the literary canon (Bennett, Woolf, Wells, Kipling, and others) and texts by authors who have been largely forgotten;[49] many examples are taken from the best-selling but surprisingly under-researched fiction magazines of the time (whose editors could be more speedily responsive to changes in the public mood than hardback publishers).[50] Only stories about contemporary soldiers will be examined; there is another thesis to be written about historical fiction of this period, since the ways in which soldiers of other times were represented tell us at least as much about the time of composition as about the period described, but such stories have for the most part been ruled outside the scope of the present research.[51]

Many of the texts considered are of a type later defined as 'middlebrow', although that term was not invented until the mid-twenties,[52] and can be misleading when applied to writing of even a slightly earlier period, when

---

49 A reminder of the unpredictable nature of canon-formation is offered by the *Manchester Guardian* of 1929, whose readers had been polled to predict which living novelists would still be read in 2029. Galsworthy headed the list with 1,188 votes, followed by Wells (933), Bennett (654), Kipling (455), Barrie (285) and Walpole (233). The highest-ranking woman novelist was Sheila Kaye-Smith (196 votes). Far lower down the list were the novelists whose work attracts most academic respect in 2009. Only twenty-one voters thought much of Virginia Woolf's chance of retaining readers a century on (five fewer than those who backed Warwick Deeping's staying power). James Joyce scored less than ten. *Manchester Guardian* (3 April 1929), 16.

50 The market leader among the fiction magazines was the *Strand*, which maintained half a million monthly sales even during the wartime years of paper rationing. See Reginald Pound, *The Strand Magazine 1891-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 127.

51 Notable examples would be John Buchan's historical novels of the twenties, and such Kipling stories as 'The Manner of Men' (1930).

52 The first citation in the OED is from *Punch*, 23 December 1925. 'The B.B.C. claim to have discovered a new type, the "middlebrow". It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like.'

cultural divisions between literary elites and the bulk of intelligent readers were less fixed than in later years. All of the authors of the war years, whether highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow, faced the same problem — how to respond to a historical situation that seemed to them quite unique and unprecedented — and some of the responses of popular writers are as interesting as and as varied as those found in works that have attained canonical status. There are no clear cut-offs between elite and popular writing; nor are there complete disruptions between historical periods. Many, like John Buchan, saw a clear dividing line between pre-war and wartime,[53] but it will be shown that wartime writing was often deeply implicated in pre-war issues, and that many wartime themes still resonated after the Armistice.

What united the vast majority of writers and readers between 1914 and 1928 was a commitment to two conflicting beliefs. They believed that the War was fought in a just and righteous cause, and they knew that the cost in lives and suffering was terrible. Almost all non-trivial writing about the War, whether literary, middlebrow or popular, struggled to reconcile these two dissonant propositions. Some responses were evasive and some sentimental, but writers of all kinds responded to their readers' need to resolve this difficult moral paradox.

This thesis will attempt, therefore, to pay writers the compliment of taking them seriously, and assuming that most of what they wrote was both considered and written with integrity (though trying to understand how the pressures of the time sometimes led writers into the evasion of certain issues). A model for this approach is the work of Alison Light, who has declared that criticism should 'try to avoid reproducing that "parting of the ways" which literary critics and cultural commentators were themselves so active in creating in this period. Rather than setting "highbrow" against "lowbrow", the serious against the merely escapist or trashy, [they should] look for what is shared and common across these forms [...] and to see them all as historically

---

53 'To most of us, the dividing line between the old and the new world was drawn in the first week of August 1914.' John Buchan, *Francis and Riversdale Grenfell: A Memoir* (London, Nelson, 1920), 182.

meaningful."[54] A similar principle underlies Vivien Noakes's poetry anthology, *Voices of Silence* (2006) which includes wartime verse of types that have not previously been regarded as respectable enough for study.[55] Rosa M.Bracco's *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-39* (1993) was a pioneering study that deals with some of the texts covered by this thesis. While this thesis argues against some of Bracco's conclusions, her example and her bibliography have both been invaluable. Jane Potter's *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* includes an illuminating account of wartime romantic fiction.

The thesis is divided into two parts, each of three chapters, the first dealing with wartime writing, and the second with fiction of the post-war decade. Chapter One deals with background issues such as the literary culture existing at the start of the War, which provided the context within which the writings considered were first understood, and argues that censorship and official propaganda were less important in shaping the literature of the time than has sometimes been thought. It argues that wartime literature was the product of a 'culture of consent', regulated much more by public opinion than by official interference, and also shows how pre-war fictional genres provided patterns that could be adapted to the wartime needs of both writers and readers. The second chapter examines the dominant representation of the soldier in wartime as calm, controlled and responsible, but suggests that such a representation does not necessarily lead to the endorsement of unthinking war enthusiasm. The third chapter examines narratives that broke the unwritten rules, and considers how the institutions of the literary world responded to them.

In the second part, Chapter Four argues that early twenties representations of War and the soldier were often determined by the anxieties of the time, and by a wish to understand how the War fits into a broader

---

54 Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), x.

55 Mike Ashley's, *The Age of the Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines 1880-1950* (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2006) and Hugh Cecil's biographical treatment of minor war writers, *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (London: Secker and Warburg) 1995, are also very useful to anyone investigating non-canonical literature of this period.

sweep of history. Writers could now describe the relation between soldier and Army with greater freedom, as is shown by examination of fictional accounts of military executions.

The fifth chapter deals with twenties fiction about ex-soldiers, often shown as victims of an uncaring society, but sometimes as a disturbing presence within that society. Although some soldiers were seen as a problem to which society must find a solution, others were seen as the answer to post-war society's problems, and especially as a defence against the threat of communism, in the years leading to the General Strike.

Chapter Six considers the books published after the tenth anniversary of the Armistice, and in the wake of the very successful *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Journey's End*. Their depictions of men at war are more varied than has sometimes been suggested, and their reputation as communicating war's futility is not always reliable, although that is what many readers of the time wanted them to communicate.

The conclusion makes explicit what has previously been implicit in the descriptions of these fictional narratives – that all texts about war are texts about power, and embody responses to power. Some writers identify with the greater strength; some imaginatively identify themselves with those who are abject in the face of war; a third group of writers sees war as powerful, but not all-powerful, and as a context within which individual soldiers can demonstrate agency and make moral choices. The whole thesis considers which of many different ways of writing were conducive to the fullest, and most socially and morally alert, presentation of the War, and of the men who fought it.

Chapter 1

Backgrounds

A. A Culture of Consent

According to some, it was almost impossible to write good fiction about the War between 1914 and 1918. Claire Tylee has written:

> During the First World War men fighting in the trenches had little opportunity to compose poetry, let alone write novels, and few civilian writers cut through the political smokescreen on their behalf.[1]

In fact, some remarkable fiction was written on or near the battlefield. The preface to Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push* (1916), for example, states:

> Practically the whole book was written in the scene of action, and the chapter dealing with our night at les Brebis, prior to the Big Push, was written in the trench between midnight and dawn of September the 25th.[2]

MacGill's writings composed in training camps and battle zones will be discussed in Chapter Two, as will those of Ian Hay;[3]this chapter will question the implication of the second half of Claire Tylee's sentence, which suggests an oppositional relationship between politicians and civilian writers, and a 'smokescreen' of official lies which writers were too timid or too befuddled to penetrate. It will suggest that neither writers nor the public needed undue official persuasion to support the War, but that, on the contrary, popular enthusiasm for war often outran that of the government.

The response of Britain to the events of early August 1914 was remarkable. The European crisis had quickly escalated into a war that journalistic Britain was not expecting. (For some weeks after the Sarajevo assassinations, British newspapers expressed more concern about possible civil

---

1 Claire Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 103.

2 Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), vii-viii.

3 Hay and MacGill were not alone in finding leisure to write. Claire Tylee's sentence implies that all soldiers spent most of their time in the Front Line, which was by no means the case. Vivien Noakes's book of popular poetry, *Voices of Silence: The Alternative Book of First World War Poetry* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006), shows that very many soldiers found time to write verse. The autobiographies of W.A.Darlington, who wrote *Alf's Button* while in France, and of A. M. Burrage, who kept on producing magazine stories throughout most of his war career, suggest that the unofficial soldier-writer's main problem was censorship – not because he was in danger of having his work banned, but because it was difficult to persuade an officer to plough through a 5,000 word story.

war in Ireland than about European conflict.) The invasion of neutral Belgium, however, not only united Asquith's government in support of the rights of small nations and the sovereignty of international law,[4] it also rallied the previously divided press to unusual unanimity. Liberal papers like the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Nation* (both traditionally opposed to military adventures) gave their support,[5] and even the socialist *Daily Herald*, which at the very beginning of August was organizing anti-war protests, had within a month moved towards the general consensus at least far enough to divert its protests away from the War itself, and onto the more limited issues of War profiteering and employment.[6]Most strikingly, in July *The Suffragette* had been excoriating the political establishment, and demonising soldiers as spreaders of syphilis ('The Great Scourge').[7] On the outbreak of war, it suspended publication for a few weeks, and then relaunched, supporting the War as militantly as it had previously campaigned for female suffrage.

When even the majority of the radical press was backing the war effort, it is reasonable to assume that the support for the War offered by mainstream papers was reflecting, and not merely guiding, the opinions of their paying customers. Jay Winter has reminded us that:

> In terms of domestic — though not imperial — institutions, the British state in 1914 was perhaps the weakest in Europe. Concomitantly, no country boasted a civil society as strong and diverse. It ensued that in wartime Britain propaganda from below would dominate the war of words and images.[8]

The diversity of British civil society is clearly shown by the fact that there were ten very varied morning newspapers published in London alone, and six evening papers, while most provincial towns and cities each had at least one. [9]

---

4 Hew Strachan, *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 224.

5 'England declared war on Germany at eleven o'clock last night. All controversy is now at an end. Our front is united'. 'The Declaration of War', *Manchester Guardian* (5 August 1914), 4.

6 The support of some of these papers diminished as the war progressed, as the casualty lists grew, and as conscription was introduced. The enthusiasm of others increased.

7 Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (London: E. Pankhurst, 1913.)

8 Jay Winter, 'Popular Culture in Wartime Britain', in Roshwald and Stiles (ed) *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 330.

9 John M. McEwen, 'The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 17 (1982), 462.

The ownership of these was diverse, as were their politics; what is more, they operated in a highly competitive market, where it was important to gauge their readers' opinions and respond to them. When Winter writes of 'propaganda from below' dominating during the War years, this does not only mean that much propaganda was initiated at a low level; it also implies that readers' opinions determined the content and tone of many publications.

This fact is crucial to understanding the culture of Britain during the War. If writers produced literature supportive of the War effort, it was rarely because they were coerced to do so by the state. At one end of the intellectual spectrum, the Oxford Faculty of Modern History produced pamphlets like *Why we are at War: Great Britain's Case*; Hew Strachan points out that 'these publications became the foundation for more officially directed propaganda. But the dons insisted that their reaction was spontaneous: the initiative was their own.'[10] At a lower intellectual level, writers of patriotic stories in magazines were not following government orders, but writing what the age demanded, either because of their own sincere feelings, or because publishers and editors told them that that was what their audience wanted to hear, or both. In the words of Jay Winter, 'profit and patriotism went hand in hand.'[11] The nation was united in a sense of the moral rightness of the battle against German militarism.

Nor was wartime censorship onerous to many writers of imaginative literature. During the War, the government and Army were extremely sensitive about military information; the Defence of the Realm Act banned publication of anything that might conceivably prove useful to the enemy, and about false reporting that might cause alarm, such as the *Globe*'s sensational claim, mentioned by the Home Secretary in Parliament, that there were 250,000 armed Germans in London.[12] About such matters the authorities were sticklers, while advertising their tolerance of the expression of opinions (represented as an index of the superiority of Liberal Britain to militaristic Germany).[13] Censorship was unsystematic, and most keenly applied to London

10 *The Outbreak of the First World War*, 222.
11 'Popular Culture in Wartime Britain', 331.
12 *House of Commons Debates* (23 November 1914), Vol 68 c 915.
13 In the debate extending the powers of the Defence of the Realm Act, Sir John Simon expressed the Government's aspirations: 'It is a very tempting thing to try and suppress statements of opinion

publications. It was even suggested that the provincial press escaped censorship almost completely; Sir Edward Cook, co-director of Press Bureau, replied to this complaint in terms that indicate the disparity in size between the British publishing industry and the state apparatus that would have liked to control it:

> You are not quite correct in saying that we ignore the provincial papers. It is true that we do not every day examine all the thousands of papers, to do so, we should require a staff, and premises, rivalling the War Office in size.[14]

Given the difficulty of controlling news media that might possibly reveal military information, it is unsurprising that there was relatively little official regulation of imaginative literature, and that that little was haphazard. During the first eighteen months of the War the security services paid little attention to the (mostly religious) pacifist movement,[15] and as late as 1916 a novel like Theodora Wilson-Wilson's *The Last Weapon* could be published without hindrance.[16] After the introduction of conscription, however, MI5 turned its attention to counter-subversion in Britain, suspecting Germany of fomenting pacifist resistance to compulsory service.[17] There were raids such as the one on the London Headquarters of the No-Conscription Fellowship in June 1916,

---

with the genuine belief that that is the way to assist the national cause, but I think the national cause is far more likely to be successful if we see that statements of opinion, however wide of the mark they may be, are recognised as being, within proper limits, the privilege and right of everybody who takes it upon himself to make them.' He contrasted the British situation with that in Austria, where 'the best known Socialist newspaper [...] has had to appear on two or three occasions with large parts of its edition blotted out by the censor.' *House of Commons Debates* (2 March 1915), Vol 70 cc 758-9.)

14 The National Archives: HO 139/10/38. Letter from Sir Edward Cook to Sir George Riddell, 25 October 1915. Quoted in Adrian Faber, 'The Provincial Press During The First World War: A Case Study of the Wolverhampton Express & Star between January and March 1918' (M.A. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2006. Published online at http://www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk/edissertations/Adrian Faber Dissertation.doc (accessed 7 December 2009), 6.

15 Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 94.

16 Theodora Wilson-Wilson, *The Last Weapon* (London: C.W.Daniel, 1916). The book is a religious tract, whose most powerful chapter describes a soldier who has returned from the front, where he has done terrible things. He angrily and sarcastically confronts the minister who had told him that by enlisting he would be doing Christ's work.

17 Christopher Andrew suggests that though Germany was actively encouraging subversion in many countries, including Ireland and India, 'though MI5 and Whitehall failed to realize it at the time, Germany made no serious attempt at subversion on mainland Britain.' This was 'not for lack of any desire to damage the British war effort', but because of the belief that 'Britain was a harder target than its main allies.' (*The Defence of the Realm*, 86.)

which removed three-quarters of a ton of printed material.[18] Pre-publication censorship was instituted for pacifist leaflets, but not for fiction, though some fictional titles were confiscated when found. When a large cheap edition of *The Last Weapon* was published in 1917, 18,000 copies of it were among the books and papers seized from the offices of the Christian Peace Crusade.[19] Yet, as with the impounding of the playscripts of Miles Malleson's *Black 'Ell* in a raid on Henderson's bookshop, this confiscation was unusual enough to be raised in parliament.[20]

Criminal prosecutions were very rare. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) was condemned for obscenity, not for its politics – though Lawrence's unorthodox opinions and his German wife probably did not count in his favour. The one high-profile prosecution of a novel on political grounds was of *Despised and Rejected* (1918) by 'A. T. Fitzroy' (Rose Allatini); this book's combination of a sympathetic account of conscientious objectors with a positive representation of homosexuality made it doubly troubling to moralists.[21] It is notable, however, that *Despised and Rejected* had been on sale for several months before coming to trial, which suggests no official hurry to prosecute; the decision to bring charges was more likely a response to pressure groups than a sign of extreme official anxiety about dissident fiction.

The possibility of prosecution had a strong deterrent effect on the minds of publishers (as is shown by Stanley Unwin's reluctance to publish *Despised and Rejected*)[22] but the authorities were rarely proactive, only interfering when

---

18 *The Defence of the Realm*, 94. The next day, a further one and a half tons of documents was seized from the National Council against Conscription.

19 *House of Commons Debates* (21 March 1918), Vol 104 Cc1144-6

20 *House of Commons Debates*, (31 October 1916), Vol 86 C1533. The decision to confiscate the scripts of Malleson's play was defended on the grounds that the play was a 'calumny on the British soldier'

21 There was a connection in many minds between obscenity and lack of patriotism, as is shown by the *Sunday Chronicle*'s fulmination against *The Pretty Lady*, Arnold Bennett's wartime novel about a prostitute, demanding that it be banned under the Defence of the Realm Act 'as a book calculated to destroy the moral of the people'. Philip Hoare's *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1977) describes the anxiety focused by Maud Allen's 1918 performance as Salome, and by Pemberton-Billing's claim that her audience included many of the 47,000 members of the 'Hidden Hand' who combined treasonous politics with sexual inversion.

22 Unwin later wrote in his memoirs: ' I examined it and felt sure that in the then state of public opinion we should be prosecuted if we published it.' He consulted A. R. Orage, who told him: 'You cannot publish this novel. You will be prosecuted if you do.' Since Unwin's associate had told the author that the firm would probably be accepting her book, Unwin felt morally obliged to help her find another publisher, but 'the only man who might conceivably do so was C.W.Daniel.' 'The sequel,' writes Unwin, "was interesting. Daniel accepted the novel, was prosecuted for publishing

a publication was brought to their attention, as in the case of Harold Begbie's *Mr Stirling Sticks It Out*.[23] This novel contains a disturbing account of the treatment of a conscientious objector in prison, and the printer entrusted with the manuscript by the publisher referred it to the Press Bureau who 'disclaiming their power to censor, nevertheless felt it their duty to read the book, and having read it they informed the printer that its publication was against the national interest.'[24] Protesting, Begbie's publisher pointed out that other books had been published 'in which callous and torturing treatment of Conscientious Objectors was very fully described'; those books had not been presented for approval, however, and the Press Office would not give an authorisation that might look like approval; it therefore argued unconvincingly that 'there was all the difference between those obscure pamphlets and a novel written by one who might be sure of a considerable number of readers.'[25]

The state played its part in arousing and maintaining commitment to the war, but Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker suggest that popular support was in excess of what government propaganda could provoke:

> The scale and nature of enlistment in Great Britain and the Dominions suggest the nations' emotional investment in the war. And it was not simply the result of massive propaganda [....] Indeed there was mass propaganda, with a profusion of posters with guilt-inducing and brutal messages ('Daddy, What did you do in the Great War?') and many rousing meetings. But the recruiters quickly decided that using the latest forms of mass advertising had a negative effect, devaluing the act of enlisting, and the recruitment campaigns quickly became more discreet. It has to be said, then, that early in the war, the enlisted British men were for the most part volunteers in the true sense of the word.[26]

---

it, and sentenced to three months imprisonment or £460 fine (to which latter, having a guilty conscience for having mentioned his name, I contributed.)'. Sir Stanley Unwin, *The Truth about a Publisher* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), 137-8.

23 The book's title echoes Wells's *Mr Britling Sees it Through*, perhaps with the implication that endurance was easier for a non-combatant whose opinions were as fluid as Mr Britling's than for a pacifist who stuck firmly to his principles.

24 Harold Begbie, 'Preface', *Mr Sterling Sticks It Out* (London: Headley, 1919), v.

25 'Preface', *Mr Sterling Sticks It Out*, vi.

26 Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker *1914-18 Understanding the Great War*, (London: Profile, 2002), 99. This official rejection of the more emotive forms of advertising indicates a similar attitude to that found in the fictional critiques of the White Feather campaign (described in Chapter Two). Excessive pressure on men to enlist shows a lack of faith in their instinctive desire

Nicholas Hiley's analysis suggests that even the 'profusion of posters' was not entirely a matter of propaganda issued from the top down. [27]The more emotive official ones ('Daddy, What did you do in the Great War?') were exceptional, and did not have large print runs; most government posters were based on letterpress, and carried a dignified message. The most famous poster of the War, Leete's design of Kitchener's pointing finger, is often assumed to be typical government propaganda, but it began unofficially as an illustration in the small-circulation topical magazine *London Opinion*, and when it became a poster, this was not under the auspices of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, but as a private venture. Hiley concludes that: 'There is [...] no evidence that this design played any part in the official campaign, or was even regarded by contemporaries as an official poster.'[28]

Official recruiting posters were almost all single-sheet Double Crown size (30 ins x 20 ins) and were rarely displayed on hoardings among the large commercial advertisements. These hoardings were dominated by commercial posters, but also featured a great deal of khaki during wartime. So popular was the war effort that it was used to sell everything from soap and toffees to pens and Oxo cubes.[29] It was also used to sell causes. Temperance campaigners used it as an argument in their campaign against drink (and managed to introduce compulsory licensing hours); feminists used it to promote recognition of women's abilities. In his analysis of the role of religion in the conflict, Adrian Gregory has shown how: 'The widespread view within the Church was that the war represented an unparalled opportunity,'[30] and how the National Mission of 1916 was an attempt to harness the selflessness of the war effort into

---

to do so, and devalues the spirit of the volunteer.

27 Nicholas Hiley, '"KITCHENER WANTS YOU" and "Daddy, What did YOU do in the Great War?": the myth of British recruiting posters', *Imperial War Museum Review*, (No 11, 1996), 40.

28 '"KITCHENER WANTS YOU"' 44. The role of private enterprise in poster production is revealed by the correspondence column of *The Times*. On 19 June 1915. S. Arthur Peto of Sandwich enthused about a soldier's letter published earlier, and offered to contribute £100 towards the expense of publishing it as a poster. *The Times* contacted the National Committee for National Patriotic Organisations, who took up Mr Peto's offer. Earlier, a commercial firm, Messrs David Allen and Sons, of Harrow, had picked up a piece from the newspaper summarising 'Why Britain is at War', and printed it as a poster (in two sizes). *Times* readers were told how these could be purchased. (*Times*, 6 September 1914.)

29 The Boer War precedent for this commercialization of war enthusiasm is discussed in Jane Potter's *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 15-19.

30 Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 161.

conventionally religious channels. In fiction, Wells's *Boon* used the War as an argument for the outdatedness of the pre-war world of letters, with its 'Clowns and dons and prigs, cults of the precious and cults of style';[31] Ian Hay noted with satisfaction war's power to transform Trades Unionists into loyal subjects of the King.[32] The imperious Mrs St John in Warwick Deeping's novel *Kitty* was not unique when she 'made the war her own, and allowed it to give expression to her prejudices.'[33]

In any case, as Brian Bond points out, propaganda by itself would not have kept alive the commitment of the majority of the nation through four difficult years; it was not in the power of advertising campaigns to 'create high morale in the face of harsh realities such as poor working conditions and obvious military failures.'[34] There were exceptions to the enthusiasm for War, and patriotic idealism was not the only motive for enlisting,[35] but, as Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker suggest, this was a culture of consent rather than one of coercion; the great majority of the population actively acquiesced in the war effort, as did the great majority of writers.

The fact that support for the War was a genuinely popular phenomenon, rather than one manufactured by the Government, made life much more difficult for the relatively few dissenters, especially the men out of uniform who found or imagined themselves the subject of a powerfully disapproving public gaze; Harry, the non-combatant hero of Herbert Tremaine's *The Feet of the Young Men* (1917), feels that 'the citizens were looking at him more than usual and with some contempt and hostility.'[36] The degree of public enthusiasm also limited the options for politicians; a cynical character in

---

31 H.G.Wells, *Boon, The Mind of the Race,The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump:Being a First Selection from the Literary Remains of George Boon, Appropriate to the Times* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), 268.

32 Hay's politics will be discussed in Chapter 2.

33 Warwick Deeping, *Kitty* (London: Collins 1927), 38.

34 *The Unquiet Western Front*, 10-11.

35 'T]he peak of enlistment in Britain coincided with the peak in unemployment caused by the August financial and commercial crisis. Nine out of ten of the working men laid off in Bristol in the first month of the war joined up; enlistment rates were clearly lower in areas where business quickly picked up again. Men were not entirely irrational in 1914.' Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1999), 206.

36 Herbert Tremaine (Maude Deuchar), *The Feet of the Young Men: A Domestic War Novel* (London: C.W.Daniel, 1917), 143. This intense consciousness of a scornful public gaze directed at a man out of uniform would also be described vividly by D.H.Lawrence in the 'A Nightmare' chapter of *Kangaroo* (1926).

Young Orland, a post-war novel by Herbert Asquith (the Prime Minister's son) considers democracy:

> [I]n wartime it's the devil. Statesmen rouse its hopes and then they have to obey what they've roused. Absolute monarchies might well have made peace after the Marne rather than sacrifice their best troops in deadlock: democratic statesmen in England or Germany would have fallen directly they tried it: in war-time they are little more than corks bobbing on the tide of passions easily stirred, but not so easily put to rest.[37]

When public enthusiasm for the War often outran that of the authorities, the most successful propagandists of the war years were those who knew that they had the public on their side when they criticised the government for pursuing the fight with insufficient vigour. Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, which maintained a circulation of about a million throughout the War, and sold most copies during the second half of 1916,[38] when its criticism contributed much to the destabilisation of Asquith's administration, advertised itself as 'The Soldier's Paper', and harried the government on behalf of the ordinary Tommy. Even more forcibly populist was Horatio Bottomley's best-selling weekly, *John Bull*. A typical issue of this magazine shows very clearly that pro-war propaganda was by no means always government propaganda. As well as fierce arguments against 'a shameful and premature peace with the butchers of Belgium',[39] there are several attacks on the government for not pursuing the War with sufficient vigour: 'Our Admiralty is a disgrace – and it is a wonder that the Navy doesn't revolt against it. The War Office is little better.'[40] Abuse of ministers is personal and extreme: 'The Foreign Secretary is a pompous and solemn ass; the Home Secretary is an oleaginous, smug, self-righteous prig; whilst as to some of the Treasury Bench underlings – ye gods! Have you seen their faces on the films?'[41] Haig is criticised for being slow to implement Bottomley's idea of providing body armour for soldiers, and the Army is accused of leaving 'soldiers "rotting" at home through over-training, while thousands of care-worn and war-worn men can get no leave at all.' The

37 Herbert Asquith, *Young Orland* (London: Hutchinson, 1927).
38 'The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', 482.
39 C.B.Stanton, M.P., 'Labour's Golden Dawn', *John Bull* (18 November 1916), 10.
40 'Time to Speak Out: by The Editor', *John Bull* (18 November 1916), 14.
41 'Time to Speak Out: by The Editor', 14.

magazine prints complaints from soldiers about poor food and unfair treatment in camp; the general impression is of warlike decent soldiers eager to fight the 'Germhun' enemy, but hampered in their efforts by elitist and ineffective leadership. Since this magazine claimed a weekly circulation of two million copies by the time of the Armistice,[42] it is easy to credit Adrian Gregory's judgement that 'Being beastly to the Hun was good business; being fair-minded might be ruinous. The public were far more vehement haters than most of the press, and the press was far more inclined to hatred than official agencies.'[43] Sometimes the government could be seriously embarrassed by popular war enthusiasm, as by the campaign against the supposedly Germanophile cabinet minister, Lord Haldane, which forced his exclusion from the cabinet.[44]

Most writers, like most citizens, sincerely supported the war effort, and needed no governmental prompting to produce texts proclaiming their enthusiasm. Critics have made much of the propaganda material sponsored initially by C.F.C. Masterman's organisation at Wellington House, and later by the Ministry of Information,[45] but the Wellington House books and pamphlets were primarily for export, to present the British case to neutral countries, and are insignificant in quantity beside the vast number of patriotic books, pamphlets, postcards, comics, stories, plays, songs, board games, cigarette cards and newspaper articles produced commercially during wartime, without any government subsidy. Gordon Williams notes how the War sold theatre tickets:' 'Good shows [...] used war references as a *sauce piquante*, while poorer ones seized on them in a bid for survival.'[46] Masterman easily found eminent writers eager to produce texts promoting the cause, and liable to go

---

42 'The National Press during the First World War', 483.

43 Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 69.

44 Haldane later recalled the rumours that had circulated: 'I had a German wife; I was an illegitimate brother of the Kaiser; I had been in secret correspondence with the German government; I had been aware that they intended war and withheld this from my colleagues; I had delayed the dispatch and mobilisation of the expeditionary force.' (quoted in Kate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, London, 1977), 125. When Asquith formed the first coalition in May 1915, Haldane was excluded from the government.

45 See especially Peter Buitenhuis *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After* (London: Batsford, 1989).

46 Gordon Williams, *British Theatre in the Great War: A Revaluation* (London: Continuum, 2003), 20.

beyond the government brief in their enthusiasm. His wife's memoir claims that he had to restrain the wilder claims of authors such as Kipling, and that he insisted on firm evidence for any atrocity stories.[47]Even in the later stages of the War, when Northcliffe took over at what had become the Ministry of Information, and more official propaganda was aimed at the home front, the products of Wellington House were far outnumbered by the patriotic output of private enterprise.

Considerable public money was devoted to the propaganda effort, both at home and abroad, but doubts were often expressed about its effectiveness. Letter-writers to *The Times* frequently expressed the view that there much more was needed, to combat the arguments of pacifists.[48] In 1918 the Select Committee on National Expenditure issued a highly critical report on what had by then become the Ministry of Information, claiming that 'a large part of the expenditure, then at the rate of three-quarters of a million a year, and rising, was wasteful.' It quoted claims that 'wrong methods were adopted', and that 'many of the articles circulated to the Press were stated to be of little interest', and a report of '900 bales of from 50 to 80 lbs. each in weight of literature lying in sheds are warehouses, so that when they were distributed they were out of date."[49]

On the one wartime occasion on which there was a full parliamentary debate on propaganda, considerable concern was expressed that 'a large part of the operations of this Ministry are not propaganda for the country but propaganda for the Government."[50] There was an officially-subsidised pictorial

47 Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman: a Biography* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939), 274. Mrs Masterman's account may show some bias, and does not take account of the change in direction when Lord Northcliffe took command of what had by then become the Ministry of Information. She claims that her husband's organisation resisted pressure to publish accounts of the rumoured German 'Corpse Factory.' The Wellington House Schedule, however, lists a text called: 'A "Corpse Conversion" factory: A Peep Behind the German Lines.' This was produced in 1917, by which time Northcliffe had taken charge of the operation.

48 A typical example is the letter from Lord Denbigh, headlined 'Keep it Dark: Half-Hearted Home Propaganda: German Crimes Ignored', *The Times* (24 May 1918), 8. Similar opinions were even expressed in the War Cabinet : 'It was pointed out [...] that the only really efficient system of propaganda at present existing in this country was that organized by the pacifists, who had large sums of money at their disposal and who were conducting their campaign with great vigour.' Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 101. According to Andrew, 'The cabinet minutes record no challenge to this preposterous allegation.'

49 'Propaganda Finances: The Department of Information: Committee's Scathing Report', *The Observer* (4 August 1918), 3.

50 *House of Commons Debates*, 5 August 1918. Vol 109, c 964.

life of Lloyd George, for example. Beaverbook's role as Chairman of the War Office Committee for the Production of War Films aroused concern, provoked mainly by a short film, *Once Hun, Always a Hun,* which had been shown in some cinemas. This first depicted two German soldiers in a ruined town in France, terrorising a woman with a baby in her arms, and striking her to the ground; it then showed the same two Germans as commercial travellers in England after the War, selling saucepans. A shopkeeper's wife who sees 'Made in Germany' on the bottom of a pan calls in a policeman, who orders the German out of the shop. Leif Jones, a Free Trade Liberal M.P. was especially indignant that 'A final notice flashed on the screen was to the effect that there cannot possibly be any more trading with these people after the War, and under this statement were the words, "Ministry of Information".'[51] The film, described as 'ignoble and contemptible' by the Liberal M. P., J.M. Robertson,[52] was taken as a clear case of using the popularity of the War effort to sell a particular political message, in this case protectionism.

The effect of official propaganda campaigns during the War is impossible to quantify but they were almost certainly less important than the actual events of the War. According to Stephen Badsey's analysis, the degree of war enthusiasm fluctuated over the War years, declining during the gruelling year of 1917, for example, but rising again after the German spring offensive of 1918 'to a level of passion and even xenophobia that may even have been greater than in 1914.'[53] When considering the fiction written during wartime, therefore, it is important to see it not as part of some top-down propaganda exercise, spreading War enthusiasm through the masses, but as the response to popular demand by writers who typically shared their readers' enthusiasm for the cause, and also their anxieties about the human cost of the War. As will be shown, they mobilised the existing genres of popular fiction to explore these themes, and when they were restrained, this was less by taboos imposed from above, than by the common understanding of writers and readers.

---

51 *House of Commons Debates*, 5 August 1918. Vol 109, c 958. The final notice mentioned is not part of the copy in the British Film Institute archive, which is listed under the alternative title, *The Leopard's Spots*.

52 *House of Commons Debates*, 5 August 1918. Vol 109, c 977.

53 Stephen Badsey, 'Press, Propaganda and Public Perceptions' in Howard et al., *A Part of History*, 34.

B: What Could be Written

At the start of the War, it was by no means certain that people would want to read fiction in such troubled times. On Monday 10th August, D.H.Lawrence received the manuscript of his novel *The Wedding Ring* back from Methuen, 'returned, like most of their recently submitted fiction, to be resubmitted in six months time, when they hoped the economic and business situation would have stabilised.'[54] As Jane Potter has pointed out, however: 'Fears that the demand for books would plummet were unfounded. The public need for reading material, both on the subject of, and as a diversion from the war, was enormous.'[55] By 1917, the *Observer* estimated that five hundred books of personal experiences by 'soldiers, nurses, journalists, prisoners of war and visitors to the front' had been published in Britain, and 'as many works of fiction.'[56]

But did writers of fiction even have the moral right to deal with the War? A few weeks into the War, a *New Statesman* article insinuated that they did not:

> There is little that is good in the crop of war literature and war periodicals that is now appearing [....] For our popular authors who have made their name and their money already there is no excuse. And yet almost without exception our eminent novelists have rushed into print as authorities on all matters of foreign policy and military strategy.[57]

Arnold Bennett replied indignantly the next week. Mentioning Wells as the presumed target of the attack, he stated the novelist's case:

> As war is pre-eminently an affair of human nature, a triumph of instinct over reason, it seems to me not improper that serious novelists (who are supposed to know a little about human nature, to be able to observe

54 John Worthen, *D.H.Lawrence:The Life of an Outsider* (London: Allen Lane, 2005),148. The rejected novel *The Wedding Ring* would be re-written to become the basis of *The Rainbow* (1916) and *Women In Love* (1921).

55 Jane Potter, 'For Country, Conscience and Commerce: Publishers and Publishing, 1914-18' in (eds) Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed , *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007),12.

56 'Thousands of War Books', *The Observer (*7 January 1917) 11.

57 'War Books and Pictures', *New Statesman* (29 August 1914), 643.

accurately and to write) should be permitted to express themselves concerning the phenomena of a nation at war without being insulted. [58]

Bennett took particular exception to the reference to 'authors who have made their name and their money already'. 'The imputation is clear' he wrote, sensitive to even the hint of an innuendo that writers like Wells and himself might be using the national crisis for their own financial advantage – profiteering, to use the phrase of the time. Clifford Sharp, the editor of the paper, replied that the sentence does not necessarily bear the imputation Bennett found there — that writers were turning the nation's idealism to their own financial advantage — but 'at the same time' he wrote, ' we have no hesitation in saying that we very much regret that it was allowed to appear.'[59]

The right to treat the war fictionally was soon assumed by many writers, but at a time when perhaps most readers had friends or relatives in some danger abroad, there were very real questions about what was proper to include in fictions that might be read as entertainment. Novels criticising prevailing attitudes were rare, and when they appeared could provoke unease, as when the *Manchester Guardian* reviewer writes of Douglas Goldring's *The Fortune* (1917): 'If Mr Goldring could have put off the publication of this book until after the war he might have been wiser and more kind. An individual or a nation involved in a suffering as bitter as ours needs no further torture — and the truth in Mr. Goldring's statement is brutal in itself and brutally told.'[60]

Later commentators have tended to value most highly fiction that graphically exposes brutal truths, and instructs readers in war's futility; often they have suggested that wartime writers ducked the task of confronting an ignorant audience with the facts. Paul Fussell, for example, writing of the 'severe and uncompromising' gap between soldiers and civilians,[61] endorses the aggressively realistic performance art of Sassoon's revenge-fantasy, 'Blighters', which threatens a music-hall audience with an actual tank:

---

58 Arnold Bennett, 'Novelists and the War' (Letter), *New Statesman* (5 September 1914), 661.

59 Footnote appended to Bennett's letter. A fastidiousness on this score may explain why Bennett, usually the most topical of novelists, delayed several years before using the War as background for a novel.

60 Review by 'M.C.', in 'New Books', *Manchester Guardian* (9 October 1917), 3.

61 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 86.

I'd like to see a tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or 'Home Sweet Home',
And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
To mock the riddled corpses of Bapaume.[62]

This confrontational model of wartime art presumes that the gap between soldiers and civilians was 'severe and uncompromising' indeed. It assumes a rigid distinction between soldiers and civilians, as though there were no soldiers or ex-soldiers among that audience, no nurses painfully aware of the cost of war, no wives, families or friends in whom soldiers had confided, and no munitioneers doing dangerous work for the war effort. It assumes that no men back from the front would enjoy hearing some rousing musical patriotism, which given the number of breezy West End revues catering for men on leave, seems unlikely. Fussell acknowledges that Sassoon's imagination habitually 'polarises', creating 'flagrant' dichotomies', [63] but does not acknowledge how much this habit permeates his own critical account.

A magazine story, 'Camouflage' by Roland Pertwee, in the *Strand Magazine* for May 1917, hints at a very different possible relationship between wartime fiction and its readers. This starts with a definition of camouflage as 'a thin veil drawn over great events' and gives wartime examples; then adds:

> But perhaps the subtlest variety of all is the kind that men and women devise to screen their real emotions from each other and the world.[64]

We meet 'he' and 'she', a typical couple trying to make the most of his twenty-four hours leave before departure to France; their conversation is a compilation of clichés:

> How lucky he was to be going to France, when it might have been Mesopotamia or one of those other unfriendly places! He had only known for certain that it would be France that morning. They always keep you in the dark as long as possible. Of course there were no submarines in the Channel — besides, his sleeping bag was of a variety which guaranteed to keep a man afloat for eight hours.

---

62 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Blighters', *Collected Poems 1908-1956* (London: Faber 2002), 19.
63 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 90.
64 Roland Pertwee, 'Camouflage', *Strand Magazine* (53:317, May 1917), 502.

How adorable she looked in her new frock.[65]

The couple try to spend a romantic evening together untroubled by war — but even their favourite restaurant reminds them that the man who used to be their waiter might at that moment be 'cruising the North sea in a Zeppelin.' They struggle to maintain the cheerful pretence, in dialogue whose banality fights to hide a painful subtext:

> 'That's what's so jolly about France, getting letters regularly.'
>
> 'I should have hated you to go anywhere else.'
>
> 'It's a great piece of luck, the whole thing.'
>
> 'I'm tremendously pleased about it.'
>
> 'So am I.'
>
> He was at the door now, swinging it backwards and forwards in his hands.
>
> 'Splendid! And I'm awfully — awfully happy really.'
>
> 'Yes.'[66]

Only at the last moment does the facade break down. He confesses his misery at being sent to France, and 'there, revealed, were the naked sobbing souls of two young people, brokenly crying on each other's shoulders, untidily knit in each other's arms.' The story's coda expands its significance:

> It occurs every day. A trifling detail in the conduct of the war. Ask any khaki-clad wanderer you may find in a South-bound express. The odds are he won't answer you, but you will know it is the truth because of his silence, and because he will probably Camouflage himself behind the pages of this magazine.[67]

This inclusion of the *Strand Magazine* itself within the story reveals a striking view of the function of fiction in wartime. As in the couple's conversation, to speak the whole horrible truth directly would not only be upsetting, but unnecessary. Both people at home and the soldiers abroad know enough of the horrors and the dangers; nobody needs to talk about that. So what fiction can do — sometimes by the repetition of cliché — is to maintain the convention of a reassuring, positive appearance, although both author and

65 'Camouflage', 503.
66 'Camouflage', 506.
67 'Camouflage', 506.

reader are aware that this is camouflage. Readers in England might have taken this story as a conventional tribute to the bravery of soldiers, and of the women who are left behind, but Roland Pertwee is also reassuring the 'khaki-clad wanderer' that people at home realise how very difficult it is to go back, and how very inadequate language is in the face of the the horror of war.

Tactful reassurance is not a quality that later readers have valued in wartime literature, and writing with aims other than the revelation of war's horrible truth has often been relegated to the status of the sub-literary, as when Chris Baldick sums up the current literary reputation of much wartime writing as 'of historical interest only'.[68] Revelation, however, was something that both soldiers and writers were chary of during wartime. Reticence was at the heart of the manly code defined by pre-war texts such as A. E. W. Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902) and relatively few would attempt to breach it during wartime. Even Siegfried Sassoon, so critical of the Home Front's apparently willed ignorance of conditions that he fantasised about tanks being driven into music halls, would later describe the 'studied unconcern' assumed by relatives before soldiers left for battle, while unguarded expressions and body language revealed other feelings: 'Others hurried by me with a crucified look; I noticed a well-dressed woman biting her gloved fingers; her eyes stared fixedly.'[69] In Sassoon's novelisation of his war experience, his alter ego, George Sherston, pretends to his aunt that when in France his job is safely looking after the horses, though knowing that the lie is unconvincing.[70]

The existence of this code of reticence means that we should be careful not to accept too readily the opinion of John Onions that:

> One of the more remarkable things about the home front during the war was its ability to sustain for four years an image of warfare so pictorially different from the reality whose literal distance would have been negligible were it not for the channel.[71]

---

68 *The Modern Movement*, 331.

69 Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, in *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber 1980), 315.

70 *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*, 313-4.

71 John Onions, *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War, 1918-39* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 30.

The people of the home front were neither stupid nor unobservant. They met the crippled casualties of war, and spoke to them; many read, or heard of, realistically horrific accounts like those of 'Sapper' or Patrick Macgill. They knew that on some days complete pages of *The Times* were devoted to lists of casualties:

ROLL OF HONOUR.

LOSSES IN THE RANKS.

LIST OF 4,068 NAMES.

All privates unless otherwise shown:—

CORRECTION.

AUSTRALIAN FORCE.

NAVAL CASUALTIES.

The Secretary of the Admiralty announces the following casualties:—

H.M.S. FALMOUTH.

DIED.

H.M.S. NOTTINGHAM.

WOUNDED (SLIGHTLY).

Figure 2. *The Times* (23 August 1916), 11.

Having examined the collection of soldiers' letters at the Imperial War Museum, Paul Fussell claimed that 'Few soldiers wrote the truth in letters home for fear of causing needless distress,'[72] but Jessica Meyer's research in the same archive shows that many did send back realistic accounts of battle conditions.[73] Censorship was never systematic; some officers cut out material that might cause alarm; others censored only information that might be of direct use to the enemy. Many soldiers (for example, Wilfred Owen in letters to his mother) exercised self-censorship to spare the worries of their families, but some did not. Some soldiers could be both explicit about conditions and protective of civilian sensibilities in the same letter; Frank Cambridge writes home to his brother:

> While we were patrolling near this river a chap pointed out to me that I was standing on a body, it was caked in the ground & I didn't notice it in the dark & a little further on we saw rats eating the bodies, we packed up we had seen enough for one night. I dread to think of the summer as it smells horrible enough up there now goodness only knows what it will be like when we have a bit of heat.[74]

While keen that his brother should know the truth, however, he adds: 'I must tell you this Syd, quite between ourselves as you need not let Dad & Ma know because it's not nice for them to know these things.'[75]

Few adults can have been under any illusion about the dreadful cost of the War in lives and suffering, but they did not necessarily want this made explicit in the fiction that they read. There was no complete taboo imposed from above against depicting the horrors of war; many frank descriptions can be found in the literature. War reports in the newspapers were carefully censored as to military detail, to prevent publication of any information that might be useful to the enemy (which undoubtedly allowed cover-ups and evasions to disguise military failures), but even in the earlier period of the War, when correspondents were kept well away from the

---

72 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 87.

73 Jessica Meyer, *Men at War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20-25.

74 Letter (17 March 1916) from Frank Robert Cambridge of the London Irish Regiment. Collection of his grand-daughter, Jill Martin.

75 *Ibid.*

fighting zone, any reader of newspapers would have known that very terrible things were happening in France and Belgium. The effects of the gas weapon as first used at Second Ypres in 1915, for instance, were made graphically clear to the readers of the *Daily Chronicle*:

> [M]any, alas! not understanding the new danger, were not so fortunate, and were overcome by the fumes and died poisoned. Among those who escaped nearly all cough and spit blood, the chlorine attacking the mucous membrane. The dead were turned black at once.[76]

Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push*, published as a book in 1916 after serialisation in the *Daily Mail*, makes horrors very explicit in its thinly fictionalised description of the Battle of Loos:

> Men and pieces of men were lying all over the place. A leg, and arm, then again a leg, cut off at the hip. A finely formed leg, the latter, gracefully putteed. A dummy leg in a tailor's window could not be more graceful. It might be X; he was an artist in dress, a Beau Brummell in khaki. Fifty yards further along I found the rest of X [....] A man, mother-naked, raced round in a circle, laughing boisterously. The rags that would class him as friend or foe were gone, and I could not tell whether he was an Englishman or a German. As I watched him an impartial bullet went through his forehead, and he fell headlong to the earth.[77]

This passage is quoted, together with many others from *The Great Push*, in a 1917 pacifist pamphlet as an example of the vileness of war, and as an argument for pacifism;[78] many of the original readers of this best-seller, however, could have read the grim descriptions as evidence of what the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer praised as the soldiers' 'defiant fortitude', patriotically noting that 'Mr. MacGill's soldiers look at such terrors every day and remain recognizably Englishmen.'[79]

---

76 *Daily Chronicle* (26 April 1915) quoted in Martin J. Farrar, *News from the Front: War Correspondents on the Western Front 1914-18* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 62.
77 Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), 77-9.
78 Miles Malleson, *Second Thoughts* (London: The National Labour Press, 1917), 67.
79 'Two War Novels', *Times Literary Supplement* (29 June 29 1916), 302.

Officially commissioned writing could also retail horrors. Arnold Bennett, in *Over There,* a pamphlet sponsored by Wellington House, described only the aftermath of battle, but did so grimly: 'A leg could be seen sticking out of the side of a trench [...] and superbly shod in almost new boots with nail-protected soles.' Such legs were left to 'decay at leisure amid the scrap-heap, the cess-pit, the infernal squalor [....] So they liquefied into corruption in their everlasting boots, proving that there is nothing like leather. They were a symbol.'[80]

Insofar as there was a taboo on the publication of graphic descriptions, it did not necessarily come from above. Louis Golding, an ambulance driver in Salonika, and a left-wing critic of the War, published in 1918 a poem protesting the exhibition of photographs of 'actual fighting' on the Somme, organised by the Ministry of Information. The poem appeared in *The Cambridge Magazine*, a major outlet for oppositional writing where many of Sassoon's poems first appeared.

In the gallery where the fat men go
They're exhibiting our guts
Horse-betrampled in the ruts;
And Private Tommy Spout,
With his eye gouged out;
And Jimmy spitting blood:
And Sergeant lying so
That he's trampled in the mud,
In the gallery where the fat men go.[81]

This stanza, protesting against explicitness while at the same time practising it, shows how complex the issue could be. In part, Golding seems to be making a distinction between what can be shown in a photograph and what can be said in a poem, but mostly he seems concerned with the

---

80 Arnold Bennett, *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front* (London: Methuen, 1915), 119-120.

81 Originally published in *The Cambridge Magazine* (18 May 1918). Included in (eds) Dominic Hibberd and John Onions, *The Winter of the World: Poems of the First World War* (London, Constable and Robinson, 2007), 234. It is possible that Golding had not seen the actual exhibition, which mostly showed photographs by Lieutenant Ernest Brookes, who would later be criticized for sanitizing warfare, and not showing the dead.

question of who has ownership of disturbing images — is it 'us' or 'them'? 'They', he implies, are improperly exhibiting 'our' guts for the overfed civilians to gawp at; only 'we' have the right to describe such things, and on 'our' terms, which will restore dignity to the men who have fought, suffered and died. Anxiety on this subject was expressed in public discussion of the 1916 documentary film, *The Battle of the Somme*, which, in the words of the *Manchester Guardian*, showed 'sudden death and maiming, hideousness as well as heroism, with a clearness that no narrative can compass' so that many could not 'bear to think of such scenes being viewed by the merely curious'.[82] A letter to the editor of the paper claims that 'the effect of this exhibition must be [...] entirely pernicious', and says that 'To use pictures of what our soldiers must face and bear only as a means of filling the pockets of the proprietors of the show is an insult to our men.'[83]

Informal rules seem to have applied in this delicate area; more frankness was permissible to soldier-writers such as MacGill and Sapper, to medical personnel such as Golding, or to correspondents actually within the War zone, than to civilians. A single author could apply different standards when writing in different genres; Arnold Bennett, for example, is reticent about the horrors of war in his fiction, and notably less so when writing first-hand reports from France in *Over There*. When he is writing an appeal on behalf of the Wounded Allies Relief Committee, however, he not only feels free to confront his readers with a first sentence insisting that: 'The primary object of this war and of all wars is to lacerate human flesh, to break bones, to inflict torture, to paralyse and to kill.' He also insists on the realities that conventional words hide; when he and his readers see on a poster the words 'Ten Thousand Casualties', he tells them: 'We do not see a thousand prisoners led away in despair, nor a thousand decaying corpses on the ground, nor 8,000 tortured bleeding men, whose torn and pierced bodies have in a few moments exuded hogsheads of blood.'[84] When an author's motives were demonstrably unimpeachable, taboos could be breached.

---

82 'The Pictures of the Somme', *Manchester Guardian* (21 August 1916), 4.
83 Frank E. Marshall, 'The Somme Film' (letter), *Manchester Guardian* (1 September 1916), 3.
84 Arnold Bennett, 'Wounded', *The Times* (19 May 1915), 5.

Such rules were usually imposed not by any authorities, but by the consensus of publishers and readers. There was a strong sensitivity to anything potentially degrading to the troops, and objections could come from soldiers as well as censors. Similar informal taboos seem to have governed the representation of soldiers on stage. Gordon Williams explains that: 'It became bad form for men who had not seen service to appear in uniform,' and cites the *Times* reviewer who felt that 'usually patriotic songs sung by actors in khaki are detestable.'[85] The avoidance of graphic realism in much wartime fiction can therefore be seen less as a matter of ignorance, obfuscation, or censorship than as a matter of taste. It is no more likely that all the writers who avoided such descriptions were ignorant of the squalid and terrible nature of war than that all the authors and readers of sexually reticent Victorian novels were ignorant of the basic facts of human biology.

Avoidance of dwelling on horrors often encouraged a euphemistic artificiality of style, both in fiction, and in the language of soldiers. John Buchan at the beginning of *Greenmantle* established Major Richard Hannay's professional military tone by making him reflect:

> Loos was no picnic, and we had had some ugly bits of scrapping before that, but the worst bit of the campaign I had seen was a tea-party to the show I had been in with Bullivant before the war started.[86]

It is the unrevealingness of the language – 'no picnic', 'pretty ugly' and so on, that establishes its authenticity. Readers knew that soldiers assumed that some things did not need to be said, and certainly did not need to be communicated to civilians. Wyndham Lewis, who in his Vorticist writing was not given to euphemism, writes home:

> In the more or less illusory security of the concrete dugout [...] it is not too unpleasant to listen to the absurd enemy smashing the parapets of your guns outside. Yesterday I had quite half a dozen splinters within a yard or two of me...[87]

---

85 Gordon Williams, *British Theatre in the Great War: a Revaluation* (London: Continuum, 2003), 32, quoting *The Times* (4 January 1917). Godfrey Tearle, an actor playing the naval lead in *The Flag Lieutenant*, was taunted by a woman in the audience holding up a white feather. (Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 72.)

86 John Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 109.

87 (Ed. W.K.Rose), *Letters of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen, 1963), 91.

Whatever Lewis's actual feelings were, such artificial understatement disguises them; his reader is left to decide what emotions lie behind the bravado.

Wartime facetiousness can cause problems, however, for readers not attuned to the British culture of the period. Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, told M.O'C Drury, 'I couldn't understand the humour in *Journey's End*. But I wouldn't want to joke about a situation like that.' His interviewer suggested, 'It may have been that they had no language in which to express their real feelings.' To which Wittgenstein replied, 'I hadn't thought of that. That might well be true: no way of saying what they really felt.'[88]

Pat Barker, whose widely-praised modern novels about the War stress the abjection of both soldiers and civilians but eschew imitation of wartime speech-patterns, has told an interviewer:

> In the *Regeneration* trilogy I avoided the kind of language they spoke because at least on our side in the trenches there was this sort of farcical humour which would not be appreciated today. It's terribly febrile, you just could not use that language.[89]

This facetiousness that Pat Barker finds unsuitable for her own purposes is often a recognition of the disparity between experience and language, and of the limits of acceptable discourse. Either through litotes, euphemism or the self-conscious use of cliché or inappropriate hyperbole, it creates a code that implies the recognition both by writer and reader (or speaker and listener) of a reality better left undescribed. It is also a defence, and part of Barker's intention as a novelist is to show soldiers and others reduced to abject defencelessness.

Wartime language can sometimes include explicit reference to its own insufficiency.The anonymous 'Billet Notes' in *Nash's and Pall Mall* for October 1915 are presented as 'letters of a splendid type of British soldier written 'somewhere in France' and sent home to his best pal — his mother'. One letter is headlined 'The Death of a Chum':

---

88 M.O'C Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein' in (ed.) Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Personal Recollections*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 144-5.

89 'A Backdoor into the Present: An interview with Pat Barker, one of Britain's most successful novelists', Interview with Wera Reusch, translated from German into English by Heather Batchelor, at http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/reus_e.htm. Accessed 28 January 2008.

> It is late and I am very sad, —— was killed yesterday, almost by my side. It is a knock to lose one's very best friend. If I were a woman I should cry. I almost wish I could. He was such a fine chap, so cheery and such a good soldier. And only twenty-six! The men adored him. It seems such a hopeless waste of good material. I oughtn't to say that, I suppose. From the military point of view the individual can't be considered.[90]

The language of this letter, almost infantile in its simplicity, is studded with reminders of the limits of what it is acceptable for a man and soldier to say. A woman could express more emotion; a civilian could criticise war's waste. The writer allows himself only a limited language, but he can draw attention to that limitation, both by explicit hints, and by exaggerating the restriction of his vocabulary until it cannot help but draw attention to the unexpressed emotions that are beyond the range of its clichés and simplicities. The prevalence of such linguistic techniques, and especially of the facetiousness that draws attention to the disparity between civilian language and wartime realities, shows that readers of the time were well attuned to such effects. This is, after all, language that asks the reader to work at interpretation. A strategist might say 'From the military point of view the individual can't be considered,' as a simple statement of military fact; a satirist like Sassoon might infuse it with the bitterest irony. In 'Billet Notes' the statement is not firmly anchored in any fixed attitude, and the reader is left free to take it as he or she wishes, and is thereby allowed both to share in its endorsement of military values and to feel the pathos of a world where the individual counts for less than he should.

In his study of soldiers' morale, Alexander Watson has suggested the usefulness of 'trench wit' (often dark and ironic) as a palliative in difficult circumstances: '[B]y humanising the horror of their situation, humour made it more manageable and thus protected men from becoming obsessed with fear or descending into an ultimately self-defeating, apathetic fatalism.'[91] Less blackly absurd than the jokes made by soldiers in the face of death, facetiousness was a linguistic resource that could be shared with civilians. This

---

90 'Billet Notes: being casual pencillings from a fighting man to his mother', *Nash's and Pall Mall Magazine* (56:271, October 1915),195.

91 Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 92.

assumes an understanding between writer and reader that certain things can be left unsaid; it implies shared vales and a common culture. Although on occasion it can become a complicity in ignoring awkward or unpleasant facts, or a collusion in defining the War according to a particular class politics, it was a language that writers and readers found useful for positive as well as negative reasons; its very popularity shows that the bond of understanding implicit within it was one that was highly valued.

Turning War into Stories

The national commitment to War was expressed in many ways, generally by adapting pre-war genres of discourse to the new situation. Clergymen voiced their enthusiasm in sermons; journalists turned manoeuvres into stories and exaggerated atrocities; Georgian poets produced verses saturated with a rich feeling for the English countryside; conservatives mythologized the War as a fight for traditional values, and radicals presented it as a democratic battle against tyrannical Prussianism. Populist magazines like *John Bull* assumed the role of spokesman for the common soldier, urging the government to fight more vigorously, and the militant discourse of the Suffragette movement ('Come fight with us in our battle for freedom!') could, as Angela K. Smith has shown, easily be adapted to patriotic ends when Emily and Christabel Pankhurst adopted the War as a feminist cause.[92] Writers of fiction not only used available genres to express support for the national effort, but used the War to revivify those genres. In the process, they defined the War and the soldiers who fought it in terms of the genres that they and their readers knew, and shaped their representations of the soldier accordingly.

Specifically military stories comprised a minor, specialised genre in the pre-war years, greatly outnumbered by romances, adventures, mysteries and light comedies. As will be seen, such stories continued to appear after August 1914, but they did not dominate the fictional interpretations of the War. If the fiction magazines accurately reflected the public's needs, excited speculation about military technology was less important to most wartime readers than

92 Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in the First World War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 26 *et seq.*

endorsement of their belief that British soldiers were fighting in a righteous cause, and reassurance that the effort and sacrifice would be successful. Some readers also wanted acknowledgement of their uncertainties about the social changes and disruptions that the War could bring. In order to respond to these needs, writers in fictional genres that had previously been unlikely to mention war or soldiers would now begin to integrate the military into their conventional narratives, and to use these genres to express their commitment to the War.

In August 1914, however, nothing was certain; editors of magazines, for example, would have to decide whether their readers wanted to read topical stories linked to the War, or whether they would prefer to read the usual, often escapist, mixture of excitement and sentiment.[93] Editorial policies varied; *Nash's and Pall Mall* printed very few war stories during the first year of the War, whereas the *Grand* magazine included War-related fiction as soon as possible. Its issues of late 1914 show editor and writers gradually discovering how familiar genres could be adapted to the new situation.

The November *Grand* (on sale around October 20th, with a publishing deadline a month earlier) includes two stories about war, though neither is specifically anchored in the current conflict. One, 'Under War Conditions' is an anecdote about tough soldiers in training that could have appeared at any time during the next four years, but the other, 'The Terminus' by C.W.Simpson, is a realistic account of an air raid on a railway yard, told from the viewpoints of both attackers and defenders. This clearly belongs to the genre of stories describing possible future wars that had been popular ever since 'The Battle of Dorking' (1871) had warned the British that the recent Prussian conquest of France could be repeated in Southern England.[94] 'The Terminus' differs from most such stories published later in the War, because moral superiority is

---

93 According to E.W.Hornung, who recorded his experiences as a Y.M.C.A. librarian on the Western Front, soldiers themselves preferred to read books that were not about the War. 'Some forty-nine readers out of fifty wanted something that would take them out of khaki, and nearly nine out of ten pinned their faith to fiction.' (*Notes of a Camp Follower on the Western Front* (London: Constable, 1919), 171.

94 *Blackwood's Magazine* (May 1871), 539-72. The story is notable for including tropes – such as indecisive command, lack of coherent planning and insufficient artillery support – that would reappear in writing of the twenties when the strategy and command of the Great War were criticized.

ascribed to neither side. Such impartiality would later become rare when attitudes had stabilised, and authors and publishers discovered that war fiction could offer readers more than realism and accuracy. [95]

The December issue of the *Grand* incorporates the War into other genres: technological fantasy and social comedy. Gunby Hadath's 'How it Might have Been' imagines the invention of a death-ray super-weapon that could kill an entire German army at a stroke; the story ends on a note of triumphant wish-fulfilment: 'So came the stirring Pax Britannica — a peace that shall rule the world so long as Britain guards John Tinney's secret.'[96] Once again, the technological war fantasy was a familiar genre, and one of which I. F. Clarke has written: 'Never again would so many writers describe the state of wars to come with so much eagerness and ignorance,'[97] a description that fits Hadath's story neatly. The other War story in the December *Grand*, however, is a social comedy, and has many qualities that would appear in popular fiction throughout the war years. Disappointed that her father is above the recruiting age, the young heroine of 'The Army and Araminta', decides, 'I must have *some* man to kill Germans for me.'[98] She fails to persuade Laird, her industrialist fiancé , and embarrasses herself by nagging a young man who turns out to have 'lung trouble'. Finally she overhears a conversation revealing that her fiancé had been engaged on secret war work all along, and will soon join the R.F.C. This story, with its reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and its ironic putting in her place of a young woman who doubts the masculinity and patriotism of her menfolk, is typical of much fiction that will be published during wartime, both in its adaptation of an existing popular genre to wartime conditions, and in using that genre, not to say much about the actual war, but to define roles and attitudes that were available to people at home.

---

95 C.W.Simpson, 'The Terminus', *Grand Magazine* (23:117 November 1914) 65-71.

96 Gunby Hadath, 'How it Might Have Been', *Grand Magazine* (23:117 November 1914) 243. Tales approving destructive wonder-weapons would become less common after the Germans' introduction of poison gas in 1915.

97 I.F.Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92.

98 Alan Graham, 'The Army and Araminta', *Grand Magazine* (23:118, December 1914), 157.

These stories in the *Grand* show no uniformity; each genre applies its own tropes and linguistic registers to the task of responding to the national mood and endorsing popular commitment to the War. Notably absent from them, however, as from the great majority of prose fiction during the War, is the register of language for which Paul Fussell has claimed a particular representative status during wartime, the 'essentially feudal language'[99] of a heroic high style derived from Victorian romance. This language was certainly present in poetry; Jon Stallworthy has noted that 'In the poems of 1914 and the first half of 1915, there are countless references to sword and legion, not a few to chariot and oriflamme, but almost none to gun and platoon.'[100] By contrast, although in six months of the *Story-Teller* magazine from March to August 1915, there are many stories connected to the War (usually two in each monthly issue), in all of these there is only one reference to a sword, and it is dismissive: 'Before the Germans could draw their swords they had been shot'.[101] There are no mentions of legions, but plenty of platoons and battalions. Oriflammes are absent. The magazine story is traditionally a bourgeois form, and where soldiers are praised in them, it is usually not for dashing and flamboyant action, but for the bourgeois virtues of steadfastness, decency and integrity that such magazines had valorised before the War. Soldiers' self-control is important to many stories, as is their silence or reticence. The short story is a form that thrives on revelation, and in these stories the nobility of the soldier is often disguised, until its discovery provides the story's climax.[102] The mediaevalising language employed in poetry and sermons is significant as an indication of writers' desire to find words as lofty as their aspirations, but it is a language disconnected from the actualities of

---

99 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 21.

100 Jon Stallworthy, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), xxvii.

101 W.G.George, 'The Brothers Stabwiller', *Story-Teller* (March 1915), 907.

102 In A.G.Greenwood's 'The Waster',*Story-Teller* (March 1915) the title character's redemption through military service is not revealed until the last paragraph; in Owen Oliver's 'His Sergeant's Stripes' (April 1915) the demoted N.C.O.'s true qualities are ignored until he redeems himself in battle; the spy hero of 'The Englishman from Heidelberg' by Ethel M.Dell (June 1915) is rejected by the woman he loves until she finally recognizes his courage; in 'His Duty' by J.U.Giesy (June 1915) the apparent shirker in fact longs to do his patriotic duty; the eponymous hero of 'Sergeant Bliss' (by Warwick Deeping, August 1915) pretends drunkenness, but only to allow a French girl to escape the Germans — and so on. Story after story shows a man performing actions of which others thought him incapable; they can be seen as addressing anxieties about the readiness of British manhood to confront the challenges of war.

life. Most genres of popular fiction, by contrast, were to some degree committed to a surface representation of these actualities, and if writers wanted to present citizen-soldiers as noble, they first had to acknowledge the sometimes unpromising exterior beneath which this nobility lurked, and then define forms of nobility not incompatible with what their readers knew of actual soldiers.[103]

Boys' publications adapted to war more flamboyantly than *The Story-Teller,* though still without mediaevalism. In the *Gem* magazine, Tom Merry and the boys of St. Jim's were soon foiling German saboteurs and helping a criminal redeem himself by showing his patriotism.[104] In the *Union Jack*, Sexton Blake was by 12 September investigating 'The Case of the German Admiral' and had infiltrated a secret enemy ammunition depot in the middle of Epping Forest. In 'The Case of the Belgian Relief Fund' (12 December 1914), some of Blake's traditional enemies (Ezra Q. Maitland, Broadway Kate and their servant Yang) need to be foiled when they engage in a topical robbery. War gave the opportunity for a new spin on some very conventional formulas.

When writers in a various genres catered for the public's enthusiasm for the War, adapting very different conventions and tropes to the task, the effect was that each genre produced a subtly different representation of the soldier, as is shown by a comparison between wartime romances and tales of the supernatural. In romantic fiction the soldier becomes a figure of erotic charm; the reaction of the heroine of a Jessie Pope short story when she enters a room full of wounded soldiers is almost orgasmic: 'For a moment Hazel felt dazed. She had never come in touch with them before; the atmosphere, charged with endurance and heroism took away her power of speech, and brought a quick colour to her cheeks.'[105] Meeting soldiers, especially wounded

---

103 An exception to the absence of mediaevalism in prose fiction of the time is Arthur Machen's 'The Bowmen', which appeared in the London *Evening News* of 29 September 1914.This fanciful fiction, about the appearance of St George and a company of Agincourt archers encouraging the soldiers in Flanders from the clouds, gained fame, however, because it was transformed in the popular mind as evidence for the Angels of Mons; readers' imaginations forgot the mediaeval trappings, preferring signs of heavenly approval for the war effort. A full account of the story's fortunes can be found in James Hayward, *Myths and Legends of the First World War* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), 55.

104 'The King's Pardon', Gem (9:351).

105 Jessie Pope, 'Boy Blue' in *Love — On Leave* (London: Pearson, 1919), 135. Though published after the War, the book is a collection of stories written during wartime.

ones, energises Pope's heroines, and makes them active; in such tales, the soldier is an agent of change in women, even when himself in need of changing. The hero of a novel like *Richard Chatterton, V.C* by Ruby M. Ayres (1915) must conform to the generic norms of romantic fiction by changing, by joining the Army and proving himself a man worthy of the heroine's love, but, as Jane Potter points out in her analysis of the novel, the heroine is also changed by seeing the man she has rejected, wearing khaki and wounded: 'Sonia is transformed, not by donning khaki herself, but by *observing* it on the man she loves.'[106] The War therefore becomes (something like the purifying fire in *Jane Eyre*) the apparent disaster producing redemptive suffering that makes the man fit for a woman's love; the soldier, in turn becomes a means through which the woman sees 'reality'. As Jane Potter says, by seeing Chatterton and other soldiers the heroine 'is disabused of her second-hand notions [....] She continues to think romantically about the War, but the meaning of the words has altered from abstract to concrete.'[107]

This eroticising of the soldier, and the celebration of his power to transform the woman he loves, is very different indeed from the presentation of soldiers in wartime tales of the supernatural. Eerie tales had been popular in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and the genre had been adapted to many uses and many moods, offering glimpses of ultimate horrors, but also consoling fantasies about the survival of the dead. Edwardian supernatural stories, like James's 'The Turn of the Screw' and 'The Monkey's Paw' by W. W. Jacobs, had frequently created chilling unease; when the genre was adapted for wartime use, however, it became one of the most conservative and reassuring of forms, generally presenting the soldier as the subject of a special providence.

A typical example is the 1916 short story 'The Dark Hour', by the Countess Barcynska; at first this seems neither a war story nor a tale of the supernatural. A young man is depressed and suicidal. He shares a railway carriage with a young woman, to whom he tells everything, including his intention to kill himself. The girl, whose eyes 'radiated sympathy', listens, and makes him promise to wait for just another six days. Despite himself, he

106 Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 117.
107 *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print*, 117.

agrees. Within the week war breaks out, and he discovers a new purpose in life by enlisting. The story moves forward to an imagined peace, when 'he was entitled to wear the emblem of glory in his breast and carry the essence of it in his heart.'[108] His aunt shows him an album of old photographs; he sees for the first time a picture of his mother, who died in his infancy — and she is, of course, the girl in the train. The story ends with him standing by her grave and thanking her, 'and he knew that she could hear.'[109] This story is typical of many of the War years, in that it manages both to present war as a vehicle of personal salvation and to endorse traditional values: the woman remains supportive and maternal even after she has died; the man finds fulfilment in the role of soldier.

In story after wartime story, ghostly parents, dead lovers, and guiding ancestors give soldiers hope, courage, advice, a sense of purpose, or even physical help in difficult circumstances. By 1918, in Ronald Gurner's 'Guardianship', it is the spirit of a soldier of the first weeks of the War ('E was a good plucked 'un, sir. I can see 'im now.')[110] who comes to re-inspire a former comrade. Sometimes the story of the supernatural helper could mix with another genre, that of the coward redeemed; Andrew Soutar's 'The Blank File' tells of 'Gibby' Strachan, who in 1895 had apparently deserted his troop, but whose ghost reappears to save his battalion in the trenches. [111]

Such stories present a reassuring picture of the British soldier as under the protection of a special providence, and some read like merely propagandistic wish-fulfilment; yet their popularity indicates that they were serving a purpose, if only by acknowledging the need for that special protection. Soldiers in these stories are presented as vulnerable men, in danger of defeat or demoralisation, until saved by the advice, help or example of a presence that puts them in touch with enduring values – enduring because not just of this life.

---

108 Countess Barcynska, 'The Dark Hour', *Grand Magazine* (February, 1916), 444. The phrase 'the emblem of glory' moves into the 'poetic' register noted by Fussell and Stallworthy, and is appropriate to an imagined future. The rest of the story, like most naturalistic fiction, stays mostly within a less high-flown register of language.

109 'The Dark Hour', 445

110 Lieutenant Ronald Gurner, 'Guardianship', *Windsor Magazine* (48:283, July 1918), 154.

111 Andrew Soutar, 'The Blank File', *The Story-Teller* (September, 1918).

Other versions of the soldier are found in the most characteristic genre found in magazine fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century, the didactic fable, a conversion narrative in which a character comes to see the error of his or her ways. These remained extremely popular during wartime, and Walter E. Grogan's 'The Deserter' (1916) is a representative example. It begins with a scene calculated to deliver a small shock to contemporary readers. Sergeant Abel Dillway is expressing his discontent with army life:

> I'm sick of it – fair sick of it! I hate the rasp of the army shirt and the smell of khaki! I hate the stale old mess jokes! I hate the whole deadly sameness...[112]

After two years of war, this was a resonant speech for readers when time and hardship were threatening to erode initial enthusiasm. Sergeant Dillway is not a soldier of the current war, however, but is in Cape Town at the start of the century; he deserts from the army, takes the name of George Causton, and goes to Australia, where he prospers. Eventually, though, the 'the irresistible tug of the old homeland' takes him back to England and his home-town, fifteen years after he had left it. Then: 'Suddenly came the crash. Germany had declared war. What was England going to do?"[113] Dillway tries to distance himself, but becomes 'unaccountably restless' when the local territorials leave for duty. One day he hears the marching feet of his old regiment, the Tollgatherers. 'And he was out of it, out of it! A deserter!' Just as he is suffering a tense crisis of identity, he hears that the King has pardoned all deserters who re-enlist. 'An hour later, he burst into the bar parlour. His eyes were shining, his shoulders braced.' He proudly tells the company: 'I'm Sergeant Dillway of C Company of the Tollgatherers – that's who I am [....] Going to France, likewise to Belgium, likewise to Germany...'[114]

This simple fable is typical of many. It begins with a man declining his military duty, and ends with him enthusiastically embracing it. It is a story about identity; he must decide whether he is civilian George or soldier Abel. It is also about nature; his discontented will removed him from the army and

---

112 Walter E.Grogan, 'The Deserter', *Windsor Magazine* (November 1916), 803. Ellipsis in original.
113 'The Deserter', 805.
114 'The Deserter, 808. Second ellipsis in original.

took him to Australia, but his true nature feels the 'irresistible tug' of England and the regiment. The alert reader understands this long before Abel/George does, being positioned to identify not with one of the characters, but with the authorial voice describing those characters from a position of superior knowledge and moral certainty.

Such techniques had long been found in popular literature, especially in the conversion stories found in moral tracts written for young people, or designated as 'specially suited for Working People'.[115] The sinner, blind to his sin, is brought to repentance, and a fuller understanding of himself that brings true happiness. A Victorian example is Mrs Prosser's *The Wise Man of Wittlebury*, whose selfish hero's wisdom is 'Charity begins at home,"[116] until the events of the story bring him to an understanding that 'the true wisdom is to be wise unto salvation."[117] Such texts typically demonstrated the paradoxical virtues of selflessness and sacrifice; the Wise Man achieves a richer pleasure by giving away the wealth that he has accumulated. Generosity is the richer wealth in this story, just as subservience to military rule is a richer source of pride than the spurious independence of desertion in 'The Deserter'.

Stories of this pattern are found throughout the War, though details change with the historical situation. During the first months, Ada Leonora Harris wrote 'Your King and Country', in which a mother is protective of her son, and physically prevents him from enlisting. By the end of the story she has learnt from another woman's greater sacrifice (losing her husband) and tells her son: 'I see now I was wrong. If your King and country need you, I won't stand in your way."[118] When civilians were being affected by shortages and hardship, Andrew Soutar's 'The Changelings!' described a pampered couple being transformed for the better when he becomes a soldier and she devotes herself to helping the wounded.[119] In 1918, Frank H. Shaw's

---

115 Publisher's advertisement section at the back of Mrs (Sophie Amelia) Prosser, *The Wise Man of Wittlebury* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1880), 1.

116 *The Wise Man of Wittlebury*, 10.

117 *The Wise Man of Wittlebury*. 95. Victorian stories of far greater literary merit could also follow a similar pattern of conversion narrative; for example, Dickens's *The Christmas Carol*, or Eliot's *Silas Marner*.

118 Ada Leonora Harris, "'Your King and Country –'", *Grand Magazine* (23:119 January 1915), 296.

119 *New Magazine* (84, March 1916), 829-838.

"'Woodenhead'" addressed readers' anxieties that the conscripted men of later drafts would show the same degree of courage as earlier volunteers.

In most cases the overtly implied audience for such stories is the sinner in need of conversion, but the far likelier readership, as in the case of the Victorian tracts, consists of the righteous wanting their own convictions reaffirmed. These are reassuring stories, in which the foolish are granted wisdom, the blind made to see and the ungodly given grace. As in 'The Deserter', there is progression from the falsity to truth, and from the willed to the natural. The typical protagonist discovers a role of greater personal authenticity (which reassuringly coincides with the perceived needs of the wartime community).

There were full-length novels built on the same pattern as these stories, but usually showing the process of conversion as a harder struggle. The protagonist of William J. Locke's novel *The Rough Road* (1918) is Marmaduke Trevor, a self-pitying hypochondriac who is shamed by receiving a white feather from insensitive women; he applies for a commission in the Army, but fails. Humiliated, he finally enlists as a private, and begins the journey towards becoming an adequate soldier and man. Locke's attitude is one of unquestioned moral superiority throughout. Marmaduke is observed though the eyes of those who know him better than he knows himself. ('Dr Murdoch grinned [....] Here was this young slacker, coddled from birth, absolutely horse-strong and utterly confounded at being told so.')[120] The novel enlists the War to teach the protagonist moral lessons that were already obvious to author and to the implied reader.

> He realised the brutality of fact. When great German guns were yawning open-mouthed at you, it was no use saying 'Take the nasty, horrid things away. I don't like them.'[121]

This 'brutality of fact' is the weapon with which the narrative bludgeons its protagonist. The reader is asked to become complicit with Locke's pleasure in the process of Marmaduke's forced development, described by Virginia Woolf in her review of the novel as: 'that process of unveiling and vindication and

---

120 *The Rough Road*, 75.
121 *The Rough Road*, 69.

making good in which [Locke] delights so heartily that we can scarcely help enjoying it too.'[122]

It would be possible to categorise these stories simply as pro-war propaganda, but other readings are possible. Rather than fitting into a specifically wartime genre, many of these stories use the occasion of war (and the public interest in war) as an opportunity to give a new vitality to well-established formulae. "Your King and Country–"', for example, can be read as primarily a story about the need for a mother to let her son go, to live his own life away from her control. Both 'The Deserter' and "'Woodenhead"' are about the shift from selfish narrow-mindedness to generosity, in the tradition of *The Wise Man of Wittlebury*. The War gives these stories the tang of topicality, but their values have been imported directly from pre-war prototypes.

An example showing this clearly is 'Forty-Eight Hours' by Edward Cecil, where the soldier is not the person changed by the events of the story, but takes the role of the agent of change. Captain Dick Travers, has leave for just 'forty-eight hours — trenches to trenches'. [123] He summons his courage to propose to Millicent, but she has become engaged to a rich man, Denzil Kennaway. Travers takes her with him to visit a Mrs Perkins in Hoxton. Travers explains the conditions of the woman's life:

> Yes. She has to make sixty shirts a week to make nine-and-sevenpence. That is to say, she has to work every hour of every day from early morning to late at night. It's late now. We found her at work. *Even though she had received the news which I this afternoon gave her, she was still at work.* It's what they call sweating, and a pretty bad case of it.[124]

Kennaway controls the firm that exploits Mrs Perkins, and Millicent comes to realise that 'Diamond rings which cost a hundred pounds or more are sometimes bought with money which has been made out of human flesh and blood.'[125] She chooses the soldier, and at the end of the story is on her knees, praying for his safe return from France. The final paragraphs rhetorically

---

122 *Times Literary Supplement* (24 October, 1918), 510.
123 Edward Cecil, 'Forty-Eight Hours', *Strand Magazine* (54:32, November 1917),505.
124 'Forty-Eight Hours', 508. The italics are in the original.
125 'Forty-Eight Hours', 509.

describe Kennaway, '*alone* with his wealth – alone with his wealth, as every one of us will some day be left *alone* with God.'[126]

The basic plot of this story, the conversion of Millicent from shallow flapper to serious loving woman, is one that could be independent of the War setting, as could the condemnation of the sweatshop capitalist, but war gives these standard themes urgency and resonance. Alert wartime readers would have picked up the clue that Travers' message for Mrs Perkins is about her husband's death, which is placed in ironic contrast to war profiteering:

> The woman we have just left gets one-and-elevenpence a dozen for making those shirts. The Government pays nine-and-threepence for them. Contractors and sub-contractors rake in the difference.[127]

The genre is being used to project a propagandist message about the War, but at the same time the War is being used to demonstrate the truth of values typical of the genre.

Even the religious references at the end, which might have seemed dated or excessive in Edwardian fiction, are also given fresh potency by the life-and-death issues of the War, which has revivified a genre whose values are traditionally Christian. This affects the presentation of the soldier, who will typically display the Christian virtues of charity, loyalty and perseverance rather than specifically warlike qualities such as aggression or ruthlessness. Just as the big commercial posters simultaneously used the soldiers to sell the products and used the products to endorse the war effort, so with these stories it is hard to decide whether they are using their morality as propaganda for the War, or the War as propaganda for the genre's values; war and morality have become so interlinked in them as to be indistinguishable.

Writing within the limits of a pre-war genre could lead to predictability, and a taming of the shock of war. At least one writer, H.G.Wells in *Boon* (1915), attempted to escape generic conventions by producing a fiction as disturbed as the times themselves. Originally published anonymously, this book is a chaos of fragments whose tone is deliberately unstable; there are texts nested within texts, unreliable narrators and even less reliable editors,

---

126 'Forty-Eight Hours', 509. The italics are in the original.
127 'Forty-Eight Hours', 508.

and the reader is given no point of stability from which to judge its incoherence. Such unity as the first half of the book can claim comes from its satirical portrait of old-fashioned literary men, most effective in its attack on the Jamesian novel with its 'endless marshes of subtle intimation".[128] This literary satire is disrupted, however, by the sudden irruption of the War, which destabilises the book; the pompous bookmen are confronted by real and terrible issues, about which they can do nothing but talk. There is a long discussion between two literary men, Boon and Wilkins, about the War's meaning. Wilkins argues for its nobility ('Think of all the people whose lives would have been slack and ignoble from the cradle to the grave, who are being twisted up now to the stern question of enlistment.') but Boon interrupts with a reminder of:

> the light of fires appearing through the cracks of falling walls, and charred bits of old roadside, and the screams of men disembowelled, and the crying of a dying baby in a wet shed full of starving refugees who do not know whither to go.[129]

In this chaos nothing is certain, and even Wells's own formulation of the War's meaning, 'This is the war that will end war,' is dismissed as belonging to the empty rhetoric of Osborn, the patriotic versifier of the *Morning Post*.[130] Boon dies (and the reader is left in no doubt that the war is symbolically to blame) having written a final parable about the blowing of the last trump and the coming of the last judgement. The people of England glimpse for a moment a vision of God - 'the terrible gentle eyes of God' - but then carry on with their lives, and let the vision of judgement make no difference to them. This constantly disrupted text scorns the country that ignores the opportunity offered by disruption. Reginald Bliss, the (fictional) editor of Boon's papers, suggests a more positive ending that Boon might have written had he survived, and the reader is left unsure whether to believe Boon or his editor, in a way obliquely corresponding to Wells's own ambivalence about the meaning of the

---

128 (H.G.Wells), *Boon, The Mind of the Race,The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump:Being a First Selection from the Literary remains of George Boon, Appropriate to the Times* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), 118.
129 *Boon*, 274.
130 *Boon*, 295.

War that was just beginning. The book's incoherence imitates the incoherence of the time.

Boon was not a success. Reviewers easily guessed the actual authorship,[131] and the reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* likened the satirical attitude to that of 'rude little boys who stick out their tongues'.[132] Nor had the fiction quite succeeded in breaking with all preceding genres. The games it plays with its own textuality, which in a later generation might have been hailed as post-modern, in fact locate it in a tradition of outlandish prophetic writing in which a writer uses multiple narrators to express ideas more extreme than those for which he is personally willing to take responsibility that can be traced back — in Britain at least — to Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (though Carlyle himself was imitating the German Romantics). If the writers did not relate their work to existing genres, the readers would, and might well find it wanting.

Just as it is inaccurate to describe the War as being utterly different from all wars that had gone before, it is misleading to think of War writing as a category distinct from all previous ones. The same writers continued to write, and when they included the War in their subject-matter they were often more influenced by the conventions of their genre (whose values they shared with their audience) than by the actualities of warfare. Equally, there is remarkably little evidence to show that the authorities, whether military or civil, demanded or requested any particular styles of fictional representation.

---

131 'Such an affectation of anonymity is childish,' wrote one reviewer. 'Readers and Writers', *The New Age* (20 May 1915), 61.

132 'The Mind of the Race', *Times Literary Supplement* (13 May 1915), 150.

Chapter 2.

Controlled, calm and responsible – the ideal soldier

A month into the War, this article appeared among a number of war-related 'Personal Narratives' in *The Times*:

> A London vicar sends us the following extracts from a letter addressed to his son from an officer serving with the Expeditionary Force :—
>
> Here I am in the thick of it. This may interest you, as I am writing it in the firing line. We arrived in this place about 8 p.m. last night, having marched 56 miles. All last night we entrenched, and at 5 a.m. this morning we got our first glimpse of the Germans. They advanced in solid masses. Their shells at first fell rather short, but they soon got the range, and at 6.30 a.m. their shells started to pitch in the trenches. The first one killed three of my poor fellows, including my sergeant. . . . I never realized what an awful thing war is. You cannot imagine at home the horror of it. I am in a small village on the extreme left, and can see the horrible cruelty of the Germans to the inhabitants. We have got three girls in the trenches with us, who came to us for protection. One had no clothes on, having been outraged by the Germans. I have given her my shirt and divided my rations among them. In consequence I feel rather hungry, having had nothing for 32 hours, except some milk chocolate.
>
> We have been hard at the Germans all day (now 8 p.m.), and have successfully driven them back. Our men's shooting is wonderful and accurate. The Germans collapse like ninepins under it. The slaughter is awful. . . . I started this morning with 50 men in my trench, and now have 23 and no n.c. officers. They are wonderfully cheery. I have been hit twice; one took the heel of my boot off, and one through my shoulder, which is rather sore, so I must have it dressed. . . .
>
> Another poor girl has just come in, having had both her breasts cut off. Luckily, I caught the Uhlan officer in the act, and with a rifle at 300 yards killed him. And now she is with us, but, poor girl, I am afraid she will die. She is very pretty, and only about 19, and only has her skirt on: . . .

Fig. 2. From *The Times* (12 September 1914), 6.

A century later the letter reads as an obvious fake, with its dubious provenance and inherent improbabilities (for example, that the officer could pick off a German at 300 yards in mid-atrocity). Yet in 1914 it convinced the editor of *The Times*, because it told a story that he, like others, expected and wanted to hear.[1] Uncontrolled Germans are attacking civilians with a 'horrible cruelty' exemplified by the gratuitous viciousness of cutting off the breasts of a rape victim; British soldiers, whose control and discipline is shown by 'wonderful and accurate' shooting, come decently to the rescue.

Stories like this are among the earliest to present the most common wartime representation of the British soldier, one so often reproduced and so obviously important to writers and readers that it appeared over and over again, in many genres, with many variations. The soldier is above all calm, responsible and caring, doing a difficult job in a controlled and disinterested manner, for the sake of others. This chapter will examine some of the many ways in which this representation was communicated, looking at its role in different types of stories, beginning with variations on the narrative that appeared in *The Times*. It will be argued that this representation was driven by the public's need to reinforce its belief in the justice of Britain's engagement in a continental war, and the need to define Britain as the liberal champion of the rule of law, honour and decency. It will be suggested that this stereotype of the ideal soldier is implicit in fictions about training that show the conversion of ordinary citizen into disciplined soldier. It will also be suggested that use of this idealised representation did not necessarily imply an unthinking militarism or jingoism on the part of either author or reader, since such soldiers are frequently found in stories whose aim is to criticise excessive war enthusiasm. Many of the fictions presenting soldiers in this way belong, as will be seen, to the realm of the sub-literary, but others are texts that cannot be dismissed as merely patriotic propaganda.

---

1 Because the military authorities were parsimonious with news from the front at this time, newspapers depended on letters from eye-witnesses to inform their readers what was happening, and had few resources for checking which accounts were exaggerated or false.

Nicoletta Gullace has analysed how in the public imagination the invasion of Belgium became symbolically identified with the violation of womanhood,[2] and this letter is a contribution to that myth, presenting horrors with a frankness that disrupts the usual decorum of the *Times* news pages.[3] In the 1920s, pacifists like Arthur Ponsonby would class this sort of story as the product of 'special publicity experts and expert stunt-promoters' whose 'spicy paragraphs of calumny are eagerly accepted by the newspapers',[4] and part of the 'fixed and sustained determination of Authority to popularise war'.[5] Ponsonby assumed a 'Great Conspiracy' to mislead, and 'most people very much prefer being definitely told what to do and what to think rather than making the mental effort of forming their own conclusions."[6] There is no evidence, however, that fake letters like the one in *The Times* were planted by orders from above; on the other hand, there are strong indications that they came from below, from ordinary citizens so emotionally involved in the narrative of the War that they believed the horror stories conjured by their own excited imaginations.

The *Times* letter's origin remains a mystery (though the vicar's son must surely be a suspect), but a court case of December 1914 is suggestive as to the reasons for its creation. Kate Hume, a seventeen-year old girl from Dumfries, was on trial for forgery; in September she had written a letter apparently from her sister Grace, a nurse in Belgium. It read:

> Dear Kate, — This is to say "Goodbye." Have not long to live. Hospital has been set on fire. Germans cruel. A man here has had head cut off. My breast taken away. Give my love to —. Goodbye, Grace.[7]

Another forged letter, apparently from a friend, described Grace's fate:

---

2 Nicoletta Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 26-31.

3 Gullace describes this news story as 'melding the discourse of pornography with the language of battle' (*'The Blood of Our Sons'*, 27). That the girl dies after having been desecrated suggests that the story is also following the conventions of those genres in which any fallen woman inevitably dies.

4 Arthur Ponsonby, M.P., *Now is the Time: An Appeal for Peace* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1925), 68.

5 *Now is the Time*, 32.

6 *Now is the Time*, 69.

7 'The "Murdered Nurse" Hoax', *Manchester Guardian* (29 December 1914), 2. The other quotations about the case are from the same source.

> She endured great agony in her last hour. One of the soldiers (our men) caught two German soldiers in the act of cutting off her left breast, her right one having been already cut off. They were killed instantly by our soldiers.

An expert witness tried to medicalise Kate's actions: 'Sir Thomas Clouston, an expert in mental and nervous disease, of Edinburgh, expressed the opinion that 'the prisoner at the time was in a state of adolescent hysteria, and such conditions might have made her quite abnormal in fancy and action.' Sir Thomas's distancing vocabulary ('adolescent', 'hysteria', abnormal') tries to present Kate Hume as an aberration, and yet examination of the stories of 1914 suggests that she was actually very typical of her time, replicating and developing an emotive myth of the War. Her defence counsel claimed: 'The letters were literary creations only, and in writing them the accused had been a slave to her emotions. What she did was under the influence of emotions only partly normal,' an explanation that could be applied to much wartime fiction. Perhaps the most convincing account is Kate's own:

> I do not know now why I wrote it, but I fancied what I said would be the way Grace would have written of herself in her last minutes. I could fancy the whole thing as it was written [...] I cannot say what made me do it, except the cruelties which the Germans were committing. I firmly believed what was in the letters was true, and that Grace had been killed. I had worked myself into that belief. I did not think I was doing anything improper.

Disturbed and possessed by stories of the War, she had personalised them by imagining her own sister as part of them, so vividly that she seems genuinely to have believed in her own fabrications. This pattern, of a non-combatant imagining wartime horrors so violently personal and so imaginatively gripping that he or she is convinced that they must be true, is a pattern that will often be seen in the literature of the War.

This story, of a violent and excessive outrage committed by an undisciplined German on a defenceless woman, and the rescue in mid-atrocity by British soldiers who deal with the situation quickly and efficiently ('They were killed instantly by our soldiers.'), would be replicated in many forms.

Versions of it appear, for example, in the writing of 'Sapper' (Captain Herman Cyril McNeile of the Royal Engineers), who early in the War sent stories and sketches to the *Daily Mail*. As Jessica Meyer has noted, Sapper's wartime stories contribute to the myth of individual decisive action:

> By centring on an individual's actions they emphasise his potential for heroism. Such actions can take the form of blowing up a bridge across which groups of Germans are charging, or escaping from the German lines having taken a German officer captive single-handedly [....] [S]uch stories present an understanding of war that is antithetical to that of the soldier as simply a passive victim.[8]

'Three to One' is a typical 'Sapper' short story; its officer narrator meets the Irish Sergeant Cassidy (a literary descendant of Kipling's Mulvaney), and hears a tale of the first days of the War, when 'there was a chance of meeting a stray Uhlan on his own, scouting'.[9] In Cassidy's narrative, he and a young officer discover Germans mistreating the proprietors of a café:

> Mother of heaven! 'twas awful! There was six of them in all, six of the dirty treacherous swine. They'd been drinking hard, and the old lady that kept the café was trussed up in the corner [....] The old man was bound to the table, but they hadn't stunned him [....] They'd got the daughter – a pretty girl, of maybe twenty – in a chair. Well, I needn't say more, but every time the poor old man tried to get to her, they pulled the table back and roared with laughter.[10]

The story's contrasts are unsubtle as those of the atrocity stories previously described. The drunken and uncontrolled German bullies are in complete contrast to the 'straight' British officer who 'forgets the risk' and whose brave example is followed immediately by the Irish sergeant, whose instinctive reactions are no less convincing for being expressed naively. ('I got home on one of their heads with my rifle belt, and split it like a pumpkin.')[11]

---

8 Jessica Meyer, 'The Tuition of Manhood: Sapper's War Stories and the Literature of War' in (eds.) Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007),119.

9 'Sapper', *Sergeant Michael Cassidy, R.E.* (London: Hodder, 1915), 6.

10 *Sergeant Michael Cassidy, R.E.*, 7-8.

11 *Sergeant Michael Cassidy, R.E.*, 8-9. The use of an Irish character to perform the most violent acts is typical of wartime stereotyping. In the Irishman Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push* (1916),

The French are represented by the helpless couple and their daughter, whose threatened fate is made more terrible by being unspeakable, even by the garrulous Irishman ('Well, I needn't say more.'). As in the *Times* story, linguistic decorum is broken, when the violent simile of the head split 'like a pumpkin' invites the reader to participate in the gusto of the action. The Irishman's violent gusto is under the control of the officer, however, and is presented for approval to the officer narrator, so that his aggression is clearly shown as being within a context of control and discipline.

Sapper's tale was aimed at adults, but the basic story was easily adapted for juvenile readers. Captain F.S. Brereton's *With French at the Front* (1914) features a young hero, Jim, who 'had none of the stodginess so often found among the beer-drinking subjects of the Kaiser' but possesses 'a handsome face that was resolute and firm.'[12] He happens to be in Germany when war is declared, and rescues 'a young woman, a trim neat figure' from a 'yelling, menacing crowd'[13] of physically repellent Germans. (One of them, for example, is 'thick-set and jowly', with 'fleshy cheeks' and 'thick lips'.[14]) He has many adventures behind the lines before joining up with the British Army, 'the clean-limbed sons of Albion'.[15] The same story could even be translated into a form suitable for very young children, as in the *Lot-o-Fun* comic for 14 November 1914. This paper specialised in uncomplicated slapstick picture-stories, in which the fat, the pompous and the bullying got their comeuppance at the hands of the young, the poor, and the ingenious. In this issue we find several topical texts that refer to the War, and the front page adapts the narrative of the War into a picture story, 'Patriotic Paul turns the Table on the Germans', whose hero is a young drummer-boy (Fig. 1):

---

lightly fictionalizing the actions of the London Irish, all the soldiers are from Ireland, but the most bloodthirsty are represented as more Irish than the others by the representation of accent and dialect.

12 Captain F.S. Brereton, *With French at the Front: A story of the Great European War down to the Battle of the Aisne* (London: Blackie, 1914), 10.

13 *With French at the Front*, 9.

14 *With French at the Front*, 14.

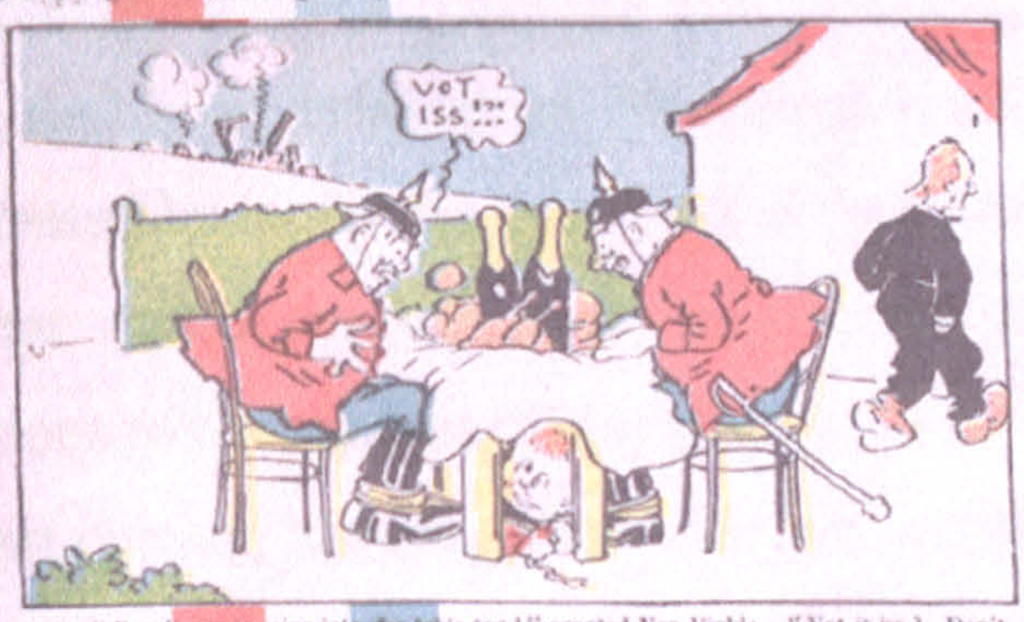
15 *With French at the Front*, 159.

James Henderson & Sons, Ltd.] Vol. XVIII. No. 453. [November 14, 1914.

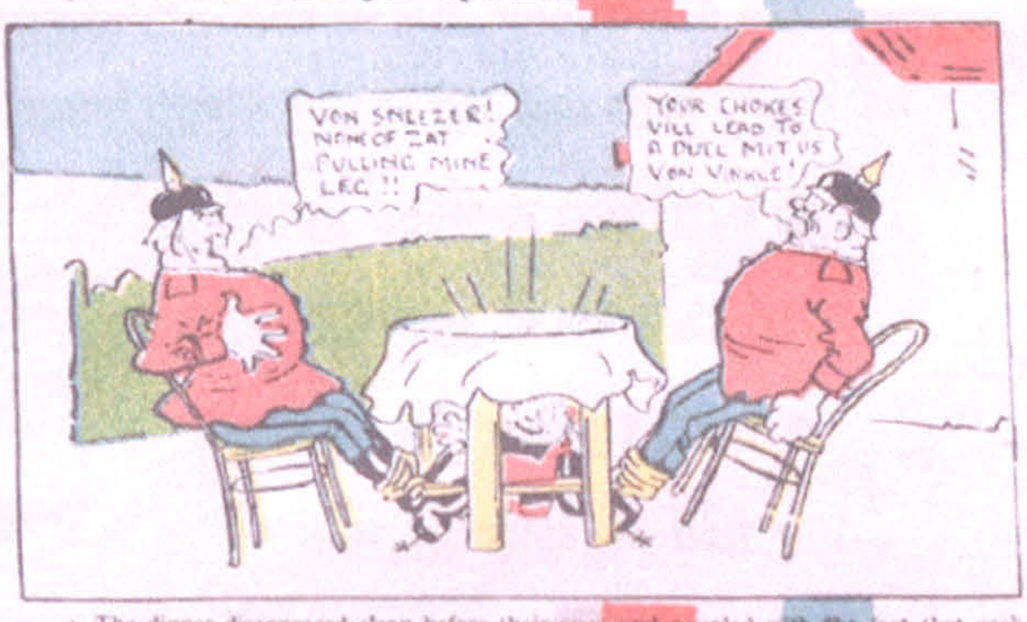
Patriotic Paul turns the Table on the Germans.

1. "It makes my blood boil to see the way these German officers bully the poor innkeepers into supplying them with free grub," panted Patriotic Paul.

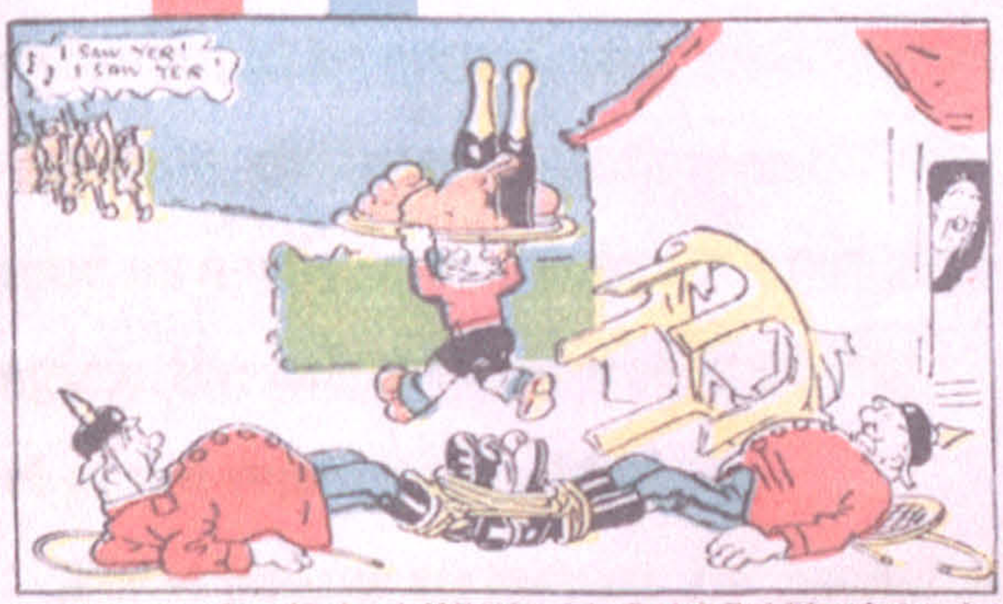
2. He has prepared a scheme, but we mustn't let you into it until you see what a lot in it was for the Germans—and the grub. Up it marched.



3. "Der dinner is going into der table top!" grunted Von Vinkle. "Vot it iss? Don't come any of your funny chokes at deg dinner table. Let mine foots alone!" growled Von Sneezer.



4. The dinner disappeared clean before their eyes, and, coupled with the fact that each felt a tightening round his ankles, they glared at each other suspiciously.



5. Hearing a welcome lilt of good old British melody, Patriotic Paul did not hesitate, but knocked the drum-head table over, and popped out.

6. He passed the dinner along to the hungry soldiers and asked the British commander to take charge of his prisoners. He had kept his ears open while under the table—you trust him!

Fig 3. *Lot-O-Fun* (14 November 1914), 1.

At an open-air cafe, presumably in Belgium or Northern France, Paul overhears three fat German officers bullying an innkeeper into providing free food. Ingeniously using his bass drum and a length of rope, he captures two of the Germans, makes off with their huge trayful of food and champagne, and hands them over to a slim and efficient-looking British officer. The food and drink is distributed among jubilant Tommies.

The writer and artist of this comic strip have extended their usual genre of slapstick wish-fulfilment to translate the story of why the country was at war into a pictorial and emotional language that a child can understand. The young hero offers a suitable identification figure, and there is clear visual stereotyping; the English are slim, trim and dignified, while the Germans are fat, fleshly and ridiculous. The moral is clear and optimistic; bullies are defeated by ingenuity, but the anarchic spirit of the young hero is put into a framework of control, since, like the Irishman of Sapper's story, he refers his actions to the upright officer for approval. The fact that the dispute is over a roast chicken not only allows the use of food — a universal symbol — but provides a way of suggesting unregulated German appetites in a non-sexual way that could be considered suitable for children. The story could be read as propaganda, designed to convince children to support the War, but it can also be read as a way of rendering the subject of the War less disturbing, and bringing the subject that was troubling the imagination of the nation to the level of the reassuringly familiar.

These stories all feature enterprise and heroism on the part of an individual; even though stories of collective heroism could be made to resonate with the war narrative, they did so less satisfactorily than tales of individual action, which is why the majority of Sapper's war stories are the plot-driven accounts of individual enterprise, as are those of most of his contemporaries writing in the action genre. Michael Parris has noted the disparity between the conventions of heroic fiction and the actuality of the Great War:

> Clearly, then, these writers knew exactly what it meant to serve in the trenches and understood the nature of modern industrial warfare. Yet in their stories we find no lessening of the romance of war [....] Was this simply a denial of reality, or was it a deliberate distortion for propaganda purposes?[16]

This is an accusation of bad faith which will seem convincing to those who share the view that the horror of trench warfare was such that any description of it which includes the heroic must necessarily be inauthentic; such a view was by no means obvious to those alive at the time. Sapper does not ignore or underplay the horror or cost of war; instead, and especially in his more realistic vignettes, he uses the awfulness of what he called 'the land of glutinous stinking mud'[17] to enhance our sense of the men's heroism. An alternative interpretation would be that his desire to celebrate soldiers' bravery was so great that he felt the need to refer to a heroic genre (and one whose conventions both he and his readers thoroughly understood and enjoyed) even though there was a considerable disparity between the generic norms and the actuality of the war being described.

These texts are all refractions of the same basic story, though different genres give it different flavours. The light-hearted children's comic makes the War seem a matter for high spirits, where ingenuity triumphs; Sapper's stories show grit and courage overcoming obstacles; the *Times* story lingers on the atrocity, and presents the retribution as an incidental needing little elaboration: 'Luckily, I caught the Uhlan officer in the act, and with a rifle at 300 yards killed him.'

Clearly this was a story that people wanted to tell and wanted to be told, but it posed difficulties for most authors, especially those with ambitions to write literature of a higher order. Some of these problems were practical. Writers in England had not seen war, and were receiving sparse and possibly unreliable information from the front. Even Hugh Walpole, who had been near battles as a medical orderly on the Russian front, found the

---

16 *Warrior Nation*, 144. By 'these writers' Parris is referring specifically to writers of boys' fiction such as F. S. Brereton and Percy F. Westerman.

17 Sapper, 'Over the Top', originally printed in the *Daily Mail* during wartime, collected in *Jim Brent* (London: House of Stratus, 2002), 147.

war difficult to write about. His 1916 novel *The Dark Forest* can describe only the edge of 'the invisible battle'; like civilians at home, Walpole's characters (who are involved in an intense but predictable love-triangle) see no fighting, but only its result:

> At long intervals, out of the forest, a wounded soldier would appear. He seemed always to be the same figure, sometimes wounded in the head, sometimes in the leg, sometimes in the stomach, sometimes in the hand — but always the same, with a look in his eyes of mild protest because this had happened to him.[18]

This soldier is presented as an intriguing mystery, part of a terrible drama that is happening just out of sight, but in which the writer cannot share, setting a pattern for many novelists of the War years.

There were particular problems for the literary novelist, used to writing in a genre that featured the analysis of psychological and social complexities. May Sinclair was a literary novelist deeply committed to the War, and eager both to participate and to write about it, but she found it almost impossible to square heroic representations of the soldier with the conventions of her genre. Sinclair herself joined a volunteer ambulance unit in 1914 and went to Belgium, but found herself marooned at a base, seeing something of the effects of the war but achieving little contact with significant events. Her War experience would provide some material for her fiction, but differences between journal and novels give an insight into the imaginative constraints operating on novelists during wartime. In her journal, she can write frankly about her feelings before going out to an ambulance unit in France, during:

> those five weeks of frightful anticipation when I knew that I must go out to the War; the going to bed, night after night, drugged with horror, black horror that creeps like poison through your nerves; the falling asleep and forgetting it; the waking, morning after morning with a lucid brain that throws out a dozen war pictures to the minute like a ghastly cinema show, till horror becomes terror.[19]

---

[18] Hugh Walpole, *The Dark Forest* (1916). (Reprinted London: Macmillan, 1926) 82.
[19] May Sinclair, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (London: Hutchinson, 1915), 16.

This is a register of language that males at the time would not generally have felt able to use in public discourse, though there are examples in private letters and diaries.[20] Because she is a woman, Sinclair can acknowledge her own fears; when she came to write about males at war her tone was markedly different.

Snubbed by the ambulance unit (and not asked to rejoin it) Sinclair was frustrated by the fact that because she was a woman (and middle-aged) the War cast her as an outsider. In *Tasker Jevons* (1915) she imagines a different outsider, and lets him triumph gloriously in ways forbidden to her. Jevons is an over-achiever, so full of *élan vital* that in war-torn Belgium he manages to rescue two of his wife's disapproving family, and to lose an arm in romantic circumstances. It is hard not to see this as an enthusiastic dramatisation of Sinclair's own fantasy. If only she were a man, she too would be allowed to rescue people from burning buildings. In this novel, the War is imagined only as a means of self-expression; Sinclair gives no indication of its origins or rationale; it exists purely as an arena in which Jevons, her alter ego, can prove himself. Despite this, we are never allowed to see inside Jevons's mind; he is left intriguingly opaque, an enigma that the narrator cannot quite understand.

Jevons is not actually a soldier, though he displays the soldierly virtues. Sinclair's next novel, *The Tree of Heaven* (1917), is about a family of individualists, including Michael who does not want to be a soldier. While he remains a civilian the reader is allowed full access to his thoughts and feelings, his doubts and hesitations. But when he decides that he will no longer be a conscientious objector, and enlists, a shutter comes down, and readers are not allowed access to what is happening in his mind; he has become a soldier.[21]

A similar avoidance of actually entering the mind of a fighting soldier seems to be in operation in Arnold Bennett's *The Roll Call* (1918). This novel tells the story of George Cannon (son of Hilda Lessways, from Bennett's *Clayhanger* trilogy) who leaves the Five Towns for London to become an

[20] O. Lyle, for example, wrote home to his brother after the Battle of Loos: ' [I] lost my nerve for three days. It was just hell - especially at night. I couldn't sleep at all.' This, together with similar letters, is quoted in Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21.

[21] This novel is discussed fully in Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

architect. He has some successes and makes many compromises, then enlists in the Army, and the novel rather abruptly stops. The *Times Literary Supplement* assumed that there would be a sequel to resolve the narrative, but Bennett never wrote one.[22]

George the civilian is an unappealing hero; he can be pretentious, insensitive and shallow, jilting the intelligent sensitive girl and marrying the self-dramatizing sensual one. Bennett in his journal refers to the book as 'my London novel', [23] and its portrayal of pre-war society is dense and complicated. The city is a palimpsest of unorthodox passions and ambitions that George has to decipher. Though successful, he is always partly an outsider – yet all the other characters in the book also seem to be on the margins. There are artists trying to scrape a living in a difficult market; architects dependent on the whims of clients and assessors; socialites whose esteem depends on who they are seen with. Apparent fortunes turn out to be illusory; apparent success can turn out to be flimsy; relationships can be ruined by the actions of a third party. Yet Bennett shows George, the representative member of this society, transformed idealistically by wartime. He refuses temptation in the shape of a lucrative contract to design munition factories, and enlists, at which the book ends, with George deciding 'There is something in this Army business!' and looking forward hopefully despite thoughts of Mons, and 'the idea of terror and cataclysm.'[24]

Margaret Drabble suggests that a clue to Bennett's reluctance to include in the novel the actual war that he had seen in France can be found in the disparity between 'his journal's bleak comments' on the War and what she sees as the 'patriotic, cheerful, false' tone of the propagandist articles he collected in *Over There* (1915).[25] Leaving his hero at the moment when he fully assumes the identity of a soldier is a way of squaring his commitment to the methods of a realist novelist with a reluctance to explore further. Bennett began the novel

---

22 *Times Literary Supplement* (23 January 1919), 43. The critic of the *Westminster Gazette* on the other hand, saw it not as part of a larger possible novel, but as two stories yoked together — the dispiriting story of the architect and the energised one of the recruit — which he did not feel to be connected.

23 *The Journal of Arnold Bennett* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1933), 619.

24 Arnold Bennett, *The Roll Call* (New York: Doran, 1918), 416.

25 *Arnold Bennett: A Biography*, 217.

in the autumn of 1916, after the Pyrrhic victory of the Somme, and the triumphant transformation of George Cannon into a soldier can be seen as a deliberate attempt to remind readers of the spirit of 1914; an alternative reading might be that Bennett knew that many readers would be as aware as he that the 'terror and cataclysm' would be real enough for George and his fellow-soldiers, and that some at least would read his enthusiasm as ironic. The ambiguity is not very satisfactory.

The Making of Soldiers

Literary novelists may have found it difficult to deal fully with the character of the soldier, but there was intense public curiosity, and some anxiety, about him, especially the civilian recruited by Kitchener for the New Army of volunteers. Donald Hankey, in his *Spectator* article 'An Experiment in Democracy', presented what many wanted to believe: 'For once a national ideal had proved stronger than class prejudice. In this matter of the war all classes were at one – at one not only in sentiment but in practical resolve.[26] Many, however, must have had reservations about such consoling generalisations. The fitness of British youth had been in doubt since the recruiting crisis of the Boer War; additionally, the industrial disputes of the early twentieth century had made many on the right question the patriotic commitment of the working-class, and some on the left question the rightness of fighting against foreign workers on behalf of their class enemies. Such doubts are the context of the wartime writings of Ian Hay and Patrick MacGill, who described, in notably different ways, the transformation of civilians into soldiers.

Both authors volunteered during the first few weeks of the War, and their books have much in common. Each tells the story of a group of soldiers from early training through to the 1915 Battle of Loos, in accounts that are lightly fictionalised; names are changed, and details are selective, but there is a framework of actual experience. Both were experienced writers who had already written successful books, but their war books originated in journalism,

[26] Reprinted in Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms* (London: Andrew Melrose Ltd, 1916), 25.

published as serials, almost as diaries, reporting from the army. Sometimes neither audience nor author would know whether the writer would be alive to write the next episode.

Hay joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and describes the training of officers and men through 'a long, laborious, sometimes heart-breaking winter'.[27] His articles first appeared in *Blackwood's*, a conservative monthly published in Edinburgh, and popular with the prosperous middle classes throughout Britain. Hay had published in *Blackwood's* before,[28] but his new articles were by-lined simply 'The Junior Sub', though Billy Little, the junior sub-lieutenant of the text, is not the narrator. The narrative voice of the text is unusual; this is an autobiography without the first person singular. There is no 'I' in the text; it is always 'we'. This is the autobiography of a unit, and the reader is implicitly invited to feel part of the 'we', and to identify with the fortunes of the unit.

When published in book form as *The First Hundred Thousand,* these *Blackwood's* articles became a best-seller,[29] for reasons that remain obvious. The book has a light touch and a pacey narrative, and it tells the reader of 1915 many things that he or she wants to know, about the training of soldiers and the techniques of trench warfare. It has skilful changes of tone; one chapter may be very serious, about the death of a recruit during training; the next may be light-hearted, describing the confusions of a night exercise.

The following extract demonstrates the book's tone, and some of the author's strategies. The officers are waiting to see when they will be drafted to France:

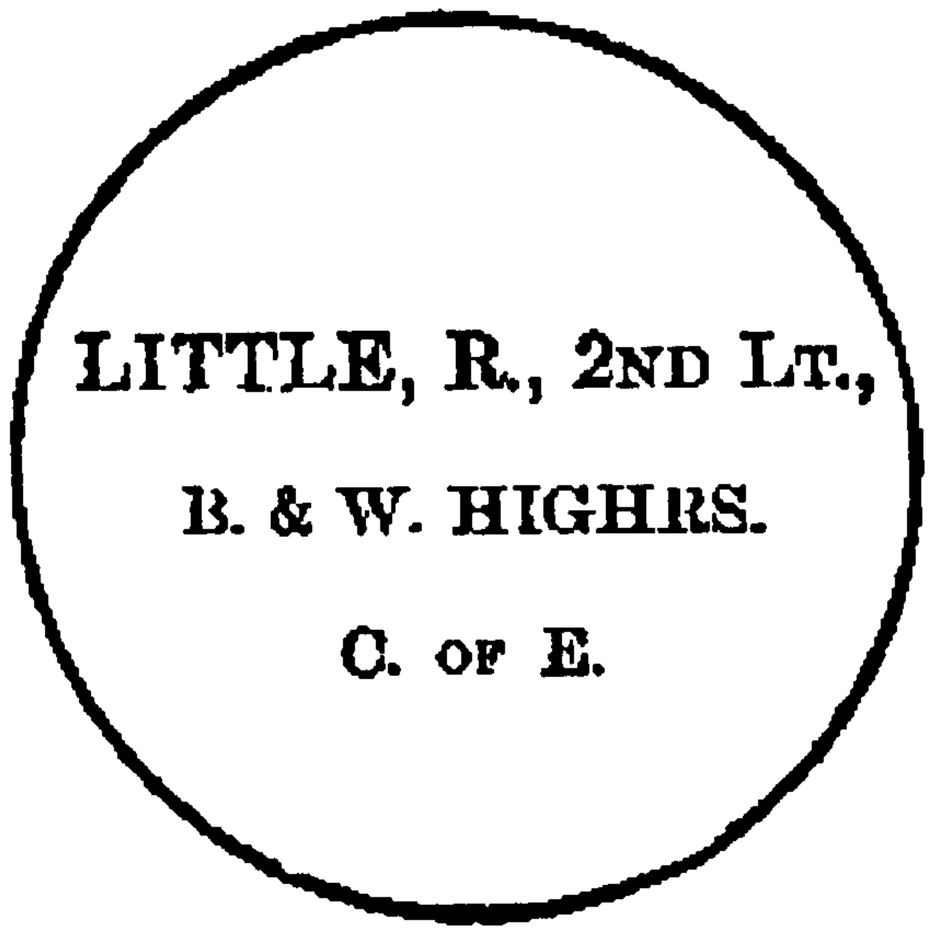
> To-day each of us was presented with a small metal disc. Bobby Little examined his curiously. Upon the face thereof was stamped, in ragged, irregular capitals—

---

[27] Ian Hay, *The First Hundred Thousand: Being the Unofficial Chronicle of a Unit of "K(1)"* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1915), 178.

[28] 'Ian Hay' was the pseudonym of John Hay Beith, whose pre-war writings were mostly about school life; the adoption of a pseudonym suggests that he wanted to make a distinction between his identity as writer and his identity as schoolmaster.

[29] My own copy is dated 1916, and is the eighth impression. E.W.Hornung wrote that Hay's were the only war books sought out by the readers of his Y.M.C.A. library in France (*Notes of a Camp Follower on the Western Front*, 170).



'What is this for?' he asked.

Captain Wagstaffe answered.

'You wear it round your neck,' he said.

Our four friends [...] regarded the humorist suspiciously.

'Are you rotting us?' asked Waddell cautiously.

'No, my son,' replied Wagstaffe, 'I am not.'

'What is it for, then?'

'It's called an Identity Disc. Every soldier on active service wears one.'

'Why should the idiots put one's religion on the thing?' inquired Master Cockerell, scornfully regarding the letters 'C. of E.' upon his disc.

Wagstaffe regarded him curiously.

'Think it over,' he suggested. [30]

This passage is typical of the book; it conveys military detail, it combines light slangy dialogue with a small reminder of danger and death — and the senior officer puts the younger one right, a pattern frequently repeated throughout the book. A soldier's education is constantly shown as a top-down process; information and ethos must come from above. The raw material of the division — truculent Glasgow Trades Unionists, as Hay often reminds us — need to learn new attitudes. The 'we' of the following passage has become sarcastically detached:

---

[30] *The First Hundred Thousand*, 51-2.

At home we are persons of some consequence, with very definite notions about the dignity of labour. We have employers who tremble at our frown; we have Trades Union officials who are at constant pains to impress upon us our omnipotence in the industrial world in which we live. We have at our beck and call a Radical M.P. who [...] informs us that we are the backbone of the nation and that we must on no account allow ourselves to be trampled upon by the effete and tyrannical upper classes.[31]

Hay manages to combine paternalist affection for his men with frequent insistence on their limitations. He presents them as simple souls, and gives them caricatured names (like Mucklewame and McOstritch). Some need to learn the 'habit of cleanliness'.[32]

Hay identifies totally with the army's project of converting individualistic citizens into obedient and efficient soldiers, and as an officer is prepared to suffer and make sacrifices in order to do so. He explains that he has the right to give orders because he takes orders himself. His own uncomplaining endurance of the discomforts of training entitles him to expect his subordinates to do the same; they too should lose their 'I' in the collective 'we'. In his books higher authority (despite the occasional imperfections of Army bureaucracy) finally gets things right. For example, he describes how the various recruits are sorted into appropriate jobs:

> But the great sifting and sorting machine into which we have been cast is shaking us all out into our appointed places. The efficient and authoritative rise to non-commissioned rank [....] The handy are absorbed into the transport, or become machine-gunners. The sedentary take post as cooks, or tailors, or officers' servants. The waster hews wood and draws water and empties swill-tubs. The great, mediocre, undistinguished majority merely go to stiffen the rank and file, and right nobly they do it. Each has his niche.[33]

---

[31] *The First Hundred Thousand*, 15.
[32] *The First Hundred Thousand*, 17.
[33] *The First Hundred Thousand*, 172.

The army sorts men almost magically, and does so by revealing the true natures lurking beneath peacetime identities; these true natures fit the army's scheme of things (and the finest nature, he reassures us, is that of 'the great, mediocre, undistinguished majority'). The clearest example of the Army's transformative power comes in the story of a truculent republican, Private McSlattery, who is 'grumbling mutiny' at having to go on an extra parade in front of the King – until glimpsing the person of King George converts him immediately into a fervent royalist.[34] Before the War, readers of *Blackwood's* had been given representations of the militant working man as a threat to social stability. Hay conveys the optimistic message that labour can be tamed and disciplined to work for the common good.

A similar optimism had marked Hay's pre-war writing. Formerly a science master at Fettes, the Scottish public school, he had scored a success with *The Lighter Side of School Life*, originally serialised in *Blackwood's Magazine* from June to October 1914. In November 1914, *Blackwood's* began to feature *The First Hundred Thousand.* The pseudonym changed, but there were strong similarities between the two series; the generic norms that governed Hay's writing of school life were transferred with remarkable ease to writing about the Army. *The Lighter Side of School Life* offers an entertaining sociology of life at a public school, mixing sharp insights with reassurance. As in *The First Hundred Thousand*, authority may be gently mocked, but is revered. A headmaster, we are told: 'knows how to stimulate the slacker, be he boy or master; and he keeps a sharp lookout to see that the willing horse does not overwork himself.' Like the officers of *The First Hundred Thousand*, 'He knows when to be terrible in anger, and when to be indescribably gentle'.[35]

In both series there is a similar attitude to the lower orders (schoolboys and private soldiers); they are given humorously odd names, and slotted into stereotyped categories (the Swot, the Butt, the Buffoon, etc.), but we are told that they are precious and mysterious ('Finally, all public schoolboys are

---

[34] *The First Hundred Thousand*, 19-25.
[35] Ian Hay, *The Lighter Side of School Life* (London: Blackwood, 1914), 32.

intensely reserved about their private abilities and deeper feelings.'[36])

Sometimes the parallel between school and army is made explicit:

> The prefect in a public school occupies the same position as the non-commissioned in the Army. He is promoted from the ranks; he enjoys privileges not available to his former associates; and he is made responsible to those above not merely for his own behaviour but for that of others. [37]

For readers of *Blackwood's*, therefore, the tonal change from peace to wartime would not have seemed disruptive. Hay's serial preached that the attitudes of working men would need to be transformed when they became soldiers; but its generic similarity with what had gone before implicitly offered reassurance that middle-class readers would not need to shed their own prejudices when considering the War.

The tone of *The First Hundred Thousand* darkens when the soldiers reach France:

> But the grim realities of war are coming home to us. Outside this farm stands a tall tree. Not many months ago a party of Uhlans arrived here, bringing with them a wounded British prisoner. They crucified him to that self-same tree, and stood round him till he died. He was a long time dying.[38]

Hay is re-telling an early version of the 'Crucified Canadian' legend, a potent part of the War's folklore. It seems to have had no basis in fact, but when a story is re-told as frequently as this one was, it clearly meets some need in the tellers and listeners. Hay explicitly uses it to justify his own aggressiveness: 'Some of us had not heard of Uhlans before. These have now noted the name, for future reference — and action.'[39] Hay's imagined enemy is excessive and cruel, whereas his own self-image is of reticence, order and control.

Where the self-image cannot be maintained, there will be a gap in the text, and the most obvious lacuna in Hay's wartime writings comes in his

---

36 *Lighter Side of School Life*, 226.

37 *Lighter Side of School Life*, 93.

38 *The First Hundred Thousand* , 199. Passages like this show that Hay's book offered its readers more than is suggested by Paul Fussell's description of it as a 'work of popular literature showing how much fun is to be had at the training camp.' *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 28.

39 *The First Hundred Thousand*, 199.

second series of *Blackwood's* articles (*Carrying On!).* Readers of these in book form [40] find only a slightly odd leap forward in time, as he goes from a description of preparations for the great Somme assault of 1916 to an enthusiastic account of the coming of the tank. Followers of the series in *Blackwood's* would have had a stronger sense of discontinuity; the articles stopped abruptly after May 1916, to reappear sporadically in 1917. There are several likely factors determining the break in publication, the most obvious being that Hay, as a serving officer, would have been very busy during the preparation and execution of the Somme offensive. The events of the Somme, however, would have been hard to express in the style that Hay had developed; the eventual partial success of the operation was won at a huge cost, and Hay's regiment took especially heavy casualties. The tone of the *Carrying On!* articles was bleaker than that of his earlier series, but adequate treatment of horror on such a scale would demand what Hay, when writing about school life, had deplored as 'the sort of realism which leaves nothing unphotographed'; it would require the author to touch on 'matters which are better not discussed, at any rate in a work of fiction.'[41] Hay recommences his series only when he has something encouraging to report to his audience — the arrival of the tank, Britain's secret weapon. This gives his series an optimistic closure, but it cannot fully disguise the gap at its heart.

Contrasting with Hay's book is the work of Patrick MacGill, another wartime best-seller. *The Amateur Army* and its sequels *The Red Horizon, The Brown Brothers* and *The Big Push* were first serialised in the *Daily Mail,* the most popular and populist daily paper of its day, conservative but typically taking up the cause of the common soldier against the authorities. Much of *The Amateur Army* covers the same ground as *The First Hundred Thousand*: the details of military routine, the confusions of combat training, and the comedy

---

40 This second series of articles was collected in book form as *Carrying On – After the First Hundred Thousand* (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1917).

41 *The Lighter Side of School Life*, 172. Hay disapproved of the tendency of some boys' fiction to deal frankly with 'intimate matters'. He explains: 'We are told that such matter should not be excluded from the text, because it is "true to life." So are the police reports in the Sunday newspapers; but we do not present files of these delectable journals to our sons and daughters – let us not forget the daughters: the sons go to school, but the daughters can only sit at home and read schoolboy stories — as Christmas presents.' (172)

of initiation, but from the point of view of an enlisted man, not an officer. The overall cheerfulness and optimism in this first book of the series are not dissimilar to Hay's, but there are subtexts that become stronger in the later books. *The Amateur Army* is a much more physical book than *The First Hundred Thousand*. Ian Hay has a great appetite for the trivia of military routine, but no relish for food, whereas MacGill's books are full of eating, drinking and smoking. Significantly, the meals, bottles and cigarettes are shared, and play an important part in the bonding of soldiers.

Where Ian Hay sees a unit being moulded by the benevolent guidance of the authorities, MacGill shows initiation into a community of equals, where men share with their comrades, and where one of the most important things a soldier learns is how to break the rules, or at any rate bend them. In *The Amateur Army*, MacGill explains admiringly the ruses by which some men are able to get away from camp for a weekend without a pass. In *The Red Horizon*, when the soldiers are in France the rule-breaking becomes frequent, almost routine, and is usually sociable — leaving a post to try and get some *vin rouge*, absconding with a friend to shoot some duck for dinner, or sharing a forbidden cigarette. In one incident, a corporal tries to enforce a No Smoking rule. The soldiers argue with him, and eventually the corporal lights up, too.[42] Later in the book, after a battle, leave to smoke is granted. 'To most of us it meant permission to smoke openly.'[43] Even medical orders can be over-ridden by human feeling; in one incident the narrator comes across a wounded man:

> 'Have you got any water to spare, chummy?' he asked.
>
> 'We've been told not to give water to wounded men,' I said.
>
> 'I know that,' he answered. But just a drop to rinse out my mouth. I've lain out between the lines all night...'
>
> I drew the cork from my water-bottle.[44]

The contrast between Hay's books and MacGill's is not explicable simply in terms of the differences between the two men's military rank, or of their backgrounds; just as Hay imported generic conventions from his writing about

---

[42] Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), 44.
[43] *The Red Horizon*, 211.
[44] *The Red Horizon*, 202-3.

school, so MacGill interpreted the War according to patterns found in his earlier accounts of working-class life. Born to rural poverty in Donegal, he had run away to Scotland at the age of fifteen, to work first as a potato-picker and later building railways. He had developed into a self-taught poet with *Songs of a Navvy* (1911), and after being adopted by literary notables, had written journalism for the *Daily Express* and published a best-selling semi-fictionalisation of his life, *Children of the Dead End,* before volunteering for the London Irish in 1914 at the age of twenty-four.[45]

MacGill's wartime accounts of working-class conviviality in difficult circumstances echo similar scenes in his peacetime book, such as this description of a group of farm-workers feasting in a reeking cow-byre:

> We boiled a pot of potatoes, and poured the contents into a wicker basket which was placed on the floor of the vault. Then all of us sat down together and ate our supper like one large family, and because we were very hungry did not mind the reeking midden behind us.[46]

In both peace and war, MacGill shows an existence where the poor help the poor, where thieving is an accepted part of life, and where unpromising characters can reveal unexpected talents. Tom MacGuire, for example, 'had just come out of gaol after serving six months because he shot the crow in an English public house [...] he was sitting reading an English translation of Schopenhauer.'[47] The continuities between the navvying life of *Children of the Dead End* and life in Kitchener's Army are many, and sometimes unexpected. (For example, MacGill explains how, when young, he lied about his age, in order to obtain a job on the railways – which suggests that some of the young volunteers who pretended to be eighteen to join the Army were continuing a standard practice, not doing something completely exceptional.) Like his war books, *Children of the Dead End* contains scenes of explicit violent horror, as

---

45 Owen Dudley Edwards, 'MacGill, Patrick (1890–1963)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53076, accessed 29 March 2008].

46 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1914), 76.

47 *Children of the Dead End* , 115. 'Shooting the crow' means ordering a whisky in a public house and drinking it before revealing that you cannot pay.

when a man is cut in half by a ballast engine ('Others pulled stray pieces of flesh from among the rods, bars and wheels of the engine.'[48]).

MacGill has, like Hay, carried the techniques and tropes of his pre-war writing into his wartime work, but there are two important differences. The first is that there is less fighting in the war books. *Children of the Dead End* is full of epic fights between itinerant labourers; the soldiers of *The Amateur Army* and *The Red Horizon* usually get along peacefully. The second difference is more significant. *Children of the Dead End* shows a strong antagonism towards priests, landlords, and employers; young Dermod's first act of self-assertion comes when he strikes his schoolmaster; a little later, as a young teenager, he sees a landlord by himself in a first-class carriage when twenty labourers are crowded into a third-class compartment.

> Then I knew what a gentleman really was. He was the monster who grabbed money from the people, who drove them out to the roadside, who took six ears of every seven ears of corn produced by the peasantry; the man who was hated by all men, yet saluted by most of the people when they met him.[49]

No such antagonism is expressed towards the officers in the war books, for whom MacGill often has a good word, especially when they are convivial; the colonel in *The Amateur Army* gains respect when he sings one of MacGill's songs at a camp concert. As the books progress, officers become increasingly marginal, part of the background, whilst MacGill's fellow enlisted men become more detailed as characters, and more precious to the narrator. The anti-clericalism of the earlier book is also replaced by nostalgic memories of 'a barefooted boy going over the hills of Corrymela to morning Mass, with his beads in his hand.'[50]

MacGill's work is not analysed in either of the most influential accounts of the shaping of literary perceptions of the War, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* or Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined*, yet we can see in his writing a clear early expression of what would much later become an

---

[48] *Children of the Dead End*, 130.
[49] *Children of the Dead End*, 30.
[50] *The Red Horizon*, 147.

influential way of perceiving the War and the soldiers who fought it. The books not only foreshadow one of the important war novels of the twenties (Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We*); they also anticipate significant late twentieth-century accounts. The army as a working-class community is an idea that underpins Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963), a text which has significantly affected popular understanding of the conflict, and whose influence has been regretted by some historians.[51] Soldiers are represented as comrades bonded by the pressure of war; within a historical process larger than themselves, they find meaning within small friendship groups; intelligent men sceptical for the most part of large-sounding political discourse fight because they are committed to one another. Even more than in Britain, this complex of ideas has been influential in Australia, where 'mateship' plays a crucial role in national self-understanding, and where the Great War experience (especially at Gallipoli) is at the heart of the national myth.[52]

There are clues even within MacGill's text that his account of harmonious masculine togetherness is not representative of the entire army; in *The Red Horizon*, having given a near-idyllic picture of his group of friends harmoniously reading together in their dugout, he writes:

> On the whole, the members of our section, divergent as the poles in civil life, agree very well. But the same does not hold good in the whole regiment; the public school clique and the board school clique live each in a separate world, and the line of demarcation between them is sharply drawn [....] In one, full of the odour of Turkish cigarettes, the spoken English is above suspicion; in another, stinking of regimental shag, slang plays skittles with our language. Only in No 3

---

51 'The play is not even serious enough to be called a travesty, yet from a Marxist viewpoint, Joan Littlewood's production has, allegedly, become dominant in history as well as drama in the cultural understanding of the war,' writes Brian Bond in *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 65). Dan Todman in *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, Hambledon and London, 2005) gives a more rounded account of the play's appeal and influence (102-110). The present writer still remembers with admiration the theatrical panache and emotional effect of the first production.

52 '[E]ver since the first ANZAC Day every Australian has recognised in our Army the traits that they regard as distinctively Australian — mateship and sacrifice.' General P. F. Leahy, Chief of the Australian Army, address on the occasion of the birthday of the Australian Army, 1 March 2006.

is there two worlds blent into one; our platoon officer says that we are a most remarkable section, consisting of literary men and babies. [53]

In *The Red Horizon* this aside only momentarily disturbs the general impression of social harmony under difficult conditions; as will be seen in Chapter Four, some post-war texts will take up friction within the Army as a major theme.

A contrasting perspective might come from Joanna Bourke, an analyst of military behaviour who sees male bonding, by which she means 'intimate, emotional interaction between men in which the individual identifies himself as an integral part of an all-male group'[54] as an important tool of the military authorities, because 'it was in the interests of military authorities to foster in servicemen a sense of group solidarity, a merging of the individual's identity with that of the battalion.'[55] She details how military regimens combined negative disciplines such as intimidation with positive reinforcement of group behaviour, but adds that 'young men expected war to heighten male bonding, but [...] wartime experiences placed too great a strain on this expectation.'[56] She explores the limits to male bonding, such as the lack of fraternisation between regular and territorial groups, and the conflict between groups from different classes and localities. On occasion, this could be a matter of sufficient concern to be recorded in Haig's diaries, which normally rarely touched on questions of the composition of units.[57] Where strong male bonding occurred, it could be turned against the Army, or against other groups. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau sees this as something especially likely to happen in the anonymous circumstances of trench warfare, which disempowered the individual; analysing the conditions favourable to the commission of war crimes in German-occupied France, Audoin-Rouzeau singles out small-group solidarity as a major factor in enabling and legitimising rape:

---

53 *The Red Horizon*, 94

54 Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996), 127.

55 *Dismembering the Male*, 128.

56 *Dismembering the Male*, 145.

57 On 24 June 1918. 'Some Irishmen in KOSB. Latter regiment quelled disturbances in Dublin before the war! Highlanders in Fusilier battalions anxious to wear their kilts again! Some are anxious as to the meaning of this measure!' Douglas Haig, *War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, eds. Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005) 423.

> À lire de pres les dépositions des victimes, ce sont bien ces groupes primitifs de "camarades" que l'on voit à l'oeuvre dans les viols collectifs, commis à deux, à trois, à quatre, rarement davantage, lors l'été 1914. Ce sont ces groupes qui se soudent autour du corps des femmes humiliées et brutalisées, devenues objet de solidarité et de communication entre soldats. [58]

This is not to suggest that there are war crimes concealed by the benign conviviality of MacGill's text, or that he and his friends would have been led into less innocuous ways of asserting themselves than organising unofficial banquets. What it does suggest, however, is that small-group male bonding is an institution both potent and potentially dangerous. By suppressing any acknowledgement of its darker side, MacGill avoids examining a major factor in the sociology and psychology of the War.

In *The Great Push*, MacGill, now a stretcher-bearer describes the London Irish fighting in the battle of Loos; there are frank descriptions of scenes of suffering that have clearly disturbed the author.('The dead lying on the fields seem to ask, "Why has this been done to us?"'[59]) After this, his writing becomes more fragmentary, and far less positive in tone. The original group of comrades has been destroyed, and pieces like 'Fear' of 1916 concentrate on individual, not communal experience: 'I walked slowly, my eyes fixed steadily on the field ahead, for I did not desire to trip over the dead, who lay everywhere.'[60] Instead of the cheerful fellow-soldiers of the earlier writing MacGill now describes the desperate and the disturbed:

> A youngster named Lamond rushed forward with his rifle, fired and missed. Still advancing, he slipped a round into the breach of his weapon, shoved the rifle close to the German's forehead and pulled the trigger. The upper part of the man's head was blown off.

---

58 'Reading through the depositions of victims, it is these primitive groups of "comrades" which one sees at work in gang- rapes, committed by pairs, by threes, by fours, rarely more, after the summer of 1914. These are the groups which are welded together by means of the bodies of humiliated and brutalised women, which have become objects of solidarity and communication between soldiers.' Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'Enfant de L'Ennemi(1914-1918):Viol, Avortement, Infanticide pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris, Aubier, 1995), 76.

59 *The Great Push*, iii.

60 Patrick MacGill, 'Fear', *Land and Water* (13 July 1916), 17.

> The boy came running and shouting 'Let me into the trench! I've killed a man, killed him! It was wrong. I knew as soon as I done it. Let me get back into the trench!'[61]

The attempts by Hay and MacGill to adapt their peacetime genres to documentary descriptions of war were at first successful; training could be realised in such terms. When it came to battle, however, Hay can only avoid the violence that would threaten the literary conventions on which his work is built; MacGill describes the violence frankly, but then becomes unable to maintain the tone that had sustained his previous work.

The Regulation of War Enthusiasm

Stories presenting the central myth of the War, that calm and restrained British soldiers had the ability to defeat unrestrained and rapacious German ones, did not by any means always promote a mindless jingoism, and could sometimes imply the need for restraining war enthusiasm. Although implying a full support for the project of the War, such stories could express a concern that the sudden dominance of warlike values was unsettling and destructive of social stability. The soldier, although crucial, is frequently a marginal figure in such stories, because they prefer not to question his role directly; instead, they examine excessive, unregulated enthusiasm in classes with whom the soldier is implicitly or explicitly contrasted — usually young boys and women.

A clear example comes from a 1914 story in *The Magnet*. Boys' papers were quick to adapt their existing genres to deal with the War, and Frank Richards must have written 'Looking for Alonzo' very soon after the declaration of War. In this story, Peter Todd, the most serious student in the Greyfriars Remove, is worried. His cousin Alonzo had been in Switzerland before the War, and, oblivious of the international situation, had sent a telegram saying that he would return to England via France. Todd realises that this means travelling through occupied territory and, having always taken responsibility for his less intelligent cousin, decides to undertake a wild scheme of rescue. Vernon-Smith, the daredevil 'Bounder of the Remove' offers

---

[61] *Ibid.*

to accompany Todd on his journey, purely for the fun of it. The two of them enter France with an old passport and several lies; they hire a car and a chauffeur who will take them into the danger zone. Todd begins to understand the situation's seriousness:

> He was brave, and he was resolute. But he did not share the utter recklessness of Vernon-Smith. The more danger thickened around them, the more thoroughly the Bounder seemed to enjoy the situation. His eyes were sparkling now, and he hummed a gay tune as the car sped onwards. But Peter Todd was silent.[62]

Meanwhile Harry Wharton the responsible Form Captain has persuaded Colonel Wharton, his uncle, that the two of them should go to France and rescue the pair. Other classmates want to accompany them but Wharton will take no one else without parental permission.

In the battle zone, Todd and Smith are welcomed at a local inn ('The word "English" was enough. Immediately the looks of the peasants cleared.') until Germans, led by an officer 'huge and muscular in form, his face heavy, his expression bullying, his eyes small and narrow and glittering,' arrives and (as in 'Patriotic Paul' and the Sapper story) threateningly demands food from the innkeeper. The English boys are discovered, and their papers are demanded.

> Vernon-Smith handed over his passport. The German captain scanned it, and then tore it into pieces, and threw the fragments on the sanded floor.[63]

After some fruitless expostulation, 'Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth and was silent. He understood how it was that German troops were sometimes fired upon by civilians. A man with a weapon was not likely to stand very much of this.' German soldiers bring in such a *franc-tireur*, and the boys see him summarily shot; the officer promises that they will be next. As spies, they will be shot at dawn. Harry Wharton and his uncle arrive, followed by a platoon of French soldiers, so that all are saved – just in the nick of time.

---

62 'Frank Richards' (Charles Hamilton), 'Looking for Alonzo', *The Magnet* (9:352, 7 November 1914), 18.

63 'Looking for Alonzo', 20.

Under the sensational clichés and the blatant stereotyping, this story manages to give its young readers an interesting and fairly sophisticated message about the War. The two boys who venture alone into the war zone are Todd, the most serious, and Vernon-Smith, the most foolhardy of the Greyfriars schoolboys. Frank Richards has recognised the potent dual appeal of the War — to the sense of morality, and to the thirst for adventure (a combination that may have taken many *Magnet* readers to the recruiting office, boldly lying about their age). The impetuous venture is only saved by the intervention of the rational Harry Wharton, who goes into the war zone sensibly, under the authority of Colonel Wharton. The *Magnet*'s boy readers are being told that war enthusiasm is something that needs regulation.[64]

In magazine stories for adults, the excessive wartime enthusiasm of children is often a source of humour. Two examples can be found in the *Windsor Magazine* for 1916. 'The Anti-Huns' mocks a secret society of children who take hostage the son of a local man whom they assume to be German, [65] while in 'The Dachshund',[66] children strike absurd attitudes against a German breed of dog. The naivety of the children in these stories is not unlike that of the young woman in the 1914 story 'The Army and Araminta', described in Chapter One.

A contrast between the reticent efficiency of a true soldier and the excessive (and inauthentic) behaviour of a woman is at the heart of E.M.Delafield's 1918 novel *The War Workers*. The book's most memorable character is Miss Vivian, the forceful and determined manager of a Red Cross depot, who is widely admired for putting war service above all personal

---

64 Throughout the War, the *Magnet*'s stories often showed a thoughtful resistance to excessive or unthinking wartime enthusiasm. Particularly notable is 'A Case of Conscience' (26 October 1918) which treats a conscientious objector with some sympathy.

65 Laurence North, "The Anti-Huns", *Windsor Magazine* (November 1916). The local policeman and the children's father break up the meeting, and the conspirators are chastised for their activities, and made to write letters of humble apology to the man that they have maligned. The twist in the story comes in the last lines, however: 'The letters were addressed to the father of Montague Goldman, Esq. What the Anti-Huns do not know is that their penal apologies were never forwarded.' In other words, the story implies a balanced judgment, that children must be restrained from taking war enthusiasm too far, but that adults can be frugal in forwarding apologies to people with Jewish/German names.

66 Ethel Turner, 'The Dachshund' *Windsor Magazine* (September, 1916), 664.

considerations.[67] Delafield makes us aware that Miss Vivian is constantly aware of the effect that she is having on others; she stays longer in the office than is necessary, to impress others with her tireless industry, and consistently refuses lunch so that others will marvel at the sacrifices she is making. She makes herself a monster of self-advertising dedication, putting the war effort before the needs of her dying father, and the novel contrasts her with Trevellyan, the authentic soldier, who does not let 'being a soldier' become his only identity.

One reading of *The War-Workers* would be that it is a socially conservative book, since the woman who steps out of the traditional female role is held up to ridicule, while Miss Jones, the ladylike clergyman's daughter, predictably marries the hero. Doubtless many early readers interpreted it that way. Other readings are possible, however. Miss Vivian disregards traditionally female activities, and dismisses the hostel housekeeper for perceived inefficiency, even though Mrs Bullivant has the nurturing skills that her young charges need, and keeps the hostel homely and convivial. The book can therefore be read less as an assault on an ambitious woman than as an assertion of traditionally female social and caring values in times that relegate these to a lower status.

The desirability of regulating war enthusiasm is also implicit in many stories that take the White Feather campaign as their subject. The meaning of a white feather had been culturally defined by texts like A.E.W.Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902), in which a man refusing a military duty was presented with feathers by his fiancée and others, and then redeemed his reputation by feats of courage, performed anonymously.[68] It was reinforced in September

---

[67] According to Delafield's biographer , the character of Miss Vivian was closely based on Georgiana Buller, who ran the Devonshire Red Cross Society at Exeter, where Delafield had spent time as a V.A.D. worker. Violet Powell writes: 'Elizabeth admitted that she had got into trouble over *The War-Workers*, and, even more candidly, that she deserved to do so [....] the Buller family were still wary of Delafield when they met socially years later.' (Violet Powell, *The Life of a Provincial Lady: A Study of E.M.Delafield and her Works* [London: 1988, 36]).

[68] In the years between 1902 and 1914, Mason's book inspired many imitators. In 1908, for example, the two most prestigious English boys' papers, *The Boy's Own Paper* and *The Captain* both ran serials called *The White Feather*. The more interesting of these is the serial in *The Captain*, an early piece of fiction by P.G.Wodehouse, which transfers the pattern of *The Four Feathers* to a public school. Sheen, a scholarly sixth-former, avoids involvement in a fight between a group of his fellow students and tough boys from the town. He is sent to Coventry by the school, and, facing that silence, redeems himself by recognising his fear, secretly learning to

1914 when retired Admiral Charles Penrose Fitzgerald organised women in Folkestone to hand out white feathers to men not in uniform. This was reported in the press and the custom spread quickly. Arnold Bennett's story, 'The White Feather: A Sketch of English Recruiting' appeared while the craze was still popular, and is typical of the many texts critical of the craze. Its hero, Cedric Rollinson, is a twenty-nine year old man with a wife and children, making his career in manufacturing. When war breaks out, his company posts a notice saying that any employee enlisting will have his place kept open, while the company will pay his family the difference between his soldier's pay and his usual wage. Inspired by this, Rollinson decides that he has skills necessary in an officer. He tells his wife and 'In a moment they both knew that the matter was decided. He must go [....] His wife cried and started to prepare things for him.'[69]

His application seems to be going well, until he speaks to Mr Hawker Maffick, a director of the firm who had shown his patriotism by writing sarcastic newspaper advertisements about 'shirkers';[70] Rollison's suggestion gets a chilly reception. The firm is willing to make up the pay of manual workers, but not of a manager whose salary is significantly larger; if Rollinson enlisted, therefore, his wife and children would face hardship. Forced to choose between his country and his family, he does not enlist. That evening, on the way home, three smartly dressed girls bar his way. One stuffs a white feather into his waistcoat.

> 'That's all you're short of, you Koward! Why don't you enlist?'
>
> And off the trio went laughing. This was the latest sport of bright and pretty creatures in London.[71]

---

box, and achieving honour for the school in the Public Schools boxing championship at Aldershot, before the approving eyes of the military. Like Mason's Harry Faversham, he proves himself by his own efforts, pursued in secrecy and silence.

69 Arnold Bennett, 'The White Feather: A Sketch of English Recruiting', *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (19 September 1914), 13.

70 The Maffick family were invented by H.G.Wells in 'The War to End War', where they represent all that is worst in the prosperous classes of Britain, 'the most pampered and least public-spirited of any stratum in the community'. Remembering the Boer War, Wells accuses this class of hoarding, profiteering and selfishness during wartime, after which he predicts that it would, like the crowds who had celebrated the relief of Mafeking with excess, 'maffick at the victories it has done its best to spoil'. H.G.Wells, *The War That will End War* (London: Frank and Cecil Parker, 1914), 22.

71 'The White Feather', 14. The spelling of 'Koward' may be a misprint, and is not used in the

Bennett's story is very typical of the white feather tales written at this time. The man wants to enlist, and the women who assume he does not are mistaken about him. Bennett here insists on the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate war enthusiasm. Those who go in for easy gestures (the newspaper advertisements, the white feather) are revealed as shallow in comparison with the man who has the real soldierly qualities. Similar treatments of the theme can be found in more popular culture. A story called 'The White Feather' fills the *Union Jack* magazine for 26 December 1914. In this, 'a girlish figure wearing a badge of some sort on her breast' sees a young man wearing tweed and a heavy overcoat. Her mother, sensing the young man's 'troubled look', tries to stop her, but the girl says: "'I don't care, mother [....] I think it's a shame that any healthy young man should be lounging here while his countrymen are training themselves, ready to meet the enemy..." and the scrap of white was thrust into his buttonhole.'[72] The insensitive girl does not know that the young man is desperate to enlist, but has been prevented by his father.

Another variation appeared in a West End play, *The Man who Stayed at Home* (1915), a comedy thriller so popular that it was later turned into both novel and film. Christopher Brent, its protagonist, is apparently a facetious and idle dilettante, but the audience know he is really a spy. The scene that made the biggest impact is one where an earnest young woman gives him a white feather; he cheerfully uses it to clean his pipe. He chaffs her, and she responds with dignity (in the novelized version):

> 'Mr. Brent,' replied Daphne, drawing herself up, 'you little know me.'
> 'My dear girl.' replied the young man, dropping his pose and turning slightly away with a shrug of the shoulders, 'if you aren't careful, you'll find that nobody will know you.'[73]

His implication is that giving a white feather is a breach of etiquette, and that good manners should take precedence over war enthusiasm. Similar

---

American publication of the story, in *Collier's Magazine* (10 October 1914).

[72] *Union Jack* (26 December 1914), 1-2.

[73] Lechmere Worrall and J.E.Harold Terry, *The White Feather* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1915), 24. *The White Feather* was the name under which the play was sometimes performed, especially in America.

stories show a woman presenting a man with a white feather, to discover later that he has a V.C., or is wounded and is convalescing before returning to France.[74] Often, but not always, the woman is shamed by recognition that she was wrong.

Where Mason's *The Four Feathers* had shown a soldier acting in an inappropriate way, shamed for it and seeking redemption, the implication of these wartime stories is quite the opposite. In them we see a man who is apparently lacking in military virtue, and accused for it, but it is the accuser, not the man, who is shamed. The implication is that any British man is, despite appearances, a soldier at heart, and the stories often convey considerable hostility to the woman who shows her blindness to his latent heroism by presenting feathers, and therefore stepping outside her proper sphere. This hostility that could be linked to male anxiety about the wartime strategies of the suffragette movement. From September 1914, Mrs Pankhurst drew loud attention to the fact that some women were doing a great deal for the war effort, while some men were not, calling into question the gendered basis on which the right to full citizenship was awarded. She advocated 'War Service for All' — conscription for men and compulsory war work for women.

> The least that men can do is that every man of fighting age should prepare himself to redeem his word to women, and to make ready to do his best, to save the mothers, the wives and daughters of Great Britain from outrage too horrible even to think of.[75]

There may be only slight exaggeration in the account of the pacifist Sylvia Pankhurst when she caricatures the war efforts of her mother and Christabel:

> Mrs Pankhurst toured the country making recruiting speeches. Her supporters handed the white feather to every young man they encountered wearing civilian dress, and bobbed up at Hyde Park meetings with placards, 'Intern Them All'.[76]

---

[74] As in M. McD. Bodkin, 'The White Feather' (*Women at Home*, August 1917).

[75] *The Suffragette*, 23 April 1915, 25.

[76] Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffrage Movement* (London: Longmans,1931), 594. The wartime campaigns of the Pankhursts are discussed fully in Nicoletta Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women*

It would be wrong to think that the suffragettes' participation in the movement was more than a small part of a far wider phenomenon. Probably most distributors of white feathers were teenage girls, as described by Angela Woollacott in her article on 'Khaki Fever'. The outbreak of war led to a huge interest in soldiers among girls, who sometimes became 'aggressive and overt' in their attention to the military and even hunted in packs; Woolacott describes 'Colonials running for their lives to escape a little company of girls.'[77] These young soldier-worshippers may seem very different from suffragettes suspicious of male power, but as Woolacott says, 'This assertive behaviour by young working-class women threatened a subversion of the gender as well as of the moral order.'[78] What is significant about the involvement of the suffragettes is that it made explicit what was otherwise unspoken — women were claiming the right to inform males of their duty, and were demanding that they fulfill the duty implied in the restriction of full citizenship and the franchise to males, the obligation to defend their womenfolk. The stories about the white feather campaign that appeared in magazines and elsewhere countered to this claim, labelling the women who have over-stepped the bounds as uncontrolled, and as quite ignorant of the men's essential natures, which were defined as comfortingly military.

John Buchan and J.B.Morton

Of the prose written for a large audience during the War, little survived its time or entered the popular canon. War stories by Sapper and Edgar Wallace may have remained in print, but were overshadowed by more popular works by the same authors. Bruce Bairnsfather's 'Old Bill' character seems to have retained a hold on popular affection for many years, but it was a

---

and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) and Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

77 Angela Woollacott, ' "Khaki Fever" and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Morality on the British Home Front in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 29 (1994), 325-47.

78 ' "Khaki Fever" and its Control', 326.

diminishing one, and depended on his encountering the peacetime world, and becoming increasingly detached from the war that produced him.[79]

The exception to this is the one new popular genre to be developed during the War, the type of espionage thriller pioneered by John Buchan. There had, of course been thrillers before the War, and Buchan himself had experimented with the form of what he called the 'shocker' in *The Power House* (1912), but what he created in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and its successors was something new, and would be extremely influential, notably on the twenties thrillers of Sapper and Dornford Yates. The key elements of these thrillers are a manly hero surrounded by 'men of his totem' who work together as a united team, and a closely described battle with a physical environment as well as with a villain of the type defined by Gertrude Himmelfarb: 'He is not a fallen gentleman, but a fallen man, the personification of evil. He dabbles in black magic rather than sex, seeks not money but power, and trafficks in the secrets of the soul as much as those of the nation.'[80]

Richard Hannay is not a vividly characterised hero (being less individual than Edward Leithen of *The Power House*, for example.) Richard Usborne describes him as 'a stolid, brave, rather lucky man' who had 'no vices, and no attractive stupidities even'.[81] His understated first-person narrative is reticent about himself, and his character is revealed almost entirely in action, especially in his quick thinking as he responds to challenges, often by the assumption of disguise.[82] *The Thirty-Nine Steps* establishes his sane steadfast courage, which contrasts with the 'white fanatic heat'[83] burning in the eyes of his opponent. He has precisely the qualities of the controlled responsible soldier, and his early readers would not have been surprised by the novel's last sentences:

---

79 See Tonie and Valmai Holt, *In Search of the Better 'Ole: A Biography of Captain Bruce Bairnsfather* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2001).

80 Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'John Buchan, the Last Victorian' in *Victorian Minds* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 268.

81 Richard Usborne, *Clubland Heroes* (London: Constable, 1953), 106.

82 In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* alone, he becomes in succession a milkman, a road-mender and a chauffeur.

83 John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay* (London: Penguin, 1992), 103.

> I joined the New Army the first week, and owing to my Matabele experience got a captain's commission straight off. But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki.[84]

By the time of *Greenmantle* (1916) he has become Major Hannay, having spent a year like Ian Hay, as 'a busy battalion officer, with no other thought than to hammer a lot of raw stuff into good soldiers', feeling pride as he takes them 'over the parapets on that glorious and bloody 25th September' at Loos, a battle he describes with gruff euphemism as 'no picnic'.[85] For the great adventure of the novel, however, Buchan takes him away from the sphere of collective action, to the Middle East and an adventure where individual initiative and action can have free rein, though returning him at the end, to bring the lateral thinking demonstrated elsewhere to bear on the Western Front. Much the same pattern is repeated in *Mr Standfast* (1919). It is no wonder that *Greenmantle* was popular reading among soldiers, since it offered a vision of escape, not to safety but to the release of decisive action.

Buchan offered a fantasy so anchored by physical detail that it read like reality; by 1918, writers in other genres were also beginning to develop ways of integrating the War into satisfactory works of literature. As will be discussed in the next chapter, writers such as Sheila Kaye-Smith and Arnold Bennett were writing novels that deviated from the standard presentation of the soldier, and in that year too Enid Bagnold published her lightly fictionalised nursing memoir, *A Diary Without Dates* (1918) which, as Claire Tylee has written, 'recreates her gradual, tactful exploration of the interface between the physically efficient nursing-system and the patients' inner encounters with pain and their own death.'[86] Sharing Bagnold's humanity and concern for the ordinary soldier is J.B. Morton's *The Barber of Putney* (published early in 1919). This book does not challenge orthodox representations of the soldier, but traces the War experience of a decent average man, and his survival with mind and integrity intact. It also contrasts

---

84 *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, 103.
85 John Buchan, *Greenmantle*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay* (London: Penguin, 1992), 109.
86 Claire Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 190.

this understated and responsible soldier with a more flamboyantly heroic type, to show why the former is more fittingly celebrated as the hero of this war.

The book begins with what its first readers would have recognized as a deliberately understated version of Christian's leave-taking at the start of *The Pilgrim's Progress*:[87]

> 'So long, old girl! So long, Steve! Keep the pot boiling.'
>
> Tim Henrick had kissed his wife and shaken hands with his assistant, who was sharpening a razor; then he had turned his back on the barber's shop, and on Putney.[88]

Tim's pilgrimage will be different from that of the protagonist in a conversion narrative like Locke's *The Rough Road*, as he will not be radically transformed by his experiences. He does not especially need to be transformed, since he begins the novel with no obvious faults of character, with a successful small business of his own, with a wife who loves him, and with no major dissatisfactions in his life. We are not told why he enlists, but it does not seem to be because of external pressure; he is doing what hundreds of thousands of others are doing. Though clearly characterized, he can stand as a decent lower-middle-class everyman. His pre-war job as a barber, insisted on in the book's title, reminds us that he has been the reverse of warlike, a member of a nurturing profession.

Morton takes Tim through the various stages of initiation into Army life, starting with the attentions of the regimental barber who 'cropped his hair, in a vigorous manner that hurt all there was of the barber in Tim's soul; for he was a barber with a Putney reputation.'[89] Tim has to learn the Army's ways, but the process is not entirely a top-down one; much as in MacGill's accounts of training: 'Everybody helped someone — for these were the days when a whole Army was learning, officers and men.'[90] There follows a series of educative experiences: training, the passage to France, the journey up the line, the sight of a dead man, the experience of battle, the death of a friend, the setbacks of

---

[87] Paul Fussell notes the frequency with which *The Pilgrim's Progress* is referred to in Great War literature; he calls it 'the one book everybody knew.' (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, 138.)
[88] J.B.Morton, *The Barber of Putney* (London: Philip Allan,1919), 1.
[89] *The Barber of Putney*, 2.
[90] *The Barber of Putney*, 4.

March 1918, and so on. The narrative voice is not Tim's, but gives voice to what he does not articulate; when he reaches France, for example, he can only say 'Coo – fancy this!' but the narrator is able to hint at the emotion behind this inarticulacy:

> That night in his tent Tim crouched on his blankets and wrote, by the light of a stump of candle, his first field post-card. It said that he was well and that a letter followed at the first opportunity. When he blew his candle out he could not sleep for some time. 'And I was a barber,' kept bobbing through his thoughts, like a refrain.[91]

The field postcard, with its multiple choices between standard phrases, becomes a symbol of Tim's lack of an adequate vocabulary to deal with his new experience — but that lack of vocabulary is itself an index of the strangeness and challenge of the experience, and the complexity and depth of the feelings that it arouses. Tim learns, experiences and grows as the War progresses; although this is not a book about a man radically transformed by war, it shows that such transformations are possible. The change that can occur in characters as apparently unmanly as Locke's Marmaduke Trevor in *The Rough Road* is in Morton's book a cause not for moralising, but for wonder:

> Blokes who collected stamps and caterpillars, sort of coves that was frightened to pat a bull-dog, why they do things that beat anything the old highwayman chaps and smugglers do in the storybooks.[92]

Morton shows Tim gradually inducted into more difficult experiences, especially during the German March Offensive of 1918, culminating in a face-to-face struggle with a German very like himself. Any changes in him are unapparent to anyone else, except perhaps his wife. His experience has all been internal, and if there has been spiritual growth, it has been on his own terms, not on any insisted upon by the author.

This novel presents the ugliness of war quite graphically, but it is not a denunciation of those who asked men to fight; it therefore belongs to a genre that some later critics find hard to appreciate. Peter Thomson, writing from a Marxist perspective, believes that 'To a reader in the 1990s, the bad faith of

---

91 *The Barber of Putney*, 19-20.
92 *The Barber of Putney*, 23.

J.B.Morton's *The Barber of Putney* is palpable.' Noting Morton's 'Harrow and Oxford' education, he claims that 'Morton's ignorance of the people about whom he writes is, however sentimentally camouflaged, an expression of unconscious contempt'.[93] By mentioning Harrow and Oxford, Thomson draws attention away from the fact that Morton enlisted not as an officer, but as a private soldier; many of Tim's experiences are clearly Morton's own.[94]

Morton is clearly aware of the possible dangers of condescension, and of the gap between the educated narrative voice and the voices of the ordinary soldiers; he explores the difference through a character representing some aspects of himself: O'Hanlon, an educated man and a poet, 'struck by the strangeness of it all – the popular songs, the letter home, the drinks, the swearing',[95] who gradually earns his place in the community of soldiers. In a key chapter, 'Just Routine', O'Hanlon, now an N.C.O., has to take a squad to do 'about the most unpleasant job that can come a soldier's way', clearing 'bodies and fragments of bodies and splintered wood and mud."[96] The job is done, and Morton makes the horror, and its effect on Tim, very clear:

> His spade was caught in a piece of clothing, but there was something all mixed up with it [....] He tried to lift the spade, but something came with it, a hideous shapeless mass. A bloated rat moved away as Tim shook the spade from side to side [...] He was cold now and weak, and then suddenly hot.[97]

Tim thinks, 'Suppose I'm sensitive,' but then wonders about O'Hanlon. 'Surely he must be worse. Weren't poets sensitive devils? Yet O'Hanlon managed all right.' But then Morton tells us: 'O'Hanlon's nails had bitten into the palms of his hands and, in a dark corner, he was retching.'[98] The point is

---

93 Peter Thomson, *Mother Courage and her Children (Plays in Production series)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17. Thomson chooses Morton's novel to write about because it was republished by Penguin in 1934, the same year that Brecht wrote *Mother Courage*, an attack on the lower-middle class virtues celebrated by Morton.

94 Many details have the ring of personal experience; this one, for example, from the period of training: '[A]fter the first few weeks he once made one big blunder. He forgot how to fix bayonets. He became flurried, and then paralysed. "Didn't half get chewed up," he said afterwards. "Just couldn't move my hands, not a blinking inch."'(5).

95 *The Barber of Putney*, 164. In the 1934 revised edition, O'Hanlon's name is changed to 'Eccles', perhaps because Morton wanted to avoid the Irish connotations of the earlier choice of name.

96 *The Barber of Putney*, 215.

97 *The Barber of Putney*, 216.

98 *The Barber of Putney*, 219.

not that O'Hanlon is more sensitive, but that he finds it more difficult to cope with the disgusting horrors of war, because less rooted in common-sense reality than Tim and Curly. The sense of social difference is explored and dramatised when Morton has Tim's wife meet O'Hanlon and Grania, his fiancée, in London. The two women become friendly, but: 'They never lost a touch of self-consciousness. Grania was afraid of seeming to be condescending. Meg was afraid of seeming to realize condescension.'[99]

O'Hanlon dies with a heroic gesture: 'Tim looked and saw on a mound of earth where the trench wall had fallen in, O'Hanlon; saw him raise his arm. Rifle pointing skywards he shouted, twice, the name of the regiment.'[100] His imagination inspires the poet to his fine gesture, and it kills him; the strength of Tim and Curly, by contrast, is that their imaginations are useful to them, but do not dominate them. To offset the unpleasantness of the trenches in the difficult last months of the war, Tim and his friend Curly indulge themselves with a pastoral dream:

> 'I saw the sort o' place you want,' said Curly. 'Long time ago, on leave, I ran across it. Rum little cottage, on a country road; seemed to 'ave been dropped there an' kind of forgotten, as 'ow you might say. It 'ad a smallish garden with bags o' different coloured flowers, all the colours of the flamin' rainbow [....] It 'ad a field at the back where cows were swishing their tails.'[101]

When the War is over, though, Tim resists this unrealistic fantasy, and goes back to exactly where he began, to real life and his barber's shop. Marking this difference between the poet and the barber is not contempt, as Peter Thomson would imply, but a recognition of complementary virtues in the two types of men; the elite education has fostered in O'Hanlon a romanticism that is both his strength and his weakness, while Tim Henrick's lower-middle class upbringing has inculcated within him the steadfastness and coping ability that help him to survive. Unlike Brecht, who mocks his characters' illusions of agency in a cruel world, Morton allows his character modestly to flourish, and

---

99 *The Barber of Putney*, 203.
100 *The Barber of Putney*, 293-4.
101 *The Barber of Putney*, 305-6.

suggests that the petit-bourgeois virtues so distasteful to the German modernist are the ones that can bring him through the War both morally unscathed and alive.[102]

In 1934 Morton gave the book a preface critical of recent war books that attempted (in his deliberately controversial words): 'to persuade the young that the war was "futile"; that those who fought were silly dupes, swept away by emotional appeal; that nobody knew what it was about; that nobody can say who was guilty of beginning it all; and so on.' Fifteen years after writing the novel, he states that: 'I see now that my book has a moral. It is this. The more you insist on the agonies and tortures and filth of modern warfare, the more honour must you pay to men who endured these things.'[103] In 1919 this had not been a point that needed insisting upon, and the reader was left free to choose his or her own moral for Morton's story — that a decent man can survive the worst, perhaps, or that the inarticulate have endured as much as the articulate, and have felt as deeply. Whatever the moral, it has not been forced on the protagonist. Unlike the middlebrow moralities, or stories such as D.H. Lawrence's 'England, My England', this text does not enlist the power of the War to bully its hero into a new understanding, or an altered way of life.

The responsible unspectacular soldier would still appear in fiction after the War, but his meaning would change. Rather than symbolising the whole war effort, as he does in much wartime literature, he will come, in texts such as Hutchinson's *If Winter Comes* and Ford's *Parade's End* tetralogy, to represent what the War could have been; writers will contrast the decent soldier with the men in power, either at home or in the Army, who share neither his principles nor his stability.

---

[102] If condescension in an author means showing off that he understands the character better than the character does himself, this is surely the essence of Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, or alienation technique.

[103] J.B.Morton, 'Introduction', *The Barber of Putney*, 2nd edition. (London: Philip Allan, 1934), ix.

Chapter Three
Outside the Consensus

Not all wartime representations of the soldier were of the embodiment of decency, responsibility and control described in the previous chapter. There were, for example, many humorous texts in which the private soldier was represented as amiably stupid. Two representative specimens are *Kitchener Chaps* (1915) by A. Neil Lyons, which adapted the affectionately condescending tone of his pre-war books (like *Arthur's (1908)*, about a London coffee-stall and its cheery Cockney customers) to soldiers enlisting in the New Army, and W. A. Darlington's fantasy, *Alf's Button*, serialised in *The Passing Show* magazine in 1917. In a story like 'The Mutiny in Sludge Lane', Lyons's typical private soldier is 'a sniffing, blinking boy. God how he sniffed! God how he blinked!' [1] and Darlington definitely gives the view from above of his gormless privates who become possessed of a magic brass button, in one of the few popular wartime texts to maintain its appeal long after the War.[2] Yet both of these texts, while encouraging easy mockery of uneducated working-class soldiers, also make room for readings consonant with the standard story.

Many of Lyons's tales are narratives of transformation, telling how unpromising recruits are turned into proper soldiers; his middle-class readers were allowed both the pleasure of laughing at their social inferiors, and the promise that the War would transform them for the better.[3] In *Alf's Button*, too, the ludicrous Alf and his friend Charlie are changed at the end. In the confusion of battle, they lose the magic button and fight in earnest, proving themselves true soldiers: 'They delivered the counter-attack, and Alf and Bill found themselves heaving, kicking and stabbing in a hand-to-hand struggle

---

1 A. Neil Lyons, *Kitchener Chaps* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1915), 11.

2 The popularity of *Alf's Button* was partly maintained by frequently updating the text to deal with current concerns. Darlington expanded the magazine serial to double the length for book publication by Herbert Jenkins in 1919, to include chapters making fun of English society, but excluding chapters satirising the Kaiser and Horatio Bottomley, who were no longer topical. The very successful 1920 film and the West End play of the same year each also radically re-worked the material in different ways. Later versions included two more films, *Alf's Button* of 1930 and *Alf's Button Afloat* of 1938. The last of these, a vehicle for the Crazy Gang, bears only a tenuous resemblance to the original material.

3 Similar gratifications of comedy and reassurance are provided by Ian Hay's descriptions of the recruits in *The First Hundred Thousand*, as described in the previous chapter.

with innumerable fat, greasy Huns.'[4] Wartime readers were given a choice; they could prioritise the condescending knockabout comedy or the parable of transformation, as they saw fit.

Other alternative versions of the soldier were more thoroughgoing, and this chapter will examine representations of soldiers created by writers who differed from wartime norms, and challenged the taboos governing war writing; it will consider some representative examples, and the reaction of the cultural institutions of the day (the authorities, the critics and the libraries) to writing that some considered subversive or offensive. The case of D. H. Lawrence's 'England My England' illuminates the difficulties faced by a writer trying to write seriously about the War without first-hand knowledge, and avoiding the usual taboos. It also shows, however, that a story that could be read by a late twentieth-century critic as 'an indictment of war'[5] would not necessarily have had that meaning in 1915, since stories later read in isolation could look very different in their original context. The stories of Wyndham Lewis, and especially 'Cantelman's Spring-Mate', are the work of a programmatic modernist eager to avoid complicity with his audience, and to tell ugly truths about human nature. The publication history of his stories shows that censorship was less onerous in wartime Britain than in America, especially for work aimed at an elite audience. Rose Macaulay, 'Herbert Tremaine' (Maude Deuchar) and Douglas Goldring were writers who, to varying degrees, distanced themselves politically from the consensus, and from the War; novels by all three were published, and (unlike *Despised and Rejected* by 'A. T. Fitzroy') escaped prosecution. By 1918, when the War had been in progress for so long that no serious novelist could avoid it, writers such as Arnold Bennett and Sheila Kaye-Smith were giving pictures of wartime Britain and its citizens and soldiers that, while not disputing the rightness of the War effort, disturbed stereotypes and challenged preconceptions. The varying fortunes of these (to a greater or lesser extent) dissident representations of the War, and of the soldiers who fought, reveals much about

---

4 *The Passing Show* (24 November 1917), 304.

5 Brenda Maddox, *The Married Man: A Life of D.H.Lawrence* (London : Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), 213.

the institutions that exercised power in the literary world, and the way that that power could be exercised, by publishers, by reviewers, by libraries, and by the police courts.

D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis

At the beginning of the War, many writers were uncertain about what sort of writing would be considered fit to print. After writing 'England, My England' in 1915, D. H. Lawrence wrote to his agent: 'I send you a story, which England will not publish, I am afraid, but America may.'[6] His doubts were understandable, since the story's representation of a soldier was decidedly heterodox. Lawrence had glimpsed something of the realities of modern warfare in 1913 when observing troop exercises in Bavaria;[7] what he saw there was 'an affair entirely of machines'; men, he explains, were 'subordinate to the cold machine [....] There was neither ferocity nor joy nor exultation nor exhilaration nor even quick fear: only a mechanical expressionless movement.' At night, he sees some infantry, and imagines what would happen if one of the artillery's shells landed among them.

> Who would have been torn, killed, no one would have known. There would just have been a hole in the living shadowy mass; that was all. Who it was did not matter. There were no individuals, and every individual soldier knew it.[8]

'England, My England' imagines the result when a man whose values are those of English individualism meets the harshness of such a war. Its central character, Evelyn, is clearly based on Percy Lucas, the son-in-law of Wilfred and Alice Meynell, who had let Lawrence and his wife live in a cottage on

---

6 Letter to J.B.Pinker dated 6 June 1915. (ed Zytaruk and Boulton), *The Letters of D.H.Lawrence, Volume* 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 354.

7 He described them in a *Manchester Guardian* article of 18 August 1914, 'With the Guns', which is credited to 'H.D.Lawrence'. It was reprinted as part of Carl E. Baron , 'Two Hitherto Unknown Pieces by D.H.Lawrence.' (*Encounter*, October 1969, 5-6). Some sentences of this article reappear almost unchanged in 'England, My England'. In the story, Evelyn is supposed to be with 'three machine guns covering the rear,' but Lawrence's description is clearly of field artillery. Possibly Lawrence was recalling his insistence on these big guns as machines controlling men, and assumes that the term 'machine guns' covers what he saw in Germany.

8 'With the Guns', 6.

their estate. Lawrence saw in Percy a peculiarly English amateurishness that avoids connection with the hard facts of life, and a temperament quite unfitted for the realities of warfare.[9]

The 1915 story represents England as a garden (an 'ancient, changeless, hollow of flowers and sunshine') but one that people like Evelyn keep inefficiently. Using his characteristic technique of explaining a character through vivid metaphors rather than showing him dramatized in action, Lawrence presents a 'tall, thin, fair attractive man of the middle class, who, never very definite or positive in his action, had now set in a rigid obstinacy of negation. He kept rigid within himself, never altering nor yielding, however much torture or repression he suffered.'[10] Evelyn's problem, Lawrence suggests, is that his unearned income (a hundred and fifty pounds a year) is just enough to prevent him from engaging with the real world. He suffers from a 'strange inertia', and his relationship with his wife is stated with Lawrentian certainty – 'For this horrible neutrality, because of the horrible paralysis that seemed to come over him in these crises, when he could do nothing, she hated him.'[11]

In 1914, Evelyn joins up, for reasons presented as complicity with war's destructiveness:

> Somewhere at the back was the death he was going to meet [....] He was really a soldier. His soul had accepted the significance. He was a potential destructive force, ready to be destroyed [....] What had he to do with love and the creative side of life? He was a destructive spirit entering into destruction.[12]

Lawrence is not among the writers who suggest that enlistment means transformation into a better kind of person; Evelyn seems debased, 'an

---

9 Much of the personal background to the story is explained in Bernard Bergonzi, 'That Wretched Story', *Times Literary Supplement* (16 October 2009), 15.

10 D.H.Lawrence, 'England, My England', *The English Review* (21:83, October 1915), 239. References will be to this first publication. The text was revised and expanded considerably before republication in book form in 1921.

11 'England, My England', 241.

12 'England, My England', 245. In the 1921 revision, the character, now called Egbert, is given only apathetic feelings about a war he has drifted into: 'Egbert just refused to reckon with the world. He just refused even to decide between German militarism and British industrialism. He chose neither... Probably Germany was wrong, but he refused to make a choice.'

uncouth figure in the rough khaki, he who was always so slender and beautiful and clean-limbed in motion.'[13] His wife is at first impressed, but 'when he had been home longer than a day, began to find that the soldier was a man just the same, the same man, only become callous and outside her ethical reach, positive now in his destructive capacity.'[14] Evelyn is deeply attracted to the destructiveness of war; he goes to France, where 'he hated it, and yet he was fulfilling himself.'[15]

Having been 'twice slightly wounded' in two months, Evelyn finds himself in a party in charge of 'three machine guns'. There is some action near a symbolic slanted crucifix, and he is hit by shrapnel. He manages to express his destructiveness by killing three Germans with his revolver, but then is killed by a bayonet, and mutilated, as a fitting punishment for his previous inattention to the facts of life.

> The German cut and mutilated the face of the dead man as if he must obliterate it. He slashed it across, as if it must not be a face any more; it must be removed. For he could not bear the clear abstract look of the other's face, its almost ghoulish, slight smile, faint but so terrible in its suggestion, that the German was mad, and ran up the road when he found himself alone.[16]

This highly personalised violence is significantly different from the impersonal mechanised destruction that Lawrence had glimpsed in Bavaria. If it has a model, it would seem to be the atrocity stories common at the start of the War. Like Kate Hume, though with vastly more literary skill, Lawrence attempts to express the full horror of the war he has imagined by representing its violence as deliberate personal sadism.

Possibly it was awareness that this horrific excess went beyond current fictional norms that made Lawrence doubt whether his agent could place the story in an English magazine; it was, however, accepted by *The English Review*, which had printed his poems when it was an avant-garde journal edited by Ford Madox Hueffer. The new editor, Austin Harrison had not turned his back

---

13 'England, My England', 244.
14 'England, My England', 245.
15 'England, My England', 246.
16 'England My England', 252.

entirely on experimentalism, and had published Lawrence's 'The Prussian Officer' in 1914, but the magazine's emphasis became far more political. The fiercely anti-German Harrison, author of *The Pan-Germanic Doctrine* (1904), an exposé of the Kaiser's territorial greed, used the wartime *English Review* to criticize the Government's lack of severity towards Germans. In the same volume of the magazine as 'England My England', there are attacks on Lord Haldane for his Germanophilia, and an article insisting that even naturalised Germans should be treated as hostile. This context gives a strongly political meaning to Lawrence's story image of an unrestrained German savagely mutilating the dead.

Lawrence's critique of a leisured, impractical class would almost certainly have appealed to Harrison as a diagnosis of English amateurism.[17] In the context of *The English Review* Lawrence's story becomes part of an attack on the Asquith government for lacking the ruthless professionalism necessary for war. Lawrence may have been unaware that his story would carry this political connotation, since he recommended it in a letter to the Prime Minister's daughter, Lady Cynthia Asquith: 'You will find in the English Review for next month a story about the Lucases.'[18] Her response is unrecorded, but there seems to have been negative reaction from others, since Lawrence replied to friends who had read it, 'I'm sorry you don't like the story.'[19] This may, however, have had more to do with the personal than the political implications of the work.

The army career of Percy Lucas, so recognizably caricatured in the story, differed from that of fictional Evelyn. He became an officer, not a private, and whereas Evelyn suffered annihilation on the battlefield within weeks of enlisting, Percy survived, until a year after the story was published. He died on the Somme, on 6 July 1916. Hearing of the death, Lawrence wrote: 'It

---

17 Soon after publishing this story, the magazine printed a characteristic article by Harrison himself, caricaturing Asquith's Cabinet as ineffective dilettantes: 'Five more gentle creatures never trod upon a War Office carpet. Mr McKenna, humanitarian and pacifist; Mr Balfour, the dilettante philosopher, aristocrat, bachelor, and cynic; Mr Bonar Law, the impeccably safe controversialist; and Mr Lloyd George, whilom fiery demagogue of peace-time democracy. And to these must be added the sweet reasonableness of Sir Edward Grey.' Austin Harrison, 'We Must have Responsibility', *English Review*, December 1915 (21:85), 530.

18 Letter dated 5 September 1915. (*Letters Volume* 2, 386.)

19 Letter to William and Sallie Hopkin, 25 September 1915 (*Letters Volume* 2, 401-2).

upsets me very much to hear of Percy Lucas. I did not know he was dead. I wish that story at the bottom of the sea, before ever it had been printed.'[20] He does not wish it unwritten, only unprinted – regret does not make him deny his desire to express his perceptions through fiction, but he does see that circumstances may place constraints upon what should be printed. He reaffirms, however, the message of the story:

> Yet it does seem to me, man must find a new expression, give a new value to life, or his women will reject him, and he must die [...] Lucas was, somehow, a spiritual coward. But who isn't? I ought never, never to have gone to live at Greatham. Perhaps Madeleine won't be hurt by that wretched story – that is all that matters. If it was a true story, it shouldn't really damage [...]
>
> P.S. No, I don't wish I had never written that story. It should do good, at the long run.

Lawrence uses the inflated language of pre-war vitalism — 'give new value to life' and 'or he must die' as though the War had not changed the connotations of these words. 'Death' is a word bandied around in Lawrence's writings, and others of the period, to mean spiritual defeat, inertness, failure, lack of masculine energy. In his story, Evelyn's spiritual inertness made him as good as dead, so in the story his actual death was symbolically necessary. When this symbolic death was followed by the model's actual death, there must have been some embarrassment for the writer. When a soldier killed in battle is libeled, Lawrence's 'If it was a true story, it shouldn't really damage' must be the reverse of the truth — the truer the story, the greater the hurt, particularly when 'true' is being used in Lawrence's way, to mean 'in

[20] Letter, 16 July 1916. *Letters Volume* 2, 635. The story caused great offence to the Meynell family. In 1961, when Lawrence's critical reputation was at its highest and when his books were, as she put it, 'selling like bread', Percy Lucas's youngest daughter Barbara published an essay to discredit the idea – made widely available in Harry Moore's biography of Lawrence – that the tale was in any sense a reliable portrait of her father. Questioning how well Lawrence actually knew any of the family, she wrote: 'When *England, my England* was published in the Autumn of 1915, with its vividly recognizable natural setting, family set-up and central event (the accident to the little girl), it was apparent to friends of my family that – to borrow Compton Mackenzie's admirable phrase – Lawrence had indulged in his "trick of describing a person's setting or background vividly, and then putting into the setting an ectoplasm entirely of his own creation."[...] But only people who knew my family well, and/or the mind of Lawrence, could know where to draw the line between reality and fiction in this case; could know how total a "creation" the "ectoplasm" was.' Barbara Lucas, 'Apropos of "England, My England"' (*Twentieth Century,* March 1961, 293).

accordance with my world-view'.

Evelyn's negative emotions are easy to find in Lawrence's own letters and other writings,[21] and there is clear justice in Barbara Lucas's claim that into her father's situation Lawrence has put 'an ectoplasm entirely of his own creation'. Artistically this restricts the story. There seem to be two voices in the narrative — the insistent, moralising voice of the narrator, and the disturbed voice of self-destructive Evelyn; in fact, these are both voices of Lawrence. While David Lodge has argued that there are dialogic techniques at work in Lawrence's major novels,[22] even when there do not seem to be, in this story Lawrence uses Evelyn as a puppet, to project his own opinions and feelings about the War.

On the other hand, this is a story that is seriously trying to voice possibilities that generally went unspoken in 1915. Lawrence rejects the idea that enlisting automatically transforms an unsatisfactory civilian into something nobler; war is shown as liberating human destructiveness.[23] Mark Kinkaid-Weekes sees the story (and its rewriting in 1921 in a way that made the Meynell family even more recognisable) as an example of Lawrence's artistic 'ruthlessness'.[24] The main target of this 'ruthlessness', however, was not the War, and certainly not the Army. Like the moralists of the middlebrow fiction magazines, Lawrence uses the War to point out the failings of a character familiar from peacetime, and to punish him. Like them, Lawrence has assumed a 'truth' about the War, and has manipulated his characters until they face it, and are forced into submission by the 'brutality of fact'.

As seriously as Lawrence, but less solemnly, Wyndham Lewis was a writer who positioned himself in explicit opposition to comfortable literary conventions. (As an editor, his instruction to Ezra Pound had been: 'Give me something nasty for *Blast*!'[25]) Many characteristics of conventional wartime

---

21 For example: 'It would be nice if the Lord sent another flood and drowned the world.' (*Letters Volume 2*, 339).

22 David Lodge, 'Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin: Lawrence and Dialogic Fiction' in (ed.) Brown, *Rethinking Lawrence* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1990).

23 Perhaps the only other fiction of this period that comes as close to exploring the power of war's destructiveness is by Kipling, whose 'Mary Postgate' (*Nash's Magazine*, September, 1915) shows the death of a young soldier bringing out the destructive energy latent within a middle-aged woman.

24 Mark Kinkaid-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence Triumph to Exile* 1912-1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 701.

25 Remembered by Ezra Pound in a letter of October, 1956. (ed.) Timothy Materer, *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* (London: Faber, 1985) 298.

stories — the complicity with the reader, the taming of experience within the confines of a familiar genre, and the comforting resolution of a positive ending — were anathema to the aesthetic of Lewis and his fellow-Vorticists, who had followed the Futurist Marinetti in choosing 'to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap.'[26] Lewis's *Blast* was designed to be the slap that a tired culture needed, and was full of threatened violence, possibly playful.

In 1914, however, (as Lewis would put it later) 'All Europe was at war and a bigger *Blast* than mine had rather taken the wind out of my sails.'[27] He explored the new situation by writing from behind the mask or persona of Cantlelman, an anti-romantic anti-hero strongly aware of his own priapic animality, who views the War and the public enthusiasm for it with objectivity and scorn. In 'Cantelman's Spring-Mate' he undergoes military training in Hardy Country, becomes unpopular with his military colleagues, and has rapacious sexual intercourse with a local girl, but when she becomes pregnant he does not answer her letters. Cantleman's character was what it is before the War, and he is unchanged by the experience. Lewis, unlike most contemporary writers, refuses to see a distinction between the War and the normal run of life; they are a violent continuum:

> He saw everywhere the gun-pits and the 'nests of death' [....] In the factory town ten miles away to the right, whose smoke could be seen, life was just as dangerous for the poor, and as uncomfortable, as for the soldier in the trench.[28]

This soldier challenges the usual wartime idealisation; where the warlike attitude of most fictional British soldiers is carefully presented as reactive, a

---

26 F. T. Marinetti, *The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* (trans R.W.Flint). In (eds.) Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (New edition)(Oxford, Blackwell 2003), 147. While Lewis responded to Marinetti's radicalism, and was sometimes happy to be included under the Futurist label, *Blast*'s manifesto considered an art angled towards the future just as sentimental as one looking back to the past. It declared: "The Present is Art." (*Blast 1*,147)

27 Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombadiering* (revised edition) (London, Calder and Boyars, 1967), 85.

28 'Cantelman's Spring Mate',in *The Ideal Giant, The Code of the Herdsman and Cantelman's Spring Mate*, 'privately printed for the London Office of the Little Review' 1915, 43. This first British printing uses the spelling 'Cantelman', so it is used here, although Lewis made it 'Cantleman' when the story was reprinted in the second edition of *Blasting and Bombadiering* (1967) and elsewhere.

controlled response to German aggression, Cantelman is deliberately excessive and vicious: 'And when he beat a German's brains out, it was with the same impartial malignity that he had displayed in the English night with his spring-mate.' [29] That 'impartial' seems to be mocking the image of the British soldier as disinterested dispenser of justice; by making it qualify the noun 'malignity', Lewis reminds the reader that calm detachment is not necessarily a positive quality.

Lewis placed the story with the *avant-garde* American magazine *The Little Review*, but the edition containing the story was impounded by the American Post Office on grounds of obscenity, and was therefore effectively banned from distribution in the United States. In Britain, the story was included in the pamphlet-sized publication *The Ideal Giant* 'privately printed for the London Office of the Little Review' which according to Ezra Pound
sold well at fashionable artistic Christmas bazaars: 'Lewis has been having a hell of a go socially. No duchess without a copy of Cantelman and the Ideal Giant.'[30] Pound exaggerates, but his account indicates that an unorthodox text could find an elite audience in Britain during wartime, without official interference.

'Cantelman's Spring Mate' imagines an affectless anti-hero, killing without remorse. 'The French Poodle', another story written before Lewis saw action in France, considers the act of killing more closely, and presents a soldier whose self-control is unstable. This appeared in *The Egoist*, the 'Individualist Review' which claimed that it 'Recognises no taboos',[31] and describes a man nervously afflicted by battle experience. Rob Cairn is 'drifting about London in mufti, by no means well, and full of anxiety, the result of his ill-health and the shock he had received at finding himself blown into the air and painted yellow by the unavoidable shell.'[32] Forcibly reminded of his own mortality, Cairn, unlike the fictional heroes rendered more spiritual by war, is reminded also of his own physicality: 'When the shell came he had not

---

29 'Cantelman's Spring Mate', 44

30 Letter to John Quinn, 29 December 17, quoted in Paul O'Keefe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London, Cape 2000), 201.

31 Advertisement for *The Egoist* in *Blast 1*, 160.

32 'The French Poodle', *The Egoist*, 1 March 1916, 39.

bounded gracefully and coldly up, but with a clumsy dismay.'

Intellectually convinced that humans suffered from the absence of animal life around them, he buys a dog, Carp:

> He loved him as a brother. But it is not at all sure that in the end Carp did not take the place that some lady should have occupied in his heart, as many of the attachments of men for girls seem a sentiment sprung up from the absence of a dog.[33]

When the time comes for him to return to the front, Cairn decides to kill the dog, possibly because he does not want it to transfer its affection to someone else. As a gunnery officer Cairn has been responsible for many deaths — but at a distance. Lewis too was a gunner, and well aware that this was a gunner's war, where most of the killing happened impersonally, at a long distance. This impersonality had bemused and impressed Arnold Bennett, whose pamphlet *Over There* describes British gunners in France; they seem to be just technicians absolved of responsibility for their actions, dealing only with 'numbers and formulae – and perhaps an occasional rebuke' which come to them on the telephone. The result is a distant 'faint puff of smoke, seemingly harmless as a feather momentarily floating.'[34] This kind of war, Bennett says, 'seems vague and casual, because a mere fragment of it defeats the imagination, and the bits of even the fragment cannot be fitted together.'[35]

Imagination is the theme of 'The French Poodle'; despite having killed men in a calm and orderly way, Cairn had not been able to visualise a killing. The death of the dog is partly described in the story ('I shot it with a revolver; but I aimed too low. It nearly screamed the place down.'[36]) but Cairn breaks down in the middle of his account, and the worst is left to the reader's imagination, as something unspeakable. The event leaves Cairn demoralised, convinced that he has killed his own luck. Very soon he is killed. Lewis, preparing to head for war, has produced a fable about a man struggling and failing to maintain his sense of his own ability to control circumstances,.

As a picture of war, 'The French Poodle' is potentially more disturbing

---

33 'The French Poodle', 41.

34 Arnold Bennett, *Over There* (London, Methuen, 1915), 103.

35 *Over There*, 104.

36 'The French Poodle', 41.

than 'Cantelman's Spring Mate'. Where the earlier story casts doubt on the character of the men who went to war, 'The French Poodle' asks awkward questions about what war does to those who fight it — questions that would re-surface in writing of the 1920s. Like 'Cantelman's Spring Mate', it was published in an avant-garde context; *The Egoist* was a low-circulation magazine whose readers were used to unorthodox voices. The fact that it was published without interference or after-effects shows the latitude that censors afforded to literary material likely to reach only an elite audience.

Three Pacifist Novels

The fictions of Lawrence and Lewis provoke unease about the savagery involved in combat; other writers presented a more directly political challenge to the consensus. Rose Macaulay's *Non-Combatants and Others* (1916) and *The Feet of the Young Men* (1917) by Maude Deuchar (writing as 'Herbert Tremaine') both present protagonists trying to avoid a war to which they feel no personal commitment, and in each of them the protagonist's attitude to the War is crucially affected by seeing a soldier who has returned from the front.

Macaulay's heroine sees what war has done to her brother John, a soldier lately released from hospital. Although at the family dinner-table he had been pleasantly articulate about the War, despite 'nervous and watchful' eyes, [37] Alix later hears 'a sound of quiet gasping, choked sobbing, as if a child were in despair.' She goes to investigate:

> Outside his own window, John, barefooted, in pink pyjamas, stood, gripping with both hands on to the iron balustrade, his face turned up to the moon, crying, sobbing, moaning, like a little child like a man on the rack. He was saying things from time to time... muttering them [....] Alix heard. Things quite different from the things he had said at dinner. Only his eyes [...] had spoken at all like this. His eyes were now wide and wet, and full of a horror beyond speech. They turned towards Alix and looked through her, beyond her, unseeing. John was fast asleep.[38]
>
> The 'horror beyond speech' cannot be uttered by John's waking official

---

37 Rose Macaulay, *Non-Combatants and Others* (1916) reprint (London: Methuen, 1986), 12.

38 *Non-Combatants and Others*, 18.

self. Like Alix, the reader is left trying to reconstruct it from hints — 'What was it John had said on the balcony —something about a leg... the leg of a friend... pulling it out of the chaos of earth and mud and stones which had been a trench... thinking it led on to the entire friend, finding it didn't, was a detached bit...'[39] The next morning John comes in, 'cheerful and placid', though his hand shakes: 'He sat down and began to talk about the advantages of not digging up one of the lawns for potatoes, which Margot wanted to do.'[40] Conventional reticence is restored, but Macaulay has hinted at unspeakable truths, and the rest of the novel takes the heroine towards acknowledgement of them, and towards committed pacifism.

Like Macaulay's Alix, Harry, the hero of *The Feet of the Young Men*, begins with no principled objection to the War, but feels disconnected from it. To him, soldiers seem to be play-acting:

> Well, it was a pose created by the hysteria of the press. Miserable papers overflowed, guttered with gush about 'Tommy'; what a daredevil he was, what a brick he was, and how all the girls went mad about him, how he loved his cup of tea, how he always wore a smile. The khaki men – clerks, porters, teachers, students – were mesmerised into thinking that they must behave like those fictional Tommies.[41]

As a young male, Harry is under considerably more pressure than Macaulay's Alix. When he declines to enlist, his employer dismisses him; in town he feels the pressure of a judgmental gaze: 'Harry felt that the citizens were looking at him more than usual and with some contempt and hostility.'[42] Meanwhile 'posters glared from the hoardings. Lord Kitchener stared and painted khaki lads shouted, "Come over and help us."' [43] Like Alix, Henry is deeply disturbed by seeing a man who has returned from the War; his friend David has won a V.C., but is mentally shattered:

> Mostly his nerves, the doctors said. His eyes had a strange frightened

---

39 *Non-Combatants and Others*, 21.

40 *Non-Combatants and Others*, 24.

41 Herbert Tremaine, *The Feet of the Young Men: A Domestic War Novel* (London: C.W.Daniel, 1917), 30. The idea that becoming a soldier involved a degree of play-acting was developed by several writers of fiction during the 1920s.

42 *The Feet of the Young Men*, 143.

43 *The Feet of the Young Men*, 151.

look; he sometimes faltered in his speech, but sometimes spoke loudly with a fluent violence. He forgot things. Once Eva had heard a scream when a door was opened suddenly behind him.[44]

The sight of his friend in this state is the more disturbing for Harry because he has recently enlisted when under the influence of drink and the imagined disapproving gaze of all around him. He is eventually sent to France, and it is left to his widow to make explicit the book's message: 'It's wicked for people to be such fools; to let the old men go on ruling the country and heaping up money, and sending the young men out... to die...'[45]

There are strong similarities between the novels of Macaulay and Tremaine, but the firms that issued them represent two extremes of wartime publishing. *The Feet of the Young Men* was published by C. M. Daniel, a small firm specializing in literature with a Tolstoyan tendency, much of it outspokenly pacifist. Many of Daniel's authors subsidised the publication of their writing; Thodora Wilson Wilson, for example provided £60 to subsidise *The Last Weapon*, and Rose Allatini paid £75 towards the publication of *Despised and Rejected*.[46] Maude Deuchar was not required to subsidise her novel, but her contract stipulates that royalties would only begin to be paid after the first 2,000 copies had been sold.[47] Daniel was a publisher for those who wanted their views to be expressed, rather than those who wanted to make money. In April 1917, he was prosecuted for publishing 'The Knock-Out Blow', a strongly worded argument for a negotiated peace; fined £80 and £10 costs, he refused to pay, and was jailed for two months.[48] The pacifist novel,

---

44 *The Feet of the Young Men*, 194. Another novel that is mostly about the dilemmas of civilians, but allows glimpses of the mind of a soldier is H.G. Wells's *Mr Britling Sees it Through*, serialised in *The Nation* during 1916, while the Battle of the Somme was being fought in France. Mr Britling's son, Hugh, sends letters to France that indicate the strain he is undergoing, especially when dealing with the death of a friend:'And suddenly it was all different, I began to cry. Like a baby. I kept on with the water-bottle at his teeth long after I was convinced he was dead.'(*Nation* [23 September 1916], 787.) Wells allows a glimpse of the tension within Hugh, between the efficient soldier repressing his feelings and the human being disturbed that his feelings have to be repressed. Shortly after writing this letter, Hugh is killed, and returns once more to silence.

45 *The Feet of the Young Men*, 239.

46 C. W. Daniel Archive (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam), folders 85-6.

47 C. W. Daniel Archive, folder 85.

48 *The Times* (30 April 1917), 5. Technically, because the pamphlet did not include the name and address of the printer, Daniel could have been fined £5 for each of the 52,000 copies seized by the police, so that the maximum fine that the court could have imposed was £1,040,000, a suggestion that provoked laughter in court. ('Alleged Sedition in a Pamphlet', *The Times* [2 April 1917], 5.)

however, escaped prosecution.

Daniel's firm was outside the mainstream of publishing, but the commercial history of *Non-Combatants and Others* shows that a book questioning war enthusiasm could find both a commercial publisher and an audience during the War years. It was published by Hodder and Stoughton, although Macaulay was by no means a typical Hodder author.[49] Her earliest novels had been published by John Murray, and she was with Hodder because she had won their £600 competition with *The Lee Shore* in 1912. According to Hodder's ledgers, 9,000 copies of *The Lee Shore* were printed, of which 7,873 were sold before the end of the financial year ending March 31st, 1913.[50] The book kept selling modestly through the War years, and there was a new edition in 1921 (10,000 printed) that did well during the twenties, presumably helped by the success of Macaulay's post-war novels. *Non-Combatants and Others* was published in 1916 at 5/- a copy. (Her previous two books had been issued at 6/- each). Hodder printed 3,000 copies, indicating that their hopes for the book were moderate. Of these, 2,586 had sold by March 31st, 1917. It seems to have earned Macaulay no more than £62/6/- (no generous advance this time) while the publishers made a modest profit of £48/19/2. Over the next six years the rest of the edition gradually sold out. Hodder did not reprint it, probably because it was so much a novel of the War years. These figures show that Macaulay's book managed to reach a respectable audience, despite its pacifist message and lukewarm reviews. (The readership was larger than the raw sales figures might suggest, because many sales would have been to libraries). They also show the publisher in an interesting light. Hodder and Stoughton, despite their commitment to the War and their involvement with Wellington House, did not stand in the way of an author who wished to express dissident opinions (and a disturbing view of the effects of the War on

---

[49] In the decades before the First World War, Hodder had expanded from its origins as primarily a publisher of religious books to develop a list of popular fiction. Between 1914 and 1918 its greatest best-seller was Buchan's *Greenmantle*. The firm strongly supported the War, and published 134 books and pamphlets that were sponsored by Wellington House, the largest number of any publisher. See Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 227.

[50] Printing and sales figures from ledgers of Hodder and Stoughton in the Guildhall Library. GL Ms 16312 vol 26.

soldiers). As a writer with some reputation and an established readership, Macaulay was able to find a publisher and an audience for her work.

The less well-established Douglas Goldring, however, could not find an English publisher for his 1917 novel, *The Fortune*; Maunsel's of Dublin took it on, but only three or four hundred copies reached England. The book is semi-autobiographical; Goldring, like his officer hero, enlisted in 1914, but became convinced of the War's wrongness, partly because of the arguments of a pacifist friend. He was invalided out of the army with rheumatism in 1916 (unlike his hero, who would be killed in Dublin in that same year).

During the first half of the novel — the peacetime years — Goldring's protagonist, Harold Firbank, is presented as a chameleon figure, always reflecting the values of the surrounding community, or of a stronger personality. He loves his public school, is enchanted by Oxford, and excited by literary London — until the intelligent scorn of his friend, James Murdoch, makes him sceptical about each in turn. He enlists in 1914 out of a conventional (yet genuine) sense of duty, though dubious about the people he will have to mix with in the Army: 'He did so hate that type of public schoolboy. There would be manly curates among them, he knew there would!'[51] As he adapts to military life, he is confronted by war's horrors and hardships:

> [H]e had watched a party of men one day having dinner by the roadside near his lines. They had just come back from a spell in the trenches and were trying to find their mouths with their forks. Their hands shook so that they smeared their cheeks with gravy almost up to their eyes. Some of the poor dears encouraged one another with an overpowering humour and uncontrollable riots of laughter: others, different in temperament, sat like men struck dumb.[52]

Still, he acts the part required of him:

> Only the realization of his rank, and that blessed vanity (a very present help in all the troubles of warfare) which made it impossible for him to give way before the men, saved him. He gave the necessary orders for a

51 Douglas Goldring, *The Fortune* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1917), 201.
52 *The Fortune*, 243.

> stretcher party quite calmly, and when a veteran subaltern of about nineteen strolled up and made a comment on the unwonted success of the Hun's 'evening hate', his agitation had not betrayed itself. The incident put one more layer of military concrete over his artist's emotionalism.[53]

This sense of the soldier as a man awkwardly performing a role anticipates much fiction of the twenties. Gradually, the gap between his inner self and the part he is expected to play widens, and his faith in the distinction between German militarism and the British equivalent crumbles:

> Every evil passion raged in the men around him — the evil passions that the glucose school ascribe only to one's enemies. Filthy lust, obscenity, disgusting cruelty, injustice, an utter absence of honesty of every kind: and permeating the whole military machine, favouritism and corruption and the most various forms of tyranny.[54]

Goldring implies that if Harold had been as unthinking as many of his contemporaries, war would have been easy enough — but because he has come in contact with independent thought, personified by James, it becomes impossible. James is called before an appeals tribunal, where 'it seemed to Harold that James was like some king of old time, snared by creatures who were scarcely human, and disdaining them'.[55] Predictably, the appeal fails, but James can disappear to safety in Ireland, while Harold, more conflicted than ever, must return to the War.

Eventually Harold is posted to Dublin in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, where he sees British military values in an even less alluring light:

> Some of the actions of the troops, which came within Harold's knowledge, sickened him more than ever of war; and the culprits were not always of the rank and file. There were stories of prisoners 'executed' without trial, and for no apparent reason save sheer vindictiveness.[56]

Things end messily. During the street-fighting after Easter 1916 he is leading a group of soldiers; when he shows rational mercy towards suspected terrorists,

---

53 *The Fortune*, 244.
54 *The Fortune*, 246.
55 *The Fortune*, 313.
56 *The Fortune*, 316.

his men question his loyalty. In the confusion of a gunfight, one of them shoots him. Goldring's message is that intellectual independence and war do not mix.

Since this book is markedly different from most novels of the War years, the story of its publication and reception reveals much about the wartime literary world, and its receptiveness to unothodox representations of the soldier. In his autobiography *Odd Man Out* (1934) Goldring claimed:

> It has earned me nothing save a number of unknown friends and enemies, an infinity of disappointment and (since it has been banned in England) the collapse of what they call in the trade my 'subscription value'. [57]

Saying that the book had been 'banned', was true only in the limited sense that the major libraries and distributors, Boots and W.H.Smith, would not handle it. It was not prosecuted, and copies were available to purchasers who ordered them. It was widely reviewed, so can be said to have contributed to the public debate.

Goldring notes that the book provoked 'a surprisingly large crop of reviews,' the majority of which were 'unexpectedly generous and impartial'.[58] T.S. Eliot in *The Egoist* felt that its propagandist impulse was its strength: '[I]t is a pacifist novel; and it is a novel with brilliant things and weak things in it. But the weakest things are not the propagandist things.' [59] The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer, on the other hand, was condescending about the book's politics ('Its unpopular views of the war are stimulating enough; not that they are profound — they are indeed rather callow — but that they are so eagerly put.') but found value in the book's presentation of its protagonist:

> His mental and emotional ordeals are truly 'spiritual adventures' and they make this book, with its breathlessness and the pathos and irony of its end, one of the best war novels of youth that we can remember. [60]

In *Odd Man Out*, Goldring says that he was fairly treated by politically hostile

---

57 Douglas Goldring, *Odd Man Out: The Autobiography of a 'Propaganda Novelist'* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1935), 202.

58 *Odd Man Out*, 202.

59 *The Egoist*, January 1918 (5:1). The review is anonymous; Gallup, in his Eliot bibliography, considers Eliot's authorship probable, but Goldring's autobiography ascribes it to him with certainty.

60 *Times Literary Supplement* (8 November 1917), 540.

papers such as *The Westminster Gazette* and *The Morning Post,* but other reviews seem to be negative for political reasons. *The Saturday Review*

> was great fun, or as George Robey would say, 'very terse'. It began with a few damaging reflections on my personal character and ended with the comment that I ought certainly to be put in gaol.[61]

G.K. Chesterton in the *Illustrated London News* used his review as the springboard for an attack on pacifists, with only tangential relevance to the actual book. The novel seems to have impressed Chesterton, however, since he came back to it two weeks later:

> I remember reading a novel, which appeared some little while ago [....] It was called 'The Fortune', and it was by Douglas Goldring. In its sub-title and substance it professed to be a sort of romance of intellectual friendship; but it was really rather a romance of intellectual slavery [....] [I]n this story the relations of the two are in no sense those of friend and friend, or even merely of master and pupil, but rather those of master and servant. The master exhibits in his anti-militarism the only thing that can ever be really evil in militarism — the beatification of the bully. In parts it suggests the writing of a rather morbid woman, for such worship of superiority is almost worthy of 'Ouida'.[62]

This review is the only one that clearly hints at the homosexual subtext that seems evident to a modern reader. Chesterton's comments are hostile, but he gives the book many column-inches, and like some of the other negative reviews, makes it sound interesting.

The left-wing and pacifist press were less generous than the mainstream papers; *The Nation* ignored the book, despite having been sent several copies, and 'the only really offensive review in the whole bundle is from the columns of my favourite weekly paper, *The Herald*.'[63] The *Herald*'s short review deals almost entirely, and very critically, with the book's Irish sections,[64] as does that

---

61 *Odd Man Out*, 204-5.

62 *Illustrated London News* (11 May 1918), 546.

63 *Odd Man Out*, 204.

64 'The gathering together of stock anecdotes familiar to most visitors to Dublin after the Insurrection and the exploitation of a well-known tragedy of the time will be distasteful to most Irish readers and to many British ones with balance and taste.' 'A Pacifist Novelist', *Herald* (29 September 1917), 14.

in *The New Age*, whose review begins: 'Mr Douglas Goldring has told with some vivacity the story of a man who knew another man who was always right,' and continues to give a mock-naive simplifying precis of the novel:

> The Englishman joined the Army, and his wife rejoiced to think that, on this one point at least, they were in perfect agreement; it was a triumph for her influence over her husband. But alas, the reality of the war taught the silly Englishman how right the Irish gentleman was [....] The Irish gentleman was very brilliant, although the book does not record any instances of it; and the tribunal was very stupid, of course, and ordered him to take combatant service.[65]

The moral of the book, this critic sarcastically claimed, was that: 'The Irish are always right, whether they fight against England, or have conscientious objections to any form of fighting.' The concentration on Ireland in these reviews hints that in left-wing circles Ireland was a more controversial and divisive issue than the War.

1918

In 1914 or 1915 to write about the War was deliberately to make a show of topicality, but by 1918, as a character in Arnold Bennett's *The Pretty Lady* of that year reflected, the War by now 'seemed co-extensive with life itself.'[66] By then, if a writer's intention was to write accurately about ordinary life, the War was there, if only in the background. *The Pretty Lady* is remarkable as an unflattering depiction of wartime London, published by a man with a senior role in the Ministry of Information.[67] Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Little England*, also published in 1918, is equally frank about the impact of the War on a grudging and anxious rural community. In both of these novels, the representation of the soldier departs notably from the norms established earlier in the War.

Little England is a novel without obvious propagandist intention; Kaye-Smith is primarily a chronicler of rural life, and her main interest is in showing

---

[65] *The New Age* (10 January 1918), 217. Goldring was not singled out by *The New Age* for exceptionally rough treatment; the review of *The Fortune* is immediately preceded by an equally scathing one of *The Gulf* by Hugh Spender, a novel endorsing the war effort.

[66] Arnold Bennett, *The Pretty Lady* (Leek: Churnet Valley, 2009) Facsimile reprint of first edition (London: Cassell, 1917) with an introduction by John Shapcott, 50.

[67] It certainly casts doubt on Claire Tylee's suggestion that Bennett 'simply scribbled puff for the government's case' (*The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 103).

the reactions of the people of East Sussex to a disturbing and dispiriting time when, in the local shop : 'the bottles of sweets had vanished long ago, and the empty spaces were filled with large cardboard posters, displaying Thyrza's licence to sell margarine, and the Government list of prices.'[68] Shortages, deprivation and regulation are the distinguishing features of the War years. The main characters are a family whose hard work on a small farm had never given more than a subsistence living; the War introduces new uncertainties into their difficult lives, and its effects are constantly paradoxical. Tom, an unwilling conscript, will become committed to soldiering, and fit the standard image of the responsible decent soldier, but then will die a meaningless death. Jerry, the wild young man who volunteers because he needs adventure, will be shot as a deserter. This execution provokes the largest paradoxes, when Jerry's father, Mr Sumption, a hellfire preacher to a small and narrow-minded congregation at the local Bethel, is transformed by the news. In his desperation to believe that his son is not damned (as his religion tells him) he scandalises his narrow-minded flock by preaching a convoluted justification for Jerry's waywardness. If the other soldiers died to save England, then Jerry, shot as an example, died to save other soldiers, since his death would deter them from following his path. Soldiers presented as Christ-like saviours were common in Great War literature, from Sassoon's 'The Redeemer' to religiose magazine stories like Andrew Soutar's 'The Story Without a Title',[69] but Kaye-Smith seems to be deliberately pushing at the idea in a difficult and disturbing way that challenges the reader to accept that there are no easy answers to the problems caused by the War. Though the only voice in the novel critical of Britain's engagement in the conflict is that of an irresponsible drunkard, the depiction of war's disintegrating effect on a rural community does not make for consoling reading. Even the sub-plot that seems to be heading in towards a

---

68 Sheila Kaye-Smith, *Little England* (London: Cassell, 1924 [reprint]), 295-6.

69 Andrew Soutar, 'The Story Without a Title', *The Story-Teller* (April 1917). This story imagines a magazine writer who produces a story with a miraculous power to console those who read it. The story-within-a-story describes the 'splendid silence' of a father who watches with satisfaction when his soldier son falls into the hands of the enemy. 'His boy was dying with resignation that ennobled him. He was teaching the whole of the sleeping army how to die' (99). By placing the soldier in the role of Christ, passively undergoing an exemplary and inspirational death, he represents him as purely abject, in a quite unconvincing way, and the implied parallel with the central myth of Christianity runs the risk of making it seem merely absurd.

conventional moral eventually fails to do so; Tom's wild younger brother, when unwillingly put in a position where he has to take responsibility for the farm, rises to the occasion and develops in maturity and seriousness. It seems like a standard moral fable, with the War forcing a character towards a discovery of his true potential — but then, just as he has got the farm going really well, he is conscripted, and all his good work seems likely to go to waste.

Kaye Smith's analysis of the effect of the War on rural society is disenchanted, and so is Arnold Bennett's depiction of London in *The Pretty Lady.* Margaret Drabble has described the book, whose main theme is the career of Christine, a prostitute, as 'a "feverish" engagement with the violence and sexuality of modernity,'[70] and its main focus is indeed on the impact of modernising war on civilians, as their lives are challenged by bereavement, uncertainties and the extreme violence of air raids. The most significant soldier in the novel is a minor but crucial character, and his relationship with Christine shows Bennett challenging conventional estimates both of prostitutes, and of soldiers.

When Bennett began to write *The Pretty Lady*, *in* May 1917, the question of prostitution was being urgently discussed as a cause for great moral concern. In February Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had written to *The Times* :

> Sir – Is it not possible in any way to hold in check the vile women who at present prey upon and poison our soldiers in London? A friend of mine who is a Special Constable in a harlot-haunted district has described to me how these harpies carry off the lonely soldiers to their rooms, make them drunk with the vile liquor which they keep there, and finally inoculate them, as likely as not, with one or other of those diseases which, thanks to the agitation of well-meaning fools, have had free trade granted to them amongst us?[71]

A few days later, a news article in *The Times* reported:

> Dealing with young women of known disorderly character for

---

70 Margaret Drabble, 'The Lost Art: The Modernist in Arnold Bennett', *Times Literary Supplement* (21 & 28 August 2009), 19. She is reviewing John Shapcott's 2009 edition, the introduction of which makes persuasive claims not only that 'Bennet's novel extends the trenches into wartime London' (iii), but that his techniques of fragmentation and allusion anticipate those of more programmatic modernists.

71 'Soldiers in London', *The Times* (6 February 1917), 9.

importuning soldiers in the streets, Mr. Paul Taylor, at Westminster yesterday, said he was very glad to see Sir Conan Doyle's letter in the Press characterising persons like the prisoners as enemies to their country, putting temptation in the way of young men, with horrible consequences. No fines would meet this class of case, and he sentenced the prisoners to a month's hard servitude.[72]

The Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Venereal Diseases Act of 1917 were responses to the problem that penalised the women, and the parliamentary debates contained language very like Doyle's crude misogynist stereotyping, as when Col Sir Hamar Greenwood reflected on the scandal of seven thousand 'clean Canadian boys' needing venereal treatment after a stay in England:

> During a recent visit to the Dominion I met many fathers and mothers whose boys had been sent back to Canada debilitated and ruined for life because they had been enmeshed by some of the harpies who are still allowed to go very near the camps, and especially in this great Metropolis, and again and again these parents have said to me, 'We do not mind our boys dying on the field of battle for old England, but to think that we sent our sons to England to come back to us ruined in health, and a disgrace to us, to them, and to the country, is something that the Home Country should never ask us to bear.'[73]

Christine, the central character of *The Pretty Lady*, is a French prostitute who has escaped Ostend during the German invasion, and now continues her business in London. She is not a harpy preying on an innocent soldier; her main relationship is with G.J.Hoape, a wealthy man above the military age, and when they meet on the Empire promenade their communication is a matter of subtle hints between equals in sophistication.

As Margaret Drabble wrote in her Bennett biography, 'the extreme calm with which Christine, G.J. and the author accept her profession is unusual in English fiction, to say the least.'[74] The whole novel questions the simple moral

---

72 'Soldiers' Street Perils', *The Times* (6 February 1917), 11.

73 *House of Commons Debates* (23 April 1917) vol 92 col 2117. More nuanced accounts of relationships between Canadian soldiers and prostitutes can be found in the novels *All Else is Folly* (1929) by Peregrine Acland, and Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930).

74 Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 229.

dualisms found in Doyle's letter. The prostitute may be 'the professed enemy of society',[75] but society's official protectors, the police, demand a bribe to let her continue her business. As for those who set up as society's moral guardians, Bennett shows them as using the War to advertise the nobility of their own characters. There is Lady Queenie Paulle, for example, who 'had few rivals as a war-worker',[76] because she attended so many societies and sat on so many committees, and had, Bennett sardonically notes, 'done practically everything that a patriotic girl could do for the war, except, perhaps, join a Voluntary Aid Detachment and wash dishes and scrub floors for fifteen hours a day and thirteen and a half days a fortnight.'[77] One of her committees, in charge of a French hospital, assumes the right to moralistically discuss the private lives of doctors and nurses, with an interest clearly shown as lubricious.

The novel promises, therefore, a standard satirical contrast between civilian and soldier, but the soldiers in this book are neither the innocents of Doyle's fantasy, nor the calm and responsible men of wartime cliché. The first soldiers that we hear of, at a funeral service, and as the subject of an official telegram, are dead; living ones are enigmatic. When Hoape meets some old friends on leave, they will not speak about the War, and channel the conversation into trivialities, making both him and the reader aware of the urgency of their need for distraction before they leave again for the front. The most important military character is the anonymous officer first seen fighting with another soldier on the Empire promenade, and later found lying in a drunken stupor, snoring on Christine's bed. He is almost the opposite of the controlled and self-disciplined soldier of the wartime stereotype. Above all, he is needy, and Christine supplies what he wants – not sexually, but as someone to talk to, so that he can unburden himself in confession. Significantly, he is irrational and superstitious. Christine asks him about his experiences:

> 'Have you been in the retreat?'
>
> 'I was.'

---

75 *The Pretty Lady*, 92.
76 *The Pretty Lady*, 79.
77 *The Pretty Lady*, 79.

'And the angels? Have you seen them?'

He paused, and then said with solemnity:

'Was it an angel I saw?... I was lying doggo by myself in a hole, and bullets whizzing over me all the time. It was nearly dark, and a figure in white came and stood by the hole; he stood quite still and the German bullets went on just the same. Suddenly I saw he was wounded in the hand; it was bleeding. I said to him: "You're hit in the hand." "No," he said — he had a most beautiful voice — " that is an old wound. It has reopened lately. I have another wound in the other hand." And he showed me the other hand, and that was bleeding too. Then the firing ceased, and he pointed, and although I'd eaten nothing at all that day and was dead-beat, I got up and ran the way he pointed, and in five minutes I ran into what remained of my unit.'

The officer's sonorous tones ceased; he shut his lips tightly, as though clinching the testimony, and the life of the bedroom was suspended in absolute silence.[78]

The text's realistic narrative is disturbed by this irruption of the wondrous; the silence that follows it is also an authorial silence. Bennett does not tell us whether he gives any credence to the story of the figure with the stigmata, or whether readers should.

This association of this soldier with the uncanny (which could signify his contact with experience beyond the reach of prosaic civilians, or merely reflect the extremity of his need) recurs months later at a tedious night club, when Christine hallucinates a voice calling her name. Running randomly through the streets, she finds her officer, now reduced to the ranks because of his drunkenness, and puts herself at his service again. Bennett implies that people like her, nearer to the harsh realities of life, can do more for a soldier than the proliferating committees and charities can. The soldier and the prostitute are both outsiders, and Bennett links them by this narrative of the uncanny that is beyond the conceptual range of an otherwise naturalistic story. [79]

---

[78] Arnold Bennett, *The Pretty Lady* (London: Cassell, 1917), 131.

[79] To research this part of the book, Bennett consulted George Whale, a folklorist: 'Dined with

At the end of the novel, there is a crucial scene where Hoape, who thinks he has exclusive rights to Christine, sees her in the streets, talking to one soldier after another. He does not realise that she is searching for news of the soldier who needs her, and whom she is helping back to the War, but assumes Christine's infidelity, and decides to have nothing more to do with her, thus condemning her once again to the difficult life of a common prostitute. Like Doyle and the parliamentary moralists, Hoape, himself far from innocent, can only assume that the relationship between soldier and prostitute must merely be sordidly financial.

As A. S. Wallace wrote in his review for the *Manchester Guardian*, Christine has, 'despite an analysis of the stratagems and devices of her professional career that is Maupassant-like in its ruthlessness [...] a humanity that shines in contrast with this world of humbug and hysteria.'[80] The prostitute and the soldier together become a judgment on the wartime society that passes judgment on them. The committees of the rich and powerful who populate the book pride themselves on doing good for the victims of war, while benefiting themselves from the power and status that do-gooding confers on them. She, meanwhile, is a refugee who does not claim charity or victim status, but copes efficiently for herself. This was not a message that commended itself to some of the book's first readers. The *Star* reasserted Doyle's moralistic contrast between soldiers and courtesans:

> Our boys are being martyred by the millions. Hearts are being lacerated by incalculable sorrows. This is no time to regale our hurt minds with glimpses of the nether world. We are not in the mood for idylls of the promenade and pastorals of the pavement.[81]

Bennett's point is that the 'nether world' with its acknowledgment of human frailty, may be more use to a damaged soldier than the sermonizing of those above him.

George Whale at the N.L.C. And in his great ugly sitting room took what I wanted from his large collection of notes on war superstitions for my novel. His notes were extremely interesting.' (*Journal*, 10 October 1917).

80 A.S.W., 'Mr Bennett's New Novel', *The Manchester Guardian* (28 March, 1918), 3.

81 James Douglas, *The Star* (5 April 1918). Reprinted in *Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981), 376.

The book aroused protests; the *Sunday Chronicle* reviewer demanded that it should be banned under the Defence of the Realm Act 'as a work calculated to destroy the moral of the people'.[82] Among the strongest complaints were those from Catholics offended by the portrayal of Christine as a sincere member of their religion. The Catholic Federation wrote threatening prosecution; nothing seems to have come of this, but as Kinley E. Roby writes: 'It was the kind of letter that made publishers very nervous, and Bennett was sufficiently disturbed by the letter to send a copy of *The Pretty Lady* to Attorney General F. E. Smith to forestall any police action against the book.'[83] Bennett's establishment connections helped him to outface criticism in ways that a less well-situated writer would have found difficult. As he wrote to Geoffrey Madan: 'Various attempts have been made to suppress it. Smiths, after doing exceedingly well out of it, have decided to ban it. Boots of course won't touch it[....] However, I have influences in high places which ought to be able to counteract such moves. The book sells like hot cakes.'[84]

The Pretty Lady sold 30,000 copies within six months,[85] one of the most successful initial sales of any of Bennett's novels, which indicates that by 1918 a large readership was ready for fiction that avoided the simpler stereotypes of early War literature. Yet the book's critique of wartime society does not imply any loss of faith in the need to fight; before the book's publication he had been recruited by Beaverbrook to a senior post in the Ministry of Information, and was working tirelessly in the national cause.

These two novels of 1918 prefigure much fiction of the twenties, not only in their assertion of the right to write more freely about both soldiers and civilians, but in their sense of the War as a catalyst, speeding up processes of disintegration and change that were already at work in pre-war society. Both assume the rightness of the cause, but vividly present its cost, both personal and social, and imply that the disruptions of the War may have a permanently destabilizing effect on Britain.

---

82 John Shapcott, 'Introduction', *The Pretty Lady*, i.

83 Kinley E. Roby, *A Writer at War: Arnold Bennett 1914-1918* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 244.

84 James Hepburn, (ed.) *The Letters of Arnold Bennett*, Vol III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 60-61.

85 Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett*, 228.

Chapter 4

The Twenties: Rewriting the War

A. The needs of the time

Scholars examining representations of the Great War in the 1920s have primarily been interested in the vivid contrast between the conventional wartime themes of sacrifice and redemption and (usually later) perceptions of the War as a tragic waste. Dan Todman's *The Great War, Myth and Memory*,[1] traces the supplanting of patriotic myths by a late-twenties myth of 'futility', and Samuel Hynes makes a clear division of post-war texts into 'Monuments' and 'Anti-Monuments' — pious tributes to the dead contrasted with 'monuments of loss: loss of values, loss of a sense of order, loss of belief in the words and images that the past had transmitted as valid'.[2] Rosa M. Bracco defines a post-war conservative middlebrow literature that clings on to wartime positives in decided contrast to the accepted Great War canon of 'Owen and Sassoon, Ford and Graves'. [3] While such mappings of the territory have their uses, this chapter will suggest that emphasis on large contrasts, or treating the decade after the War as a unity, or as a progression towards the creation of a myth, can obscure the variety and vitality of the representations of the War produced during this time. It will suggest that the period between 1919 and 1928 was at once a time of extreme anxiety and a time of experiment, when symbolic meanings became less stable, and when writers of many kinds, while still almost all regarding the War as a worthwhile cause, attempted to find new ways to describe it, and to decide how its memory related to the postwar world.

It will question the interpretation of mass-market literature given in Rosa M. Bracco's *Merchants of Hope.* This book surveyed war-related fiction produced during the years 1919-39, and usefully defined the characteristics of a kind of novel whose target audience was the middle-class, middlebrow reader of the day. Bracco defines 'middlebrow' fiction as essentially

1 Dan Todman, *The Great War, Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005).
2 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 307.
3 Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-39* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1993), 1.

unchallenging, making 'no attempt to go beyond, or as the writers themselves would have put it, to deviate from comfortably familiar presentations.'[4] These books, she notes, 'assumed the presence of an audience bound by a community of values',[5] and their style is 'firmly set within the confines of traditional structures.'[6] Stylistic conservatism is seen as a sign of political and social conservatism in books that 'ultimately reaffirmed historical continuity and the coherence of faith.'[7] She stresses 'the perceptual balance which is characteristic of so many middlebrow novels: the capacity for belief within the waste and cruelty of war.'[8]

Bracco's analysis is often perceptive and her survey of the literature is extremely useful, but her conclusions are open to question. There is some circularity to her argument: she has selected books aimed at a middle-class conservative audience, and then demonstrates that they convey middle-class, conservative values. If one defines the term 'middlebrow' not by prejudging its social and political implications, but by applying it to the whole range of fiction aimed at a literate but non-coterie audience, one finds fiction published for a readership similar to that of the books that Bracco analyses, but taking a different view of the War. Even books that she does mention do not always fit comfortably within her definitions; *The Victors* by 'Peter Deane', for example, is a grim fable of post-war failure. Other novels may eventually reach balanced resolutions, but raise awkward and disturbing questions on the way, and allow for readings not necessarily conservative. More significantly, *Merchants of Hope* treats the inter-war period as a unity, collecting together books written over twenty years, and from them extrapolating one 'middlebrow' ideology of conservatism; this chapter and the next will instead look for diversity, and will suggest that while some writers and readers in the twenties were implicated in myths of consolation, others explored a range of interpretations of their recent collective experience.

Any study of war fiction during the twenties must begin by considering its

---

4 *Merchants of Hope*, 10.
5 *Merchants of Hope*, 12.
6 *Merchants of Hope*, 13.
7 *Merchants of Hope*, 12.
8 *Merchants of Hope*, 31.

relation to the huge collective project in which Britain was engaged at this time, defining and celebrating the memory of the War. War memorials appeared in almost every town and village in the country, and the newly invented public rituals of Armistice Day were a responses to a demand for the public recognition of private grief. In the words of Adrian Gregory, 'The lasting appeal of the Silence rested, above all, on its double nature as public and private commemoration.' During a shared experience through which the solidarity of the community was affirmed, '[e]ach individual was alone for two minutes with his or her own thoughts.'[9] Importantly, this day, in the words of David Cannadine, was 'not a festival of homage by the citizens to the state, but a tribute by the living to the dead."[10]

There were other forms of remembrance. David W. Lloyd has described how the thriving industry of battlefield tourism satisfied both curiosity and the need for pilgrimage: it was 'not simply about the sights one could see but about recapturing the meaning of the war."[11] In British cinemas, films reconstructing battles seem to have remained popular throughout the twenties,[12] and during the inter-war period, non fiction reached what Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have described as 'a reading public with a seemingly unquenchable thirst for books about the war."[13] There was, in short, a huge collective project during the twenties, defining memories of the War, and establishing their meaning. Despite all this, there was a common perception that war fiction was not wanted.

Ian Hay begins his note 'To the Reader' of *The Willing Horse* (1925) with: 'One is informed that novels touching upon the war are no longer read."[14]

---

9 Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 18.

10 David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain' in (ed.) Joachim Whaley, *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa, 1981), 219. Cannadine concludes that:'the Armistice day ritual, far from being a piece of consensual ceremonial, cynically imposed on a divided and war-weary nation by a cabinet afraid of unrest and revolution, was more a requiem demanded of the politicians by the public.' (*ibid.*)

11 David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 112.

12 In particular, the productions of British Instructional Films, from *The Battle of Jutland* (1921) to *Ypres* (1924) and *Mons* (1926), frequently used actual participants in the battles, as a guarantee of authenticity.

13 Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61.

14 Ian Hay, *The Willing Horse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 7.

Similarly, R.H.Mottram thought it necessary to preface *Sixty Four! Ninety Four!* (1925) with an apology for writing a war novel at a time when such books were not required. Richard Blaker, an aspiring writer who had published two war stories in *Land and Water,* was warned by A. M. Burrage:

> Your war stuff is the real stuff. I can follow you because I fought over the same ground; but most magazine editors employed their wartime more profitably, and that stuff means nothing to them.[15]

The fiction magazines, which in a competitive market were highly responsive to popular taste,[16] show an interesting progression. Between 1919 and 1921 war stories appear whose representations of soldiers depart radically from wartime stereotypes. Edgar Wallace's 'The Magnificent Ensign Smith' (*Strand Magazine*, May 1919) deals with a soldier shot for cowardice; Warwick Deeping's 'What Every Soldier Knows' (*Story-Teller,* April 1919) portrays a man shamming shell-shock; 'Piecrust' by Roland Pertwee (*Nash's*, April 1919) depicts a soldier indulging in an adulterous affair while posted in Alexandria, and so on. After 1921, however, stories set in wartime were rarely found in the magazines, although these continued to feature fiction about ex-soldiers. This may simply be because the War had become old news; by 1922, a *Times* reviewer could criticize *The Great Day,* a film based on a wartime theatrical hit, in these terms:

> The story, in these post-war years, seems extremely old-fashioned, as all war stories do. It is concerned with a patent steel that is going to help England to win the war, with some desperate villains who spend all their time trying to obtain the secret of the steel, with the Armistice, and with the Peace Conference. A couple of years ago this kind of theme was quite thrilling. Now it is merely rather amusing. [17]

If War fiction had lost the power to thrill, publishers in the twenties would necessarily be wary of it; four years of shortages and rationing had raised the price of paper and other raw materials. Before the War, according to John St

---

15 Bodleian Mss Eng, Lett. c317 f292.

16 *The Story-Teller*, for example, monitored readers' preferences by a long-running monthly competition, in which readers were invited to rank stories in order of merit.

17 *The Times* (January 11, 1922), 8.

John, a publisher knew that 'if he sold as few as 500/600 copies out of a first print of 1,000 he would still not suffer a loss'. After the war, even with the cover price of an average novel raised from 6/- to 7/6 a publisher 'needed to sell about 1,800 copies out of 2,000 to break even."[18] In such a climate, only fiction that spoke clearly to the concerns of the post-war age would be likely to find a publisher.

After the Armistice, fiction had lost its wartime role of imaginatively filling in the gaps that were obvious in censored journalism. Non-fiction could now take over this role with a more plausible claim to authenticity.[19] As the twenties progressed, the memoirs of politicians, soldiers, nurses and others competed to reveal the behind-the-scenes story, to claim credit and to apportion blame. Each regiment produced its official history, describing conflict from a collective, not an individual viewpoint; ex-soldiers could read these to understand the larger actions in which they had played a part, thus reinforcing their sense of identity as member of an elite group. The language of some of these histories glossed over the pain and brutality of battle, but others were written vividly; both styles can be found within Douglas Jerrold's history of the Royal Naval Division. Parts are written in the formulaic euphemisms of the military communiqué:

> While consolidating their objective they experienced rather heavy losses, and they had also suffered severely from the enemy's barrage before the attack began. The result was that two companies of Hood Battalion had to go up to reinforce them. Nevertheless they consolidated their objective, and the difficulties which had arisen on the 3rd in safeguarding the left flank were on this occasion avoided.[20]

The flat phrases – 'consolidating their objectives', 'heavy losses', 'difficulties' disguise more than they reveal; yet given that the book's intended readership included many who had fought with the Division, these dignified euphemisms may reflect the author's consciousness that horrors and brutalities are vivid

---

18 John St John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 160-61.

19 The two titles of war correspondent Philip Gibbs's re-telling of the War indicate the appeal that made it a best-seller. In Britain it was called *Realities of War*; in America *Now it Can be Told*.

20 Douglas Jerrold, *The Royal Naval Division* (London: Hutchinson, 1927), 219.

enough in his readers' memories to need no sensationalising emphasis. On the other hand there are passages of writing made vivid by personal observation, as when Jerrold describes the scene at Gallipoli, just before the final withdrawal:

> Here and there were gathered in pitiful heaps rifles and equipment from the wounded and the dead, and amid this wreckage, across the sand still strewn here and there with rusted entanglements, men moved about with that brisk solemnity which one meets but seldom beyond range of the guns, which contrasts so markedly with the lackadaisical formalism of the base.[21]

The evocative imagery of rust and wreckage sums up the whole doomed enterprise, but more significantly the phrase 'brisk solemnity' is packed with what Jerrold has observed of the concentrated professionalism of soldiers engaged in the difficult business of ordered retreat. The vivid details are not here for their own sake, but to evoke what was special about this particular moment in the Division's history, and to emphasise its special ethos, in contrast with the conventionalism of the base.

It was not only participants who could describe campaigns vividly, however; in Rudyard Kipling's *History of the Irish Guards* (1923), the sensory experience of battle is communicated more precisely than in most texts by combatants:

> Every battle has its special characteristics. St Léger was one of heat, sunshine and sweat; the flavour of at least two gases tasted through respirators or in the raw; the wail of machine-gun bullets sweeping the crests of sunken roads; the sudden vision of wounded in still-smoking shell-holes or laid in the side of a scarp; sharp whiffs of new-spilt blood, and here and there a face upon which the sun stared without making any change.[22]

Kipling's son, an officer in the regiment, had been killed at Loos, and Kipling's *History* was a memorial to him, as well as a tribute to the whole regiment.

---

21 *The Royal Naval Division*, 94.

22 Rudyard Kipling , *The Irish Guards in the Great War: The First Battalion* (reprint) (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1997), 258.

Paragraphs such as the one quoted are evidence not only of exhaustive research, but also of profound imaginative engagement with the material. The writing is skilfully managed — as in the shift from the past tense 'was' to the immediacy of the present participle 'sweeping' and the noun phrases of the 'sudden vision' and 'sharp whiff', and then back to the past historic when 'the sun stared' upon the unchangeable dead — but there seems more than skill at work here, as a non-combatant with a deep emotional commitment to the War attempts to both understand and communicate its most intense experiences.

The tone of many regimental histories was that of pious memorialisation, honouring both the dead and the survivors, and this tone seems to have become the favoured one for discussion of the War as the twenties progressed. David W. Lloyd, in his *Battlefield Tourism*, has drawn attention to the distinction constantly made in newspapers and elsewhere between 'real pilgrims' to the war zones and what a writer in the *Daily Express* called 'morbid seekers after sensation. Vandals. Ghouls of the battlefield.'[23] Speaking for the War Graves Commission, Rudyard Kipling made an appeal for reverence to those visiting the battlefields, noting that 'there is a tendency among some visitors to forget this obligation.' Kipling blames 'unthinking carelessness' rather than 'any intentional disrespect' but urges those who visit the battle areas to 'bear in mind that, at every step, they are in the presence of those dead through the merits of whose sacrifice they enjoy their present life and whatever measure of freedom is theirs today.'[24]

There was therefore a danger that any popular novelist dealing with the War might be labelled a sensation-seeker, unless he or she used the hushed tones of piety that are unlikely to be conducive to lively fiction. One novel, however, managed the difficult feat of combining lively characterisation with a reverence for the soldiers' sacrifice, and became one of the great best-sellers of the twenties. Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* was reprinted fourteen times in 1922, and six times in the next year; by 1939 it had sold 300,000 copies, and subsequent editions stayed in print for forty years.[25] It is a book divided sharply

---

23 *Daily Express*, 23 Sep, 1919. Quoted in *Battlefield Tourism*, 41.

24 'Consecrated Battlefields: Mr Kipling's Plea for Reverence', *The Times* (5 December 1919), 16.

25 Ernest Raymond, *Please You, Draw Near, an Autobiography 1922-1968* (London: Cassell 1969), 69.

in two. The first half ('Five Gay Years of School') is a story of public-school life; the second half ('And the Rest – War') follows the two main schoolboy characters to the later days of the Gallipoli campaign.

The division into pre-war and wartime was becoming conventional for books of the period, but few have such a marked difference of tone between the sections. Most of the first half of the book had been written before 1912, when Raymond, in his late teens, began teaching at preparatory schools. What he wrote then reflects both nostalgia for his own schooldays and the paternalistic view of the teacher. He abandoned the book — or what he later called 'a shapeless mass of stuff'[26] — some time before 1912, when he discovered a religious vocation and, having become an Anglo-Catholic, studied theology at Durham. He was ordained as deacon in 1914 and fully priested in 1915. Almost immediately he became a chaplain attached to the 10th Manchesters, and sailed for Gallipoli in August. His authorial ambition returned and he decided to write about war, but in a special way:

> But it was on the Peninsula that there broke before me a moment of vision. I saw what to do with the massed and untidy chapters of my school story — or with what seemed the best of them: they would form the first half of a two-part novel which would be a study of my own generation of schoolboys who, after their few years of school, happy or unhappy, had been called upon to bleed and die for England.[27]

The disparity between the book's two halves is striking. The first is a candid portrayal of ungodly youth, with an emphasis on physical horseplay and practical jokes. Its style must have seemed old-fashioned in 1922; it refers back to the way that school stories were written before the revolution in the genre effected by *Stalky and Co* and early P. G. Wodehouse. As Alec Waugh wrote in his review for the *Sunday Times*, '*Tell England* comes to us with the raiment of modernity, but its heart is with the sixties'.[28] In this section, protective mothers and manly schoolteachers keep an anxious eye on schoolboy souls, while a

---

26 Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days: An Autobiography 1888-1922* (London: Cassell, 1968), 132.

27 *The Story of My Days*, 133.

28 Quoted in *The Story of My Days*, 183.

depraved and ugly boy called Freedham lurks at the edge of the narrative as a warning against sexual 'beastliness'. At the same time, the writing seems strikingly unaware of its own homoeroticism: the boys are conscious of their attractiveness ("'I'm the best-looking person in this room," said Archibald Pennybet.'[29]) and form close emotional bonds ('There, far ahead of us, was Doe in the company of Freedham, with whom he was turning into a doorway. A pang of jealousy stabbed me, and with a throb, that was as pleasing as painful, I realised that I loved Doe as Orestes loved Pylades.'[30]) Ceremonies of caning are described in lingering detail, and manly schoolmasters become hero-figures of erotic potency. When Doe and Ray have been beaten by the 'hard' assistant housemaster, Radley, Doe comes to Ray's dormitory bed and tells him: 'Do you know, I really think I like Radley better than anyone else in the world. I simply loved being whacked by him.[31] Forty-five years after the novel's publication, Raymond would write: 'Another thing that is a cause of wonder to me as I re-read the book is the indubitable but wholly unconscious homosexuality in it,' since "'homosexuality" was a word which — absurd as this seems now — I had never heard.' He decided that 'Its presence in the book is one more evidence of its author's unusually slow progress towards maturity.'[32]

If Raymond's sexual naivety made possible the unrepressed expression of boyhood emotions, his ignorance of military matters helped to make the structure of the book more effective. As a chaplain, he had not undergone the training that his heroes would have experienced before going to Gallipoli. John Keegan, writes of how the process of training is one of drilling and repetition, enabling men 'to avert the onset of fear, or, worse, of panic and to perceive a face of battle which, if not familiar, and certainly not friendly, need not, in the event, prove wholly petrifying.'[33] In Raymond's book, the sudden lurch from peace to war is possibly accidental; in later texts whose aim is defamiliarisation, it will be used deliberately to enhance the horror of war.[34]

---

29 Ernest Raymond, *Tell England* (London: Cassell, 1922), 19.
30 *Tell England*, 107.
31 *Tell England*, 37.
32 *The Story of My Days*, 180-181.
33 John Keegan, *The Face of Battle:* A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 21
34 The sudden time-shift, ignoring any period of training and jumping straight to the battle zone, is a favourite technique of twenty-first century novelists aiming to dramatically convey the shock of

On the ship bound for Gallipoli, where they will arrive at the time of the Suvla landings, a project doomed to failure, Ray and Doe meet Padre Monty, a High Church chaplain who excites them with his strong enthusiasm for church ritual. If the depiction of public school life in the first half of the book owed much to the idealising nostalgia of one recently deprived of its pleasures, the second half may be read as the wishful thinking of a newly-ordained chaplain. Raymond's memoirs make no mention of the dramatic spiritual conquests described in the novel, where the fierce hero-worship that the boys had given to Radley is now transferred to the priest. ('Radley had become remote [....] Monty reigned in his stead.')[35]

By the time they arrive at Gallipoli, the invasion has faltered, and the soldiers wait miserably for withdrawal, though sustained by their new-found faith. Finally, Doe is killed in battle, leading his men with bravery, and previous doubts about his showy character are put to rest. Juxtaposed in one text, therefore, are a recognizable picture of the undisciplined passions of young men, and a depiction of them in terms saintly and heroic enough for a War Memorial, or a Service of Remembrance. The forced combination of two disparate genres, necessitated by the inclusion of material written years before the War (material untainted by awareness of what will follow, and therefore generating a less forced irony than the depictions of youthful ignorance in Cicely Hamilton's *William, an Englishman*) produces a text that provides a way of interpreting the physicality and waywardness of youth as a kind of energy that could be transformed into spirituality. It offers readers a consoling opportunity to reinterpret their own memories of the dead.

Tell England helped post-war readers define their relation to the War; other best-sellers addressed different kinds of anxieties about the post-war world. Robert Keable's scandalous novel about an Army chaplain, *Simon Called Peter*, is a good example of a book set in wartime that appealed to post-war readers because its issues had relevance after the War. The book's hero leaves his fashionable London parish and strait-laced fiancée to attend to the spiritual needs of a labour battalion in France. At first he is appalled by the

---

war. It is used effectively in Pat Barker's *Life Class* (2007), for example.

35 *Tell England*, 215.

sexual mores of the men, and by the abundance of women with 'paint laid on shamelessly',[36] but gradually he understands both men and women better, and decides that 'Commandments are no use – not out here.'[37] Julie, a lively and frank South African nurse, shows him that there is more to life than he had previously realised. He has sexual intercourse with a French girl who has drifted into prostitution and, explosively, with Julie. These sexual experiences so move him that they revive his waning religious instincts, and he develops a new faith, in which sex is sacramental.

Wartime texts had frequently shown sinners redeemed by enlistment; *Simon Called Peter* challengingly claims that war could teach lessons to the sinless. Its lush conflation of sex and religion was condemned by many as tasteless — in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald puts it on the bookshelf of the vulgar character, Myrtle, presumably as an index of her vulgarity — but it became a best-seller, despite the disapproval of the conventional. [38]This was partly, no doubt, because its reputation invited salacious curiosity, but must also have been because the War had disturbed many conventional assumptions about sex and gender roles. Julie, the sexually forthright nurse who is willing to acknowledge what she has in common with the prostitutes of the town, is very different from the typical idealised selfless nurse of wartime romantic fiction (whose inner beauty was celebrated far more than her sexuality).

The depiction of Julie addresses questions that must have been in many minds about the young women who had left sheltered existences to work in hospitals and elsewhere, had seen aspects of life that they would otherwise have been sheltered from, and had sometimes returned home transformed. Vera Brittain would later reflect on the difference between her earlier life: ('Throughout my two decades of life, I had never looked upon the nude body of an adult male') and her nursing experiences ('Short of actually going to bed with them, there was hardly an intimate service that I did not perform for one

---

36 Robert Keable, *Simon Called Peter* (London: Constable, 1921), 66.

37 *Simon Called Peter*, 168.

38 The degree to which the book was scandalous can be indicated by the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to license a theatrical adaptation in 1925. He passed the script to the Bishop of London for an official opinion, and the Bishop responded negatively: 'I picture myself taking my house party [...] to the Theatre, and any nice girl or woman would I think be sick at seeing any man or woman emerging from the bedroom where they had spent the night in their night-dresses, but when one was a parson they would be positively shocked.' (BL Add Mss 1925 (LR) – *Simon Called Peter*).

or another in the course of four years.')[39] Irene Rathbone, also writing many years later, described the relationship between nurse and soldier in terms of unconscious sexuality: 'She was a nurse in uniform, and he was a wounded soldier; the gulf between them was rigid. And yet across that gulf, unrecognised and certainly unheeded by either, stretched the faint sweet fingers of sex.'[40] These nurses hint at sex as a potential experience; historian Cate Haste goes much further when generalising about social changes, suggesting that 'the war had demolished the myth of female sexual apathy, since there had been so much evidence, and fear, of women's sexual activity'.[41]

Keable's philosophy of love, formulated in high-flown idealistic language, offered a way for post-war readers to acknowledge and consider such experiences, and to explore unorthodox and potentially troubling ideas about how the disruptions of the War may have affected the men and women involved in it. Since the War has liberated its clergyman hero, the book's final verdict on the conflict is a positive one; the assumptions of pre-war society have been shaken up, and realities have been acknowledged.

A positive view of the War is also often found in fiction that Samuel Hynes notes as typical of the early twenties, the sort that positions the War within its historical context, considering its relation to what came before, and its effect on the years that followed. Samuel Hynes has said of such fiction:

> These novels vary enormously in quality, in point of view, and in the degree of their popular success; but they have these qualities in common: They are all located precisely in actual history, and they all contain the war at their centre — the disintegrating, transforming element that changed reality.[42]

The War is indeed often shown as a 'transforming element', but when it is disintegrative, this is generally because it brings pre-existing trends to a crisis. The upper-class family of Michael Sadleir's *Privilege* (1921) has been

---

39 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: an autobiographical study of the years 1900-1925* (London: Virago, 1978), 165.

40 Irene Rathbone, *We That Were Young* (first published 1932) (New York: Feminist Press, 1989), 212-3.

41 Cate Haste, *Rules of Desire: Sex in Britain: World War I to the Present* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 56.

42 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 328.

disintegrating for years; the War, which leads one character from selfishness to treason, is the immediate cause of the family's ruin, but merely completes an ongoing process. Douglas Jerrold's *Quex* (1927) *is* mostly set before and after the War, but it is wartime profiteering that allows the full blossoming of its anti-hero's chicanery.

Many novels of this period, however, present the War as having quite the opposite of a disintegrating effect. Stressing the continuities between pre-war and post-war as much as the disruption caused by the War, novels of the twenties rarely idealise the years before 1914; C. E. Montague in *Rough Justice* (1926) reminds readers of the destabilising influences present in pre-war society:

> Women were trying to force a change of law, quite just in itself, by practising the brutal tricks of neurotic male savages. Rich lawyers and traders, men for whom law and order meant as much as plate glass and policemen mean for a jeweller, with his paraded diamonds, were toying with plots for killing their neighbours in Ulster. Among slight-minded people in London chatter about a coming 'class war' was becoming the fashion; some of it among people soured by poverty of their own, or naturally prone to envy, or sickened by some passion of pity that had curdled into spite; more of it among the rich illiterates and their harems, who canvassed aloud in flash restaurants the chances of roping the Army into a 'push' to shut up 'the talk-shop at Westminster' and scrap 'all this representative rot' before Labour could get into power.[43]

Montague's extreme and scornful language presents a pre-war England seemingly beyond hope, where political protest unleashes savagery in women, where the classes with most to gain from stability plot murder, where political debate has become trivialised into a shouting-match between the 'slight-minded' and the 'rich illiterates'. The sexual order is disturbed; some women have become 'brutal' and 'neurotic', while others belong to 'harems'. Democracy is under threat. Yet to the reader of 1926, the passage might read less like history than an account of the post-war world. Women had won the vote, but

---

43 C. E. Montague, *Rough Justice* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), 146-7.

the other sources of disquiet remained. Ireland was still disturbed by violence and changing gender norms were still a cause of anxiety, while the class war had become even more disturbing, Russian communism and Mussolini's fascism having provided anti-democratic models for left and right.

When novels contain such descriptions of the pre-War world, the War comes as an opportunity for the country to renew itself, and the man who voluntarily enlists is often shown as the exception to an otherwise general rule of selfishness, dishonesty, or lack of self-control He embodies a national spirit that has persisted despite the odds; the War years are shown as an opportunity for unity, not a period of disintegration.[44] It is after the War is over that the nation falls apart again. Two novelists, otherwise very dissimilar, who represented pre-war society as corrupt and troubled, and the War as a missed chance for regeneration, were A. S. M. Hutchinson in his best-selling *If Winter Comes* (1921) and Ford Madox Ford in his Tietjens tetralogy (1924-8). Each of these shows a righteous man becoming an exemplary soldier, but in conflict with tendencies left over from pre-war society that corrupt the otherwise noble enterprise of the War. Hutchinson's hero, Mark Sabre, is a dreamer who lives a pre-war life of unspectacular integrity, in striking contrast to his closest associates (a specious priest, an amoral aristocrat, a corrupt journalist, self-serving employers and a snobbish wife). The book's presentation of England's dispiriting social actuality is offset by Sabre's vision of what the country might be. He has tried to communicate his mystical faith in England to the young by means of a school textbook, and has a conviction that in an emergency the country will reveal its true nature; the declaration of war in 1914 is a chance for England to become truly itself. In the event the transformation is never more than partial; the novel's many villains rally to the war effort, but profit from it, too. Sabre himself enlists as a private, though later earning a commission, but when he returns home, seriously wounded, it is not to a hero's welcome, but to scandal. A girl he had befriended has given birth to an

---

44 In Montague's novel, a man who has left public life because he is disillusioned by its standards of honesty devotes his life to bringing up his children in a manner that means that they will retain their integrity, despite the temptations to shallowness offered by the conventional educational system. This upbringing means that both son and daughter survive the war morally intact, while others are destroyed by it.

illegitimate child; out of charity, he gives her a home, and is suspected of being the child's father. When the desperate girl commits suicide, he is publicly vilified. Throughout, he behaves with what Margot Asquith, one of the book's many admirers, described as 'the highest qualities of man, and those generally associated with Christ – Tenderness, Patience and Compassion.'[45] This Christ-like soldier suffers not at the hands of the enemy but at those of the Pharisees at home; his becoming a soldier is, however, crucial to his development as the man who suffers and takes responsibility.

With its over-determined emotional situations and its depiction of a struggle between an impossibly virtuous hero and caricature villains, *If Winter Comes* might seem to have little in common with the complex literary products of modernism, yet a strong similarity between this novel and Ford's *Parade's End* was rather mischievously noted by Claude Washburn in 1926:

> Mark Something-or-Other was a man whom the world in general regarded with indifference as a failure, and for whose excellent work somebody else was always getting the credit, but whom a few really fine spirits reverenced. So was Christopher Tietjens. Each was unhappily married [....] Each hero loved another lady, really appreciative and good, who was eager to sacrifice, in Mark's case her husband [....] in Christopher's her virginity. Each hero refused the gift. ('Some do not' ... do that kind of thing.) [....] Each, instead of getting himself profitably *embusqué,* slipped off unassumingly to the war and was badly hurt. Each slipped back home again to take up modestly and wearily the old round – a good deal hampered in this by all those *embusqués* who had pushed ahead in the meantime. Each, for no obvious reason, became a social pariah, was slandered and fairly hounded by the world in general – but not, of course, in the sophisticated novel, to the point of general hysterics reached in *If Winter Comes.*[46]

---

45 Margot Asquith, Letter to *The Times*, 24 April1922. *The Times* had inaugurated its new 'Books' section with an invitation to its readers to debate *If Winter Comes*. Most responses were extremely favourable to the novel, and, like Asquith's, to its hero especially.

46 Claude Washburn, 'Sophistication', *Opinions* (London: Constable, 1926), 65-66. Similarities between the novels have also been noted by John Onions in *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War* (1990) and by Billie Melman in *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (1988).

Washburn's teasing style suggests that he was being deliberately provocative in representing Ford as merely converting the 'ten-twenty-thirty melodrama' of *If Winter Comes*, into the style of *Madame Bovary*.[47] The similarities of structure that he points to are significant, however, showing that two very different writers could each convey in his own way a picture of a far-from-innocent pre-war world, and the war as a missed opportunity for national renewal.

Ford shows a pre-war society maimed by selfishness and careerism, and one where sexuality is out of control. Tietjens' wife Sylvia (plausibly described as 'the worst woman that can be imagined'[48]) is unrepentantly adulterous, and lechery is taken as the norm by many characters. Tietjens clings to his identity as an English gentleman even while gentlemanliness is becoming an old fashioned and unvalued virtue. His life, like the narrative of *Some Do Not...*, is continually interrupted and disturbed by uncontrolled sexuality, most memorably in the scene where the ruined priest Duchemin interrupts the breakfast party with obscenities. The clergyman Boom Bagshaw in *If Winter Comes* had merely been an absurd and transparent hypocrite; Duchemin is mad, sexually and scatologically obsessed. He represents the corruption not only of religion, but of art. As a disciple of Ruskin, Duchemin had connections with the Pre-Raphaelites, used by Ford to represent an undisciplined sensuality (Tietjens describes Rossetti as 'that obese, oily man who never took a bath'.[49]). On Duchemin's walls are by pictures by 'Simeon Solomon, one of the weaker and more frail aesthetes',[50] notorious as the artist imprisoned for homosexual importuning.[51]

Duchemin represents a sexuality not only out of control but polymorphous and inappropriately public. It bursts from the private domain to cause intense embarrassment – but so does much of the other sexuality in the novel. The smutty talk of City men disturbs the civilised restraint of a golf club; Sylvia's

---

47 'Sophistication', 67.

48 Ford Madox Ford, *Some Do Not*. Included in *Parade's End* (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), 15.

49 *Parade's End*, 18.

50 *Parade's End*, 56.

51 There are guarded references also to 'Ruskin's road-builders', the Oxford undergraduates recruited by Ruskin to be socially useful; these included Oscar Wilde, and also William Money Hardinge, sent down from the University because of his flagrant homosexuality and his relationship with Walter Pater. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 58.

adultery constantly threatens to become a ruinous public scandal. Although Britain's engagement in the War is 'the one decent action that humanity has to its credit in the whole of recorded history,' it has no positive transforming power over the 'beastliness of human nature.'[52] As the tetralogy progresses through the war years, the stubborn integrity of Tietjens, the exemplary soldier, look increasingly out of place. Unlike Hutchinson, however, Ford does not allow his hero to be beyond criticism; in the words of Melvin Seiden:

> [Tietjens] is not either a long-suffering and saintly man or a fool. For clearly he is both. It is one of Ford's greatest achievements to have made us feel, as Sylvia does, that Tietjens's paradoxical virtue *is* intolerable, and yet to have done this without in the least mitigating her viciousness or suggesting that Tietjens deserves the calumny he receives from her or the world.[53]

It is this ambiguity that makes the difference between the difficult modernist novel and the sentimental bestseller, but putting the two side by side reveals, as Claude Washburn noticed, striking similarities and a shared sense of the War's place in history. Both writers convey clearly that the conflict had been terrible, and its cost enormous, but in these books the forces of disintegration are those associated with peacetime. The volunteer soldier, by contrast, represents the values that could (but are unlikely to) unite post-war society; both Sabre and Tietjens finally retire to private life, while their unprincipled antagonists carry on much as before, yet what Robert Caserio writes of Tietjens' retreat is true of Sabre's as well: '[T]he withdrawal is not an escape into a pure or mere privacy, opposed to civilisation and the State's public virtue. The withdrawal is an enactment of public norms which must be kept alive in acts of secret resistance at very local sites by civic principles that might yet come back into common use.'[54]

---

52 *No More Parades. Parade's End* , 489.

53 Melvin Seiden, 'The Living Dead – VI. Ford Madox Ford and his Tetralogy', *London Magazine*, 6 (August 1959), 49.

54 Robert L.Caserio, 'Ford, Kipling and Public Virtue', in Robert Hampson and Max Saunders (ed), *Ford Madox Ford's Modernity* (Amsterdam, New York: 2003), 180.

B. **New Kinds of Memoir.**

The general consensus that wartime taboos on representations of the soldier could be relaxed was expressed even by the theatrical censor G. S. Street, in his 1924 report for the Lord Chamberlain on Allan Monkhouse's play, *The Conquering Hero*, which shows an intellectual who enlists unwillingly, finds war a moral chaos, and returns a broken man:

> I have read that the author did not want this Play acted during the War. Rightly, I think, and at that time it might not have been licensed, because the 'pacifist' argument in the first part, and in the latter part the collapse of courage due to starvation and exhaustion and the final nervous state of the 'hero' might have had a bad effect. But I see no reason now for withholding a license. The arguments in the play are familiar and the realities of war and the fact that not every Englishman is always a hero are now known. It is a moving play to which bare analysis can not do justice. [55]

Given the changed circumstances, it is unsurprising that accounts of training and Army service are now very different from *The First Hundred Thousand*. For instance, there is *Combed Out*, the memoir of a unwilling conscript, 'F. A. V.' (Fritz August Vogt), published in 1920. This memoir is in striking contrast to the positive wartime accounts that had endorsed Donald Hankey's enthusiasm for the 'great experiment in democracy' bringing men of all classes together, united in a common purpose. Vogt heaps scorn on someone using the phrase 'our democratic army', and describes with disgust the experience of eating with his fellow-recruits: 'The rowdy conversation, the foul language, and the smacking of lips and the loud noise of guzzling added to the horror of the meal.'[56]

---

55 BL Add Mss LCP Corr *Conquering Hero* 1924/5316. Similar latitude was shown to J.R.Ackerley's *Prisoners of War* (1925). In this case the censor chose to ignore the homosexual implications which had worried the play's producer, and his final judgement is that 'The sentimental friendships and jealousies between the officers have no sinister suggestion in any coarser sense. The play is dreadfully painful but that is all.' (BL Add Mss LCP Corr *Prisoners of War* 1925/6255) Even Malleson's *Black 'Ell*, seized in 1916 as 'a deliberate calumny on the British soldier' (*House of Commons Debates* 86, 31 October, 1916, Col 1533), was licensed in 1926 on the grounds that 'the objections to the play now appear to be out of date', but not before it had been submitted for inspection by Sir Herbert Creedy at the War Office. (BL Add Mss LCP Corr *Black 'Ell* 1926/ 7132). Limits to the censor's complaisance will be discussed in the next chapter.

56 'F.A.V.' (Fritz August Vogt), *Combed Out*. (London: Swarthmore Press, 1920), 3. The publisher

His time in the Army is described as 'seventeen months of exile and slavery' mostly engaged in tedious fatigues, though with a period attached to a Casualty Clearing Station, whose horrors are described graphically. The Army is represented as an institution that brings out the worst in people; a Sergeant-Major, for example,

> was in reality quite a kind-hearted man, but he was bullied by his superiors just as we were bullied by ours. He was bullied into being a bully. And his superiors were bullied by their superiors. The army is ruled by fear — and it is this constant fear that brutalizes men not naturally brutal. [57]

The soldiers described by Vogt include men who rob the dead and a 'small, wiry, spiteful looking Cockney' who murders a prisoner he suspects of sarcasm.[58] The whole book is saturated with distaste and disappointment.

Vogt's book, packed with the personal resentment of an unwilling soldier, is untypical of its time, but the fact that it could now be published without outrage demonstrates the new freedom. Two other books of the immediate post-war years adapt the genre of semi-fictionalised memoir to examine wider ethical and sociological themes. They are C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922), which uses the form to trace a decline from the idealism of 1914 to what its author sees as the compromises of the later War, and Stephen Graham's *A Private in the Guards* (1919), which looks with bracing objectivity at the ethical paradoxes of warfare.

Disenchantment (1922) is a key work of this period, and generically disparate, moving from semi-fictionalised memoirs of the author's training and war experience, to essays on diverse war-connected subjects, though it is given some unity by Montague's distinctive style, with its tone of disillusioned irony. It begins as narrative, describing his training as a private after volunteering with the 24th (Sportsman's) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, an untypical and socially prestigious unit, described by Keith Grieves as consisting of 'men united in the understanding that they had left material wealth and important possessions in

---

was a small press specializing in Quaker and pacifist literature. It is unlikely that the book had a large circulation, even when reprinted in 1929, at the height of the 'war books boom'.

57 *Combed Out*, 20.

58 *Combed Out*, 78.

civilian life to join the army.'[59] He takes this elite formation, however, as representative of the country's mood in 1914, and contrasts its spirit with post-war attitudes:

> It seems hardly credible now, in this soured and quarrelsome country and time, that as many men of different classes and kinds, thrown together at random, should ever have been so simply and happily friendly, trustful and keen [....] That was the paradise that the bottom fell out of.[60]

Montague feels 'the first shiver of disillusion'[61] when a sergeant-major detailed to take his company on a route-march stops them off instead at a convenient pub. The volunteer's enthusiasm comes up against old sweats for whom the Army is not the means of a crusade, but an environment where they make themselves comfortable, with a philosophy summed up by the 'shorter creed to which the sergeants' mess waiters said that the Regular sergeants always recurred in their cups – "Stick together, boys," and "Anything can be wangled in the Army."'[62] Such attitudes are not confined to the N.C.O.s, but permeate the whole Regular establishment. Montague is scathing about 'the Old Army resistance to every inroad of mere professional ardour and knowledge and strong, eager brains.'[63] His vision of an army of noble volunteers becomes more tarnished by the introduction of conscription, whose tribunals send 'the shirker, the "kicker", the "lawyer"' and other types of undesirables' to dilute the quality of the army.[64]

Significantly, after the descriptions of training and life as an idealistic private soldier, *Disenchantment* loses touch with the author's own military career. Montague himself became a sergeant, survived a serious accident while instructing his grenade company in bombing, went to France and spent three weeks in the trenches. Soon after this experience he took a commission, and joined the intelligence department at G.H.Q., where he accompanied war correspondents to the front line and censored their daily reports. Little of this

---

59 Keith Grieves, 'C. E. Montague and the Making of *Disenchantment*, 1914-21', *War in History*, (4:1) 1997, 40.
60 C. E. Montague *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto and Windus, Phoenix Library,1928) 12.
61 *Disenchantment* , 15.
62 *Disenchantment*, 20.
63 *Disenchantment*, 133.
64 *Disenchantment*, 135.

post-training career is made clear in *Disenchantment;* the book loses specificity and becomes a collection of essays critical of the conduct or development of the War. In the chapter 'Can't Believe a Word', for example, he criticizes war correspondents for being too closely connected to the Staff:

> They lived in the Staff world, its joys and its sorrows, not in the combatant world. The Staff was both their friend and their censor [....] They would visit the front now and then, as many Staff Officers did, but it could only be as afternoon callers from one of the many mansions of G.H.Q., that heaven of security and comfort. When autumn twilight came down on the haggard trench world of which they had caught a quiet noon-day glimpse they would be speeding west in Vauxhall cars to lighted châteaux gleaming white among scatheless woods.[65]

This description gives no hint that Montague was one of the censors, nor that he himself took journalists and others on these safe conducted tours; he has written himself out of the picture.

What Montague seems unable to write is an account of his own compromises with practicality. The full account of his wartime career would contain episodes not quite compatible with the high moral tone assumed by his authorial voice. In the chapter on 'The Duty of Lying', he analyses the evasions and falsifications of propaganda, but without reference to his own major wartime literary work, the captions for Muirhead Bone's drawings in *The Western Front.* [66] Montague's elegant prose describes the scenes, always positively, without revealing the more horrific conditions of battle, or any problematic features of the campaign. As Samuel Hynes suggests: 'both the drawings and the commentaries imagine the war in familiarising English terms [....] Drawings like Bone's are official art, not because they are of generals or heroes, but because they are not *strange*.'[67] The work provides the kind of sanitised picture of war that Montague had satirized in his 1910 comic novel about journalism, *A Hind Let Loose*, in which a war correspondent travels 'over

---

65 *Disenchantment*, 101.

66 Published in instalments by *Country Life* from 1917.Later collected in two volumes.

67 *A War Imagined*, 160. Sue Malvern in her *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony and Remembrance* (New Haven and London 2004) disagrees, seeing intimations of 'self-doubt and a sensitivity to anomaly' struggling for expression in Montague's prose (28).

land and ocean without rest, bent to sweeten the home-life of the *Warder's* readers with all the heroic pleasures of war, unalloyed by groin wounds or enteric.' [68]

Montague's subject was the spiritual decline that he had observed during the course of the War, and *Disenchantment* makes use of two genres, lightly fictionalised personal reminiscence and discursive essay, that allow him to express that decline. The disparity between these genres means that the book does not live up to the promise of its beginning. While lived experience is the criterion by which the first part of the book judges the events and conditions of the War, the later sections become increasingly bookish, viewing events less in the light of experience than in the light of quotations, from Shakespeare, Scott, Goldsmith, Smollett and other favourite authors. Together these quotations embody a standard that reveals the modern age's shortcomings, but they are less convincing than the earlier appeal to experience.

Montague's civilised yearning is very different from the tone of sociological enquiry assumed by Stephen Graham, who had been a journalist reporting for the *Times* in Russia before returning to England in 1917 and enlisting as a private rather than an officer, in a spirit of social adventure: '[T]o serve in the ranks is a unique opportunity to get to know the working man.' [69] Graham shares Vogt's perception of the Army as an organisation in which bullying was endemic, but his attitude is not one of total disapproval. He served in the Scots Guards, an elite regiment whose ethos is summed up in Graham's first sentence: 'The sterner the discipline the better the soldier, the better the army.'[70] Graham was among conscripts, 'some of whom in a true and sensible national economy would never have been sent to fight,'[71] and these were turned into soldiers by means of brutality: 'the humiliation of recruits by words or blows' and 'the use of glaringly indecent language'.[72] Graham deplores these but 'in wartime the problem of breaking in those who were

---

68 C.E.Montague, *A Hind Let Loose* (first published 1910) (London: Methuen, London, 1928), 11.

69 Stephen Graham, *A Private in the Guards* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 212. Graham showed a similar spirit after the war, writing about London jails: 'I have often wished [...] to serve a term and see a prison from within.' *London Nights* (London: John Lane, 1929), 96.

70 *A Private in the Guards*, 1.

71 *A Private in the Guards*, 37.

72 *A Private in the Guards*, 57.

never intended by Nature to be soldiers was so difficult that some of these ugly things became useful.'[73] This recognition of awkward paradox is Graham's characteristic tone. He understands what is needed to win a war, and also the human cost of it: 'You drilled to the breaking point, and then you went on drilling.'[74] When, like Hay, he sometimes speaks as 'we' rather than 'I', the effect is very different, not involving the reader in the process of training as Hay had done, but challenging him or her to enter the community that accepts the facts of war: 'We shoot our cowards at dawn, we shoot also sentries found asleep at their posts, we make an example and give the death penalty to officers or men making mistakes which have led to disaster.'[75] He confronts us with a unit whose unofficial ethos was that 'a good soldier was one who would not take a prisoner'[76] and in which 'men who were not in themselves brutal cultivated brutality to get the army tone.'[77] Refusing to dodge the most difficult issues, Graham's writing is very different from that of Ian Hay and his like. He is also, however, very different from the later writers who simplified the War by emphasising its futility, and choosing to minimise the moral impetus behind it. Graham's book is a study of the cost of morality, never underestimating the harshness of the War, but facing up to the necessity for such harshness.

C. Playing the Part

In wartime fiction, becoming a soldier often meant discovering your true identity; there was no gap between the man and the role. In the twenties, when most soldiers had returned to a civilian existence, often with difficulty, the question of the relationship between man and role has become problematic.

Many books of the twenties stress a separation between man and soldier. In his memoir, *The Romance of the Last Crusade* (1923) Major Vivian Gilbert makes clear what generally remained unacknowledged during wartime — the

---

73 *A Private in the Guards*, 58.
74 *A Private in the Guards*, 73.
75 *A Private in the Guards*, 18.
76 *A Private in the Guards*, 217.
77 *A Private in the Guards*, 213.

element of play-acting involved in soldiering. An actor before the war, Gilbert describes how he undertook to play the part of officer:

> I spent this fortnight in getting my uniform made, being photographed in it, and growing a moustache. My theatrical training stood me in good stead in helping me to cultivate the kind of moustache suitable for a second lieutenant. I did not make the mistake that some temporary officers made, of growing the type of moustache usually worn by a sergeant-major or a field-marshal.[78]

Gilbert suggests that actors did well in the Army: 'I think the reason for this is that actors, on obtaining a commission, took it just as they would have taken a fresh part to study. They knew the 'make-up' required, they were conversant, from practice in a score of parts, with the speech and all the little tricks that go to the composition of a typical subaltern.'[79]

The idea of soldiering as performance is often found in admiring descriptions of T. E. Lawrence, a hero who caught the public's imagination in the twenties. Lowell Thomas, in articles that transformed Lawrence's exploits into myth, constantly stresses the disparity between the 'retiring young Oxford graduate' and what he became when dressed in Arab garb — 'the world's champion train-wrecker, the leader of a hundred thrilling raids, commander of an army, creator of princes, and terror of Turks and Germans.'[80] Thomas's Lawrence is admired for his performing skills and for the perfection of his image:

---

78 Major Vivian Gilbert, *The Romance of the Last Crusade: With Allenby to Jerusalem*. (New York: William B.Feakins Inc., 1923), 15.

79 *The Romance of the Last Crusade*, 15-16.

80 Lowell Thomas, '"The Uncrowned King of Arabia":Colonel T.E.Lawrence: The Most Romantic Career of Modern Times', *Strand Magazine* (February 1920),141. Graham Dawson, in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994) sees the persona adopted by Lawrence as transgressive: 'Lawrence seems to break all the informally codified rules that [...] had governed white colonial masculinity, and upheld the authority of Empire.' (170) Yet the role that Thomas makes Lawrence enact derives from the tropes of imperial adventure fiction; he writes: 'Fate never played a stranger prank than when she transformed Thomas Lawrence, the retiring young Oxford graduate, from a studious archaeologist into the world's champion train-wrecker, the leader of a hundred thrilling raids, commander of an army, creator of princes, and terror of Turks and Germans.' This representation of the mythical Lawrence seems to owe much to the slim, almost girlish figure of Sandy Arbuthnot in Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), who 'rode through Yemen, which no white man ever did before,' and who was 'blood-brother to every kind of Albanian bandit. Also he used to take a hand in Turkish politics, and got a huge reputation.' (*The Complete Richard Hannay*, 118.)

> Young Colonel Lawrence was like an actor playing a part during the war of liberation in the land of the Arabian Nights. The Bedouins never saw him excepting when he was at 'top-notch'. He cultivated the character of a man of mystery. He usually dressed in robes of pure white. In order that his garb should look spotlessly clean he carried three or four changes of raiment on an extra camel.[81]

In Thomas's account, Lawrence's impersonation is represented as an effortless achievement, but in his autobiography Lawrence would give a different view:

> At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only [....] I had dropped one form and not taken on the other [....] Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near. [82]

Novels of the twenties often analyse this strain of performance. Adrian, the hero of Wilfrid Ewart's novel, *Way of Revelation* (1921), is very conscious that he does not take to soldiering as naturally as his friend Eric, an instinctive soldier. When the pressure of trench life persists, Adrian notices, however, that he is not the only officer finding it difficult to keep up appearances:

> Stick it. Second Lieutenant Walker had to, though he trembled all over, jumped to this side and that, and went white to the lips when shells came plunging into the ditches that lay so immediately beneath the enemy's eye. Cornwallis, on the other hand, though gaining by dint of immense effort more visible control over himself, had nightmares in the back areas. He now rarely spoke. Others became jerky and took to drinking rather large quantities of neat whisky. [...] Alston, the ex-lawyer, for all his assumed toughness, began to wear a perpetually grim and worried, an almost haunted look.[83]

And so on, through a list of almost all the officers in the unit, including even the Colonel, who 'had acquired a stutter, as though he kept himself

---

81 '"The Uncrowned King of Arabia"', *Strand Magazine* (March 1920), 251.

82 T.E.Lawrence, *The Complete 1922 Seven Pillars of Wisdom: The 'Oxford' Text* (Fordingbridge: J and N Wilson, 2004), 11-12.

83 Wilfrid Ewart, *Way of Revelation: A Novel of Five Years*, (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), 291-2.

under perpetual constraint."[84] With the laconic soldierly 'Stick it', Adrian orders himself to maintain the role, as only Eric, the novel's natural warrior, seems able to do. Yet Eric's total identification with the role of soldier has its darker side, as is shown when he and Adrian come across two German prisoners 'being prodded along a lonely section of trench by the bayonets of a sergeant and three soldiers, accompanied by kicks and curses."[85] To Adrian these enemies are 'as much the victims of the holocaust of war as himself or their captors' but Eric gives the men permission to do what they like with their prisoners. 'Passing back that way half-an-hour later, they found the Germans lying dead in the trench.' Eric has seen the matter purely from a military perspective ('They're no use to us.') and has none of Adrian's compassion. Complete identification with the role of soldier comes at a moral price.[86]

This is also suggested by A. W. Wheen's 'Two Masters' (1924). The enigmatic hero of this story is Ralston, an Australian sergeant more interested in painting than in soldiering, whose inner life is incommensurate with his military role; when he talks seriously, his conversation is idealistic, studded with quotations from Dante. The battalion moves to France and Ralston is seen in action: 'His courage was of a character which marked it as unique. Everywhere he was serene and imperturbable, and in extremity he was the rallying-point for us all."[87] The second half of the story is in Ralston's own voice, a long letter describing a secret mission behind the German lines:

> I went impersonating that German artillery-liaison officer we captured by Warfusée-Abancourt [....] As a German artillery-officer I was ranging guns on my own countrymen, and as a British spy I was betraying the Germans who had accepted me.[88]

He makes close friends with Schaeffer, a German officer ('with him I could have made that one friendship which in a life-time it is given men to enjoy [....]

---

84 *Way of Revelation*, 292.
85 *Way of Revelation*, 290.
86 Ewart belonged to the Scots Guards, like Stephen Graham, discussed earlier.
87 'Two Masters', *The London Mercury*, November 1924, 30. (The story was reprinted in 1929 as the first of Faber's *Criterion Miscellany* pamphlets.)
88 'Two Masters', 32.

We were made for friendship.')[89] Inadvertently he gives himself away to Schaeffer, who does not denounce him. They talk together of the impossibility of serving two masters — the state and the Christian law to which their consciences respond. Ralston knows that eventually Schaeffer will have to give him away, and forces himself to shoot the German.

While an ordinary soldier, in the first half of the story, Ralston had managed more or less to reconcile the demands of his conscience and his military duty by dissociating them, distancing himself from those who glorified war, and retreating into a personal world of painting and poetry. The spying mission of the story's second half makes the contradiction inescapable, and performing his military duty means personal degradation: 'It is unchristian, unholy, ignoble, hideous; it is devilish.'[90]

The contradiction between Ralston's military duty and his personal feeling is so extreme that only suicide can resolve it; he deliberately walks alone into No Man's Land. The narrator sees this not as a solution to the ethical problem, but as avoidance. 'Then there was cowardice in his woman's heart after all,'[91] he editorialises, but the dramatic excess of this stereotyping condemnation should perhaps be taken as a hint that this judgment is not necessarily the author's. The story is studded with historical references that, like the quotations from poetry, insist on a wider context. In his letter, Ralston describes Agrippa's Roman road, and wonders 'how many thousands of soldiers, for the thin comfort of a *solde* have dragged themselves along that weary straight, with big heads and little hearts, since Julian?'[92] The ethical issues raised are not unique to this war, but are foregrounded by it, just as the particular situation of Ralston as a spy brings out the ethical dilemma that he had previously evaded.

A striking fictional exploration of the relation between man and soldier is found in Godfrey Elton's *The Testament of Dominic Burleigh* (1925), a book that gets no attention in the accounts of War literature

89 'Two Masters', 32-33.
90 'Two Masters', 33.
91 'Two Masters', 37.
92 'Two Masters', 37.

by Fussell and Hynes, who concentrate on telling the story of a developing myth of futility. This is a different sort of novel altogether, the supposed memoir of a man determined to expose his own hypocrisy and inauthenticity — qualities dating from before the War; the character describes himself as a young don at Oxford:

> I suppose it was then that I began to cultivate the trick of talking like the people in H.G.Wells's novels. I think I did it quite consciously; but I should never have formulated its implication — that it doesn't matter how much thought there is behind what you say provided you say it in a certain manner.[93]

In 1914, with conscious hypocrisy, he joins the Territorials, in order to wear a uniform, and suggests that his fellow-territorials (whom he despises) 'were all unconscious fellow-conspirators, involved together in creating an illusion – the illusion that we were really anxious to find ourselves in the firing-line.'[94]

He eventually goes to France, where the book makes clear the disparity between conventional images of the soldier and actuality. An officer goes mad, crawls over the parapet and is shot; his obituary reads: 'Killed leading his men upon a desperate attack.' A chaotic episode, during which Burleigh behaves less than bravely, gains him the D.S.O. Frequently he insists that he is not an exception, but that hypocrisy is endemic, even in the reader:

> The things I have told of myself and shall tell are just the things you thrust deep down within yourselves, and instinctively, when they are drawn up to the light, you shudder at them. [....] But they are in you all right, that's my point.[95]

In the retreat of March 1918, Burleigh runs away from battle and, wounded, falls in with a band of squalid deserters who are reduced to the most basic form of survival; pretence is no longer possible. 'Filthy, bearded, gaunt and verminous' among 'the lepers of society', he discovers a new authenticity: 'I had deserted, and I was going to accept that stark fact, and build on it the rest of my life.'[96] When he escapes from this situation, he finds himself listed as

---

93 Godfrey Elton, *The Testament of Dominic Burleigh* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1925), 25-26.
94 *Dominic Burleigh*, 75.
95 *Dominic Burleigh*, 113
96 *Dominic Burleigh*, 135.

dead, and mourned as a war poet who had been 'woken to new beauties by the trenches (the fly-blown trenches!)'[97] He accepts this official death, and, retreating to anonymity, constructs a new life free of hypocrisy.

Elton's novel can be seen as a parody of those wartime stories where enlistment leads to triumphant self-discovery; for him war is at once an environment that invites hypocrisy and one that exposes it cruelly. Dishonest Burleigh is brought to honest acknowledgement of the disparity between his own moral capacity and what is asked of him by the War (the righteousness of which is never questioned); since the book suggests that his dishonesty is not unique to him, there is a suggestion that the moral demands of the War are too great for mere humans to bear.

Extreme Penalties

A recurrent trope in Great War literature has been the soldier shot for cowardice, desertion, or other dereliction of duty; nothing shows more dramatically the conflict between a military code developed in the eighteenth century for disciplining an army composed, according to Wellington, of: 'men escaping justice, with bastard children, or seeking cheap wine — the scum of the earth'[98] and the expectations of a twentieth-century army of volunteers and conscripts. During wartime itself, this was rarely a theme for the writer of fiction, though Warwick Deeping's *Valour* (1918) comes close to it. In a story that might have been indirectly inspired by the case of Siegfried Sassoon, he depicts an egotistical officer who responds to bullying by his Colonel, and refuses to obey an order; sent home, he publishes a letter of protest against the War in a newspaper. He faces a court-martial, which 'might have doomed [him] to be shot', but instead inflicted on him 'a far more delicate yet poignant punishment. They set him free. They sent him back to his own people to explain away his shame.'[99] While the book

97 *Dominic Burleigh*, 114.

98 Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: A New Biography* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), 42.

99 Warwick Deeping, *Valour* (London: Cassell, 1918), 178. Sassoon's was the most publicized case of a soldier's protest against the War, and was widely reported in 1917, when Deeping was writing *Valour*. The circumstances are different; Sassoon made his protest in England, not in the fighting zone, and made a point of protesting against the politicians, not the army, but the novel indicates how Sassoon's protest might have looked to a conservative army doctor who had seen the results of Gallipoli – by no means totally unjustified but rather petulant and self-centred.

eventually comes to a conventional resolution, with the taming of the rebel, his re-enlistment as a private soldier, and his achievement of an appropriate humility, its scenes in Gallipoli (where Deeping himself served as an Army doctor) are disturbing, with grim descriptions of fighting conditions, and of bullying by a senior officer. The question of conflict between the individual and the Army is raised before it is backed away from.

Two other novels written during wartime feature wilful rebels who are actually executed. In Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Little England* (1918), the wayward Jerry who had volunteered for the sake of adventure finds it hard to settle to military discipline and becomes 'a bad soldier, a disgrace to the uniform he wore'.[100] A letter to his father explains the circumstances of his death:

> Mr. Archie said perhaps not tell you, but I said I would rather you knew. It is like this. I kept away in —— last time we went up to the trenches, with a lady friend, you may have heard of. Beatup says he told you. Well, I am to be shot for it. I was court-martialled, and they said to be shot. Dear Father, this will make you very sorry, but it cannot be helped, and I am not worth it.[101]

The novel presents this death as consistent with a short life in which Jerry had been consistently presented as unable to relate to the needs and wishes of others; his resentment because his passion for Ivy Beatup was unrequited had led him almost to raping her. The novel's sympathies are not with him in his rebellions against military discipline, but since Tom Beatit, the novel's exemplary responsible soldier is killed in battle at about the same time, there is a sort of equivalence in their fates that raises questions about clear moral distinctions.

In Stacy Aumonier's *The Querrills* (1919), the death sentence results from a different kind of wilfulness, this time on the part of an officer who has previously been established as very self-opinionated; the reader is abruptly and unsympathetically told:

> 'Rodney had been shot, by order of a court-martial, for acting culpably against the orders of his superior officers during action [....] Rodney

100 Sheila Kaye-Smith, *Little England* (London: Cassell, 1924 [reprint]), 265.
101 *Little England* , 264.

had acted deliberately against instructions. He believed his plan was better and he disobeyed [....] As a result a whole company — not his own — was almost annihilated.[102]

Aumonier describes the man going to his death 'tremendously casual, with his slightly twisted, slightly ironic, smile, and his great pride of soul' and 'his head thrown back as though he were saying: "Well, God?"'[103] Not even a death sentence dents his egotism.

These executions are of men who have with some deliberation set themselves against the Army; Kipling, in one of his 'Epitaphs of the War', gives voice to a man condemned to death for human weakness, because he slept while on sentry duty:[104]

Faithless the watch that I kept: now I have none to keep.
I was slain because I slept: now I am slain I sleep.
Let no man reproach me again; whatever watch is unkept—
I sleep because I am slain. They slew me because I slept.[105]

The movement of this poem is a slow and tortuous working-through of paradoxical antitheses; the nagging repetitions of 'sleep' and 'slain' move toward an acceptance that his fate is just; the man who has let down his unit faces the consequences.

After the War, when popular literature was beginning to venture into aspects of the War that had previously been forbidden territory, the *Strand* published *The Magnificent Ensign Smith*, by Edgar Wallace. In this tale, a white-haired old woman is dying, and anxious to hear from the comrades of her dead son, a disappointment when young. Three embarrassed soldiers arrive to reassure her that Jimmy was 'the bravest of the brave.' The old lady dies, happily kissing the Medal of Honour that one of the soldiers has given her; after this, one of the soldiers reveals to the narrator that 'Ensign Smith [...] was shot for cowardice in the face of the enemy.'[106] With that sudden twist the

---

102 Stacy Aumonier, *The Querrils*, (London: Methuen, 1919), 266.
103 *The Querrils*, 267.
104 During the War, 449 men were condemned to death for this offence, although only two were actually executed (in Mesopotamia); the other sentences were commuted. (Corns and Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone* [London: Cassell, 2001], 264.
105 Rudyard Kipling, *The Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990), 314.
106 'The Magnificent Ensign Smith', *Strand Magazine*, May 1919, 371.

story ends, confronting the reader with an ugly fact and inviting ambivalence about war legends. On one hand, the narrative invites scepticism, positioning the reader as someone who knows that heroic stories told to old ladies should not always be taken at face value; on the other hand, it approves of the telling and public endorsement of such stories. It shares this ambivalence with a wartime poem whose story it re-tells in a cruder and more melodramatic fashion — Sassoon's 'The Hero', in which an officer visits the idealising mother of a dead comrade, concealing his private knowledge:

> He thought how 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine,
> Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
> Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
> To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,
> Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
> Except that lonely woman with white hair.[107]

When Sassoon's poem had appeared in the coterie-radical *Cambridge Magazine* of 1916, it caused controversy, one reader protesting that there was 'at least one Englishman pained not to say disgusted by the poem'.[108] Now in 1919 Edgar Wallace can publish essentially the same story in a mass-circulation magazine. In both story and poem, the reader is invited to identify with the conventional surviving soldiers; both texts view the coward with contempt. Not only has he been a poor soldier, but has given other soldiers the awkward and embarrassing job of covering up for him. And in each text the white-haired mother is viewed with sad but distancing irony; we readers feel sympathy for her, but we know more than she does, and we know it from real soldiers who have seen combat. In Wallace's story these soldiers also communicate their opinion that the execution was justified, and readers are given no reason to doubt this, since Ensign Smith, insofar as he is characterized, is stereotyped as a weakling.

Wallace is sentimental about the mother; it was also possible to

---

107 Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 2002), 26. The story also bears a similarity to that of Allan Monkhouse's Boer War play *The Choice* (1908).

108 Quoted in Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet: A Biography 1886-1918* (London: Duckworth, London, 1999) 268. According to Wilson, Sassoon made no attempt to offer caustic poems like *The Hero* to more mainstream journals, which would have refused them.

sentimentalise the soldier. In *The White Monkey* (1924), Galsworthy imagines a disillusioned ex-soldier poet Wilfred Desert, who writes a poem about an imagined defiant deserter, a brave coward who is the mouthpiece for Desert's (and presumably Galsworthy's) own opinions:

'See 'ere! I'm myde o' nerves and blood
The syme as you, not meant to be
Froze stiff up to me ribs in mud.
You try it, like I 'ave, an' see!

'Aye, you snug beauty brass hat, when
You stick what I stuck out that d'y,
An' keep yer ruddy 'earts up — then
You'll earn, maybe, the right to s'y:

"'Take aht an' shoot 'im in the snow,
Shoot 'im for cowardice! 'E who serves
His King and Country's got to know
There's no such bloody thing as nerves."'[109]

As a poem this, with its clichés and weak rhymes, is negligible, quite failing to rise to the dreadfulness of the situation; the man speaks a petulant protest in thin stage-Cockney; its significance is as a precursor of later sentimental versions of the theme, such as the twenty-first century best-seller, *Private Peaceful.*

A far more penetrating treatment is found in A. P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), loosely based on the controversial case of Sub-Lieutenant Edwin Dyett, a member of Herbert's own unit, the Royal Naval Division, though in a different battalion, and not known to him personally. In late 1916, Dyett had been brought before military justice on the grounds that 'when it was his duty to join his battalion, which was engaged in operations towards the enemy, did not do so and remained absent from his battalion.' [110] Dyett was found guilty

109 John Galsworthy, *The White Monkey*. In *The Forsyte Saga, Volume 2,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 206.

110 Dyett's story is told in Corns and Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone* (London: Cassell, 2001), 264.

and executed; the novel is driven by Herbert's sense of the injustice of this sentence.

The sensitivity of the book's hero, Harry Penrose, is established from the start; he is 'a shy, intelligent-looking person, with smooth, freckled skin and quick nervous movements.'[111] The potential for tragic irony is made clear: of all the officers heading for Gallipoli, Penrose is the one enchanted by the closeness to the site of Troy; he is determined to succeed despite his insecurities ('I won't be the battalion dud – and I'll have a damned good try to get a medal of some sort and be like – like Achilles or somebody.'[112]) Herbert's plain-man narrator lucidly describes how the Gallipoli campaign (the punishing heat, the abrasive sand, the constant presence of death, and the plague of flies) took its toll of a 'sensitive nature and a delicate upbringing.'[113] After the retreat, Harry faces drudgery in France, and becomes increasingly unable to cope.

At the beginning, Herbert apologises for a book that will 'seem to digress into the dreary commonplaces of all war-chronicles,'[114] but his novel will move away from generic expectations, will fail to maintain a close focus on the central character, and will be unable to maintain a uniform tone. The narrator is away from his unit at the time when the crucial event of apparent cowardice occurs; he cannot give us his usual plain and lucid account of the event, but has to reproduce alternative testimonies, none of them complete. The book becomes a sifting and weighing of ambiguous evidence. Those who decided to prosecute Harry did so for motives that were probably discreditable — and yet he did run away. Chapter XII, describing Harry's court-martial, loses focus on the character altogether; Herbert has much that he wants to say about the shortcomings of military justice, and makes keen forensic points that seem to come from his own lawyer's mind rather than from the plain-man narrator previously established. He imagines how the defence case for Harry could have been conducted, and how doubt could have been cast upon prosecution testimony, but his indignation disturbs the linguistic register of the novel, and special pleading and forensic argument take over from imaginative fiction.

---

111 A.P. Herbert, *The Secret Battle* (Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2001), 1.
112 *The Secret Battle*, 12.
113 *The Secret Battle*, 49.
114 *The Secret Battle*, 1.

Samuel Hynes sees this novel as 'an early example of a kind that later became conventional' (the victim-as-hero novel) and points out that while in 1919 it did not sell very well, 'When it was reissued in 1928 the public was ready, and *The Secret Battle* took its place among the end-of-the-decade books that defined the Myth.'[115] Yet the book does belong to 1919, and in no respect more so than its straining against the generic norms of the war chronicle. Perhaps because the events are too recent and emotive to be recollected in tranquility, they cannot be given a neat literary form.

In *Blindfold and Alone*, Corns and Hughes-Wilson investigate the facts of the Dyett case; inevitably it is a messier and murkier story. Where Penrose was accused of disobeying an order by bringing his men back from a dangerous situation, Dyett was accused of deserting the men under his command. In addition, Dyett did not have the distinguished war record that Herbert describes in the first half of the book; he had not fought in Gallipoli, but was new to the trenches. It is Herbert's own campaign record that he gives his main character, as though acknowledging that there were circumstances in which he too might have found himself in Dyett's position. It is notable that while Herbert is telling the part of the story that corresponds to his own experiences he is able to maintain the conventional narrative tone, sympathetic but distanced slightly by the irony of foreboding. When he comes to Penrose's offence, he can no longer maintain that tone, and the account is fragmented among various narrators (whose accounts are punctuated by indignation and incomprehension from the main narrator) until it is stabilised into a forensic discourse, the language of the defence lawyer.

Other treatments of the theme consider the deserter as part of a unit, and see the act of desertion as an index of the man's relation to his comrades. In C.E. Montague's *Rough Justice* (1926), Victor flourishes before the War as a charming character, enchanting all who meet him with verbal fantasies, quite divorced from reality. When, as a romantic gesture, he enlists as a private, the War brutally exposes his limitations. He becomes the clumsy failure of the platoon, isolated and wretched. On the march to battle he collapses, and,

---

115 *A War Imagined*, 306.

thrown on his own resources, is lost. Unlike Auberon, he has never been able to connect on a human level with his fellow-privates. He hears some soldiers that he knows, but, frightened that he might be apprehended as a deserter, is afraid to approach them.

> You see — he did not know them — had never really fraternised with his fellows — not even enough to know that all privates are tacitly leagued together to avert from any one of themselves the major severities of the law — no more than he knew how courts-martial, for all their grim looks, will struggle until the going down of the sun to find some excuse for the poor brother who has failed.[116]

Montague is indicating that Victor, aware only of the written rules of the Army, cannot understand the unwritten laws of its subcultures, or appreciate the instinctive sympathy of man for man. Unable either to trust his fellow-humans, he becomes less than human, discovering within himself 'a furtive animal cunning, a rat's or a beetle's, that he had never known himself to possess: he loathed it while he used it.'[117] Weary and confused, Victor is taken in by a French peasant woman, who steals his uniform and keeps him more or less as a slave. Utterly demoralised, he acquiesces in this humiliation, and remains with her for two years, until finally discovered, and arrested for desertion. Montague gives more detail of the execution than other writers of the period. Victor's mouth has been stuffed with cotton-wool to stop him saying anything that might disturb the firing squad, despite which 'The blighter's face kept working,' as the brutal officer in charge of the execution explains later.[118] This man, whose only talent was verbal, is denied the power of speech, and is finished off by a revolver shot in his mouth. The description is intentionally disquieting, but the novel as a whole has rather schematically shown that Victor's fate was, if not deserved, inevitable, given the limitations, and his inability to connect with his fellow-soldiers. This is a text that, like the wartime moralities or Lawrence's 'England, My England', uses 'the brutality of

---

116 *Rough Justice*, 281.
117 *Rough Justice*, 280.
118 *Rough Justice*, 347.

fact' as a bludgeon with which to punish its characters for their failings, however regretfully.

Max Plowman (writing as 'Mark VII' in 1928) shows military discipline from the viewpoint of an officer uneasy in the role. The diarist narrator of *A Subaltern on the Somme*, a cleverly crafted fiction closely based on Plowman's own experience, makes clear the difficulty of reconciling military rules and human feeling. A soldier collapses in the middle of an arduous journey to deliver rations:

> 'Look here,' I say, 'If you don't get up, it's my duty to shoot you for disobeying an order. You understand? Either you get up and go on, or I shall have to shoot.'
>
> He does not stir, but after waiting a moment replies in the voice of one turning over to go to sleep:
>
> 'Then, sir, I'm afraid you'll have to shoot.'[119]

The subaltern is unable to carry out his threat: 'Cursing, I pick up his ration-bag and hasten after the disappearing file.' On another occasion the subaltern comes across three sentries asleep; instead of putting them on a charge that could technically have led to execution, he plays a tough-minded practical joke on them, hiding their rifles and firing his revolver:

> All three jump to their feet feeling for their rifles and fairly gibbering with fear. There follows a short and vehement address. I return with their rifles and, pointing an obvious moral, leave them.[120]

Playing this trick allows the subaltern to maintain the role of officer, pointing the 'obvious moral', without compromising his humanity by exposing the men to excessive punishment for human weakness. Despite finding the scene 'too pitiable and realistic to be amusing', Plowman allows his character to feel satisfaction ('I don't think Burt will sleep on sentry again,') and to enjoy the anxiety that the incident will have aroused: 'I wonder if he thinks I shall split on him?'[121]

---

119 Max Plowman ('Mark VII'), *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (Uckfield: Naval and Miltary Press, n.d. Facsimile reprint of 1928 edition by Dutton, New York), 148.
120 *A Subaltern on the Somme*, 89.
121 *A Subaltern on the Somme*, 89.

This anecdote shows the subaltern pleased at being able to display tolerance; a later one indicates that such tolerance has its limits. A Sergeant was sent with half a dozen men to make billeting arrangements in a town. They stay there a week, and then the sergeant disappears. After a while, the men go back to the battalion, to find themselves apprehended for desertion, though when they explain their case to the C.O. he withdraws the charge. Plowman's narrator comments on the Sergeant: 'Quite obviously he is asking to be shot if he is caught, and I would not lift a finger to save him; for if he is skunk enough to want to dodge these trenches himself, that doesn't excuse him for very nearly having half a dozen men court-martialled for desertion.' [153] There is the implication here of a moral gradation; being a deserter opens the Sergeant to the conventional denigration of 'skunk', but risking the lives of the men under his charge is inexcusable.

The relation of the deserter to his group is dealt with differently in a book from the end of the decade, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We*, whose central character is, like Manning, a private soldier. A serial deserter, Miller, is brought to court-martial; Bourne, Manning's alter ego, given the job of escort, feels for him 'the kind of pity which can scarcely tolerate its own object.'[122] The death sentence is commuted; later two other soldiers see the man, and: '"They ought to 'ave shot that bugger," said Minton indifferently'. Manning points out that '[t]he indifference of this judgment was its remarkable feature'. The typical soldiers judge without emotion, and simply reject a man who has let down the group. Then:

> Bourne found himself contrasting Miller with Weeper Smart, for no-one had a greater horror and dread of war than Weeper had. It was a continuous misery to him, and yet he endured it. Living with him, one felt instinctively that in any emergency he would not let one down, that he had in him, curiously enough, an heroic strain [....] Miller might be one of those people whose emotional instability was not far from madness [. ...] And then, from amusing his mind with the puzzle presented to it by

122 Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999), 122. This novel was first published in a limited edition, in 1929. An expurgated general edition was published in 1930.

Miller's character, Bourne found himself probing anxiously into his own.[123]

Manning neither condemns nor exonerates Miller in his own voice or that of Bourne. Instead he presents the 'indifferent' judgment of the soldiers and considers the nature of fear, and the effort that Weeper must put into maintaining the façade of courage (which paradoxically reveals his 'heroic' strain). But the final effect of seeing Miller is that Bourne starts 'probing anxiously' into his own character, and his own potential weakness. What this passage implies is that all soldiers knew fear. Most managed, like Weeper, to endure it; most, equally, must have felt the temptation to crack, as Miller had done. By displaying such cowardice, he has let down the whole group; his presence confronts them with a reminder of their own potential weakness, which they must reject with a façade of indifference. Condemning the man is a way of coping with 'the contagion of fear'[124] that such a man threatens to spread.

Stephen Graham also relates the question of crime and punishment to the group as well as the individual, and, typically, tells a story full of moral paradox. Writing about the code of the Guards, he illustrates this by exploring an anecdote from earlier in the War, before he enlisted. During the battle of Neuve Chapelle, 'Private X' was dazed by shellfire, and 'straggled in later, and was unable to give an account of himself.'[125] 'Sergeant-Major Y', a dour martinet who 'through army training, had become the sort of man who presented every fault in the worst possible light',[126] reported him as a deserter; a court-martial took the sergeant-major's testimony against the confused account of the private, and he was sentenced to death. His fellow-soldiers know the sentence is unjustified, but some of them are commanded to form the firing squad: 'And not a man has mutinied. Such is the force of the discipline. The mutiny has only been in the heart.'[127]

---

123 *Her Privates We*, 193-4.
124 *Her Privates We*,122.
125 *A Private in the Guards*, 159.
126 *A Private in the Guards*, 160
127 *A Private in the Guards*, 164.

The execution has two effects. The first is that because the battalion feels humiliated, its ethos intensifies, with even greater ferocity, both in discipline and in fighting spirit. The second is that 'Sergeant-Major Y' became a marked man, sent to Coventry and forced to drink alone. When he was mortally wounded at Festubert, 'no one would give him a drink of water, though he kept asking for it.'[128] He is buried apart from the other eighty soldiers who fell in the battle. 'It is a matter of *esprit de corps*' is Graham's summary of the incident. The sentence is unfair, but discipline prevails. The men's revenge on the Sergeant-Major comes from the same spirit that wins them honours in battle.

These stories about executions are deliberately disturbing; they raise questions, often unanswerable, about the relation between the military authority and the individual, and the most probing make the question more complex by including in it the relation between the individual and his unit. The stories exemplify fiction of the twenties, which admits the imperfections both of soldiers and of military authorities. What they never do, however, is question the moral validity of the cause in which the War was fought, or the motives of those who volunteered in 1914. Even Douglas Goldring, in his 1920 pacifist novel, *The Black Curtain*, acknowledges that 'In those few opening weeks of war mean men were startled into a timid generosity; the naturally generous became exalted, carried away by the impulse of self-surrender; the nervous received an access of courage.'[129] There is no equivalent in the prose literature of this time for the 1919 lines in which Ezra Pound, the American avant-gardist who had spent the War years as a non-combatant in London, impugns the motives of volunteer soldiers:

> These fought, in any case,
> and some believing,
> pro domo, in any case . . .
> Some quick to arm,
> some for adventure,
> some from fear of weakness,
> some from fear of censure,

128 *A Private in the Guards*, 158.
129 Douglas Goldring, *The Black Curtain*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920), 126-7.

some for love of slaughter, in imagination,

learning later . . .

some in fear, learning love of slaughter;[130]

Those who enlisted because they felt that willingness to do so was a condition of citizenship, or because they felt outrage at German atrocities in Belgium, are possibly included in 'and some believing, /pro domo, in any case...' which limits their intellectual and moral engagement to a narrow defensiveness. When Pound later acknowledges patriotism more directly: 'Died some, pro patria,' he cuts off the phrase with an ironic 'non "dulce" non "et decor" . . .' He parodies the wartime slogan, 'The Great War for Civilisation' by saying that soldiers fought 'For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization.' The clever bitch/botched half-rhyme is effective rhetoric, but his definition of 'civilization' as 'two gross of broken statues [and] a few thousand battered books', is a belittling phrase which is hard to relate to what any actual soldiers were fighting for.[131] At the time, Pound's was a lone voice of denigration; it was not until the 1930s that his list of impure motivations would be copied and adapted by other writers, such as Helen Zenna Smith in *Not So Quiet.* [132]

---

130 Ezra Pound, 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Life and Contacts)' in *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber, 1952), 207.

131 Soldiers who saw themselves as fighting for 'Civilisation' might have had many different interpretations of the word, but few would have mentioned statues, and many would have included an opposition to Prussian militarism, and outrage at the invasion of Belgium.

132 Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (London: Newnes, 1930), 137. See Chapter 6. T.S. Eliot's 1934 historical pageant, *The Rock*, imagines men enlisting for the Crusades with a list of motives closely modeled on Pound's. (London: Faber, 1934), 56.

Chapter 5
Returning Soldiers

'Many of the men who came back were in a strange mood — restless, morbid, neurotic,' wrote Philip Gibbs in his 1920 documentary novel, *Back to Life*. 'Their own people did not understand them. They could not understand themselves.'[1] A half-quotation from Shakespeare ('this peace seemed flat and unprofitable to their souls') suggests that these ex-soldiers were as alienated from their own country as Hamlet in Elsinore; like Hamlet's, their confusions can find violent expression:

> There was an epidemic of violence and of horrible sensual crimes with women victims, ending often with suicide. There were mob riots by demobilised soldiers or soldiers still waiting in camps for demobilisation. Police stations were stormed and wrecked and policemen killed by bodies of men who had been heroes in the war and now fought like savages against their fellow-citizens. Some of them pleaded guilty in court and made queer statements about an utter ignorance of their own actions after the disorder had begun.[2]

'It was a dangerous kind of psychology in civil life,' Gibbs continues; the mismatch between the ex-soldier and society is a dominant theme in twenties fiction. Almost all writers agree that there was such a mismatch, yet interpretations differ radically. Some, like Gibbs suggest that men damaged by war cannot escape from 'the dangerous kind of psychology' it has created, and represent them as only tenuously in control of themselves as they come home, bringing violence with them. Others take a very different view, showing the ex-soldier not as one of the age's problems, but as the solution to those problems.

Britain after the Armistice saw itself as troubled; as the previous chapter showed, twenties novelists frequently reminded readers that the problems and conflicts of pre-war British society were unfinished business. Despite the hopes of those who had seen the War as a 'great experiment in

---

1 Philip Gibbs *Back to Life* (London: Heinemann 1920), 221. The unrest of the time is usefully analysed by Jon Lawrence in 'War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalisation in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History* (75) September 2003, 557-589.

2 *Back to Life*, 221.

Democracy', class conflict became evident again after the War, exacerbated by the example of the Russian Revolution, seen by some on the left as an inspiration, and by others as a terrible reminder of the fragility of social systems. During these years, the spectre of violent revolution haunted many imaginations.

The War was often still viewed positively, and many texts ascribed to it almost magical powers of transformation, able to turn at least for the duration, unsatisfactory civilians into unmitigated heroes. Basil Thomson, head of the wartime C.I.D. writes warmly in his memoirs about the conversion of criminals into good soldiers:

> In 1915 eleven hundred habitual criminals were known to be fighting. More than seventy had been killed. One of these had been condemned to death, but his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life, and in due course he had been set at liberty on licence. He was one of the first to answer the call.[3]

He mentions an ex-burglar who went on to win the Victoria Cross, and points out that: 'The very qualities of enterprise and adventure that swept so many youngsters into crime during peacetime took the same men to the recruiting office, and when conscription came in our prisons were more than half empty.'[4]

Both literary and popular fiction echoed these sentiments. Despite a Freudian twist, May Sinclair's *The Rector of Wyck* (1925) is essentially the old tale of a wastrel son redeeming himself by fighting and dying. For the mass market, the 1919 Sexton Blake story *The Affair of the Demobilised Soldier*, describes a criminal turned straight by the army, whose ex-confederates try to lure him back to crime.[5] In thrillers of the twenties, ex-soldier heroes may come across ex-soldiers in the employ of (non-military) villains — an example is Jem Smith in *Bulldog Drummond* — until a reminder of wartime experiences and values revives their better natures. In Gilbert Frankau's 'The City of Courage', an ex-soldier who has been tempted into embezzlement flees the country; he

---

3 Basil Thomson, *Queer People* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), 50-51.

4 *Queer People*, 50. This ex-burglar was William Mariner, who won the V.C. for silencing a machine-gun post single-handed.

5 Anon (William J. Bayfield) *The Affair of the Demobilised Soldier* (*The Sexton Blake Library*, 1:94. September 1919).

reaches Ypres, where memories of "the older days when he himself had been entitled to call himself a man"[6] convince him to regain that manliness by returning home to face retribution.

The assumption that serving in the war had been a morally enriching experience chimed in well with the official rhetoric of Remembrance, which insisted on the nobility of those who had died. Its corollary was that post-war society was morally debilitating. The ex-officer of Rose Macaulay's 'Dennis Demobilised' looks forward to an ignoble future:

> He imagined himself and Marjorie, living in some little residence, (that would year by year get more over-populated), perhaps at Gerrard's Cross, he going to some beastly office on those crowded trains, getting up all the time to offer women seats.[7]

For others the post-war world is not merely banal, but a site of moral squalor; the hero of *Sorrell and Son* bitterly reflects on:

> All that scramble after the war, the disillusionment of it, the drying up of the fine and foolish enthusiasms, the women going to the rich fellows who had stayed at home, the bewilderment, the sense of bitter wrong, of blood poured out to be sucked up by the lips of a money-mad materialism.[8]

Images of mud and filth suffuse this book's descriptions of the post-war world. In Sorrell's imagination, living in peacetime is like undergoing a tank attack on the Western Front: '[E]ver since his demobilisation, life had been to Sorrell like some huge trampling beast, and he — a furtive thing down in the mud, panting, dodging, bewildered, resentful and afraid."[9]

Most accounts are less melodramatic, but constantly return to the figure of:

> those ex-officers who long after the war still found themselves at a loose end and unable to make a place for themselves in civil life, until some of them took to crime and some to despair and some to a bed-sitting-room hired for the night with a gas stove and a shilling-in-the-slot machine and a bolted door which had to be burst open in the morning.[10]

---

6 Gilbert Frankau, 'The City of Courage', *Strand Magazine* (June, 1926), 544.
7 Rose Macaulay, 'Dennis Demobilised', *Land and Water* (27 November 1919), 22.
8 Warwick Deeping, *Sorrell and Son* (London: Cassell, 1925), 5.
9 *Sorrell and Son*, 2.
10 Philip Gibbs, *Young Anarchy*, 20.

Some texts presented the ex-soldier purely as a figure of pathos; for example, John Galsworthy's short story 'The Man Who kept His Form' (1920) which tells the story of Miles Ruding, Old Harrovian and representative of a declining class ('My family's beastly old, and beastly poor."[11]), who after a distinguished but unspectacular war finishes as 'A Lieutenant-Colonel, and a major when he was gazetted out, at the age of fifty-three, with the various weaknesses which gas and a prolonged strain leave in a man of that age, but no pensionable disability."[12] His Canadian farm has floundered in his absence, and the narrator comes across him reduced to working as a London cabman, too proud to seek pity or charity. Galsworthy presents him as 'symbol of that lost cause, gentility' and reminds the reader that Ruding's story is a 'tale which is that of hundreds since the war'.[13] This theme would be taken up by many in the 1920s, and the ex-soldier lost in the post-war world becomes a stock figure of twenties fiction. Even on 19 July, 1919, which as 'Peace Day' should be a tribute to his achievements, the hero of Henry Williamson's *A Dream of Fair Women* (1924) is confused and alienated; his mood seems to match that of Williamson himself at the time, who had written of his demoblisation: 'It was then that I felt lost."[14] The day is characterised by drink-filled chaos, but the ex-soldier whose achievement it is supposed to celebrate feels excluded:

> Soon he reached the fringe of the mob, conscious now of loneliness. His dog was lost; every face was a strange face; everybody seemed radiant with the spirit of carnival; gay bunting and merriment everywhere, laughter and talk — he wandered aimlessly down the High Street searching the faces that passed him by.[15]

Whole novels, such as *The Victors* by 'Peter Deane', are devoted to the miseries of such ex-officers, but more typical of popular fiction is the story unequivocally on the side of an ex-soldier, opposing him to a non-military antitype, especially

---

11 John Galsworthy *Carnival: The Assembled Tales of John Galsworthy*, (London: Heinemann, 1925), 191.

12 *Carnival*, 198.

13 *Carnival*, 201. Part of Ruding's tragedy is that he is let down by a shallow wife; tales of ex-officers' woes often have a tinge of misogyny, the betrayal by the country echoing betrayal by a woman. Warwick Deeping's *Sorrell and Son* is an obvious example.

14 Quoted in Anne Williamson, *Henry Williamson and the First World War* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 188.

15 Henry Williamson, *A Dream of Fair Women* (London: Collins, 1924), 139.

the war profiteer. Such stories can be comic, like those in Dornford Yates's *Berry and Co* (1920), which often describe the farcical besting of some complacent *nouveau riche* who has done well out of the War by members of the upper-class with unimpeachable military records .[16] In popular fiction it is taken for granted that such profiteers are outsiders, either with foreign-sounding names or socially outlandish manners; the 1920 musical comedy *Who's Hooper?* includes a drinking song:

> Here's to the artful profiteer
> And may he ne'er get thinner:
> And here's to the fork he ought to use
> When he eats his peas at dinner.[17]

Such fictional put-downs of profiteers have generally been seen as conservative, a defensive action on the part of those made less prosperous by the War against those to whom it has given upward mobility; this was almost certainly how they were read by many of their audience. Two stories by Frank Hubert, however, indicate that the theme contains more radical potential; both largely consist of dialogues between an ex-soldier and a war profiteer, in which the profiteer is challenged to subsidise the soldier who has risked his life for the sake of civilians.

In 'The Glorious Living', Sir Henry, a financier who had 'gambled on the war coming — and won' begins the story 'gazing at the severe simplicity of the Cenotaph... conscious of a wealth of emotions."[18] He meets his impoverished young relative, Herbert Longton, who has fought throughout the war, and invites him to dinner, despite his vulgar and snobbish wife's disapproval. After dinner, Longton describes how he and his fellow soldiers had imagined a postwar Utopia, and expresses the pain of having fought 'to defend a country that on returning to it, hardly seems worth the trouble.' During wartime: 'We saw profiteering rampant,' and 'England showered her richest gifts on those

16 Yates often makes his odious profiteer not only *nouveau riche*, but foreign as well, such as 'One Dunkelsbaum. Origin doubtful – very. Last known address, Argentina. Naturalised in July, 1914. Strictly neutral during the War, but managed to net over a million out of cotton, which he sold to the Central Powers *at a lower price than Great Britain offered* before we tightened the blockade. Never interned, of course.'(Yates's italics.) Dornford Yates, *Berry and Co.* (London: Ward Lock, 1920), 225.

17 BL LCP 1919/19 *Who's Hooper?*, Act II, 32.

18 Frank Hubert.'The Glorious Living', *The Story-Teller* (January 1920), 425.

who risked least. She bribed non-combatant workers with fabulous wages, and paid her soldiers the same wage they'd been paid a hundred years before.'[19] He calculates how much the War has cost him, in lost time and opportunities ('something like ten thousand pounds'), and says:

> They talk a lot about war memorials — towns and villages are endeavouring, so I read, to outvie one another in the splendour of the token they will erect to the memories of those who died. [...] The country should give a thought to the glorious living.[20]

Sir Henry is enthused by the idea:

> It's been a pleasure to entertain a man who's sacrificed so much for this dear land of ours. I shall tell my friends what you've said — endeavour to form a league. A good idea — myself as chairman — why, it might mean a peerage.[21]

When Longton leaves, Sir Henry hands him an envelope ('My tribute to a hero – my aid to Utopia.') containing a cheque for five pounds. The ironic inadequacy of this gift is hardly the comforting closure that Rosa Bracco identifies as typical of middlebrow fiction. The injustices revealed in the story have not been resolved, and the reader is left feeling that more should be done. The story is politically charged in an age when ex-servicemen were a force to be reckoned with.[22]

Warwick Deeping's 1925 *Sorrell and Son* was one of the most influential dramatizations of the plight of the ex-soldier. This 'self-pitying masculine

---

19 'The Glorious Living', 429-30.

20 'The Glorious Living', 431.

21 'The Glorious Living', 431.

22 A year later, in February 1921 the same magazine printed 'Because of the Great Silence' (by 'Captain Frank H. Shaw', one of Hubert's pseudonyms), a very similar story about an encounter between a magnate and an ex-officer. The hypocrisy of the profiteer in the later tale is even more blatant. Shaw's ex-soldiers disclaim any desire to take from the rich, but their words do not rule out the possibility: 'I'm not asking a gift from you. I'm not demanding a half-share of your gains, as some men might have done.' ('Because of the Great Silence', 461) Only in the instability of the immediate post-war years could a story in this type of magazine have come so close to an explicitly radical politics. The radicalism is unfocused, and could easily be read as of the right rather than the left, at a time when the ex-serviceman's vote had lifted Mussolini to power in Italy, with an implied promise to use the brutal methods of Communism against the Communists who threatened social stability. In November 1921, Remembrance Day was marked by political demonstrations. A procession of 5,000 unemployed joined the mourners at the Cenotaph; their banners bore slogans such as 'To the dead not forgotten, from the living forgotten' and 'To the dead victims of Capitalism from the living victims of Capitalism.' According to *The Times*, the police were 'obliged to censor' some of the inscriptions on their wreaths as being 'likely to be objectionable to those who mourned at the shrine.' *The Times* (12 November 12), 5.

melodrama',[23] as Chris Baldick has described it, is about an ex-officer reduced to menial work in a hotel, and has sometimes been underestimated and misunderstood by critics. Samuel Hynes, for example, calls it an 'unremarkable plodding novel'[24] and surmises that it was popular because many readers shared Deeping's disillusionment, and because Deeping gave answers to post-war social issues 'conservatively and reassuringly'. Yet there is little of the reassuring in the savagery of Sorrell's fantasies of violence against Buck, the novel's bad soldier: 'Buck had one of those round flat heads with the pink skin showing at the crown, and a great broad neck that bulged slightly over his collar. An axe, a hammer, — and one smashing blow on that pink, bald patch —!'[25]

The book's drama lies in Sorrell's struggle to repress this violence, and in this is typical of Deeping's fictions about ex-soldiers, which often feature a war-damaged man struggling to maintain his integrity, set against another ex-soldier who personifies all that is worst in war. In the 1921 novel *The House of Adventure*, Brent, a British soldier attempting to remake his life after the war by helping to rebuild a damaged French village, makes an enemy of Louis Blanc, a French ex-soldier who is everything that Brent is not – boastful, lazy, flashy and bullying. Instead of rebuilding the village, Blanc wants to leave it ruined, for tourists to gaze at. In this novel, the opposition between good and bad soldier is resolved through a series of vicious fights, in the course of which Louis Blanc is blinded and crippled.

Violence, whether physical or suppressed, is a constant presence in Deeping's novels, and the difficulty of repressing anger against the bad soldier is the central subject of *The Secret Sanctuary* (1923). Stretton, its hero, had been an officer in the trenches, under a bullying brigade-major, nicknamed 'Slaughterhouse'. One day, the exhausted Stretton's nerve snaps: 'and in twenty seconds he had said things to Slaughterhouse which half the brigade would like to have said.' Immediately a shell comes, killing the brigade-major and knocking

---

23 Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 181.
24 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (New York: Athenaeum, 1991), 350. Rosa Bracco's reading of the book also emphasizes continuity. (*Merchants of Hope*, 137).
25 *Sorrell and Son*. 90

Stretton unconscious, thereby saving him from a court-martial.[26]

Invalided home, Stretton has typical symptoms of trauma – 'Slight tremor of the hands. Some sleeplessness. No mental clouding but a slight hesitancy in speech.'[27] On occasion, he attacks people: a hospital orderly, a platform attendant, a man bullying a girl in a bus queue. All these are physically similar to 'Slaughterhouse', and are aggressive and officious. The third victim's skull is fractured, and Stretton is jailed for two months. The wartime origin of the impulses suggests that this violence is that of war itself, returning to punish the post-war age; the attacks seem to be the uncontrollable expression of a moral instinct. His remarks to 'Slaughterhouse' were what 'half the brigade would like to have said'. Now Stretton's unconscious expresses itself, but in ways impermissible in civil society. Readers are allowed to collude emotionally in Stretton's attacks on bad people, while rationally siding with the doctors who want the outbursts to be controlled, a duality that is undoubtedly part of Deeping's appeal. His novels are remarkably unlike the socially cohesive fiction of Philip Gibbs and others who follow Galsworthy's model of seeing merits and faults on both sides of a conflict. *The Secret Sanctuary* is conservative in its political attitudes, but it is only partially reassuring, and certainly does not demonstrate what Bracco calls 'the perceptual balance which is characteristic of so many middlebrow novels'.[28] Nor does it offer a complete closure; at the end of the novel Stretton is tempted to violence once again, and is only restrained by the firm words of the girl who loves him. While there are selfish rule-breakers in society, violence remains a potential solution.

Deeping's post-war fictions stress the ex-soldier's vulnerability in a hostile world and his need to repress his violent reactions. The repression is difficult because his antitype has no qualms about using violence. Where the Deeping hero has internalised the moral idealism that justified the War, the typical Deeping villain has embraced the spirit of amoral realpolitik that must also be part of warfare. Deeping's fiction suggests that the working out of the conflict between these two attitudes in a post-war world is on the whole much likelier to

---

26 Warwick Deeping, *The Secret Sanctuary: or The Saving of John Stretton* (London: Cassell, 1923), 20.
27 *The Secret Sanctuary*,21.
28 *Merchants of Hope*, 12.

give an advantage to the man unhampered by morality.

Less well documented than the books and stories designed to arouse pity for the unemployed ex-officer are the post-war texts — in various genres — that deal (usually far less emotively) with the social embarrassment caused by those raised by war to a status higher than the one that they had enjoyed in peacetime. In Coningsby Dawson's *The Kingdom Around the Corner*, a valet becomes a General; in Charles McEvoy's play, *The Likes of Her* (1923), a coster becomes a Colonel; in William J. Locke's novel, *The Mountebank*, a circus clown becomes a General; in H. F. Maltby's play *A Temporary Gentleman* (1919), more plausibly, a clerk becomes a Lieutenant. In none of these do the ex-officers find it easy either to maintain the position acquired in war, or to return comfortably to their former status. The hero of *The Mountebank* eventually returns to circus juggling, but without his previous panache, until saved by the intervention of an upper-class woman. George Miles, in *The Likes of Her*, fears that his high rank will become a barrier between himself and Sally, who has waited patiently while he recuperated from wounds. When he visits her, he deliberately wears, not his military uniform, but his old coster's outfit. In *The Kingdom Around the Corner*, the valet/general cannot fit back into ordinary life, but becomes the leader of a radical ex-serviceman's political movement.

H. F. Maltby, whose *A Temporary Gentleman* was a stage hit of 1919, had served in the ranks during the war, and had formed an unflattering opinion of those set above him, such as his play's protagonist, Walter, a pre-war clerk elevated to the position of Lieutenant in the Army Service Corps (whose job was essentially administrative, and therefore regarded by fighting soldiers as no more than clerical). Walter exults in his commission; for him and his snobbish sister, war is a time of social opportunity. They consider themselves vastly superior to the family next door, whose son is a mere corporal.

The first act happens in wartime, but then the play moves into a post-war future. Demobilised, Walter is offered his old post, but considers himself above it. Unfortunately, ex-officers are plentiful, and nobody offers a job consonant with his high opinion of himself. His sister has married a doctor, but he too is

finding peacetime difficult, and looks back nostalgically to his days in the R.A.M.C., because in the Army: 'The patient has to prove that he is ill, and then it is up to the doctor to prove that he isn't.'[29]

The third act is set in an imagined 1921, when Walter has learnt his lesson, has taken on the salesman's job that he had preciously spurned, and is making a proper hardworking success of himself. This reformation gives him the right to deliver a ringing third-act condemnation of the smug industrialist who profited from the War. In his memoirs, Maltby attributes the play's success to the fact that it endorsed the experience of the ordinary soldier; he describes a performance where one man was beside himself with loud agreement throughout but

> was so obviously enjoying himself that no one had the heart to 'hush' him. At last one line particularly took his fancy: carried away by his enthusiasm he jumped to his feet, and waving his arms above him in delight shouted to the rest of the audience, 'That's bloody true!'[30]

At least one ex-officer did not share this enthusiasm; the despairing hero of a 1930 story by Richard Aldington describes it, recognisably and with bitterness:

> We made a damned silly mistake in being so eager to get back - the lucky ones are out there under six feet of French mud, God bless it. I saw a play the other night making fun of the demobilised officer who couldn't shake down to civilian life. A damned nice sense of humour that playwright has. You tell men for years they're heroes, saving the nation, and making the world safe for everybody — and then you sneer at them because in two months they don't immediately become efficient and obsequious commercial travellers. I'd like to kick that fellow where he keeps his intelligence, *i.e.* in his backside.[31]

Aldington's description ignores the fact that Maltby's central character is not a fighting soldier, but suggests that perhaps part of the play's appeal to civilian audiences was that it made distinctions between officers, and asked whether all

---

29 *A Temporary Gentleman.* Act II, 14-15.

30 H. F. Maltby, *Ring Up the Curtain* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), 151.

31 Richard Aldington, 'The Case of Lieutenant Hall', *Roads to Glory* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1930), 251. We can assume that Hall is speaking for the author here, as Aldington gives a similar account of the play in his 1941memoir, *Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences* (London: Cassell, 1968),189.

were equally worthy of respect. Maltby's play is forward-looking, telling its central character to put past pretensions behind him, and to engage with the post-war world as it is, not as he wishes it would be; Aldington's spokesman is looking backwards, wanting to be validated by the past.

Other writers also celebrated the man who put the past of the War behind him, in ways that implicitly or explicitly contrast with the wartime norm of the honest manly soldier. Arnold Bennett's Charlie Prohack returns from war 'full of magnificent and austere ideals' but 'six months of England had destroyed these ideals in him'.[32] He takes revenge on society by amoral gambling in risky investments with no sense of the social cost of his enterprise; Bennett lets him win, bringing no moral retribution down on his character's head for daring to be an over-reacher. Both Richard Blaker's 'Identity Discs'[33] and Mary Butts's 'Speed the Plough'[34] celebrate men who turn their backs both on a military identity, and on stereotypes of masculinity, and are triumphantly reborn in a role that might be considered effeminate, selling luxury clothes to women. 'Speed the Plough' especially challenges the reader by presenting a damaged soldier who is brought back to health not by the means celebrated in conventional stories (the love of a good woman, the healing power of the countryside, productive work, or regaining pride in his masculinity), but by indulging a masochistic delight in female arrogance, and in everything that conventional moralists decried — luxury clothing, the flashy values of the music hall, and women who put appearance before patriotism. As Mary Hamer says: 'There can be little doubt that conventional thinkers were meant to find this mocking tale utterly provoking.' She notes that the story is subtly unpatriotic: 'To find pleasure and the words to put it into, the story suggests, you have to look outside England, to another sensibility, to another language.'[35]

Other texts showed ex-soldiers as a challenge to the moral order by contrasting their hard-won experience with the conventionalities of religion. In Somerset Maugham's play *The Unknown* (1920), the Rev. Poole, a manly vicar

---

32 Arnold Bennett *Mr Prohack* (London: Methuen, 1922), 43-4.
33 Richard Blaker, 'Identity Discs', *Land and Water* (24 July 1919), 20-22.
34 First printed in *The Dial* in 1921, and in Britain in *Georgian Stories* (1922).
35 Mary Hamer, 'Mary Butts, Mothers and War' in (eds.) Raitt and Tate, *Women's Fiction and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 225-6.

who bemoans the fact that his health kept him from going to the front, believes in war as 'the great school of character' fostering the Christian virtues of 'courage, self-sacrifice, charity, self-reliance.'[36] When John Wharton returns from France without his faith, this vicar is called in to re-convert him. Much of the play is a debate about the possibility of a good God in a world of suffering, and the human hunger for religion when facing extreme pain and fear. John's fiancée Sylvia asks, 'Are you sure you wouldn't call on God instinctively to help you?' and John replies:

> And if I did? That wouldn't be me, that mangled, bleeding, starved, delirious thing. It's me now that speaks, now that I'm well and conscious and strong. It's the real me now. I disclaim and disown anything I may feel or say when I'm tortured with pain and sickness. It would give my real self just as little as a prisoner on the rack gives the truth.[37]

Typically for its time, the play does not criticize generalship or the political motives of the War, but the civilians at home, and the clergy especially, are shown as shallow in comparison with the soldier who has been through an experience that makes the idea of a caring God seem impossible. *The Unknown* looks back to Victorian loss-of-faith novels more than it looks forward to later condemnations of war's futility

Another West End play in which the War creates dilemmas to which the morality of the established Church can offer no relevant answers is Clemence Dane's *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921), set in a hypothetical future where mental illness has become grounds for divorce. Margaret Fairfield's unstable and potentially violent husband has been locked away since the end of the war that released his madness, and she wants to remarry. The play contains a debate on the ethical issues involved, to which the most fatuous contributions are made by Rev Christopher Pumphrey, the voice of unintelligent conventionality. Equally conventional is the clergyman in Pinero's play *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922), whose pieties can do nothing to help a maimed and bitter survivor of war.

---

36 Somerset Maugham, *The Unknown*, in *The Plays of Somerset Maugham*, VI (London: Heinemann, 1934), 16.

37 *The Unknown*, 26.

Much further from any middlebrow consensus, and unperformable in Britain at the time, was Douglas Goldring's lurid *The Fight for Freedom* (1920).[38] The play's heroine, Margaret, has fallen in love with another man while Michael, her soldier fiancée, is away at the War. When Michael returns, she discovers that his experiences have made him jagged, bitter and unstable; as the second act curtain falls, it is clear that he is about to rape her. The third act shows Margaret distraught after the rape; a warmongering clergyman, the rather crudely named Rev Samuel Slaughter, argues that she should 'Try to make allowances for the terrible effect which the war has had on the fellow...' and telling her: 'If you refuse him I am much afraid that you will drive him to evil courses. He will despair... He will go under... All that he needs to keep him straight is the softening influence of a good and pure woman.'[39] Slaughter is so unfeeling as to be a mere caricature, but his glib talk is disturbed by the entrance of Michael, a raging personification of all the negativity and horror of war:

> Before the war you promised yourself to me. And all through the months that I have been stuck in that cesspool of mud and blood and putrid bodies and infernal noise, I had nothing but the thought of you to cling to. And when at last I got leave, all the accumulated longings of those horrible months consumed me. I came home — to find that you had been spending your time flirting with some snivelling socialist.[40]

By the fourth act, Michael has been incarcerated in a lunatic asylum. The play lacks the dialectical clarity of *The Unknown,* but it brings the extreme violence of war into a polite English sitting-room, and represents Christianity as not only inadequate to deal with problems posed by the War, but actually complicit with war's destructiveness.

In these plays, clergymen are caricatured figures, banal but glib representatives of society in general, whose arguments never stand a chance of

38 The play's sexual frankness went far beyond what was allowed on stage, and the absence of a correspondence file in the Lord Chamberlain's archive suggests that it was not even submitted for the censor's consideration. The script was, however, published in the *People's Theatre* series published by C. W. Daniel, which Goldring devised with D.H. Lawrence.

39 Douglas Goldring, *The Fight for Freedom* (London: C.W.Daniel, 1919), 60.

40 *The Fight for Freedom*, 82.

convincing the audience. Two novelists explored the subject differently, possibly influenced by the tone of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918), a book questioning the values of the great institutions of Britain whose reputations had been central to the national wartime self-image. Strachey's biographical subjects are exposed as complex and tormented personalities, whose apparently disinterested determination to do God's bidding is shown in each case to be inextricably linked to a ferocious and arbitrary personal will. Similarly wilful Victorian believers are contrasted with ex-soldiers in Rose Macaulay's *Told By an Idiot* (1923) and E.M. Delafield's *The Optimist* (1922).

In Delafield's novel, Owen Quintillian has spent two years fighting on the Western Front and 'many months in hospital with shell-shock'[41] before returning to England and the home of his old tutor, Canon Morchard, a monster of selfishness disguised as faith, whose children are made to feel guilty by the pain he expresses whenever crossed in the slightest particular. Though horrified by what he sees, Owen is powerless to act, rendered inert by his experiences; he is a writer, but produces only magazine articles, in a modern style, filled with 'slight, cynical epigrams' expressing a 'terse, essentially unsentimental rationalism'.[42] Morchard's self-serving rhetoric of religious optimism is contrasted with the experience that has enervated Owen:

> 'But for England's optimism there would be no England today. It was the spirit of optimism that won the war, Owen.'
>
> A sick recollection of men, armed and disciplined, taking steady aim at other men, standing against a wall to be shot for cowardice or treason, of grey-faced commanders leading those who followed them into certain death, all surged into Quintillian's rebellious mind. They, the men who had been there, had known better than to prate of optimism.[43]

Owen's recollection is 'sick' because the Army itself seems sick, turned against itself, killing its own men. He is rebellious, but his rebellion cannot find full expression in a simple scorn for commanders, because they too ('grey-faced' with resolution) are facing death in suicidal attacks. The military virtues of

---

41 E.M.Delafield, *The Optimist* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 28.
42 *The Optimist*, 239-40.
43 *The Optimist*, 31.

discipline and leadership have been rendered nonsensical, and belief in anything is impossible. Morchard, on the other hand, who has been protected from realities, dies, 'radiant and serene',[44] enacting a pastiche of a transcendent Victorian death scene in complete ignorance of the real thoughts of the children whom he gently blesses. He possesses an 'invincible faith in the rightness of all things'[45] that is unavailable to the war-damaged ex-soldier. At first Quintillian sees the philosophical choice as a dichotomy: 'Hard facts and – at best – resignation, or baseless hopes and undaunted courage, such as had been Canon Morchard's?'[46] Coming close to admiration of Morchard's perverse will, Quintillian comes to see that his total negativity is equally perverse. Eventually, Delafield allows him a happy ending, when he finds himself able to fall in love, and rediscovers the instinctive feeling that allows him to get beyond intellectual paralysis:

> In the long silence that fell between them, there began a process by which he slowly reversed certain judgments, and eliminated certain axioms, which hitherto had stood him for wisdom.[47]

This ending could be read as what Rosa Bracco calls middlebrow fiction's tendency to offer 'perceptual balance', hedging its bets by moving from extremes towards a centralist position;[48] this description does not quite fit *The Optimist*, however, which is merely doing what good novels do — dramatising and placing the world-views of all its characters. If Delafield had finished her novel by merely following the logic of her earlier caricature of Victorian faith towards a simple rejection of the Canon and what he stood for, this would have entailed complete endorsement of Owen's total negativity about the British tradition that the Canon represents; it would have endorsed his decision to write only as a critic, an outsider, unable to connect with the world except negatively. The War had revealed to Owen a bleak vision of life's meaninglessness, which he could not escape; the Canon, on the other hand, 'bereft of all and yet believing himself to possess all' had lived in perverse

44 *The Optimist*, 270.
45 *The Optimist*, 287.
46 *The Optimist*, 289.
47 *The Optimist*, 296.
48 Although, as will been shown, fiction by so representative a middlebrow author as Warwick Deeping by no means always did this.

defiance of the possibility of negativity. Until the Canon's death, Owen had been fully aware of the perversity, but had not appreciated the defiance, which he now recognises as extraordinary. He still sees the Canon without illusion, but the man's death has made him see himself more clearly too, and he reasserts his power to choose and act, proposing marriage to Morchard's eldest daughter (who, though he does not realise this, had loved him for a long time). The book finishes, therefore, with a relatively conventional happy ending, but in this case the reader is left with a strong sense, not of what Bracco calls 'ultimately reaffirmed historical continuity and the coherence of faith,'[49] but of a disturbed continuity in which faith can never again have an unquestioned status; if there is hope it will lie in new types of relationship, not traditional ones.

Rose Macaulay's *Told By an Idiot* (1923) looks at the relationship between Victorianism and the War generation differently. The novel extracts much comedy from the spiritual convolutions of Mr. Garden, whose very Victorian and immensely serious progress through every faith from Catholicism to Christian Science provides one of the comic threads of the novel. 'Poor Papa' dies in 1914, just before the beginning of the War that would have been so incomprehensible a shock to his Victorian meliorism. His grandson Roger, 'whose class was B2, served in France for a year, and wrote a good deal of trench poetry.'[50] Invalided out, he worked at the Ministry of Information, compiling 'propaganda to interest the Greenland Esquimaux in the cause of the Allies'. He lacks any philosophy that will make sense of the War, and therefore lets war itself become the arbiter of meaning. His mother, Amy, complains to him that his poetry is 'too terribly beastly and nasty and corpsey.'

> 'Unfortunately, mother,' Roger explained kindly, 'war is rather beastly and nasty, you know. And a bit corpsey, too.'
>
> 'My dear boy, I know that; I'm not an idiot [....] All I say is, why write about corpses? There've always been plenty of them, people who've died in their beds of diseases. You never used to write about them.'
>
> 'I suppose one's object is to destroy the false glamour of war. There's no glamour about disease.'

---

49 *Merchants of Hope*, 12.

50 Rose Macaulay, *Told By an Idiot* (London: Virago, 1983), 292.

'Glamour, indeed! There you go again with that terrible nonsense. I don't meet any of these people you talk about who think there's glamour in war [....] Glamour indeed. I'll tell you what it is, a set of you young men have invented that glamour theory, just so as to have an excuse for what you call destroying it, with your nasty talk. Like you've invented those Old Men you go on about, who like the War. I'm sick of your Old Men and your corpses.'

'I'm sick of them myself,' said Roger gloomily, and changed the subject, for you could not argue with Amy.[51]

His mother's brisk demythologizing reveals Roger to be as much a prisoner of the War as Delafield's Quintillian; he attacks the supposed 'glamour' of war not because anyone else thinks that war is very glamorous, but because he wants to assert his superiority on the basis of a soldier's privileged experience of combat (although, Macaulay has mischievously told us, he was classified B2, which means fit for service abroad, but not in a fighting unit, so that this trench poet probably did not get near the firing-line.) For Macaulay, allowing oneself to be obsessed by the War was just one more of the intellectual fads that her characters must pass through.[52]

The Damaged

If returning soldiers in general were disturbances to post-war civil life, the most disturbing were the casualties of war, the disfigured, blinded and crippled whose presence was a constant reminder of the cost of the War. From wartime love stories like Phyllis Bottome's *The Second Fiddle* through to Warwick Deeping's *Kitty* there was a stream of fiction in which a woman showed her worth by caring for a damaged man, who was generally cured by her ministrations to provide a happy ending. Other texts, however, could take a sterner line with the disabled, effectively lecturing them on the need to be

51 *Told by an Idiot*, 292-3.

52 Another satirical portrait of a disillusioned war poet is to be found in John Buchan's *Huntingtower*. John Heritage's book *Whorls* contains 'verses which apparently enshrined the writer's memory of the trenches. They were largely compounded of oaths, and rather horrible, lingering lovingly over sights and smells which most people are aware of, but most people contrive to forget.' John Buchan, *Huntingtower* (Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), 26. Heritage is cured of his disillusion by becoming involved in romantic adventure, during which a cold night requires the use of the volume for kindling.

positive, and to make a new beginning, so that they will fit in with the rest of society. In Andrew Soutar's story, 'It's the Way you Look at Things', for example, Captain Paget, who has been blinded, finds it 'harder to live than it would have been to die' and becomes 'bitter, vengeful.'[53] He goes to live in a village, where he meets his former Colonel, who listens to his self-pity, and offers to take him about, but tells him:

> You and I are old soldiers, aren't we? It was our privilege to grouse at everything while 'Jerry' was still on his toes; but the fighting's done, and the privilege is washed out. You're not going to get any sympathy from me if you insist on keeping your tail between your legs. That isn't the right spirit.[54]

In the spirit of these no-nonsense wartime clichés, Paget is helped, and the Colonel's loving descriptions of the countryside and village replenish his imagination, and give him courage to visit the girl he had loved before the War. Only at the very end of the story does he discover that Colonel Poppy, too, is blind. The story's implication is that the war-wounded should learn to count their blessings and 'look at things' appropriately – in a way that does not disturb others.[55] Stories like Soutar's, confident in their right to lecture the less fortunate, clearly belong to the middlebrow literature defined by Rosa Maria Bracco as conformist work that 'ultimately reaffirmed historical continuity and the coherence of faith'.[56] Readers are effectively told that a damaged man should stop disturbing others with his self-pity, and submit his own interests to those of the community.

Other fictions of the period, however, were considerably less reassuring. A striking example can be found among the *Grand Guignol* plays presented at the Little Theatre from 1920 to 1922. Modelled on theatrical presentations long popular in Paris, these were horror plays appealing to sophisticates, but publicity spread their effect beyond the immediate audience. The plays differed

---

53 Andrew Soutar, 'It's the Way you Look at Things', *London Magazine* (December 1921) 305.
54 'It's the Way you Look at Things', 307.
55 Other stories expressed the same scepticism about psychological damage. *Marjorie's Hands*, by W. B. Trites (*Story-Teller*, May 1919), is set in a post-war clinic, where shell-shock is 'cured' by a placebo treatment, and an ex-soldier comes to admit that his post-traumatic blindness is merely psychological, and an avoidance of responsibility.
56 *Merchants of Hope*, 12.

from traditional melodramatic thrillers, in that they offered no clear division of the characters into clearly signalled 'good' and 'bad', but, in the words of Richard Hand and Michael Wilson, presented 'characters inhabiting an amoral – or at best morally erratic – universe where there are no easily defined heroes and villains.'[57] The plays shocked because they deliberately repudiated the sense of comforting moral coherence that Bracco defines as the essence of middlebrow literature.

H.F.Maltby's *The Person Unknown* (1921) takes place in a setting representative of the hedonistic post-war world, the flat of Daisy, a revue artiste. At the start, the audience is ominously aware of someone moving about the room, but cannot see him. He hides when others are heard arriving. A trio of theatrical types arrives, and during their inconsequential chatter, Daisy boasts of how her recruiting songs brought men to the colours in the early days of the war. When the two friends leave, the stranger comes out of hiding; his face bandaged. He reveals that before the war he had been Daisy's devoted fan, and one evening went to a music hall and heard her singing the famous Paul Rubens song:

> Oh, we don't want to lose you but we think you ought to go.
> For your King and your country both need you so.
> We shall want you and miss you
> But with all our might and main
> We shall love you, hug you, kiss you
> When you come home again.

He unwraps his bandages to show a face horribly deformed by the War, and says: 'Ah, ha! I ain't so pretty as I was – but that is what you 'ave got to love and hug and kiss – 'cause I've *got* back home.'[58]

The woman dies of fright, and the audience is given no clear standard by which to judge what has happened. This could have been a simple morality play, in which Daisy is punished for her cynical adoption of patriotism, but the punishment is so excessive, and its agent so obviously deranged, that this

57 Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 83.

58 H.F.Maltby, *The Person Unknown* (script in *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror*), 159.

interpretation is impossible. The play's construction has the tautness of an effective short story, but allows no comfort in its closure, only the shock of horror. The audience is being challenged to confront the physical effects of war, without being told what to think about them.

The climax of this play has much in common with that of D.H.Lawrence's story 'The Blind Man', whose hero, Maurice, 'had been blinded in Flanders, and who had a disfiguring mark on his brow'.[59] He lives with his wife on a remote farm, and they are visited by Bertie, a bachelor lawyer friend of hers whose 'incurable weakness' is a fear of physical intimacy. Sensing his phobia, Maurice forces Bertie to touch his scars:

> Now Bertie quivered with revulsion. Yet he was under the power of the blind man, as if hypnotized. He lifted his hand, and laid the fingers on the scar, on the scarred eyes. Maurice suddenly covered them with his own hand, pressed the fingers of the other man upon his disfigured eye-sockets, trembling in every fibre, and rocking slightly, slowly, from side to side. He remained thus for a minute or more, whilst Bertie stood as if in a swoon, unconscious, imprisoned.

Maurice's aim is to force a bond between himself and Bertie. "'Oh, my God" he said, "we shall know each other now, shan't we? We shall know each other now.'" The scene is, in the words of Santanu Das, 'at once erotic and violent, charged with the kind of visceral thrill [...] encountered in the poetry of Owen'.[60] Describing Maurice's triumph, Lawrence reaches for the language of orgasm: 'Maurice was actually filled with hot, poignant love, the passion of friendship', whereas Bertie is left looking 'haggard, with sunken eyes.' As Trudi Tate says, 'Maurice's blindness, though at times explicitly represented as a symbol of castration, actually empowers him.'[61]

The forced confrontation, the swooning, and the disparity of feeling between the two participants are common to both texts. Each takes a standard

---

59 D.H.Lawrence, 'The Blind Man', in *England, My England andOtherStories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 46. The story was first published in *The English Review*, 1920.

60 Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 234.

61 Trudi Tate, Modernism, History and the First World War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 105.

theme (the showing up of an insensitive jingo in one, and the triumph of the instinctive over the intellectual in the other) but in each the suffering of the victim seems in excess of what is deserved. Barbara Schapiro makes explicit a homosexual subtext in Lawrence's story: 'Bertie's "swooning" in contact with Maurice's powerful male animality, as well as his extreme revulsion and dread, all suggest an unconscious but terrified desire.' [62]The disabled body, because its physicality is made obvious and insistent, forcefully brings out the other person's attitude towards physicality, and reveals it, possibly cruelly.

Depictions of the ex-soldier using their disability, consciously or unconsciously, as a way of exercising power over other characters become commoner later in the decade, and in the early thirties. The crippled Roy in Helen Zenna Smith's melodramatic *Women of the Aftermath* (1931) bullies his wife with 'the diabolical cunning of the partially unbalanced.'[63] Less judgementally, Dorothy L. Sayers in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928) makes clear the strain that the nerve-ridden war casualty George Fentiman places on his wife and others, while the actually emasculated Sir Clifford in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) leaves his wife frustrated and unfulfilled. The claims for sympathy made by the war-disabled are mocked in Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928), when Captain Grimes shamelessly exploits his artificial leg for sympathy and respect (disguising the fact that it is not the result of war, but of a tram accident in Stoke).[64] In Margery Allingham's *The Crime at Black Dudley* (1929) the facial prosthetic apparently hiding the appallingly damaged face of a war veteran turns out to be masking the identity of an arch- criminal.

Of all the effects of war, the most difficult for society to comprehend were the psychological symptoms popularly classed under the misleading heading of 'shell-shock'. These could include trembling, mutism, incontinence and uncontrollable rage, and caused anxiety because they confused conventional classification. The preface to the 1922 Southborough committee's enquiry into

62 Barbara A. Schapiro, *D. H. Lawrence and the Paradoxes of Psychic Life* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 65.

63 'Helen Zenna Smith' (Evadne Price), *Women of the Aftermath* (London: John Long, 1931), 78.

64 Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1937), 27. In his military career, Grimes had only escaped a court-martial and firing squad because 'It's out of the question to shoot an old Harrovian.' (29).

shell-shock remarked: 'This class of complaint excited more general interest, attention and sympathy than any other, so much so that it became a most desirable complaint from which to suffer.'[65] Genuine 'shell-shock' offered writers of fiction a powerful subject, but one that was difficult to handle. Many writers and readers of fiction must have wanted to avert their eyes, like the bus passengers described in Susan Miles's poem 'The Unknown Warrior' when joined by a disturbed ex-soldier:

> We speculate as to whether he is about to utter
> A blasphemous phrase,
> An indecent comment,
> Or something merely maudlin.
> He is still laughing;
> His face is crumpling itself
> In hilarious creases.
> 'And then,' (his voice lurches towards us
> Huskily dramatic),
> 'And then they buried
> The Unknown Warrior.'[66]

Public embarrassment is resolved (and the threatening self-dramatisation and mockery, which threatens to lurch out of control, is quietened), when finally the disturbing presence is reduced to an infantile state:

> The lids that have winked ironically
> Now droop like a weary child's.
> We watch their slumber
> And are still.

Another rare unidealised representation of the shell-shocked is the portrait of Joe in *Riceyman Steps* by Arnold Bennett, who had seen war's psychological effects during wartime, when his Essex house became a billet for damaged soldiers. 'Some of the billettees,' remembered the novelist Richard Blaker, who was one of them, 'were very genuine wrecks – down and out physically and

---

65 *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'*, Facsimile Reprint (London: Imperial War Museum, 2004), 6.

66 Susan Miles, *Annotations* (Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1922), 48-9.

mentally haggard.'[67] Ex-soldier Joe's 'mysterious mental malady'[68] makes him unpredictable and violent, even towards Elsie, the girl who loves him. Like that of Stretton in Deeping's *The Secret Sanctuary*, Joe's violence is specifically linked to reminders of the War; he describes the events that land him in prison:

> I went down to Piccadilly to see the sights, and when it was about dark I see our old divisional general in a damn big car with two young ladies. [...] We used to call him the Slaughterer. That was how we called him. We never called him nothin' else. And there he was with his two rows o' ribbons and his flash women, perhaps they weren't flash, and I didn't like the look of his face — hard, ye know. Cruel. We knowed him, we did. And then I thought of the two minutes' silence, and hats off and stand at 'tention, and the Cenotaph, and it made me laugh. I laughed at him through the glass. And he didn't like it, he didn't. [....] And he lets down the glass and says something about insultin' behaviour to these ladies, and I put my tongue out to him. That tore it, that did. That fair put the lid on. I felt something coming over me — ye know. Then there was a crowd, and I caught a policeman one on the shoulder.[69]

The word 'know' echoes through Joe's monologue. His 'We knowed him,' suggests more than just recognition, but refers to a knowledge of the general's inadequacies shared by all the soldiers; the repeated phrase 'ye know' attempts to find common ground with his listener, but war experience erects an impossible barrier between Joe and an uncomprehending world. After prison, he sells his 'papers', which disturbs Elsie because:

> Every man in her world could, when it came to the point, produce papers of some sort from somewhere — army-discharge, pension documents, testimonials, birth-certificate, etc., etc. [....] No man in Elsie's world could get far along without papers, unless specially protected by heaven; and, sooner or later — generally sooner than later — heaven grew tired of protecting.[70]

---

67 This account comes from the transcript of a radio programme, *Meet the Author* (KMPC Los Angeles, 12 October 1938.) Bodleian Mss Eng Misc b 115 p.10 leaf 4.
68 Arnold Bennett, *Riceyman Steps* (London: Methuen, 1922), 71.
69 *Riceyman Steps*, 365-6.
70 *Riceyman Steps*, 363.

Joe's disposal of his identity is a gesture that links him with the kind of traumatised victim most popular with writers of fiction, the amnesic. Loss of memory was the symptom that most notably caught the imagination of writers and others. It is there in what Hibberd and Onions identify as the first poem to deal with shell shock:

> Back from the trenches, more dead than alive,
> Stone deaf and dazed, and with a broken knee,
> He hobbled slowly, muttering vacantly:
>
> 'I cannot quite remember... There were five
> Dropped dead beside me in the trench – and three
> Whispered their dying messages to me...
> [...]
> But what they said, or who their friends may be
> I cannot quite remember...'[71]

Many traumatised soldiers were indeed amnesic, for example the one described by Charles Myers in his pioneering *Lancet* article of 1915:

> The patient says that he was blown off a heap of bricks 15 feet high owing to a shell bursting close to him. Thinks he must have fallen in a pool of water, as he next remembers finding himself, about 3 p.m. the same afternoon, in a cellar near a church with his clothes drenched. He does not know how he got there or how he left the cellar.[72]

This soldier presents anterograde amnesia, the inability to form new memories since his injury, a common symptom in those who have undergone shock or injury to the head, or in sufferers from dementia. Others with head injuries also presented some retrograde amnesia, the inability to remember some past events, especially those immediately before their injury. Writers of fiction, however, tended to interpret these symptoms in terms of the literary myth of

---

71 W. W. Gibson, 'The Messages', first published in *The Nation* (17 October 1914). In Hibberd and Onions (eds.) *The Winter of the World* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2007), 24-5.

72 Charles S. Myers, 'A Contribution to the Study of Shell Shock:Being an account of three cases of loss of memory, vision, smell, taste, admitted into the Duchess of Westminster's War Hospital, Le Touquet', *The Lancet* (13 February 1915). Among the patient's other symptoms were muscle spasm, impaired sight, tremulous hands, sweating and dizziness.

trauma-induced dissociative amnesia, according to which a psychological shock causes repression (or disassociation) of emotive memories. Recently, psychologist Harrison Pope has argued that since accounts of cases of complete memory-loss caused by the repression of painful memories are plentiful in both literary works and medical studies after 1800, but since cases are completely absent from literature earlier than the late eighteenth century, this dissociative amnesia cannot be an innate capacity of the brain, but is rather 'a product of modern Western culture'.[73] In the late nineteenth century, however, the possibility of total amnesia caused by psychological shock was widely accepted, as is shown by the *Times* review of Pinero's 1890 amnesia farce, *In Chancery*:

> Unlike that of most farces, Mr Pinero's story is based upon an utterly sound assumption. Medical literature contains many instances of a complete loss of memory being occasioned by a sudden shock.[74]

For real-life ex-soldiers the problem was usually not what they forgot, but what they painfully remembered; yet, apart from the fact that amnesia is a more presentable symptom than incontinence or uncontrollable shouting, it has an appeal to novelists and playwrights because it defines shell-shock as an absence. The shell-shocked soldier is abstracted from his military role. At a time when the military was the role that men were supposed to aspire to, this caused anxiety, and suspicions of malingering. In most amnesia stories the shell-shock is presented as genuine, but when the soldier loses his military identity he becomes literally a nobody.

Chris in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1919) had set a pattern for this; he returns from war without an identity, and has to be gradually helped back to himself by stages, through reminders of his early life. The womenfolk who help him through the process find it a disturbing one, when his past reveals

---

73 Harrison G. Pope et al, 'Is dissociative amnesia a culture-bound syndrome? Findings from a survey of historical literature.' *Psychological Medicine*, 2006,1. See also George Simmers, 'Kipling, Traumatic Amnesia and "Nina"', online at http://greatwarfiction.wordpress.com/kipling-traumatic-amnesia-and-nina/ (Accessed 30 August 2009) for a brief history of the amnesia myth. Dr. Pope's findings have been challenged, for example by Goldsmith, Rachel E., Cheit, Ross E. and Wood, Mary E.(2009) 'Evidence of Dissociative Amnesia in Science and Literature: Culture-Bound Approaches to Trauma in Pope, Poliakoff, Parker, Boynes, and Hudson (2007)', *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* (10:3, 237-253), but his central hypothesis seems firm.

74 'Terry's Theatre', *The Times (24 November* 1890), 8. Pinero's play became the basis of *Who's Hooper*?, the 1920 musical comedy mentioned above.

him to be a different man from the one they knew; an early relationship is discovered that reveals the shallowness of his marriage. Amnesia releases him not only from the demands of military manliness, but also from the social pretences that memories would normally reinforce. As the novel's doctor explains: 'His unconscious self is refusing to let him resume his relations with his normal life, and so we get this loss of memory.'[75]

West's fable allows her to suggest that Chris's military personality and his social one are masks assumed with difficulty and at a cost. The amnesia allows his return to an innocence that places his military bearing in an ironic perspective, and the reader is made aware of the loss involved when at the end of the novel he becomes once again 'every inch a soldier', ready to return to 'that No Man's Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead...'.[76]

The Return of the Soldier shows amnesia as a regression to innocence in order to question contemporary attitudes to masculinity; more conventional writers kept the connection between amnesia and innocence, but used it for less subversive purposes. The farce *Three Live Ghosts*,[77] for example, presents the shell-shocked amnesic, Spoofy, as a source of slapstick comedy. He is an absent-minded kleptomaniac who breaks into a house and steals a baby, and behaves like a chaotic lord of misrule. His innocent blundering finally resolves the confusions of the plot, by bringing secrets into the open and leading him instinctively towards truth (the baby he steals turns out to be his own).

Amnesia also confers innocence in 'The Enemy over Yonder', by A.M.Burrage, which centres on the murder of Algernon Freundheimer, a war profiteer of dubious patriotism who is blackmailing a girl into marrying him. The culprit turns out to be shell-shocked Jimmy Dormer, who 'gets fits sometimes.' Another soldier tells the story of how, while in the trenches, Dormer had become so obsessed by a dangerous German sniper that he had gone out one night and killed him while sleepwalking. On the night of Freundheimer's murder, Jimmy had looked 'just as he did that night in the

---

75 Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago 1980), 163.
76 *Return of the Soldier*, 187.
77 By Frederick Isham and Max Murcin, 1918.

trenches, and – his old knobkerry was swinging from his wrist.'[78] Amnesic Jimmy has no memory of the murder committed while asleep, but it was what all the other soldiers would have liked to do if unrestrained by civilised conventions. His unconsciousness puts him beyond blame, and the others feel able to decide that the murder 'must remain one of the great unsolved mysteries.'[79]

These post-war amnesia stories are varied, but have certain things in common. They are told from the point of view of other members of society, who are attempting to solve the riddle of the amnesic; the narrative does not enter the subjective experience of amnesia, in contrast to stories of the late thirties and early forties, which are often told from within the confused consciousness of the amnesic.[80] In each case, the War has caused the condition, yet oddly the stories give support to the myth of the fortunate War, which, while apparently harming the man, has paradoxically connected him with a 'nature' and an innocence that contrast with the compromises and insincerities of civilian society. The victim does things while amnesic for which he would otherwise be blamed, but these actions bring situations to a crisis, and resolve otherwise insoluble problems. The stories often include a nostalgia for wartime, when issues were more clear-cut and values were simpler. There are conventions and habits in civilian life, these stories are saying, that deserve to be forgotten.

Innocence, however, seems always to involve a degree of infantilisation; West's Chris is taken back to his childhood self; kleptomaniac Spoofy and sleepwalking Jimmy are granted a child's immunity from responsibility. Their actions may offend against social norms, but when, as on Susan Miles's bus, 'The lids that have winked ironically/Now droop like a weary child's', the

---

78 A.M.Burrage, 'The Enemy over Yonder', *Grand Magazine* (December 1919), 405.

79 'The Enemy over Yonder', 405. That amnesia confers innocence is confirmed by the odd example of the film *Woman to Woman* (dir. Graham Cutts, 1923) in which the life of an unhappily married ex-officer is disturbed by the arrival of a dancer whom he had known in Paris while amnesic during the War, bringing his son. What is significant about this is that neither the play from which the film was adapted, nor the novel based on that play, mentions amnesia. In both of these, the affair in Paris had been simply adulterous. The censors would have deemed this plot unacceptable for the cinema's working-class audience, but amnesia solves the problem by making adultery innocent, and therefore acceptable, while the film was still able to show the dramatic confrontations between frigid wife and self-sacrificing dancer.

80 Examples include Patrick Hamilton, *Hangover Square* (1941), Margery Allingham, *Traitor's Purse* (1941), James Hilton, *Random Harvest* (1941), Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (1943).

danger of such actions can be minimised by infantilising the subversive presence.

Some writers criticised infantilisation. Pinero's play *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922) depicts a mother trying ineptly to deal with her son's extreme emotional reactions to disability by enlisting a local clergyman and his wife to act as substitute parents to him. In Warwick Deeping's *Kitty* (1927) a 'cold' and 'self contained'[81] possessive mother regains control of the son whose marriage has challenged her:

> Alex St. George lay and stared at life like a very young child, as though trying to understand it. He [...] appeared particularly interested in the doctor's monocle. He could move his arms, but not his legs, but seeing that his mentality was still that of an infant the paralysis of his legs did not concern him [....] He showed a desire to finger things, and even to put them in his mouth.[82]

In this state, the 'man-baby' is exactly as docile as his mother wants. When his mind clears, he begins to ask awkward questions, but the doctor follows a common practice of the time, influenced by the Weir-Mitchell treatment for hysteria, and orders that he should be 'wrapped up in cotton-wool'.[83] This gives the mother the excuse to keep him secluded, coddled and undisturbed by visitors, a prisoner in her luxurious home. Rendering him infantile is a crucial strategy in the exercise of power.

Deeping gives his novel the affirmative resolution of the kind that Rosa Bracco labels as typical of middlebrow fiction; brave young Kitty rescues her husband and, by involving him in a worthwhile project, rescues him from melancholy and gives him a chance to restore himself to full mobility and manhood. She succeeds, but, just as in wartime moralities like Locke's *The Rough Road*, the unmanly man has to suffer and strive before he achieves the goal of manliness.

Far less positive in its outcome, and with a more profound scepticism about the exercise of medical power, is Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, in which,

---

81 Warwick Deeping, *Kitty* (London: Collins, 1927), 1.
82 *Kitty*, 189.
83 *Kitty*, 208.

in contrast to *Kitty*, the reader is taken inside the mind of Septimus Smith, a disturbed ex-soldier whose problem is not forgetting but remembering, and whose eyes 'had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too.'[84] As Sue Thomas has pointed out, Woolf's character of Septimus Smith was conceived in October 1922, very soon after the publication of the Southborough Report on shell-shock, which emphasised the control and management of the afflicted man, and advocated methods similar to those of Woolf's fictional doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw. [85] These doctors are, as Lee Edwards has noted, 'an oddity in the entire canon of Virginia Woolf's fiction. Nowhere else can one find characters so simply in a single dimension, so deprived of any inner life or light which might save them from total villainy.'[86] It is as though the men who refuse to acknowledge Septimus's inner life are denied an interiority of their own. Woolf's notebooks suggest that her close involvement with the character of Septimus made writing difficult. ('Of course the mad part tries me so much, makes my mind squint so badly that I can hardly face spending the next few weeks at it.')[87] Hermione Lee, having compared the manuscript with the final version, explains that:

> [S]he turns what reads like a direct transposition of her own experience as a 'mental patient' into a less self-referential, more abstracted narrative. But she keeps the 'exasperation' which she says in her notes should be the 'dominant theme' of Septimus's encounters with his doctors. [88]

In this novel, Woolf does not draw a strict dividing line between the War and the rest of life. Wartime experience may be the immediate cause of Septimus's disturbance, but his troubles are not different in kind from those suffered by civilians. Clarissa Dalloway remembers her own visit to Bradshaw: 'She had once gone with some one to ask his advice. He had been perfectly right; extremely sensible. But Heavens—what a relief to get out to the street again!

---

84 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1925), 17.
85 Sue Thomas, 'Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell-Shock', *English Language Notes* (25:2 December, 1987), 49.
86 Lee R.Edwards, 'War and Roses: The Politics of Mrs Dalloway', in Bloom (ed.) *Clarissa Dalloway* (New York: Chelsea House, 1990), 106-7.
87 Notebook in the Berg Collection, quoted in Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), 192
88 *Virginia Woolf*, 192.

There was some poor wretch sobbing, she remembered, in the waiting-room.'[89] One reason that Septimus cannot keep his misery in proportion by comfortably locating it in the War is that it is reflected back to him by the society around him: 'brutality blared out on placards; men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive; and once a maimed file of lunatics [...] ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe.'[90]

Yet despite the continuity between the War and the post-war world, there is a gap between the afflicted soldier and those around him. Septimus's wife, Lucrezia, tries to play Kitty's role of plucky wife, but is defeated by his acute melancholia or his 'sudden thunder-claps of fear.'[91] The doctors refuse to acknowledge the extent of the problem: Sir William Bradshaw 'never spoke of "madness"; he called it not having a sense of proportion.'[92] The first reaction of Clarissa Dalloway, hearing a mention of his death, is to feel threatened:

> 'What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party— the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!

Trudi Tate, arguing that the novel is 'partly an attack on the Dalloways, their class, and their responsibility for the war', sees a satirical impetus at work in this passage: 'Like a child, Clarissa thinks about her party first, before confronting the unpleasant news.'[93] Yet she does not so much confront the news as have it burnt into her (from the outside: first her dress, then her body); and it is not a truth about the War, but one linked by the word 'always' to all the

---

89 *Mrs Dalloway*, 201.
90 *Mrs Dalloway*, 100.
91 *Mrs Dalloway*, 96.
92 *Mrs Dalloway*, 107.
93 *Modernism, History and the First World War*, 164.

accidents of precarious life that threaten the artificial but precious social fiction of her party. The word 'accident' in this internal monologue, however, shows a partial evasion of the issue, however, since Septimus's death is not accidental; by taking the one means of self-assertion left to him, Septimus has performed an act that will be felt as aggressive by the world he has left behind him, and Clarissa feels the shock of this, as it arouses an intensely imagined fantasy of self-destruction within herself.

'Woolf knew more about psychiatric power than most non-combatants, and as much as most shell-shock patients,' writes Elaine Showalter,[94] and her doctors exercise it more subtly than Deeping's. His doctors were merely socially pliable, giving the rich and dominating Mrs St. George what she wanted, but Sir William embodies a disinterested and independent will to power, exercised on those of a lower status than himself, for the supposed good of society:

> Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped: he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims.[95]

Andrew Soutar's story 'It's the Way you Look at Things' had endorsed precisely the 'having a sense of proportion' that Sir William advocates. Woolf is exposing the attitudes behind such stories as a desire to 'shut people up' (with its overtones both of silencing and incarceration). Relatives who cannot put damaged patients into a submissive role are grateful to Sir William for imposing a quasi-parental will far stronger than their own; Lucrezia, who wants not to control but to love her husband, is less certain. Septimus, rather than submit himself to the power of Sir William's conformist will, commits suicide in an act of despairing defiance. Woolf can imagine intensely the desperation of the damaged man, but can see no solution to his problems, and life, in the form of Mrs Dalloway's party, goes on. At the party, a small snub is delivered to Sir William, but it is hard to imagine that this will change his ways.

---

94 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1995), 192.

95 *Mrs Dalloway*, 113.

A writer who wanted to imagine a practical solution to the problem, or at least a palliation of it, without 'shutting people up', was Rudyard Kipling, whose later fiction constantly returns to the theme of the damaged ex-soldier, and the possibility of his finding a place in the world, with the help of a supportive community. Published just after the Armistice, 'In the Interests of the Brethren' (*Story-Teller*, December 1918) described a Masonic lodge welcoming damaged soldiers of all kinds, finding them roles that made use of their talents and restored their self-respect. The story was presented with a deliberate propagandist intention, prefaced by the editorial comment: 'The motif which lies behind it is such that we urge all those who have relatives in the War who are Freemasons to send them a copy.'[96] 'The Janeites' (*Story-Teller*, 1924) begins in the same Masonic setting, but goes on to define a range of communities that support the damaged soldier Humberstall – the Army, his friends, the Lodge and his family, as well as the imaginary community of admirers of Jane Austen which gives the story its title.

There is more to these Masonic stories than is suggested by the comment of critic Douglas Hewitt that: 'The stories of shell-shock end with the clipped tones of men of power and action who know how to put things right.'[97] Paternalism was something that Kipling frequently approved of, but the relation between helpers and helped in these stories is more complex. In 'Fairy-Kist' (1927), for example, Lodge-members prove that a war-damaged ex-soldier is innocent of murder, and even show how the man's odd delusions and eccentricities come from memories of a children's story read to him by a well-meaning nurse. However, Kipling makes it clear that their finding a solution to the apparent murder-mystery has no effect on the mental condition of the man, who happily continues with his eccentric practice of planting flower seeds on the verges of roads, lunatic by everyday standards, but to him a sensible, satisfying and absorbing practice.

Shell-shock may not be cured, but men, Kipling implies, can be helped to find an alternative to the sense of horror and emptiness that war has inflicted

---

96 *The Story-teller* (December 1918), 221.

97 Douglas Hewitt, Review of Kemp, *Kipling's Hidden Narratives*, in *Essays in Criticism* (January 1989), 347.

on them. For Kipling, man was a social animal, and many of his early stories are the tragedies of men who do not belong to any community. Kathryn Sutherland, in her commentary on 'The Janeites' has described why the Masonic lodge is, for Kipling, particularly useful. It offers:

> a set of social ideals based on male self-sufficiency, shared knowledge and comradeship, where special jargon and rituals not only confer power — the power of a secret mastered and shared — but imply unity and sense, a world that makes sense, obeys rules, and protects those inside it.[98]

Kipling's remedy is a long way from the rest and milky diet formula that wants to cure men by reducing them to the status of infants. The lodge, with its familiar ritual, hard work and all-male community, is very like the Army in whose service these men have been damaged. Like many soldiers, Kipling sees shell-shock as a problem of morale, a loss of self-respect and control that needs to be combated by the reinforcement of a sense of the man's identity as member of a group.

The support given by the group is not just a matter of kind-hearted men caring for the needy, as a close reading of the first Masonic story, 'In the Interests of the Brethren', shows. While *The Story-Teller's* editorial comment stressed the possibility of a Lodge's helping others, Kipling's narrative suggests more. Brother Burges was proprietor of Burges and Son ('but Son had been killed in Egypt').[99] In *The Story-teller*, the tale begins like this:

> I WAS buying a canary in a birdshop when he first spoke to me and suggested that I should take a less highly coloured bird. 'The colour is in the feeding,' said he. 'Unless you know how to feed 'em, it goes. Canaries are one of my hobbies.'[100]

By 1926, when it was reprinted in *Debits and Credits* however, Kipling had made a significant change: Burges' last sentence becomes 'Canaries are one of <u>our</u> hobbies.'[101] With the correction, Kipling wants to ensure that we recognise that

---

98 Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.
99 *Debits and Credits* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 57.
100 *The Story-teller* (December 1918), 221.
101 *Debits and Credits*, 57.

bird-breeding was something Burges and his son had shared, and that their joint hobbies have lost appeal. (Later in the story Kipling drops the hint that Burges has now given up canaries.) No longer part of a significant pair, Burges has devoted immense effort to transforming the lodge as much for his own sake as for the soldiers. Organising meetings several evenings a week and two afternoons as well is his way of filling his life with useful activity, just as the polishing of jewels was for the soldiers, and maybe as the War Graves Commission and *The History of the Irish Guards* were for the bereaved Kipling. We can see Burges as a partial self-portrait of the author not only in his desire to help the war-damaged, but also in the intensity of his need. The same things are needed to help the bereaved as to help the war-damaged, Kipling is saying; what threatens both is loss of meaning, existential emptiness.

This partly explains why these stories foreground the act of story-telling. The lodge members of the frame stories sometimes sort out problems, but more characteristically they are engaged in telling stories, often as a group, each one making his own contribution to the narrative. Kipling does not explain why they do this, perhaps not feeling that he needs to; the sharing of stories is a way of reinforcing the group's bonds, as well as refining its shared view of the world. In 'Fairy-Kist', the lodge-members communally tell a story which is about the unexpected effect of a story on a troubled man, giving him purpose and activity. The story that obsesses him is *Mary's Meadow* by Juliana Horatia Ewing, a children's book from the 1880s that in itself is a story about the power of stories; inspired by old books, a family of children improvise together a tale about gardeners and honest-root-gatherers, and then put the story into practice by planting flowers by the roadside, for the pleasure of travellers. By writing his story about men telling a story about a man obsessed by a story about children acting out a story based on stories that they have read, Kipling has affirmed his own place in the community of storytellers; possibly, too, he has given us a strange self-portrait.

By 1927 Kipling was increasingly isolated and out of touch with an age that had generally rejected many of his political ideals. Yet he kept

on writing stories, and publishing them, often in magazines where they sit oddly with the rest of the contents and despite complaints that they were becoming too obscure, in the hope that they would give pleasure and consolation to others. His persistence has something in common with that of Wollin of 'Fairy-Kist', impelled to motor-cycle obsessively around the countryside, for reasons he only partly understands, planting flowers in the hedgerows with the hope of making the world a better place for others. Wollin has been damaged and disturbed by the war, but when he busily 'cuts around the Home Counties planting his stuff' and is utterly absorbed in this work, becomes 'as happy as — Oh my soul! What wouldn't I give to be even one fraction as happy as he is!'[102] If flowers are taken as an equivalent of stories, this could be taken as a portrait of the artist.

Kipling's stories are about healing the damage done by the violence of war, and finding an antidote to it in the fellow-feeling of healing communities. In his stories, ex-soldiers are valued for what they have suffered; in another type of fiction (expressed in various genres) sickness is located not in the victim of war but in post-war society, and the ex-soldier is imagined as the person who will cure it.

D. Bringing the War back home: soldiers and enemies.

In 1924, the Lord Chamberlain's office received the script of a farce set in wartime, *Khaki,* written by Herbert Sargent and Con West for the comedian Ernie Lotinga. The reader, G.S. Street, not only considered the play a 'farrago of idiocy, vulgarity and sham sentiment' but was concerned that its main villain was a colonel plotting to swindle the heroine, abusing his military powers outrageously in order to do so, by sending the hero to his death. Street was reluctantly willing to grant a licence, but the script was passed to one of the Chamberlain's Advisory Board, Brigadier-General Sir Douglas Dawson, who was horrified by it, writing:

---

102 Rudyard Kipling, 'Fairy-Kist', *Limits and Renewals,* 178.

I should ask consideration of the importance at this moment of upholding the good name of the army. Revolutions only become serious when the soldier refuses to obey his officer. 'A l'heure qui l'est' the agitator is at work with propaganda subversive of discipline, and winked at if not supported by the Govt. in office. Is this the moment for a play to appear the moral of which is to cast ridicule on what may ere long be the only buffer between us and revolution?[103]

It was not only censors faced with irresponsible farces who were nervous of revolution in the years immediately following the war. Working-class discontent and industrial action were hardly new phenomena in British society, but in the post-war depression they seemed more threatening than before. After 1917, the Russian Revolution had bred atrocity stories as terrible as those that had emerged from Belgium in 1914, and the prospect of something similar occurring in Britain caused much anxiety. In 1920 the Emergency Powers Act was passed, controversially making provision for military aid to civil ministries in peacetime emergencies. In the House of Commons, Winston Churchill explained in what circumstances this was deemed to be necessary:

> To use soldiers or sailors, kept up at the general expense of the taxpayer, to take sides with the employer in an ordinary trade dispute [...] would be a monstrous invasion of the liberty of the subject, and [...] would be a very unfair, if not illegal, order to give to the soldier. But the case is different where vital services affecting the health, life or safety of large cities or great concentrations of people are concerned.[104]

Such measures were controversial, and there was doubt as to whether they could be implemented. In the words of Christopher J. Whelan:

> Moreover, in 1919, it was revealed that doubts existed as to whether troops could still be relied upon when intervening in industrial disputes. A secret circular to this effect was drafted by military authorities in January 1919 asking commanding officers whether their troops would assist in

---

103 LCP Corr 1924/5673. The script of *Khaki* is in LCP 1924/29.
104 *House of Commons Debates*. Vol 116, col 1511.

strikebreaking, where they stood on trade unionism and what influence there was upon them of agitation.[105]

Many fictional texts of the 1920s share Churchill's fear of socialist extremism, and like him justify the use of force against strikers and revolutionaries.[106] Characteristically, writers equate the fight against internal enemies with the wartime fight against the Germans; they explore how attitudes and tactics nurtured by war could be deployed against the internal enemy. The wartime myth of national unity was recalled, and strikers, because they were represented as pursuing a sectional interest at the expense of the national good, were equated with the other stereotyped enemy of the ex-soldier, the (usually foreign) wartime profiteer. In such texts, it is usually ex-soldiers who take a stand against the forces of instability, and their methods are often of dubious legality. Industrial action and political extremism are handled not by conventional legal means, but by tough-minded vigilante action, usually undertaken by ex-soldiers. This section will analyse some examples of texts in various genres that explore the subject, and will suggest that failure of the General Strike in 1926 marked a decisive change in the ways in which both industrial action and the military were described in fiction.

The theme was tackled very directly in Ernest Hutchinson's 1920 play, *The Right to Strike*. Railway workers on a Yorkshire line have a legitimate grievance about their wages, and strike, knowing that without the railway, food and essential supplies will soon run out in the isolated town of Valleyhead. A tough-minded local doctor, back from the War, organises a quasi-military operation of lorry convoys to beat the strike. Some strikers fix a booby trap on the road; a lorry is overturned and the driver, another young doctor, is killed. The ex-R.A.M.C. man therefore decides to fight like with like, and announces a doctor's strike — they will attend no railwayman or member of a railwayman's family until the strike is over.

---

105 Christopher J Whelan, 'Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes', *Industrial Law Journal* 1979 (8:1), 226.

106 Hugh Addison's *The Battle of London* (1924) for example, imagines a revolutionary uprising in Britain led by Russian-Jewish commissars, in league with Germans plotting to invade. The army and a paramilitary Liberty League restore order.

In the words of the *Times* reviewer, the play's subject 'was one which must naturally be a subject of much serious thought in these difficult times — the attitude of the middle classes to the ever-recurrent strike.'[107] In the novelisation published to cash in on the play's success, it is made clear that the strike-breakers' tough-minded attitude had been learnt in the War. The room where the strike-breakers organise their campaign is 'busy as an orderly room';[108] a strike-breaker warned of the cold night laughs that 'It won't be half as bad as Belgium in January';[109] one of the helpers organising convoys whistles 'Mademoiselle from Armentieres' and asks, cheerfully, 'Isn't it like being back at the war again?'[110] The strikers are explicitly compared to wartime profiteers: 'Though they dealt in pounds and even shillings, were they not equally guilty with those magnates who were even now holding up commodities in order to extort a larger profit later?'[111]

Hutchinson acknowledges that the railway workers, many of them ex-soldiers, had just grievances; the novelisation editorialises:

> To the least intelligent it was clear that England had been saved from spoliation by the men who fought, and those men were in the main the workers, the men who possessed nothing but their lives and their strength. Collectively they had saved the whole vast wealth of England – for whom? [112]

The main workers' representative is Ben Ormerod, who during the War had been 'a strapping sergeant of the Lancashire Fusiliers'; he is portrayed as a thoughtful man, a good husband and a natural leader – but misled by socialist rhetoric, which leaves him unable to control the violence of the men he should be leading. Where the officer-led strike-breakers are represented as efficient, organised and controlled, the strikers are volatile, violent and chaotic.

The Times reviewer praised the play's 'meticulous impartiality', but felt that it 'discussed much and solved nothing.' The ethical questions are not pushed as

107 'The Right to Strike: Mr Hutchinson's New Play', *The Times* (29 September 1920), 8.
108 Ernest Hutchinson and Geo. Goodchild, *The Right to Strike: A novel based on the successful Play of the same title* (London: Robert Hayes Ltd, 1921), 128. The novel sticks very closely to the play's dialogue, but adds some additional commentary.
109 *The Right to Strike*, 126.
110 *The Right to Strike*, 129.
111 *The Right to Strike*, 173.
112 *The Right to Strike*, 22.

far as they might be, since the doctors are saved from making the very hardest decisions by the last-act resolution of the strike. The prospect of direct vigilante action as a possible 'attitude of the middle classes to the ever-recurrent strike' has been raised, but the audience are left to ponder what its final consequences might be.

A similar drawing back from complete endorsement of vigilante action against the enemies of society is shown in 'The Judgment House', a 1920 short story by W. D. Gray, whose hero describes himself thus:

> My name is Henry Tullin. I am one of what have been called the New Poor, one of those unfortunates with a practically fixed income in a world of ever-rising prices. I served in the Army during the war, and came back poorer than before I had joined it. Instead I found myself in a new world, a world of profiteers and aggressively money-seeking women, with the distant growling of awakened labour ever at the back of their feverish gaiety.[113]

One evening Tullin is kidnapped and driven to a mysterious house, where he faces a panel of cloaked figures: 'But the most remarkable feature was that each one also wore a mask, or rather a complete helmet, apparently made of some stiff material, with a cloth front to it, in which were cut holes for the eyes and mouth.'[114] Tullin's kidnap transpires to be a case of mistaken identity, caused by his close resemblance to a wealthy financier. He is allowed to leave, after taking an oath of secrecy, and after being given an insight into the strange organisation's purpose, which is to deal with persons who are 'injurious to humanity'. Two such, who will be dealt with that evening, are 'Sir John Cartwright, who is acquiring a vast fortune by illegitimately forcing up the price of an absolutely necessary article, of which he has a huge stock. And, secondly, Philip Swayne, who is working to bring on a bloody revolution in this country.'[115]

---

113 W.D.Gray, 'The Judgment House', *Premier Magazine* (8 October 1920), 84.

114 'The Judgment House', 87. The masks are not only like those of the Inquisition, but also like those of the Ku Klux Klan, whose vigilante action after the American Civil War had been celebrated in D.W.Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

115 'The Judgment House', 89.

This equation of profiteers and socialists is accepted unquestioningly by the narrator; within a week of the eventful evening, he reads in the newspaper that both men have retired from public life. His double, the financier, is soon also reported as severing his links with all financial institutions, and giving much of his fortune to charity. The methods used to persuade these men to change their ways are left to the imagination, but the story ends with the ex-soldier pondering:

> The men who can cause such things to happen are a force to be reckoned with. The society is a power – for good or for evil, it is a power. And I doubt not that it will grow still stronger. [116]

A fictional ex-soldier who took a more active part in vigilante operations against the enemies of society was Bulldog Drummond. Sapper had published the first Drummond thriller in *Hutchinson's Story Magazine*, beginning in September 1919, exploring the peacetime possibilities of the genre developed during wartime by John Buchan. Like Buchan, he made creative use of some of the conventional ingredients of the pulp 'shocker': the race against time and against impossible odds to stop a malicious mastermind from destroying the country; the manly hero who is both a lone venturer and the centre of a group of utterly dependable friends; and the shape-shifting villain who is above mere nationalism but detests England.

Captain Hugh Drummond M.C. shows none of the symptoms of post-war distress that trouble many fictional ex-officers. He has been neither horrified nor demoralised by the War, but embodies an unabashed relish for fighting:

> The ordinary joys of the infantry subaltern's life — such as going over the top, and carrying out raids — had not proved sufficient for his appetite. He had specialised in peculiar stunts of his own: stunts over which he was singularly reticent; stunts over which his men formed their own conclusions, and worshipped him accordingly.[117]

---

116 'The Judgment House', 90.

117 'Sapper', *Bulldog Drummond*. In *Bulldog Drummond: The Carl Peterson Quartet* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 65.

Mildly bored with civilian life, Drummond advertises for adventure, and soon finds himself combating Carl Peterson, a master-criminal whose malevolence, like that of Buchan's villains, greatly exceeds any reasonable motivation.

In the second Drummond novel, *The Black Gang*, serialised in the *Sovereign Magazine* in 1922, Sapper's hero becomes proactive, seizing and punishing criminals before they have the chance to commit really large offences. In order to carry out this retribution, Drummond and his friends become 'the Black Gang', masked and hooded, like the vigilantes of *The Judgment House*. In the book's first chapter, this Gang bursts in upon a meeting of conspirators — socialists, crooks and Jewish white-slavers — to dispense punishments which approximately fit the criminal. For white-slavers the sentence is 'Flog them to within an inch of their lives [....] It is the punishment for their method of livelihood';[118] socialist agitators, on the other hand are taken away to an island where they are subjected to a regime that imitates Russian communism in its arbitrary severity.

The assumption that there is a link between socialists and criminals is common in twenties fiction. In *Huntingtower* (1922), Buchan has an émigré Russian princess explain: 'My country has been broken to pieces, and there is no law in it; therefore it is a nursery of crime. [....] There is crime everywhere in the world, and the unfettered crime in Russia is so powerful that it stretches its hand throughout the globe and there is a great mobilising everywhere of wicked men.'[119] It is never made clear whether the prime motive of *Huntingtower*'s villains is politics or greed. In *Bulldog Drummond*, Carl Peterson is a criminal mastermind fired both by a desire for money and a delight in pure destruction, and is contemptuous of the socialist plotters whose naivety will help him to undermine the country; he is the destructive unconscious of the revolutionary movement, and a revelation of the truth about it.

After spectacular successes, the Black Gang finally disbands; Sapper reluctantly concedes that such a proactive policy is not really permissible. The head of the police, having discovered Drummond's involvement, tells him: '[Y]ou either deserved penal servitude or a seat in the Cabinet. And since

118 'Sapper', *The Black Gang*. In *Bulldog Drummond: The Carl Peterson Quartet*, 214.
119 John Buchan, *Huntingtower* (Oxford: World's Classics, 1996),141-142.

neither course commends itself to us, we have decided to do nothing [....] But, Hugh, the Black Gang must cease."[120] The authorities agree that the Gang's operations may be laudable, but a senior police officer cannot officially be complicit with them; for Drummond to continue would compromise his friend, so both comradeship and obedience to convention decree that he must stop.[121]

Drummond was far from alone among 1920s heroes in stepping outside the law. In *Huntingtower* (1922), Sir Archie Roylance asks Buchan's retired grocer hero, Dickson McCunn, who is determined to protect a Russian princess from criminal Bolsheviks: 'Don't you realise that you're levying a private war and breaking every law of the land?' McCunn replies: 'Hoots! I don't care a docken about the law. I'm for seeing the job through."[122] This is said in the heat of the moment, however; Buchan's heroes, like the Drummond of *The Black Gang*, are finally on the side of legality, even while conducting vigilante operations.

A.M.Burrage's Captain Dorry, on the other hand, established himself firmly on the wrong side of the law in a 1921 series of stories published in *Lloyd's Magazine*. He is an unemployed ex-officer (with M.C.) who is recruited by the engaging and mysterious Fewgin, into a select band of ex-army thieves — who steal only from 'certain vampires who made money out of the war, and, by keeping up prices, are continuing to make money out of the peace."[123] Fewgin justifies what he does:

> I help brave men who cannot help themselves. I give them a chance to get back a little of their own from the men who battened and fattened on them, who helped to starve their dependents while they were fighting, who smoked fat cigars in the haunts of their betters, and hoped the war might never end.[124]

---

120 *The Black Gang*, 389-90.

121 During the 1920s, however, there were some real-life imitations of the Black Gang's tactics. In 1925, for example, a group of British Fascists kidnapped the Communist leader, Harry Pollitt, and took him to South Wales for a weekend of 're-education'. See Martin Pugh, *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts': Fascists and Fascism Between the Wars in Britain* (London: Pimlico, 2006) 51.

122 *Huntingtower*, 143.

123 A. M. Burrage, 'The Strange Career of Captain Dorry: I. Second in the Field', *Lloyd's Magazine* (March 1921), 381.

124 'Second in the Field', 382.

These are the values of Bulldog Drummond taken one step further. Drummond in *The Black Gang* punishes the enemies of England in ways impossible for the police, but his motives are disinterested. Dorry and Fewgin commit outright crime, and usually happily profit from it. In the first of the stories, they rob a man who made a fortune manufacturing inferior jam during the War, one Isaac Sheintz (The name is significant; like those of Sapper, the stories are consistently anti-Semitic). Sheintz has bought an immensely valuable pearl necklace for Muriel Stedwich, the daughter of an impoverished family; she is being compelled to marry him to save the family estate. (Sapper had used a similar forced-marriage theme in *Mufti*). Dorry and Fewgin steal it, but the morality of the story is maintained because they do not profit — the proceeds go to the decent but impoverished ex-soldier whom Muriel truly loves, and enables their marriage.

'The End of a Robespierre', the fifth story in the series, concerns the murder of a socialist agitator, Comrade Alfred Bugg, who preaches 'revolution, red revolution', and is defined in language rich with sarcasm as the antithesis of an ex-officer:

> He had never climbed over ruined sandbags with the taste of explosive in his mouth and heard the many-toned voices of searching death. He had avoided conscription as a skilled toreador avoids the bull, finding it more congenial to stay at home and manufacture screws of the wrong size for the wretched pittance of sixteen pounds a week.[125]

In forthright language contrasting with the poeticism of 'the many-toned voices of searching death', the munition-worker is blamed for the shortcomings of his industry, and attributed the sort of wage that rarely existed outside soldiers' resentful gossip. Bugg is defined as worthless, and it is little surprise that when Dorry and Fewgin investigate his death they discover that he had been cheating both the workers whom he has manipulated, and his Russian paymasters. The revolutionaries are exposed as utterly corrupt; Dorry and Fewgin, on the other hand, who have captured the motive for Bugg's murder, 'the contents of the

125 A. M. Burrage, 'The Strange Career of Captain Dorry: V. The End of a Robespierre', *Lloyd's Magazine* (July 1921), 849-50.

jewel case of some unfortunate murdered Russian princess', nobly donate half the proceeds of their enterprise to the relief of Russian refugees in England.[126]

These Dorry stories belong to the 'gentleman-crook' genre, for which the adventures of Hornung's Raffles provided the model. Bunny, the unwilling assistant and admiring chronicler of Raffles, is often plagued by conscience, and he and Raffles get their come-uppance, first when Bunny is sentenced to prison, and finally when both get a chance to prove their worth as gentleman-rankers in the Boer War, dying for their country. By contrast, neither Dorry nor Fewgin suffer many qualms, and in the five stories printed in *Lloyds* in 1921 receive no kind of retribution. They are presented as ex-soldiers dealing with the problem characters of the post-war world, and the stories back their activities without reserve.[127]

Such texts are symptomatic, but their attitudes were neither omnipresent nor unchallenged. John Galsworthy's play, *Loyalties* (1922) handles the contrast between wealthy outsider and ex-officer thief very differently. De Levis is a Jew whose wealth has gained him social connections, but not popularity. Dancy is 'a gallant fellow with a fine record as a soldier'[128] who is so impoverished that he gives away an unpromising horse to De Levis because he cannot afford its keep. The horse turns out less of a 'weed' than Dancy had thought, and De Levis sells it on for £1000. Dancy considers that he has a moral right to this money, and steals it from De Levis while both are staying with the conventional Winsor family (who cannot acknowledge that one of their own kind could be criminal.) Galsworthy's main interest is in the social processes that help the insider and exclude the outsider, until it becomes impossible for the truth to remain hidden.

Galsworthy presents Dancy as possessing qualities invaluable in wartime but dangerous in peace. To commit the robbery he risked a potentially lethal leap in the dark, from one balcony to another. One of the characters describes him:

---

126 'The End of a Robespierre', 856.

127 On the other hand, there is no indication that these stories were particularly successful. There seems to be no second series, and the tales never found their way into hard covers.

128 John Galsworthy, *Loyalties*, in *The Plays of John Galsworthy* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 648. The clichéd phrasing of this praise, by a very conventional character, is clearly designed by Galsworthy to suggest an unwillingness to stray beyond standard attitudes.

> There are people who simply can't live without danger. [...] They're all right when they're getting the D.S.O. or shooting man-eaters; but if there's no excitement going, they'll make it — out of sheer craving.[129]

Thriller-writers invited readers to fantasise about dealing out rough justice to social enemies, but Galsworthy imagines the probable results of such behaviour (Dancy ends by committing suicide). Wider political implications are hinted at when De Levis calls Dancy's threatening behaviour 'Black and tan swashbuckling',[130] linking the ex-soldier's attempt at bullying with the attitudes of the paramilitary unit composed mostly of ex-officers, who used tough tactics against Sinn Fein, and against Irish civilians suspected of supporting the rebels.

Galsworthy's play warns against putting class interests above the law, as does *The Middle of the Road* (1923) by Philip Gibbs. Bertram, the novel's ex-soldier hero, is invited to join a paramilitary Defence Corps that would deal with strikers and revolutionaries in England by using similar methods to the Black and Tans:

> Ex-officers and men would be invited to join for a three months' service. They would take over the transport system, work the railways, organise lorry columns, ensure the vital supplies of material life, meat, milk, bread, and so on, to defeat the purpose of the strikers, which was to strangle national industry and activity. If there were any attempts at violence, intimidation, picketing, the Defence Corps would be ordered to do their duty, relentlessly.[131]

It is made clear that the methods of this group would go far beyond the strike-breaking imagined in *The Right to Strike*, and might include firing on the mob: '"I hope there'll be a lot of shooting," said Joyce heatedly. "A good opportunity to get rid of our Bolshevists."'[132]

The Defence Corps of Gibbs's novel was fictional, but in 1925, a semi-official body for the recruitment of volunteers in case of a national emergency, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was established, and was

---

129 *The Plays of John Galsworthy*, 661.
130 *The Plays of John Galsworthy*, 664.
131 Philip Gibbs, *The Middle of the Road* (New York: Doran, 1923), 165.
132 *The Middle of the Road*, 165.

strongly criticised from the left as the kind of strike-breaking organisation advocated by extreme right-wingers.[133] In 1926, the O.M.S. would come into action, as part of the government's response to the General Strike, and Gibbs would write about its performance in a very different mood from the foreboding of *The Middle of the Road.*

The Strike was the most challenging national event since the outbreak of the War, and far more divisive. The Trades Union Council called out all the workers of Britain in support of the miners, and for ten days there was social confrontation on a scale never before experienced. After the General Strike, the fiction of the late twenties suggests, Britain would take a significantly different view of itself, and its relationship with its Army.

In any industrial conflict that threatened the maintenance of essential supplies, the role of the Army would be crucial, but was potentially an embarrassment. In 1919, Winston Churchill had conceded that to use soldiers or sailors against the workers in an ordinary trade dispute would be 'a monstrous invasion of the liberty of the subject,'[134] but he went on to insist that the case was different where vital services were affected: 'Light, water, electric power, transport, the distribution of food – all these are indispensable to the existence of these mighty cities which cover our land.'[135]

John Galsworthy allowed his character Soames Forsyte very ambiguous feelings in *Swan Song* (1928), when he saw a tank heading towards the docks during the General Strike, to protect the essential services that Churchill had spoken of; at first he experiences 'a feeling almost of exhilaration,' at the thought of the message that this 'great primeval monster' would deliver to the strikers, but then his instincts insist on a different reaction: 'Something in Soames revolted slightly. Hang it! This was England, not Russia, or Italy! They might be right, but he didn't like it! Too — too military!'[136] (The instinctiveness

---

133 The Communist party labelled the OMS as 'the most definite step towards organised Fascism yet made in this country.' Martin Pugh, *'Hurrah For the Blackshirts': Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 98.

134 *The Times* (Friday May 30th, 1919), 17.

135 The Emergency Powers Act (1920) clarified and regulated the role of the military in such contingencies. See Christopher J. Whelan, 'Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes', *Industrial Law Journal* (8:1) 1979, 222-234.

136 John Galsworthy, *Swan Song*. In *The Forsyte Saga, Volume 2* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 585.

of Soames's reaction is dramatised by the colloquialism, the exclamations and the searching for a word that expresses what England is not.) His son-in-law, a Conservative M.P., later remarks of the tanks, in suaver language: 'They're going down to the docks. Rather provocative! Just as well there are no papers for them to get into.'[137] The use of overwhelming force against fellow-citizens, though possibly necessary, is best not publicised.

It is frequently mentioned in *Meanwhile* (1927) by H.G.Wells, however. This book, less a novel than a scattering of opinions around the General Strike, takes an ex-soldier back to England, not participating on either side, but observing all parties with scorn. Though bemused by the impracticality of the labour movement, and the short-sightedness of the mine-owners, he is especially critical of Churchill's posturing and the use of armoured food convoys, asking, 'Is all life a comedy of fools?'[138]

Wells's cynical overview of events is eccentrically presented, in a ramshackle novel, and seems not to have gained wide currency. When this national emergency became translated into middle-class myth, the part taken by the military would be downplayed, and the role of heroes would be awarded not to the soldiers who manned the docks, but to the young people of the British middle classes. In this new myth, the actions of young volunteer strike-breakers are credited with victory, and their spirit is related to the idealism of 1914; it is expressed most clearly in *Young Anarchy* by Philip Gibbs, published in September 1926, only a few months after the end of the ten-day strike.[139]

Like most of Gibbs's central characters, the narrator of this novel is a well-meaning observer, eager to see the good in all parties, and torn in his loyalties. He is disturbed both by the behaviour and attitude of hedonistic and rebellious Youth, and by the intolerance of the older generation, when he finds himself involved, sometimes willingly and sometimes not, with the family of the reactionary Bishop of Burpham; these provide a cross section of British political attitudes. Some of them support the foundation of a supposedly non-political

---

137 *Swan Song*, 588-9.

138 H.G. Wells, *Meanwhile* (London: Benn, 1927), 203.

139 This novel is considered from a different viewpoint in Stuart Laing's 'Philip Gibbs and the Newsreel Novel' in Humm, Stigant and Widdowson (eds.) *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History* (London: Methuen, 1986), 127-150.

League of Youth, which founders because it is as disunited as the nation it is trying to bring together. The Bishop's son, Jocelyn, campaigns as a Labour candidate, a disillusioning experience for all, and the novel seems set for utter pessimism about the prospects for England. On the edges of this picture of a disoriented nation there are soldiers: ex-sergeants proud of their war service; ex-officers desperate for work; and men blinded on the Somme, now begging in the streets. The novel's import is that these men have been betrayed by the post-war world; but then the National Strike occurs.

When the Strike begins, the narrator expects the worst: 'It was impossible to believe that there would not be rioting, mob violence, looting, lawlessness.' But what is expected to be the most disruptive and negative event of the book turns out to be unifying and almost entirely positive. The hedonistic Glad Young Things prove themselves, by doing their bit. Driving buses wearing their plus fours and tasselled socks, show good humour when they do hard work unloading food at the docks. 'The post-war youth of England,' the narrator decides, were 'as like as peas in a pod to another crowd of youth I had known, twelve years ago, when the country was in danger.'[140]

The wartime spirit is demonstrated not by the wearing of uniforms and the forceful imposition of a superior will, but by enthusiasm and playfulness. Wells's ex-soldier observer in *Meanwhile* notices 'General disposition to treat it as a lark [....] For some unknown reason most of them have come to the job in plus fours.'[141] Gibbs understands the reason:

> They retained their social status by outward and visible signs – those plus fours and fancy ties and tasselled stockings – and did not lose caste by driving 'buses or sweeping out station yards or unloading vessels at the docks or covering themselves with oil and grease as stokers and engine drivers. The dirtier the work, the more they saw the humour of it.[142]

This analysis has much in common with that of a modern anthropologist who has explained the symbolic success of the volunteers in terms of their obvious

---

140 *Young Anarchy*, 302.
141 *Meanwhile*,177.
142 *Young Anarchy*, 293.

(and flamboyantly displayed) amateurism, representing their takeover of manual jobs as a kind of play-acting :

> Representatives of the upper and upper-middle classes defended their right not to do manual labour by doing it – temporarily. They countered the accusations of the socialist labour movement that they were the 'idle rich' by demonstrating their ability to come through in a crisis. [...] Yet because the forms the volunteers chose were derived explicitly from the customary forms of dramatic play and unpaid service, which were the preserve of the upper and middle classes, no one besides the striking workers was obliged to take them seriously.[143]

The amateurism of the volunteers, signified by their dress code, and by the facetious signs on the splashboards of buses ('Pretty Flappers free of charge: Others threepence all the way' and 'Please don't stop me. I can't start again.'[144]) defined their enterprise as non-political, and the period of the strike as a time of carnival and rule-breaking.[145] The office workers and shop-girls riding on the unofficial buses join in the fun, and the novel shows them developing a community spirit that was not there before. Paradoxically, it is their unmilitary bearing that links the volunteers with the spirit of 1914, and communicates it to a wider community, from which only the striking workers are excluded. The volunteers have come to the defence of England, and the strikers are placed on the outside of the definition of the nation created by volunteer action.

The mythologizing of the volunteer force, not only suggesting that it was a national effort above and beyond class interests, but also representing the volunteers as better at the job than the full-time labourers that they replaced, was evident in early reports of the strike, such as this from *The Times*:

> The volunteer workers of all classes – many of them repentant strikers – have worked with immense zeal. They are saying at the Port of London that the efficiency of these amateurs, loading flour or meat against time,

---

143 Rachelle H. Saltzman, 'Folklore as Politics in Great Britain: Working-Class Critiques of Upper-Class Strike Breakers in the 1926 General Strike', *Anthropological Quarterly* (67:3, July 1994),116.

144 *Young Anarchy*, 291.

145 Wyndham Lewis in *The Apes of God* uses the topsy-turviness of the period to comic effect. He describes it from the viewpoint of Dan, who walks around London, not realising that a strike is in progress, but disturbed by such aberrations from the norm as the repeated attention of strangers in cars offering him lifts.

has astonished the professionals who have directed their efforts. The proverbial 'nigger' worker has been outclassed.[146]

The middle classes were presented as united, while the working class movement was disunited, with many of its leaders uncertain how far they should go in using industrial power for political ends. By 12 May, Arnold Bennett was writing in his journal:

> The general strike now seems pitiful, foolish — a pathetic attempt of underdogs who hadn't a chance when the over-dogs really set themselves to win. Everybody, nearly, among the over-dogs, seems to have joined in with grim enthusiasm to beat the strike.[147]

John Galsworthy chronicled some of the over-dogs in *Swan Song* (1928) and, like Gibbs, constantly refers back to the war. At its start, Jon Forsyte hurries to volunteer: 'Left his wife and mother in Paris — said he'd missed the war and couldn't afford to miss this.'[148] At the end, Michael Mont reads the news on placards and 'For a minute he sat motionless with a choky feeling, such as he had felt when the news of the Armistice came through. A sword lifted from over the head of England! A source of pleasure to her enemies dried up!'[149]

Galsworthy shows this relief as earned, because during the strike the middle classes have been revivified. Michael's wife, Fleur, is a rather decorative character, and when they start a canteen for strike-breakers, he is afraid that she will not be able to cope with the black beetles that infest the place; she proves him wrong:

> Her face was pale; she was drawing little shuddering breaths; and Michael was thinking: 'It's too bad; I must get her out of this!' when suddenly she seized a broom and rushed at a large beetle on the wall. In a minute they were all at it — swabbing and sweeping, and flinging open doors and windows.[150]

---

146 *The Times* (19 May 1926), 11
147 *The Journal of Arnold Bennett* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1933), 873.
148 John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga: Volume Two* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2002), 568.
149 *The Forsyte Saga: Volume Two*, 604.
150 *The Forsyte Saga: Volume Two*, 566.

Since (unlike Gibbs) Galsworthy does not include any actual strikers in his novel, these beetles have to stand as their representatives — an infestation that has been allowed to get out of hand, until the volunteers deal forcibly with it.

Like Gibbs, Galsworthy presents the involvement of the young as instinctive and spontaneous, and as the decisive factor in its defeat; this account does not completely tally with the facts. The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was not a spontaneous movement, but a semi-official one prepared in advance. The effectiveness of the volunteers was also something of a myth. During the strike only 3 per cent of freight trains ran; in London the number of trains running rose from 4 per cent at the start of the strike to only 12 per cent at the end.[151] Nor were enthusiastic volunteers always competent to do the jobs of skilled men; on the railways, there were accusations that considerable damage had been caused by the volunteers, and it was estimated that this took two years to repair, with the GWR not returning to full service until a year after the strike.[152] In all, the involvement of volunteers was a far less significant factor in the collapse of the strike than the splits and disagreements within the Trades Union movement.

Later fictional accounts of the strike would present the strike very differently, as an epic of working-class endurance, betrayed by the failures of a timid leadership; novels embodying this alternative myth became plentiful during the mid-thirties.[153] In the twenties, however, the story of the young volunteers was the dominant narrative of the strike, and its subtext is the memory of war. In *Swan Song*, when the strike is over, Soames Forsyte walks

---

151 *'Hurrah For the Blackshirts'*, 103.

152 Anne Perkins, *A Very British Strike: 3 May-12 May 1926* (London: Pan, 2007), 204-5). This aspect of the volunteers' efforts is featured in Wells's *Meanwhile*. Lady Catherine, who, offers her services to a Fascist organisation, kills a man by her dangerous driving (227-8). At about the same time, Sempick, the novel's voice of scientific philosophy, is knocked down by a bus. (232)

153 Mellor, Pawling and Sparks identify Harold Heslop's *The Gate of a Strange Field* (1929) as the first novel to interpret the strike in this way, but also cite D.H.Lawrence's unpublished 'Return to Bestwood' and the first draft of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as left-wing interpretations of the strike; they see Lawrence's failure to publish either of these texts as a retreat from social concerns. (Andrew Mellor, Chris Pawling and Colin Sparks, 'Writers and the General Strike', in Margaret Morris (ed.) *The General Strike* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976)). Raymond Williams details several Welsh novels describing the strike from a left-wing viewpoint, but none before 1934. (Raymond Williams, 'Welsh Industrial Novels', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*(London: Verso and NLB, 1980.) On the other hand, Sean O'Casey claimed that the inspiration for his war play, *The Silver Tassie*, came to him during the strike. See *Autobiographies 2* (London: Pan, 1963), 269-270.

around London, and is drawn to Jagger's dramatic and sombre Royal Artillery Memorial in Hyde Park:

> Automatically he had begun to encompass the Artillery Memorial. A great white thing which he had never yet taken in properly, and didn't know that he wanted to. Yet somehow it was very real, and suited to his mood — faced things; nothing high-flown about that gun — short, barking brute of a thing; or those dark men — drawn and devoted under their steel hats! Nothing pretty-pretty about that memorial — no angels' wings there! No Georges and no dragons, nor horses on the prance; no panoply, and no panache! There it 'sot' — as they used to say — squatted like a great white toad on the nation's life. Concreted thunder. Not an illusion about it! Good thing to look at once a day, and see what you'd got to avoid.[154]

By introducing this note, Galsworthy suggests that the strike has stirred memories of war that go deeper than the excitements of play-acting and volunteering. The crisis has made Soames want to confront the 'very real', something deeper than panoply and panache. He identifies with the 'dark men' (the black figures dramatically contrasting with the white of the monument) whose drawn faces show recognition of the seriousness of their predicament. 'What you'd got to avoid' means war, but also the catastrophic class conflict which had just been averted.

The novels of Gibbs and Galsworthy are exceptional in dealing directly with the strike. It was an event that gripped and disturbed the nation, but soon lost its topicality; moreover, it was a politically divisive subject, of the type that publishers of popular fiction and editors of fiction magazines were chary of. Any influence of the strike on fiction usually has a less direct expression. An example from popular culture suggests ways in which the story of the strike could be mythologised, but also how difficult it is to directly link a piece of fiction with the national events. 'The Slacker's Awakening' appeared in the *Magnet* for June 28th, 1926, and was almost certainly written during or just after the strike. It tells how Lord Mauleverer, a languid and aristocratic member of the Greyfriars Remove, who is often considered a 'lazy slacker', responds to an

---

154 *The Forsyte Sage, Volume Two*, 627-8.

emergency, saving the life of a girl from a neighbouring school: 'And his laziness, his slacking, dropped from him like a cloak. Marjorie was in danger, and [...] only he was there to save her; and the slacker of the Remove had become keen, alert, resolute – a new Mauleverer.'[155] This seems an exact parallel for the way in which the plus-foured undergraduates had proved themselves during the strike, so could be read as a translation of recent events into the terms of the school-story genre; on the other hand, the story of an unlikely character proving his true worth had long been a staple of popular writing. It is probably most accurate to say that both the story and the favoured interpretation of the strike use tropes from the same literary tradition.

More definitely, Arnold Bennett's novel *Accident* (1929) is, as John Lucas suggests, 'a novel intended to explore something of the strike's underlying causes.'[156] It begins in an England divided by class; Alan, a rich businessman, boards a luxury train, wondering about 'all the humble who would be left behind' and asking himself: 'Why are we going and why are they helping us to go? And why do they not storm the train and take our places by force?'[157] The train rushes through an uncertain Europe filled with rumours of crashes, as Alan tries and fails to understand two marriages, that of an abrasive elderly couple, and that of Michael, his son, whose wife is threatening to end the marriage because of Michael's decision to become a Labour parliamentary candidate. Eventually the express crashes.

'And with the crash,' John Lucas writes, 'the sense of mounting disquiet, even of horror, is dispelled. The second, tedious half of the novel is concerned with Alan's role in patching up his son's marriage.'[158] Lucas finds the second half tedious because 'family comedy replaces the larger social issues and crisis which the first half of the novel has prepared us for' but finds the novel instructive 'because it so obviously testifies to the sense of anti-climax which followed the ending of the general strike.'[159] Writing from a left-wing perspective, Lucas is disappointed that the accident does not radicalise the characters, or provoke a

155 'The Slacker's Awakening', *The Magnet* (26 June 1926), 20.
156 John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 167.
157 Arnold Bennett, *Accident* (London, Cassell, 1929), 9.
158 *The Radical Twenties*, 169.
159 *The Radical Twenties*,169.

change in social relations; instead, what happens is that Alan's son Michael, a doctor, gives practical help to the wounded, and is brought to a sense that his desire to become a Labour M.P. is less important than his feelings for his wife (who in turn also becomes willing to compromise). The crash has given both a sense of perspective, and an exhilaration that they have come through unharmed. If the train crash is, as Lucas convincingly suggests, an equivalent for the strike, it finally turns out to be relatively harmless, and the harbinger of social unity.

This also seems to be the drift of Wells's *Meanwhile*. Philip, the ex-soldier who goes to England to observe the strike, reacts against the bluster of Bullace, a Fascist sympathizer 'spouting nonsense out of the *Daily Mail*',[160] and is attracted to socialism, but by the end of the novel comes to accept the wider perspective of the novel's philosopher, Sempack,

> The socialist movements of the nineteenth century, the communist movement, are no more than crude misshapen, small anticipations of the great revolutionary movement to which all lives, all truly human living things, must now be called.[161]

Such fictional movements away from the left echo political decisions made during the strike by writers who would soon afterwards produce important war fiction. Fifteen years later, Richard Aldington recollected his involvement, which had him reaching for his old army pack:

> [W]hen I got a telegram from *The Times* asking me to come and help the paper continue, I stuffed some underclothes and a book in my army pack and hitch-hiked to London, no regular transport being available. I suppose I ought really to have been on the other side, for I had no particular liking for Mr. Baldwin and his friends or what they represented. On the other hand, a dictatorship of wooden-headed trade union leaders seemed no great happiness; while contact with Labour-minded intellectuals had made them positively distasteful to me.[162]

The strike seems to have been more important as a turning point in

---

160 H. G. Wells, *Meanwhile* (London: Benn, 1927), 127.
161 *Meanwhile*, 275.
162 Richard Aldington, *Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences* (originally published 1941), (London: Cassell, 1968), 273.

Siegfried Sassoon's development. Since his wartime protest he had been associated with the Labour Party and the *Daily Herald*, though his identification with socialism had never been absolute. (At a 1919 election meeting, a woman told him: 'You will never understand us, Mr. Sassoon. For you, Mr. Sassoon, never took in Marx with your mother's milk.'[163]) By 1926, his political sympathies were far less certain than in 1921, when he had wholeheartedly supported striking miners. He was recruited by Osbert Sitwell to an attempt to solve the crisis by behind-the-scenes negotiation. Beverley Baxter noticed Sassoon's extreme excitability at this time, 'brandishing his fists at the ceiling' and apparently 'riding some tempest of the soul that would not give him peace.'[164]

The strike ended, and Sitwell believed that the conciliatory efforts of the two poets had been useful, but this seems to have marked the end of Sassoon's direct political engagement. Soon afterwards he began writing the semi-autobiographical *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (first published anonymously in 1927), in which he re-imagines himself as George Sherston, a Sassoon uncomplicated by the Jewish background, the homosexuality, the literary interests or the politics. The book's mode is gently pastoral, and its picture of pre-war England is very different from the troubled representation typically found in novels of the early twenties.[165] Sassoon's idyll presents a world undisturbed by politics; the excitements are those of cricket and fox-hunting. The loyal servants described are very unlike striking coal-miners or dockers.

When war comes, Sherston volunteers in the playful spirit of the 1926 strike-breakers, enjoying the first days of the War as a 'mounted infantry picnic in perfect weather'; his activities are seen as 'a bit of a joke',[166] although secretly he takes them very seriously. He volunteers purely as a social duty, and the book gives no hint that he appreciates the causes of the War, or its purposes.

---

163 Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: the Journey from the Trenches* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 37.

164 Quoted in: *Siegfried Sassoon: the Journey from the Trenches*, 171.

165 The account of rural life in Henry Williamson's *The Beautiful Life* (1921) and *Dandelion Days* (1922), for example, is far more troubled. Sassoon's nostalgia is the product of 1927; his diary entry for 3 December 1915 had described his pre-war existence as 'the old inane life which always seemed like a prison.' *Diaries 1915-1918* (London: Faber, 1983), 22.

166 Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, in *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber 1980), 219.

The only moral justification for fighting mentioned is described with sarcastic exaggeration: 'The newspapers informed us that German soldiers crucified Belgian babies. Stories of that kind were taken for granted: to have disbelieved them would have been unpatriotic.'[167] Sherston's naivety works to good dramatic effect; where earlier twenties writers had typically been interested in the continuities between pre-war and wartime, often presenting war as a catalyst, bringing to crisis pre-existent social processes, Sassoon puts all the emphasis on discontinuity and the shock of battle; Sherston, his *alter ego*, is an innocent transported from the timelessly rural to industrialized warfare. This erstwhile left-winger's war book is imbued with nostalgically conservative values, emphasized more strongly in the second edition, whose illustrations by William Nicholson were designed to look like very old photographs.[168]

More significant as an effect of the strike than this swing to the right, however, is a change in the relationship between the generations. To take an example from popular culture, the typical thriller hero of the early twenties, Bulldog Drummond, had a team of associates whose absolute loyalty had been forged in the War; they brought the virtues of wartime to help a post-war world that could not help itself. Similarly, in Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924), when Richard Hannay fights evil in a debauched jazz-dancing London that has lost touch with reality, his helpers are wartime colleagues like Sandy Arbuthnot.[169] After the strike, however, there was a new sense that some of the younger generation have appropriate qualities; when Dornford Yates began a new series of thrillers with *Blind Corner* (1927), his ex-soldier hero Jonah Mansel recruits two of the younger generation to help him, Richard Chandos and George Hanbury, who 'had lately been sent down from Oxford for using some avowed communists as many thought they deserved'.[170]

That after 1926 ex-soldiers felt less alienated from the succeeding generation is often indicated in War books published towards the end of the

167 *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*, 221.

168 The means by which Nicholson achieved this effect are described in Stanford Schwartz, *William Nicholson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 218.

169 In Buchan's *Huntingtower* (1922), representatives of the younger generation are among the team united against evil. These, however, are not middle class but the Gorbals Diehards, young working-class boys whose instinctive courage and sense of right proved them able to rise above their education in Socialist Sunday Schools.

170 Dornford Yates, *Blind Corner* (London: Dent, 1985 reprint), 1.

decade. Sometimes these were written with the explicit purpose of informing the young: in the foreword to *War is War*, A.M. Burrage writes: 'If any young man should ask an old soldier, 'Was it really like this?' and the old soldier answers, 'Yes, it's all true,' this book will have served its purpose.'[171] Richard Blaker finishes *Medal Without Bar* with an image of the reconciliation of generations. Cartwright, the middle-aged main character, had been disturbed when his son, John, first wanted to enlist: 'No man in his senses could see in the fellow anything but a schoolboy; lanky, nothing but wrist, ankle and Adam's apple; prodigiously dignified for the two days immediately following his bi-weekly shave, fluffy and diffident and gawky for the other five.'[172] John does enlist, despite Cartwright's wishes, and becomes a pilot. Cartwright fears for him, but the novel ends with them drinking Johnny Walker together, comrades.

R.C.Sherriff asserted that the characters of *Journey's End* were partly based on young men he knew in post-war life: 'I got the notion that it would be interesting to imagine the post-war generation in the atmosphere of the trenches.' He told the theatrical newspaper, *The Era*: 'I see in the present generation of boys exactly the same people who served with me in the War.'[173] Faced with criticism that the play presented too demoralising a picture of war, Sherriff conducted the experiment of taking three boys just out of school to see it. Their reaction convinced him that having seen the play they would be better able to face the experience of war.[174]

The events of May, 1926 were not the only reason for a change in the style of war writing, but they helped to make the change possible, partly by the removal of barriers. The failure of the strike meant that the threat of revolution, which had haunted many minds since 1917, need no longer be taken with the utmost seriousness. What is more, this threat had been defeated, people let themselves believe, not by the army, but by the efforts of citizens opposed to the strike, and especially by the young. If the army was no longer the only defence against social chaos, there was less need now to guard the army's reputation as carefully as the stage censors had done when they read the script of *Khaki* in

171 A. M. Burrage, *War is War* (London, Gollancz, 1930),
172 Richard Blaker, *Medal Without Bar* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 566.
173 Quoted in *Merchants of Hope*, 176.
174 *Merchants of Hope*, 179.

1924. In addition, the Fascist groups who had argued for the establishment of tough-minded militias had also been sidelined during the strike. While individual Fascists undoubtedly played their part in the strike-breaking, they were easily outnumbered by those who considered themselves non-political. Moreover, if the young had proved their seriousness (paradoxically by exhibiting their playfulness) and had shown their fitness to defend democratic values, they could now seem a fitting audience with whom ex-soldiers could share their memories of combat, as they would do in some of the texts considered in the next chapter.

6. Truths about the War?

In the Leslie Charteris thriller *The Last Hero* (published in 1930, when the authorwas 23), the hero, Simon Templar, gives a caustic account of how wars begin:

> The people never make or want a war — it's sprung on them by the statesmen with the business interests behind them, and somebody writes a 'We-Don't-Want-to-Lose-you-but-We-Think-You-Ought-to-Go' song for the brass bands to play, and millions of poor fools go out and die like heroes without ever being quite sure what it's all about. [1]

It is unlikely that this futility-of-war thesis put so strongly would have appeared in any popular thriller before 1929. To the objection that people may have learnt their lesson, Templar replies with 'an impatient gesture':

> Do people learn lessons like that so easily? The men who could teach them are a past generation now. How many are left who are young enough to convince our generation? And even if we are on the crest of a wave of literature about the horrors of war, do you think that cuts any ice? I tell you, I've listened till I'm tired to people of our own age discussing those books and plays — and I know they cut no ice at all. It'd be a miracle if they did.[2]

'Those books and plays' have clearly made an impression on Templar and his author, and subsequent critical opinion has largely agreed with them that the end of the nineteen-twenties should be seen as the time when new war books appeared, radically different from what had gone before, embodying a new myth and a narrative that describes, in the words of Samuel Hynes: 'a generation of high-minded young men [...] slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals.'[3] This section of the thesis will suggest that the novelty has been overstated, that the books produced at this time were less uniform in their attitudes and style than has sometimes been suggested, and

---

1 Leslie Charteris, *The Last Hero* (London: Hodder, 1930), 42-3.
2 *The Last Hero*, 43
3 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), xii.

that what happened at the end of the twenties can best be seen as a debate about the nature of war and the soldier, and about what constituted 'truth' about the War.

The tenth anniversary of the Armistice was an occasion for both remembering and reassessment, and it coincided with two events remarkable enough to convince any publisher that the war was again a marketable subject for fiction; these were the first performances of *Journey's End* in London at the end of 1928, and the publication in March 1929, amid much publicity, of the English translation of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* only a few months after its initial serialisation in the Berlin *Vossiche Zeitung*.[4]

The success of these works encouraged the publication of others, but despite the belief of Herbert Read and others that Remarque's book 'was the touch that released this particular mental spring'[5] the excited reaction to *All Quiet on the Western Front* was not the first indication of renewed public interest in the War. In July 1928, the alert publisher Jonathan Cape had written to T.E.Lawrence, about e. e. cummings's war novel:

> *The Enormous Room* is printed, and is being published on July 20th. [...] I fought shy of it because war books were entirely at a discount then, but the conditions have changed now, I think. We have done quite well with young Gristwood's *The Somme* which Wells sent to me.[6]

Gristwood's book had been published in 1927, and contained harrowing accounts of battle, concentrating on endurance rather than heroics. H.G.Wells described the book in his preface:

> Mr Gristwood has had the relentless simplicity to recall things as they were; he was as nearly dead as he could be without dying, and he has smelt the stench of his own corruption. This is the story of millions of men — of millions. This is war as the man in the street will get it if it comes again.[7]

---

[4] The translation was by A.W. Wheen, author of 'Two Masters' (1924).
[5] Herbert Read, 'Books of the Quarter', *The Criterion* (July 1930), 764.
[6] Michael Howard, *Jonathan Cape, Publisher* (London: Cape, 1971), 149-150.
[7] H.G.Wells, 'Preface' in A. D. Gristwood, *The Somme: including also The Coward* (London: Cape, 1927), 11.

Wells's description also fits *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which concentrates with extreme directness on the experience of one German soldier, with no attempt to put the War into any historical context. The only explanation for why the Baumer and his comrades are fighting is given in the caricatured picture of the schoolmaster, Kantorek, whose false rhetoric is the opposite of the novel's own style. The book is episodic and disconnected, mostly told in the historic present, as though shutting out everything except the moment being endured. There is constant emphasis on the physical — eating, defecating, pain, weariness. In the scenes of combat, there is little sense of strategy or purpose, only of suffering. These German soldiers feel no animosity towards opponents; the enemy is war itself, which casts Baumer and the other soldiers into an abject role, without control over their lives. It kills them one by one.

There had already been texts published in Britain that used some of these themes and techniques. The physical effect of warfare on the common soldier, and especially the importance of food and drink, had been stressed in many accounts of ordinary soldiers' experiences, notably in the wartime books of Patrick MacGill and the Frenchman Raymond Dorgeles.[8] Read's *In Retreat* (written 1919, published 1925), had, like Gristwood's two novellas, presented a forceful picture of a destructive episode, in which the individual was powerless to influence his fate. The diary format of Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928) had produced a similar effect to Remarque's use of the historic present, allowing a similar concentration on the moment at the expense of the bigger picture.

All Quiet's avoidance of many usual tropes of war literature led to its being seen as artless, for example by the *New Statesman* reviewer:

> [A]nyone who was sufficiently in the thick of it for a long period, on one side or the other, might have written this grim, monotonous record, if he had the gift, which the author has, of remembering clearly, and setting down his memories truly, in naked and violent words.[9]

---

8 *Les Croix de Bois* (1919) by Dorgeles was translated as *Wooden Crosses* (London: Heinemann, 1920).

9 'The Men Who Were Boys', *New Statesman* (25 May 1929), 218.

This critic saw the book as the clear expression of an unmediated truth that was the truth of war in general, not just the German experience, although:

> If we seek in literature the quintessence of the soldier's life in that dismal episode in history, it is better, perhaps, to look for it on the German side, rather than on the British, for on that side everything was a little more so – militarism was a little more militarist; parade ground imbecilities were a little more imbecile; the squalor of the trenches (in the last year or two) was more squalid; there was less relief, less leave, more hunger, more weakness, more disease. And the typical victim of the war should be, like Herr Remarque, one who was always in the ranks.[10]

The assumption here is that the truth about war must lie in war at its worst; not in the average soldier's experience, but in that of the least fortunate.

The factual accuracy of *All Quiet* is stressed in many reviews. L. P. Hartley in the *Saturday Review* considered it 'not primarily a novel, but a historical document' and 'clearly founded on fact'.[11] Herbert Read justified his opinion that this was 'the greatest of all war books' by measuring it against not only his own experience, but that of others: 'I have discussed it with men of all degrees, especially with those whose experience of the war was as complete as that of the author; I have tested it faithfully against my own memories, and always my conviction remains firm.'[12]

Some other writers were more dubious about the work's veracity. Henry Williamson, for example, in *The Gold Falcon* (1933) has his war-novelist protagonist reflect:

> The only thing that would satisfy about a war book was its sense, not only of reality, but of actuality. [...] Had the author ever been in a battle? Manfred thought many of the scenes were faked. The battle scenes had the tensions of imagined dread. A battle imagined was more terrible than a battle in movement. Those who had passed over the crater zones in the

---

[10] 'The Men Who Were Boys', 218.
[11] L.P.Hartley, 'New Fiction', *The Saturday Review* (20 April 1929), 544.
[12] Herbert Read, 'A Lost Generation', *Nation and Athenaeum* (27 April 27 1929), 116.

shrieking air were not haunted as those who had only dreaded the assault.[13]

Williamson's suspicions may be justified. Modris Eksteins concludes that: 'Considerable mystery surrounds Remarque's war experience."[14] He was wounded, but not in action, and possibly not very near the front. During the 1920s he suffered from depression, and fixed on the War as the cause and symbol of his state of mind. Eksteins suggests that: '*All Quiet* is more a comment on the postwar mind, on the postwar view of the war, than an attempt to reconstruct the reality of the trench experience. In fact, that reality is distorted, as many critics insisted."[15] Siegfried Sassoon was among the sceptical. Jean Moorcroft Wilson describes how: '*All Quiet on the Western Front* irritated him not just because of its sensationalism, but also because it gave "no place names", left "everything vague".'[16]

The criterion being applied by Williamson and Sassoon is that of total authenticity. During wartime the soldier had assumed the right to speak about things of which non-combatants should be silent; ten years later men who had experienced combat take it on themselves to police literary offerings, in an appeal to what James Campbell calls 'combat gnosticism, a construction that gives us war experience as a kind of gnosis, a secret knowledge which only the initiated elite knows."[17]

The criterion of authenticity was also applied to R.C. Sherriff's play, *Journey's End*, first given a few performances by the Stage Society in London at the end of 1928, while Remarque's novel was being serialized in Germany. Charles Morgan in *The Times* praised the production for 'coming as near as the stage may ever come to precise representation of life in a dug-out', though, like

---

13 Henry Williamson, *The Gold Falcon: or the Haggard of Love*, second edition (London: Faber, 1947), 9.

14 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Bantam,
1989), 278.

15 *Rites of Spring*, 282.

16 Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey from the Trenches: A Biography (1918-67)* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 239.

17 James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History* ((30:1) Winter 1999), 204. In *A Subaltern's War* (London: Peter Davies, 1929), Charles Carrington puts this explicitly: '[S]oldiers who have fought side by side are conscious of being initiated: they are "illuminati".' (194).

some other critics, he also felt that it was 'a historical document, but not a work of art':

> You experience, while watching the play, a hot, cloudy, unstable emotion, but await in vain that poetic leap from things observed to universal truth apprehended which yields tragedy's own exaltation, not hot, though flaming, not cloudy but serene.[18]

Sherriff's play expressed no opinion as to the origins of the War, or the justice of the cause; the immediacies of the situation were everything. In presenting the War in this way, Sherriff seems to have been true to his own wartime attitudes, as revealed in the letters he sent home, in which there is little sense that the war is for a righteous cause; instead: 'I simply feel that we have been set a task which has got to be carried through, and which will probably be unpleasant.' [19] The play was taken up, however, by the manager Maurice Browne, a wartime conscientious objector who had recently presented two explicitly pacifist plays.[20] Sherriff much later wrote of Browne, 'What made him fall for the play was a mystery to me then, and has remained a mystery ever since. It was totally unlike anything he had produced before, and the sentiments of the characters towards the war were in absolute contrast with his own.'[21] Browne was prescient enough to see that Sherriff's understated depiction of men attempting to do their best in appalling circumstances spoke more movingly against war than explicit preaching.

All Quiet on the Western Front had divided German critics along political lines, but *Journey's End* united the British ones, who acclaimed its combination of deep feeling with restraint. It had none of *All Quiet*'s grossness; when the play opened in America, the critic of the *New York Evening Journal*, while reacting very positively ('Here is a play to tear your heart out.') commented on the very English decorum of the dialogue ('[I]t is as polite as a tea party in a vicarage without once losing its vigorous touch with reality.'[22]) While the

---

18 *The Times* (11 December 1918), 14.

19 Letter of 5 October 1916. Sherriff archive, SRO 2332. Box 44 Part 2.

20 *The Unknown Warrior* by Paul Raynal, according to the *Times* critic, moved 'from strong truth to weak rhetoric' (6 February 1928). *Wings over Europe* (by Browne himself, with Robert Nichols) was about the possibilities, peaceful and warlike, of nuclear fission.

21 R.C.Sherriff, *No Leading Lady* (London: Gollancz, 1968), 72.

22 *New York Evening Journal*, 23 March 1929. In SRO 2332. Box 3, Folder 6.

German novel had been interpreted by many as an insult to the German fighting man, objections to the English play were such that Browne could dismiss them flippantly: 'An angry general sent a letter to the press, an even angrier cleric preached against the play: young captains in the front line never drank.'[23]

Journey's End was accepted as a thought-provoking picture of war, without being subversive or oppositional; its production became an event that could integrate easily with existing mainstream ways of remembering the War. Browne devised an ending that referred to the iconography of war memorials: 'the curtain rose again for a moment on twelve figures clad in uniform, standing stiffly to attention and dimly seen against a darkness amid the swirl of smoke.'[24] Soon the production became associated with official and semi-official forms of remembrance; Browne's company made a contribution to the Haig Fund, and Lady Haig gave a luncheon in Browne's honour. A private performance was arranged one Sunday, to which every V.C. in Britain was invited, and also the Prince of Wales. In 1929, the play was broadcast by BBC radio as part of the Remembrance programme.[25] Two years later, the *Radio Times* recalled that despite the work's appropriateness, 'it was feared that the effect upon many listeners of recalling actual scenes of war might be unduly painful and create protest.' In the event, however, '*Journey's End* drew more letters than any single broadcast of the last two years; only one of these hundreds of letters protested against the play being included in the programme for Armistice Day.'[26]

The play's success, like that of *All Quiet*, crossed national borders. According to Maurice Browne, within a year of its opening, the play had been performed by seventy-six companies in twenty-five languages.[27] This international success was used in British publicity. 'Daily and daylong outside the theatre a crowd gather, studying the large map of the world which hung there. The little flags which indicated where each company was playing were

---

23 Maurice Browne, *Too Late to Lament, an Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1955), 309.

24 *Too Late to Lament*, 309.

25 At Sherriff's own insistence, 'a certain number of pungent words' were cut from the broadcast script, because, he said, 'in the case of broadcasting one must think of old ladies and families in country vicarages who might be shocked by these expressions'. *Manchester Guardian* (9 November 1929), 13.

26 'A History of Broadcasting on Armistice Day', *Radio Times* (6 November 1931). Quoted in Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, (Oxford and Providence: Berg,1994), 138.

27 *Too Late to Lament*, 319.

rearranged weekly.'[28] The play's advances on this campaign map became a synecdoche for the spread of pacific ideas around the world.

Paradoxically, the play's closeness to precisely remembered actuality allowed a variety of interpretation. Pacifists like Browne could see it as an exemplar of war's futility; traditional patriots could relate to its picture of resilient courage under appalling conditions. The 'hot, cloudy, unstable emotion' identified by Charles Morgan was anchored to no obtrusive authorial viewpoint; instead the close focus on war as endurance let the play's appeal cross political boundaries. When it was produced in Berlin in August of 1929 *The Times* report quoted a critic from 'an extreme Nationalist journal' (of the type that condemned Remarque) as saying:

> Hats off to this Englishman who has given us the cleanest War play yet seen on the German stage. [....] He caricatures neither soldiers nor officers, neither glorifies nor belittles war or the enemy, but gives an honest picture of life at the front. The German pacifists should take a lesson from him.[29]

More usually, Sherriff's play was held to propagate pacifist truths. At a celebratory dinner, his health was proposed by Mrs. Snowden, the wife of Philip Snowden, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, but in wartime a spokesman for the No-Conscription Fellowship. *The Times* reported her speech:

> Mrs Snowden said [...] that in his play Mr Sherriff had given the world a great thought, a great message, and, she believed, the profound hope that some day by the exposition of the facts there would be abolished the evil institution of war. (Cheers.)[30]

Sherriff's reply, reported in the same article, seems almost to refer to a different play. Asserting that his play was not peace propaganda, he claimed that he 'did not write it with an audience in mind, and when one wrote in that way it was easy to tell the truth as one saw it with one's own eyes.'

Sassoon's novel *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* was also praised, like *All Quiet* and *Journey's End*, for its veracity; the *Times* reviewer wrote:

---

28 *Too Late to Lament*, 319.
29 *The Times* (30 August 1929), 10.
30 '"Journey's End": O.P. Club's Tribute to the Author', *The Times* (25 November 1929), 11.

> Mr Sassoon disclaims any ambition of telling everybody's War story; but his strong purpose of discovering and disclosing the truth of his own motives, actions and reactions makes him more capable than the majority of communicating what other soldiers said, did and were.[31]

The book before the reviewer was a novel, told in the first person by George Sherston, a character unlike Sassoon (not a poet, not Jewish, not homosexual) and yet the review is headed 'Mr Sassoon's War Memories'. To judge it by Sassoon's own criteria: it does refer accurately to place names and circumstantial details; it combines factual accuracy with a rendering of personal experience. Sassoon worked from his wartime diaries (on occasion transcribing them directly) transferring the memories of Second Lieutenant Sassoon to Second Lieutenant Sherston, and filling these out to give the impression of intensely remembered detail, complete with apparently transcribed conversations and detailed accounts of the narrator's thoughts and feelings at particular moments. Yet at the same time *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* is studded with remarks about the difficulty of remembering. There is a consciousness that memory is patchy and selective; he is aware that some peaceful war pictures 'are rarely recovered even in imaginative retrospect',[32] that 'memory tries to misinform me'[33] and that 'One's mind eliminates boredom and physical discomfort, retaining an incomplete expression of a strange, intense and unique experience.'[34] Despite this, the narrator feels that his (or Sassoon's) memories are precious, more important even than his duty to interest his reader:

> I also remember how I went one afternoon to have a hot bath in the Jute Mill. The water was poured into a dyeing vat. Remembering that I had a bath may not be of much interest to anyone, but it was a good bath, and it was my own story that I am trying to tell, and as such it must be received; those who expect a universalisation of the Great War must look for it elsewhere.[35]

---

[31] 'Mr Sassoon's War Memories', *The Times* (9 September 1930), 15.
[32] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 288-9.
[33] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 285.
[34] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 311.
[35] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 291.

What Sherston remembers is an Army that is singularly untroubled, except by the War itself. There is a continuity with the feudal atmosphere of *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* in the depiction of Flook, the loyal soldier servant who carries Sherston's valise on his back: 'Flook and I were very good friends, and his vigilance for my personal comfort was such that I could more easily imagine him using his rifle in defence of my valise than against the Germans.'[36] Sassoon describes none of the jagged social relations among officers that are depicted in Robert Graves's account of the Royal Welch in *Goodbye to All That.* He only has good words for his fellow-officers; referring to 'good old Durley'[37] and 'my friend the Quartermaster',[38] while Bill Eaves is 'one of our best officers'.[39] Of the men, only the loyal Flook is a character in any way developed; the others are ciphers. There is, however, a strong contrast between these front-line soldiers and those behind the lines.

Early in the book Sassoon describes a Highland Major who lectures on 'The Spirit of the Bayonet' with 'homicidal eloquence', assisted by a Sergeant, a 'tall sinewy machine' who had been 'trained to such a pitch of frightfulness that at a moment's warning he could divest himself of all semblance of humanity.'[40] The Sergeant not only becomes inhuman; he is implicitly linked with the enemy, since 'frightfulness' was the usual wartime translation of 'Schrecklichkeit', a term used by the Germans to describe their policy of forceful intimidation of civilians in Belgium, Poland and elsewhere; using this word implies a moral equivalence between the two sides in the War. Britain may have begun by opposing Prussian militarism; now it has embraced it. In the novel, the major's lecture includes the words to 'The bullet and the bayonet are brother and sister'; Sassoon's diary entry for April 25th, 1916 records that 'all who listened caught fire from his enthusiasm',[41] and immediately afterwards Sassoon wrote 'The Kiss' ('To these I turn, in these I trust/ Brother Lead and Sister Steel.')[42] Robert Graves and others have taken this poem at face value, as a celebration of

---

[36] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 294.
[37] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 302.
[38] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 297.
[39] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 309.
[40] *Memoirs of George Sherston*, 289.
[41] Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries 1915-1918*, (London: Faber, 1983), 59.
[42] *Collected Poems*, 14.

violence, despite Sassoon's assertion that it was always a satire.[43] Since the poem is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for either reading, there must be a possibility that Sassoon himself was among those who 'caught fire', and that he began writing the poem as an expression of the Major's ideas, until a realisation of what he was saying caused him to write the grotesque last lines, where the bayonet becomes a *femme fatale*, from whose kisses men 'quail'.

The caricatured portrayal of the Highland Major in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* contrasts with Stephen Graham's account of the excesses of training in *A Private in the Guards*. Sassoon presents the lecturer as self-evidently appalling; Graham, while communicating no less disquiet at the violence of the training methods, at the same time shows that they have a purpose and a function. There is also a training course in Max Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme*, but this one becomes the occasion for self-analysis and self-criticism: 'It is pleasant and flattering to be able to hit an object invisible to the naked eye [....] I began to see that war entails many employments which are wholly enjoyable provided a certain part of the imagination is atrophied. The great seductive enjoyment of war, outside the infantry ranks, is the sense of power it confers.'[44] Plowman, who, like Sassoon, would go on to make his protest against the War (and, lacking Sassoon's influential circle of friends, would have a more difficult time of it)[45] does not describe or anticipate the protest in his book, but leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. Like Graham, he presents the reader with unresolved paradoxes; Sassoon, on the whole, has done our judging for us.

The appeal of Sassoon's writing to a later generation, distrustful of its political leaders and conscious of the War's fruitlessness, is evident. As well as the gusto of his descriptions of action, and his precise renditions of atmosphere, he gives in Sherston a wholly admirable figure with whom to identify. A soldier of undeniable boldness, loved by his men, who then takes it on himself to do what later readers hope that they would have done in the same situation, bravely protesting against the terrible War. As time went by it became increas-

[43] See *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*, 252-3.
[44] 'Mark VII' (Max Plowman), *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (Uckfield: Naval and Military Press, undated facsimile of 1928 edition published by Dutton, New York), 178.
[45] See Malcolm Pittock, 'Max Plowman and the Literature of the First World War', *Cambridge Quarterly* (33:3) 2004, 231.

ingly less obvious that Sassoon's statement of protest was, in the words of his biographer Max Egremont 'as a political document [...] quite startlingly naïve'.[46]

Such a gesture now chimed with the mood of a time when the views of the pacifist Arthur Ponsonby were gaining more acceptance. His *Falsehood in War-time* (1928) aimed to show that war inevitably breeds untruth ("This is no plea that lies should not be used in war-time, but a demonstration of how lies must be used in war-time.").[47] Easily demonstrating that some of the best-known atrocity legends of the War (the Crucified Canadian, the German Corpse Factory) had no discoverable basis in truth, and having made the valid point about atrocity stories that 'The repetition of a single instance of cruelty and its exaggeration can be distorted into a prevailing habit on the part of the enemy,'[48] Ponsonby goes on to claim that the British war effort involved 'the authoritative organisation of lying'[49] and 'elaborate and carefully staged deceptions',[50] and that 'ignorant people' are easily duped when 'lies are circulated with great rapidity. The unthinking mass accept them and by their excitement sway the rest.'[51]

Ponsonby questions all Belgian accounts of atrocity, and therefore a major reason for Britons' moral commitment to the War. Equally, reviving claims about pre-war secret diplomacy, he asserts that the country was fooled into war under false pretences, thus undercutting the official legal and diplomatic case for war. Throughout the book he insists not only that the public can easily be 'worked up emotionally',[52] but that manipulation was part of a public policy with which editors and writers consciously colluded. Of the 'intellectuals and literary notables' who wrote in support of the war effort he writes, 'They were able to clothe the rough tissue of falsehood with phrases of literary merit and passages of eloquence better than the statesmen [....] Everything was legitimate which could make the soldiers go on fighting.'[53] For Ponsonby, any writer who

---

[46] Max Egremont, *Siegfried Sassoon* (London, Picador, 2006), 145.
[47] Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1928), 27.
[48] *Falsehood in War-Time*, 22.
[49] *Falsehood in War-Time*, 13.
[50] *Falsehood in War-Time*, 26.
[51] *Falsehood in War-Time*, 15.
[52] *Falsehood in War-Time*,14.
[53] *Falsehood in War-Time*, 25.

in any way endorsed the war was guilty of bad faith, and of intellectual betrayal.

Ponsonby's book was published at a time when the British political establishment was in low esteem. By the late twenties the thought of intelligent writers spontaneously and honestly endorsing government policy must have been hard to imagine. At the same time the imperfections of the Treaty of Versailles had become clear, and understandably there was widespread scepticism about the War that had cost so much and seemed to have delivered little. Hope was invested in the League of Nations, and a renewed unwillingness to conceive of another European war looked for validation in combat novels and memoirs, and found expression in the wider culture — for example in the Leslie Charteris thriller quoted above.

Not only were new texts written that referred to this new understanding of the War; at least one older text was significantly re-written. In 1929 Henry Williamson revised his *A Dream of Fair Women*, whose description of the alienated soldier in the vulgar crowd of 'Peace Day' was described in Chapter 5, adding a whole new element to the episode. Where in 1924 the Peace Day procession had been just the distant 'blare of a brass band', now it became full-scale march-past of the Shorncliffe and Folkestone Command, described in some detail, and arousing this reaction from Maddison:

> How alert and beribboned were the staff officers, with their red-banded caps whose peaks were gold-encrusted with oak leaves, their red tabs, their shining boots and spurs and double rows of ribbons. The beribbon'd staff! [....] Ah! here was the cavalry!... Skull and crossbones, the seventeenth lancers — his heart beat violently — the old seventeenth! Did they remember when they had been sent to attack Bullecourt in broad daylight [...] because the blasted Staff had believed the Germans in the Hindenburg line would be asleep after their mid-day meal? The survivors had returned about 3.p.m., looking as though their faces had been soaked in brine, their eyes smarting and fixed beyond seeing.[54]

[54] Henry Williamson, *A Dream of Fair Women*, (London: Faber, 1931), 158-9.

In his introduction to the 1936 Faber volume collecting the whole tetralogy, Williamson says that his revisions were to cut out 'untruths, exaggerations, incidents of false characterisation and false writing.'[55] In this case the addition goes beyond this, adding a new political dimension to the passage.

This view of the War was not without its critics. In 1930 Douglas Jerrold, in his polemical *The Lie about the War*, and Cyril Falls, in his more measured *War Books*, took it upon themselves to answer what they saw as an unfortunate new orthodoxy. Falls, after fighting with the 11th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, had written the history of his division, and worked on the official history of the War. *War Books* is a critical bibliography, most of which is devoted to histories and memoirs, but Falls also evaluates fiction, especially combat fiction, using accuracy as a major criterion. He is critical of novels produced in the wake of Remarque's by writers who 'have set themselves. [...] to prove that the Great War was engineered by knaves or fools on both sides, that the men who died in it were driven like beasts to the slaughter, and died like beasts, without their deaths helping any causes or doing any good.'[56] While agreeing that: 'The general conditions of the War, especially on the Western Front, were horrible, and the infantryman had a worse time of it than anyone who did not serve in the ranks or as a junior officer can realise,'[57] Falls insists that 'the falsest of false evidence' is produced by 'closing up scenes and events which in themselves may be true' so that horror is piled on horror, until 'the soldier is represented as a depressed and mournful spectre hopelessly wandering about until death brought his miseries to an end.'[58]

Jerrold also criticises the false impression created, sometimes unwittingly, by a concentration on the horrible; in 'that fine play, *Journey's End*', he writes, 'the only falsity is statistical.'[59] Jerrold denies that Sherriff's play gives a complete picture of the War, any more than a depiction of a mining disaster says everything about the coal industry. Such objections on the grounds of statistical inaccuracy are not necessarily persuasive because similar ones could be made to

---

[55] Henry Williamson, *The Flax of Dream* (London: Faber, 1936), 4.
[56] Cyril Falls, *War Books: A Critical Guide* (London: P. Davies, 1930), xvi.
[57] *War Books*, xvii.
[58] *War Books*, xvii.
[59] Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie about the War* (London, Faber [*Criterion Miscellany*],1930), 8.

disparage most fiction. *Bleak House* probably exaggerates the unscrupulousness of Victorian lawyers; *Macbeth* is inaccurate about Scottish history; to judge a fiction by its closeness to actuality is to measure it against a standard that is essentially non-literary. Yet the fact that war fiction attracts this kind of criticism tells us something about the genre. When Inspector Morse novels suggest a greater murder rate in the picturesque parts of Oxford than the authentic crime statistics, few readers complain, knowing that the author is writing within a genre, playing a game that requires a suspension of our sense of statistical probability. Similarly, readers of romantic wartime novels seem rarely to have complained that fictional awards of the V.C. were more plentiful than real-life ones; the genre's conventions demanded that valour be recognised, and the statistically unlikely award makes satisfying reading. When books and plays are promoted as telling 'the truth about the War', however, it is hardly unreasonable for critics to hold the texts to account by investigating their authenticity. When Sherriff disclaims any intention to provide a representative picture of the Western Front he is in effect saying, 'I am not playing by the rules of statistical accuracy, but by different rules altogether.' Authors in general seem to have been well aware of the nature of their work, presenting texts as fictive constructs and not unmediated truth; some promoters and publicists were less careful in their claims.

Jerrold goes beyond the concerns about factual representativeness that he shares with Falls, however, to question the fashionably negative war books in different ways. To begin with, he questions the authenticity of the public response and 'the value of the moral indignation, the emotional force and the effective will of people who were unmoved by the deaths of nine million men in four years but waited till a novelist wrote a book about it before they sat up and took notice.'[60] He points out that hundreds of books had already been written about the War; many contained acknowledgement of horrors and suffering, but balanced these against other considerations. He maintains that the newer books 'could be read and accepted only by men who had wholly forgotten or wholly rejected the earlier books.'[61] The people who respond so strongly to the war books are therefore not responding to the actual horrors of war, but to a new

[60] *The Lie about the War*, 8.
[61] *The Lie about the War*, 12.

way of describing them, which presupposes them to be futile: 'It is this obsession of futility, not any depth of sympathy or humanitarianism, which accounts for the piling up of the individual agony to so many poignant climaxes remote from the necessities or even from the incidental happenings of war.'[62] He also points out that: 'As for their infinite pity, nothing is easier, unfortunately, than to be bravely sympathetic about the sufferings of the past.'[63]

His diagnosis is that the newer books do not describe soldiers, but civilians in uniform; when the books present courage, it is 'not the courage and long-suffering of soldiers but of civilians, individual isolated civilians at that.'[64] He criticises them for 'writing of the war always and continuously from the point of view of the individual, without pointing out, or even allowing the reader to guess, that the individual in modern warfare is not a fighting unit.'[65] Since the individual in modern war is only a small piece of a pattern larger than he can comprehend, concentration on one person's subjective experience inevitably produces an impression of futility, because 'to the individual personally, all operations of war are meaningless and futile.' The operations of modern warfare make meaningful sense not at the level of the individual, the company, the battalion, or even the division, but the army.

As an individual a man cannot help but be conscious of his own fate; the soldier, for Jerrold, must identify with his army's. To write only of men as individuals, by definition powerless in the face of industrial warfare, is to miss the real drama of war, which is not the crushing of the individual by impersonal forces, but the struggle within each man as he attempts to fulfil the role of soldier. He writes: 'The real tragedy of the war is being falsely reported as the death of so many men whose duty it was to live, whereas the real tragedy was that duty offered no alternative but death.'[66]

This romantic view of the soldier as warrior was shaped by Jerrold's internalisation of the customs and standards of his own unit; the Hawke Battalion of the Royal Naval Division was unorthodox, fighting with the Army,

---

[62] *The Lie about the War*, 18.
[63] *The Lie about the War*, 24.
[64] *The Lie about the War*, 12.
[65] *The Lie about the War*, 22.
[66] *The Lie about the War*, 19.

but retaining distinctive naval traditions. Jerrold's autobiography, *Georgian Adventure* (1937), much of which describes his experiences with the battalion at Gallipoli and in France, makes his attitudes more explicit, and suggests that he was not objecting to the fact that other writers described the horrors of war, or criticised the Army, but to the limitation of their world-view. This book contains paragraphs as scathing about the conditions and conduct of the War as any in the books he deplored:

> The fact was that in France officers and men ceased to be human beings, or even fighting animals (except on stated and peculiar occasions). They became, even when most exalted, units in a machine and only through the machine did even the generals possess any *raison d'être*. British strategy was still under the ghastly delusion that heavy artillery could open up the road to Berlin; that it was a war of material, not of men. Keep the machine well-oiled and greased, give it a trial run occasionally to see that it is neither over-oiled nor run down, and wait for orders. Meanwhile discipline was the solvent of all personal difficulties. Polish up your drill and learn to be killed quietly, without asking any awkward questions.[67]

He writes of the 'long agony of Passchendaele, where tactics foolish to the point of criminality had wasted thousands upon thousands of lives.'[68] He anatomises the shortcomings of the Gallipoli generals, and criticises conventional methods of cadet training: 'If they had been given their commissions largely because they looked *something* like officers, at the cadet course they had been taught nothing except to look *exactly* like officers. It was [...] rough luck on the men whose lives would be in the keeping of these *papier-mâché* soldiers.'[69] Jerrold's account of his war service is full of proud memories of acts of disobedience. He describes an incident, for example, when he refuses to send his men out on a working party, because they had just returned exhausted from a previous one. Warned by Headquarters that such attitudes would 'get him noticed', he comments: 'How true; all I had to do was to write out an order and go to bed

---

[67] Douglas Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure* (London: Right Book Club, 1938), 165-6.
[68] *Georgian Adventure*, 205.
[69] *Georgian Adventure*, 203.

and be blessed for my efficiency. Luckily I had a Colonel who would not have allowed me any such easy laurels. Bless him!'[70]

When, having lost an arm at the Ancre, he was involved in the training of officers, his aim was not to turn civilians into smooth-working parts of the military machine, but rather the reverse; he describes his aim: 'I had, as a rule, three weeks to teach these officers to think and to act on their own initiative, to argue and to become at least potentially insubordinate.'[71] This insubordination should not be because the officer is thinking like an individual, looking out for his own interests, but because he is thinking like a soldier, seeing himself as part of an Army, and putting its interests above such considerations as smooth relations with his military superiors.

Jerrold complains of the war books of 1929-30: 'Every one of these books [...] deals with every conceivable kind of struggle except the struggle of one army against another.'[72] By this he means that the books show men struggling against an impersonal onslaught, men trying to survive in appalling conditions, men struggling with their own fear, and sometimes individuals confronting an individual enemy. They do not show men thinking for themselves as an army should think. By making this point, he is not claiming that the majority of soldiers between 1914 and 1918 thought in this way — his autobiography makes clear that in his opinion many of his superior officers did not — but that if someone writes about war, he or she should write about what makes war distinctive; suffering, a sense of futility, incompetent leadership and even violent death can be found in civilian life as well. Essentially this is the same argument (mentioned in Chapter 5) that Amy in Rose Macaulay's *Told by an Idiot* (1923) used against her war-poet son, whose verse she finds 'too terribly beastly and nasty and corpsey': 'All I say is, why write about corpses? There've always been plenty of them, people who've died in their beds of diseases.'[73] Jerrold's prescription was for a literature potentially of great interest to people who think like soldiers, or who would like to learn how to do so. The reading public, however, is largely made of civilians who think like civilians and whose

[70] *Georgian Adventure*, 131.
[71] *Georgian Adventure*, 203.
[72] *The Lie about the War*, 17.
[73] *Told by an Idiot*, 292-3.

interest in war is likely to concern, in the words of H.G.Wells, 'war as the man in the street will get it if it comes again.'

The 1928 anniversary of the Armistice had been celebrated with ritual and solemn memorialisation, of a kind that sometimes masked the ugliness of war. Sassoon, in his poem 'On Passing the New Menin Gate' contrasted the 'pomp' of the noble monument with the 'foulness' of the fate of the soldiers it commemorates:

> Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime
> Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.[74]

It was not only ex-soldiers who felt a disparity between the bland dignity of monuments and the ugly reality. Richard Church (a civil servant during the War), began his review of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by asking for war books that revealed: 'the heroism, the brutality, the foul intimacies, the brutality and coarseness, the gradual moral, social, and emotional decay, which made up, with a myriad other happier factors, the story of the soldier's life in the trenches.'[75] What Church and other readers found in Remarque was a convincing sense of war's ugliness. This was provided also by Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, which, although its presentation of a peacetime dominated by monstrous women seems to hark back to earlier models, such as *If Winter Comes* and *Parade's End*, presents a brutal picture of conflict. As Max Saunders writes:

> Though Aldington does not use the term, the book is a critique of an already sacralised memorialisation of the war; and he offers his protagonist George Winterbourne's story of sexual complications, mental disturbance, despair and ultimate futile suicide as a counter-story to the rhetoric of the unknown soldier and heroic sacrifice. [76]

The unromantic ugliness of war was the theme of *War is War* (1930) by 'Ex-Private X', a pseudonym for the magazine writer A. M. Burrage, who states the object of his book as 'to give those who may be curious to know what the

---

[74] *Collected Poems*, 173. Hibberd and Onions in *The Winter of the World* date this poem as 1927-8. (312).

[75] Richard Church, 'War', *The Spectator* (20 April 1929), 624.

[76] Max Saunders, 'Life-Writing and Fiction in First World War Prose', in Howard et al, *A Part of History:Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War* (London: Continuum, 2008), 133.

war was really like, all the intimate details of the lives we led in and behind the lines.'[77] He fulfils the brief with vivid descriptions of the Passchendaele mud ('of various depths and of consistencies varied between that of raw Bovril and weak cocoa'[78]) and fragments of first-hand observation such as : 'A wounded man always tried to break his own fall. A dead man generally fell forward, his balance tending in that direction, and he bent simultaneously at the knees, waist, neck and ankles.'[79]

Burrage explicitly contrasts his present work with morale-boosting stories written during wartime ('Lord love me and forgive me, I did some of them myself before I got out there.')[80] and maintains a consistently unromantic tone. Before an advance, he loses his last trouser-button, and the horror of military disaster is relieved by comedy. ('Only men with very strong chins, such as "Sapper's" heroes can keep their trousers up by will-power alone.'[81]) His disenchantment extends to the officers, for, like H.F. Maltby, Burrage enlisted as a private, and formed a low opinion of the 'temporary gentlemen' set over him.

Far more extreme in its depiction of war's ugliness (and publishable only in an expensive limited edition)[82] was *The German Prisoner* (1930) by James Hanley, who had enlisted while only sixteen, and went to France in 1918 with the Canadian Black Watch, though it is uncertain whether he saw military action.[83] From the beginning, the soldiers in this novella are imagined as animals, savage and disgusting:

---

77 Ex-Private X, *War is War* (London: Gollancz, 1930), 5.

78 *War is War*, 27.

79 *War is War*, 137.

80 *War is War*, 183.

81 *War is War*, 130.

82 Christopher Hilliard, in 'The Literary Underground of 1920s London' (*Social History*, May 2008), explains how putting a high price on books helped to ward off legal troubles. Hanley's *Boy*, which locates sexual violence on board ship, 'circulated safely in a two-guinea limited edition of 145 copies' but a cheaper edition, even though expurgated, was prosecuted for obscenity.

83 In his autobiography, Hanley writes extensively of his training, and of his time in camp, but of his time near the front only this: 'We were shifted about a good deal. Today we were on one sector, tomorrow on another; apparently this division was being used as shock troops. I remained with them until the thirty-first of August 1918, and by welcome accident returned to England via three hospitals – Whalley, Blackburn and Bexhill.' He mentions his mother being informed that he 'had some gas in the wrong place,' but says no more about the nature of his 'welcome accident'. (James Hanley, *Broken Water: An Autobiographical Excursion* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1937], 240-241.) Chris Gostick suggests that: 'His symptoms were consistent with minor gas poisoning, possibly a result of contact with old or unexploded munitions.' ('James Hanley's Life', in James Hanley, *Boy* [London: Oneworld, 2007], 184.)

> They were shepherded into one of those huge French houses, which now seemed more stable than house [....] The food was attacked with a savagery almost unbelievable [....] They filled the room with their sweat; their almost pesty breath.[84]

The story focuses on two soldiers, a Dubliner, O'Garra, and an Englishman, Alston. In thick fog, a weaponless German prisoner surrenders to them, and they proceed to torture and mutilate him with the degree of uncontrolled ferocity that D.H.Lawrence had fantasized about in 'England, My England', spitting at him, and kicking him in the face. When Alston urinates on the prisoner, and O'Garra copies him, Hanley comments:

> There is a peculiar power about rottenness, in that it feeds on itself, borrows from itself, and its tendency is always downward. That very action had seized the polluted imagination of the Irishman. He was helpless. Rottenness called to him; called to him from the pesty frame of Elston.[85]

The attack is deliberately obscene: 'With a wild movement Elston tore down the prisoner's trousers. In complete silence O'Garra pulled out his bayonet and stuck it up the youth's anus.'[86] The two 'almost demented' men are compared to 'mad dogs'[87] and Hanley makes O'Garra suggest that the attack is the eruption of everything that the Army has repressed:

> I said to myself: 'That bastard lying there is the cause of all this.' And piece by piece and thread by thread I gathered up all the inconveniences. All the actions, rebuffs, threats, fatigues, cold nights, lice, toothaches, forced absence from women, nights in trenches up to your knees in mud. Burial parties, mopping-up parties, dead horses, heaps of stale shite, heads, balls, brains, everywhere. All those things. I made the case against him. Now I ask you. Why should he live?[88]

By implication the British soldiers are taking out on the German all that they themselves have suffered, but Hanley complicates this reading by suggesting that O'Garra, from 'the filthiest street in Dublin', was violent and

---

[84] James Hanley, 'The German Prisoner' in *The Last Voyage and Other Stories* (London: Harvill, 1997), 47.
[85] 'The German Prisoner' 72.
[86] 'The German Prisoner' 76.
[87] 'The German Prisoner' 75.
[88] 'The German Prisoner', 73

anti-social before the War, of which he says: 'Personally it is a change for me from the rather drab life of Tara Street, with its lousiness, its smells, its human animals herded together, its stinkin' mattresses.'[89] Unlike much fiction of the late twenties, Hanley's makes no contrast between peacetime and the horrors of the War. Instead he presents war as an intensification of what is worst in pre-war society, allowing an outlet for cruelty that was formed elsewhere. The novella's obscenity and violence seem to link it with the genre of graphic realism, but the thick symbolic fog, which hides the men's crime, and the filthy 'sea of mud' that finally engulfs both torturers and victim, suggest that it is also a fable about what happens when the worst of human nature is released. Nor, for Hanley, was the War the only environment that could allow such expression; in stories written just before or after 'The German Prisoner' he sets similar fables of violence and sexual torment among sailors, or, most memorably, in a condemned cell.

It was often those too young to have been directly involved in the War, like Leslie Charteris, who could be most forceful in their expression of the message of war's horror and futility. Noel Coward was born in 1900, joined the army briefly in 1918, but was discharged sick before seeing action. In 1930, having acted as Stanhope in *Journey's End* in Singapore, and having 'read several current war novels one after the other',[90] he wrote *Post-Mortem*, a play that brings into strident explicitness themes and possibilities latent in Sherriff's. It begins with soldiers in a dugout, mocking the concerted dishonest propaganda of the patriotic press, and the ignorance of the civilian public which 'must enjoy its war'. His war poet character, Perry, predicts that after the war 'They'll smarm it over with memorials and Rolls of Honour and Angels of Mons and it'll look so noble and glorious in retrospect that they'll all start itching for another war.' Even the books and plays of the war boom are suspect:

> You'll see, there'll be an outbreak of war literature in so many years, everyone will write war books and war plays and everyone will read them and see them and be vicariously thrilled by them, until one day someone will go too far and say something that's really true and be flung in prison

[89] 'The German Prisoner', 49.
[90] Noel Coward, *Present Indicative* (1937). (London: Methuen, 2004), 308.

> for blasphemy, immorality, lese majesty, unnatural vice, contempt of court, and atheism, then there'll be a glorious religious revival and we'll all be rushed across the Atlantic to conquer America, comfortably upheld by Jesus and the right![91]

This promise of truth-telling collapses into facetious exaggeration, yet the speech gestures towards a book or play that Coward wants to write but cannot, because, as he later commented, of a 'lack of detachment and lack of real experience'.[92] The work he asks his audience to imagine ventures beyond the consensus values and reticence of *Journey's End* to something more daring, disturbing and 'really true'.

Post-Mortem develops as a mixture of expressionist ghost story and social satire; a dead soldier from the first scene visits the London of 1930. Asking whether the War had been 'blind futility', he finds a trivial and dishonest society, either forgetting or lying about the War. Even ex-soldiers deny their authentic memories; the youngest, 'Babe', denies his affection for Armitage, who died – wanting to censor any suggestion of 'unnatural vice' from the record. Coward has found a repressed homosexual subtext in *Journey's End*, and makes it more explicit.

The horrors of war are described rather than dramatised, and though the descriptions are forceful ('an attack, treading on men's faces, some of them not dead, with the bloody din of the barrage in our ears, and thin human screams cutting through it — quite clearly, like penny whistles in a thunderstorm')[93], they are perhaps inevitably derivative.

Another writer too young to have experienced the War personally was Evadne Price, an accomplished *pasticheuse* whose most recent work had been light comedy.[94] Under the pseudonym 'Helen Zenna Smith', she wrote *Not so Quiet...:Stepdaughters of War*, which has some basis in the wartime diary of a woman ambulance driver, but is, as Angela K. Smith has shown, a close

---

91 Noel Coward, *Post Mortem*. In *Coward: Plays Two* (London, Methuen, 1979), 285.The play was published in 1931, but its first performance was by British prisoners in Germany in 1944.

92 *Present Indicative*, 309.

93 *Post-Mortem*, 287.

94 For example, 'The Eternall Triangel' in *Premier Magazine* (May, 1929), and the 'Jane' books — featuring a female version of Richmal Crompton's 'William'.

adaptation of the themes, characters and style of *All Quiet on the Western Front.*[95] It shares that book's use of the historic present, its short declarative sentences, and its refusal of euphemism. Partly perhaps because the author's pseudonym is the same as the name of its central character, but also because of its overpowering directness, this novel has been accepted as based on authentic experience by several critics.[96] Belief in its veracity has come easily to those who want wartime women to have written this kind of book, with its frankness about the physical (almost as many references to lavatories as *All Quiet*), its explicitness about wounds ('a wagging lump of raw flesh on a neck, that was a face a short time ago'[97]) and its feminist-pacifist message ('Enemies? Our enemies aren't the Germans. Our enemies are the politicians we pay to keep us out of war [...] It's time women took a hand. The men are failures [...] this war shows that.'[98]) Soldiers are stupid victims of stupidity, 'as senseless as a flock of senseless sheep obeying a senseless leader'[99] and the motives of the volunteer ambulance drivers are denigrated:

> There may be an odd few who enlisted in a patriotic spirit — I haven't met any, personally. Girls who were curious, yes; girls who were bored stiff with home (like myself) and had no idea what they were coming to, yes; man-hunters like The B.F.; man-mad women, semi-nymphomaniacs like Thrumms, who was caught love-making in an ambulance and booted back p.d.q to England, yes; megalomaniacs like Commandant who love 'bossing the show' and have seized on this great chance like hungry vultures, yes.[100]

---

95 Angela K.Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 108.

96 A.D. Harvey describes the book as 'based on her own experiences'(*A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War* [London, The Hambledon Press, 1998], 140.). Allyson Booth does recognise that *Not So Quiet* has 'a narrator' (*Postcards from the Trenches*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 150) but elsewhere (pages 25, 31, 95, 117) treats the book as an unmediated testimonial of experience. Jane Marcus, in her illuminating 'Afterword' to the 1989 Feminist Press edition, acknowledges the debt to *All Quiet*, but writes of Price's knowledge of 'the real experience of [...] female bodies in World War I.'(279)

97 Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (London: Newnes, 1930), 95.

98 *Not So Quiet...*, 55.

99 *Not So Quiet...*, 29.

100 *Not So Quiet...*, 137. The list of motivations is similar enough to that in Pound's 'Mauberley' to suggest a direct influence.

The book will seem less convincing to those who have read its sequels, which apply the same emotive and violent style to peacetime.[101]

Another writer without personal experience of it who depicted the War at this time was Sean O'Casey. Of an older generation than Coward or Price, during the years 1914-18 he had been less concerned with the Great War than with 'two fierce fights... for liberty: one on the little green dot in the world's waters, called Ireland; and the other over a wide brown, grey, blue, and scarlet expanse of land, later to bloom into the many-coloured gigantic bloom of the Soviet Union.'[102] The second act of O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* (1930) is an expressionist vision of war's horror and absurdity. The play's story is of Harry, a footballer who goes to war, loses the use of his legs, and, sees his girl taken by another man, Barney, the bullying V.C. Rather than naturalistically showing Harry's actual war experience, O'Casey presents a luridly stylised abstraction; a demented prophet comments biblically on the scene, while anonymous Cockney Tommies are sent into battle by an insensitive staff officer. The stage picture, dominated by a huge gun, balances a toppling crucifix with the figure of a soldier tied to a gunwheel, undergoing Field Punishment Number One. Like Coward's spokesman wanting to go beyond existing war books, O'Casey pushes beyond Sherriff's naturalism; he listed *Journey's End* among trivial London theatrical productions: 'There wasn't a human heart-beat, no, nor even a human foot-step in one of them; not a knock at the door; not a sob in the silence; not a stone flung through any amiable window of thought. [103]

In a letter rejecting *The Silver Tassie* on behalf of the Abbey Theatre, W.B. Yeats took the expressionist abstraction as a sign that O'Casey wanted merely to use the theme of war, rather than explore it dramatically:

> But you are not interested in the Great War; you never stood on its battle-fields, never walked in its hospitals, and so write out of your opinions [....]
>
> The mere greatness of the world war has thwarted you, it has refused to

---

101 In *Women of the Aftermath* (1931) the heroine is subjected to extreme mental cruelty by her war-disabled husband, escapes into drug-fuelled bohemia, but finds salvation and happiness by learning to fly aeroplanes. In *Shadow Women* (1932) a plane crash leaves her facially disfigured; she is reduced to sleeping on the Embankment, until saved by meeting an old friend. She inherits a legacy and starts a humane refuge for down-and-outs. The melodrama becomes increasingly improbable.

102 Sean O'Casey, *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (1949), collected in *Autobiographies 2*, (London: Pan, 1963), 9.

103 Sean O'Casey, *Rose and Crown* (1952), in *Autobiographies 2*, 261.

> become mere background and obtrudes itself upon the stage as so much dead wood that will not burn with the dramatic fire [....] Among the things that dramatic action must burn up are the author's opinions.[104]

Yeats feels that O'Casey should not write about the experience of the Great War, because unlike the Irish Civil War, in which O'Casey was deeply involved and of which, Yeats tells him, he 'wrote out of [... his] sense of its tragedy,' the Great War was something known to him only journalistically. In his autobiography, O'Casey retorts that unlike elitist Yeats, he knew soldiers, that he 'had talked and walked and smoked and sung with the blue-suited wounded men fresh from the front' and that he was 'one who had been among the armless, the legless, the blind, the gassed, and the shell-shocked.'[105] Against the objections of Yeats, O'Casey asserts his right (or duty) to speak up abrasively for the victims of the War.

Marjorie Perloff has linked Yeats's rejection of the play with his omission of the English war poets from his *Oxford Book of English Verse* (1936) 'for the same reason that made Arnold withdraw his *Empedocles on Etna* from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry.'[106] What Yeats calls the 'mere greatness of the world war' dwarfs individuals (all but one of the soldiers in this expressionist scene are anonymous) and robs them of any possibility but abject obedience and suffering. As Perloff writes:

> The charge that 'the mere greatness of the world war has thwarted you' is [...] serious. If there have been few great poems dealing directly with the First World War [...] it is surely because the significance and import of such large-scale events cannot be readily digested [....] Describing the horrors of war, the poet is too often left with nothing to do but point to its hapless victims and find someone to blame.[107]

O'Casey claims that knowledge of the 'hapless victims' is enough, and that their victimhood is the crucial truth of the War. In this, like Coward and Price, he is the precursor of many later writers who would vicariously imagine

---

[104] (ed.) Wade, *Letters of W.B.Yeats* (London: Hart-Davis, 1954), 741.
[105] *Autobiographies* 2, 275.
[106] Yeats, 'Introduction' in Yeats (ed) *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, 1892-1935 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1936), xxxiv.
[107] Marjorie Perloff, ' "Easter, 1916": Yeats's First World War Poem', in (ed.) Kendall, *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 240.

themselves into the experience of the Great War. The generation of Auden and Isherwood lived through the War as impressionable schoolchildren, and their work often imagines a situation where 'Less than a hundred miles from here, young men are being shot to pieces.'[108] The War is often imagined as an ultimate test of manhood, and a challenge to consider the extremes of experience. Valentine Cunningham suggests that for some of this generation the Spanish Civil War was: 'the chance to catch up with their fathers and the dead Old Boys, to wipe out their guilt over having missed the First War [...] That the young should wish to is a tribute to the immense potency of First World War images that the '20s and then the '30s carried in their heads.'[109]

These writers of a later generation developed the interpretation of the War as exclusively horrific and futile, but ex-soldiers of the late twenties and early thirties were considerably less uniform in their approach. Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* shows war's grimness, but less reductively than Remarque. Like Patrick MacGill during wartime, he also shows the Army as a complex social organization, with customs and obligations. The poem-novel *In Parenthesis* (begun in the late twenties, published 1937) by David Jones uses many of the techniques of *All Quiet* (the historic present tense, the beginning *in media res*, the concentration on the experience of the private soldier, the physical immediacy) but for other purposes. As he says in his preface: 'I have attempted to appreciate some things, which, at the time of suffering, the flesh was too weak to appraise.'[110] As well as communicating 'the actual shock of men fighting',[111] he invokes Arthurian myth, Roman history and Shakespeare to give the fight for Mametz Wood a resonant context. Numerous pasts suffuse the present and provide registers of language that interconnect with those of the Army (jokes, orders, swearing, snatches of song) in constantly unexpected ways. The result is a text that fully acknowledges war's vileness, but also communicates a sense of a linguistically vital and resourceful community, which is given the dignity of epic reference.

---

[108] W.H.Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *The Dog beneath the Skin: or Where is Francis?* (London: Faber, 1935), 145. A major theme of Isherwood's novel *The Memorial* (1932) is the painful memory of war during the post-war years.

[109] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 50.

[110] David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), x.

[111] *In Parenthesis*, 13.

Completely different is the work of Charles Morgan, whose *Times* review had criticized *Journey's End* for lacking 'that poetic leap from things observed to universal truth.' His *The Fountain* (1932) is a novel loosely based on his own experiences as a prisoner after the fall of Antwerp. Its hero accepts the restrictions of captivity as an opportunity to consider the contemplative life, and begins a strange spiritual and emotional journey. Different again is W.F.Morris's *Bretherton: Khaki or Field-Grey*, (1930) which begins by offering the reader a puzzle (Bretherton, a British officer, is found dead in a captured chateau, wearing the uniform of a German general). The mystery is explained by outrageously coincidental attacks of dramatically convenient amnesia; Bretherton has two separate identities, which alternate, so that each forgets the other. The idea is far-fetched, but allows the author to explore issues previously raised by stories such as Wheen's 'Two Masters', in which a British soldier meets his German double; in this case, Bretherton's enemy other is himself. The equivalence of the experience of soldiers on each side is suggested, but without the War being presented as futile.

Some authors wrote directly in opposition to the depiction of war in *All Quiet* and *Journey's End*. Richard Blaker, for example, worked closely with his publisher, Ralph Hodder-Williams, who disapproved of the new fashion in war writing, and steered his author away from it. When *Journey's End* was staged in January 1929, Hodder-Williams sent 'a hard-headed man' to report back on 'how it hit him as a war performance.'[112] The emissary thought the play superior to the usual 'light, dirty or mixed stuff served up on the London stage,' but considered: 'There is no creative power here — only prosaic memory dramatised more or less vividly.'[113] Forwarding this report to Blaker, Hodder-Williams summarised it: 'His answer boils down to the sentence on page 2: 'Reproduction is not interpretation.' So say I. What do you think?'[114]

Neutral reproduction of 'the literally damned silly waste of war' was precisely the style that Blaker had chosen when he wrote the story 'Choice of

---

[112] Bodleian Ms Eng. Lett c319 f 104.
[113] Bodleian Ms Eng. Lett c319 f 106.
[114] Bodleian Ms Eng. Lett c319 f 104.

Weapons' at the end of the War;[115] now his intentions were more ambitious. At thirty-six, he takes as hero an unexceptional man of his own age, a solicitor without any 'independence of thought or peculiarity of emotion"[116] and puts him through the experiences and adventures that he had endured when young. This use of an older hero allows the war to be examined through a mature temperament, and one that will be able to survive the war sane and unembittered. This is not a protest novel, and contains no criticism of politicians or generals, though there are the front-line soldier's usual harsh words for staff officers. Like Sherriff's, Blaker's main interest is in the depiction of men under extreme pressure — a large cast of characters, all reacting and coping differently, each with his private fears and superstitions.[117]

Though the horrors of war are graphically presented — descriptions of wounds are explicit and appalling — equal attention is given to the positive by-products of war, such as courage, comradeship and mutual respect among soldiers. In the book's postscript, set twelve years after the war, Cartwright's wife objects: 'There was something about it all men must have *liked*... or you wouldn't think about it the way you do; and read those books; and talk about it.' Like the young, she can see 'only the badness of that execrable job.' But soldiers remember, and

> Their yearning is for man's brotherhood, revealed to them only through the chaos of his imbecility— the brotherhood whose tokens are the simplicities of courage and faith; and laughter.[118]

This final message may sound like a reversion to wartime language, but it is the interaction between such ideals and the horrors that makes the book complex and unsettling.

Medal Without Bar is the story of a civilian who learns to think like a soldier, and other books appeared, too, of which Douglas Jerrold might have

---

115 'Choice of Weapons: The Story of a Lewis Gun Post', *Land and Water* (29 May 1919), 20-21. The central character of this grim story, set in the thick mud of the front line, is shot, but his comrades sardonically note that this at least saves him from a worse death by tuberculosis. The story is published under the pseudonym of 'Richard Merrill'.

116 Richard Blaker, *Medal Without Bar* (London: Hodder, 1930), 1.

117 For example, there is a remarkable passage is where the experienced and boastful Whitelaw becomes enraged because someone else's action breaks his own personal taboo against volunteering . We are suddenly shown the turbulent fears beneath his surface pose. (427)

118 *Medal Without Bar*, 638.

approved, because their authors think like soldiers — though rather than claiming to present the truth of the War, these books imagine how the War might have been. Bernard Newman's *The Cavalry Went Through* (1930) is a counterfactual historical fantasy, about an officer called Duncan, who after success in East Africa, revolutionises British tactics on the Western Front by thinking seriously and originally about what a soldier ought to be. He puts new tactical ideas to work, replacing mass dawn attacks by clever small-scale surprise operations, and is himself a charismatic leader, but his main innovation is in his treatment of his men. Each soldier is trained, not to obey discipline, but to think for himself, like a soldier, understanding what he is doing. Duncan tells a more orthodox major:

> I think, Major, you confuse discipline and morale. Morale is essential to all, discipline only to second-class troops [....] All I can say is that what is usually called discipline is merely a vague attempt at a codification of mob instincts. Your men will advance in a mob – one because all do. The imitative instinct is enough. But let one man run away, and the instinct works again; your whole mob may run, too.[119]

Newman was not the only novelist to consider how the trench-warfare stalemate could have been broken. John Buchan, from *Greenmantle* (1916) onwards, was considering problems of tactics and generalship; in *Huntingtower* (1921), a small and heterogeneous group of fighters, including the portly grocer McCunn and the Gorbals Diehards, a group of boy scouts, defeat a much stronger one through lateral thinking. In *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), Buchan makes his most considered fictional study of military tactics. In the South American republic of Olifa, Sandy Arbuthnot has only a relatively small band of soldiers with which to confront the formidable Olifan army, which is up-to-date, and 'has learned all the lessons of our little scraps in France and Flanders'.[120] His one advantage is that the Olifan army still fights like an army. Its leader is 'a conventional soldier, and, like most generals of 1914-18, will fight his battles in the old professional way,'[121] confident that 'the mathematical

---

[119] Bernard Newman, *The Cavalry Went Through* (London: Gollancz, 1930), 35.
[120] John Buchan, *The Courts of the Morning* (Edinburgh: B & W Publishing, 1993), 103.
[121] *The Courts of the Morning*, 173.

certainties of modern warfare'[122] will give success to the larger force. Arbuthnot, on the other hand, is enigmatic, unpredictable, and able to think in unorthodox ways. ('Sandy hated bloodshed. For war he had no use unless it was war on his special plan, an audacious attack upon the enemy's nerves.')[123] He finds a different way of fighting, avoiding wasteful head-on conflicts, using a small mobile force in guerrilla raids and a method based on the principle of ju-jitsu, using the enemy's strength against itself. In describing this, Buchan may have remembered his time in South Africa, when the unorthodox tactics of the Boers gave a great deal of trouble to the British Army.

War books of the late twenties and early thirties, therefore, by no means present one new uniform myth of the War. Ever since 1919 texts had been published that suggested disturbing and challenging interpretations of the conflict; these had not previously grasped the public imagination. It was a change in political attitudes that created the demand for war books, and made them a talking point for Leslie Charteris's generation. Readers, persuaded by political events to see their country, and its leadership, and the prospect of war, in a different light, were looking for texts that echoed what they had come to believe; sometimes, as with *Journey's End*, this meaning was projected onto a text in excess of the author's proclaimed intentions. Many of the fiercest 'anti-war' books were created by those who had not seen battle; they embody imagined horrors, rather than ones experienced. Meanwhile ex-soldiers, finding publishers now willing, and indeed eager, to accept war-related fiction or memoirs, made contributions that generally did less to bolster this myth of the futile war. Writers like Manning, Jones and Blaker explored war experience without self-pity or negativity, and expressed individual insights that were not the expected sensational 'truth about the war'; Buchan and Newman in turn imagined the positive possibilities of soldiership, where thinking was more important than brute force or even than endurance.

Such writers do not present soldiers only as the passive victims of dreadful circumstance, or of unfeeling generals. It is the younger ones, without experience of war, who imagine soldiers as utterly powerless and without

---

[122] *The Courts of the Morning*, 190.
[123] *The Courts of the Morning*, 309.

resources in the face of horror. This possibly points to a truth in Henry Williamson's comment, quoted earlier, that: 'A battle imagined was more terrible than a battle in movement. Those who had passed over the crater zones in the shrieking air were not haunted as those who had only dreaded the assault.'

Conclusion

By the 1930s, as Hew Strachan has written:

> a consensus had been established that Germany was probably not guilty of causing the war, for all that the treaty of Versailles had said it was. The conclusion was that the war had broken out through a combination of misunderstanding and miscalculation [....] From here it was but a brief step to characterise the trenches of the western front as the embodiment of waste and futility.[1]

As the last chapter showed, the war books of the late twenties and early thirties were not uniform in the propagation of this consensus, though readers, especially younger ones, often took that message from the totality of them. In the thirties, overshadowed by the prospect of a future war, the books of the late twenties that emphasised the experience of combat were read eagerly, while earlier fictions without this focus seemed dated in their concerns.

Succeeding generations have continued to interpret the War according to the priorities of their own times. During the Second World War, the previous one lost its uniqueness in the public mind, although continuities between the two were sometimes stressed, whether jocularly, in the Flanagan and Allen song that tells young soldiers heading for France, 'If a grey haired lady says 'How's your father? /That's mademoiselle from Armentieres!',[2] or more seriously, as in Lord Moran's *The Anatomy of Courage*, which used case studies from the earlier war to help understand psychological difficulties triggered by the later one.[3]

The fiftieth anniversary of the Great War in the nineteen-sixties renewed interest in its history and literature; in the nuclear age its origins were reinterpreted to warn that an apparently stable world could be disrupted by unintended and devastating war. Soon after the Cuban missile crisis, Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963) presents the outbreak of war as absurd farce, caused by posturing politicians; the generals are mostly

---

1 Hew Strachan, *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), v.
2 Ted Waite, 'If a Grey-Haired Lady Says "How's your Father": A Message from an Old Un of 1914 to a Young Un of 1939' (London: Chappell, 1939).
3 Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: Constable, 1945).

insensitive idiots and the rank and file doggedly passive sufferers. A.J.P. Taylor's writing about the War takes a similar tone. In his *English History 1914-45*, Asquith's council of war on 5 August 1914 is described as 'sixteen men, "mostly entirely ignorant of their subject" speculat[ing] in the void."[4] According to Taylor, the deployment of British troops was determined more by railway timetables than by strategy, and subject to 'random, and no doubt inescapable decisions', which 'had lasting consequences'.[5]

The sixties saw the publication of new editions of the major war poets and Brian Gardner's influential anthology, *Up the Line to Death* (1964). The prose works of war poets such as Graves, Sassoon and Blunden were also republished, and, together with their poems and those of Owen, were accepted as canonical texts for the study of Great War literature by examination boards; they are the main focus of attention in Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975).

Fussell had been drafted into the American infantry during the Second World War, and in his 'Afterword' to the 2000 edition of *The Great War and Modern Memory* explicitly relates the writing of the book to the attempt to understand his own experience in combat.[6] Though he characterized the Great War as unlike previous wars, he notes how during his research he 'was searching for displays of language that might help define the similarity of infantry experience in the two world wars' and found what he was looking for, being 'struck repeatedly by the similarity (almost the identity) of the two wars'. He elaborates:

> Our tactics of infantry were hardly more refined than theirs, consisting of mass attacks in skirmish lines, ambushes, night patrols, and defence while dug in. With the exception of the bazooka and the anti-tank mine, infantry weapons had undergone little change between the wars [....]

---

4 A.J.P.Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 6. The quoted phrase is from Sir Henry Wilson, director of military operations.

5 *English History, 1914-1945*, 7. The possible accidental outbreak of nuclear war was directly treated in popular films of the period, such as *Doctor Strangelove* and *Fail-Safe* (both 1964).

6 He also notes that his book was written at a time when Americans were 'experiencing their own terrible and apparently endless war of attrition' in Vietnam. (341)

> The bayonet was shorter, but it still had power to chill the blood of the enemy who saw it approach.[7]

Placing his book in a tradition of writing 'illuminated by emotion',[8] he called it the work of an essayist, rather than of a scholar, speaking with pride of having annoyed those who 'still [...] apparently think the First World War was not such a bad idea."[9]

Although acclaimed by *The Times* in 1975 as 'the most thorough survey of [Great War] literature',[10] Fussell's book concentrates on relatively few texts beyond the well-known poems of the War, and some of the prose published at the end of the twenties.[11] What he took from (or imposed on) the literature of the Great War was the representation of a conflict whose pointlessness seemed unarguable, and whose horror was totally unappreciated by civilians, yet he shows a certain dissatisfaction with the writers he is considering, ranking them inferior to the modernists of the same period,[12] and buttressing what he has found in them about the futility and disgustingness of war with digressions into the work of American novelists of the Second World War, such as Heller and Pynchon, whose emphasis on absurdity and obscenity was much more explicit. Like some of the texts by non-combatant writers of the late twenties and thirties, his book seems to want to present a picture of the War more unremittingly terrible than that found in the witness of most who actually fought in it.

The narrow canon accepted by Fussell was to some degree questioned and widened in the 1980s by a new generation of feminist scholars, at a time when the deployment of cruise missiles put the possibility of nuclear war high on the political agenda, and the protest against it was closely linked to the

---

7 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 341.

8 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 338.

9 *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 338.

10 Derek Parker, 'Truth from the trenches' (*The Times*, 13 November 1975), 17.

11 He also uses Montague, Plowman, Williamson and Graham as sources of documentary evidence, in the same way that he uses letters and other archive material from the Imperial War Museum. MacGill, Morton and Wilfrid Ewart do not appear in his index, and his narrow concentration on writing about combat means that women writers are hardly discussed at all, and civilians in general are almost always referred to slightingly.

12 'Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Pound, Yeats were not at the front to induct them into new idioms which might have done the job better' (174). William Golding, reviewing the book, considered that 'a note that can only be called patronising creeps in.' 'Crabbed Youth and Age', *The Guardian* (20 November 1975), 16.

feminist movement, at Greenham Common and elsewhere. These scholars looked beyond the accepted male canon, to consider women's depictions of and responses to the War. Catherine Reilly's anthology of women's war poetry, *Scars upon my Heart* (1981), together with historical and critical works such as Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985) and Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1991) radically connected literature about soldiers with literature about women, while still largely subscribing to the historical interpretation of the War as futile, and stressing above all the suffering of both soldiers and civilians.

Meanwhile, poets and novelists found in the Great War a place of ultimate horror that their imaginations needed to brave. Tim Kendall has described how the experiences of Ted Hughes's father at Gallipoli and of his Uncle Walter on the Western Front dominated the poet's imagination, giving him a glimpse of a horror that refused to be exorcised; this remained 'a pressure which shape[d] his writing career.'[13] In the nineteen-eighties, Pat Barker, a novelist whose characteristic themes were trauma, violence, the disintegration of civil society, and the powerlessness of the individual, used the Great War as the setting for her *Regeneration* trilogy. These highly acclaimed novels, like her later *Life Class*, concentrate on characters isolated from the mainstream of society, suffering from bitterness and anomie; they reflect the author's view of the Thatcher years in which they were conceived as much as the war years in which they are set.

Popular perceptions of the War as futile were encouraged by such novels, but probably more so by the valuable oral history books of Martin Middlebrook, Lyn Macdonald and others, whose interviews with former soldiers and nurses concentrated attention on individual experience and suffering. Sebastian Barry's *A Long, Long Way* (2005) is typical of twenty-first century fiction in exaggerating this effect by presenting the War through the eyes of a politically naïve innocent.

The most influential recent fictions about the war have been the caustically satirical television series *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) and the

---

[13] Tim Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 197.

prize-winning 2003 children's book, *Private Peaceful*, by Michael Morpurgo, which ends with an unbelievably virtuous soldier being shot at dawn for stopping to help his simple-minded brother who had been wounded during an attack, an execution corresponding to none that actually took place during the War.[14] That a book so full of class stereotypes and contrived situations as Morpurgo's should be highly valued indicates how unquestioned in Britain is the public perception of the War as futile and unnecessary, and its status as a symbol of the very worst of experiences. [15] Dan Todman suggests that British perceptions of the Great War as the worst of wars are caused by the fact that 'Britain [...] avoided the terrible moral and ethical questions for remembrance posed by occupation, genocide or defeat. It was therefore unsurprising that the First World War should continue to signify what was worst about war.'[16]

While popular fictions were reinforcing the idea of the wartime Army as class-ridden, cruel and inefficient, historians were interpreting it differently, calling attention to its success, not only as a military force that learnt from experience and delivered a crushing defeat to German forces in the last hundred days of the War, but also as the only major army never to undergo widespread mutiny.[17] The distance between historians and some writers of imaginative literature is demonstrated by a recent incident. In 2000, Ben Shephard had published *A War of Nerves*, a serious historical study of military psychology; his introduction notes that 'The clinical literature of the war neuroses is so rich that it is easy for the historian to pull together a collage of

---

[14] Charlie Peaceful had committed an offence, and could have been charged with 'When on active service, without orders from his superior officer, leaving the ranks on pretence of helping wounded to the rear', but the maximum punishment for this was penal servitude, not death. General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1917), 220

[15] *Private Peaceful* won the Whitbread and Smarties prize for children's books, and is one of the novels recommended by the DCSF for teaching to 11-14-year-olds at Key Stage 3. See the official scheme of work at http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152080?uc=force_uj (accessed 1 February 2009). The book's success is evidence for Douglas Jerrold's contention that 'nothing is easier, unfortunately, than to be bravely sympathetic about the sufferings of the past.' (*The Lie About the War*, 24)

[16] Dan Todman, 'Remembrance', in Howard et al, *A Part of History*, 214.

[17] J.G. Fuller, in *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), has ascribed this success to a cohesiveness created not by the cruel enforcement of discipline but by an ethos of benign paternalism. It was also the result of a shared commitment. Significantly, mutinies and strikes did occur in 1919, when troops considered their work done, and therefore demanded to be demobilised.

horror and pathos'[18] and explains why it is important to get beyond such horror and pathos to a subtler understanding of the psychological effects of war within a historical context. He therefore understandably protested when in November 2009 Andrew Motion, the ex-laureate, published exactly such a collage in *The Guardian*, a 'found poem' five of whose eight sections were minimally altered reprints of testimony quoted in Shephard's book,[19] but without the historical analysis that made a more complex sense of them.[20] When Shephard protested at this use of his research, Motion's reported response was 'He doesn't get it, does he? This is ridiculous. He has got completely the wrong end of the stick. To blow off about it like he has done completely misunderstands what found poetry is.' [21]Motion assumes the right to appropriate the historian's material for emotive ends, ignoring the complex meaning that the historian has discovered it, and using it purely to communicate 'horror and pathos'. His chosen form — the 'found' poem — is disingenuous, since it claims to be presenting the reader with an unmediated truth about war, hiding the process of selection and alteration, and disguising the fact that it is a fiction.[22]

Between the priorities of history and those of literature there will always be a tension, and one that can often be productive when imaginative writers ask questions about subjects that historians ignore. (The imaginative

---

18 Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (London: Pimlico, 2000), xxi.

19 Andrew Motion, 'An Equal Voice', *The Guardian* (8 November 2009). Online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/nov/07/andrew-motion-remembrance-day-poem (Accessed 21 November 2009). As well as snippets from Shephard's book, the poem also copies extracts from the prose of Siegfried Sassoon.

20 Shephard's book is critical of psychologists for whom 'patients were just passive victims of PTSD whose symptoms could be measured' (338). He is sceptical about those who see an automatic progress from disturbing experience to psychological disorder, arguing that trauma is not ahistorical, but occurs within specific social contexts. He notes, for example, the 'enormous changes in social values [...] that have redefined the role of emotion and stress in Anglo-Saxon public culture' (396).

21 'So what if I copied work says Sir Andrew Motion, Shakespeare did all the time', *The Times* (9 November 9, 2009). Online at: http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/poetry/article6908977.ece (accessed 21 November 2009). Motion cites Shakespeare's use of North's translation of Plutarch in *Antony and Cleopatra* as a precedent for what he has done.

22 The quotations taken from Shephard's book were only minimally altered, but in ways that take away the individuality of speakers. Motion's first quotation is from Tom Salmon, an American army psychiatrist in the Great War who had, in Shephard's words, 'an eye alive to incongruity'. Motion's poem alters words like 'gasoline' that reveal him to be American, and cuts details that are incongruous, and which show him observing freshly.

exploration of women's histories in fiction predated, and partly inspired 'women's history', for example.) Current critical and imaginative writing about the Great War, however, seems too often to be limited in its range. The fact that the War was a site of great suffering is an important truth, and one that should not be forgotten, but it is not the only truth about the War; nor is it the complete truth. Sometimes the greatest praise has been given, not to the books closest to the lived experience of the War, or to the ones that investigate war's subtler moral problems, but to those that most grimly detail horrors or most vociferously announce the War's futility. This has led to misreadings; works like *Journey's End* have been simplified into statements against war, while novels like *The Barber of Putney* are denigrated because they do not match a critic's political presuppositions.

When the wide range of Great War fiction is evaluated, the material raises many critical questions; for example, Pertwee's 'Camouflage' indicates the writer's recognition of things better left unsaid, and the need for complicity with the reader's desire for reticence. Twentieth-century critics (especially those committed to modernism) have not put a high value on reticence, or on literature that implies a cosy relationship with the reader; it could be argued, however, that taking a rigidly modernist stand makes it difficult for a critic to read such texts for what they are, or to understand how even the widely deplored omission, euphemism and facetiousness of wartime writing can be a way of communicating with readers. Equally, if we judge books only by their presentation of combat (whose authenticity is hard to gauge by those of us who have not fought in any wars, let alone one that finished ninety years ago), we run the risk of over-valuing some texts whose representations of war are unbalanced, exaggerated or even false. A text like Hanley's *The German Prisoner* may be over-praised because of its extreme violence, at the expense of more nuanced accounts of Army life, such as Stephen Graham's memoirs, whose analysis of military brutality is far more complex than Hanley's, but considerably less sensational.

Rather than evaluating texts according to how trenchantly they convey the horror and futility of war (which is to say, how strongly they reinforce our

pre-existing opinions) we could bear in mind that all texts about war are ultimately about power, and distinguish between fictions by evaluating their responses to power. On this basis, war writing can be divided into three general types, embodying distinct attitudes:

1. War is powerful, and the writer identifies with its power.
2. War is powerful, and the writer identifies with those abject in the face of that power.
3. War is powerful, but not all-powerful. The writer's interest is in individuals who can demonstrate agency and make moral choices within the context of war.

The first type of war writing was surprisingly plentiful during wartime, typified by those who enthused in 1914, believing that war would bring about social changes that they considered desirable. H.G.Wells (in *Boon*) thought it would disrupt the old-fashioned literary establishment; Ian Hay thought it would bring stroppy Glasgow Trades unionists into line. Writers of moral fables welcomed the War as having a salutary effect on the individual, making the unmanly manly and the uncaring caring, and bringing out the best in all who enlisted. There were also those, like D. H. Lawrence in 'England, My England', who liked to imagine the War punishing those in need of chastisement.

Wartime writing went out of fashion, but was replaced in critical esteem by another kind, where war is presented as a force in the face of which powerless humans can only be abject. The passive antiheroes of works like *All Quiet on the Western Front* are victims of the overpowering force of industrialised war, and similar abjection finds its way into descriptions of ex-soldiers helpless in an uncaring post-war society, like *The Victors,* by 'Peter Deane.' The representation of the Great War soldier as victim of a remorseless war machine has been the most common in recent fiction (for example, the works of Barker, Morpurgo and others). Such writing can be powerful, and the best examples are proper reminders of the appalling nature of war, but they will often be simplifications, especially in comparison with fictions that represent the individual soldier as part of a community, doing an unpleasant

job, but retaining some power of choice and agency. These latter will often be reminders of Charles Carrington's statement that 'the soldier is a social animal, undergoing a particularly social experience.'[23]

This thesis has shown that stories about soldiers have been many and various. The most interesting are those that avoid the contrary pieties of unthinking patriotism or routine anti-militarism, but attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction between two fundamental but dissonant beliefs. Almost all the writers discussed believe that the War was just, and fought in a righteous cause; on the other hand they realise that its human cost is terrible. Sometimes one of these propositions predominates, sometimes the other, but the tension between the two is what gives writers their subject, and the impetus to write. Sometimes the contradiction is resolved evasively, or by way of stock answers; at other times the attempt to solve it leads to flawed but interesting work. What needs to be recognised, however, is that it was the contradiction that impelled the writing; there is a loss when only the cost of war is stressed, and the moral commitment of soldiers and civilians in wartime is presented as merely false consciousness, a matter for irony to which author and reader can be superior.

Investigation of the fiction of the Great War between 1914 and 1930 reveals a collective effort at self-definition, constantly developing, as the writers of the time use existing genres and forge new ones, and represent the soldier in diverse ways, in attempts to elucidate the possible meanings of the War. The range of responses and interpretation is considerably wider than that suggested by the AQA syllabus discussed in the introduction, with its emphasis on the literature of futility.[24] As has been shown, these fictions are extremely varied; remarkably few are the simple transmission of a propagandist message (either for or against the War) and many raise searching questions about warfare, about social relations, and about human nature, even when they

---

[23] Charles Edmonds (pseudonym of Charles Carrington), *A Subaltern's War* (London: Peter Davies, 1929),196.

[24] Students taking the course would gain a considerably more diverse and more interesting idea of the War and its literature if the list of recommendations included, for example, *Greenmantle*, *The Pretty Lady*, *Told By an Idiot* and Kipling's Masonic stories, to name only works that are currently in print.

cannot give satisfactory answers. 'What we now accept as the literature of the First World War' is not the complete story.

Bibliography

Archives

Hodder and Stoughton Archive, Guildhall Library, London.

C.W.Daniel Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Richard Blaker Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

R.C.Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, Woking.

Lord Chamberlain's Papers, British Library, London.

Victor Gollancz Archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

Primary Texts: Fiction, Memoirs, etc.

Acland, Peregrine, All *Else is Folly*. London, Constable, 1929.

Addison, Hugh, *The Battle of London*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1924.

Aldington, Richard, *Death of a Hero*. London: Hogarth Press, 1984.

Aldington, Richard, *Roads to Glory*. London:Chatto and Windus, 1930.

Aldington, Richard, *Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences* (second edition). London: Cassell, 1968.

Allatini, Rosa ('A.T.Fitzroy'), *Despised and Rejected*. London: C.W.Daniel, 1917.

Allingham, Margery, *The Crime at Black Dudley*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950.

Asquith, Raymond, *Young Orland*. London: Hutchinson, 1927.

Auden, W.H. and Isherwood, Christopher, *The Dog Beneath the Skin: or Where is Francis?* London: Faber, 1935.

Aumonier, Stacy, *The Querrils*. London: Methuen, 1919.

Barker, Pat, *The Regeneration Trilogy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998.

Barker, Pat, *Life Class*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007.

Barry, Sebastian, *A Long Long Way*. London: Faber, 2005.

Bennett, Arnold, *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front*. London, Methuen, 1915.

Bennett, Arnold, *The Roll Call*. London: Cassell, 1918.

Bennett, Arnold, *The Pretty Lady*. Leek: Churnet Valley, 2009. Facsimile reprint of first edition (London: Cassell, 1917.)

Bennett, Arnold, *Mr Prohack*. London: Methuen, 1922.

Bennett, Arnold, *Riceyman Steps*. London: Methuen, 1922.

Bennett, Arnold, *Elsie and the Child*, London: Cassell, 1924.

Bennett, Arnold, *Lord Raingo*. London: Cassell, 1926.

Bennett, Arnold, *The Journal of Arnold Bennett*. New York: Literary Guild, 1933.

Blaker, Richard, *Medal Without Bar*. London: Hodder, 1930.

Bottome, Phyllis, *The Second Fiddle*. New York: Century, 1918.

Bottome, Phyllis, *A Servant of Reality*. London: Hodder, 1919.

Brereton, Captain F.S., *With French at the Front: A story of the Great European War down to the Battle of the Aisne*. London: Blackie, 1914.

Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth Testament of Youth: an autobiographical study of the years 1900-1925*. London: Virago, 1978.

Browne, Maurice, *Too Late to Lament, an Autobiography*. London: Gollancz, 1955.

Buchan, John, *Francis and Riversdale Grenfell: A Memoir*. London: Nelson, 1920.

Buchan, John, *The Adventures of Edward Leithen*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939.

Buchan, John, *Huntingtower*. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996.

Buchan, John, *The Complete Richard Hannay*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.

Buchan, John, *The Courts of the Morning*. Edinburgh: B & W Publishing, 1993.

Burrage, A.M., ('Ex-Private X'), *War is War*. London, Gollancz, 1930.

Cable, Boyd, *Action Front*. London: Smith Elder, 1916.

Carrington, Charles (as 'Charles Edmonds), *A Subaltern's War*. London, Peter Davies, 1929.

Carrington, Charles, *Soldier From the Wars Returning*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006.

Charteris, Leslie, *The Last Hero*. London: Hodder, 1930.

Childers, Erskine, *War and the Arme Blanche*. London: Arnold, 1910.

Coward, Noel, *Coward: Plays Two*. London: Methuen, 1979.

Coward, Noel, *Present Indicative*. London: Methuen, 2004.

Darlington, W.A., *Alf's Button*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1920.

Darlington, W.A., *I Do What I Like*. London: Macdonald, 1947.

Dawson, Coningsby, *The Kingdom Round the Corner*. New York: Cosmopolitan, 1921.

Deeping, Warwick, *Valour*. London: Cassell, 1918.

Deeping, Warwick, *The House of Adventure*. London: Cassell, 1922.

Deeping, Warwick, *The Secret Sanctuary or The Saving of John Stretton*. London: Cassell 1923.

Deeping, Warwick, *Sorrell and Son*. London: Cassell, 1925.

Deeping, Warwick, *Kitty*. London: Cassell, 1927.

Deeping, Warwick, *The Short Stories of Warwick Deeping*. London: Cassell, 1930.

Delafield, E.M., *The War-Workers*. London: Heinemann, 1918.

Delafield, E.M., *The Optimist*. New York: Macmillan, 1922.

Dorgeles, Raymond, *Wooden Crosses*. London: Heinemann, 1920.

Eliot, T. S., *The Rock*. London: Faber, 1934.

Elton, Godfrey, *The Testament of Dominic Burleigh*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1925.

Ewart, Wilfrid, *Way of Revelation: A Novel of Five Years*. Gloucester: Sutton, 1986.

Ewing, Juliana Horatia, *Mary's Meadow*. London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1886.

Frankau, Gilbert, *Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant: A Romance of Married Life*. London: Hutchinson, 1919.

Frankau, Gilbert, *Self-Portrait: A Novel of his Own Life*. London: The Book Club, 1941.

Galsworthy, John, *Saint's Progress* (Popular edition). London: Heinemann, 1923.

Galsworthy, John, *Carnival: The Assembled Tales of John Galsworthy*. Heinemann, London, 1925 .

Galsworthy, John, *The Plays of John Galsworthy*. London: Duckworth, 1929.

Galsworthy, John, *The Forsyte Saga* (Three volumes). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001.

General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1917.

Gibbs, Philip, *Realities of War*. London: Heinemann, 1920.

Gibbs, Philip, *Back to Life*. London: Heinemann, 1920.

Gibbs, Philip, *The Middle of the Road*. New York: Doran, 1923.

Gibbs, Philip, *Young Anarchy* (Uniform Edition). London: Hutchinson, 1929.

Gilbert, Major Vivian *The Romance of the Last Crusade: With Allenby to Jerusalem*. New York: Feakins, 1923.

Goldring, Douglas *The Fortune*. Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 1917.

Goldring, Douglas, *The Fight for Freedom.* London: C.W.Daniel, 1920.

Goldring, Douglas, *The Black Curtain.* London: Chapman and Hall, 1920.

Goldring, Douglas *Odd Man Out: The Autobiography of a 'Propaganda Novelist'.* London: Chapman and Hall, 1935.

Gould, Nat, *Racecourse and Battlefield*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1899.

Graham, Stephen, *A Private in the Guards.* London: Macmillan, 1919.

Graham, Stephen, *London Nights*. London: John Lane, 1929.

Graves, Robert, *Lawrence and the Arabs.* London: Cape, 1927.

Graves, Robert, *Goodbye to All That*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.

Gristwood, A. D., *The Somme: including also The Coward.* London: Cape, 1927.

Haig, Douglas, *War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918,* ed. Gary Sheffield and John Bourne. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005.

Hamilton, Cicely, *Senlis.* London: Collins, 1917.

Hamilton, Cicely, *William — An Englishman*. London: Persephone, 1999.

Hankey, Donald, *A Student in Arms.* London: Andrew Melrose Ltd, 1916.

Hanley, James, *The Last Voyage and Other Stories*. London: Harvill, 1997.

Hanley, James, *Boy*. Richmond: Oneworld, 2007.

Harrison, Charles Yale, *Generals Die in Bed*. London: Noel Douglas, 1930.

Hay, Ian, *The Lighter Side of School Life*. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1914

Hay, Ian, *The First Hundred Thousand: Being the Unofficial Chronicle of a Unit of 'K(1)'*. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1915.

Hay, Ian, *Carrying On – After the First Hundred Thousand*. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood. 1917

Hay, Ian, *The Willing Horse*, 1925. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925.

Hodson, James Lansdale, *Grey Dawn – Red Night* (second edition). London: Simpkin Marshall, 1954.

Hornung, E.W., *Notes of a Camp Follower on the Western Front*. London: Constable, 1919

Hutchinson, A.S.M., *If Winter Comes*. London: Hodder, 1921.

Hutchinson, Ernest and Goodchild, Geo., *The Right to Strike: A Novel Based on the Successful Play of the Same Title.* London: Robert Hayes Ltd, 1921.

Isham, Frederick and Murcin, Max, *Three Live Ghosts: a Comedy in Three Acts* (from the novel of the same name by Frederick S. Isham). New York: Samuel French, 1922, (Copyright 1918).

Jerrold, Douglas, *The Lie about the War*. London: Faber (*Criterion Miscellany*), 1930.

Jerrold, Douglas, *Georgian Adventure*. London: Right Book Club, 1938.

Jones, David, *In Parenthesis*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2003.

Junger, Ernst, *Storm of Steel* (translated by Michael Hoffman). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004.

Kaye-Smith, Sheila, *Little England*. London: Cassell, 1924.

Keable, Robert, *Simon Called Peter*. London: Constable, 1921.

Keable, Robert, *Recompence: A sequel to Simon Called Peter*. London: Constable, 1925

Kipling, Rudyard, *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*. London: Macmillan, 1895.

Kipling, Rudyard, *Traffics and Discoveries*. London: Macmillan, 1904.

Kipling, Rudyard, *A Diversity of Creatures*. London: Macmillan, 1916.

Kipling, Rudyard, *Debits and Credits*. London: Macmillan, 1924.

Kipling, Rudyard, *Limits and Renewals*. London: Macmillan, 1932.

Kipling, Rudyard, *The Complete Verse*. London: Kyle Cathie, 1990.

Lawrence, D.H., *England, My England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Lawrence, D.H., *Kangaroo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950.

Lawrence, D.H., *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.

Lawrence, D. H.,*The Letters of D.H.Lawrence,* (ed Zytaruk and Boulton). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Lewis, Wyndham, *The Ideal Giant, The Code of the Herdsman and Cantelman's Spring Mate*. London: Little Review, 1915.

Lewis, Wyndham, *The Apes of God*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965.

Lewis, Wyndham, *Blasting and Bombadiering,* (revised edition). London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

The Letters of Wyndham Lewis (ed. W.K.Rose). London: Methuen, 1963.

Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis (ed. Timothy Materer). London: Faber, 1985.

Locke, William J., *The Rough Road*. London: John Lane, 1918

Locke, William J., *The Mountebank*. London: John Lane, 1921.

Locke, William J., *Stories Near and Far*. London, John Lane, 1926.

Lyons, A.Neil, *Kitchener Chaps* (Second edition). London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1919.

Macaulay, Rose, *Non-Combatants and Others*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Macaulay, Rose, *Told by an Idiot*. London: Virago, 1983.

Macaulay, Rose, *Potterism*. London: Collins, 1950.

Macaulay, Rose, *What-Not: A Prophetic Comedy*. London: Constable,1919.

Macdonald, Philip, *Patrol*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1935.

MacGill, Patrick, *Children of the Dead End*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1914.

MacGill, Patrick, *The Amateur Army*, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915.

MacGill, Patrick, *The Red Horizon*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916.

MacGill, Patrick, *The Great Push*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916.

Malleson, Miles, *'D' Company and Black 'Ell: Two Plays*. London: Hendersons (The Bomb Shop), 1916.

Malleson, Miles, *Second Thoughts*, London: The National Labour Press, 1917.

Maltby, H. F., *Ring Up the Curtain*. London: Hutchinson, 1950.

Manning, Frederic, *Her Privates We*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1999.

Marinetti F. T., *The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* (trans. R. W. Flint), In *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (New edition), ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell 2003.

Masefield, John, *John Masefield's Great War*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007.

Mason, A. E. W. ,*The Four Feathers*. London: Smith, Elder, 1902.

Masterman, Lucy, *C. F. G. Masterman: a Biography*. London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939.

Maugham, Somerset, *The Unknown*, in *The Plays of Somerset Maugham*, VI. London: Heinemann, 1934.

Miles, Susan, *Annotations*. Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1922.

Milne, A. A., *If I May*. London: Methuen, 1921.

Monkhouse, Allan, *War Plays*. London: Dunstable, 1916.

Montague, C. E., *Disenchantment*. London: Chatto and Windus, (Phoenix Library), 1928.

Montague, C. E., *A Hind Let Loose*. London: Methuen, 1928.

Montague, C. E., *Rough Justice*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1926.

Morpurgo, Michael, *Private Peaceful*. London: Harper Collins, 2003.

Morton, J. B., *The Barber of Putney*. London: London: Philip Allan, 1919.

Morton, Michael and Traill, Peter, *Woman to Woman*. London: Hutchinson, 1924.

Mottram, R. H., *The Spanish Farm Trilogy: 1914-1918*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.

Newman, Bernard, *The Cavalry Went Through*. London: Gollancz, 1930.

O'Casey, Sean, *Autobiographies 2*, London: Pan, 1963.

O'Casey, Sean, *The Silver Tassie.* London, Macmillan, 1928.

Pankhurst, Christabel, *The Great Scourge and How to End It.* London : E. Pankhurst, 1913.

Pankhurst, Sylvia, *The Suffrage Movement.* London: Longmans, 1931.

Plowman, Max ('Mark VII'), *A Subaltern on the Somme.* Uckfield: Naval and Military Press, n.d. (Facsimile of 1928 edition by Dutton, New York.)

Ponsonby, Arthur, *Now is the Time: An Appeal for Peace.* London: Leonard Parsons, 1925.

Ponsonby, Arthur, *Falsehood in War-Time.* London: Allen and Unwin, 1928.

Prosser, Mrs (Sophie Amelia), *The Wise Man of Wittlebury.* London: Religious Tract Society, 1880.

Rathbone, Irene, *We That Were Young*, New York: The Feminist Press, 1989.

Raymond, Ernest, *The Story of My Days: An Autobiography 1888-1922.* London: Cassell, 1968.

Raymond, Ernest, *Please You, Draw Near: An Autobiography 1922-1968.* London: Cassell, 1969.

Read, Herbert, In Retreat. London: Faber (Criterion Miscellany), 1930.

Remarque, Erich Maria, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (trans. A.W.Wheen). London: Putnam, 1929.

Rivers, W.H.R., 'The Repression of War Experience', *The Lancet*, Feb 2, 1918.

Sadleir, Michael, *Privilege.* London: Constable, 1921.

'Sapper', *Sergeant Michael Cassidy, R. E.* London: Hodder, 1915.

'Sapper', *Jim Brent.* London, House of Stratus, 2002.

'Sapper', *Bulldog Drummond: The Carl Peterson Quartet.* London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007.

Sassoon, Siegfried, *Collected Poems.* London: Faber, 2002.

Sassoon, Siegfried, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston.* London: Faber, 1980.

Sassoon, Siegfried, *Diaries 1915-1918.* London: Faber, 1983.

Shipley, A. E., *The Minor Horrors of War.* London: Smith Elder, 1915.

Sherriff, R. C., *Journey's End.* London: Gollancz, 1929.

Sherriff, R. C. and Bartlett, Vernon, *Journey's End: A Novel.* London: Gollancz, 1930.

Sherriff, R. C., *No Leading Lady.* London: Gollancz, 1968.

Sinclair, May, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* . London: Hutchinson, 1915

Sinclair, May, *Tasker Jevons*, London: Hutchinson, 1916

Sinclair, May, *The Tree of Heaven*. London: Cassell, 1917.

Smith, Helen Zenna, (Evadne Price) *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War*, London: Newnes, 1930.

Smith, Helen Zenna, *Women of the Aftermath*. London: Newnes, 1931.

Smith, Helen Zenna, *Shadow Women*. London: Newnes, 1932.

Strachey, Lytton, *Eminent Victorians*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.

Stuart, Sir Campbell, *Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920.

Tate, Trudi (ed.), *Women, Men and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

'Tremaine, Herbert' (Maude Deuchar), *The Feet of the Young Men*. London: C. W. Daniel, 1917.

Thomson, Basil, *Queer People*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922.

'F. A. V.' (Fritz August Vogt) *Combed Out*. London: Swarthmore Press, 1920.

Walpole, Hugh, *The Dark Forest* (Reprint). London: Macmillan, 1926.

Wells, H. G., *Boon, The Mind of the Race,The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump:Being a First Selection from the Literary Remains of George Boon, Appropriate to the Times*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915.

Wells, H. G., *Mr Britling Sees it Through*. London: Cassell, 1916.

Wells, H. G., *Meanwhile*. London: Benn, 1927.

West, Rebecca, *The Return of the Soldier*. London: Virago 1980.

Williamson, Henry, *A Dream of Fair Women*. London: Collins, 1924.

Williamson, Henry, *The Gold Falcon: or the Haggard of Love* (second edition). London: Faber, 1947.

Williamson, Henry, *The Flax of Dream*. London: Faber, 1936.

Wodehouse, P. G., *The White Feather*. London: A & C Black, 1907.

Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs Dalloway*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1925.

Woolf, Virginia, *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol II 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson. London: Hogarth Press, 1976

Worrall, Lechmere and Terry, J. E. Harold, *The White Feather*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1915.

Yates, Dornford, *Berry and Co*. London: Ward Lock, 1920.

Yates, Dornford, *Blind Corner*. London: Dent, 1985.

Magazines , Newspapers and Serials

Blast

The Boy's Own Paper

The Captain

Cornhill Magazine.

The Criterion

The Egoist

The English Review

The Era

The Gem

Grand Magazine

The Herald

Illustrated London News

John Bull

The Lancet

Land and Water

London Magazine

London Mercury

Lot-o'-Fun

The Manchester Guardian

The Magnet

Nash's and Pall Mall Magazine

The Nation

The New Age

The New Magazine

New York Evening Journal

New York Times

The Observer

The Passing Show

Pearson's Magazine

Punch

The Sexton Blake Library

Sovereign Magazine

The Story-teller: A Magazine of Clever Fiction

The Suffragette

Strand Magazine

The Thriller

The Times

The Times Literary Supplement

Union Jack

Windsor Magazine

Women at Home

House of Commons Debates

Secondary works:

Ashley, Mike, *The Age of the Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines 1880-1950*. London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2006.

Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane and Becker, Annette, *1914-18: Understanding the Great War*. London: Profile, 2002.

Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane, *L'Enfant de L'Ennemi 1914-18: Viol, Avortement, Infanticide pendant la Grande Guerre*. Paris: Aubier, 2005.

Badsey, Stephen, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

Baldick, Chris, *The Modern Movement (The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 10. 1910-1940)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Baron, Carl E., 'Two Hitherto Unknown Pieces by D.H.Lawrence', *Encounter*, October 1969

Bloom, Clive, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction since 1900*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.

Bond, Brian, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Bond, Brian, *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front*. London: Continuum, 2008.

Booth, Allyson, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Bourke, Joanna, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*. London: Reaktion, 1996.

Bracco, Rosa Maria, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-39*. Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1993.

Buitenhuis, Peter, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After,* London: Batsford, 1989.

Campbell, James, 'Combat Gnosticism:The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History* (30:1) Winter 1999.

Cannadine, David, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain' in (ed.) Joachim Whaley, *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa, 1981), 219.

Carrington, Charles, *Rudyard Kipling : His Life and Work.* Macmillan: London, 1955.

Caserio, Robert L., 'Ford, Kipling and Public Virtue', in Robert Hampson and Max Saunders (ed), *Ford Madox Ford's Modernity*. Amsterdam, New York: 2003.

Cecil, Hugh, *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* , Secker and Warburg, London, 1995.

Corns, Cathryn M. and Hughes-Wilson, *John, Blindfold and Alone.* London: Cassell, 2001.

Cunningham, Valentine, *British Writers of the Thirties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Das, Santanu, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Dawson, Graham, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge, 1994.

DeGroot, Gerard J., *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*. London: Longman, 1996.

Drabble, Margaret, *Arnold Bennett: A Biography*. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1974.

Edwards, Lee R., 'War and Roses: The Politics of Mrs Dalloway', in Bloom (ed.) *Clarissa Dalloway*. New York: Chelsea House, 1990.

Egremont, Max, *Siegfried Sassoon*. London, Picador, 2006.

Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.

Eksteins, Modris, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. London: Bantam, 1989.

Falls, Cyril, *War Books*. London: P. Davies, 1930.

Ferguson, Niall, *The Pity of War*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999.

Finkelstein, David, 'Blackwood's Magazine in the Great War' in (ed) Treglown and Bennett, *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism from Fielding to the Internet.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Frow, John, *Genre.* London: Routledge, 2006.

Fuller, J. G., Troop *Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

George, Daniel and Macaulay, Rose, *All in a Maze, an Anthology*. London: Collins, 1938.

Goring, Jeremy, 'C. W. Daniel "Crank" Publisher', *The Bookseller* (December 18, 1971).

Gregory, Adrian, *The Silence of Memory*. Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994.

Gregory, Adrian, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Grieves, Keith, 'C.E.Montague and the Making of *Disenchantment*, 1914-21', *War in History* (4:1), 1997.

Gullace, Nicoletta *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.

Hamer, Mary, 'Mary Butts, Mothers and War' in Raitt and Tate, *Women's Fiction and the Great War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hand, Richard J and Wilson, Michael, *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007.

Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (ed.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Harvey, A. D., *A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War*. London: Hambledon Press, 1998.

Hayward, James, *Myths and Legends of the First World War*. Stroud: Sutton, 2002.

Haste, Kate, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. London: Allen Lane, 1977.

Hewitt, Douglas, Review of Kemp, *Kipling's Hidden Narratives*, in *Essays in Criticism,* (39) Jan 1989.

(ed) Hibberd, Dominic and Onions, John, *The Winter of the World: Poems of the First World War*. London: Constable and Robinson, 2008.

Hiley, Nicholas, ' "KITCHENER WANTS YOU" and "Daddy, What did YOU do in the Great War?" The myth of British recruiting posters.' *Imperial War Museum Review* (11), 1996.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude, *Victorian Minds*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968.

Hoare, Philip, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*. New York: Arcade , 1977.

Holmes, Richard, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle*. Cassell, London, 2004.

Hopkin, Deian, 'Domestic Censorship in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* (5:4), 1970.

Horne, John and Kramer, Alan, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, Yale University Press, 2001.

Howard, Michael, *Jonathan Cape, Publisher. London:* Cape, 1971.

Howard, Michael, et al, *A Part of History: Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War.* London, Continuum, 2008.

Hynes, Samuel, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture.* New York: Atheneum, 1991.

Ingram, Angela, '"In Christ's Name, Peace!" Theodora Wilson Wilson and Radical Pacifism', in Ingram, Angela and Petai, Daphne, *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

Joseph, Michael, *Short Story Writing for Profit*. London: Hutchinson, 1923.

Joseph, Michael, *How to Write a Short Story*. London: Hutchinson, 1925.

Keating, Peter, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*. London: Fontana, 1991.

Keegan, John, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme.* London: Pimlico, 1991.

Keegan, John, *The First World War: An Illustrated History*. London: Hutchinson, 2001.

Kendall, Tim, *Modern English War Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

(ed) Kendall, Tim, *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*. Oxford, OUP, 2007.

Kinkaid-Weekes, Mark, *D. H. Lawrence Triumph to Exile 1912-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Kramer, Alan, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Laing, Stuart, 'Philip Gibbs and the Newsreel Novel' in Humm, Stigant and Widdowson (eds.) *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Lawrence, Jon, 'War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalisation in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History* (75), September 2003.

Leavis, Q.D., *Fiction and the Reading Public*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1932.

Light, Alison, *Forever England: Femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Lloyd, David W., *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939*. Oxford: Berg, 1998

Lee, Hermione, *Virginia Woolf* . London: Chatto and Windus, 1996.

Lodge, David. 'Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin: Lawrence and dialogic fiction' in Brown (ed), *Rethinking Lawrence*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990.

Longford, Elizabeth, *Wellington: A New Biography* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002).

Lucas, Barbara, 'Apropos of "England, My England"', *Twentieth Century,* March 1961.

Lucas, John, *The Radical Twenties*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Lytton, Neville, *The Press and the General Staff*. London: Collins, 1920.

Macdonald, Peter D., *Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Maddox, Brenda, *The Married Man: A Life of D.H.Lawrence*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994.

Masterman, Lucy, *C.F.G. Masterman: a Biography*. London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939.

Melman, Billie, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988.

Meyer, Jessica, 'The Tuition of Manhood: Sapper's War Stories and the Literature of War' in (ed.) Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Meyer, Jessica, *Men at War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Nowell-Smith, Simon, *The House of Cassell 1848-1958*. London: Cassell, 1958.

O'Keefe, Paul, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*. London: Cape 2000.

Onions, John, *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War, 1918-39*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990.

(ed) Orel, Harold, *Kipling: Interviews and Recollections, II*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983,

Paris, Michael, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000*. London:Reaktion Books, 2000.

Perkins, Anne, *A Very British Strike: 3 May-12 May 1926*. London: Pan, 2007.

Pittock, Malcolm, 'Max Plowman and the Literature of the First World War', *Cambridge Quarterly* (33:3), 2004.

Pope, Harrison G. et al, 'Is dissociative amnesia a culture-bound syndrome? Findings from a survey of historical literature.' *Psychological Medicine,* 2006.

Potter, Jane, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

Potter, Jane, 'For Country, Conscience and Commerce: Publishers and Publishing, 1914-18' in (ed.) Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Pound, Ezra, *Collected Shorter Poems*. London: Faber, 1952.

Pound, Reginald, *The Strand Magazine 1891-1950*. London: Heinemann, 1966.

Powell, Violet, *The Life of a Provincial Lady: A Study of E.M.Delafield and her Works*. London: Heinemann, 1988.

Prior, Robin and Wilson, Trevor, 'Paul Fussell at War', *War in History,* (1:1), 1994.

Pugh, Martin, *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts': Fascists and Fascism Between the Wars in Britain.* London: Pimlico, 2006.

Raitt, Suzanne and Tate, Trudi, Women's *Fiction and the Great War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Reilly, Catherine, *Scars Upon My Heart*. London: Virago, 1981.

Rhees, Rush (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Personal Recollections.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Roberts, David, *Minds at War: The Poetry and Experience of the First World War.* Burgess Hill: Saxon, 1996.

Roby, Kinley E., *A Writer at War: Arnold Bennett 1914-1918*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972.

Rose, Tania, *Aspects of Political Censorship 1914-18*. Hull: University of Hull Press, 1995.

Roshwald, Aviel and Stites, Richard (ed) *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda 1914-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.

Ryall, Tom, *Anthony Asquith*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005

Satltzman, Rachelle H. 'Folklore as Politics in Great Britain: Working-Class Critiques of Upper-Class Strike Breakers in the 1926 General Strike', *Anthropological Quarterly* (67:3), July 1994.

Seiden, Melvin 'The Living Dead – VI. Ford Madox Ford and his Tetralogy', *London Magazine*, 6 (August 1959).

Sheffield, Gary, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001),

Sherry, Vincent, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980,* London: Virago, 1995.

Smith, Angela K., *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Smith, Angela K., *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

Smith, Constance Babington, *Rose Macaulay*. London: Collins, 1972.

Southborough et al., *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock, 1922* (facsimile). London: Imperial War Museum, 2004.

Stallworthy, Jon (ed), *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Stallworthy, Jon, *Survivors' Songs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Stephen, Martin, *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War.* London: Leo Cooper, 1996.

St John, John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990. London: Heinemann, 1990.*

Strachan, Hew, *The First World War: A New Illustrated History.* London: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Strachan, Hew, *The Outbreak of the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Sutherland, Kathryn, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Swinnerton, Frank, *The Georgian Literary Scene 1910-1935: A Panorama* (revised edition). London: Hutchinson, 1954.

Tate, Trudi *Modernism, History and the First World War.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

Thomas, Sue, 'Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell-Shock', *English Language Notes* (25:2 December, 1987),

Thomson, Peter, *Mother Courage and her Children (Plays in Production series).* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Todman, Dan, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*. London: Hambledon and London, 2005.

Truffaut, Francois, *Hitchcock.* London: Panther, 1969.

Trotter, David, 'The British Novel and the War' in Sherry (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Tylee, Claire M., *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*. London: Macmillan, 1990.

Unwin, Sir Stanley, *The Truth about Publishing*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1926.

Unwin, Sir Stanley, *The Truth about a Publisher*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1960.

Usborne, Richard, *Clubland Heroes*. London: Constable, 1953.

Washburn, Claude, *Opinions*. London: Constable, 1926.

Watson, Alexander, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Whelan, Christopher J., 'Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes', *Industrial Law Journal,* (8:1) 1979.

White, Hayden, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Williams, Gordon, *British Theatre in the Great War: A Revaluation*. London: Continuum, 2003.

Williamson, Anne, *Henry Williamson and the First World War*. Stroud: Sutton, 2004.

Wilson, Angus, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1977.

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet: A Biography 1886-1918*. London: Duckworth, 1999.

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey from the Trenches: A Biography 1918-67*. London: Duckworth, 2003.

Winter, Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Winter, Jay and Prost, Antoine *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Woollacott, Angela, ' "Khaki Fever" and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Morality on the British Home Front in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* (29), 1994.

Worthen, John, *D.H.Lawrence:The Life of an Outsider*. London: Allen Lane, 2005.

Zuckerman, Larry, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War One*. New York: New York University Press, 2004.

Internet resources:

"A Backdoor into the Present: An interview with Pat Barker, one of Britain's most successful novelists", Interview with Wera Reusch, translated from German into English by Heather Batchelor, at http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/reus_e.htm. Accessed 28th January, 2008.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography