

# **The History/Literature Problem in First World War Studies**

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## ABSTRACT

In a cultural context, the First World War has come to occupy an unusual existential point halfway between history and art. Modris Eksteins has described it as being “more a matter of art than of history;” Samuel Hynes calls it “a gap in history;” Paul Fussell has exclaimed “Oh what a literary war!” and placed it outside of the bounds of conventional history. The primary artistic mode through which the war continues to be encountered and remembered is that of literature—and yet the war *is* also a fact of history, an event, a happening. Because of this complex and often confounding mixture of history and literature, the joint roles of historiography and literary scholarship in understanding both the war and the literature it occasioned demand to be acknowledged. Novels, poems, and memoirs may be understood as engagements with and accounts of history as much as they may be understood as literary artifacts; the war and its culture have in turn generated an idiosyncratic poetics.

It has conventionally been argued that the dawn of the war's modern literary scholarship and historiography can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s—a period which the cultural historian Jay Winter has described as the “Vietnam Generation” of scholarship. This period was marked by an emphatic turn away from the records of cultural elites and towards an oral history preserved and delivered by those who fought the war “on the ground,” so to speak. Adrian Gregory has affirmed this period's status as the originating point for the war's modern historiography, while James Campbell similarly has placed the origins of the war's literary scholarship around the same time.

I argue instead that this “turn” to the oral and the subaltern is in fact somewhat overstated, and that the fully recognizable origins of what we would consider a “modern” approach to the war can be found being developed both during the war and in its aftermath. Authors writing on the home front developed an effective language of “war writing” that then inspired the reaction of the “War Books Boom” of 1922-1939, and this boom in turn provided the tropes and concerns that have so animated modern scholarship. Through it all, from 1914 to the current era, there has been a consistent recognition of both the literariness of the war's history and the historiographical quality of its literature; this has helped shape an unbroken line of scholarship—and of literary production—from the war's earliest days to the present day.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Preamble

The year 2012 saw two deaths that each, in different ways, constituted a significant moment in the ongoing debate over how we are best to approach the cultural history of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> The first, of Florence Green on 4 February 2012, marked the final severing of the line of living memory between the experience of the war itself and those of us studying it today. Green served as an officers' mess steward with the RAF from September through November of 1918, making her the last living "veteran" of the war to have been alive in any country.<sup>2</sup> With this last living link to the war having passed away, the responsibility of preserving the war's memory now falls entirely upon those who were not alive to experience it themselves, and a great deal of care must consequently be taken. The war had come to haunt that generation of young men and women born in its aftermath, many of whom felt they had missed out on "the war that was called Great" (Scannell 39), and who could only hear it spoken of—or not spoken of—without ever having had a chance to participate in it themselves. It would be difficult now to imagine anyone regretting having missed out on the trenches, but for

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<sup>1</sup> A third and similarly meaningful 2012 death for First World War studies was that of Dominic Hibberd (b. 1941), the English scholar and critic best known for his work on the poets Wilfred Owen and Harold Monro. He was also one of the more prolific anthologizers of First World War poetry, often working alongside the less-prolific John Onions. While volumes like *Poetry of the First World War* (1983), *Poetry of the Great War* (1986) and *The Winter of the World: Poems of the First World War* (2007) have been important contributions to the field of First World War poetry, they have been more notable as inheritors of a pre-existing tradition than as creators of a new one.

<sup>2</sup> Canada's last known living veteran, John Babcock, had served with the Young Soldiers' Battalion without ever having seen combat. He did not consider himself a "veteran" of the war in any meaningful sense, but continued to be hailed as one up until his death in 2010.

young people like Christopher Isherwood, George Orwell or Norman Mailer it seemed that some great test of manliness and courage had come—and gone, themselves never to be given the opportunity to try their strength in its cause. Isherwood refers to this as a subconscious feeling of shame; Mailer speaks of a morbid fascination with the war so powerful that it overrode even his own willingness to admit that he had it (Fussell 110). For those who fought in the war themselves, the situation was sometimes equally fraught; Guy Chapman, in *A Kind of Survivor* (1975), declares firmly that “to the years between 1914 and 1918 I owe everything of lasting value in my make-up” (280)—a claim on an individual level that has been echoed by others on a cultural one, as with Paul Fussell's declaration that the First World War is the “all-encompassing, all-pervading . . . essential condition of consciousness in the twentieth century” (GW 321), or Wade Davis' that “everything you know of your life, every sense you have of being modern, every existential doubt, each burst of confusion, every neurotic affirmation or affliction was born in the mud and blood of Flanders” (141). Will this be the nature of the ghost that continues to linger where our memory of the war is concerned? Will it be a spirit to be embraced—or to be exorcised?

Another implication of this death of such last living witnesses, however, is that today's scholars and commentators are no longer beholden to the sensibilities and perspectives of any living participant in the war; they may speak without giving personal offense, and many have already begun to do so. The early days of the 2014 centenaries saw an unseemly burst of political rhetoric about the war and its commemoration, with British political figures like (former Tory Education secretary) Michael Gove and (current Labour leader) Jeremy Corbyn declaring everything from that the war was a misremembered pageant of heroes to that it was

a mere orgy of murder that should scarcely be remembered at all. One struggles to think of such things being said while the notoriously outspoken Pvt. Harry Patch was still around to hear them, though one suspects he might rather have sided partly with Corbyn; his death in 2009, along with that of others like him, has cleared the way for a brand of commentary that offers the hope of being thoughtful and the almost certain reality of being crass.

The second death, of the influential American literary scholar Paul Fussell on 23 May 2012, suggests a more abstract severing. While Fussell's professional career saw him begin as a scholar of eighteenth-century writing and eventually turn his attention to topics as diverse as travel writing, Kingsley Amis, and American class structure, it was his work as a commentator on war and the memory of war that made him into an international name. He brought to such work not only a provocative and compelling voice, but also the lived experiences of (in his words) a "pissed-off infantryman"—a critic who could analyze and synthesize war stories from afar while remaining intimately aware of their cost in blood and sorrow.

The influence of Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* has been felt profoundly in the English-speaking world since its publication in 1975, and the force of his then-novel arguments about the literary response to the war by those who were involved in it has been inescapable. Criticisms of the famously irascible Fussell and his approach to the war have persisted almost from the moment of the book's publication, and for good reason;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Section II of my Conclusion for further analysis of the debates that surround this essential critical text; see also Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson's "Paul Fussell at War" (*War in History* 1.1; 1994) for a synthesis of the major military-historical complaints against *The Great War and Modern Memory* and Fussell's Second-World-War-focused follow-up, *Wartime* (1989). Claire Tylee, in "'The Great War in Modern Memory': What Is Being Repressed?" (*Women's Studies Quarterly* 23.3/4; 1995), also offers a provocative and necessary feminist criticism of Fussell's

nevertheless, his approach to the subject—privileging the sensitive aesthetic views of certain educated soldier-poets and conceiving of the war primarily as an ironic and failed enterprise—has informed much of the literary and historical scholarship focused on the war, and his death suggests that a moment for broad reflection and reconsideration has come.

These two deaths, then, joined with the opportunities that something like a centenary always tends to present for looking back and thinking again, leave us with an important opportunity to re-evaluate much that has become established—and even, potentially, stale—in the study of the First World War's various histories, legacies, and artifacts. Such re-evaluations are already occurring in some of the sub-fields of First World War studies, as we shall see, but one area that continues to require attention is the matter of the war's literary canon.

This canon is intimately interrelated with the corresponding canons of First-World-War-focused historiography and literary scholarship. The war has famously been described as both “a gap in history” (Hynes, *War* xi) and “a literary war” (Fussell 155), with the war's copious literature often serving—sometimes against its original purpose—to fill in that gap and provide an account of the war for which mere historiography was thought to be inadequate. As Santanu Das has recently argued, “a constant tension in First World War poetry criticism is whether the accent should fall on war or on poetry, on cultural history or on aesthetic value” (13); we may perhaps add to these concerns “military history” and “truth value”. While Das is primarily focused upon the war's poetry, his comments also ring true for other literary products as well. Neta Gordon has astutely pointed out that

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highly selective approach to just what can and should constitute a “modern memory” of the war.

a conundrum that explains much of the critical ambivalence about examining (and probably writing) historical literature about war [is that] there is always a lurking sense that such work must be scrutinized not solely, or even primarily, in terms of literary qualities but for an inquiry into the way historical events have been discursively reiterated. (10)

The latter part of this claim remains in dispute where the First World War is concerned, but the centenaries offer an important opportunity for further debate.

Central to these questions is that of what is “true” about the First World War. There are a lot of claims about it which are made quite emphatically, but they tend to be ethical and emotional rather than analytical or strictly factual. Thus, the war was a catastrophe and a crisis; it was a calamity and a crime; it was a barbarous waste of young life, spurred on by the ignorance and greed of the old; it was a clash of propagandized states in which the proletariat were sacrificed like pawns in a game between various elites; it was the dawn of Modernism, or at least its lynchpin; it was the worst thing that has ever happened, and possibly the most important; it was futile and unendurable and incompetently conducted. Opinions vary, to put it mildly.

All of the above should be more adequately described as a *mood* rather than as a *truth*, or even a set of facts. They are intensely subjective responses to events. There is nothing wrong with responding to events subjectively, for indeed this is often all we can do, but, when we find ourselves embroiled in a debate over commemoration and representation, it perhaps behooves us to examine all of the possibilities that are available. With new approaches to the war's cultural and military history beginning to gain ground, it has become clear that the standard

narrative of/response to the war is less enduring and irrevocable truths and more highly contingent ones rooted in certain historical and political developments over the course of the century that separates us from the war itself. This is true, especially, of the 1960s and 70s.

It has long been argued that the modern understanding of the First World War finds its roots in the scholarship of these decades, and there is much in this argument to recommend it. James Campbell has argued that it was during this period that “the literature of the first total war gradually became more relevant to the academy” (“Interpreting” 264), and that consequently the first wave of literary scholarship devoted to the war began during the years of 1964-1975, “assign[ing] itself the task of defining the canon of Great War literature and defending its aesthetic and ethical status” (262).<sup>4</sup> He traces these origins to key works like John H. Johnston's *English Poetry of the First World War* (1964), Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965), Arthur Lane's *An Adequate Response* (1972), and Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975)—all of them leading to what Campbell describes as an ultimately synthetic and artifact-based approach:

The literature thus becomes less an end in itself than a means through which to interpret the war as a kind of literary text. The war is to be read as an artifact, full of symbolic resonance and prophetic power. It fulfills the dark forebodings of the literary nineteenth century and provides the vocabulary through which the postwar world will articulate itself. Fussell is the first to read the war in this

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<sup>4</sup> In “Interpreting the War,” from the 2005 *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005; Ed. Vincent Sherry). This regrettably short chapter remains the most focused existing overview of the history of the war's literary scholarship.

manner, or at least to do so in anything like a systematic way. ("Interpreting"  
267)

If one does indeed view the history of the war's literary scholarship as a series of typological prefigurings of an eventual critical messiah named Paul rather than Jesus, it is perhaps understandable to place its origins in the 1960s and 70s—but it is hardly fair to suggest, as Campbell does, that it was only during these decades, far-removed from the war itself, that anyone thought to start “defining the canon of Great War literature and defending its aesthetic and ethical status” (262).

Nevertheless, a corresponding conviction exists that, as Adrian Gregory has expressed it, “the modern historiography of the First World War begins in the 1960s” (*A War* 183).<sup>5</sup> This is true as far as it goes, and the reasons Gregory cites for it are legitimate. The 1960s and early 70s saw the deaths of the last remaining major political figures of the war—men like Paul von Lettow Vorbeck, Winston Churchill, or Alexander Kerensky—and with them went their authority over the subject. The fifty years that had passed since 1914-18 also meant that many archives (especially British ones) that had previously been sealed were finally opened up for historians to examine. This provided an enormous amount of new material from which to compile narratives about the war, and there were many authors ready and waiting to do so.

Gregory also notes that the era saw many changed perspectives when it came to the relationships between the sexes, the classes, different races, different educational levels, and so on. This was an era of continuing decolonization, of rising European unity, of student

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<sup>5</sup> In *A War of Peoples: 1914-1919* (2014). This short work offers a thumbnail account of the war's military and cultural history. Gregory also provides a tremendous amount of (quite welcome) analysis of the war's comparative historiographies, giving capsule reviews and evaluations of numerous major works written since the 1960s.

uprisings and war protests and teach-ins and popular movements. These changes offered fertile new platforms from which to understand the events of fifty years past. Many of those writing the new histories, lastly, were younger professional historians rather than memoirists, novelists, or poets. These new authors had “no personal (even childhood) memories of the First World War (and increasingly none of any personal involvement in war at all)” (183). As a consequence—and here I take over from Gregory's own argument—the matter of personal experience became absolutely central to how these historians proceeded. They privileged the vanishing voice of experience over their own; they fueled a boom in the field of oral history, spear-heading projects like the Imperial War Museum's recordings of veteran testimony, the BBC's epic 26-part *The Great War* miniseries (1964), and the release of such testimony-focused books as Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day on the Somme* (1971) and Lyn MacDonald's *They Called it Passchendaele* (1978). In spite of the fact that “the historiography of the war is now firmly in the hands of a generation born after the end of the Second World War” (Gregory 184), there remains a tremendous devotion to the ideas and perspectives of the men and women who were actually there, fighting on the front lines. This, the rear cover matter for MacDonald's *Passchendaele* informs us, is after all “the only view that really matters.”

A more nuanced view of these putative origins can be found in the survey offered by the influential First World War historian Jay Winter in his introduction to *The Legacy of the Great War, Ninety Years On* (2009).<sup>6</sup> Winter conceives of the history of the war's historiography as a

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<sup>6</sup> One of the central figures of the new transnational cultural historiography of the war, Winter's more influential volumes include *The Great War and the British People* (1986), *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995), *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (with Antoine Prost, 2005), and *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On* (2009). He is also the general editor of the long-

generational affair, with “the dialogical nature of historical practice therefore [making] it necessary to place one generation's thinking about the Great War alongside those of earlier generations” (“Approaching” 1-2). Winter approaches this matter by dividing the history of First World War scholarship into several generational categories or stages; the first, which he calls “the Great War generation,” encompasses the work produced by the “scholars, former soldiers, and public officials who had direct knowledge of the war either through their own military service or through alternative service to the country's war effort” (2). These works were first published in the years following the war and leading up to its more audacious sequel, and both their contents and impact have now largely been forgotten.

Winter posits a second phase of First World War scholarship that he names the “fifty years on” generation (2). This generation was most impacted by the availability of previously inaccessible official documents and a newfound focus on examining the war in terms of social conditions and movements. An already prominent strain of moral judgment and disillusion—all readily to be found in much of the war’s most influential literature—metastasized in the late 1970s and 1980s with what Winter describes as “the Vietnam generation” (4), which was marked by powerfully anti-establishment works aimed at unsettling assumptions about the place of class, race, and sexuality in the war and its history while privileging the oral history of combatants over the written history of officials or academics. With the field having thus been opened, a fourth and ongoing historiographical generation has been building what Winter calls a “transnational” understanding of the war’s history (6). This approach examines the war’s

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awaited three-volume *Cambridge History of the First World War* (2014), which offers an excellent synthesis of the modern scholarship where the war's cultural history is concerned.

history on a macro-level but through a micro-lens, and challenges the previous primacy of personal or nationalist approaches to this global conflict.<sup>7</sup>

This greater nuance provided by Winter's approach shows his recognition of the inextricable significance of the work done by scholars, critics, and literary authors in the years between 1914 and 1945 to the work being done from the 1960s onward. These generations are indeed in dialogue with one another, and this is a dialogue that is both fruitful and necessary. Perhaps it is possible to understand the work of the 1960s/70s—and of the 2000s/10s—without looking back to the foundations laid during the war and in its immediate aftermath, but it is considerably more illuminating to appraise them holistically.

In this dissertation, then, I contribute to the ongoing scholarship surrounding the war by providing both a counterpoint to and an expansion of the arguments set forth by the likes of Campbell, Winter, and Gregory. The war's historiography, literary scholarship, and canon formation did not only begin in earnest in the 1960s and 70s; they began with the opening of the war itself, and we may fruitfully examine the early examples of such writing to see how—and why—we have arrived at the state of affairs that has been dominant since this putative beginning some fifty years on from the war itself. To understand this, we must first understand the extent to which the war's history, literature, and literary scholarship have become intertwined.

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<sup>7</sup> “Thus the history of mutiny is transnational, in that it happened in different armies for different reasons, some of which are strikingly similar to the sources of protest and refusal in other armies. The history of commemoration [ . . . ] also happened on many levels, and the national is not the most significant, not the most enduring” (7). This, then, is a history of ideas rather than necessarily (or primarily) a history of nations or peoples.

## II. "Oh What a Literary War!"

The popular historical understanding of the First World War, its circumstances, its conduct and its meaning has not been a stable one. In the century that has passed since the war's conclusion, the varied reactions to the war and its conclusion that were dominant in its immediate aftermath have given way to a newly-dominant strand of mournful regret. This spirit of regret is reflected in the consistently sombre nature of yearly Remembrance Day celebrations and by the regular insistence that the war's primary lessons should be preventative—that is, that one significant justification for the study of the war is to ensure that such a thing does not occur again.

A hugely important component of this popular mood is the general timbre of the war's literature, both contemporary and modern. From wartime poetry by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, to post-war memoirs and novels by veterans like Robert Graves and Erich Maria Remarque, to modern and post-modern writings of the war from decades after the fact, like Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-95) or Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993), there is a consistent and well-worn tone of futility, loss and tragedy. "Whether or not it is representative," as Sharon Ouditt writes, "the experience of the officer on the Western Front has come to typify the story of the war, and it is a story that has an imaginary coherence composed of numerous narrative tropes and images" ("Myths" 247). Given the significant role that literature has played in how people now understand the war, it is not at all surprising to see these tropes and images become intertwined with expressions of public commemoration.

In all of this I speak of popular memory and creative literature, but there is an academic element to it that presents complications. While this dominant “mud, blood and futility” narrative remains firmly entrenched on a popular level, there have been compelling and important challenges offered to it by historians (both cultural and military) working on the war professionally. Many of the assumptions that undergird this narrative have been unsettled in recent years, with a particular “revisionist” strand of historiography attaining a sort of ascendancy since the early 1990s. This new historiography, curated largely by researchers working out of King’s College London, Birmingham, Leeds, and the Imperial War Museum, operates with the intention of presenting a more holistic view of the war, its actors, and its events, with a deliberate focus on extricating historical data (where possible) from matters of aesthetics, sentiment, or morals. This should not be viewed, however, as an attempt to make military history the privileged lens of study where the war is concerned; the military historian Gary Sheffield—at the forefront of this new movement—argues rather that “the way of the future is surely to integrate different facets of the history of the war, not to privilege some and marginalize others”; to accomplish this will require scholars who can deal with both cultural and military history, and preferably some who are at home with both (Rev. 860).

This hoped-for unity of the disciplines necessarily includes literary scholarship. It is important that we consider the development of the war’s historiography and its literary criticism together because the First World War, perhaps more than any other modern war, has come to be powerfully defined by the literature that it occasioned. Both literary critics and historians have remarked upon the fact. Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, takes the war’s supremely literary quality as a matter of course; he offers up a whole chapter

under the title “Oh What a Literary War!”, and suggests as a possible subtitle for the book “An Inquiry into the Curious Literariness of Real Life” (ix). “Sometimes,” he goes on, “it is really hard to shake off the conviction that this war has been written by someone” (241). The military historian Richard Holmes is similarly convinced of the war’s inescapable literary quality, but views it in a much less positive light; he laments that the war “usually enters our minds not as history, but as literature. One of the problems with trying to write about the First World War is that most people have already read Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks, before you get to them” (*Tommy* xvii).

With the war’s literature playing so much of a role in how its history is now remembered, it is important to consider the many ways in which the two intersect with one another and influence each other’s development. The sterile, lengthy, often self-exculpatory history-writing of the immediate post-war period fueled a popular turn away from the historians and towards the poets and memoirists, who told, if not *the* truth about the war, then at least a sort of truth that the reading public found more immediately interesting. Fussell places this truth venture firmly within the context of a corresponding boom in “clever novels exhibiting a generation of bright young men at war with their elders” (109)—with works like Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928) and Evelyn Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* (1928) being mentioned specifically. Still, the great “war books boom” of 1927-39 was motivated not solely by a burning need finally to express things long bottled up, on the authors’ part, but also by the possibility of making a great deal of money.<sup>8</sup> Had the first wave of the war’s historiography

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<sup>8</sup> A period which saw, as we shall examine in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the publication of numerous classic works of First World War fiction—such as Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Robert Graves’ *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Robert Blunden’s

been less marked by multi-volume regimental histories and works of political economy, this turn towards the artists may have been much gentler than it ended up being.

This impact of historiography upon both literary production and literary reception extends in some other directions, however. The dizzying success of the post-war poems and memoirs created an environment in which historians who wished to sell books had to accommodate themselves to the public mood which the literature helped create; the few statesmen whose histories of the war really *did* sell well, like David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, achieved their success in works that were as long and as all-encompassing as those that failed to make an impact,<sup>9</sup> but which were nevertheless marked by the kind of artful prose, critical self-reflection, and overall sense of dismay that was the mark of the memoirs and the poetry. As the military historian Brian Bond aptly puts it, they found “an intellectual framework and a language which would appeal to a readership inclined to say ‘goodbye to all that’” (*Unquiet* 49). We have but to examine Lloyd George’s prefatory declaration to see how congenial his approach would be to a readership primed by Sassoon and Owen, to say nothing of Graves:

I aim to tell the naked truth about the war . . . I saw how the incredible heroism of the common man was being squandered to repair the incompetence of the trained inexperts . . . in the narrow, selfish and unimaginative strategy and in the ghastly butchery of a succession of vain and insane offensives. (8)

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*Undertones of War* (1928) (as well as Blunden's edition of Wilfred Owen's war poems), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), and many others. The reasons for which so many of these works all appeared at once are complex and varied, and the analysis below will consider them within several necessary cultural contexts.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* (1933-38) and Churchill's *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (1923-31) were each originally released in six volumes.

The cycle that this sort of thing creates should be readily apparent. The historiography that impacts popular memory is the historiography that actually gets read, and—in this case—the historiography that was being read was that which most successfully mirrored the attractive features of the fiction and poetry that were already being so widely consumed. A template for successful writing about the war had been established, and those wishing to find similar success adopted it aggressively. It is a template that persists on a popular level unto this day, though there has been a great deal of refinement over the decades. Best-selling works of popular history about the war in recent years have borne titles like *A World Undone*, *The Pity of War*, *The Beauty and the Sorrow*, *Cataclysm*, and *Catastrophe*.<sup>10</sup> There is a great emphasis on the pathos of the war, and upon expressing it at its most powerful through the letters, journals and other ephemera of the men and women who experienced the war firsthand—usually from the ground level. This omnipopular form of historicizing the war is still, perhaps amazingly, characterized as a precarious and novel one; in spite of it having been among the most successful formats of history books about the war since the oral history boom of the 1970s, such books continue to be promoted as being “unprecedented” and providing access to the only view of the war that really matters.<sup>11</sup> If this is how the reading public encounters the war

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<sup>10</sup> G.J. Meyer, *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War, 1914 to 1918* (2006); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (1999); Peter Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War* (2011); David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (2004); Max Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War, 1914* (2013).

<sup>11</sup> It would be impossible to provide a full number of the volumes that now exist compiling letters, diaries, telegrams and other personal ephemera in a bid to record the history of the war as it was experienced by “regular people;” what Samuel Hynes has called “the authority of ordinary men’s witness” (*Soldiers’ Tale* 1) is everywhere preserved. A recent and well-reviewed volume—*A Broken World: Letters, Diaries and Memories of the Great War* (2014), edited by Sebastian Faulks and Hope Wolf—boasts on its back cover of including richly varied material

even when reading a work of history, it comes as no surprise that the war's literature should also prove such an attractive option when it comes to understanding the events of 1914-1918.

Before proceeding further, let us briefly return to a lament from the military historian Richard Holmes quoted above. "One of the problems with trying to write about the First World War," he writes, "is that most people have already read Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks, before you get to them" (*Tommy* xvii). To this I could be added that they have also watched *Blackadder* (1989) and *War Horse* (2011) and *My Boy Jack* (2007).

Given the interdisciplinary nature of how the war is received by the reading (and watching) public, there is much in Holmes' lament that should cause concern – and not solely for the historian. The literature of the First World War is often celebrated for its truth-telling quality, however abstract, and for telling a truth that both convicts and convinces. As James Campbell has argued, it "provide[s] the least mediated path between the realities of the trench and the innocence of the civilian reader" ("Interpreting" 266), and this least mediated path is the one that leads us to what Virginia Woolf saw in the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon: "we say to ourselves 'Yes, this is going on; and we are sitting here watching it,' with a new shock of

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from "privates and officers, seamen and airmen, munitions workers and mothers, nurses and pacifists, prisoners-of-war and conscientious objectors," offering "an unprecedented insight into the Great War as it was experienced and as it was remembered" (Faulks and Wolf, *Rear Matter*). Leaving aside the literal falsity of the claim that this volume is unprecedented (it is not even the first such volume that Faulks has edited), it is worth noting the overt absence of any preserved memories or experiences from those in positions of military or political authority—that is, those who might have had some understanding of the war from the top down. The letters, diaries and memories of field marshals, cabinet ministers, propagandists, press barons and royals could just imaginably offer some "insight into the Great War," but they are almost never included in collections of this sort in spite of considerably greater effort having often already been undertaken to make such material accessible to researchers and anthologists in the first place. Nothing of the sort finds its way in, with the doubtful exception of the Bloomsbury Group.

surprise, with an uneasy desire to leave our place in the audience” (Woolf 259). From the perspective of the historian, however, this path is not always or necessarily a smooth one; when literature (even if unwittingly) begins to take on the role and function of historiography, it is imperative that the critical and pedagogical response to it reflect the best—and most up-to-date—that has been said and done in each discipline. The substance of Holmes’ lament is that this is not always the case, and it suggests a number of problems that deserve to be examined in greater detail.

The first of these problems is this notion of the war “enter[ing] our minds not as history, but as literature.” What this may mean is explained by Brian Bond:

. . . military historians have in general failed to present a positive interpretation of Britain’s role in the war or, at any rate . . . their versions have been overwhelmed and obliterated by the enormous impact of supposedly “anti-war” poetry, memoirs, novels, plays and films. While the best of these imaginative literary and personal interpretations have deservedly remained popular and influential they ignored, or failed to answer convincingly, the larger historical questions about political and strategic issues: what was the war “about”? How was it fought? And why did Britain and her allies eventually emerge victorious?  
(*Unquiet* vii-viii)

While Bond believes that the tide is turning on this front (a possibility I will explore in greater detail in this document’s concluding pages), he notes elsewhere that “it is obvious that literature cannot provide a substitute for the *history* of the war which embraces policy, strategy, and tactics as well as the dramatic personal experiences of war on the home and

military fronts” (Editor’s Introduction 2). Fellow historian Correlli Barnett goes farther, protesting “the absence of any attempt to explain the political and strategic dynamics of the war, or even of individual campaigns, which alone can give meaning to the human experiences so glumly harped on” (“Oh” 18).

Bluntly stated though it is, Barnett’s complaint is well worth considering; from Paul Fussell’s contention that the war is unique and best approached as “ironic,” to Samuel Hynes’ that it constitutes a “gap in history” and is best approached through a mythic lens, to Modris Eksteins’ that the war is “a matter of art, not history” (290), and thus best understood as the “psychological turning point [ . . . ] for modernism as a whole” (328), absent from many of the major literary-cultural engagements with the war is the notion that it should best be understood *as a war*.

For such the First World War certainly was, and to acknowledge this seemingly basic reality is to acknowledge a number of increasing complexities. Contrary to the popular presentation of the subject, it was not simply chaos and folly and madness and triviality—or, at least, it was not only or even primarily these things. It was a hugely complex series of events orchestrated by the planning and efforts of tens of thousands of minds; it was a dizzyingly complicated chain of rational actions and counter-actions, each contingent upon as many more; it was the momentous immanentization of political and economic activity—Clausewitz’s “policy conducted by other means”; it was an occasion of massive social upheaval, industrial expansion, invention, the shifting of philosophical and even religious paradigms; it was a moment of vast physical, moral and practical pedagogy; it was waged for justice, for honour, for obligation, for survival, for profit, for revenge, for simple wrath and rapacity; it was multifarious

to the point of being infinite. In short, it was a war—and it strikes me that condemning it as simply being futile, tragic and ironic and then championing only that literature which confirms this opinion is a failure of imagination rather than a triumph.

It remains the case that the war of Sassoon and Graves and Remarque—the war in which Isaac Rosenberg dies on April Fool’s Day and in which Wilfred Owen’s parents receive word of his death as the bells ring out for the Armistice—is the war that many readers of British literature seemingly *want* to see, and that many writers and scholars of that literature dutifully help bring about. This brings us to the second notable aspect of Holmes’ complaint above—that is, that this literary primacy *does* something to inquiring readers “before [the historian] can get to them.” This impact appears to be threefold.

First, it primes those readers to be mistrustful of historical works generally, and especially of those written by senior officers, military theorists, journalists, or anyone else who may reasonably have been expected to be “in the pay” of the military establishment and consequently keen on propagating that establishment’s values. Sassoon and Owen took their shillings from the same establishment, of course. This suspicion predominates when it comes both to “establishment” works about the war produced at the time and to military-historical works produced today. Works of purely operational history face an uphill battle when it comes to sales, no matter who writes them; the historical treatments of the war that now do well on the best-seller charts are uniformly works instead of *narrative* and *cultural* history—see Peter Englund’s *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War* (2012), or Jack Beatty’s *The Lost History of 1914: Reconsidering the Year the Great War Began* (2012), or Ian F.W. Beckett’s *The Making of the First World War* (2012). Beckett’s work is particularly

interesting in this regard; although he is a widely-respected military historian who has produced numerous operationally-focused works about the war, he declares in his introduction that while “it is the dramatic battles and the extraordinary loss of life that will occur to many as the most significant episodes of the First World War,” it is nevertheless the case that “great battles may not be the most decisive events in a war. Even what seemed momentous political decisions at the time may not mean that much in the longer term. What, then, does constitute a pivotal point in a war?” (Beckett 2). The perspective is a perfectly defensible one, and he is perfectly right to ask the question that he does, but it remains significant to see a military historian depart so thoroughly from his usual field and instead produce a book with chapters about newspaper rivalries, cinematic releases, and the popular response to the deaths of celebrated monarchs. This book, and those like it, offers a holistic view of the war that relies heavily upon the pleasing accessibility of narratives about personalities rather than upon an analytic presentation of figures, maps, and the implications thereof. To become used to such an approach is to become wary of those that deviate therefrom; this, I think, is the essence of Holmes’ complaint.

This is not to disparage the considerable merits of narrative and cultural history, which remain of crucial importance to our understanding of the war and of the past more generally; it must still be acknowledged that one generation's extreme focus on the common and the civilian may be as troubling as another generation's focus on great battles and great men.

The second implication of this lies in the tendency to view the war in terms of a collection of character-based narratives rather than of a series of military or political operations—that is, in the tendency to view the war as a *genre* rather than as a *war*. Eksteins

declares that “existence has become aestheticized,” and declares as much in specific relation to the war itself (xvi); such declarations make it an attractive prospect to view the war in such terms. But I—along with historians like Holmes, Sheffield, and Bond— would argue that this view is very far from normative, and even very far from being easily defensible.

This brings us at last to the third implication of this literary primacy “doing something” to readers, as per Holmes’ complaint: because the war is often viewed as a genre rather than as a war, the hermeneutic by which this genre’s canon—both literary and historical—is determined becomes significantly warped. On a literary level, the reliance upon certain schools of interpretation when it comes to the literature of the war ensures that only certain works will be taken seriously. The formation of the canon becomes, as it were, a sealed and self-perpetuating exercise. For example, pace Fussell et al., the war was an ironical tragedy; stories that are not ironic in their tone or tragic in their unfolding obviously do not fit into that narrative. If we accept that the most significant literary response to the war in Britain was one of disillusion and disruption, texts that are neither disillusioned nor disruptive do not command nearly as much attention in spite of whatever reputation they may have enjoyed at the time. This is the sort of assumption that could lead someone like Ernest Hemingway to declare that “there was no really good true war book during the entire four years of the war” (“Introduction” xiii), which is an absurdly broad wave of dismissal; surely it would be difficult to wholly deny any power or literary merit in something like Rudyard Kipling’s “Mary Postgate” (1915), Wyndham Lewis’ “The French Poodle” (1917), Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), or the narratives in Ian Hay’s *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915) and its sequel—unless one did so for reasons external to the mere analysis of art.

It is in this tension that my own interest lies, however; the metrics by which “significance” may be determined are not rigidly codified, and I argue that then-contemporary popularity is as much a reason to privilege a text’s place in the canon as our interest in it now in light of all subsequent events. Indeed, if we are to meaningfully gauge the literary culture that existed during and after the war, rather than only our own response to and evaluation of it, we *must* place a great deal of emphasis on what was widely distributed and consumed at the time—as we shall see in Chapters 1 and 2.

Necessarily—and here the seal comes into effect—if the only texts taken seriously on a canonical level are those that flatter the pre-existing assumptions of the canon, the only conclusion the reader of these texts can reach, in isolation of other possibilities, is that the outlook of these texts is simply correct. That is, the canon codifies those texts that support the narrative of disillusion and disruption, even as the primacy of texts that support disillusion and disruption helps to define the boundaries and effect of the canon.

This leads to the marginalization of stories that historians—and many of the war’s combatants—might deem more accurate. So, for example, as the media historian Stephen Badsey writes in describing the history of the war’s presentation in recent television and film, “it is doubtful if any British play, film or television dramatization of the Western Front since perhaps 1950 has depicted something that was actually a commonplace of the war: a competent officer bravely and successfully leading his troops” (Qtd. In Bond, *Unquiet* 118).<sup>12</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> This has actually changed in the past few years with (for example) the successful BBC adaptation of *The Wipers Times* (2013), an historical drama telling the story of the production of the famous satiric trench newspaper. Captain Fred Roberts (Ben Chaplin) is depicted as a man deeply wounded by his experiences as a leader in the trenches, but also as one remarkably good at it both tactically and morally.

a consequence of all this, “trying to write about the First World War” is rendered problematic. The trends noted above have made this as true for the literary scholar as for the historian, however; each is determined in his or her own fashion to present an analysis of the war that is both useful and true, but the same problems are proving complicating for both.

Nevertheless, the emphasis in Holmes’ *Tommy* (2004)—as in numerous works by historians like Sheffield, Bond, and Daniel Todman—is upon disentangling what we “know” about the war from having read novels and poems (and having seen plays, television programs and movies) and what we can “know” about it through historical inquiry. Whatever benefits interdisciplinary collaboration may bring, these historians make it clear that, to them, these two types of knowing are not the same at all, and that the literary way of knowing is by no means necessarily the better.<sup>13</sup>

The war’s literature has come to serve as a companion to and, in many cases, a replacement of its historiography as a foundation for popular memory. It has not replaced it entirely, however, owing to the degree to which authors of prominent First World War literature and literary scholarship are motivated in their writings by either experience or research. They both wish to write about an historical event, and consequently seek out information to inform that historicity. They thus act as a proxy by which the reading public really does get exposed to the war’s historiography—but in a highly mediated and selective

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<sup>13</sup> The historian’s perennial complaint, in fact; Thucydides, in his introductory remarks in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (c. 400BC), declares the historians’ work preferable to “that of the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes, or of the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public” (47). The *ῥαψωδός* of old bore considerably more authority than do modern poets, and confined themselves to an epic mode which many of the most prominent poets of the war consciously shunned, but there is still something striking in the adequacy of the ancient historian’s complaint to the situation now at hand.

fashion.<sup>14</sup> As the war's historiography informs how we understand its literature, which in turn inordinately informs how we understand its *history*, it is important that we be ready to re-evaluate just what historiography is being privileged and just what lessons, as a consequence, are being both learned and taught.

History is not written in a vacuum. The work of a given scholar is necessarily in dialogue with that of the prior scholars she cites, and also—whether implicitly or explicitly—with that of those scholars surrounding her or even yet to come. Nevertheless, it is still worthwhile to recognize (or create) divisions and categories that help to explain trends. Cultural concerns, political developments, even important anniversaries can all lead to bursts of new historical work and new historical perspectives on matters of the past, with attendant schools or coteries forming around them. The history and art associated with the First World War are very far from offering an exception.

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<sup>14</sup> By way of an example of this we might consider the enduring popularity of Denis Winter's *Haig's Command: A Reassessment* (1991) among cultural historians and literary scholars. Winter (no relation to Jay M. Winter) made his name with *Death's Men* in 1978, and had this been the whole of his output it would be likely that he would still be remembered fondly. *Haig's Command*, however, constitutes a sustained attack on Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's abilities as an officer, fitness for the position of Commander-in-Chief, and personal integrity as a human being. It makes all of the familiar arguments about Haig's putative unimagination, hostility to technological advancement, disregard for his men's lives, and so on, but to them adds the accusation that Haig willingly falsified his own published journals and ordered the destruction of other records, not in his own keeping, that might have implicated him in the charges of incompetence that have so often been leveled. This serious charge caused considerable ripples when the book was first published, but subsequent scholarship has shown the work's methodology to be flawed and Winter's approach to be considerably biased. *Haig's Command* all but ruined his career as a serious historian—and yet it continues to be cited by scholars interested in the war's cultural and artistic history to buttress the familiar narrative of military-institutional incompetence against which the poets and memoirists are claimed to have reacted.

Having already described Jay Winter's approach to the "generations" of First World War scholarship, I am compelled to add another to his list. "Generations" is used here advisedly, for there is much in this that involves younger scholars reacting against the lessons handed down to them by their academic elders and a new generation of readers reacting to the tastes and concerns of the one that preceded them. The major differences that exist between Winter's conception and my own involve how we are to understand the earliest and latest generations, respectively. His "Great War generation" should rather be understood as two distinct generations—that of the war and its immediate aftermath (up until 1922, for reasons which will be elucidated below), and that of the "war books boom" that began in the late 1920s and ran through the mid- to late 1930s. This second generation was in dramatic reaction against the first, with the weighty operational histories and generals' memoirs of the first era being supplanted by more analytical histories and the memoirs of the individual fighting man (and supporting woman, at that). Conceiving of the era between 1914 and 1939/45 in this fashion provides a more coherent bridge to the developments of the 1960s, and the focus of this dissertation will be on showing how these two distinct generations have laid the foundations for modern and contemporary scholarship.

My second divergence from Winter's model is far less important, but still significant insofar as it signals my departure from his primary concerns in having drafted the model to begin with. While it is indisputable that the war's current scholarship has a tremendously transnational focus, and has benefited immensely from the co-operation of international scholars, libraries, museums and archives during a time of congenial pan-European peace, an equally important trend of revision—even of *revisionism*—can be seen in modern scholarship as well.

Some of the interrogations and re-evaluations for which I have called in the preceding pages are already underway, with no field having been so affected by these changes as that of military and operational history. New work by scholars promoting a reading of the war's history from a perspective informed by military theory, tactics, strategy, logistics, and so on has led many to radically revise our understanding of the war away from the typical mud, blood, and futility that has often marked it. Some have even gone so far as to observe a "learning curve", to borrow a often-used phrase, in the British Expeditionary Force's campaigns on the Continent. Supporters of this school have provided a compelling (if still controversial) new reading of the war as being one which should best be measured on the Western Front as a combination of the lessons of 1914-16 being applied to the successes of 1916-18. Most controversially yet, this reading has revisited the infamous Somme campaign of July-November 1916 and declared it to be a costly success rather than an abject catastrophe. Such arguments are startling, especially for those used to saying, with the German officer Friedrich Steinbrecher, "Somme: The whole history of the world cannot contain a more ghastly word" (Sheffield, *Somme* 108), or lamenting, with Edmund Blunden, that "by the end of [the first day on the Somme] both sides had seen, in a sad scrawl of broken earth and murdered men, the answer to the question. No road. No thoroughfare. Neither race had won, nor could win, the War. The War had won, and would go on winning" (*Mind's* 38). The aesthetic power of the Somme as an iconic catastrophe and indictment of the war's waste is being challenged, in short, by a newfound focus on the broader tactical and strategic realities that brought such a campaign about in the first place. After all, as John Terraine has rightly noted, the first day on the Somme was also the 132<sup>nd</sup> day of the Battle of Verdun, to say nothing of also being 28<sup>th</sup> day of the Russian Brusilov Offensive, and that "only

a dense and impenetrable insular mythology, unforgiveable after so many years,” has seen 1 July 1916 continue to be treated in the fashion that it has (108).

This spirit of revision, then, is not wholly echoed in Winter's focus on trans-national scholarship. While it is indeed a trans-national crew of scholars who are responsible for this newly energized approach to the war's military history—scholars like the German Matthias Strohn, the South African Alan Kramer, the British Gary Sheffield, the French François Cochet, and so on—it maintains a focus on the military side of war that cultural scholars have not always privileged even in the study of an actual war. This continues even now; Santanu Das acknowledges our presence within an age of revision, and rightly notes that “our understanding of even familiar [First World War] poems has been largely transformed by recent scholarly enquiry into fields as diverse as cultural history, modernism, psychoanalysis and gender studies” (4). Military history remains conspicuously absent in spite of its tremendous new flowering over the same time-frame as the scholarship Winter rightly notes.

This absence of the military and emphasis upon the cultural may best be understood through a consideration of just what this “modern” literary scholarship entails. Its concerns and foci have animated several successive generations' worth of understanding where the war is concerned, and tracking these developments across the decades since the 1960s is instructive. The development of the literary criticism surrounding the war and its canon can be traced through an examination of twelve key critical texts, which we will consider in brief here. It is worth keeping these in mind as we examine the historiographical, literary, and literary scholarly output of 1914-1939 and discover the ways in which the putatively modern is really somewhat older than it seems.

As I have had cause to note already above, James Campbell describes this development of modern scholarship in terms of three phases: the first (1964-1975) focuses upon the collation of the lyric trench poets and post-war memoirists into a coherent canon and the development of a critical attitude marked as much by ethics as by aesthetics; the second (1975 through 1988, roughly) is a product of the post-Fussell emphasis on the centrality of sexuality to the war's literature, with new readings and rereadings being produced by a growing number of feminist scholars; the third—which is ongoing—is focused largely on achieving a synthesis of the first two through an examination of the war's relation to modernist expression and discourse.

The obvious difference between this conception of how the century unfolded and Winter's is that the literary scholarship as a coherent field seems to have gotten off to a relatively late start—what generations there are involved in this correspond tidily with those of the historiography, but it appears that a step has been missed. Let it suffice to say for now that editors, authors and scholars in the war's aftermath were just as concerned about formulating a coherent canon and coming to some conclusions about its shape and direction as were those who took up the task again in the 1960s—it was simply often being expressed in ways less obvious than the production of scholarly monographs.

This modern era of literary scholarship might best be exemplified by twelve key texts with publication dates ranging from 1964 to 2004. I have chosen them for a number of reasons: each has been influential in its own way, each is by an author of considerable ability and proliferation, and each exemplifies a particular modern idea with which I hope to engage throughout this document as a whole. I have no wish simply to exclude those works produced

in the decade since that outward limit, but it is rather more difficult to speak of any of their reputations and influence as being definitively established. In any case, the works listed below contribute to a current trend and an opportunity.

The first critical text to be considered is John K. Johnston's *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form* (1964), a seminal volume that collates the likes of Owen, Sassoon, Brooke and Grenfell into a coherent canon of "war poets." This was followed shortly by Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (1965), a useful counterpart to Johnston's study in its willingness to examine the war's prose as well (albeit in less detail and breadth than it does the poetry; Bergonzi was preparing his manuscript even as Johnston's book hit the market, so it would not be fitting to regard Bergonzi's as a successor). Jon Silkin's *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (1972) moved the war's literary scholarship into the 1970s and the end of the pre-Fussell era; Silkin's text is marked most notably by its unambiguous adoption of a lens of criticism that is ethical and aesthetic in equal measure, seizing upon an implication of Johnston's approach and deploying it without apology. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) provides what Campbell has called "a fork in the road for Great War criticism" ("Interpreting" 267); this influential and controversial text helped open the floodgates of feminist and modernist criticism that would become so common in the ensuing decades, though it is fair to say that as much of this criticism has been in reaction to Fussell's thesis as in extension of it. In any event, a substantial critique of Fussell's work will be found in Chapter 5.

An essential foundation of the feminist approach to the war's literature is Catherine Reilly's *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography* (1978); this ground-breaking

attempt to provide a complete overview of the poetry produced during the war revealed that the vast majority of poems being written were the work of civilians, and that an unexpectedly large number of those civilians were women. This bibliography reframed the terms under which “First World War poetry” was understood, providing a foundation for a new critical approach to poetry written outside of the trenches. This re-evaluation of what “war literature” actually entails was taken up at great length by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their *No Man’s Land* trilogy (1988-94);<sup>15</sup> this follow-up to their highly influential *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) positions women’s writing during and after the war within the context of the war’s impact on the burgeoning women’s rights movement.

Modris Ekstein’s *The Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (1989) examines the war’s impact upon the rise of literary and aesthetic modernism. It also places a heavy emphasis on the war’s qualities as an aesthetic experience rather than only a military one—an emphasis that can also be found in Samuel Hynes’ *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990). Hynes builds upon the work that has preceded him by emphasizing what he calls “the Myth of the War”: a set of agreed-upon tropes (mud, blood, rats, incompetent generals, etc.) that have come to define our experience of the war in both history and literature. This agreement is necessarily complicated by history, and subsequent scholars have produced important work intended to open the canon to those texts that were popular during and after the war itself without having achieved the same enduring power as

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<sup>15</sup> *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* is comprised of the following volumes: *The War of the Words* (1988), *Sexchanges* (1989), and *Letters from the Front* (1994).

those included in the canon which solidified in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Rosa M. Bracco's *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (1993) argues for the expansion of the canon to include those authors now ignored for the "unliterary" quality of their prose, while Hugh Cecil's *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (1996) makes the case for a re-engagement with those best-selling authors whose works do not necessarily measure up to the standards set by the ethical and aesthetic criticism articulated above.

Trudi Tate's *Modernism, History and the First World War* (1998) presents an attempted synthesis of the feminist and modernist focuses of the preceding scholarship by examining a variety of canonical and non-canonical works in relation to many (sometimes unexpected) contemporary cultural concerns. With the groundwork having been laid throughout the 1990s for reappraisals of the canon from a variety of perspectives, a work like Janet K. Watson's *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (2004) helps to demonstrate that (as Watson argues) the previous irreconcilability of so many different texts under the banner of "war literature" was a result not of those texts succeeding or failing under a single coherent lens, but rather of them having been reflective of experiences so different in the first place as to render them functionally (if abstractly) "different wars."

What are these "different wars?" What are these different ways of seeing, and how have they grown and changed over the intervening century? To discover that, we must begin at the beginning—which means considering how these problems and opportunities were addressed during and immediately after the war itself. While no coherent canon of the war's literature could easily be said to have developed by the time the war ended in 1918, there were

many texts that were acknowledged as early classics and which have seen this status endure.<sup>16</sup> Early efforts were indeed made to sort out which works were worthy of celebrating and which were not; however, so too were there many and varied early debates about just what role the war would play in history—and whether it was possible to write of it *as* history while it was as yet inconclusive.

An interest in learning the truth about the war persisted throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, and the late 1920s and early 1930s saw an important turn, on the reading public's part, away from the work of the establishment historians who comprised the "Great War generation" and towards the poets, artists and novelists whose work was devoured in such vast quantities during the War Books Boom of 1927-1939. As Desmond MacCarthy wrote in 1929, "One of the symptoms of this change of attitude is the sudden and unexpected revival of interest in the actualities of war all over Europe. Books which a year or so ago no publishers could hope to sell are now read eagerly by hundreds of thousands" (Qtd. in Jerrold 7). This was not true for everyone, alas; Doyle's *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* was a commercial and critical failure, the worst of his career.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, if Doyle had little success during this time there were many other literary figures who could say otherwise; R.C. Sherriff's 1928 drama *Journey's End* ran to fourteen editions in its first three months, the late Rupert Brooke's collected poetry continued to sell in the hundreds of thousands, and Erich

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<sup>16</sup> See Barbusse, West, Wells, etc.

<sup>17</sup> I will have more to say of Doyle's failure in Chapter 2, but a fine overview of his calamitous history and its reception may be found in Keith Grieves' "Depicting the War on the Western Front: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the Publication of *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*" (*Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, 2007; 215-32).

Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* became one of the best-selling works of historical fiction in all of history itself.

This headlong flight into verse and fiction as a means of understanding the events of 1914-1918 was not accepted without a fight by those in the historiographical trade; 1930 saw the publication of two works that offered sharp criticisms of this trend—*The Lie About the War*, a lengthy (and often scathing<sup>18</sup>) pamphlet by Douglas Jerrold, and *The War Books: A Critical Guide*, an annotated bibliography by Cyril Falls. Jerrold's pamphlet offers a survey of sixteen of the major novels about the war that were then currently in vogue, declaring of them that "they present a picture of war which is fundamentally false even when it is superficially true, and which is statistically false even when it is incidentally true." They cannot "tell the truth about war," he insists, because "there is no such thing as 'the truth about war'" (9).<sup>19</sup> Falls employs a less passionate approach, offering up a detailed list of hundreds of books all categorized in terms of their fidelity and usefulness to history. Even at this early stage, the necessary role of artistic works in providing a window onto history was beginning to develop. This project will offer some sense of the shape this development took.

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<sup>18</sup> For example: "That there are a lot of people going about to-day saying that they never knew until they read *All Quiet on the Western Front* what war was really like I can well believe. But as to 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—well, that is a different thing" (8).

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis mine.

### III. Outline

The questions that this dissertation seeks to answer are these: how and when did “modern” First World War scholarship begin, and what does it mean for us to treat this “modern” way of seeing the war as a true and enduring one? To answer these questions, I examine numerous primary and secondary works from 1870 to the present, paying particular attention to three distinct periods of scholarship: the years of the war itself, the years of its immediate aftermath, and the years surrounding the late 1960s and early 1970s—when this “modern” scholarship is commonly held to have begun.

The bulk of this document will compare works of literary scholarship and works of historiography, examining the different approaches of each while also highlighting their mutually beneficial similarities. “Literary scholarship” may be defined, simply enough, as “non-creative writing about creative writing;” it encompasses those articles, chapters, monographs and series that analyze the contents of literary texts and provide readings of them. It is also, secondarily, concerned with the questions occasioned by the matter of book history—at which point it finds itself beginning to overlap with historiography. “Historiography” may be taken countervailingly to mean, in brief, “non-creative writing about history.” It stands distinct from history itself, which is its always-complicated and always-mediated subject, and it can be considered in similar terms as those applied to literary scholarship, which is not so very different in some of its processes even if it differs greatly in its subject matter.

This dissertation will demonstrate a) that “modern” scholarship is not modern at all, b) that it can trace its roots back to the days of the war itself, and c) that maintaining this brand of

scholarship as “modern” is injurious to a holistic understanding of the war. The work of contemporary scholars has already begun to shift against this older fashion, in some disciplines, and it is the goal of this dissertation to apply some of the work that has already been done by historians to work that still needs to be done by literary scholars.

With the groundwork for the project having already been laid in this introduction, we will proceed to Chapter 1 and begin with a prelude which traces—however paradoxically—the cultural and literary responses to the war before the war even began. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 occasioned a rising tide of anxiety throughout Europe, and not least of all in Britain, about the likely future ambitions and dominance of a newly unified German Empire. This in turn occasioned a great deal of political debate, military activity, and even artistic engagement—manifesting itself most notably (for our purposes, at least) in the form of the “invasion literature” genre, which looked ahead to the alarming possibility of a cross-Channel German invasion of the British Isles. This prelude examines the ways in which these rising anti-German anxieties helped lay the groundwork for an acceptable “war literature” at the First World War's outset, in many cases providing the grist for a propaganda mill that had to spring into being almost overnight. Concerns about a lack of British preparedness, German technical and military superiority, and the burdensome problems of international diplomatic obligations such as those imposed by the 1839 Treaty of London—all of these would feather the nest in which the crises of 1914 would hatch and grow.

With this having been examined, we continue with an examination of the cultural and ideological background of the First World War era, with a particular focus upon the period's conception of history and of literature. I propose in this section that one of the key lenses

through which we might regard this era's literature is that of propaganda. This is a subject fraught with difficulties nevertheless; in Section I I examine the ways in which the run-up to 1914 left the British public in a state quite ready to be propagandized, and in Section II I examine the many complexities that attend our understanding of propaganda in the first place. With the fears generated by 1870-71 having already been stoked, it proved relatively easy to develop a structure of writing and of public discourse that adapted those fears to the long-predicted nightmare of a continental war with Germany.

The contours of this propaganda, however, proved rather more complex than the typical designation of “deception” and “lies” would suggest. Section III of this chapter, then, also considers some of the ways in which “propaganda” has been theorized in the years since the war, and also the inherent variety that existed in its earliest manifestations. In summary, the one-to-one equation of “propaganda” with “deceit” is no longer supportable, and neither is a reading of the discourse of 1914 that sees only or primarily an innocent public being cynically manipulated by elites. It is no longer possible to agree with Arthur Ponsonby, perhaps the interwar period's most vocal anti-propaganda activist, that propaganda is strictly to be understood as the “fraud, hypocrisy . . . humbug . . . and the blatant and vulgar devices which have been used for so long to prevent the poor ignorant people from realizing the true meaning of war” (*Falsehood* 26). It is rather a reciprocal and complicated field of endeavours that plays as much upon the existing public mood as upon the desires of any elite to shape it. It is also, perhaps most importantly, not necessarily or inherently *deceptive*—but rather *persuasive*. It is no longer possible to dismiss something like the 1915 *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (more popularly known as the *Bryce Report*) as “itself one of the worst

atrocities of the war” (Peterson 56). All of this should not simply be considered as a defense of propaganda in its own right, however, but rather as a necessary platform from which to critique the accepted canon of First World War literature and its long-standing characterization as a truth-telling foil to the propagandists. If, as it turns out, the propagandists were not such outrageous liars after all, we are more or less forced to pause and reconsider the putatively oracular roles played by authors like Owen, Graves, and Sassoon.

With all of this having been considered, we turn in Chapter 2 to the writings that were popular during the war itself—whether historical, literary-scholarly, or simply literary. This chapter will examine the ways in which all three strands of writing about the war contributed to the development of a canon and to a broad understanding of what was meant by “war literature”—anticipating the developments of the 1960s and 70s while laying the foundations for what would follow. The chapter examines the attempts of (often literary) authors to write a history of the war while it was still in progress, of anthologists and critics to address and curate the tidal wave of writing that the war occasioned, and of literary authors to render authentically (or at least meaningfully) in fiction what was still going on so inescapably in fact.

Early histories by authors like John Buchan, Henry Newbolt and Arthur Conan Doyle attempted not only to provide a coherent story of the war as it progressed, but also to theorize just what position the war should have in history more broadly. Such authors' early successes—and profound later failures—tell us much about the historiographical environment to which the authors of the late 1920s and early 1930s were reacting. Meanwhile, authors like Ian Hay, H.G. Wells and (again) John Buchan helped craft a literary response to the ongoing war that attempted to synthesize certain strands of popular feeling into a form of art that would be both

immediately accessible and historically enduring. The chapter will pay particular attention to the different types of stock “Englishman” that these writers employed as their protagonists—whether in the form of Hay's hapless Private Thomas Atkins, Wells' doubtful intellectual Mr. Britling, or Buchan's dauntless hero Richard Hannay. In each we find the ability to “manage” the war, albeit in a variety of different ways and with understandable grappling with doubts and dangers—the totalizing “futility” of future readings had not yet come into effect.

At the heart of the ensuing turning-back to the war and the stories that remained to be told is a growing interest in interrogation or re-examination. The dismal peace of 1919 and the ongoing economic turmoil of a worldwide Depression had dramatically undercut the hopes that the war would simply secure the world for liberal democracy and usher in a new era of prosperity. The war had not done that; it had also not ended all wars (or even ended itself, really, until the 1920s), created a land fit for heroes to live in, cleansed Britain or Europe of indolence and complacency, or done any of the other things that had variously been hoped at its outset apart from liberate Belgium and halt (for a time) the other international endeavours of the Central Powers.<sup>20</sup> With all of this being the case, and the too-present absence of the “lost

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<sup>20</sup> The First World War is an event mired in such inconclusive determinacy. Did it end with the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918? If so, it did not end for everyone; the ragtag German/Askari army commanded by General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in German East Africa did not formally surrender until 25 November, and tens of thousands of Allied troops remained in action in Russia until 1920, summoned there at the behest of the White Russian government to suppress the Bolshevik revolt. Did it end with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919? If so, not everyone was convinced; the French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, upon the signing of the treaty, bitterly declared that “this is not a peace. It is an armistice for twenty years” (Murray 209). He was right. Did it end, then, with the start of the Second World War—fought over many of the same issues, by the same combatant powers, over much the same terrain, in some cases even by the same people? Did it end when the generation that had fought in 1914-1918 began to pass away, cutting the thread of living memory that had linked the living to the distant past? Has it ended now that the centenary of its commencement is at

generation” continuing to be felt throughout Britain specifically and the world at large, the time seemed ripe for a turning-back—for coming to grips at last with what all of it had really meant, and what all of it had really been. This, at least, was the idea.

The period consequently saw the publication of hundreds of influential books about the war across dozens of subjects and disciplines, and Chapter 4 will take them as its focus. This chapter will depart from the format of Chapter 2 in skating fairly lightly over the subject of the period's historiography. For reasons that will be examined, the period was one in which the semblance of “public authority” over the history of the war began to shift away from historians and statesmen and towards authors and memoirists. Cheap, provocative books that delivered a poignant lesson in 200 pages were greatly to be preferred to multi-volume histories comprising thousands of pages, and such histories might make poor (and unacceptably titanic) grist for examination in a chapter such as this one. We will have cause to note—in brief—some of the cultural impact of deeply personal memoir-histories like Winston Churchill's *The World Crisis* (1923-31) and David Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* (1933-38), but this chapter will otherwise focus primarily upon the literature that has so aggressively become its hallmark.

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hand, and the descendants of those combatants are once again squabbling (thankfully without violence—for now) over how the war's great matters should be understood? It seems hard to say that it has ended at all, if one considers it in that light; its effects are still constantly felt—sometimes in vividly real ways. Unexploded ordnance in France and Flanders does not always stay unexploded forever, and over 700 people have been killed in Belgium alone since 1918 by unearthed shells, which they now call the “Iron Harvest,” first fired in a war in which no living person participated (Albright 120). Bitter political and academic debates continue over the legitimacy and scope of the atrocities visited during the war on Belgians, Armenians, Poles, Russians, Serbs, Africans, and others—as vitriolic and hateful in some cases as the original arguments were. Books are still written, art is still experienced, monuments are still erected (and defaced); we must “go over the ground again.” See David Reynolds' cautious *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (2013) or Frank Furedi's contentious *First World War: Still No End in Sight* (2014) for more on the war's inconclusive qualities.

The fourth chapter consequently continues with a consideration of the inter-war era's major interrogations of the war's literary canon. These critical treatises—specifically Douglas Jerrold's "The Lie about the War," Cyril Falls' *War Books: A Critical Study* and Jean Norton Cru's *Du témoignage*, all from 1930—analyze the era's dominant war literature from the perspective both of detached military historians and of scandalized co-participants in a conflict which they view as having been severely distorted in the period's literature. Jerrold, Falls and Cru are concerned primarily with evaluating the era's war writing from the perspective of historical veracity and, more basically, personal charity. The tendency of these works to sensationalize, to magnify, to exaggerate, and even to invent was not purely a literary matter to them; it was also an ethical one, as it should be to the reader considering such war writing within the wider field of collective memory. If a generation of poets and novelists sold their wares with the assurance that they were—perhaps for the first time—telling the truth about the war, it behooves us to consider this critically in light of new information even as we observe this trend's impact on the development of still-dominant critical understandings.

Self-serving though some of this writing may have been, it remained highly influential—and was itself much of a piece with the period's dominant literary expressions where the war was concerned. 1922 saw the publication of two works that jointly encapsulate the competing understandings of the war: Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* and C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment*. Both would become bestsellers, with Raymond's in particular going through on average a new edition every year up until the end of the 1960s, but only one—Montague's—would herald a new and audacious way of understanding the war. Where Raymond's text is a prose-ode to the British school-boy and the system that made him, Montague's is instead a

merciless meditation upon the war that destroyed him. Where Raymond's text is full of Rupert Brooke's "swimmers into cleanness leaping" ("1914: Peace" 104), Montague's carries more of the vicious legacy of Wilfred Owen's Abraham, "who slew his son, / And half the seed of Europe, one by one" ("Parable" 171). While Raymond's text would remain a romantic classic, Montague's would serve as the catalyst point of a new literary movement: the "War Books Boom."

This boom began most notably in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, but can justifiably be said to characterize the period of 1922 through 1939 more generally. Around the end of the 1920s, something seems to have happened; authors who had previously remained silent began to speak, stories that had previously been suppressed began to be told, and a reading public that had hitherto shown itself to be uninterested in reading more about the war suddenly found its appetite for it again. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw an explosion of novels, plays, poetry, and memoirs about the war and its consequences, most often focused on the experiences of young male infantry officers on the Western Front.<sup>21</sup> While considering the Boom as a whole, this chapter will focus on three exemplary works, each from a different literary field. Primary attention will be paid to C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment*, already described above, but we will also consider the poetry of Wilfred Owen, who, though largely unsung during his own life and even in the war's immediate aftermath, has become arguably *the* iconic poet of the First World War—and perhaps of War in general. To these works will be joined Erich Maria Remarque's sensationally popular novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

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<sup>21</sup> See Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Edmund Blunden's *The Undertones of War* (1928), Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), among many others to be outlined later.

(1929); in spite of its German provenance, it became an international success story almost from the moment of its publication, and was responsible in no small part for both the flood of imitators that followed and the prevailing mood of First World War scholarship ever since.

This brings us to the project's concluding chapter: an attempt to show how the putatively “modern scholarship” of the war began and how it was really more of a continuation of earlier work. This will be undertaken through an examination of the “memory/oral history boom” of the 1960s and 70s and the manner in which this has served as the foundation for understandings of the war that still linger now even after fifty years. Though a broad consideration of the impact of the Vietnam War, the boom in “oral history,” and the impact of the work of Paul Fussell, we will see how a particular view of the war has become solidified—a war that was chaotic and unknowable, a war that was barbaric and futile, a war that was a psychological and aesthetic event, and a war that should only be remembered through the lens of the subaltern experience. If—as Campbell, Gregory, and Winter suggest—the modern understanding of the war can only be said to begin in the 1960s and 1970s, what, then, does that beginning look like? This concluding chapter will show its shape and trace its debts to the work already done by those writing during the war and in its immediate aftermath, and will place considerable emphasis on the ways in which the ongoing Vietnam War impacted the development of First World War studies during the same period.

If the First World War is still with us even after its putative conclusion(s) in 1918 and 1919, it is also the case that it was “with” the world even before its actual beginning in 1914. The period between the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the outbreak of fresh hostilities in 1914 saw a rising tide of anxiety over the possibility—and, to some, the inevitability—of a pan-

European conflict with the newly formed German Empire at the centre. This anxiety manifested itself in the period's literature and public rhetoric, and it is to this fertile field that we now turn: the prelude to the war itself.

## CHAPTER 1:

### Cultural and Ideological Backgrounds of the First World War, 1914-1922

#### I. Introduction

While the First World War has consistently been remembered and even evaluated through the lens of the literature it occasioned, it is nevertheless the case that rather little of the literature that was actually popular *during* the war now has any important place in popular discussions of or introductory lessons on the conflict. The top-selling war works of home-front and combatant authors alike have largely been relegated to also-ran status, when they are not instead being aggressively positioned as foils against which the sort of “truth-telling” literature to be examined in Chapter 3 and 4 was written.<sup>22</sup> The sub-sections in Chapter 1 and 2 of this survey, then, focus on the cultural background of the war and on the various strands of literature that were popular both during the war and in its immediate aftermath, while also examining the ways in which these forms of literature began gradually to fade in popularity and influence as the years after the war rolled on. The regimental histories, sentimental adventures, romantic poems and jovial personal memoirs would be dealt a crushing blow with the 1922 publication of C.E. Montague’s *Disenchantment*, as we shall see later; in the meantime, however, they formed the literary landscape against which the British experience of the war was formed and debated.

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<sup>22</sup> Important counterpoints to this include Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* (1916) and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918); Barbusse’s ferociously anti-war text is very much in keeping with the works that would come to dominate the 1920s and 1930s, while West’s is a home-front elegy quite unlike (and deliberately distant from) the roaring escapades of the firing line.

Section II of Chapter 1 constitutes a prelude of sorts, offering an examination of the cultural milieu that prevailed throughout Britain in the years between the Franco-Prussian War and the outbreak of the First World War. Particular attention will be paid to the popularity of so-called “invasion fiction” and the ways in which this sort of writing helped prime the population for the early propaganda and rhetoric of 1914.

Section III offers an extended analysis of the use of writing as propaganda and as support for the war effort—as, in fact, a weapon of war in its own right. Both combatants and non-combatants alike set down their thoughts about the war in print, with governments and other state agents curating these literary responses for public consumption. The resulting literature and cultural ephemera have remained at the centre of debate since the war's conclusion, with competing critics examining them as everything from a triumph to a crime.

## II. A Future Nightmare, 1870-1914

The period leading up to 1914 in Britain—and throughout Europe more generally—has often been characterized as a “long summer.” Samuel Hynes, in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (1968), notes the ongoing tradition of referring to it also as “‘golden’—‘a golden afternoon’ or ‘a golden security’—or . . . as a ‘long garden party.’ And certainly it must have seemed like a long garden party on a golden afternoon—to those who were inside the garden” (4). David Fromkin has taken the notion of “Europe's last summer” as the title of his book about the war's outbreak.<sup>23</sup> This idyll was not always looked upon approvingly by those on the outside; George Orwell, in his lengthy autobiographical essay “Such, Such Were the Joys” (1952), describes the years leading up to 1914 in scathingly familiar terms, and his description is as serviceable as any:

It was the age when crazy millionaires in curly top-hats and lavender waistcoats gave champagne parties in rococo house-boats on the Thames, the age of diabolo and hobble skirts, the age of the “knot” in his grey bowler and cut-away coat, the age of *The Merry Widow*, Saki's novels, *Peter Pan* and *Where the Rainbow Ends*, the age when people talked about chocs and cigs and ripping and topping and heavenly, when they went for divvy week-ends at Brighton and had scrumptious teas at the Troc. From the whole decade before 1914 there seems to breathe forth a smell of the more vulgar, un-grown-up kind of luxury, a smell of brilliantine and *crème-de-menthe* and soft-centred chocolates—an

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<sup>23</sup> *Europe's Last Summer: Who Started the Great War in 1914?* (2004)

atmosphere, as it were, of eating everlasting strawberry ices on green lawns to the tune of the Eton Boating Song. (Orwell 441)

“The extraordinary thing,” Orwell nevertheless concludes, “was the way in which everyone took it for granted that his oozing, bulging wealth of the English upper and upper-middle classes would last for ever, and was part of the order of things. After 1918 it was never quite the same again” (441).

For all the venom in Orwell’s description, it was “never quite the same” even before 1918. Against this catalogue of indolence must be set the realities of ongoing class warfare and the threat of international revolution; the battle for women’s suffrage and liberation; the collapse of accepted Victorian notions of morality, art, science, and philosophy; the rising tide of anti-colonial sentiment and activity; and the frequent outbreak of “small wars” and popular uprisings—putting paid handily to the notion of 1815-1914 as a time of amiable peace between the powers and an idyll for their respective peoples.<sup>24</sup> Even the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his consort Sophie in June of 1914 could hardly have been called an unprecedented development; the Austrian-born Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico had been executed by revolutionaries in 1867, the Empress of Austria-Hungary had been murdered by an anarchist in 1898, and the pro-Austrian King and Queen of Serbia had been killed in a *coup d’état* conducted by Serbian officers in 1903.<sup>25</sup> The Austrian response to the latter was to begin

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<sup>24</sup> See Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela’s *Empires at War: 1911-1923* (2014) for a consideration of the First World War within a broader international and chronological context of conflict.

<sup>25</sup> An even more immediate example could be found in the death of King George I of Greece, shot dead in the streets of Thessaloniki by an anarchist in 1913. Nevertheless, the results of the recent Greco-Turkish War and the First Balkan War had been such that Greece was not a prominent contributor to the lingering Balkan powder-keg in spite of its geographical location.

planning a devastating program of punishment for Serbia—“a plan that if carried out threatened to lead to a dangerously wider conflict” (Fromkin 11). The possibility of a pan-continental war over the Serbia-Austria question, then, had been in the air for years by the time the summer of 1914 drew to a close.

Nor was it the only feature of the war’s outset that found curious and significant precedents. The previous century, already marked by revolution and violent upheaval, had become even more fraught with complications with the advent of the Franco-Prussian War (1870). It was thought, at the time, to have broken the strength of France as a military entity even while heralding the arrival of a powerful new cultural, military and political force in the form of the newly-united German Empire. It was a war to undo established narratives; declared by the French on dubious pretexts in July of 1870, the Franco-Prussian War would end in their defeat in a mere nine months, their emperor captured and their capital broken by siege. The squabbling German states drew together at the foot of the throne of Wilhelm I (and, perhaps more importantly, under the steady guiding hand of Otto von Bismarck), expanded their territory with the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, and embarked upon a new and (to many) thrilling project of nation-building predicated on prolific industry, aggressive commerce, and the dramatic expansion of a military power that had not previously been reckoned a factor in the continent’s affairs.

The immediate impact of the war upon the British was slight; they were not participants in it, and could not easily be said to have totally regretted the sight of rivals old and new at each others’ throats. Nevertheless, the war carried profound and troubling implications vis-à-vis the distribution of continental power, especially where Belgium was concerned. Prime Minister

Gladstone and his traditional foe Benjamin Disraeli found themselves in a rare moment of agreement in acknowledging their concern over the threat the war posed to Belgian neutrality, and even at this early stage in the worsening Anglo-Prussian relations it was an open question as to whether or not Britain would choose to intervene on Belgium's behalf. Gladstone and Disraeli both believed the answer to be "yes," and declared as much in speeches delivered in the House in August of 1870; on the heels of these announcements came fresh treaties concluded between Britain and the two continental combatants reaffirming their respect of Belgian neutrality, and any increase in British involvement in the conflict was averted (Lowe 233).

In spite of a lack of military involvement, the immediate cultural impact was a heightened interest in the matter of the British Empire's ability to defend herself both at home and in her colonies abroad. The Empire had been involved in no major war since the 1850s, and all of them on comfortably distant foreign soil at that. The hard lessons of the Crimean War, the Second Opium War and the Indian Rebellion had been learned, but British troops had not fought on the continent or defended the Isles themselves in living memory. The rising and presently justified threat of German military power fueled calls for an expansion of the British military on both land and sea. The total Prussian triumph and the subsequent creation of the unified German Empire had left many in England worried about the prospect of eventual war with this new power; George Tomkyns Chesney quickly wrote a novella on this subject, *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), in which a narrator fifty years in the future looks back with regret upon the successful German invasion of England and the price that was paid for a lack of English preparedness. The British Empire is dissolved; the Isles themselves are now a German province,

Canada has been ceded to the United States, and both India and Australia have been granted independence—a nightmarish vision, to be sure.

Many were convinced that a dramatic reconstruction of both the Army and the Navy would be required to meet a challenge such as this; one of the loudest voices in support of the cause was that of Field Marshal Frederick Roberts, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Roberts, who lent his considerable popular and political influence to the call for more recruits and better training in a series of public lectures. He also drew the ears of certain authors, well aware of the popular impact that timely newspaper articles or even works of fiction could have. The novelist William Le Queux, inspired by Lord Roberts' pleas, produced two novels on this theme that heavily echoed the note already sounded by Chesney—*The Great War in England in 1897* (1894) and *The Invasion of 1910* (1906). The first of the two offers an intriguing glimpse into the period's delicate diplomatic realities: the “great war” that transpires in the work sees England assailed by France and Russia, with the German Empire coming in as a staunch English ally. *The Invasion of 1910* offers a more familiar warning, however; it began appearing in serial in the *Daily Mail* in March of 1906, and took as its pretext the successful German invasion of England and the necessity of a mass popular uprising in response. The *Mail*, the flagship of the notoriously anti-German Lord Northcliffe's press empire, would prove to be a leader in prosecuting the British war effort from 1914 onward, and in Le Queux's work we see a prefiguring of many of the sensational stories of occupied Belgium and France that would appear in those pages as the war unfolded.

At the heart of the “invasion literature” genre is a rising sense of anxiety. The established order was threatened, old verities no longer held, and there was a very real danger that Britain would find herself facing a future in which she was not only equaled but eclipsed.

Erskine Childers, in his speculative espionage thriller *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), dramatically sets forth the ambivalent perspective of the British upon the German empire in the years leading up to the Great War:

I described her marvelous awakening in the last generation, under the strength and wisdom of her rulers; her intense patriotic ardour; her seething industrial activity, and, most potent of all, the forces that are molding modern Europe, her dream of a colonial empire, entailing her transformation from a land-power to a sea-power. Impreguably based on vast territorial resources which we cannot molest, the dim instincts of her people, not merely directed but anticipated by the genius of her ruling house, our great trade rivals of the present, our great naval rival of the future, she grows, and strengthens, and waits, an ever more formidable factor in the future of our delicate network of empire . . .

“And we aren’t ready for her,” Davies would say. (90)

This sense of Germany as a success story—but also an imminent threat—was prevalent in the pre-war era’s speculative fiction.

At the back of this German achievement and at the forefront of the German threat is the figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was taken by many, for good or ill, as the embodiment of his empire’s potential. In British popular opinion the Kaiser was frequently admired for his greatness even as he was castigated for his rhetorical flourishes and ominous deeds; in Lothar Reinemann’s words, “Wilhelm became a ‘representative individual’, whose personal characteristics were generalized to the entire German population” (469). These flames of suspicion and alienation were only fanned by the 1908 “*Telegraph* controversy,” which saw the

Kaiser sit for an unprecedentedly candid interview for publication in that paper. What began as an attempt to cement the bonds of Anglo-German friendship quickly degenerated into a sensational tirade, faithfully transcribed for the paper, in which the Kaiser denounced the English as being “mad, mad, mad as march hares,” and warned that Germany would not long continue to be patient in having her friendly intentions doubted (Clark 240). It was a watershed moment in the development of his popular image, and one that—in Britain, at least—he would never live down.

The complexities of his status are manifested in the speculative fiction produced in the years leading up to the war as well. Even as the heroes of Childers’ *Riddle of the Sands* race to thwart the Kaiser’s secret plans to invade England, they cannot help but call him “a splendid fellow” and “a man... who doesn't wait to be kicked, but works . . . for his country, and sees ahead” (89). In Le Queux’s *Invasion* the Kaiser is a distant figure, sending out bulletins and proclamations from various far-removed locations and relying upon his underlings for their execution. Even during the war, in works like John Buchan’s widely popular adventure novel *Greenmantle* (1916), the Kaiser (as encountered by the accomplished hero Richard Hannay) is an enigmatic and conflicted figure; he wears “a face of one who slept little and whose thoughts rode him like a nightmare” (90). “This man,” the narrating Hannay concludes, “the chief of a nation . . . paid the price in war for the gifts that had made him successful in peace. He had imagination and nerves, and the one was white hot and the others were quivering. I would not have been in his shoes for the throne of the Universe” (91). Looking ahead to another major character who will feature below with Hannay in Chapter II, the eponymous protagonist of H.G. Wells’ *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* (1916) lies locked in similar dreams and nightmares after the

assassination in Sarajevo; not wishing to disturb Britling's slumber further, Wells reaches out instead to "recover the states of mind of two such beings as the German Kaiser and his eldest son." "Here was the occasion," Wells continues,

. . .that would put them into the very forefront of history forever; this journalist emperor with the paralysed arm, this common-fibred, sly, lascivious son. It is impossible that they did not dream of glory over all the world, of triumphant processions, of a world-throne that would outshine Caesar's, of a godlike elevation, of acting Divus Caesar while yet alive. And being what they were they must have imagined spectators, and the young man, who was after all a young man of particularly poor quality, imagined no doubt certain women onlookers, certain humiliated and astonished friends, and thought of the clothes he would wear and the gestures he would make. The nickname his English cousins had given this heir to all the glories was the "White Rabbit." He was the backbone of the war party at court. And presently he stole bric-a-brac. That will help posterity to the proper values of things in 1914. (135-36)

This consistent emphasis upon placing the Kaiser, his character, his failings and his empire into the ongoing stream of history underscores some of the major concerns to be tackled in this and ensuing chapters. With such nuanced treatments as the above being largely overshadowed during the war years by caricatures of the Kaiser as a gorilla, a pig, a dachshund, a demon, or simply a venal and hideous man, it would not be until the distance afforded by the passage of many years that more sympathetic literary representations of the Kaiser would begin to appear in British fiction. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Death Voyage" was first published in the

*Saturday Evening Post* of September 28, 1929, before being reprinted the following month in Doyle's favored periodical, *The Strand*. It has ended up becoming a marginal work in every sense—as a piece of First World War literature, as a short story by Doyle, as a piece of alternate historical fiction—in spite of its unique character, and last saw print in an anthology released in 1982 with no greater purpose than to collect those short works of Doyle's that no one had yet bothered to anthologize.<sup>26</sup> In it, the Kaiser—though forced officially to abdicate and urged to flee to the Netherlands as he did in reality—decides to travel in disguise to the port at Kiel, convinces the navy's mutineers to stand with him, and takes the whole of the German fleet out to meet the combined Anglo-American squadron in a last battle to the death. “No ignoble suicide will end your Emperor's career,” he assures his astonished men; “there are nobler ways of dying, and it is for me to find them” (397).

This determination strikes a notable contrast between these “nobler ways of dying” and the sinister predations of the German U-Boat fleet, of which Doyle famously warned in his 1913 story, “Danger!”. These twin poles of opinion—one of warning, the other of almost wistful reflection—are both examples of the sort of war-focused writing that came to prominence during the war. As we shall see, however, it was of a rather different timbre than that which would follow in the war's footsteps.

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<sup>26</sup> *Uncollected Stories: The Unknown Conan Doyle*, edited by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green. The same editors would continue the *Unknown Conan Doyle* series in 1986 with *Letters to the Press*, a fascinating collection of Doyle's letters to the editors of various newspapers and magazines. For more on “The Death Voyage,” see my chapter in *Baptism of Fire: The Birth of the Modern British Fantastic in World War I* (2015).

### III: Words for Waging War

“If We Fail—Under that dispensation man will become once more the natural prey, body and goods, of his better-armed neighbour. Women will be the mere instrument for continuing the breed: the vessel of men’s lust and man’s cruelty; and labour will become a thing to be knocked on the head if it dares to give trouble, and worked to death if it does not. And from this order of life there will be no appeal, no possibility of escape. This is what the Hun means when he says he intends to impose German *kultur*—which is the German religion—upon the world.”

- Rudyard Kipling<sup>27</sup>

“It is sometimes necessary to lie damnably in the interests of the nation.”

- Hilaire Belloc<sup>28</sup>

Randal Marlin, in his recent survey of the history of propaganda, acknowledges that there is now “a strong association . . . between the word ‘propaganda’ and the ideas of lying and deception” (4). This has not always been the case; propaganda found its beginnings both as a practice and as a word in rhetorical (and often quite honest) efforts to persuade other parties of a position they might not currently hold. Now, however, the association of propaganda with lying has become firmly entrenched—so much so that “the word carries the taint of bloodshed” (Kingsbury 13), or at the very least a hint of infamy. While these two connotative poles allow for

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<sup>27</sup> From “Kipling’s Message,” a pamphlet published by W.H. Smith in the spring of 1918, based on talk given by Kipling at a meeting on War Aims in Folkestone (“Kipling’s Message” 88).

<sup>28</sup> Letter to G.K. Chesterton, 12 December 1917 (Qtd. in Buitenhuis 38).

little hope of reconciliation, it is worth considering how such a transition of associations came to be in the first place. Some of the blame must fall upon the role of propaganda on the home front both during and after the First World War.

Chief among the enduring tropes of home front existence during the war is the notion of inhabiting a propagandized community—that is, of a community in which the state uses various means, of varying breadth and severity, to influence public opinion, and in which these means are used upon what Arthur Ponsonby, in his influential anti-propaganda tract *Falsehood in War-Time*, has called the “regimented public.” This serves in part to necessitate that we speak of “a home *front*” rather than simply of “home;” the home front is a civilian space in a military shadow, and both language and experience jointly reflect this. This experience and its effects have been overwhelmingly remembered as negative, and Trudi Tate’s articulation of it in *Modernism, History and the First World War* may be taken as exemplary: “In Britain, almost no one who was touched by the Great War had any reliable information about it. Casualty figures were misrepresented; defeats were presented as victories; atrocity stories were invented; accounts of real suffering were censored; opposition to the war was suppressed” (43).

This catalogued oppression of a truth-starved public by a deceiving establishment does not adequately encompass the wide degree of complexity and even reciprocity involved in the propagandizing of an entire nation; indeed, as Heather Jones has provocatively put it in her recent survey of the state of First World War historiography, “civilians were more complicit and less coerced in waging the war than previously thought. They were not just keeping the home fires burning; they were setting Europe ablaze” (870). The view articulated by Tate attributes to the perpetrators seemingly omnipotent ability and illimitable bad faith even as it echoes, with

Ponsonby, a conviction that the general public is best understood as “poor ignorant people” who have long been prevented by official machinations from “realizing the true meaning of war” (Ponsonby 26). It seems difficult to take either of these evaluations as comprehensive, extreme as they are. The war’s average civilian participant surely existed somewhere on a spectrum between firebrand and sheep, rather than exclusively at either end.

While “propaganda” and “lies” have now become largely synonymous in common parlance, the people employed by organizations like the British War Propaganda Bureau would perhaps have been surprised to see their work subsequently tarred with such a broad brush. They often viewed it instead, as a post-war report from the Bureau attests, as an effort to acquaint the world with “the soul that lurks in the statistics” (Qtd. in Marlin 60). This should hardly be surprising; as the sociologist and propaganda theorist Jacques Ellul has rightly noted, the incorporation of truth into propaganda—or indeed the total foundation of a propaganda work upon accurate facts—can be the most persuasive approach of all (Ellul 52).

A complication that immediately confronts us when attempting to examine the shape of propaganda work before the outbreak of the First World War is that much of it was being produced unofficially, and rarely under the overt heading of “propaganda” to begin with. The notion of a set of state-level agencies whose sole purview was the conduct of public relations between the government, the people, and various international counterparts was a new one in Britain, and so too was the notion of subsuming such activities under the broad heading of “propaganda”. The war would change that, however, and would give the term significantly greater currency; as Marlin has noted, the entry for “propaganda” in the first post-war edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (12<sup>th</sup> ed., 1922) was long and detailed, while the pre-war 11<sup>th</sup>

edition (1911) had no entry for it at all (Marlin 55). The 1922 entry extends across several pages, and makes frequent reference to the British propaganda efforts that grew to prominence during the war. Nevertheless, propaganda in both word and deed had already enjoyed a long history.

The existence of the sort of persuasive writing now commonly described as “propaganda” can be traced back to the days of the ancients, whether in the form of Herodotus’ histories, Pericles’ funeral oration, Cicero’s speeches in the senate, or any number of other relevant examples. The origin of the standard usage of the word “propaganda” can be found in the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622—an office focused on the propagation of the faith in the New World and the refutation of heresy in the Old (Jowett and O’Donnell 2). That this office and its practices emerged while the Reformation was at its height suggests that at least some of the negative feeling attached to the word may find itself rooted in Protestant suspicions; its original position within a project of colonial evangelization is no doubt also a factor.

Whatever the word’s origins and initial uses, the persuasive practices it has come to comprise continued unabated throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The exemplars included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “propaganda” taken from sources published between 1700 and 1914 are almost wholly neutral in their tone, even when used to substantiate the modern, negative definition of the word in terms of the “systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view” (“Propaganda”). Nineteenth-century literary and political works show their authors reaching towards a more coherent future genre, with world

events, like the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, making such work a necessity. As the century drew to a close, the initial seeds of the First World War's propaganda practices began to be sewn.

A working definition of "propaganda" is necessary before proceeding further, but in attempting to develop one there are two problems with which we are confronted. The first is the brute fact of a multiplicity of existing definitions, both across times and across disciplines; "propaganda" as a term was used in some subtly but significantly different fashions during and after the war than it is now, and even now does not always necessarily mean the same thing depending upon who is using it.

The political scientist Harold Lasswell, writing specifically of the practices the war occasioned, suggests that propaganda is "the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment of the organism" (4); Edward Bernays, often hailed as the father of modern public relations, defines it rather as "the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses" (9)—but insists that this manipulation is both necessary and beneficial. Jacques Ellul, writing in the decades following the Second World War, tentatively describes propaganda as "a set of methods employed by an organized group" to "bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization" (Ellul 61). This unity and incorporation depend on propaganda methods for the creation of a set of "myths" that then inform the masses' thought.

Philip M. Taylor (*Munitions* 6), an especially prolific propaganda theorist, conceives of propaganda as “the *deliberate* attempt to persuade people to think and behave *in a desired way*,” which is “*intended to benefit those organizing the process*” (6; original emphasis)—but, like Bernays, he also acknowledges that the fact it might be of benefit to those doing the persuading does not necessarily imply that they are wrong, immoral or deceptive in so attempting to persuade. Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, in their influential textbook on propaganda and persuasion, define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (7). Marlin takes a more negative stance yet, defining propaganda as “the organized attempt through communications to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual’s adequately informed, rational, reflective judgment” (12). Characteristic of all of these varying definitions is the presence of manipulation—but with considerably different moral and intellectual ramifications from articulation to articulation.

The second problem proceeds from the first: much of the variance that now exists between the ways in which “propaganda” is used as a term is less a matter of differing definition than it is of differing judgment. In the 1910s and 1920s it was still possible to have spoken with indifference or even with pride of having been a propagandist during the war, or of propaganda as simply being a tool or tactic like any other that could be used properly or improperly—as just another human endeavour that could be conducted in competence or recklessness. Consider George Creel’s memoirs of his career as director of the American Committee on Public Information (*How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing*

*Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe*, 1920), or Sir Campbell Stuart's memoirs of his service as deputy-director of Lord Northcliffe's propaganda operations against enemy countries (*Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign*, 1920). A review of the latter work in the *Spectator* (Sept. 3, 1920) drily notes that it shows "that the propagandists' first and chief difficulty was in determining what they should propagate" (23), but nowhere in the same review will the reader find any suggestion that propaganda was *de facto* perfidious or that the men and women of Crewe House were wrong to have engaged in it. Stuart offers his own definition of "propaganda" in the pages of these memoirs. At its most basic level, he writes, propaganda "is the presentation of a case in such a way that others may be influenced" (1). Its first object is the "creation of a favourable 'atmosphere'" in which this influence may be exercised, and, to attain this "atmosphere," there are two rules to which Stuart advises strict adherence: "First of all axioms of propaganda is that only truthful statements be made. Secondly, there must be no conflicting arguments, and this can only be ensured by close co-operation of all propagandists and by strict adherence to the policy defined. A false step may possibly be irretrievable" (2). In this we meet with a claim that must arouse either surprise or scepticism, and very likely both: that the successful exercise of propaganda demands "that only truthful statements be made." We will consider this problem in greater depth in the pages that follow.

It is true that the possibility of using the term in a spirit of neutral academic precision does persist in some quarters; Philip M. Taylor introduces his subject in *Munitions of the Mind* by insisting that "there is no real point . . . in making moral judgments concerning whether propaganda is a 'good' or a 'bad' thing; it merely is" (*Munitions* 8; original emphasis). That

moral judgment, he says rather, should be reserved (if it is to be exercised at all) for the causes and ends to which these propaganda methods are deployed. This, anyway, is one possible academic approach to “propaganda,” but it is not necessarily universal—Celia Malone Kingsbury, in *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (2010), offers a countervailing view that better encapsulates how the term now tends to be approached:

Recently it has become the habit of literary or social critics to refrain from making ethical judgments about historical practices, and thus the contemporary habit of viewing propaganda as a neutral phenomenon informs many studies on the subject. . . . Whatever the specific goal, using emotions, including fear, to guide thought, or to prevent it, is antithetical to the idea of intellectual freedom and self-governance. . . . [T]he word carries the taint of bloodshed, a taint it should retain. Our desire, then, to interrogate the power and potential dangers of propaganda necessarily keeps that taint at the forefront of academic study.

(Kingsbury 13)

One need not look hard or far to find examples of this taint being kept at the forefront. Kingsbury goes on to further characterize propaganda as “the obliteration of intellect” (14); Trudi Tate describes it as “an act of betrayal” and “institutional lying” (*Modernism* 47-48); Peter Buitenhuis as “a sacrifice . . . of detachment and integrity” (xviii). In short, in many academic circles—as in common parlance—to call something “propaganda” is tacitly to register disapproval.

With all of this in mind, we may usefully and synthetically describe propaganda as the following: acts, whether abstract or actual, that are calculated to change the target’s mind

about a given subject and to overcome the target's resistance (reasonable or otherwise) to such a change. This resistance can be informed and ethical—or not; these acts can be open, honest, and respectable—or not; the desired opinion can be factual and wholesome—or not. Either way, we are able to speak first of these methods in a spirit of analysis rather than of moral judgment.

As we have seen, and regardless of our formal definition, there are considerable complications which arise in using the term “propaganda” to describe many of the things being produced by both authors and political agents during the First World War. It is absolutely the case that they conceived of themselves as propagandists, and willingly worked for agencies unironically and unambiguously dedicated to the production of propaganda, but not all of their work was undertaken at the behest of the Bureau or of any organization like it. While the long-classified *Schedule of Wellington House Literature* (1918) offers a comprehensive list of works commissioned by the Bureau for publication by various otherwise independent publishing houses like Nelson, Hodder & Stoughton and so on, it barely scratches the surface of the body of war-writing released in Britain during the war itself.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps more significantly, what was meant by “propaganda” in 1914 through 1918 is not necessarily what is meant by “propaganda” now. Much of the misapprehension of the dimensions, meaning, intent and efficacy of the material written during the war is a result of

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<sup>29</sup> The *Schedule* itself may be seen (with some effort) at the Imperial War Museum, though the author has been unable to consult the original for financial reasons; Jane Potter provides an excellent partial summary of its contents in “For Country, Conscience and Commerce: Publishers and Publishing, 1914-18,” which can be found in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History* (eds. Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, 2007), and offers an Appendix detailing the full list of participating publishers and the number of their works in *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print* (2008). It is to these summaries that I am indebted.

the ways in which the popularly accepted definition of “propaganda” has shifted in the intervening decades—particularly where the Second World War is concerned. The work of the propaganda directives under someone like Paul Joseph Goebbels, marked as they were by every awful stain of deceit, invention and complete fabrication, is not necessarily the same as that undertaken by the propagandists working for Wellington House from 1914 onwards. The very word “propaganda,” in spite of being one that was unambiguously claimed by those working for Wellington House and other agencies, is no longer entirely appropriate as a descriptor.

That the word “propaganda” should carry with it such an as yet inextricable sense of intentional falsehood and predatory deception—the “taint of bloodshed” that Kingsbury described—is historically interesting, but not valid in the sense of providing a useful description of anything. For too long the study of “propaganda” has been conducted in a key of moral outrage rather than of scholarly abstraction; for too long the word has been taken to be synonymous with the falsehood and predatory deception noted above; for too long it has simply been accepted that “propaganda” was a dominating and oppressive force in British public opinion during the First World War rather than a dynamic, reactive, subordinate, and sincere one.

In short, it is problematic to view the British “propaganda” of the First World War through the definitional and connotative lenses of how “propaganda” has come to be understood in the light of the things done by Joseph Goebbels, Joachim von Ribbentrop or William Joyce (a.k.a. “Lord Haw-Haw”) during the Second World War. It was comparable in

being called “propaganda” only, and perhaps in being produced by state-run agencies; in terms of its intent, function, impact and eventual consequence it is not easily comparable at all.

With the entry of Great Britain into the war on August 4<sup>th</sup> of 1914, the enormous political, economic, military and infrastructural consequences were attended by a burst of sharpened rhetoric. This rhetoric was paradoxically both varied and uniform; while public figures differed as to whether the advent of the war constituted a tidal wave, a bursting dam, a great crusade, an approaching storm, a plunge into the abyss, a welcome purgative, or the extinguishing of the lights of Europe, all were in agreement that it constituted a significant and likely permanent change to the moral, political and cultural landscape. “Our petty social divisions and barriers have been swept away,” Rudyard Kipling declared in a September 1914 speech at the Brighton Dome; “all the interests of our life of six weeks ago are dead” (Kipling, *Uncollected* 75).

This transition into a new and more dangerous world, however, required correspondingly new approaches, methods and priorities. The war’s onset saw the creation of a variety of new agencies, committees and offices dedicated to the maintenance of a dynamic public relations campaign. Never before in British history had so many official groups been given such a varied portfolio of responsibilities in this direction; early examples of such groups included the Parliamentary War Aims Committee, the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, the Topical Committee for War Films, and the Official Press Bureau. These groups operated under the distant hand of the War Office, co-ordinating with one another over the promotion of British war aims, the recruitment of soldiers, and the creation of patriotic art. They were joined

in this by a variety of unofficial, popular organizations that were put together to support various aspects of the war effort.

The works put out by the literary and prose propagandists, whatever else they may be, are arguments—they propose something about the world and assert that it is true. They do this in a variety of ways, and with a variety of motives, but it is in this quality that we find the most useful comparative counterpart to the merits widely recognized in the existing canonical poetry and memoirs. The trench poet near Bapaume and the propagandist in Buckingham Gate are both, in their works, asserting a vision of the war, its meaning, and its consequences; they are doing so seriously, and with great emphasis on what they believe to be at stake; they are doing so in the face of strong attempted counter-perspectives—the propagandists against their opposite numbers in other lands, the poets (rightly or wrongly) against the propagandists themselves.

All of this variety of form, function and origin supports the idea that a broad characterization of propaganda as “lying” or “deception” is simply inadequate, as is the tendency to approach the subject from a position of arch moral critique. For a more in-depth view of the complex relationship between propaganda and truth value during the war, let us now turn to a history of British propaganda work and to two important case studies—one an example of rhetorical persuasion, one of embellished fact. By examining the contrast between these approaches to the same issue—that is, the issue of purported German *Schrecklichkeit*, or “beastliness” against civilian targets in Belgium and France—we may witness the diversity of intentions, approaches and results that were the features of the war’s propaganda. While unsubstantiated or wholly invented propaganda claims did enjoy some currency during the

war—as in the cases of the “Crucified Canadian” of Ypres, the Bowmen of Mons, or the purported German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*, or “corpse factory”—the response particularly to civilian-focused atrocity claims merits a far more nuanced examination.

The origins of what would eventually become the Ministry of Information were unremarkable, to say the least;<sup>30</sup> David Lloyd George and Charles F.G. Masterman happened to fall into conversation over a game of golf, and the subject turned to the lack of an established British propaganda bureau to counter the work already being undertaken in Germany and elsewhere. Lloyd George asked Masterman to “look into it, Charlie, and see what can be done” (Messinger 34), and so Charlie did. Making use of the offices he already had at Wellington House in Buckingham Gate, the home of the National Insurance Commission,<sup>31</sup> Masterman spearheaded the creation of the War Propaganda Bureau—an organization dedicated to the production of propaganda materials for distribution in allied and neutral countries. The

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<sup>30</sup> For expanded accounts of the Bureau’s inception and development, see Sanders and Taylor (1982), Buitenhuis (1987), Taylor (1993), Gregory (2009) or Marlin (2013).

<sup>31</sup> The National Insurance Act had been given royal assent in December of 1911; a limited precursor of the modern National Health Service, the Act mandated state-sponsored insurance against injury or illness suffered by waged workers during the course of their labour. Masterman’s involvement with the Commission had been considerable, and in many ways an illustrative prefiguring of his imminent career as a propaganda director. Lloyd George had appointed Masterman the Commission’s chair in 1911 during the lengthy period of canvassing for popular and political support; Masterman’s duties were varied, but his main task was to sway popular and state opinion in favour of the Act through whatever means were available to him. To this end, he organized a series of public lectures, distributed pamphlets and broadsides, secured the endorsements of celebrated public figures, and worked with various newspapers and magazines for the promotion of an appropriate literature (Messinger 28–29). Portentously, Lloyd George had argued in his Budget Speech of 1909 that the implementation of such an insurance scheme was not only a humanitarian necessity, but also an international one – Germany had offered such coverage to its waged labourers since 1884, and, Lloyd George insisted, “[we should be] putting ourselves in this field on a level with Germany; we should not emulate them only in armaments.” As the events of the fall of 1914 gathered steam, other venues for such emulation soon presented themselves.

Commission's offices were chosen for the cover they provided—nobody was likely to find anything odd in the constant coming-and-going of clerks, officials, and such from a place already teeming with them.

One of the first priorities of the newly formed Bureau was to secure the participation of the empire's most prominent authors, academics and public intellectuals in the production of a manifesto detailing the British position on the war. Consequently, on 2 Sept 1914, Wellington House played host to one of the largest meetings of established literary figures in the nation's history. Rudyard Kipling and Sir Arthur Quiller Couch were unable to attend owing to prior engagements (though they each sent messages indicating their willingness to contribute to the proposed project), but around the table sat William Archer, Sir James M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, A. C. Benson, Robert Bridges, Hall Caine, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Hope Hawkins, Maurice Hewlett, W. J. Locke, E. V. Lucas, J. W. Mackail, John Masefield, A. E. W. Mason, Gilbert Murray, Sir Henry Newbolt, Sir Gilbert Parker, Sir Owen Seaman, George Trevelyan, H. G. Wells, and Israel Zangwill (Masterman, Lucy 272) – a host of prominent literary figures as varied and representative in some ways as it was uniform and limited in others.

One notes the absence of women—the energetic involvement of Mary Augusta (aka Mrs. Humphry) Ward, among others, would not be secured until later—and of any authors likely to offer a dissenting view as to the advisability of Britain's entry into the war. George Bernard Shaw was explicitly barred from the meeting on the grounds of being unreliable; indeed, his publication in the *New Statesman* of his lengthy essay "Common Sense About the War" two months later would draw vigorous editorial response from Arnold Bennett and

others—and less eloquent suggestions in the popular press that Shaw be hanged for treason.<sup>32</sup> W.B. Yeats declined an invitation (from Sir Gilbert Murray) to be involved in the drafting of the manifesto; “I cannot see,” he declared, “who this document is going to influence. It has every sign of its origin ‘drawn up to include as many people as possible’ that is to say to be something which nobody will wholeheartedly believe, and which looks all its insincerity. If a manifesto is to move anybody the man who made it must at least believe in it” (Webb 35). This question of “belief,” where propaganda writing is concerned, would become a central one to those authors who undertook it.

The assembled authors met at Masterman’s behest to discuss the prospects for their involvement in a new state-run enterprise aimed at shaping popular allied and neutral opinion abroad. “Abroad,” at least, was to be the Bureau’s official jurisdiction—the heavy focus on an American audience and the fact of most of the Bureau’s works being available in English (and published by English publishing houses) nevertheless ensured that these works were both accessible and popular on the British home front as well. To this end, he asked the assembled authors if they would be willing to produce a variety of literary material at the Bureau’s request, but only complicatedly at its direction; the usual practice was for each author to have his own authority when it came to the actual content and style of the work produced, though it was often done to the satisfaction of prompts passed down from the Bureau’s offices. Almost

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<sup>32</sup> It was not all bad, however; Shaw also received so many letters of support for his opinions in “Common Sense” that he drafted a special postcard to be sent out in thanks for them in lieu of so many personalized replies.

all of those present agreed, and the earliest examples of this new literary front began to appear shortly afterwards.<sup>33</sup>

An immediate complication arises when it comes to how to proceed. Owing to the secrecy involved and the reticence of many participating authors to speak of the matter openly even in private letters, it is now quite difficult to accurately distinguish between a literary work produced “for the Bureau” and a literary work merely produced by an author with a Bureau affiliation. For example, we cannot really *know* whether or not Kipling published “For All We Have and Are” or if Binyon published “For the Fallen” because they were asked to by the Bureau, or because they would have written such works anyway and simply wished to see them in print. The latter is certainly true; Kipling, particularly, had made a career of publishing just that sort of poem by the dozen prior to his involvement with the Bureau. In a sense it does not particularly matter; these are the sort of works that were (and are) routinely described as “propaganda,” and the fact that it is now difficult to cast this sort of distinction is more evocative of the many blurred lines involved in propaganda production that demand to be

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Hardy appears to have been the only exception. He refused to officially commit to the Bureau’s program, but was also more than willing to produce patriotic poetry under his own steam in spite of his ambivalence towards the war. Many of his wartime poems can be found in the “Poems of War and Patriotism” section of his *Moments of Vision* (1917), and their ordering is suggestive of the shifting perspective on the war that many of those who experienced it felt. Poems positioned earlier in the sequence, like “A Call to National Service” and “Men Who March Away,” inhabit the same sort of patriotic and hortative space as poems written by a Kipling or a Binyon in 1914, but the section concludes with “I Looked Up From My Writing”—a piece as evocatively bleak as any to be found in Hardy’s catalogue, and very much more in the vein of “Drummer Hodge” than Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier.” In it, the author is interrupted from his task of writing a poem by the Moon, who speaks through his window to remind him that the war is ending lives even as he writes—whether by broken bodies or by broken hearts. The poet is implicated in his own lack of involvement, but also in his opportunism; this sense of shame at “writing [poems] / In a world of such a kind” manifests itself through the writing of yet another poem.

recognized than disruptive of our ability to recognize them. It is, in short, illustrative of how uniformly “propaganda” has come to be used as a pejorative term when we see it being applied to works that transgress against a mood rather than having been produced as propaganda as such.

Whatever the case may be, one of Masterman’s first acts with the Bureau was to produce a strong and visible example of the British literary establishment’s consensus about the facts of the war and its causes, and—in an early manifestation of the War Propaganda Bureau’s priorities—the American audience was felt to be the most important and immediate one for such a demonstration. Consequently, two weeks after the first meeting at Wellington House, a report appeared in the *New York Times* (18 September 1914) under the headline “BRITISH AUTHORS CONDEMN GERMANY,” providing a transcription of an “authors’ declaration” that had been signed the previous day and sent to the *Times* by special cable. In it, fifty-three of the leading figures in the world of British literature signed their names to a document declaring that, in spite of “some of them having been for years ardent champions of good-will toward Germany, and many of them extreme advocates of peace, [they] are nevertheless agreed that Great Britain could not without dishonor have refused to take part in the present war” (“BRITISH” 3). The declaration goes on to speak of the “calculated and ingenious ferocity” of the German invasion of Belgium, and of how this invasion obliged Great Britain and her allies to intervene. Consequently, they conclude,

Whatever the world destiny of Germany may be, we in Great Britain are ourselves conscious of a destiny and a duty. That destiny and duty, alike for us and for all the English-speaking race, call upon us to uphold the rule of common

justice between civilized peoples, to defend the rights of small nations, and to maintain the free and law-abiding ideals of Western Europe against the rule of “Blood and Iron” and the domination of the whole Continent by a military caste.

(3)

The document warrants our attention for a number of reasons.

The first and most obvious is that of just whose signatures are included. Much as was the case with the initial meeting at Wellington House earlier that month, the landscape of British literature that the list of signatories suggests is marked by some notable peaks of presence and valleys of absence that set it at odds with how we now conceive of the period. The attendees of the Wellington House meeting are included on the list, but added to their number are the likes of Rudyard Kipling (at last), the popular historian and essayist Hilaire Belloc, the adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard, the humourist Jerome K. Jerome, the poet Laurence Binyon, and the Oxford academic A.C. Bradley. Also notable is the much expanded presence of women writers and academics, including May Sinclair, Mary Augusta Ward, Margaret L. Woods, Flora Annie Steel and Jane Ellen Harrison.

The declaration proved a popular document, and the following month saw a full-page reprint of it in the same paper under the heading “FAMOUS BRITISH AUTHORS DEFEND ENGLAND’S WAR” (5). Added to the original transcript of the document is a facsimile of the authors’ signatures, as well as a full list of those involved and short descriptions for the American reader of where each author stood in relation to British literature as a whole.<sup>34</sup> Some

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<sup>34</sup> This remarkable document found its counterpart a few days later—23 October 1914—with the publication of the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three,” a German counter-declaration signed by ninety-three leading German intellectuals, artists, and academics in proclamation of the

of these descriptions are revealing in their quirkiness. J.M. Barrie is “famous for his sympathetic studies of Scotch life and his fantastic comedies;” G.K. Chesterton for “defend[ing] orthodox thought by unorthodox methods;” Israel Zangwill as “interpreter of the modern Jewish spirit.” Hall Caine is tersely described as “one of the most popular of contemporary novelists,” while Thomas Hardy is “generally considered to be the greatest living English novelist.” Rudyard Kipling “needs no introduction to people who read the English language,” while the Australian Gilbert Murray must be thoroughly contextualized as “Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University since 1908, editor and translator of Greek classics, perhaps the greatest Greek scholar now living.” H.G. Wells is known as the “author of *Tono Bungay* and *Ann Veronica*”—but not as the author of *The War of the Worlds*, *The Time Machine* or *The Invisible Man*. John Masefield is “known chiefly for his long poems of life among the English poor,” giving some hint of a future career as Poet Laureate that would last for thirty-seven years. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to his likely dismay, is characterized simply as the “creator of ‘Sherlock Holmes’.”

In all, the list reveals a complex variety of literary and academic voices which might otherwise have found very little in common with one another. This unity of vision and of

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unequivocal injustice of the claims being made against Germany and her armies in the field. Of note is the fashion in which this manifesto counters Allied claims not by repudiating their foundations, but rather by challenging their interpretations; thus, for example, no effort whatever is made to deny that the German Army had indeed conducted mass executions of Belgian civilians, or that it had burned cities like Louvain and Dinant as reprisals—the manifesto says rather that these acts were perfectly justified, and would certainly be done again at the first sign of them being necessary. The manifesto takes several less-expected turns as it unfolds, concluding ominously by accusing the Allies of “inciting Mongolians and Negroes against the white race” (Professors 285). Inquiries conducted after the war revealed that a majority of the manifesto’s signatories regretted their involvement in its publication, with many having signed it without even knowing what it was to say (“NINETY-THREE” 7). Notable signatories included Max Planck, Fritz Haber, Paul Ehrlich, Siegfried Wagner (the composer’s son), Nobel-Prize-winning author Gerhart Hauptmann, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Roentgen, Ernst Haeckel, Richard Voss and Felix Weingartner.

persuasive rhetoric in denunciation of Germany would not entirely endure until the war's end, but it nevertheless exemplifies the rhetorical spirit of the British establishment and reading public in 1914.

As the fervor of the Authors' Declaration makes clear, the role of the German invasion of Belgium in the autumn of 1914 was an important and oft-cited *casus belli* for the British Empire. The putative German violation of the 1839 Treaty of London—famously scorned by German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg as “a scrap of paper”—had been enough to generate international uproar, but the actions of the German army during its invasion and subsequent occupation of Belgium provoked further outrage. Reports began to flood in from displaced Belgian refugees and international observers testifying to harsh German responses to the alleged actions of partisans, or *francs-tireurs*, including wide-scale pillage, rape, internment, deportation, and even mass execution.

The response to these reports was immediate and sensational, with authors, cartoonists, clergy, statesmen and journalists—especially in Britain, which would end up housing some 250,000 Belgian refugees during the course of the war—very quickly adapting and disseminating (and sometimes exaggerating) these stories. The riot of furious rumour surrounding such events provoked more official responses, with various government agencies both within Belgium and abroad conducting investigations into the matter. The reports, white books, studies and other documents compiled by these investigations make for interesting (if often disturbing) reading.

A particularly relevant example is that of the 1915 *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, known in shorthand as the *Bryce Report*. The Committee was chaired by

Viscount James Bryce, a distinguished jurist and academic who had until 1913 been the British Ambassador to the United States. Under the appointment of Prime Minister Asquith, the Committee was ordered “to consider and advise on the evidence collected on behalf of His Majesty’s Government as to the outrages alleged to have been committed by German troops during the present War” (Bryce 2). The Committee was granted the authority to conduct interviews with Belgian refugees and Allied soldiers and to examine captured German documents, with the aim of evaluating the conduct of the German army in Belgium since the initial invasion.

The first published version of the *Report* includes several dozen pages of witness statements drawn from the testimony of those interviewed by the Committee, and closes by offering the four conclusions that I paraphrase below:

- I. That there were in parts of Belgium deliberate and systematic mass-executions of civilians.
- II. That the conduct of the war more generally had resulted in the needless deaths of large numbers of civilian men, women and children.
- III. That looting, burning, and other acts of destruction were carried out with the knowledge and by the orders of the officers of the Germany Army, and that these acts typically held no military necessity.
- IV. That the rules and usages of war were frequently broken, with particular emphasis placed upon the killing of wounded and prisoners, and upon the use of civilians as human shields during an advance under fire. (Bryce 60-61)

Each of these conclusions was in accord with those reached by Belgian and international commissions investigating the claims on site, and each has now also been confirmed by new archival research—most notably of recovered German sources. In short, in spite of the *Bryce Report* having become (as we shall see below) almost a byword for propagandistic deception, the main thrust of its argument has turned out to be substantially correct (Horne and Kramer 33).

To understand how this shift of opinion could have occurred, it must first be admitted that the *Report* was not without its flaws. It places a greater emphasis upon the mistreatment of women and children than this mistreatment's actual relative frequency would properly warrant, and the figures provided as to the number of civilians executed in this or that event are often slightly off, as one might imagine to be likely when being investigated during the course of an international war. Some of its figures were actually too low, in retrospect, as in its accounting of the mass-executions at Tamines, Dinant and Aarschot (Horne and Kramer 233).

Its main failing, in Horne and Kramer's view, was in choosing to include the more sensational anecdotes in the published version of the *Report* rather than those which, while more subdued and less graphic, were also concomitantly more believable. The historical consequence of this has been that the *Report* and its anecdotes have been conflated in their relative trustworthiness, and the *Report* has thus become something of a *bête noire* for those who describe the propaganda of the period as being an enterprise of naked deceit. Arthur Ponsonby was terribly skeptical of the report and all its contents, while the inter-war propaganda critic H.C. Peterson was prepared, incredibly, to denounce it as "itself one of the worst atrocities of the war" (56).

In all, some 6,000 Belgian civilians were shot, stabbed, burned alive, or otherwise executed during the course of the German invasion and subsequent occupation, with another 1.5 million uprooted from their homes and turned into refugees. Their stories percolated through friendly nations shocked to receive these refugees in such numbers, and it is no surprise that they were seized upon as further justification for the Entente powers' intervention. That these events were popularly exaggerated or politically useful does not negate their reality, however, and it must be acknowledged that when home front authors spoke in denunciation of German atrocities committed in Belgium, they were substantially justified in doing so.

The career of the literary propagandist during the First World War offered numerous occasions for reflection and anxiety. "Could anything be more awful," asks Hall Caine in *The Drama of Three Hundred & Sixty-Five Days*, "than to have to ask oneself some day in the future, awakening in the middle of the night perhaps, after rivers of blood have been shed, 'Did I do right after all?'" (59). This was a question that would require an answer; to what, ultimately, was the author most loyal? Was it to the truth? To "be of as great probity and honesty as a priest of God," as Ernest Hemingway would later describe it?<sup>35</sup> Was it to personal conviction and belief? Or was it to the war effort, with other matters falling by the wayside by comparison? "It is sometimes necessary to lie damnably in the interests of the nation," wrote Hilaire Belloc, and this is a necessity that many of his contemporaries seem to have embraced, even if only hesitantly. Still others put themselves in the service of this cause without compromising upon their dedication to what they believed to be true—whether because they

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<sup>35</sup> From his scathing Introduction to *Men at War* (1942); xiii.

embraced the cause wholeheartedly, like Kipling or Buchan, or because they refused to allow their principles to be pushed beyond their limits, like H.G. Wells or Ford Madox Hueffer.

These complexities and ambiguities are enlightening rather than obfuscating; while the scope of the war's British propaganda is vast and varied, its literary manifestations are of particular interest in gauging certain aspects of the public and popular response to the war and the formation of cultural memory. Propaganda production encompasses a series of negotiations between the state, its chosen representatives and disseminators, and the various groups that are in the intended target of that propaganda; it is not simply a top-down imposition of ideas by one group upon another. In the case of British literary propaganda in particular we see a complex set of variables at work, with the reputations of noted public thinkers, the successes and failures of the publishing market, the need to rebut enemy claims (whether implicitly or explicitly), and the desires of the reading public all coming into contact with one another.

The study of propaganda is likely to continue to be marked by complexity. With ever-growing and justified concerns about the place of corporate and political sponsorship in journalism, in school textbooks, and in other parts of the public sphere, "propaganda" will remain a useful—if fraught—phrase with which to assail and dismiss certain kinds of speech and thought.

In terms of the First World War, written propaganda lends itself particularly well to analysis from a literary perspective: it is creative, it is rhetorical, it is typically didactic, and it is even sometimes wholly fictional or at least attended by fiction. In short, it deals in stories, and dwells heavily in the realm of the war's "Myth" as articulated by Samuel Hynes in *A War*

*Imagined*—that is, the vast majority of it is “not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it” (xi). It differs from Hynes’ articulation in being in many ways the antithesis of the *sort* of literature that his explication of “the Myth” is meant to encompass—that is, the poems and memoirs that have so powerfully shaped the cultural imagination—but it bears many of the same critical features. That portion of it that is pure invention may easily be analyzed in rhetorical and literary terms, and even those examples which instead present glossed versions of factual events have in them so much of the quality of euhemerism that they may perhaps be examined with some of the same tools that would be utilized in a historical-critical reading of the *Iliad*, Plutarch’s *Lives*, or the *Song of Roland*. The difference of mythic status where the two sorts of literature are concerned can be found in the fact that many of the propagandistic works began as mythic, with the intention of reshaping the reader’s view of reality, while many of the poems and memoirs began with the intention of being unsparingly authentic and precise, only accreting into a “Myth” afterward.

Regardless of this mythic status, those works of propaganda which were not conducted in a spirit of wholesale invention and which did provide reasonable persuasive rhetoric or good-faith accounts of actual events remain an important area of study as well. It is insufficient to persist in viewing them as bearing “a taint of bloodshed,” or as having been deliberately deployed as deception to trick an unwilling populace into supporting the war. As an examination of the period’s literature and popular art will show, there was already a will—the war’s propaganda, if anything, instead provided the way.

## CHAPTER 2:

# Writing the War: Historiography, Literary Scholarship, and Literature of the First World War, 1914-1922

### Introduction

In the following chapter, I offer (in Section I) a critical overview of this generation's historiography of the war, describing the fashion in which various authors and scholars attempted to turn an ongoing event into an historical one before it had even concluded. The challenges this posed to the writing of history and the many problems these historical texts and approaches exhibited will be considered in depth, with particular focus on how their deficiencies would set the stage for the wave of writing that was shortly to follow during the "War Books Boom" described in Chapters 3 and 4. Of particular interest in this period is the tendency of literary authors to assume the duties of historians, and consequently special attention will be paid to John Buchan's 24-volume *Nelson's History of the War* (1914-1919), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 6-volume *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (1916-1920), and Sir Henry Newbolt's various volumes on the war's naval history.

Section II of Chapter 2 offers a similar overview of the generation's literary scholarship as it was directed at war-related writings. The war occasioned an enormous output of literary material, and this tidal wave of poems, short stories, plays, novels and other works found an eager audience. The primary focus of this section is on early attempts to craft a coherent canon of war writing in the face of both ongoing debates over just what constituted "war literature"

to begin with and a continuous stream of material actually being produced. I consider certain popular anthologies of the period, such as H.B. Elliott's *Lest We Forget: A War Anthology* (1915) and E.B. Osborn's *The Muse in Arms* (1917), paying special attention to the ways in which editors justified their choices of inclusion.

Literature written during the war was no less varied and prolific than that which would succeed it, and Section III of Chapter 2 consequently examines the British literary scene during the war itself. The primary focus is upon the period's popular fictional engagements with the war, and these are considered through the lens of three distinct characters and the "types" they represent: John Buchan's dashing adventurer Richard Hannay, H.G. Wells' sensitive author Mr. Britling, and the ubiquitous infantryman Tommy Atkins. In the works from which Hannay and Britling originated, and in those—like John Hay Beith's *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915) or the stories of "Sapper"—that tell the continuing story of Tommy Atkins, we can see the various ways in which the British reading public encountered the war through the sometimes illuminating, sometimes obscuring lens of fiction. It must be conceded at once that these three do not encompass every prominent character type in the war's literature—they exclude, most notably, the foreign spy, the nurse, and the public-school boy. I have excluded these types for the moment for several reasons: the spy because he is foreign, the school-boy because he does not demonstrate the kind of agency in the war that concerns me here, and the nurse because the most prominent narratives involving her—such as Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet* (1930), or Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933)—would not appear until the war's aftermath.

### I. Historiography, 1914-1922

The First World War entered history from the moment it commenced, and a corresponding writing of its history began along much the same schedule in Britain as it did elsewhere among the participating combatant powers. That the war was neither over nor likely to be so any time soon did not stop the popular historical press from beginning to turn out chronicles of its events. As Keith Grieves has rightly noted, “the need for historical writings which bolstered opinion in support of the nation's war effort was a higher priority than the publication of judicious scholarly works” (“Early” 15); as a consequence, the war's overt historicization from its outset was also marked by a curious a-historicity—a sense that all attempts to offer such chronicles were by nature provisional, and that these attempts were being made in full awareness and anticipation of their own eventual futility.

Those looking to write the war's history as it unfolded did so in a number of ways. There was a booming trade in monographs both reflective and predictive, written by authors with varying degrees of expertise in the matters at hand. Lord Ernest Hamilton's *The First Seven Divisions* (1916) offered an account of “the fighting from Mons to Ypres” from the perspective of a learned aristocrat who had seen action during both campaigns while serving with the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars; Hilaire Belloc's two-volume *A General Sketch of the European War* (1915-1916) was intended to offer a top-down examination of the war's origins, conduct, and eventual meaning to the layman who might have found himself less than well-served by the dispatches and telegrams published in the newspapers. Belloc conceived of the war as “the weightiest historical incident which Europe has known for many centuries,” and thus it was only fitting that each part of his chronicle “must necessarily be completed and issued some little time after

the events to which it relates have passed into history” (7). In spite of such intentions, works of this sort have proven to be of doubtful use as factual historiographical documents;<sup>36</sup> their focus, while ostensibly upon recording a true and accurate contemporaneous history of the conflict as it unfolded, inevitably shifted towards helping to frame the war within public opinion, as we shall see. Whatever due deference was being paid to the past, the present served as a much more prominent (if indirect) subject.

While many monographs of this sort appeared during the war, periodicals were also especially popular venues for such work and such curation of public opinion, with lengthy analytical essays appearing in the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Illustrated London News*—all intending to set the record straight for both current and future readers in a fashion like that articulated by Belloc above. Such writings would soon be compiled into handsome hardcover editions, the better to obtain a more imposing and pseudo-official status; the *Times History of the War* proved one of the most popular, with its twenty-one volumes collecting the weekly installments of the same name that had been published from 25 August 1914 through

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<sup>36</sup> They remain of tremendous importance as windows onto the ideas and methods of the age, naturally, but their approach to the war's history is necessarily so incomplete and so narrow that much that was important is wholly absent from these pages. Many such works pay no attention to the aerial wing of the war at all, for example; at the declaration of hostilities in August of 1914, the nascent Royal Flying Corps boasted a mere 66 unarmed aircraft and around 150 available pilots—very far from the size and scope of the eventual Royal Air Force, which would not come into being until April of 1918. The air war in retrospect is an important and vital part of the war as a whole, providing numerous and enduring images and stories that stand alongside the hell of the trenches as among the most vivid of the war while also laying the foundations for the development of British air power—and eventually British air supremacy—in the interwar years. If artillery and the machine gun were the hallmarks of the First World War combat experience, the aerial bomber was a hallmark of the Second. Nobody in 1914 was to suspect this, however. For all that the First World War is often described as having been “inevitable” and “static,” the above is but one example among many of the ways in which things simply did not turn out as expected.

27 July 1920. The *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* all offered their own versions of this approach to history, as did the *New York Times*. These volumes, in contrast to the many amateur and professional monographs that the war occasioned, have continued to be of considerable use to historians; they collect many important primary documents alongside the arguments and opinion of the age, and in doing so have provided an invaluable (if informal) archive that is far more accessible than the holdings of certain museums and libraries.

The war also occasioned some new periodicals dedicated solely to covering the conflict; the most prominent British magazine of this sort was *Land and Water*, an imprint of *The County Gentleman* edited by Hilaire Belloc and Fred T. Jane. The lavishly illustrated magazine ran (variously) weekly and bi-weekly from the war's first weeks to early 1919, with each issue including an essay of about 7000 words from Belloc recapitulating the war's major events since the previous publication and offering up expert analysis and predictions from a variety of contributors. Belloc's expertise was far from universal, and also very far from being universally appreciated—the popular satiric trench paper, the *Wipers Times*, often satirized his excesses with articles attributed to one “Belary Helloc,” and Fussell has subsequently described him as “a typical kept correspondent” (Fussell 87)—but it nevertheless provided an ongoing source of present-day commentary and forward-looking “historiography,” of a sort. John Collings Squire, Bloomsbury nemesis and eventual editor of the *London Mercury*, served as *Land and Water's* literary editor, offering a new round-up each issue of the latest books about the war. The capsule reviews included in his columns offer a fascinating view of the British literary landscape as it evolved during wartime, and stand as a testament to just how different the First World War's literature and “First World War literature” have now become.

That literary figures like Belloc and Squire should have taken the lead on history writing in this fashion stands at odds, perhaps, with today's expectations; nevertheless, the British literary establishment at the war's outset was determined to assert its authority and maintain its status as a guardian of public morals, a guide to state policy, and an agent of opinion at every level. Many authors attempted to fulfill these roles through conventional literary means, as we shall see, but many also tackled the problem through the production of popular historical works—or perhaps more appropriately “historical” works, given the frequency with which such volumes served as scarcely concealed propaganda and opinion. These works, like much of the literature produced during the war itself, have mostly been lost to popular memory. Volumes of history and opinion like Hall Caine's *The Drama of Three Hundred & Sixty-Five Days* (1915), Israel Zangwill's *The War for the World* (1915), G. K. Chesterton's *A Short History of England* (1917), John Masefield's *The Old Front Line* (1917), or Henry Newbolt's *Submarine and Anti-Submarine* (1919) all attempt to situate the war within the context of a living history and an extension of an historical narrative already in progress; all have been lost to history in turn, more or less, remaining of interest primarily to specialists and all but totally unknown to anyone else.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that the prominent adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*, 1885; *She*, 1886; *Allan Quatermain*, 1887) had also intended to write a history of the war as it unfolded, drafting plans with the publisher Charles Longman as early as 9 August 1914; the plan was dropped in October when Haggard learned Longman's son had been killed in action (Haggard 6, 11). Haggard's perspective on this might well have been welcome, had the work come to fruition, as he viewed the hypothetical work as not so much an aid to English understanding as a rebuke to that understanding's lack; “for many years,” he writes in a journal entry on 23 October 1914, “the subject of war has been more or less taboo in England. For instance, how often have I been violently attacked for writing stories that deal with fighting rather than with sexual complications. Once or twice I remember I have been provoked to answer that I was not in the least ashamed for trying to inculcate into the mind of youth the

This belief in the importance of accessible narrative history was not limited to literary authors, either; the noted military historian John Fortescue, author of the hugely influential *A History of the British Army* (1899), was convinced that “without access to writings on previous expeditionary forces the New Armies would suffer a debilitating absence of *élan* and lack continuity of purpose,” and was consequently determined to provide one copy per unit to be read by the men at the Front during the winter months of the campaign (Grievés, “Early” 16).<sup>38</sup> Other academics entered the mix through the production of various manifestos, one of the most prominent being *Why We Are At War: Great Britain's Case* (1914), in which “Members of the Oxford Faculty” offered their summation of the facts of the war, as they understood them, and a response to the German “White Book” that had been issued to present a corresponding case from the opposite perspective.<sup>39</sup> The Oxford volume is explicitly historicized; “we have some experience in the handling of historic evidence,” the authors write in the preface, “and we have endeavoured to treat this subject historically” (5). As a consequence, many of the arguments are hinged upon situating the war as the culmination of numerous historical trends and processes—from Prussian militarism to the spirit of Belgium, a nation that existed as an

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ancient and elementary fact that their hands were given them to defend their head—also their King and Country” (11). The work never would be written; whatever loss it may be to posterity, Haggard seems to have been glad enough to have been thwarted in such designs. “I am too outspoken a person in these days of censorship,” he writes a week later; “if I wrote at all I should say what was in my mind, and that would never do” (12).

<sup>38</sup> Fortescue was working on Vol. IX (covering the campaigns of 1815-1817) when the war broke out. By the time it had concluded, he had already begun and then aborted work on an “official history” of the war commissioned by Lord Kitchener, and had in the process become thoroughly disillusioned with “the growing affluence of paper-makers and printers” such as those described above (Grievés, “Early” 21).

<sup>39</sup> The preface, however, attributes “sole responsibility” for the book and its contents to “E. BARKER, H.W.C. DAVIS, C.R.L. FLETCHER, ARTHUR HASSALL, L.G. WICKHAM LEGG, and F. MORGAN,” with the proceeds from its sale going to the Belgian Relief Fund (6).

idea, they argue, long before it did as a kingdom (9). The work, then, views history as an ongoing process, and one in which it is by no means unsuitable to write of history as it is still being made.

Some authors approached the matter with a greatly expanded scope, and the example of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle will serve as a fine illustration of the challenges this involved. Doyle had already been awarded a knighthood for his work chronicling the Second Boer War,<sup>40</sup> and had interspersed his Sherlock Holmes and Professor Challenger volumes with historical fiction like *Micah Clarke* (1888), *The White Company* (1891) and *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1896). His interest in history as both a subject and a narrative aid was already well established, and he was keen to bring this interest to bear upon the war that had transformed the lives of himself and of everyone he knew. Consequently Doyle, working with the prolific Hodder and Stoughton publishing house, brought out the first of six volumes of *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* in 1916.

The dubious advisability of beginning an ostensibly complete and necessarily multi-volume history of events prior to their culmination was apparent to Doyle from the outset; the very first words of his massive undertaking are a response to an unspoken complaint in this direction. “It is continually stated,” he writes,

that it is impossible to bring out at the present time any accurate history of the war. No doubt this is true . . . But so far as the actual early events of our campaign upon the Continent are concerned there is no reason why the

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<sup>40</sup> His rather premature “complete history” of the war, *The Great Boer War*, was published in 1900; it was followed by a lengthy and supplementary propaganda pamphlet, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*, in 1902.

approximate truth should not now be collected and set forth. I believe that the narrative in this volume will in the main stand the test of time, and that the changes of the future will consist of additions rather than of alterations or subtractions. (v)

This confidence that the series would “in the main stand the test of time” was shared by his publishers, who insisted in an advertising circular of March, 1919, that “these books will never be superseded. They must be kept at hand for constant consultation by every student of the war” (Qtd. in Grieves, “Depicting” 215).<sup>41</sup> This rather breathless and emphatic claim is typical of the period’s advertising rhetoric, especially where literary works were concerned. We shall have cause to hear much more of the war’s illustrated gift-books and of *King Albert’s Book* (1914), edited by Hall Caine, below—but for the moment it is worth acknowledging that it, too, was touted in its advertising campaign as being “the world’s voice on the war”, and a volume “to treasure now, and to hand down to one’s children” (“King” 10). We see in this rhetoric the same conscious reaching towards posterity that characterizes so many of the period’s works of premature historiography, and which would ultimately prove Doyle’s undoing.

While this sort of sweepingly hopeful rhetoric may now seem rather quaint to the modern reader, it was against this brand of triumphalism that many of the War Books Boom’s memoirists, novelists and poets were reacting. The war’s immediate aftermath, as we shall see in the following chapters, played host to a series of complicated debates over whether the events of November 1918 and June 1919 could be conceived of as a “victory” for the Allies or not. While these debates continue even now, an artistic and philosophical consensus emerged

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<sup>41</sup> The author was unable to obtain a copy of this circular for direct quotation.

in the 1920s and 1930s that the Allies—and the British in particular—had somehow contrived to “win the war, but lose the peace.” Historiography like Doyle’s, which seemed to be writing towards an inevitable victory even before the war’s events had fully unfolded, became stale and unpalatable almost from the moment it reached the shelves. However merely factual and comprehensive such titanic, multi-volume undertakings may have been on the institutional and administrative details of the war, they lacked what was already coming to be positively conceived of as the soldier’s voice—a first-hand authenticity of experience, coupled with the (then novel) expectation that such experiential authenticity *was the most important thing*. This expectation would fire the Boom of 1922-1939, and, by the time the canon (and the attendant scholarship) articulated by Campbell, Gregory, etc. began to cohere in the late 1960s and early 1970s, would eventually become an orthodoxy in its own right. This focus on authentic experience and its positioning within First World War studies will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Whatever the case with other writings, Doyle’s work combined scrupulous attention to detail in some regards with a strange lack of attention in others. The reader of his account could be forgiven for assuming that airplanes and zeppelins did not exist between 1914 and 1918, or, if they did, that they played no important or even casually interesting role in the conduct of the war in France and Flanders. The volumes he released made clear their focus on “France and Flanders” from the start, but it would be a dismal history of the war that focused on them to the exclusion of all else. On the other hand, Doyle brought to the project his immense personal influence and friendships with numerous important figures within the British military hierarchy. He is known to have corresponded with at least 47 British generals in compiling data for the

book (Grieves, “Depicting” 217), and, if his personal talks with the BEF's early Commander-in-Chief Sir John French were ultimately less than helpful where acquiring material was concerned, it must still be considered remarkable that a man most famous for writing detective stories was having such talks in the first place.<sup>42</sup> Doyle eventually found a more solicitous recipient in the person of General Sir William Robertson, who had achieved considerable success during the war in overseeing the BEF's commissariat and who remains to this day the only person ever to have risen from the rank of Private to that of Field Marshal in the British Army. Still the former C-in-C's rebuke stung—especially as he would go on to release his own personal history of his involvement of the war, with a good deal of the opinions therein standing in contrast to what Doyle had been led to believe.<sup>43</sup>

With censure such as this in mind, Doyle would go on to declare in his memoirs that his attempted history of the First World War was the “greatest and most undeserved literary disappointment of [his] life” (290)—a project that consumed virtually all of his prodigious energies between 1914 and 1919 without anything much to show for it in the record of his legacy. His dispirited completion of the final volume in 1919 coincided with a surge in his

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<sup>42</sup> French would go on, rather callously, to strictly forbid Doyle to dedicate *The British Campaign* to him.

<sup>43</sup> *1914* (1919). Whatever sting Doyle may have felt from this publication, it was likely nothing compared to that experienced by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien; Smith-Dorrien had led the successful and eventually legendary rearguard action of II Corps at Le Cateau during the disastrous 1914 Retreat from Mons, thus securing the safety of the BEF while ensconcing himself forever in the annals of history. He had done so in defiance of French's wishes, however, and this audacity had cost him his command. Sent back to England in May of 1915, it had been intended that he eventually take command of the British forces in East Africa then in pursuit of the phantom army of the German General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck; he grew ill en route to Africa, however, and spent the rest of the war as an invalid. He would go on to be instrumental in bringing together the disparate Sailors and Soldiers benefit groups that would eventually be combined, in 1921, into the British Legion. See A.J. Smithers' *The Man Who Disobeyed: Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and His Enemies* (1970) for more.

interest in Spiritualism and his attendance of séances; having lost a brother, a son, a brother-in-law, three nephews-in-law, and many other friends and colleagues besides in the war, Doyle's attentions turned away from chronicling the event and towards attempting to bridge the gap between the living and the legions of the dead in other ways. His output would remain much diminished until his death in 1930, with many of his new written works focusing on this need of the living to commune with the dead. To have had circumstances render what he believed to be his most important work a failure even as he had hoped to be reposing in its success seems to have been too much to bear; it is not surprising, then, that the war received almost no attention in his ensuing works—the unusual 1929 short story “The Death Voyage,” already mentioned above, notwithstanding. In *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, Doyle had attempted to convey his own version of the history of the war—what he called in its front material “the most wonderful story in the world.” In his failure to tell that story in a fashion that has stood the test of time, his shade may at least take solace in the fact that he was hardly alone in having done so.

Another casualty of the passage of time, the changing of tastes, and the mere unfolding of events was John Buchan. Buchan is best-known now (as he was at the time—a rare example of a mostly enduring reputation) for the adventure-espionage novels he referred to as his “shockers;” the most famous of these were and undoubtedly remain his trilogy of works tracking the adventures of Richard Hannay during the course of the First World War. I shall have far more to say about these works in Section III below, but let it suffice to say in the meantime that such works established Buchan's reputation as a top-flight author of adventure stories—but to this he added a considerable record of accomplishment as an author of

histories,<sup>44</sup> essays, short stories, and (eventually) front-line war correspondence. The course of the war saw him work as a correspondent for the *Times*, an intelligence officer (and possibly ghost-writer) on the staff of Field Marshal Haig, and eventually the director of the newly-formed Department of Information.<sup>45</sup> During the course of this prolific wartime career, Buchan found himself courted to produce an ongoing series of short books conveying the history of the war as it unfolded.

Buchan, writing for Thomas Nelson & Co., began work on the first installment in his twenty-four volume *Nelson's History of the War* before 1914 had even concluded, with it finally appearing in print in February of the following year. The series as a whole would prove a tremendous success, securing Nelson's stability during the war and providing a boost to Buchan's perceived authority about the war. It is worth noting, as Kate Macdonald has, that Buchan was not even Nelson's first choice—Arthur Conan Doyle was already embroiled in the work on his own history, and so politely declined, while Hilaire Belloc settled for producing his *General Sketch of the European War* (1915-16) series for Nelson alongside his ongoing work with *Land and Water* (Macdonald, Kate 182). While Doyle and Belloc's histories were marketed to experts and collectors, with price points to match, Buchan insisted that each volume of *Nelson's History of the War* be priced at a single shilling to ensure its accessibility.

We may pause to recall the cautious skepticism with which Doyle undertook his history of the British Expeditionary Force. This same hopeful uncertainty was echoed by the Earl of

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (1897), *A History of Brasenose College* (1898), and *Some Eighteenth Century Byways* (1908), among others.

<sup>45</sup> Buchan has of course become much better-known in Canada for his service as its Governor-General from 1935 through 1940, but this has little bearing on his career as an amateur writer of histories during the First World War.

Rosebery in his preface to John Buchan's *History of the War*; while "the definite history of this war is not now to be written," still "it may be possible to disentangle from this struggle of armed nations over hundreds of miles some explicit narrative which may help all of us who are hungering for help and guidance" (5). In this we see stated explicitly that concern which in many other works had only been assumed: the need to offer guidance to those alive in the present rather than simply to offer some account of what happened in terms of the past.

Buchan had already been on record in numerous other venues as being archly critical of press censorship where the war was concerned, believing it of greater importance for readers to have a better understanding of all the parts of the war in relation to the whole (Macdonald, Kate 186-87). It was this desire that animated much of his work in *Nelson's History of the War*, the monthly and bi-monthly installments of which attempted to cross the difficult bridge between specificity and synthesis.

Buchan's work has met with many criticisms since its publication—some fair, and some much less so. As we shall have cause to consider the memoirs of the British wartime Prime Minister David Lloyd George in the following chapters, it is worth noting that he carried a particular torch against Buchan's characterization of Lloyd George's own activities and decisions during the course of the conflict. "When a brilliant novelist assumes the unaccustomed role of a historian," he writes, "it is inevitable that he should now and again forget that he is no longer writing fiction, but that he is engaged on a literary enterprise whose narration is limited in its scope by the rigid bounds of fact" (887). This admonishment was penned in response to Buchan's characterization of Lloyd George's own response to the French General Robert Nivelle's proposed 1917 offensive, which Nivelle rather naively believed would end the war

within 48 hours of it being enacted. Lloyd George was indeed delighted by the idea, whatever his later protestations might suggest, and subsequently subordinated the entirety of the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders to the command of the French—a major slight, and further fuel for the fire already burning between himself and the then-current British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig. Nivelle's offensive failed, the French army mutinied, and the British army was nearly wiped out in the German offensive of the following spring—but Lloyd George's role in all of this falls considerably by the wayside in his own memoirs when he has the chance instead to excoriate the novelist who tried to write history.

Whatever merits the Doyle and Buchan histories may now have as windows onto the mood and methods of the wartime generation of amateur literary historians, it must be acknowledged that the period's official historians looked upon them with considerable disdain. Modern historians are suspicious of them for being so very much “of their time,” and for necessarily being based on incomplete information; these complaints are to be found echoed and re-emphasized in memoranda prepared by the British War Office in anticipation of the production of an official history:

The necessity for an account founded on official documents, elaborated by statements and private records of officers and German information, has become more and more apparent. Many complaints have been heard and received with regard to the garbled and misleading accounts given in their books by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Buchan and others. The writers were of course so glad to get anything to fill their pages, and accepted statements from officers who had been sent home as failures, and from those who wished to advertise their units, while

others who were doing the fighting in the various theatres of war refused them information when applied to. (Qtd. in Grievés, "Depicting" 223-24)<sup>46</sup>

This collapse into irrelevancy was a fate that awaited many of the war's British amateur historians. Belloc's two volumes offering a *General Sketch of the European War* have been out of print almost from the moment of their publication; Hamilton's *The First Seven Divisions* seemed antiquated even when it was new. There remains, nevertheless, at least one amateur literary historian who bridged the gap between the personal and the official, and who did so in a way that paid due deference to the complexities involved in writing a history of such a titanic conflict.

This final and especially intriguing example of this trend of literary authors attempting to write history can be found in the wartime career of Sir Henry Newbolt. Best known to the reading public as a poet and author of such works as "Vitaï Lampada" (1892) and *Admirals All* (1897), Newbolt had exercised a considerable scope of talent in the writing of the war's naval history. In addition to the 1919 volume about submarine warfare mentioned above, he also published a shorter pamphlet about the history of the submarine more generally (1917) and a short one-volume summary of the war's naval history (1920) which made much of the new responsibilities of the historian in light of then-modern warfare and psychology. "The historian, then," he writes in his opening chapter, "in treating of wars, will be compelled to study them, not as manifestations of the will and character of a king, a commander, a political group, a military class, or a limited number of picked combatants, but as the conflicts of whole communities, each with its own organic life and, in a sense, its own personality" (3). He was

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<sup>46</sup> The author was unable to obtain an original copy of this memorandum for direct quotation.

gently critical of the efforts of Sir Julian Corbett, who had at that time been authoring the naval sections of Sir James Edmonds' *History of the Great War: Based on Official Documents*, declaring (through the ventriloquized anonymity of "a well-known critic") that "an Official History cannot be history, because it is official" (vii).

It is perhaps surprising, then, that Newbolt was chosen to take the reins from Corbett after the latter's death in 1922; Newbolt subsequently penned Volumes IV (1928) and V (1931) of the *Official History's* naval components. These volumes, brought out by Longmans Green & Co. in the years that saw the publication (respectively) of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and its sequel, *The Road Back*, found no popular market whatsoever. I mention this, and contrast Newbolt's failure with Remarque's success, primarily due to the difference of approach taken by each author in constructing his respective work. Newbolt's preface to Volume V of *Naval Operations* describes the absurd depth and breadth of research conducted by himself and his staff, with the 105,000 pages of the "Grand Fleet Pack" from Whitehall and the 120,000 telegrams dispatched between operational officers and the Admiralty each year forming only a part of the whole mass of documents examined for his two volumes (*Naval* vii-ix). Remarque, already used to a certain liberty of invention from his habit of falsely claiming certain decorations and ranks (Eksteins 279), relied instead on his own partial memories, anecdotes drawn from acquaintances, a veritable galaxy of invention, and the generality of a prevailing mood. Newbolt's 850+ pages of rigorously researched history were a complete commercial failure and have no place at all in the war's popular memory; Remarque's casual inventions outsold the Bible, and forever reshaped the acceptable contours of "the truth about the war." Whatever illustration may be found in this, Newbolt at least seems cognizant of it: "[we] must

not fail to take account of all the elements in the problem [of adequate historiography], among which is this fading and changing nature of memory” (*Naval* xii). This “fading and changing nature of memory” would find its most fulsome expression in the literary works of the generation to come.

These early histories, as we have acknowledged, were constantly and consciously in danger of being superseded by their own later installments or even invalidated by unfolding events. The major histories of the war appearing in its immediate aftermath were undertaken by those statesmen and senior soldiers who had been most intimately involved in running the war, or at least in seeing it from above. They are the memoirs of generals and the speculations of staff officers. They are very long, very dry, and purposefully as far removed from pathos and feeling as possible—these technical works were intended for distribution to staff colleges and university libraries, and the lessons they were written to teach were technical and operational ones, not moral. As Winter notes in his introduction to *The Legacy of the Great War: 90 Years On* (2), these works were often slow to appear, many taking years or even decades to reach their culmination. In the case of the British *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents*, for example, prepared under the supervision of Sir James Edmonds, the first of its twenty-nine volumes appeared in 1923, while the last was only finished in 1949—four years after the conclusion of a second war that had largely rendered the operational lessons of the first obsolete. We shall have more to say about this and other histories in the following chapters, but it is worth mentioning them here in this anticipatory fashion for the issues and subjects that they privilege and the backdrop they would come to provide for writing yet to appear.

## II. Literary Scholarship, 1914-1922

Because no stable canon of “First World War literature” could be said to have yet existed while the war was still going on and literary responses were still voluminously forthcoming,<sup>47</sup> “literary scholarship” focused on such war writings necessarily took a much different form than that to which we have become most used. It was so different in its conduct and its aims, in fact, that some critics have not recognized it as such at all; James Campbell's summation of the matter has already been noted, and it does remain the case that the most recognizably “modern” books about these subjects began to appear in the 1960s—with the publication of works like Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* and Johnston's *English Poetry of the First World War*. If we take it as true that the purpose of such literary scholarship has been “the establishment and defense of a canon of literary texts” (Campbell, “Interpreting” 264) and “defending [those texts'] aesthetic and ethical status” (262), then we will find much that prefigures the work of the 1960s even during the years of the war itself. Anthologists, in particular, were concerned with the ethical and practical platforms from which they chose the works that would feature in their collections.

The war has often and rightly been noted for the vast amount of literature it occasioned, but the emphasis in modern studies of the war's literature tends to be upon those memoirs, novels and poems that would not become broadly popular until over a decade after the war's conclusion. Thus, Campbell again:

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<sup>47</sup> The London *Times* alone received roughly a hundred poems a day from readers during the course of 1914, and by the end of that year had published over a thousand of them in its pages. It would take until 1978, as we shall see in Part III, for a comprehensive accounting of this vast literary output to take place.

The Great War was the first to send a large number of educated, non-professional soldiers into combat, several of whom considered themselves poets well before they became soldiers. Thus, rather than depend on a Tennyson or a Kipling to represent their feelings and attitudes, the First World War produced literary artists who articulated experiences ostensibly their own: these figures become the basis of the war literature canon. [Consequently,] history “itself” is known through texts, whether those texts be literary or cultural, and the Great War is now sufficiently recessed in time . . . [for it to be] now impossible to remember the war without in some way remembering through its literary texts, especially, for Anglophone audiences at least, the lyric poetry of two or three junior officers in the British army who fought on the Western Front. (262-63)

Nevertheless, the war’s function as a great catalyst for literary production was remarked upon even as it was in progress and these “two or three junior officers” had still yet to have their most enduring works publicized. Susan E. Cameron, for example, in her introduction to the early anthology *In the Day of Battle: Poems of the Great War* (1916), declares it to be “undeniable that among the minor results of the Great War is a vast output of war literature. Volumes of history, theory and prophecy weigh down our shelves, pamphlets cover our tables ‘thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa’” (3). The ornateness of the expression aside, Cameron illustrates a significant problem when it came to the formation of a stable canon of war literature while the war was in progress: editors were confronted with too many possibilities rather than too few—and were not always gladdened by what they saw. Cameron goes on to cite the opinion of “a learned writer in the *Times*” that “the time is not yet

ripe for poetical expression,” and consequently that the best of the war’s poetry was yet to come (4). A modern reader may look upon this with an ironical eye, noting that it was very much true of the war’s literary *prose*, while what has subsequently come to be cherished as its finest poetry was largely already being written but not yet widely encountered by the reading public. Even at that, the “learned writer” carries in his claims something of the caution of W.B. Yeats, who declared in 1915, “I think it better that in times like these / A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right” (“On Being Asked” 22). Yeats’ position on war poetry—and especially upon the works of Wilfred Owen—will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

If Cameron was already looking ahead to the poetical engagements with the war that were yet to come, H.B. Elliot's 1915 anthology, *Lest We Forget*, was even more overt in its attempts at predictive historicization. The volume focuses primarily upon the contributions of women to the war effort, and collects verse intended to celebrate those contributions and archive them for posterity. Baroness Emma Orczy (of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* fame (1905)), in her effusive foreword to the anthology, echoes this hope: “in the years to come,” she writes, “when the history of the twentieth century comes to be written, not its least heroic page will be the account of how the women and girls of Great Britain bore their part in the Great War by working for the material comfort of Britain's fighting men” (8). Certainly they should be (and have been) remembered for a great deal more than that, but the overt example of looking-ahead to an historiography that deliberately includes women rather than carelessly excluding them is an instructive one, especially where the period's poetry is concerned.

E.B. Osborn, in the introduction to his highly popular anthology of soldier-poetry, *The Muse in Arms* (1917),<sup>48</sup> declares that “of all the vast mass of civilian war-verse, very little indeed will survive; ... it has nearly all been cast ere now into the waste-paper basket of oblivion. The making of verse memorials is perhaps the only task to which the non-combatant poet may address himself without fear of losing his sincerity” (xiv). Of the 131 poems it includes, only eight were written by civilian contributors. For all that the anthology prefigures the cultural turn away from the works of civilian commentators on the war, there are parts of it that stand in the tradition actively being rejected by the likes of Sassoon, Owen, or Graves. Osborn claims as his purpose “to show what passes in the British warrior’s soul,” and that the volume “illustrates his singular capacity for remembering the splendour and forgetting the squalor of the dreadful vocation in which he was so suddenly engaged—a capacity at the root of that infinite cheerfulness which was such a priceless military asset in the early days of disillusion and disaster” (vii). In this we may see another example of how hard it was to understand the war in its entirety while it was still in progress. Rare indeed is the commentator who would now look back upon the war and see it *starting* in “disillusion and disaster” before culminating in some heady optimism in the year of Passchendaele and the French mutinies—and certainly nobody could accuse Sassoon or Owen of forgetting the squalor of their dreadful vocation. In all of this, then, we see an attempt to create a coherent and acceptable tone or register in which the poetic engagement with the war can profitably take place. While there was as yet no

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<sup>48</sup> Its full and rather cumbersome title is *The Muse in Arms: a collection of war poems, for the most part written in the field of action*. This emphasis upon the imminence of combat experience during the production of the poems points to an interest in the authentic combat presence that such writing can communicate; there will be much more to be said of this in Chapters 3 and 4.

agreement on whether the words of soldiers, civilians, or other actors were to be more or less important, this was a debate that was already beginning to be had.

These debates and efforts at canon formation continued in post-war anthologies and pedagogical collections as well. J.E. Wetherell's *The Great War in Verse and Prose* (1919), for example, was designed for the use of Ontario students of all ages, with selections of what was then considered to be the war's greatest English poetry included alongside extracts from major speeches, articles, military and diplomatic communiqués, and other mostly non-literary prose. H.J. Cody, Ontario's Minister of Education, describes the volume's intent in his introduction: "The selections of Verse and Prose in this book set forth the varying and successive phases of the War, and seek to remind, to inform, and to inspire. The teachers will use them as vehicles of moral and patriotic instruction. The pupils will keep them forever in their hearts and minds" (xx). It may seem surprising now to encounter the suggestion that an elementary school pupil would keep forever in her heart and mind an extract from one of H.H. Asquith's debates in the House of Commons or a judiciously chosen passage from Raymond Poincaré's address to the Paris conference, but such hopes are indicative of the tenor of the times.

While the above paragraphs have emphasized the role of poetry anthologies in ongoing debates over the collation and establishment of an effective "war canon," we must also consider the role of a similar yet widely varied form of commercial publishing: the illustrated gift book. These books collected a tremendous variety of prose, poetry, illustration and music under various auspices, and much remains to be written on the shape and contours of literary Britain that such collections suggest.

The gift book as a literary artifact is at once familiar and alien; while large-format volumes, now usually described as “coffee-table books,” remain popular as gifts, modern volumes of this sort often have little in common with the gift books of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The height of the British gift book, surveyed most recently in Lorraine Kooistra's *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture, 1855-1875* (2011), encompassed the 1850s through the 1870s and carried a significant emphasis on the distribution of poetical works in large-scale, lavishly illustrated formats intended for display as *objets d'art* rather than for personal reading. Shifting reading habits and a rise in literacy among social classes not disposed towards such displays saw the gift book format decline in popularity as the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, but—as Michael Felmingham has shown in *The Illustrated Gift Book, 1880-1930* (1988)—the format would continue to endure as a sight of conspicuous consumption, remaining a style of book that, “although mass-produced, . . . [was] clearly not produced for the masses” (Kooistra 3).

The gift books of the First World War played upon this presumption of their being purchased as a sign of status, and were published widely as parts of fund-raising campaigns aimed at providing wealthy civilian consumers with another incentive to contribute money to war-related causes. These causes varied from press to press and from book to book; the *Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Gift Book* (1915) published by Jarrold & Sons, for example, was intended to raise money for the convalescence program at St. Dunstan's, while the *Lord Kitchener Memorial Book* (1917), published by Hodder & Stoughton, served the dual purpose of commemorating the fallen field marshal and raising funds for disabled naval and infantry veterans. *King Albert's Book* (1914), likely the most famous of the war's gift books, compiled dozens of tributes to the

young Belgian monarch from major European artists, authors, politicians, clergy, scientists and soldiers, with the funds raised being distributed for the relief of Belgian refugees—a remarkable compilation of material providing a fascinating window onto the nature of the period’s literary and cultural celebrity.

*King Albert's Book* was the brainchild of Hall Caine, one of the era's most prolific and widely-read novelists. The book would earn him the Order of Leopold from King Albert of Belgium himself, in gratitude for the service the book had rendered; it sold some 500,000 copies in Britain, and an additional 250,000 in the United States. The book's chief importance to us is in its status as a deliberately conceived “historical artifact”—that is, a piece of publication intended for posterity in advance. The work is “calculated,” as Caine writes in his introduction, “to be a moral inspiration to posterity and to take its place as one of the luminous pages in the world's history” (6). This positioning of the book as history in the making was carried over into its promotional campaign as well. We have already had cause to consider the advertisement for the book that ran in the *Glasgow Herald* in December of 1914; the ad is not so much a tantalizing description of the book as it is an exercise in propagandistic persuasion. The emphatic declaration at the ad’s outset that the book will “help put on record for all time the true and only reason for which the Allies have drawn the sword” (10) reads like a press release from the War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House—and may well actually have been, given that Caine had been enthusiastically involved with the Bureau from its inception.

A great deal of rhetorical effort is expended in the ad on emphasizing the volume’s unique and international character. It would be “the most remarkable production that has ever issued from the press”—“a book to treasure now, and to hand down to one’s children,”

because “perhaps nothing of its kind will ever appear again” (10). This has turned out to be somewhat true; we have many imperfect analogues to the “gift book” craze in the modern day (like celebrity telethons, perhaps, or Live Aid-style concerts), but not to the same extent and with the same dizzying popularity as these volumes achieved at the turn of the 20th century. The volume was certainly quite unique in its comprehensive breadth, but it was its international flair—and the spirit of co-operation between “civilized” nations that it promoted—that was a primary focus. Many of the authors mentioned above as being connected with the War Propaganda Bureau contributed pieces to be included in the volume, but to their number were added such luminaries as Thomas Hardy (at last), Henri Bergson, the Aga Khan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, numerous generals and statesmen, and—perhaps most unexpectedly—Mary Elizabeth Braddon, the superannuated author of *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) who had reached the height of her career by giving Charles Dickens a run for his money while he was still alive.

As popular as *King Albert's Book* and other volumes like it proved to be with consumers, it did not entirely escape criticism. As Philip Waller has noted, “the business of producing such an expensive volume . . . upset other publishers at a time of paper-rationing, especially as the source of his paper was [Caine's] son Ralph, who was a director of paper firms in Canada and South Africa before joining the Ministry of Information and avoiding active service” (750). The increasing restrictions placed upon paper use for publishing purposes no doubt contributed to the decline of the gift book genre as the war continued, as it also did to the relative decline in new published volumes of all sorts. Critics of the venture on an intellectual level came at it from all angles. Some were incensed that Caine had initially invited George Bernard Shaw to contribute material to the volume, bringing him into a fold that his exclusion from the

Wellington House group had until now kept distant from him; others, like H. Rider Haggard, questioned even the possibility of collecting enough contributions to fill a volume of this sort given the tremendous proliferation of other books like it. “When confronted with these demands,” he writes, “—I think this is the third or fourth that I have had—my mind becomes a blank; in short I am no hand at this business” (11). Nevertheless, Haggard did indeed contribute, and Shaw did not. The most blistering rebuke to the project, however, likely came from the scholar Sir Walter Raleigh, who announces in a personal letter to Mrs. Walter Crum in October of 1914 that

I have just had a loathsome letter from Hall Caine, about a literary album, all gush and rant, to be given to the King of the Belgians. So I said—'Dear Sir, the best present to give to the King of the Belgians is Belgium. Two of the men of this household are at the front and a third is drilling. Yours truly.' But nothing will prevent authors and fussers butting in. They feel they don't matter, and they can't bear it. (Qtd. in Waller 751)

As uncharitable as this evaluation of the contributors' motives may seem, it remains the case that their relevance to popular opinion on the war would indeed wane considerably as years rolled by, with later critics like Paul Fussell heralding the war as the death knell, in at least some senses, for the man-of-letters. Whether or not this is true, it remains the case that those authors continued to be prolific and influential throughout much of the war and its aftermath, whether by contributing to public opinion or crafting a fictional response.

### III. War Stories: The Literary Output of 1914-1922

We have already considered the prominence of British “invasion literature” at the war's outset, and we must keep both it and the war that occasioned it in mind as we consider how the First World War's own British literary scene developed. If 1870 was an important year on the continent for France and Germany in a military sense, so too was it for Britain in a cultural and educational sense. 1870 saw the passage of the Elementary Education Act, which established rigorous new standards for education throughout the realm, and one of the consequences of this was a significant boom in mass literacy. By the time the war began the first children to be subjected to the standards of the act were well into their adulthood, and they had as much of an appetite for poetry and prose as their predecessors did—but with a far greater ability (especially among the poor) to purchase and consume it privately. It was a market that inspired strong competition between authors and publishers, and authors already known as major public figures for their literary works became more celebrated yet. The production and consumption of literature was something of a national pastime, and the war provided a much expanded venue for such works in styles and on subjects both new and old.

At the war's outset, something exciting had been happening in the world of English poetry—the birth of what has been called Georgian lyricism. The Georgian movement had been spearheaded by the influence of the editorial team of Edward Marsh and Harold Monro; it was comprised of a varied collection of young, dynamic poets producing modern works that were simultaneously deferential to many of the standards of Victorian poetry and experimental in their subjects, moods and approaches. They were thoroughly modern, however easy it is to

forget this in light of the triumph of the Modernists, who have rather swept the field where that sort of name is concerned.

The early Georgian movement proved hospitable to a number of authors whose names are now far more familiar in connection with the war—names like Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg and Robert Graves. The works of these authors appeared in Marsh and Monro's *Georgian Anthologies*, which first started appearing in 1912; Brooke was in from the start, and Sassoon, Rosenberg and Graves began to be included with the third volume in 1917—as much for their longstanding friendships within this literary circle as for the power of their works. Some of the most famous of the war poets, then, do not necessarily emanate strictly from the trenches, but rather fit into a large and pre-existing literary movement that was already increasingly popular, but which was also already on the verge of dissolution in the wake of the war. The war poets, like the Modernists, did not simply come into being because of the war: they were an outgrowth of an existing mode of expression that adapted itself to circumstance. In Patrick Deer's words, “the modern culture of war offered a 'cultural tradition' that responded directly to what Jürgen Habermas famously identified as the incomplete project of modernity”—a fragmentation of the spheres of everyday life which demanded, in a sense, an equally fragmented response (6). The war poets, correspondingly, needed a new register of expression to engage with a new kind of war. The consequences of this will be examined in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4, but it is worth keeping all of this in mind after having already considered the problems of propaganda and the tenor of mainstream literary prose production during the war itself.

The war's most prominent British literature could perhaps be summed up in the persons of three fictional characters: John Buchan's Richard Hannay, H.G. Wells' Mr. Britling, and the ubiquitous "Tommy Atkins"—the cheerful stand-in for the common British infantryman wherever his feet may find him. The wartime experiences of each of these men came to typify those of their real-life counterparts, and their development over the course of the war provides a number of fascinating insights into the shifting public consciousness regarding the war and its meaning. With these lenses firmly in place—the classless adventurer, the middle-class civilian, and the lower-class infantryman—let us consider the ways in which the English citizen met the war in a literary context.

Buchan's wartime Hannay novels gave a sense of the war through the lens of the sort of late-Victorian hero with whom British readers were most familiar—the sort of hero who might have sprung fully-formed from the pages of Haggard, Stevenson, or G.A. Henty.<sup>49</sup> Hannay was young, but not too young; dashing, but not a cad; clever, but not invincible; intensely moral, but never priggish. He was also not, strictly speaking, English, but rather a Scot who migrated to South Africa as a child and grew up in the midst of the colonial experience. He could play the part of the gentleman when it was required, but was more at home in the outdoors—in all, a sort of synthetic quintessence of Britishness. Buchan claims in his memoirs to have based Hannay in part on his old friend and colleague Edmund Ironside, a Scottish intelligence officer with considerable experience in South Africa during the Second Boer War, and who would go

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<sup>49</sup> Hannay's post-war adventures continue in several volumes, including *The Three Hostages* (1924), *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), and *The Island of Sheep* (1936), but his role in these adventures is much-reduced and they have no real bearing on the subject at hand.

on to conclude his military career with tremendous distinction after two world wars. Even Hannay did not survive that long.

Hannay's wartime adventures begin with his induction as a secret agent in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), tasked with preventing a German spy from initiating proceedings in England that would eventually lead to an assassination on the continent. Buchan began writing the novel in the months before the war broke out, and Hannay's job is to prevent that from happening; by the time the book was published, however, the war had indeed come to pass. Hannay's efforts, then, carry with them for the contemporary reader the same noble futility as that often imputed to British diplomacy in the weeks leading up to August of 1914; as the Authors' Declaration had maintained, "the British representatives were throughout laboring whole-heartedly to preserve the peace of Europe," and, when the time for a decision came, Britain "had either to break faith, letting the sanctity of treaties and the rights of small nations count for nothing before the threat of naked force, or she had to fight" ("BRITISH" 3). Hannay "had to fight" as well, and by his second adventure—*Greenmantle* (1916)—was doing so on the Western Front. Crucially, the reader is spared much detail when it comes to Hannay's front-line experiences; we learn only that he is a high-ranking officer and that he has been injured in action. Front-line combat remains, even in this adventure-novel context, something that is firmly situated "elsewhere"—at least, for now.

With Buchan's nod to the main thrust of the war having been offered, much of *Greenmantle* is spent by Hannay in disguise, fleeing from various agents at home and abroad as he tries to thwart the Kaiser's plans to set up a false prophet in the Middle East and make the

Islamic world his ally.<sup>50</sup> *Mr. Standfast* sees the hero engage in greater feats of disguise and pursuit during the course of his greatest adventure yet—reuniting with (and sometimes losing) old friends, falling in love with a cunning female spy, and eventually finding himself and all his colleagues deposited right in the middle of the German Army's Operation Michael: the almost-successful Spring Offensive of 1918. The story becomes one of last stands and heroic deeds, echoing the “backs to the wall” mentality that was espoused by Field Marshal Haig in his Special Order of 11 April 1918 and which was so broadly felt in English public culture. The war may well have been lost for the Allies in the West over the course of those fateful weeks, and it is noteworthy to see an author like Buchan purposefully interpolating his most famous creation into those days of danger and uncertainty. Hannay, of course, sees to it that everything comes out right.

While Buchan's Hannay novels were not exactly intended only for juvenile readers, they found a ready audience in the young men who had grown up on *Chum*, the *Boy's Own Paper*, and the pages of Robert Louis Stevenson or G.A. Henty. Such young men found themselves faced with the prospect of service on the continent or elsewhere, if they were of age, or of contributing to the war effort from the home front in whatever capacity was available to them until they had finally matured. Heroes like Richard Hannay offered a prominent example of one type of English response to the war: erudite, clever, courageous, and courteous. This was the officer class made manifest in thrilling fictional form, and those young men who read of his

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<sup>50</sup> As outlandish as this may seem, Buchan was basing it in part on very real (if secret) German plans to which he had been granted access as an intelligence officer. The history of German-Turkish collaboration during the First World War—and of the Kaiser's interest in a united Islam as an ally in his battle against the Entente powers—has received an excellent treatment in Sean McMeekin's *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (2010).

exploits—especially those coming out of public schools like Eton, Slade, Harrow, and so on—found much to emulate, and not just in Hannay himself.

*Mr. Standfast* is especially notable in ending with the death of a major character who had been celebrated throughout the series for his unstinting gallantry, and it is from this doomed figure and his fascination with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* that the novel takes its name. Having met his end, though, Hannay chooses an epitaph for him from Bunyan's work that casts him in rather a different light—that of the character Mr. Valiant-for-Truth:

Then said he, 'I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles who now will be my rewarder.'

So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

(Bunyan, qtd. In *Mr. Standfast* 331)<sup>51</sup>

George Parfitt, in his slender study of the *Fiction of the First World War* (1988), has made much of the place of Bunyan and his works in the consciousness of those English men and women fighting the First World War—going so far as to say that “*Mr. Standfast* proposes that the world of the war can be read in terms of the *Pilgrim's Progress*” (17). This echoes a broader cultural

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<sup>51</sup> Original emphasis throughout.

consideration of the war as a pilgrimage, of sorts—or even as a crusade.<sup>52</sup> Hannay and those like him, then, stand in as a new mode of knight—and it was their bodies that would lay dead, a new “flower of English chivalry,” in almost the same fields as those who had fallen at Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt.

What, though, of those who could not be knights? Two options remained open to them, and two competing strands of wartime hero (or, as we shall see, “hero”) came to exemplify these radically different responses. If an English man could not be a knight, he might instead be a common soldier—or a clerk, about whom we shall have more to say anon. In the meantime, it must be acknowledged that the experiences of the typical infantryman—whom we shall call Tommy Atkins, for the moment—were much discussed and even romanticized during the war, in some circles, with early texts like those of Ian Hay, H.C. “Sapper” McNiele, Donald Hankey and Patrick MacGill providing rugged, intensely masculine accounts of life at training camps and in the lines. This life was invariably filled with hardship and difficulty, but always endured stoically and in good humour.

The cheerful and uncomplaining infantryman—led in battle and at rest by a generation of Richard Hannays—provided the icon of wartime combat experience for a large portion of the British reading public. He had been doing so for quite some time; references to this hypothetical soldier date back at least to 1815, in which one “Private Thomas Atkins” was cited in a War Office publication showing how the *Soldier’s Pocket Book* should be filled out (Holmes xv). He had won additional fame throughout the ensuing century as his red coat and dark slacks

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<sup>52</sup> See Stefan Goebel's *The Great War and Medieval Memory* (2007) for an expansive analysis of the many ways in which recurring tropes of crusade and pilgrimage have characterized both the war's contemporary rhetoric and also that of the war's remembrance.

prosecuted the will of his Queen and her Empire across the face of the earth. Tommy and his colleagues have seen something of the world, even if they have always seen Britain first—and not always liked what they found there.

Perhaps no poem so exemplifies the complex relationship of the individual private to England as a whole as does Kipling's famous "Tommy," one of many poems about the common soldier to be found in *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892). That such a man could jointly be hailed by his country as a hero and excoriated by her as a villain is perhaps difficult to believe, but Kipling tapped into this unhappy consciousness to remind his readers that they were being defended by men, not "plaster saints":

Yes, makin' mock o' uniforms that guard you while you sleep  
 Is cheaper than them uniforms, an' they're starvation cheap;  
 An' hustlin' drunken soldiers when they're goin' large a bit  
 Is five times better business than paradin' in full kit.  
 Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, 'ow's yer soul?"  
 But it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums begin to roll,  
 The drums begin to roll, my boys, the drums begin to roll,  
 O it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums begin to roll. ("Tommy" 397)

Kipling's Tommy, much like the genuine article, finds himself at a nexus of public suspicion of the characters of military men and a public admiration for the achievements of military life. There is precious little consistency to be had, in times of general peace—"But it's 'Saviour of 'is country' when the guns begin to shoot; / An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' anything you please; / An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool—you bet that Tommy sees!" (398).

What Tommy saw was that the gulf between soldier and citizen was perhaps not so great after all, and this consciousness would begin to expand on both sides in 1914 as the disreputable professional soldier swiftly found himself joined by the upright civilian volunteer.

Who is Tommy Atkins, then, in the context of the First World War? John Hay Beith, writing as Ian Hay in his tremendously popular *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915),<sup>53</sup> sets out Tommy's characteristics after his run through the training provided to new men in Kitchener's Army:

When he joined, his outstanding feature was a sort of surly independence, the surliness being largely based upon the fear of losing the independence. He has got over that now. [ . . . ] He no longer gets drunk from habit. When he does so now, it is because there were no potatoes at dinner, or because there has been a leak in the roof of his hut for a week and no one is attending to it, or because his wife is not receiving her separation allowance. Being an inarticulate person, he finds getting drunk the simplest and most effective expedient for acquainting the powers that be with the fact that he has a grievance. [ . . . ] On the other hand, he is often amazingly cheerful under uncomfortable and depressing surroundings. [ . . . ] So we pin our faith to the man who has been at once our despair and our joy since the month of August. He has character; he has grit; and now that he is

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<sup>53</sup> First serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* before being collected and revised into novel form, *The First Hundred Thousand* would eventually be followed-up by *Carrying On* (1917), which included further adventures of many beloved characters from the original. *The Last Million* (1919) told a similar tale of the American soldiers who came to reinforce the British in France beginning in 1917—and who, in so doing, subsequently took England itself by storm.

getting discipline as well, he is going to be an everlasting credit to the cause  
 which roused his manhood and the land which gave him birth. (120-21)

There is much in this that echoes the complex relationship between soldier, nation, and citizen that Kipling addresses in “Tommy;” the affection mingled with contempt, the fervent belief in Tommy's powers alongside a disgust at his excesses, the belief that the military life can better a man, but only if he was first a reprobate—all of this, anyway, plays into the competing conceptions both of the professional soldiers who comprised the British Expeditionary Force at the start of the war and of the new civilian army that would answer Kitchener's call. They would all be in it together by the end.

Stories of this sort were enduringly popular throughout the war, though admittedly more so at its outset than at its conclusion. Apart from Hay, the most reliable producer of such works was H.C. “Sapper” McNeile,<sup>54</sup> a member of the Royal Engineers who saw a considerable amount of action during the war and who dramatized much of what he had seen and heard in his fiction. *No Man's Land* (1917) is exemplary of such work; through a series of loosely connected narratives, McNeile tells the story of the general infantry and the engineers who helped create and maintain the environments in which they lived. This is rather unusual from the standpoint of First World War literature as a whole, as *The Trenches* are typically treated as a diabolical manifestation of miscreant nature rather than as the product of complex ideas that have been husbanded along by actual individuals who care about them. There is a sort of intimacy involved in the relationship between those who live in the trench and those who have

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<sup>54</sup> As officers serving in the British Army in wartime were not allowed to publish stories under their own names, McNeile took the pen-name of “Sapper” at the suggestion of Lord Northcliffe, whose *Daily Mail* served as a venue for many of the author's earlier stories.

to design and maintain it, and the sappers described in *No Man's Land* come in for the same equal parts of compassion and derision from the infantry as the infantry receive from the public.

Perhaps most fascinating of all in this particular work is the way in which McNeile conceives of No Man's Land as an agricultural space—"the land," as it is frequently called in shorthand—into which the sapper-farmers must dig their trenches and plant the seeds of soldiers. This metaphor is maintained throughout, at times echoing the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4.1-9; sadly, however, the soldier-seeds that fall can only blossom in death—a literal "flower of English manhood," to reuse a well-worn phrase.

Sapper's work is dedicated, simply, "to the infantryman" (v), "that throng [who] has answered the great call" (19). The answer comes at a price:

How many lie in nameless graves, with the remnants of Ypres standing sentinel to their last sleep; how many have fought and cursed and killed in the mud holes of the Somme; how many have chosen the other path, and even though they had no skill and aptitude to recommend them, are earning now their three and four pounds a week making munitions. But they *have* answered the call, that throng and others like them; they *have* learned out of the book of life and death.

(19)

McNeile, like Hay, walks a fine line between grandiose declarations and frank acknowledgments of reality: his is a prose that can place sermonical references to the book of life and death

alongside blunt descriptions of the muddy hell of the Somme.<sup>55</sup> This balance is maintained throughout *No Man's Land*, and is even remarked upon internally:

Visions of forlorn hopes, visions of glory, visions of the glamour of war rose unbidden in their minds. And then, when they had got as far as that, the smell of that patent manure obtruded itself once again, and the dreamers of honours to come passed sadly down the gangway to the Levantine villain who presided over the vermouth and gin. Which might be taken as the text for a sermon on things as they are. In this war it is the patent manure and the vermouth which dominate the situation as far as the fighters, at any rate, are concerned. The talkers may think otherwise, may prate of soul-stirring motives, and great ideals. But for the soldiers, life is a bit too grim and overpowering for gloss. (35)

It has long been a staple in the study of the First World War's canonical literature that a discourse such as this would have been practically unthinkable for general publication while the war was going on, with censors and propagandists and the Defense of the Realm Act and generals all doing their best to prevent any mode of thought or expression that dissented from the “war for glory” attitude. Not until the truth-tellers of the late 20s and early 30s could have

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<sup>55</sup> Perhaps one of the most gorgeous and arresting moments in *No Man's Land* is McNeile's brief account of one British unit's experience during the disastrous retreat from Mons in the war's early weeks: “No trenches, no dug outs, no reserves. Ceaseless German attacks, rain, mud, death. And then, three or four days of icy coldness, with the bitter Arctic wind cutting the sodden, tired, breaking men like a knife. Fighting every hour, with rifles and bayonets and fists—sleepless, tired out, finished. Only a spirit which made possible the impossible supported them: only the glory of their traditions held the breaking line of the Old Contemptibles to the end. And at the end—they died” (51). Here, too, is that same admixture of the elevatedly spiritual and the brutally mundane.

their say would such words be heard and such accounts set to rights, or so the story goes. But here it is, all the same—in the *Daily Mail*, more or less.

Whatever else Pvt. Atkins may have been, he was not a particularly keen intellectual—a fact which did not endear him to some of the authors made popular by the war for their purported sensitivity and empathy. Wilfred Owen, for example, in a letter to his mother at the end of August, 1914, declares glibly that “I feel my own life all the more precious and more dear in the presence of this deflowering of Europe. While it is true that the guns will effect a little useful weeding, I am furious with chagrin to think that the Minds which were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years, are being annihilated—and bodies, the product of aeons of Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues. I regret the mortality of the English regulars less than that of the French, Belgian, or even Russian or German armies: because the former are all Tommy Atkins, poor fellows, while the continental armies are inclusive of the finest brains and temperaments of the land” (Owen, *Selected* 119). These heartless pronouncements of a reckless youth eerily prefigure the even more scathing denunciation levelled by Hugh MacDiarmid in “Another Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries” (1935), who declared of the men of the British Expeditionary Force that “It is a God-damned lie to say that these / Saved, or knew, anything worth any man’s pride. / They were professional murderers and they took / Their blood money and their impious risks and died. / In spite of all their kind some elements of worth / With difficulty persist here and there on earth” (169). This wide-ranging contempt for the fighting man would not become the dominant perspective, and eventually—by the period of scholarship and popular memory described in Chapter 4—would provoke a far stronger and contrary response.

This brings us to the third literary avatar where the English reading male's experience of the war was concerned—that of the clerk, however variously described. My purpose here is briefly to examine the literary engagement with those intellectuals, clerics, authors and the like who contributed to the war effort in a home front capacity, but a word about the military bureaucracy is necessary before proceeding further. There is precious little material written about the war from the perspective of those serving in low or middle positions on the general staff, just as there is little that has been written that is sympathetic to those who wore the “bloody red tabs” of the staff officer. They have instead been almost universally derided, whether in the form of *Blackadder Goes Forth's* Captain Darling or any of the pettifogging imbeciles or shirkers who tend to show up in books by authors like Sassoon, Blunden or Graves. Sassoon's poem “Base Details” is especially scathing:

If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath,  
 I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base,  
 And speed glum heroes up the line to death.  
 You'd see me with my puffy petulant face,  
 Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel,  
 Reading the Roll of Honour. 'Poor young chap,'  
 I'd say—'I used to know his father well.  
 Yes, we've lost heavily in this last scrap.'  
 And when the war is done and youth stone dead,  
 I'd toddle safely home and die—in bed. (95)

Even a more openly martial poet like Julian Grenfell could pen such savage satire as is found in his "Prayer for Those on the Staff":

The Staff is working with its brains,  
 While we are sitting in the trench,  
 The Staff the universe ordains  
 (Subject to Thee and General French).

[. . .]

*O Lord, Who mad'st all things to be,  
 And madest some things very good,  
 Please keep the Extra A.D.C.  
 From horrid scenes, and sights of blood. (109)*

While it is true that many of those officers who served as clerks rather than front-line soldiers enjoyed a greater amount of bodily comfort than did those in the line, they paid for it through working twenty-hour days, enduring byzantine institutional politics, and being the butt of pan-national jokes no matter how hard or sincerely they happened to work. There has yet to be a comprehensive survey in print of how staff officers lived during the war, but Frank Davies and Graham Maddocks' *Bloody Red Tabs* (1995) offers a fine overview of how they and their superiors suffered injury and death.

We shall have more to say of "the clerk" as a type where the war is concerned in the conclusion to Chapter 5, following the ideas of Julian Benda in his *La trahison de clerics* (1927), but for the moment let it suffice to say that he is a he (that is, typically and even typologically male), that he is middle- or upper-class, and that some set of circumstances has prevented from

joining the armed forces in spite of an evidently sincere desire to “do his bit.” He finds himself, as a consequence, confined to the home front—doing the best he can to aid the war effort with only the power of his pen, his voice, and his brain against the swords, cannons, and bombs of the foe. We have already seen his type in real figures like Kipling, Doyle, or Wells, and shall have cause to see it afresh in both the person and literary characters of Ford Maddox Hueffer/Ford; such journeys as these men might make to the fighting front are complicated and temporary, and they are forced instead to create a new type of war in a civilian space. It falls to him as well to sit at home with women, children, and other non-combatants and worry over “the son [they] bore”—who often would end up being “[given] to that wind blowing and that tide” (Kipling 29).

These were losses that were keenly and broadly felt. Doyle lost a son and a brother to the war; Buchan and Chesterton each lost a brother, and Kipling, famously, a son; Belloc would be fated to lose sons in *both* World Wars. Many was the writer who found the stories of his children, his brothers, his friends—cut off. We have already had cause to hear Blunden's dreadful declaration that “the War had won;” worse, however, as McNeile puts it in *No Man's Land*, “war means so infinitely much to the individual, [while] the individual means so infinitely little to the war” (38). The War's victory is not even satisfying to itself; the dead are new seeds sown on fallow earth, and nothing is likely to grow.

This spirit of loss and forestalled service lies at the heart of H.G. Wells' *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), one of the most contemporarily popular English novels of the war. It is one of the comparatively few such texts that focuses primarily upon the home front experience of the elderly male patriot—and does so sympathetically, at that. Wells would be joined later by the likes of Arnold Bennett in *Lord Rainsford* (1926) and Ford Maddox Hueffer in the *Parade's End*

tetralogy (1924-28), both of which also dramatize the experiences of the middle-aged male bureaucrat or author attempting to contribute to the war effort from behind the scenes; Hueffer's differs in that his complex protagonist, Christopher Tietjens, follows Hueffer's lead in abandoning his work on the home front to join the infantry at last. Wells would not do the same, though he would leave his position as a propagandist working under Lord Northcliffe before the war's end—incensed that Northcliffe's deputy director, Campbell Stuart, had fired his copy boy without warning for ostensibly having a German grand-parent (Thompson 305). Both Tietjens and Raingo lie beyond the scope of this chapter, however, as they detail post-war responses from propagandist authors rather than that of one still active as the war raged on.

The fictional Mr. Britling—his name already evocative of the isles he so stoutly defends in print—makes his name as a commentator on the war and its political dimensions, initially forecasting utopian promise before being brought low by the deaths of his son and his family's young German friend, killed in action while fighting for Britling's national foes. The novel is haunted continually by the threat (and eventual actualization) of wasted youth—whether in the abstract forms of Mr. Britling, who longs once more for his youthful vigour and his late first wife, or through the young men who do indeed meet their grisly ends in the mud of France and Flanders—"all the world," Britling muses near the end, "is losing its sons . . ." (420). In the case of Britling's son, Hugh, the very suddenness of his death—though likely painless—makes it even harder for his father to bear:

"An amazement . . . a blow . . . a splattering of blood. Rags of tormented skin  
and brain stuff . . . In a moment. What had taken eighteen years—love and care  
. . . ."

...

He choked and stopped speaking. His elbows were on his knees, and he put his face between his hands and shuddered and became still. His hair was troubled. The end of his stumpy moustache and a little roll of flesh stood out at the side of his hand, and made him somehow twice as pitiful. His big atlas, from which papers projected, seemed forgotten by his side. So he sat for a long time, and neither he nor Letty moved or spoke. But they were in the same shadow. (402)

There is a sense in this of a double bereavement—of a father being robbed both of his son and of any sort of comfort that might have come from knowing that death came in a moment of valour or gallantry. Instead, it was as it was: a thing that mattered and that did not matter, all at once.

The consequences of all this are provocative where Britling is concerned, and it is worth acknowledging, as we have in the case of many of the authors above, that it led to highly popular sentiments from an “establishment” figure that seem now to be totally at odds with the putative spirit of the age. Britling spends most of the last of the novel's three internal “books” articulating his political and spiritual philosophy in a letter to the young German man's parents; the letter evokes the many complications inherent in Wells' involvement in something like Wellington House to begin with, given the tensions that necessarily existed between the propagandist on the one hand and the quasi-socialist, utopian, pacifist visionary on the other. So far as the war was a war to end Prussian militarism, both Wells and Britling could support it—the same spirit which moved Wells to pen his famous 1914 essay on the conflict's hopeful potential of becoming “a war to end all wars.”

As Kipling substantially maintained his militarist outlook even after his son's death, he continued to take a dim view of those Britlings who turned against the war and the world in general. "Natural Theology," an astounding bit of verse from 1919, carries a section which might almost be taken as a critique of Britling and his type:

Money spent on an Army or Fleet  
 Is homicidal lunacy. . . .  
 My son has been killed in the Mons retreat,  
 Why is the Lord afflicting me?  
 Why are murder, pillage and arson  
 And rape allowed by the Deity?  
 I will write to the *Times*, deriding our parson  
 Because my God has afflicted me. (Kipling, "Natural Theology" 343)

Still, this kind of sensitive and intellectual response to the war—and to injustice and pain in general—would maintain its currency in the ensuing decades where the more bellicose approach would not. If the war tolled the death-knell of the "man of letters," as Fussell has suggested, at least some, like Wells or Shaw or Bertrand Russell, managed to come out of it with their reputations as visionaries or humanitarians intact.

It must naturally be acknowledged that Hannay, Atkins, and Britling circumscribe only some of the British wartime experience and wartime literature, for all their extensive potency. They are notably male, and notably (mostly) middle- or lower-class; they do not adequately encompass the experiences of women, or of nobles, or of public intellectuals, or of clergy, or

even—more broadly yet—of those who fought at sea, or in the air, or in the far-flung reaches of the world that did not reside in that narrow corridor between Ostend and the Vosges.

Journal-memoirs were extremely popular, especially when written by women; volumes like Edith Wharton's *Fighting France* (1915), May Sinclair's *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915), and Flora Sandes' *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (1916) provided insights into the many ways in which women experienced the war, however remarkable and atypical their authors might have been. Wharton and Sinclair were already successful authors by 1914, and Sandes' experiences as an Englishwoman unexpectedly drafted into the Serbian infantry were unequalled in the annals of the war.<sup>56</sup> Volumes such as these constituted an important step in opening the field of "war reportage" to woman authors, and paved the way for the many works published in subsequent years that sought to rescue women's experiences from the shade of the dominant male infantryman narrative.<sup>57</sup> Considerably greater study of women's experience of the First World War continues to be a necessity, in spite of many excellent studies on the subject in recent years, and the figure of the female war-reporter might provide an especially interesting point of departure in this direction.

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<sup>56</sup> For more on Wharton's experience of the war, see Alan Price's *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War* (1997) or Julie Olin-Ammentorp's *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War* (2004); for Sinclair, see Suzanne Raitt's *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (2000) or Andrew J. Kunka and Michele K. Troy (eds.)'s *May Sinclair: Moving Towards the Modern* (2006); for Sandes, see Louise Miller's *A Fine Brother: The Life of Captain Flora Sandes* (2012).

<sup>57</sup> While Sandes' experience as a nurse might offer a formidable template for imagining the "nurse character" alongside the Britlings, Hannays, and so on, her experiences were so atypical—and also factual—that she does not offer precisely the right sort of fictional engagement that this study has sought.

The war also saw familiar characters and creative universes return to print to offer their own unique involvement in the conflict.<sup>58</sup> L.M. Montgomery's popular Avonlea series continued with *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921), in which the descendants of the original *Anne of Green Gables* characters cope with the war's impact on their island home. Eden Phillpotts offered yet another installment in his *Human Boy* sequence (very similar to Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* stories)—*The Human Boy and the War* (1916)—in which his collection of schoolboys do their best to fight the war abstractly from the home front. Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan continued his adventures in *Tarzan the Untamed* (1920), in which the war's impact on German East Africa produces numerous adventures (and seeming tragedies) for the ape-man; the apparent death of his wife, Jane, at the hands of German troops drives Tarzan to swear a vow of revenge against all Germans everywhere, and the next two volumes (*Tarzan the Terrible* (1921) and *Tarzan and the Golden Lion* (1922)) see him put his words into action. Even Sherlock Holmes, the iconic thinking-man's hero of another age, returned to participate in the war: Arthur Conan Doyle's "His Last Bow" (1917) sees the arch-detective fight through encroaching old age and a touch of rheumatism to infiltrate and foil a German spy ring on the eve of the war's commencement. For

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<sup>58</sup> While not strictly within the terms delineated here, Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* (commenced 1917; first published 1923) can scarcely be passed over in silence. In this work—one of the infamous occultist's few novels—Crowley's popular magus character Simon Iff leads his cadre of White magicians in a war against their Black counterparts, with many of Crowley's friends and supporters serving as inspirations for characters in either camp. The story revolves around attempts to marshal the unborn Moonchild to either side with the aim of remaking the world, eventually resulting in the deployment in 1914 of the White sorcerers upon the side of the Entente and the Black sorcerers upon the side of the Central Powers. The ritual to bring about the Moonchild's birth somewhat unexpectedly occurs in Italy; it would be well worth investigating whether we may find any allusion in this to the internationally celebrated rise of Mussolini's fascists in Italy shortly before the book would have been submitted to Mandrake Press in 1923. If Crowley had developed post-war fascist sympathies that needed to be worked out in print, he was—as we have seen and shall see throughout this document—hardly alone.

all Holmes' efforts to stop the war, however, he is hopeful about its likely consequences:

"There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared" (1443).

Still, with these few exceptions, the works popular and popularized during the war years would not long endure in the face of what was to come: for all the war's function as a catalyst for writing, the literature, historiography and scholarship published and popular during the war itself would quickly be overshadowed by the productions of the decades that followed. This was an ambivalence that had come to stay.

## CHAPTER 3:

### The War Books Boom in Thought and Practice, 1922-1939

#### I. Introduction

According to popular memory, with the war's conclusion there settled in a two-decades-long ennui that would manifest itself in a variety of ways throughout the world. The primary combatant powers dealt with the pain of a “lost generation” of young men who had marched off to war, never to return—while those who did return were often very different from who they had been when they left. A more abstractly “lost generation” of writers—like the American émigrés and expatriates in Paris—began to develop a new mode of thinking, writing, and living, embracing the rupture that the war had constituted by abandoning the reserve and arguable frigidity of the pre-war social mores already described in Chapter 1 by Orwell. A time of emotional and psychological dismay was echoed by a Depression that saw half the world plunged into an economic calamity that made home even less welcoming and secure for those troubled veterans who managed to return.

While various government agencies, employment schemes, and nascent medical initiatives attempted to help veterans readjust to a rapidly changing civilian world, there was one avenue of self-therapy that many such veterans were to find tremendously effective: writing. Soldiers, engineers, officers, nurses, and others took up their pens to give some account of what they had seen and experienced—not simply to earn money (though this was indeed a significant concern for many of the period's popular authors), but to exorcise their wartime demons by sharing the burden with others. Veterans reading the work of veterans,

and collaborating in that work's production, provided one such means; expressing these feelings and reflections to the general public provided another. The consequences this unburdening would have upon a public growing more and more eager to participate in it were to be significant indeed.

Like the other sections, this one will proceed along the familiar lines of offering a survey of the period's dominant political and cultural concerns, examining a particular idea associated with the period's war writing, and then surveying the period's most influential historiography, literary scholarship, and literature. Thus, in Section II of Chapter 3, we will trace the war's immediate impact through the decades succeeding it, paying particular attention to the economic and political problems that sprang up in its aftermath. We will also consider the re-rhetoricization of the war during this time from being a war that would "end all war" to being instead a war that was at best a failure and at worst only a prelude to something yet more terrible to come.

In Section III, we will consider the use of "war writing" as a means of interrogating war rather than of propagating it; the most popular and influential writings of the "War Books Boom" spoke back against the literature of the war years themselves, marked as that literature was by varying degrees of distance, complacency, optimism, or outright propagandizing. The period of the Boom also saw the publication of numerous non-literary and scathingly critical denunciations of the war's propaganda writing, with Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928) and Irene Cooper

Willis' *England's Holy War* (1928) being among the most influential.<sup>59</sup> Such works helped shape a popular reaction against propaganda in ensuing decades, and are partially responsible for the near-totally negative stigma attached to the word in the modern age. Meanwhile, literary authors like Erich Maria Remarque, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and others drew upon their own first-hand combat experience to craft a new and immediate form of war literature. We will postpone until Part III of Chapter 3 a consideration of the ways in which this immediacy can serve as a conduit between combatant and non-combatant where the experience of warfare is concerned; in this chapter, we will examine instead the ways in which the Boom's literary outpourings unsettled the war's established narrative and developed a new one in its place—one which continues to be more or less dominant in the English-speaking world even after almost a century, and which continues to form the foundation of much of the historiography and literary scholarship now being produced.

The period between the two world wars was a complex and tumultuous one, marked by continued international upheaval and the ever-present danger of further conflict. The war literature of this period consequently struck joint notes of regret and of warning, and the corresponding scholarship—both in history and in literature—reflected this. The following two chapters examine the ways in which the British and global cultural milieu crawled brokenly away from trenches of one war and towards, however unwittingly, the slaughterhouse of a second.

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<sup>59</sup> The most purely influential text of the period on the subject of propaganda was undoubtedly Edward L. Bernays' *Propaganda* (1928), about which I will have something more to say below; it must nevertheless be acknowledged that Bernays' short treatise runs rather against the grain of the dominant inter-war perspective on propaganda, arguing instead, as we saw briefly in Chapter 1, that propaganda is a necessary tool for the curation of public attitudes by the people who know best how to shape them.

## II. A Culture of Regret

“When the war finally ended it was necessary for both sides to maintain, indeed even to inflate, the myth of sacrifice so that the whole affair would not be seen . . . [as] a meaningless waste of millions of lives. Logically, if the flower of youth had been cut down in Flanders, the survivors were not the flower: the dead were superior to the traumatized living. In this way, the virtual destruction of a generation further increased the distance between the old and the young, between the official and the unofficial.”

- Robert Hughes<sup>60</sup>

"This is not a peace. It is an armistice for twenty years."

- Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch<sup>61</sup>

It is a struggle to choose a single word to characterize the inter-war period's prevailing cultural mood, but we might settle, in the end, upon "disappointment." A war that had (not without certain justifiable sneers) been heralded as the end of all future conflict had singularly failed in this task; a war that had been touted as likely to be "over by Christmas" had in fact consumed four Christmases and had closed in on a fifth. To "disappointment" were added the global economic depression and a new philosophical and artistic spirit of disenchantment—inaugurated most forcefully by Montague's essay of the same name, as we will see, but to be found at work in many other works and places as well.

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<sup>60</sup> From *The Shock of the New* (30).

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Neiberg's "Foch, Ferdinand (1851-1929)" (426).

This difference between cultural moods of “disappointment” and “disenchantment” might fruitfully be considered. The one describes a set of expectations while the other describes a mood, of sorts. To be disappointed is to be frustrated in one’s attempt (however abstractly) to keep an appointment; there were expectations about things happening a certain way and people behaving in a certain fashion, and none of this ultimately came to pass. “Disenchantment,” in comparison, is a term that strongly implies a corresponding and departed enchantment, and this enchantment takes a number of forms where the war is concerned. We have already had cause to discuss the spell of adventure and excitement that had been cast (and not altogether maliciously cast) over Britain’s young men during the first call to the colours in August of 1914; this was an enchantment indeed, and we may see the evidence of its dissolution in many of the anguished lessons learned throughout the war—lessons so potent and widely disseminated that even Rebecca West, a young civilian woman on the home front, could write searingly of a “flooded trench in Flanders, under that sky more full of flying death than clouds . . . that No-Man’s-Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead” (184).

Many wartime authors vividly described this loss of idealism and of the enchantment of the pre-war mood. C.E. Montague, as we shall see later, had much to say about “the paradise that the bottom fell out of” (*Disenchantment* 15); Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* is intended as an account of “a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war” (i). Perhaps one of the most direct and emblematic expressions of this idea can be found in the American William March’s remarkable novel *Company K* (1933), which sees one of its soldier characters lament in its closing chapters that

I came out sullen and resentful, determined that such a thing should never happen again. I felt that if people were made to understand the senseless horror of war, and could be shown the brutal and stupid facts, they would refuse to kill each other when a roomful of politicians decided for them that their honor had been violated. (228)

This is a common attitude eloquently (if a trifle simplistically) expressed. All of this, then, gives the sense of a life that had been interrupted and a debt that was finally being called in; as Philip Larkin would vividly put it,

Never such innocence,  
 Never before or since,  
 As changed itself to past  
 Without a word--the men  
 Leaving the gardens tidy,  
 The thousands of marriages,  
 Lasting a little while longer:  
 Never such innocence again. ("MCMXIV" 2784)

This innocence manifested itself as yet another dissolved enchantment—that is, the pre-war reverie suggested so pointedly by things like Sassoon's fox-hunting, Orwell's "everlasting strawberry ices on green lawns," or the ludicrous cowboy-centered adventure film that G.K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw starred in under the guidance of J.M. Barrie.<sup>62</sup> The film,

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<sup>62</sup> See pages 231-33 of Chesterton's *Autobiography* (1936) for more on this remarkable production, which Barrie wrote and Percy Nash directed. While it is difficult to find extensive details of the venture elsewhere, it appears to have eventually been released in 1915 under the

produced in 1914, provided exactly the sort of silly, indulgent focal point that has often been used to characterize the abrupt end of that long summer; as Chesterton himself would put it, describing an early showing of footage from the film at a high-profile artistic event in the Capital:

There had really been a sort of unearthly unreality in all the levity of those last hours; like something high and shrill that might crack; and it did crack. I have sometimes wondered whether it was felt that this fantasy of fashionable London would appear incongruous with something that happened some days later. For what happened then was that a certain Ultimatum went out from the Austrian Government against Serbia. I rang up [friend and diplomat] Maurice Baring at a further stage of that rapidly developing business; and I can remember the tones of his voice when he said, "We've got to fight. They've all got to fight. I don't see how anybody can help it."

If the Cowboys were indeed struggling to find the road back to Reality, they found it all right. (234-35)

While I have expressed some misgivings in Chapter 1 about characterizing the Summer of 1914 in terms of its placid tranquility, looking back to that summer as we enter the post-war period allows for some interesting considerations in terms of viewing the war as an interruption, of sorts—as a point of historical rupture, after Samuel Hynes' characterization, rather than a segment of continuity within the stream of unfolding time. If the Summer of 1914 had a dream-

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title of *Rosy Rapture*, presented as a comic short at the Duke of York's theatre. The film tells the story of a showgirl and an infant who are briefly captured by ne'er-do-wells, and was the screen debut of the internationally celebrated silent film icon and dancer Gaby Deslys.

like quality, it was still marked by gathering storm clouds threatening to break out all over the place; burgeoning issues related to mass labour unrest, women's suffrage and the Irish Question continued to dominate the headlines, and to the extent that the British were preparing for war during that summer it was in response to the imminent likelihood of a civil war in Ireland rather than an international war on the continent.

By the time the First World War concluded, however, and the peace negotiations were at last formally underway at Versailles, Europe found itself once more in the midst of a languid and uncertain summer—almost exactly five years, down to the day, since the events that had set the war in motion began. It is here that this idea of the war as an interruption presents itself most forcefully, as the same critical domestic and international problems that threatened Britain in the summer of 1914 continued to percolate in the summer of 1919. In short, if the summer of 1914 was one in which nobody could imagine the war to come, the summer of 1919 was the one in which, in John Buchan's words, "everyone was feverishly trying to forget [it]" (Simmers 60).

This purposeful turning-away from the war was one of the reasons why the "War Books Boom" that will be examined in this chapter did not occur in 1918, though one might well have expected it to. There was a sense among those most likely to write of the war on this visceral level that the time had not yet come; the wound was too raw, the way too hard, the experience too lightly settled. Edmund Blunden, in his lyric "Preliminary" to *Undertones of War* (1928), writes of the difficulties involved in finding an adequate voice with which to express all that he and his generation felt:

I tried once before... when the events were not yet ended, and I was drifted into a backwater. But what I then wrote... although in its details not much affected by the perplexities of distancing memory, was noisy with a depressing forced gaiety then very much the rage. To call a fellow creature “old bean” may be well and good; but to approach such mysteries as Mr. Hardy forthshadowed in *The Dynasts*<sup>63</sup> in the beanish style is to have misunderstood, and to pull Truth’s nose. (viii)

With the passage of time and the development of a new set of literary approaches, a more adequate register of expression became available to those soldiers (among others) looking to set down their accounts with the precision and power they demanded. As painful as this process might have been, as Blunden concludes, “[we] must go over the ground again” (viii).

If the process of going over that ground was a difficult one, it was made all the more so by the realities facing those who returned from the war ostensibly “unscathed.” In Britain, there were three distinct types of soldier to be found in the infantry. The first were the so-called “Old Contemptibles”, who had been professional soldiers or reservists upon the war's outbreak. Many such men were in their thirties or forties when the summer of 1914 drew to a close, and some boasted relevant combat experience from the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). These men comprised the bulk of the British Expeditionary Force that landed in France

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hardy’s *The Dynasts* is a three-part verse-epic/closet drama first published between 1904 and 1908. The work is vast, and very difficult to encapsulate in brief, but it may be described as a long-form psychodrama examining the causes, conduct, and consequences of war from the perspective of both the human and the spirit world. While there has been a long tradition since Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) of taking Hardy’s work—especially his ironic poetry—as a backdrop and predecessor to the eventual mood of First World War writing, *The Dynasts* is not often cited in this fashion and Blunden’s recourse to it here is somewhat unusual. The only comparable verse-epic of the war is David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* (1937), but it, too, has little in common with Hardy’s work.

and Flanders in August of 1914; at the time they constituted six infantry divisions split between I (Haig) and II (Smith-Dorrien) Corps. While these soldiers comprised the majority of those fighting in France for Britain at the war's outset, they do not constitute the generation of which so much disenchantment and disappointment would become the norm; the professional soldier's outlook shared more with the wearily cynical Tommy of Rudyard Kipling's poems than it did with the starry-eyed adventurers of a G.A. Henty novel.

It is the second type, the men of "Kitchener's Army", who most notably embody this doomed and disenchanted aesthetic. The massive infantry apparatus was built from the volunteers of the first wave of recruitment, and this is an important distinction that we shall examine more in a moment: from the first, there was no program of conscription for the British infantry. The battalions that were raised were voluntary, and were often comprised along local/professional lines for the sake of convenience. The practical consequence of this is that one would have a regiment like the East Surreys (for example) comprised almost entirely of men from East Surrey, or a Kensington regiment full of Kensington lads, and so on. Entire villages' and towns' worth of men went off to fight in these battalions side by side, and the spirit of familiar camaraderie that prevailed in them saw them referred to as the "Pals' Battalions." The experiences of those who fought in such battalions had provided the grist for novels like Ian Hay's *The First Hundred Thousand* or the stories of "Sapper," but in the post-war environment there would be rather less of the high jinks and japery that had characterized so many early works—less, that is, of Blunden's "beanish style."

Whereas the men of the Old Contemptibles arrived in France more or less immediately upon the war's outbreak, Kitchener's Army took a considerable amount of time to equip and

train—often with less than satisfactory results. Regardless of their competency, the bulk of those trained up in this group began to arrive on the Western Front in the spring of 1915—in time for Second Ypres, and eventually the Battle of Loos at the end of the summer. Those who survived these ordeals would go on to make up the veteran class deployed alongside newcomers on the Somme in July of 1916—a pivotal campaign in the war, and now often viewed as a lynchpin of the war’s disenchantment and futility. By the end of the first day on the Somme, as Edmund Blunden would memorably put it, it had become apparent that “neither race had won, nor could win, the War. The War had won, and would go on winning” (*Mind's* 38).

There is a third class of soldier, however, that must be considered: the men of the post-conscription recruitment drive. Conscription was formally enacted as of 1 January 1916, and the men inducted into the infantry through this drive first started to arrive on the Front in the late summer of that year. A further crucial difference prevailed: the “Pals' Battalions” structure was largely abandoned, and conscripts were instead usually assigned to battalions as the need for them arose. This purposeful disruption of the established order meant that those units still active at the war’s conclusion had largely lost their family-/community-oriented structure; the fighting man was no longer surrounded by his friends and neighbours, but rather by strangers, and the process of alienation continued.

These differences would end up producing remarkably different sorts of veterans who would respond in remarkably different fashions to the war in its aftermath. The response to the war is often conceived of in a somewhat monolithic fashion, but the reality of the situation precludes such a possibility. Let us examine some implications.

Those in the first wave had survived a grinder of unparalleled proportions, and their first taste of the war's true flavour would have come with the disastrous Retreat from Mons in the autumn of 1914. No longer young men even at the war's outset, 4.25 years of grueling conditions would have taken an enormous physical and mental toll upon them. Having been professional soldiers already in 1914, some would choose to continue serving in this capacity now that it was over—but this was a difficult prospect in the great national rush to demobilization. Positions in the rapidly shrinking peacetime army were hard to secure and even harder to hold, and many of these veterans found themselves demobilized (though honourably) whether they wished it or not. They then found themselves forced to seek new employment after (in some cases) two decades of army life, and the difficulties this posed would have been considerable. There were literally millions of demobilized soldiers searching for the same jobs, and most firms would balk at the notion of hiring an exhausted 40-year-old when there were so many millions of men at half the age begging to be taken on. These are stories that did not always end happily.

In any case, the appalling casualties suffered by this particular wave of the infantry ensured that they did not constitute a large portion of surviving veterans after the war. As Robin Neillands notes in *The Old Contemptibles* (2004), the *British Official History* gives the casualties from the start of the campaign in August 1914 to the end of First Ypres in November as 89,864 men killed, wounded or missing. It notes also that “the greatest part of this loss had fallen on the infantry of the first seven divisions, which originally numbered only 84,000 men” (328-29). As is noted elsewhere (3), this original number would only grow to a total of 160,000 by the end of 1914—still better than 50% casualties. By means of useful comparison, the French

mustered an army of 1,071,000 within the first days of the war, while the initial German army of 850,000 swelled to 4,300,000 within a few weeks. Even “brave little Belgium” could boast an initial army of 350,000 (37). The BEF started small, and suffered an appalling proportion of casualties by any metric. Many of the men left over were moved into training positions as the second wave began to train up, but this was not a position that could be relied upon after the war’s conclusion.

Those in the second wave served a similar stretch to that of their earlier professional counterparts, but with some considerable practical and psychological differences. *Their* first taste of combat would likely have been the appalling terror of Second Ypres (with its corresponding first deployment of poison gas) or the catastrophic failure that was the Battle of Loos in September of 1915. This is not a cheerful tone to set, and it was only made worse by the situation of the Pals' Battalions; because of the way in which these battalions were constructed, a particularly bad day for one of them could result in the functional destruction of an entire town's or neighbourhood's worth of men. This, in part, is responsible for the idea of the “lost generation”—in many British communities, this was quite literally the case. Rudyard Kipling, whose son John famously died at the Battle of Loos. The death of John “Jack” Kipling has become something of an artistic and ideological flashpoint. Only just 18 when he was sent off to the Front, John had been commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Irish Guards after Field Marshal Earl Roberts had responded to Kipling's request for special influence to be applied. John had lacked the clarity of eyesight required for infantry service, but the famous Earl's intervention saw these requirements waived in his case. While John showed every sign of having the makings of an excellent officer, and was well respected by his men, he

was nevertheless killed in action almost immediately upon arriving at the Battle of Loos in September of 1915. He was initially listed as “missing,” however, and the Kiplings spent the rest of the war in a futile search for information as to his whereabouts. The elder Kipling's gradual acceptance of his son's death manifested itself in a number of bitter poetical outpourings, the most substantial of them being “My Boy Jack” (1915) and various elements of “Epitaphs of the War” (1922)—the latter including this notorious couplet: “If any question why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied.” John Kipling's death has become a sort of aesthetic symbol of the war's putative savage futility—an unpoetical counterpart to Wilfred Owen, we might say. David Haig's popular 1997 play *My Boy Jack* tells his sad story, with the author playing Kipling himself; he would reprise the role in the wildly popular 2007 ITV film version of the drama. It is interesting to note, by way of conclusion, that the death of celebrity relatives like John Kipling during the war seems to have had an impact on the public even then. Vera Brittain, later author of *Testament of Youth* (1933), writes in an October 1915 letter to her fiancé Roland Leighton of the grief she and her nursing sisters felt when they learned that John Kipling had gone missing. “Rudyard Kipling's son is among the 'Missing believed killed',” she notes; “I always feel sorrier when they are the sons of intellectual & brilliant people. I don't know why I should be, but somehow I always feel that they must mean even more to their parents than those of the more ordinary ones do to theirs . . . ” (Bishop and Bostridge 174). Kipling himself had cause to remark as much in a July 1918 letter to Edmonia Hill, albeit more inclusively:

Can you imagine such a life as it is with us here now – where there are no young men left among the people one knows, within eight visiting miles of us, every house has lost its son. Now my second young cousin – younger than John – has

just gone out to take John's place in the Irish Guards, and I'm praying that he'll get a good satisfactory deep-seated wound that will keep him quiet for six or eight months. (504)

The trouble with such wounds, of course, is that they tended to last for rather longer than one wanted them to—even when they were more abstract than physical.

These veterans, then, would carry with them the scars of having (in many cases) lost every friend or even nodding acquaintance they had ever had, often over the course of a single day. Though still relatively young, they returned to uncertain prospects and with a host of physical and mental ailments. Much has already been written about the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among veterans of this sort, but it is also worth noting the high rate of respiratory ailments and chronic pain that afflicted them as well—problems that only aggravated their attempts to reintegrate into an industrial workforce.<sup>64</sup>

Less happily still, many of those who had been most eager to enlist in the first place had done so due to a lack of employment prospects elsewhere, and because the life that the army provided would be a step-up from what they might otherwise expect. It is perhaps amazing to consider that army life (in spite of its dangers) actually constituted a real improvement recreationally, vocationally and even nutritionally for many of those who enlisted, but this was

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<sup>64</sup> See Joanna Bourke's *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (1999), Peter Leese's *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (2002), Christine Hallett's *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (2009), or Fiona Reid's *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914-1930* (2010), among many others.

sometimes the case.<sup>65</sup> With the war over, however, and the great demobilization in progress, these men, too, had to find new jobs—and they were not often available.

A final note about this group: a combination of patriotic fervor, the opportunities offered by the soldier's life, and a rather lax system of official scrutiny led to many underaged boys enlisting as adults. Such boys were scarcely ever to be found among the Old Contemptibles, for reasons that should be obvious, and the census records kept by the government formed a more reliable means of age verification when it came to distributing conscription cards in the third wave, but all that was required of those volunteering from 1914 onward was the declaration by oath that the man was over the age of 18. Though it is impossible to get a hard number, it has been estimated that as many as 250,000 such underaged volunteers served in the British infantry throughout the war. Most joined up at 17, unwilling to wait; some were as young as 15 or 16.

Finally, those in the third wave may have been in the hardest place of all. In addition to all of the challenges I have already noted above, many of these men had the misfortune to have had their first tastes of combat on the Somme. Not necessarily at its supremely troubled opening in July of 1916, admittedly, but throughout that long, frustrating slog all the same—through the wet summer, into the frozen winter, and finally into its quiet and (allegedly) consequenceless conclusion. This, too, is a hard place to start one's career as a fighting man—and to have it followed up by Passchendaele and the German Spring Offensive of 1918 does no favours either. Another crucial difference between this group of veterans and those above is that many of them *had very much wished to have nothing to do with the war at all*. While many

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<sup>65</sup> See Holmes (314-34) and Andrew Robertshaw's *Feeding Tommy* (2013) for more on the war's culinary dimensions.

of those conscripted in 1916 would have gone willingly enough in 1914 if only they had been older, there were many more still for whom their lack of a uniform after 2.5 years of war was a conscious choice. They were conscripted against their will, sent off in resentment or fear, trained in arts they did not wish to learn, deployed among strangers, and then subjected to all of the difficulties and boredoms and thrills of the war that the first two waves experienced—but without any of the small mitigation of having chosen to. If we wish to find at least one of the roots of the spirit of “disillusion” that blossomed so aggressively from 1927 through 1933, we may look with interest to this generation.

A serious consideration in the post-war employment market was that of women. During the war, women had risen to the nation's call in a tremendous way and had provided crucial labour in industry of all sorts—and not just those focused on the manufacture of weapons. Lord Northcliffe, not usually one to stand at the cutting edge of social progress, conveyed his delight in “The Women Are Splendid” (1916) at seeing how “women have successfully initiated themselves into new kinds of war work which had hitherto been regarded as coming only within man's sphere,” addressing themselves to novel circumstances “with a rapidity and adaptability that have certainly not been shown by all the ruling sex” (Harmsworth 37).

While many such women found themselves being dismissed at the war's conclusion as the production of artillery and whatnot inevitably wound down, those in industries that would remain prolific (such as textiles, metal-working, food distribution, and so on) were not so willing to simply see themselves sent back to their former situations. Many of their employers agreed, having come to recognize their talents and being unwilling to sacrifice experienced labour to give the jobs to men who had spent the last four years doing nothing of the sort. A step forward

for sexual equality it certainly was, but it also carried the unfortunate consequence that many of the men who went off to war returned to a country in which jobs that might once have been guaranteed for them would never be theirs again.

A variety of groups tried to ameliorate these problems in different ways. The Red Cross and the YMCA continued to serve as vital support networks for veterans, offering shelter, employment (when it could be found), entertainment and a means of keeping in touch with erstwhile colleagues and finding out about new opportunities. Church groups and other spiritually-oriented organizations tried to provide a continuity of community for returning veterans; Kipling's fiction, for example, points to the role of the Freemasons in helping the broken veteran make himself whole once more. His warm descriptions in several stories of the wartime and post-war efforts of the fictionalized "Faith and Works No. 5837 Lodge"—such as "In the Interests of the Brethren," "The Janeites" and "A Madonna of the Trenches"—show some of the ways in which traumatized and disadvantaged men attempted to hold fast to the world they had left behind. There is something of a paradox to be found in this, perhaps, given the often traumatizing nature of that wartime world; while many veterans found themselves seriously altered and even harmed by their time spent in combat, their experience at the front continued to exercise a strong fascination. Guy Chapman, in the preface to his memoirs *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933), writes of that "other side"—"the enormous fascination of war, the repulsion and attraction, the sharpening of awareness, and as one became familiar with one's surroundings an apprehension which was not fear—a quickening rather" (7). He would go on to recall later, as we have had cause to note in another context far above, the manner in which "to the years between 1914 and 1918 I owe everything of lasting value in my make-up.

For any cost I paid in physical and mental vigour they gave me back a supreme fulfillment I should never otherwise have had" (*A Kind* 280). This sort of declaration may seem unusual, especially coming from a veteran who otherwise professes to have despised the war, but we may see similarly intriguing claims in the recollections of authors like Anthony Eden, Sidney Rogerson and A.O. Pollard. Whatever the war may have done to such men's minds, bodies, and spirits, it still seemed to exert a powerful—and often attractive—influence upon them.

### III. Words for Revision: Writing and Re-Writing, 1922-1939

The dominant mood of the interwar years, beyond the disappointment and disenchantment considered above, could safely be described as one of uncertainty. The long-popular idea of a world slowly achieving “progress” had in large degree been disrupted by the war’s catastrophic wasting, and even those potential directions of progress that the war itself had suggested were not exactly bearing fruit. It would clearly not be the war that would end all wars, as it had not even practically ended itself; in spite of the peace conference concluded in Paris, fighting still continued in the Russian theatre as Allied forces attempted to halt the advance of Bolshevik forces and buttress the failing White cause. This fighting would continue into 1920. Germany, though ostensibly defeated, was not “at peace”. Many Germans nursed the dark suspicion that their army had not actually been defeated in the field, but rather by the collapse of resolve on the home front—the origins of the still potent *dolchstoßlegend*<sup>66</sup>—and popular resentment of the conditions imposed by the restrictive Treaty of Versailles only grew as the Allied occupation of the Rhine continued. The collapse of the German government in the war’s final stages had also led to considerable domestic instability, with the result that bands of German infantrymen, lately returned from the Front, could be found roaming the countryside under the dubious banners of popular paramilitary groups, determined to root out communists

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<sup>66</sup> The “stabbed-in-the-back myth;” this figuration of German history saw victory snatched away from a triumphant German Army by the collapse of home front morale and the conniving of various powers—usually indefinitely foreign, sometimes explicitly Jewish, often overtly socialist or communist—both at home and abroad. The Army had not been defeated, the story went; it had been stabbed from behind and prevented from seizing victory when the opportunity had presented itself.

and other ostensibly poisonous influences.<sup>67</sup> These so-called “Freikorps” had more in common with the brigandage of old than with any ideas of modern progress. While the war had been made more bearable for many of those who participated in it by the prospect of a future peace, that war’s conclusion had led to a situation in which peace was not only less desirable but positively disappointing.

In this post-war environment, then, there was a tendency to look back critically upon the events and ideas of 1914-1918. The decisions that had led the world to war began to be seen as errors rather than necessities; even diplomacy itself had been undercut by the troubling proliferation of secret agreements and closed-door discussions. While the interrogations of war and its meaning(s) offered by this generation’s literature will be examined in more depth in Chapter 4 below, a secondary and nevertheless prolific program of interrogation—better read “debunking”—was being conducted by those who had made it their business to theorize the propaganda that they viewed as having been so influential during the war itself. The immediate post-war period saw the publication of a number of works reflecting on the war’s propaganda, whether critically or otherwise.

The inter-war years saw the publication of numerous works offering new theories of the war’s propaganda and—rather more frequently—interrogations of that propaganda’s ethical dimensions. We have already seen the contours of those works that have approached the matter in a studiously neutral spirit, as in Edward Bernays’ treatise, and even in a warmly positive one, as in Stuart’s laudatory memoir; it is with the inter-war publications that the most

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<sup>67</sup> For more on this and other continued “non-official” combat operations throughout Europe in the war’s aftermath, see Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (eds) *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe After the Great War* (2012).

loud and influential notes of criticism of Britain's propaganda efforts are sounded, and their reverberations continue to be felt today.

Three key texts from this period can be taken as exemplary: Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928), and Irene Cooper Willis' *England's Holy War* (1928). Each of these works is notable in its own way; Willis' for being thoroughly representative of the anti-propaganda genre as a whole, Lasswell's for having served as a foundational document in the establishment of a new think-tank for the subject's study, and Ponsonby's as a sometimes sensational work of propaganda in its own right. These works, and others like them, contributed to an ongoing program of re-evaluation and re-examination of the claims and conduct that had led to and sustained the war.

With propaganda having become almost a science during the course of the war, it demanded a more scholarly and investigative approach in the years that followed. The inter-war period saw a flourishing of this sort of theorization. Propaganda itself had been widespread during the war amongst all major combatant powers, and its impact was such that a new dialect, of sorts, now existed for understanding the state's communication of its intents to its people. It was a dialect that could be exported, too; much of this new theorization of propaganda and what came to be called "public relations" was conducted with an eye towards recognizing its function and utility within the world of business as well.

While Willis, Lasswell and Ponsonby will be duly examined below, it must be conceded that no text of the period explores propaganda's newfound possibilities more influentially than Edward L. Bernays' *Propaganda* (1928). Bernays—Sigmund Freud's nephew and now regarded as one of the fathers of public relations as a coherent field—examines the nature of

propaganda in a manner that can only be described as “gleeful.” Bernays’ work is distinct from that of contemporaries like Ponsonby, Lasswell and Willis in that he was a propagandist himself and was quite glad to be so. The text is not a critical one; it is almost exultant.

Harold Lasswell was one of the most influential theorists of propaganda during the mid-century period. A leading American political scientist, law professor and communications expert, Lasswell would go on to chair the Library of Congress’ Experimental Division for the Study of War Time Communications, and his theories would provide the backbone for the methods employed by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. His work is marked by a behaviorist approach to communication and a lively interest in the nature of human speech—especially in adverse or unusual circumstances. As the title of his magnum opus—*Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927)—suggests, his approach to the subject of propaganda was far less passionate and critical than that of Ponsonby or Willis, though it still fell short of the positive enthusiasm of someone like Edward Bernays.

*Propaganda Technique in the World War* began its life as Lasswell’s doctoral thesis, and we may see in it the rigorous and statistics-focused approach to his subject that would go on to mark so much of the work of his latest career. Lasswell took (among other things) the state of Prussian school-books for children as his topic; he “counted and evaluated the significance of the references to national superiority, military glory, foreign inferiority, military heroes, and the like in textbooks approved by the Prussian Ministry of Education” (Almond 253). This analysis of the top-down qualities of propaganda was augmented by his acknowledgment and investigation of the ways in which propaganda subsequently became collaborative—culminating in his declaration that

the active propagandist is certain to have willing help from everybody, with an axe to grind in transforming the War into a march toward whatever sort of promised land happens to appeal to the group concerned. The more of these sub-groups he can fire for the War, the more powerful will be the united devotion of the people to the cause of the country, and to the humiliation of the enemy. (76)

Crucially, and unlike in the work of many of his counterparts, absent from this evaluation of propaganda's effectiveness is any sense of whether it needs to be true, false, or something in between. Its power lies in its rhetorical thrust rather than in its truth value. Indeed, by Lasswell's reckoning, it assumes the power of a sort of god—conspicuously a modern and atheological god—who creates its own reality through the demands of certain rites:

The fact remains that propaganda is one of the most powerful instrumentalities in the modern world. It has arisen to its present eminence in response to a complex of changed circumstances which have altered the nature of society. Small, primitive tribes can weld their heterogeneous members into a fighting whole by the beat of the tom-tom and the tempestuous rhythm of the dance. It is in orgies of physical exuberance that young men are brought to a boiling point of war, and that old and young, men and women, are caught in the suction of tribal purpose. In the Great Society it is no longer possible to fuse the waywardness of individuals in the furnace of the war dance; a newer and subtler instrument must weld thousands and even millions of human beings into one amalgamated mass of hate and will and hope. A new flame must burn out the

canker of dissent and temper the steel of bellicose enthusiasm. The name of this new hammer and anvil of social solidarity is propaganda. (220-21)

If we may detect in this a note of concern over the power that propaganda now asserts, we must also acknowledge a heady (and possibly healthy) respect for that power as well. Not everyone, however, was so excited.

The Cambridge-trained solicitor Irene Cooper Willis contributed only modestly to English letters and propaganda theory in comparison to Lasswell, and has long since been forgotten. These contributions do bear mentioning, however; to biographies of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1928) and Florence Nightingale (1931) were added *England's Holy War* and her considerable service to the literary world as the executor of Florence Hardy's estate: many of Thomas Hardy's papers were included among those left by his late wife, and it is from these that we have obtained many of the notebook and scrapbook volumes that have provided such insight into Hardy's literary collation and construction (Greenslade 99). It is with *England's Holy War* that we are concerned here, however, and a few words about its merits and debits would be appropriate.

*England's Holy War* began its life as three more slender volumes released by Willis during the years immediately following the war: *How We Went into the War* (1919), *How We Got on with the War* (1920), and *How We Came out of the War* (1921). It is a scathing book, or could at least be described so without doing it an injustice, and is primarily concerned with showing how the English press, under the command of such worthies as A.G. Gardiner, Horatio Bottomly, Sir Hedley Le Bas, C.P. Scott and Lord Northcliffe managed to martial the opinion of the Liberal government of a (she argues) liberal nation towards war, red war, war to the knife,

war to the last—and, at that, with a nation whose Emperor was related by blood to the current British monarchy and whose people and industries had enjoyed highly productive relations almost up to the moment that the declaration was made. Willis' subject is war and the chaotic, all- and ever-changing nature of war, which “plays the devil not only with bodies but with minds, and the ensuing intellectual deterioration of the warring nations, being less obvious than the physical deterioration, is by so much the more dangerous” (xix-xx). Such intellectual deterioration also has the likelihood of enduring into peacetime in a more pernicious and less noticeable way, with no outward disfigurements or maladies to show a mind or spirit that has been twisted beyond its natural inclinations. All of this, of course, presupposes that propaganda really does so twist and deteriorate; Willis is convinced that it does, but also sees cause for hope: “nowadays, the flock are less inclined to be shepherded” (xvii). Not everyone was convinced of this, however, and one critic raised a still louder note of warning.

The most lastingly influential of these exemplary anti-propaganda tracts, and now a subject of study in its own right, is Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928). Ponsonby, the Member of Parliament for the Brightside division in Sheffield since 1922 and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs since 1924, had been an active and enthusiastic opponent of Britain's involvement in the war from the moment it first began. He had been one of the charter members of the Union of Democratic Control, and had stood alongside the likes of Ramsay MacDonald and Edmund Morel in his opposition to the continued conflict. He had also been on quite cordial terms with Viscount Bryce, of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, and in the year of the Committee's report joined with Bryce (as well as Lowes Dickenson and Norman Angell, among others) in forming a discussion group that would

eventually be instrumental in establishing the shape and responsibilities of the League of Nations (Jones 98-103). He continued his work as a pacifist in the mid-1920s, and followed up his widely distributed pamphlet *Now is the Time* and his “Peace Letter” campaign with *Falsehood in War-Time*.

*Falsehood in War-Time* proved an immediate success; it went through four printings between May and December of 1928 alone, and quickly became a best-seller (Jones 168). The book is billed as “an assortment of lies circulated throughout the nations during the Great War” (Ponsonby 5), but the primary focus is upon British propaganda work. Ponsonby's ultimate thesis is that war is by necessity built upon lies—caused by them, conducted through them, justified with liberal recourse to them—and that it was especially odious for a liberal democracy which perceived itself as fighting for the right to have resorted to such lies as it did. Ponsonby was rather liberal himself in what he was willing to term a lie, as we shall see, and was willing to concede that concealment and misdirection might be tactically necessary among armies, but he was unwavering in his condemnation of deception when it came to galvanizing public opinion.

As Adrian Gregory has rightly noted in *The Last Great War*, *Falsehood in War-Time* is as much a work of propaganda as any of the texts it denounces (41). Ponsonby labours under a number of misconceptions in his text, seemingly occasioned in many cases by his extreme populist approach; he writes with the intention of exposing the “fraud, hypocrisy . . . , humbug . . . and the blatant and vulgar devices which have been used for so long to prevent the poor ignorant people from realizing the true meaning of war” (26). He insists that truth is the sole guard against war, which always rests upon lies; “if the truth were told from the outset,” he writes, “there would be no reason and no will for war.” On the contrary, the claim he wishes

his readers to accept is that “whether you are right or wrong, whether you win or lose, in no circumstances can war help you or your country” (27). This would likely have come as a surprise to the Belgians, the Poles, the Estonians, and others, but for the English reader whose home had been physically untouched during the war (or who had simply forgotten that many English homes did indeed regularly come under the fire of German naval and air forces), and who had never been faced with the imminent necessity of expelling an occupying force, it made for an attractive prospect. Indeed, Ponsonby’s explicit purpose was the destruction of even the possibility of a popular and patriotic response should the specter of war loom once more over England; to ensure that

none of the heroes prepared for suffering and sacrifice, none of the common herd ready for service and obedience, will be inclined to listen to the call of their country once they discover the polluted sources from whence that call proceeds and recognize the monstrous finger of falsehood which beckons them onto the battlefield. (29)

Certainly we have come a very long way from Montague in only six or seven years.

Ponsonby spends considerable time addressing the matter of atrocity propaganda, the bulk of which he dismisses out of hand. While he includes chapters on openly fictional episodes—like the passage of Russian troops through England in the early days of 1914, or the claims of a German “corpse factory” turning the bodies of fallen soldiers into a variety of consumer goods—he also engages with subjects on which his claims of wholesale invention or overt exaggeration rest on far shakier ground. He describes allied and neutral accounts of the German sack of Louvain in August of 1914 as “deliberate exaggeration,” resting his objections

on the fact that certain newspaper headlines claimed that this “intellectual metropolis” was “now no more than a heap of ashes,” when rather, “as a matter of fact, it was estimated that about an eighth of the town had suffered” (21). In fact “about an eighth of the town” was *destroyed*—certainly it would be a stretch to suggest that only the destroyed portion “suffered”—and that this still involved the deliberate burning of over 2000 buildings and the summary execution of around 250 civilians (Horne and Kramer 438). In any case, this brisk dismissal is characteristic of his engagement with claims of this sort, and wholly ignores the fact that the part of Louvain that constituted that “intellectual metropolis”—that is, the city centre that featured the City Hall and the internationally renowned university and library—had indeed been completely destroyed. This is also to say nothing of the civilians who were executed, but dead civilians seem to count for little in Ponsonby’s text when compared to those who were merely (he claims) misled: “It has rightly been said,” he writes in an especially astonishing passage, “that the injection of the poison of hatred into men’s minds by means of falsehood is a greater evil in war-time than the actual loss of life” (18).<sup>68</sup> An easy claim indeed from someone whose greatest challenge during the war was writing successful pamphlets.

With the impact of works like Lasswell's, Willis' and Ponsonby's being so keenly felt, what had been the minority opinion of activists and radicals during and immediately after the

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<sup>68</sup> He is hardly alone in claiming things of this sort, and I must confess a deep personal skepticism about the reliability of commentators making such claims. We find similar words on the lips of characters in Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929); confronted with the news that rumors have circulated about German soldiers eating Belgian babies, one soldier bitterly declares the perpetrators of this rumor “the real culprits” of the war. Modris Eksteins, concluding a discussion of the war’s home front propaganda in *Rites of Spring*, blandly declares that “reality, a sense of proportion, and reason—these were the major casualties of the war” (236)—not the nine million military and seven million civilian dead, and as many again injured or maimed.

war had become, by the start of the 1930s, “almost an orthodoxy” (Gregory, *Last* 40). It remains such an orthodoxy now, in large measure; the backlash against the war’s propaganda efforts was in part responsible for turning the word “propaganda”, as we have seen in Chapter 1, into a byword for malicious deception.<sup>69</sup>

This tendency has led to certain gaps in the record where the wartime literary scene is concerned. While the overview provided in Chapters 1 and 2 gives some sense of the period’s literary landscape, it would be worth considering some persisting problems to which the postwar reaction against propaganda has contributed. The tendency to use “propaganda” as a shorthand for falsehood and to dismiss it in favour of more apparently sincere and open-handed works has become widespread in many fields focused on war literature. Much of the study of the First World War’s literature seemingly has a great deal of trouble remaining neutral, even when seeking to examine works (putatively) on their own merits. The study of this literature is intimately intertwined with an ethical critique of the war, and is so in a way that is difficult to find in analyses of literature from other similarly wide-scale conflicts. One may read poems and prose from the Napoleonic War, for example, without being stopped short at every turn by footnotes denouncing the incompetence of General Picton or Marshal Ney. The English Romantics are allowed to have their complex and varied views of Napoleon as both a man and a monarch; they are not required to stand in line and either denounce him or celebrate him, a failure to fall on the proper side of the debate exiling them from the acceptable canon of the period’s writing. Surely something has gone awry when a poet—here I speak of Wilfred Owen—who admired Keats a century after his death is treated almost as Romantically as Keats himself.

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<sup>69</sup> See Paddock, ed. (2014) and Milne-Walasek (2016) for further details on this transition and its implications for the study of First World War propaganda efforts.

All of this being said, what are these gaps that a study of the propagandists might fill? What response is there to be delivered against the suspicions of a Lasswell, a Ponsonby or a Willis—to say nothing of a Tate, a Kingsbury, an Eksteins or a Fussell?

First, a significant portion of the British propaganda produced during the war at the behest of official state agencies was literary in nature, and produced at that by some of the biggest names in the period's literary establishment. To study and teach the literary landscape and production of the 1910s without acknowledging the importance of the likes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling or H.G. Wells would be simply to err; they were among the most respected and widely read authors of their time, and—which concerns us here—all produced copious amounts of “war writing.”<sup>70</sup> A view that sees the beginning and ending of “First World War literature” in the works of the trench poets and memoirists would be more limited than the breadth of available material permits, and recent studies like some of those described in the Introduction have already begun to undertake a reappraisal of the limits of the canon in other congenial directions. The work of the propagandists *as* propagandists, however, remains a critical gap.

This broadening of the canon is happening in other ways as well; Susanne Puissant, for example, in her recent study of the war's poetry,<sup>71</sup> acknowledges that bibliographic research

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<sup>70</sup> See (for example) Doyle's “Danger!” (1914), *A Visit to Three Fronts* (1916), *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (6 vols; 1916-20) and “The Death Voyage” (1929); Kipling's *France at War* (1915), *The New Army in Training* (1915), *The Fringes of the Fleet* (1915), *Sea Warfare* (1916), *The War in the Mountains* (1917), *The Graves of the Fallen* (1919), *The Irish Guards in the Great War* (1923), and numerous short stories and poems from 1914 until his death; or Wells' *The War That Will End War* (1914), *The War and Socialism* (1915), *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* (1916), *War and the Future* (1917), *In the Fourth Year* (1918), and *The Bulpington of Blup* (1932).

<sup>71</sup> *Irony and the Poetry of the First World War* (2009).

conducted since the 1970s has “revealed that the majority of poetic reactions to the war were written by civilians rather than combatants” (17).<sup>72</sup> Ann-Marie Einhaus, in her recent study of the rather neglected medium of First World War short fiction,<sup>73</sup> declares that the reintegration of this sort of writing into the canon “offers... a multi-perspectival view of the war which allows us to re-assess our current mythology . . . and to map a cultural history of the war’s experience by scrutinising a genre located at the pulse and in the everyday sphere of its readers” (3). This approach, with its emphasis on reclaiming a multiplicity of perspectives, re-assessing mythology, and looking to the “everyday sphere” of wartime readership, offers much that is usefully applicable to a new study of the war’s literary propaganda as well.

Second, written propaganda lends itself particularly well to analysis from a literary perspective: it is creative, it is rhetorical, it is typically didactic, and it is even sometimes wholly fictional or at least attended by fiction. In short, it deals in stories, and dwells heavily in the realm of the war’s “Myth” as articulated by Samuel Hynes in *A War Imagined*—that is, the vast majority of it is “not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it” (xi). It differs from Hynes’ articulation in being in many ways the antithesis of the *sort* of literature that his explication of “the Myth” is meant to encompass—that is, the poems and memoirs that have so powerfully shaped the cultural imagination—but it bears many of the same critical features. That portion of it that is pure invention may easily be analyzed in rhetorical and literary terms, and even those examples which instead present glossed versions of factual events have in them so much of the quality of euhemerism that they may perhaps be examined with some of the same tools that would be utilized in a historical-critical reading of the *Iliad*, Plutarch’s *Lives*, or

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<sup>72</sup> Most notably Catherine Reilly’s *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography* (1978).

<sup>73</sup> *The Short Story and the First World War* (2013).

the *Song of Roland*. The difference of mythic status where the two sorts of literature are concerned can be found in the fact that many of the propagandistic works began as mythic, with the intention of reshaping the reader's view of reality, while many of the poems and memoirs began with the intention of being unsparingly authentic and precise, only accreting into a "Mythology" afterward.

This tension between the intentions of the propagandists and the poets informs the third reason for this sort of study: the war's propaganda was a major factor in the reactionary writing of the canonical authors. While a study of this propaganda in its own right necessarily places them off to one side, it remains the case that authors like Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Richard Aldington were actively attempting to convey ideas about and experiences of the war that ran against—and were, they believed, superior to—the material being supplied in the newspapers, magazines and academic volumes on the home front. Sassoon's "Soldier's Declaration," for example, specifically denounces what he calls "the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the contrivance of agonies which they do not, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize" (Qtd. In Wohl 262), and his contempt for the tub-thumping music-hall patriotism that was (but not exclusively) one of the features of the home front blazes through in poems like "Rag Time" and "Fight to a Finish". Owen's "pity of war" could not, he and many of his later readers felt, be found in the "dastardly" articles of the *Daily Mail* or *Punch* (*Selected* 358), and his scathing dedication of "Dulce et Decorum Est" to the civilian propaganda poet Jessie Pope suggests the wide-reaching

role of literary propaganda as an occasion for activist response.<sup>74</sup> In short, as Trudi Tate has argued, because “many writers were aware that the stories they had read and heard during the war might be unreliable, misleading, or simply untrue” (*Modernism* 43), the result was a generation of authors determined to bear what they felt to be a more truthful witness.<sup>75</sup> This being the case, a study of the war’s literary propaganda provides an important and critically useful counterpart to the canonical texts of the period by giving voice to the other half of the dialogue in which the works of the trench poets and memoirists are participating.

Fourth, and pursuant to this idea of strong reaction, though the propagandists spoke with a voice that at the time was that of the privileged establishment, the developments of the literary canon over the ensuing century have led to a paradoxical situation in which the voice of the contemporaneous subaltern—that is, of the poets, of the novelists, of the memoirists—has risen to a pinnacle of authority that no establishment figure could now challenge. The example

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<sup>74</sup> While Owen’s initial, explicit dedication “To Jessie Pope, etc.” was eventually softened in a revision to “To a certain poetess,” before being dropped altogether for publication, the dedication lives on provocatively in the manuscript copies of the poem and in virtually every modern version of it in print. As Tim Kendall has pointed out, though, in spite of the dedication’s non-existence in any of the original published versions of the piece, it has become inextricably embedded in the critical response to the poem as “scholars encouraged by that initial judgement have taken the opportunity to present Pope as the epitome of civilians’ ignorance” (xxvi). The convenience of Pope (and “etc.”) as a *bête noire* has contributed, he argues, to a scholarly gender bias that saw women poets and writers excluded from the war’s literary canon until relatively recently in spite of their considerable contributions in this field. See Jane Potter’s *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women’s Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (2005) for a comprehensive overview.

<sup>75</sup> Tate has argued elsewhere (“The First World War: British Writing”; *Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, 160-74) that “popular, patriotic, and propagandistic writings” should indeed be considered under the umbrella of “war literature” (164). The importance of such an inclusion to Tate lies not in studying such works in their own right, however, but in “assist[ing] understanding of the debates which are taking place, explicitly and implicitly, within the [canonical] literature – and sharpen[ing] perception of how the literature takes up and, especially, refutes the language and sentiments of the press” (165). This concession of the propaganda writing’s importance, then, remains nevertheless a subordinating one. It need not.

of Jessie Pope is again instructively illustrative; the poem dedicated against her by Wilfred Owen is among the most popular works of First World War writing in the English-speaking world, but Pope's own works are now seldom anthologized, taught, or even typically mentioned except as being something of which Owen disapproved. This obscures Pope's contemporary status as one of the leading women poets of wartime Britain, who had published three books of war verse before Owen had even made it to France.<sup>76</sup>

This problem of obscurity can be found in numerous important critical texts as well. Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965) dedicates a scant ten pages to the writings of establishment authors on the home front; Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, unquestionably one of the most influential and still widely-read volumes on the war's literary-cultural history, has only the time to mention some of the most prolific and respected authors of the period in passing—and at that typically to disparage them. John Masefield, for example, is described sparingly as “one of the best-known apologists;” Hilaire Belloc as simply “a typical kept correspondent,” of whom the most important thing we must learn is that he was satirized in the *Wipers Times* as “Belary Helloc,” whose articles were always foolishly wrong (Fussell 87). That Belloc published no fewer than ten books<sup>77</sup> between 1914 and 1918 alone, all the while contributing to *Land and Water* as we have seen, is made to be less important a factor in his

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<sup>76</sup> For a brief overview of Pope's poetical output in relation to Owen, see W.G. Bebbington's somewhat piqued “Jessie Pope and Wilfred Owen” in *Ariel* 3.4 (1972): 82-93. Bebbington's argument that much of Pope's war verse was marked by a tongue-in-cheek or even satiric quality is well worth considering.

<sup>77</sup> *The Book of the Bayeux Tapestry* (1914), a translation of Joseph Bédier's 1900 version of *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* (1915), *The History of England* (1915), *The Two Maps of Europe* (1915), *A Change in the Cabinet* (1915), *A General Sketch of the European War, First Phase* (1915), *At the Sign of the Lion* (1916), *The Last Days of the French Monarchy* (1916), *A General Sketch of the European War, Second Phase* (1916), and *The Free Press* (1918).

position in the period's literary landscape than that some soldiers once made fun of him.<sup>78</sup>

Kipling, Buchan and Doyle receive similarly limited treatment, with Kipling actually being slandered, as we shall see in Chapter 5, and the involvement of such authors as these in Fussell's text is strictly as a springboard for multi-chapter appreciations of authors like Owen, Graves and Sassoon.

Fifth and finally: in a broader cultural sense, the propagandists give us a different and valuable window onto the question of what is "true" about the war. This might seem to be a peculiar thing to emphasize in an extended literary-historical study, but so much of the critical adulation that has been accorded the canonical authors since their respective debuts has been due to their authenticity, their fearlessness, their willingness to "tell the truth about the war" that this matter of "truth-telling" remains of central importance. "The figure of the soldier-poet," writes Tim Kendall, "reunited art and ethics, and undertook new obligations by speaking the truth to and about power" ("Introduction" xxii); a significant implication of this narrative of opposition is that, as I have noted above, the words of "the power" in this case have been largely swept over and lost. "The true Poets must be truthful" wrote Owen in his preface to an unfinished poetry collection; "all a poet can do today is warn" ("Preface" 31). This, in turn, has

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<sup>78</sup> The tendency to privilege this sort of criticism is endemic in First World War literary scholarship, sometimes with baffling results. The "self-hating civilian" is everywhere in evidence in the war's long aftermath; it is astounding, for example, to read the number of approving comments that have been written by latter-day civilian academics on Sassoon's poetical murder fantasies (in "Fight to a Finish") involving turning an infantry battalion—fixed bayonets and all—loose upon the civilian population of London. The author of the present study can count on one hand the number of literary scholars he has seen who suggest that Sassoon might have been terrifyingly wrong to have wished this, if he did. Fussell's self-styled identification as a "pissed-off infantryman" first and a scholar second perhaps allows him a certain amount of leeway in sympathizing with these views, but his own experience is far from typical.

become largely what all the poets (and writers) of the war are now expected to have done<sup>79</sup>— and if they did not, in modern judgment, they may then be lumped in with “lies, half-truths and propaganda” (Tate, “The First World War” 162). With the widely shared agreement that the wartime propagandists, the media, and the state were engaged in a program of deliberate lying, the status of these canonical counter-authors as “truth-tellers” becomes central to the field.

Perhaps it should not; its centrality may be one of the reasons that the most heavily and necessarily fictionalized genres of First World War literature (that is, short stories and drama) have fallen into obscurity when compared to the dominant poems and novels that seem so much better suited to conveying (respectively) the complexities of immediate experience or the vastness of extended events. In any event, as we have seen, the propagandists’ perspective on the war is no more or less open to truthfulness than any other in spite of their vocation; indeed, it may even trend towards comprehensiveness where the view of the canonical authors would be necessarily limited. As Douglas Jerrold (about whom much more in Chapter 4) acknowledges from his own wartime experiences, while “to the individual personally, all operations of war are

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<sup>79</sup> William Hecker has charted—and challenged—this perspective in a thoughtful recent article. “For the past eighty-five years,” he writes, “literary critics have generally embraced war poetry as significant, if it meets one of three criteria: if it replicates Wilfred Owen’s poetic vision of World War One (WWI); if it reinforces the belief that warfare is absolutely evil; or if it makes an overtly political statement against a specific war.” The multiplicity of possible perspectives has been lost in the supremacy of these assumptions, however, and Hecker seeks to expand the canon of acceptable war poetry from both WWI and subsequent conflicts—some of which (like the Korean War, for example) have had the totality of their poetical output marginalized as a field of study by the comparative dominance of WWI poetry. See “Finding Wilfred Owen’s Forwarding Address: Moving Beyond the World War One Paradigm”; *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41.2 (2005): 136-48.

meaningless and futile”, the emphasis on privileging accounts of the war “always and continuously from the standpoint of the individual” omits “the relationship of the part to the whole”—that is, “the smallest fighting unit is, in modern national warfare, not the individual, the section or the company, not even the battalion, the regiment or the brigade, but the division” (22-23). Whether this latter judgment of the tactical realities of 1930 is correct or not, Jerrold is certainly right that first-hand accounts of first-hand experience carry with them considerable limitations of scope and involvement. If they were simply accepted as limitations, that would be one thing—but the apparent incomprehensibility and futility of the things experienced and undertaken by individual poets and memoirists during the war have come instead to be taken as a statement on the war as a whole. Sharon Ouditt articulates the perspective well; “the meaninglessness of the First World War,” she writes, “is, of course, one of its major tropes and most searing agonies. In that it makes no sense from the perspective of the alienated individual, no ‘meaning’ can be extracted from it” (259). This might have been true if the “perspective of the alienated individual” were the only one available to us, but, as we have seen, it is not. Even so, whatever the critical utility of such a claim as Ouditt’s may be, distance and “alienation” can be essential; as the war correspondent Peter Englund argues in his preface to *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War* (2011), this distance can be not only helpful to a wider understanding but absolutely essential to it:

. . . to be right in the middle of events is no guarantee of being able to understand them. You are stuck in a confusing, chaotic and noisy reality and the chances are that the editorial office on the other side of the planet often has a better idea of what is going on than you do—just as a historian, paradoxically

enough, often has a better understanding of an event than those who were actually involved in it. (xi)

In the case of the war's literary propagandists, they were not only inhabiting that "editorial office on the other side of the planet", but also the drawing rooms, train compartments and dinner tables of the political and military figures tasked with the curation and development of Britain's war effort—that is, those actually operating authoritatively on the plane at which any "futility" of "the war" as a whole would actually be decided. To put it in glibly illustrative terms, the poet in the trench sees a general riding by and wonders (perhaps ruefully) what he could be thinking—the most he can be to them personally is the "cheery old card" of Sassoon's "The General"; if the author in Buckingham Gate wishes to know the reasons behind that general's "plan of attack," however, he can simply invite him to supper and ask him.<sup>80</sup>

The study of the war's British literary propaganda has much to offer us both as counterpart and counterpoint to the canonical writings of the trench poets and memoirists. The ongoing turn towards a more inclusive approach to the writings of the war—especially where those on the home front are concerned—leads naturally to a re-examination of the

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<sup>80</sup> "The General," as well as being a fine little gem of a poem, is an excellent illustration of the problems of perspective and experience outlined in the paragraphs above. All that the poem's infantrymen, Harry and Jack, can know of the general's plan is that he has one; whatever its contours or its outcome on a macro level, the only consequence on theirs is that it "[does] for them both" (Sassoon 97)—i.e. kills them. Thus we see two levels of experience operating simultaneously, each necessarily closed to the other's concerns; the general cannot plan divisional offensives without the possibility of individual infantrymen being killed, and the individual infantrymen are understandably not sympathetic to the dimensions of the plan when set against the value of their lives. This particular example is not unattended by the spirit of irony, given that Sassoon was inspired to write "The General" after catching a glimpse of Sir Ivor Maxse, one of the more accomplished and thoughtful British generals of the war (Bond 17)—his inventiveness of approach to the command of the 18<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division in 1916, for example, saw it achieve every single one of its objectives on the first day of the Somme. For more on Maxse's differentiation from the typical British general, see Baynes (1995).

propagandists among the British literary establishment and the ways in which their propaganda functioned on both cultural and artistic levels. We have had a chance to examine some of that propaganda itself, as well as some of the scholarly backlash against it in the years between the wars; let us now turn to ways in which creative authors, literary scholars and historians attempted similar interrogations and re-appraisals of the war's causes, conduct, and consequences.

## CHAPTER 4:

### Re-Reading and Re-Writing the War: Historiography, Literary Scholarship, and Literature of the First World War, 1922-1939

#### Introduction

As Chapter 4 begins, we will consider briefly in Part I some of the major histories of the war published during this period—each of which engages in a similarly corrective act of “writing back,” but from positions of greater privilege and narrower vision. Primary (if slender) attention will be paid to two enormous war history-memoirs compiled by British elder statesmen: former Prime Minister David Lloyd George’s scathing *War Memoirs* (1933-1938) and Sir Winston Churchill’s wide-ranging *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (1923-1931). These two memoirs, written by senior political figures involved in the war’s conduct from the very top of the civilian hierarchy, were instrumental in cementing the perception that the war became as long and deadly and “futile” as it did due to the machinations of inept generals who refused to listen to sensible civilians (such as, of course, Lloyd George and Churchill). We will also consider how these memoirs overleaped the traditional bounds of their genre by being aggressively crafted as wide-ranging histories as well as catalogues of personal reflection.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> I will pause here to offer a note about the *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Committee of Imperial Defence*—a 109-volume work curated by Sir James Edmonds. This sensational collection of information was marked both by notable merits and by hideous inadequacies, and a great deal of both had to do with the problem of timing. Dating the *Official History* is a complicated matter. Work began officially in 1915; the first published volumes, focused on naval combat and mercantile operations, were published in 1920; the first infantry-focused volume, inaugurating by far the most important and controversial portion of the *History*, arrived in 1922. The final published volume—a jointly-

The period's "literary scholarship" will be considered in Part II of Chapter 4, and I have used the quotation marks there advisedly. With the war's literary canon still far from established (and its eventual constituent works in many cases still being written), and with dramatically different standards and purposes where the literary scholarship of the period was concerned when compared to those of the present day, there is little to be found in the period that is immediately comparable to the kind of surveys and analyses that have since become the backbone of literary scholarship. Nevertheless, several key texts from the period provide something of a foundation upon which to build, and this section's focus will consequently be divided between the reaction against the previous generation's propaganda writing, on the one hand, and lively critiques of the new crop of war books, on the other.

These critics were one part of a wider movement aimed at "telling the truth about the war," and it is this impulse that motivated the authors of the three primary works to be examined in this section: Cyril Falls' *War Books: A Critical Guide* (1930), Douglas Jerrold's *The Lie About the War* (1930), and Jean Norton Cru's *Du témoignage* (1930).<sup>82</sup> All three authors are critical of the new crop of books being published during the Boom, especially when it comes to the way in which those books created an atmosphere of carnage, futility, chaos and moral

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authored volume by Edmonds and H.R. Davies surveying the Italian Front—appeared in 1949, but yet another volume (on the British naval blockade of Europe), hitherto suppressed, would be made available in 1961. For more on these complications, see Andrew Green's *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories, 1915-1948* (2003)—the very title of which takes the years of Edmonds' involvement for its bracket rather than the years of publication. Perhaps amazingly, even this titanic publication would be dwarfed by the 133-volume attempt by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace "to write the economic and social history of the war" (Winter, "Approaching" 2)—one of the few official or quasi-official histories of the period to cast its eye primarily beyond the war's military dimensions.

<sup>82</sup> Translated in 1976 by Stanley J. Pincetl Jr. and Ernest Marchand as *War Books: A Study in Historical Criticism*. It is with this version of the text that I shall primarily engage.

perversion where the public's conception of the war was concerned. These three works constitute an early—and ultimately futile—corrective to the wholesale adoption of the Boom authors' disenchanted views as normative rather than themselves corrective, and this section will examine the arguments they put forward when it seemed there was still time.

This generation's literature may seem to need no introduction, but it will be examined in Part III of Chapter 4 nevertheless. The years between 1922 and 1939 saw the publication of many of the works that have now come to be viewed as indisputably canonical, with the period seeing the production of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930), Cecil Lewis' *Sagittarius Rising* (1936), R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1928), the most popular English translation of Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* (1929), Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), much of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* tetralogy (1924-28), Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), Arnold Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927), Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1923), Gabriel Chevalier's *Fear* (1930), and Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932)—to name but a few.<sup>83</sup> From this vast sea of potential candidates, I take three representatives of three different genres and forms:

C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922), the 1931 edition of Wilfred Owen's poetry edited by

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<sup>83</sup> For more comprehensive accounts of the period's war writing, see Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965), M.S. Greicus' *Prose Writers of World War I* (1973), George Parfitt's *Fiction of the First World War* (1988), Samuel Hynes' *A War Imagined* (1990), Hugh Cecil's *The Flower of Battle* (1996), Adrian Barlow's *The Great War in British Literature* (2000), Randall Stevenson's *Literature and the Great War 1914-1918* (2013), and Andrew Frayn's *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914-1930* (2014).

Edmund Blunden, and Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929)—making one German exception to my otherwise primarily British focus due to *All Quiet's* titanic international influence and near-immediate popularity in English as both a novel and a film.

## I. History and Historiography after the War

While the War Books Boom saw a tremendous flourishing of literary engagements with the war's history and meaning, as we shall see in Section VI below, there remained an ever-growing collection of historiography with which both historians and the reading public had to contend. Volumes of Sir James Edmonds' *Official History* continued to be released, as ever, but both the markets and the general conversation were to be dominated by the work of certain war-time insiders. Having participated so actively in the making of history, they felt that the time had come for them to take some hand in writing it as well.

The dizzying success of the post-war poems and memoirs created an environment in which historians who wished to sell books had to accommodate themselves to the public mood which the literature helped create; the few statesmen whose histories of the war really *did* sell well, like David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, achieved their success in works that were as long and as all-encompassing as those that failed to make an impact, but which were nevertheless marked by the kind of artful prose, critical self-reflection, and overall sense of dismay that was the mark of the memoirs and the poetry.<sup>84</sup> As the military historian Brian Bond aptly puts it, they found “an intellectual framework and a language which would appeal to a readership inclined to say ‘goodbye to all that’” (*Unquiet* 49). We have but to examine Lloyd George’s prefatory declaration to see how congenial his approach would be to a readership primed by Sassoon, Owen and Graves:

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<sup>84</sup> Lloyd George’s *War Memoirs* (1933-38) and Churchill’s *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (1923-31) were each originally released in six volumes; each would receive a popular abridged edition as well, with Churchill's remaining in print even today.

I aim to tell the naked truth about the war . . . I saw how the incredible heroism of the common man was being squandered to repair the incompetence of the trained experts . . . in the narrow, selfish and unimaginative strategy and in the ghastly butchery of a succession of vain and insane offensives. (8)

Political memoirs seem unlikely to be where “the naked truth about the war” might most be expected to turn up, and it must be noted that prose which cloaks itself in veritable reams of adjectives should perhaps blush from the suggestion that it is doing anything nakedly.

It is not my purpose to spend the same time in this chapter as in others analyzing the period's First World War historiography, and this is so for a number of reasons. The first among them is a paradox: it was somewhat limited in its variety even as it was often almost ludicrously expansive in its scope. Liddell Hart's history is a taut, single-volume piece, but those produced by the likes of Churchill or Lloyd George ran to six volumes—and the Official History had so many volumes that there remains, as noted above, some dispute over exactly how many it actually included. A profoundly interesting history thesis might be written on the place of these enormous documents within the cultural ferment of the late 1920s and the early 1930s, but it would be vastly disproportionate in this one to go into that sort of depth. There are surprisingly few works from the period that have maintained a similar impact; C.R.M.F. Cruttwell's *A History of the Great War, 1914-1918* (1934) is perhaps the only other with a similar amount of clout, but this diminished rapidly after its publication and Oxford's Clarendon Press has commissioned Sir Hew Strachan to compile its official replacement.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *The First World War Volume I: To Arms* (2001) remains the only one of three planned volumes yet completed, unhappily, though its gargantuan size more than makes up for its present lack of companions.

Second, there has already been a great deal of analysis of the merits of these works as historiography—perhaps more than of any other histories of the war, all things considered. They have become objects of study in their own right, now, rather than (primarily) aids to study: Churchill's *The World Crisis* now occasions the same sort of interest—and holds the same dubious brand of authority—in the history of the First World War that Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89), Theodore Roosevelt's *Naval War of 1812* (1882) or William L. Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960) now do in their own fields. It is fitting, then, to defer to the work of those accomplished historians who have taken these works as their particular subjects of study.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, the very nature of the “war books boom” period was intensely and specifically *literary* rather than merely prose-based: it is not simply that everyone finally started writing and reading books about the war, but rather that they began to do so with novels, memoirs, poems and plays rather than with formal histories, whether popular or academic. Artists, not historians, became the keepers of the flame where the popular memory of the war was concerned. As we shall see below in Section II, the literary scholarship of the post-war and inter-war period had more than enough to say about truth claims in historical writing to satisfy even the most voracious historiographer.

## II. War Books Boom and Bust—Literary Scholarship and Critique

While the years following the war produced many works of literary scholarship and criticism that remain influential even today, few such works had anything to do with writings centered upon or emanating from the war. The appearance of T.S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920) brought many of his essays to a wider audience, with the most important—"Tradition and the Individual Talent", originally published in the pages of *The Egoist* in 1919—cementing for itself a permanent reputation and influence. I.A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) helped lay the foundations for the New Critics' approach to literary analysis, while H.W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926), William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), and Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading* (1934) laid out idiosyncratic and wide-ranging approaches to understanding writing on every level from the basics of written language to the reception of certain moods.

It was a time of anthologies as well. The last volume of Edward Marsh's ongoing *Georgian Poetry* series came out in 1922, offering up a final capitulation of the failed Georgian experiment just as the *annus mirabilis* of Modernism had arrived. Arthur Quiller-Couch continued his career as an anthologist for Oxford, bringing out *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (1922) and *The Oxford Book of English Prose* (1923) in rapid succession; these and other anthologies that had been curated by "Q" throughout his career would have a profound impact on the popular reading tastes of the British public, with his earlier poetical anthology, *The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1900*, having sold some 500,000 copies in its first edition alone. Significantly, Quiller-Couch would revise this anthology for release in 1939, expanding its

scope to 1918 (with the stated purpose to “close upon Armistice Day 1918” (Quiller-Couch, “Preface” xii)) and inducting many authors who had been made popular by the First World War—including Julian Grenfell, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Rupert Brooke, and Wilfred Owen. The writings of the war poets had passed beyond their early status as powerful occasional pieces and had begun to enter the canon of traditional English poetry.

In this, Quiller-Couch found himself completely at odds with the compiler of another contemporary Oxford poetical anthology: W.B. Yeats. Yeats had already signalled his discomfort with war poetry in 1915 (“I think it better that in times like these / A poet's mouth be silent” etc.), and had refused to lend his signature to the Authors' Manifesto; by 1936 he had become more stern on the matter yet, insisting in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935* that “I have a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the great war . . . [because] passive suffering is not a theme for poetry” (xxxiv). For Wilfred Owen he reserved a particular venom, as he expresses in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley: “He is all blood, dirt & sucked sugar stick (look at the selection in Faber's Anthology-- he calls poets 'bards,' a girl a 'maid,' & talks about 'Titanic wars'). There is every excuse for him but none for those who like him” (*Letters* 113). This contrast of views is suggestive of some of the early debates about the place of the war within English letters; with Quiller-Couch prepared to take the war as a turning point in the history of English poetry, and Yeats hesitant even to admit that war poetry had a notable place in modern verse, we may see that early debates had less to do with how individual works cohered within a genre than with the advisability of considering them as a genre to begin with. Nevertheless, there were critics who took a more particular focus.

In the years following 1918, we may identify two distinct strands of “literary scholarship” emerging where the war's writing is concerned. We have already had occasion above to consider the anti-propaganda criticism of the inter-war period, which is “literary criticism” of a sort. The second strand focused on the war's writings was instead concerned with those works of more purely creative literature that the war had occasioned in its aftermath; we find in these (admittedly few) critical treatises something rather more like the critical monographs that have now become the norm. The first and perhaps most seminal is Douglas Jerrold's provocative pamphlet, *The Lie About the War* (1930); first published as a broadside by the *Criterion*, Jerrold's polemic denounces the perverse anti-romanticism of the many war books then being produced, declaring that it does no service to art, to memory, or to the cause of peace to propagate a view of the war that is worse than it actually was. If anything, Jerrold concludes, such a practice actually robs the war of its truly tragic scale. Cyril Falls' *War Books* (1930) constitutes a massively expanded critique of the sort that informed Jerrold's pamphlet; in it, he offers up capsule appraisals of the most prominent First World War texts that had been published up until his own volume's release, evaluating them for their precision and accuracy or critiquing them for their looseness or inventiveness. He is joined in this approach by Jean Norton Cru, whose *Du témoignage* (1930) applied a similar approach to the most popular French books about the war. Before considering these volumes, however, let us begin with a pamphlet.

Douglas Jerrold's *The Lie About the War* (1930) is a document often referred to but seldom examined in depth. It is an old-style literary broadside delivered in an age then disinclined to still take them seriously: a manifesto printed as the ninth installment of the

*Criterion Miscellany* series and sold at local book- and newsstands for a shilling. Jerrold—introduced on the inside cover flap as “an uncompromising controversialist and something more than an amateur of war”—takes as his purpose an examination of the most popular “war books” then available on the shelves, scrutinizing them from an historian's standpoint and finding them to be more in the line of propaganda than of fearless truth-telling. His selection of primary texts may seem incomplete to the modern reader,<sup>86</sup> but he admits that he chose them “by going to a London bookseller and taking a copy of every war book he had on his shelves at that particular moment” (11). For all that, it contains many of the classics with which any study of the war's prose (he purposefully omits poetry) would have to concern itself, with the most regrettable gaps being found mainly with those works that have yet to be published—A.O. Pollard's *Fire-Eater: Memoirs of a V.C.* (1932) or Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), for example, though one wonders how well they would have served Jerrold's purpose.

“There is a special kind of war book,” he writes, “(described by reviewers as 'frank and absolutely fearless'), which has reached this year the climax of its popularity” (8). These books—like Hemingway's, like Aldington's, like Remarque's—“present a picture of war which is fundamentally false even when it is superficially true, and which is statistically false even when it is incidentally true;” as a consequence, such books “are a danger to the cause of peace” (9). Some explanation of this is in order.

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<sup>86</sup> These are: Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1916), C.E. Montague's *Rough Justice* (1926), James B. Wharton's *Squad* (1928), Arnold Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischka* (1927), e.e. cummings' *The Enormous Room* (1922), George Blake's *The Path of Glory* (1929), A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), R.H. Mottram's *Spanish Farm* trilogy (1924-26), Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* (1920), Edward Thompson's *These Men Thy Friends* (1927), and Elliott White Springs' *War Birds* (1927) (5).

Jerrold's ultimate thesis may be broken down into four distinct parts that proceed from one to another: a) that it is not true that the war books boom marked a great turning of interest towards the war for the first time, b) that the books then being published did not tell the unvarnished truth about the war where earlier books had failed or shied away, c) that this truth-telling quality, since it did not exist, could hardly be the reason for the books' success, and d) that any attempt to celebrate these developments as being evidence of the triumph of pacifism was at best misguided and at worst actually pernicious. "If an indifferent book alters the course of history for the better," Jerrold concedes, "he is a captious ass who attacks it on aesthetic or literary grounds" (9). He did not believe the war books to be indifferent, however, and still less that they were altering the course of history for the better. They were rather introducing a self-satisfied complacency to the reading public, who could now revel in their own knowingness for having at last been introduced to what Jerrold derisively calls the "actualities" of war. These actualities are far from actual, in his view:

How could I avoid, even at the outset, approaching the conclusion that it was a peculiar, unhistoric, and absurdly romantic vision of war which was popular, and that under the clever pretense of telling the truth about war, a farrago of highly sentimentalised and romantic story-telling was being foisted on to a new, simple and too eagerly humanitarian public. (12)

Indeed, those reading these new books, far from being the new custodians of memory, "are those who have chosen to forget or who are unable to remember" (14).

What does this new romanticism entail, though? We are already familiar with complaints that earlier war books presented a too-romantic view of the war—gallantry,

heroism, sacrifice, etc.—but what does Jerrold find in these boom works to match that? It is rather a dark romance—the sentimentalized and cynical view of the war as an all-consuming chaos into which the individual descends, but for which no actual intelligence seems to have any responsibility. The war becomes a genre, not an actual historical event, and so everything is consequently generalized:

Brave men shot for cowardice . . . innocent men condemned to death for offences never committed . . . routineers behind the lines worrying young heroes with an impertinent barrage of trumpery complaints . . . strong men brutalised by the sheer horror of war . . . drunken staff officers glorying in Courts Martial . . . and cynical ones letting them take their course . . . the brutality of gaolers and the simple Christian humanity of suspects . . . the iniquity and uselessness of a war prolonged to victory . . . the absurdity of patriotism . . . the callous indifference of governments and the misplaced faith of the private soldier in their good intentions . . . the death of a whole generation as typified by the annihilation of a whole section or squad . . . the hopeless struggles of sane men against futile incompetence. (17)

The consequence of all this, Jerrold goes on to say, is that “every one of these books . . . deals with every conceivable kind of struggle except the struggle of one army against another, of one people against another, of one creed or philosophy against another” (17-18). As we shall see, this emphasis upon the individual struggle against the war—rather than the struggles of armies or ideas—will indeed become the defining feature both of writing about the war and of understanding such writing. This is what James Campbell has referred to as “combat

gnosticism"—that only the personal experience of combat confers any authority to talk about war, its conduct, or its consequences.<sup>87</sup> For those of us reading about these events over the gulf of a century, this may simply prove to be an annoyance at worst; for Jerrold, though, it was a tragedy: “every lover of peace is entitled to regret that the appeal to sentiment should be made just at that time when the urgent task is to think coolly and clearly about the realities of war, which have their roots in history” (48).

Jerrold, like Cyril Falls (as we shall see), did not come to his task as a neophyte. His extensive wartime service had seen him severely injured in combat, losing an arm in the process, but his post-war career as an editor and journalist continued unabated by the injury, and, by 1931, he had been brought on as the editor of the (by-then) conservative *English Review*, which he would run until 1935.<sup>88</sup> Jerrold has with some justice been accused of harbouring fascist sympathies—remarkable ones even for the time, that is<sup>89</sup>—and it is not

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<sup>87</sup> See “Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism.” *New Literary History* 30 (1999): 203-15.

<sup>88</sup> The magazine had initially been founded by Ford Madox Hueffer in 1908, and in its glory days would regularly feature works of authors like Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, W.B. Yeats, Frank Harris, Hermann Hesse, Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. By the time of Jerrold’s 1935 departure, the magazine’s reputation had all but collapsed and it had become an increasingly conservative publication—very far from what it once was. The failed editorships of the little-remembered Wilfrid Hindle and Derek Walker-Smith saw the *Review* to its conclusion and eventual absorption into *The National Review*.

<sup>89</sup> “Sympathies” is putting the matter very lightly indeed. While authors like Chesterton and Squire were prepared to attend expensive dinners staged by the January Club or the British Union of Fascists, or to take Mussolini’s early tenure as a credible vision of the future for a Europe made secure against the threat of Communism, Jerrold’s aggressive identification with the Fascist cause was such that he declared himself an ardent supporter of the Generalissimo Francisco Franco during the outbreak of hostilities in Spain in the mid-1930s, and was himself personally involved in organizing the escapade that saw Franco stage his coup in July of 1936. He had hosted the lunch at which the coup was planned, and had himself persuaded the

difficult to see a faint halo of authoritarianism in the critiques offered in *The Lie About the War*. Jerrold's contempt for the reading public is matched only by his insider's knowledge of how the publishing industry worked. The years after the war saw hundreds of volumes boasting all sorts of merits published and hastily forgotten; "the public," Jerrold writes, "weren't allowed to want them" (15), and he places the blame for this squarely upon the shoulders of the publishers and their satellites in the press. "Without the strong support of those who control the literary press, without the formalities of preliminary paragraphs, day of publication reviews, signed articles aptly prepared for quotation, the expensive business of "putting a book across" simply cannot be undertaken" (14), and it would not be until the economically satisfying context of the world that Remarque created that such publishers would give war books the attention and effort that they had previously denied them.

If Jerrold's *The Lie About the War* leveled a set of provocative complaints at the prevailing orthodoxy of the war-book sellers and reviewers, Cyril Falls' encyclopedic *War Books: A Critical Guide* (1930) offered an expansive counterpoint by presenting a (mostly) full account of the existing works, their debits and their merits. The volume provides an annotated list of almost every major war book (and a great many minor war books) published in England up until 1930, with each entry accompanied by an evaluation of its historical merit and a sense of whether or not it could be recommended. Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* receives two stars (out of a possible three; most books receive none, even if Falls basically approves of them), for example, and praise for being an excellent account of "the philosophy of the soldier under fire" (209). Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, by comparison, while earning a single star for

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notorious Major Hugh Pollard to fly the plane that would collect Franco from the Canary Islands and take him in secret to join the Spanish Army in Morocco.

being “a good novel of the more brutal naturalistic school”, is “unnecessarily coarse” and “suffers . . . in artistry and truth from the fact that it is frank propaganda, and also because [Remarque] appears to know singularly little of certain of the details he describes” (294). One can find such pithy summations of hundreds of other works within this remarkable volume, and there is an article yet to be written unpacking the “Fallsian view” of the war's literature.

Falls’ participation in the debate over the war’s historiography and literature would be as extensive as his participation in the war itself. A recipient of the French *Croix de Guerre* for his service with the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulsters and the 62<sup>nd</sup> West Ridings, by 1930 Falls had already distinguished himself as the author of several volumes of Sir James Edmonds’ *Official History*, dealing primarily with the war in Egypt and Palestine, with several more to come between 1933 and 1940. His personal history of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulsters had already been published in 1922, and his career as a contributor to other projects was briefly laid aside as he compiled and released *War Books*. The rest of his career would be spent gradually building his reputation as an expert on the war and its legacy, with a career teaching military history at All Souls being matched by a regular output of books on modern war—with *The Nature of Modern War* (1941), *The Great War* (1961), *The Art of War* (1961), *Armageddon 1918* (1964) and *Caporetto 1917* (1966) being the most relevant to list here. Captain Falls, as he tended to be professionally known even in academic circles, came to embody a conservative rearguard of historiography where the First World War was concerned, with his single-volume history of the war (1961) standing in marked contrast to the prevailing trends of the 1960s to be examined in the concluding chapter.

With *War Books*, Falls brought to the debate over the Boom a much-needed professional edge. His approach to the genre was methodical, privileging historical veracity over

subjective emotive qualities—while nevertheless acknowledging their power when it came to convincing the reader and pulling him in. Falls sets works analyzing the causes of the war aside, and instead focuses on those which deal with the war as it progressed. His scope is broad indeed, however: from “the official records of operations at sea, on land, and in the air” (vii) to studies of “art, journalism, and propaganda” (viii) and finally the “narratives, letters, and diaries” of “soldiers, sailors, and airmen of all ranks but the highest, [ . . . ] doctors, nurses, spies and spy-hunters, ordinary people living at home and doing some work for their side in a civil capacity, or perhaps only observing what was going on about them” (viii-ix). He notes in them a trend we have already observed: “as time goes on they become more and more critical of their own country's political and military leadership, more and more bitter in tone, more and more filled with loathing of war” (ix). Falls also includes a great deal of fictional works, though he omits poetry and drama for reasons he does not explain.

Falls' purpose in the volume is to place the literary “War books” alongside the war's historiographical outpourings in a way that both the publishers and the reading public had not previously allowed. As both he and Douglas Jerrold point out, the public appetite for writing of this sort was not something that just came honestly and causelessly into being; it was stoked by the initial success of aggressively promoted works like Montague's *Disenchantment* and (much more influentially) Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, celebrated in their advertisements and reviews as new and unflinching windows onto the truth about the war. This sudden appetite would not go unsated, either, as indeed “it is common gossip that several writers sat down to produce one in the same vein after watching Herr Remarque's sales go

soaring up into the hundred-thousands" (Falls x). Gossip or not, there is an element of truth to this; Robert Graves was one such opportunist, and Henry Williamson another.

Falls is less concerned with the authors as opportunists—or even as “anti-war” writers, which not all of them were—than he is with them as purveyors of deceit. “The writers have set themselves,” he argues, “not to strip war of its romance—for that was pretty well gone already—but 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 cause or doing any good” (x); this is a reading of the war that should be all too familiar to those now reading the present document, and it is instructive that objections against it were already being raised at such an early stage. His main complaint about all of this is leveled against the manner in which historical fiction contracts the whole into a more intense and dynamic part, creating sensationalism and even absurdity where none might have existed before. There is a fine line between including “realistic” details for the sake of verisimilitude and including *every* “realistic” detail that can be imagined:

. . .the falsest of false evidence is produced in another way: by closing-up scenes and events which in themselves may be true. Every sector becomes a bad one, every working-party is shot to pieces; if a man is killed or wounded his brains or his entrails always protrude from his body; no one ever seems to have a rest. [ . . .] Attacks succeed one another with lightning rapidity. The soldier is represented as a depressed and mournful spectre helplessly wandering about until death brought his miseries to an end. (xi)

Even a modern reader may be forgiven for finding this vision of the infantryman's plight to be basically "accurate," if his or her reading on the subject has fallen along the usual lines. Far from simply telling the truth in a plain and unvarnished way, Falls describes these works as what they essentially are: propaganda of another sort, "founded upon a distortion of the truth and an appeal to the emotions rather than to reason" (xii). Because such propaganda writing cannot long withstand scrutiny, "there is good reason to believe that many of these books have not had even momentarily the propagandist effect intended upon the minds of a good proportion of their readers; that they have instead created or pandered to a lust for horror, brutality, and filth" (xii). In this Falls presages the reflective comments from Herbert Read, offered in "The Failure of the War Books" (1942), that indict the Boom's literary production for having been too sentimental, too visceral, and too titillating—inspiring strong emotional responses from their readers without in any sense enabling or even encouraging the sort of practical actions that might prevent another global war from occurring. Such activism proved completely inadequate to the task of preventing the Second World War, and if we are to consider the Boom's literary output as anything less than a failure, we must come to consider it with regard to some other metric of achievement instead.

With Falls having already started this process of re-evaluation by placing the literary works alongside the more purely historiographical, we may see considerable merit in Brian Bond's declaration<sup>90</sup> that "British fiction of the First World War [is] of considerable interest and

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<sup>90</sup> In *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (2008), his analysis of the war's most enduringly popular memoir-writing from an historian's perspective. Bond considers works like Edmund Blunden's *The Undertones of War*, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We*, and Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* as windows onto the war's history rather than primarily as reflections of individual experience. This is an approach that is paradoxically both congenial and

value for historians, so it seem[s] reasonable to assume that war memoirs would be at least of equal importance as historical sources.” He laments that “this aspect of war literature has received little attention from scholars, ” with most engagements with such texts “approach[ing] the genre essentially from the viewpoint of literary criticism rather than history” (*Survivors* xii). Like Falls, he seeks to “demonstrate the tremendous variety of war memoirs in, for example, their style of presentation and in their authors’ attitudes to the war, beyond the handful of classics admitted to the literary canon” (xiii); in this we see an acknowledgment of the canon's self-perpetuating nature and a gratifying trend towards remedying the situation.

I will close by noting briefly that, alongside Jerrold’s more polemic domestic work, Falls’ undertaking found a continental counterpart in the highly influential *Du témoignage* (1930) of Jean Norton Cru.<sup>91</sup> A highly educated polyglot and academic, Cru had served in the trenches for most of the war, spending much of his time as an interpreter liaising between French and American or British troops. There he experienced some of the worst fighting of the war firsthand, and became determined—after having been engrossed and deeply moved by works like Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu (Under Fire)* (1916)—to do his part to rescue the raft of French memoirs from the corrupting threats of sentimentalism, forgetting, and propaganda. *Du*

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hostile to Falls’ own, though they come to similar conclusions about each text's merits; Falls would argue that the overt fictionalization of these works would preclude their serious use by the student of history, while Bond is interested in investigating just why so many memoirists chose to couch their own real, historical experiences in overtly fictional terms. Whatever their likely agreements or disagreements, it remains the case that Bond's work is the most notable modern successor to that of Jerrold, Falls, and Cru.

<sup>91</sup> Most recently published in French as *Témoignage : essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928* (2006), edited by Frédéric Rousseau, and in English as *War Books: A Study in Historical Criticism* (1976), edited and translated by Ernest Marchand and Stanley J. Pincetl, Jr. This edition contains a supplementary biography of Cru (in English) by Hélène Vogel.

*témoignage* offers a critical and in many cases corrective survey of some three hundred literary memoirs of combat experience published between the war's outbreak and 1928. In complex contrast with that of Jerrold and Falls, his primary concern was with a sort of truth to life, if I may call it that. In a letter to his sister in January of 1917,<sup>92</sup> Cru repudiates the "preconceptions, or literary, traditional ideas, which constitute what I call the 'legend of the war,'" declaring instead that "these dogmas [must be replaced] with the facts of experience" (212). While Jerrold had much to say about the frequent irrelevance of experience, and while Falls was far more focused on the institutional value of the war's many texts, this emphasis upon the primacy of experience had become one of the most dominant features not only of First World War literature but of war writing more generally, as we shall see below. Whatever their disagreements might have been otherwise, Jerrold and Falls would surely have accepted Cru's angry declaration in a later letter that he "consider[ed] it a sacrilege to use our blood and our anguish merely as the material for making literature" (240). It is fitting, perhaps, that all three scholars' accounts of the literary scene stop temporally short of encompassing the full scope of the War Books Boom; of such a blood-dimmed tide as will be described in the following section, it is all but impossible to imagine a truly comprehensive account.

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<sup>92</sup> For this and other quotes from Cru's letters I am indebted to the work of Rémy Cazals at the *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. Cazals' short article on Cru is one of the very few accessible English-language sources on this important critic, and the *Encyclopedia* has performed a great service in hosting it.

### III. Writing Back—Literature

It is not so clear that this war or that can be the immediate subject of great verse. To its own generation it is too near, too intertwined with glaring realities and confused with disturbing detail. The emotions of the fight, the sacrifice, the triumph, must be remembered in tranquility—or at least in peace—if they are to be harmonised into anything deserving of the name and immortality of music.

- Henry Newbolt<sup>93</sup>

We must look for a deeper cause of this failure. I believe it can be found in that impulse which is loosely known as sadism, but which is surely something rather broader than that form of sexual perversion. [ . . . ] In writing our war books we were unwittingly ministering to this hidden lust.

- Herbert Read<sup>94</sup>

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Samuel Hynes, in *The Soldiers' Tale* (1997), argues that there are “two principal kinds [of war-writing], which correspond to two quite different needs: the need to report and the need to remember” (xiv). We have already considered some of the implications of the war-text-as-memorial in Chapter 3, so it is to this notion of “reporting” that we must now turn. It is one that found ample precedent in the written works of the First World War’s veterans; Siegfried

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<sup>93</sup> “War and Poetry” (250). Newbolt here evokes Wordsworth’s famous figuration of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . [taking] its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.”

<sup>94</sup> “The Failure of the War Books” (74).

Sassoon, for example, in *Siegfried's Journey*, characterizes their task as that of “[making] known . . . an interpretation of the war as seen by the fighting men” through the “humanized reportings of front-line episodes” (203; 60). Hynes considers this role to be best filled by the way in which war writing conveys experience, in all of its confusion and incompleteness, at the expense of conveying what we might instead call “history”; “if we would understand what war is like, and how it *feels*,” Hynes writes, “we must turn away from history and its numbers, and seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there” (*A War* xii). If the war’s reality lies in this personal witness and this personal presence, what, then, is the function of the literary or artistic text that seeks to convey it? What sort of authority or authenticity can it have, and what are the markers of these attributes? Perhaps even more troublingly, what do such texts *do* to those who read them? What is intended by the experience, and what (if it differs) is the actual result? Is the desire of a non-combatant to read an account of combat functionally vicarious and perverse, as Newbolt and Read suggest? Or is this reading doing something for the people who have written the work being read as well? These relationships—between the writer and the reader, the combatant and the non-combatant, the commander and the commanded, the soldier and the enemy, the past and the present—are complex indeed, and are built fundamentally upon a variety of exchanges. They are not unidirectional; they are reciprocal. Let us begin our examination of the reciprocities of experience that inhere in war writing at writing’s most fundamental level: language.

Martin Pegler, in his recent lexicon of First World War British soldiers’ slang, sheds remarkable light upon the varied and often highly specific language that evolved among the war’s fighting men. While much of it was too specialized to be of any relevance outside of its

original context, Pegler also frequently has cause to note the ways in which some words and phrases that began in the trenches nevertheless entered general circulation among civilians. Many are still current today, even if their origins have been popularly forgotten. “To chat,” for example, has been argued to trace its roots (via a rather byzantine circumlocution indeed) back to the conversation of soldiers sitting in groups as they removed lice from their clothing (Pegler 59-60), while words and phrases like “snapshot,” “bloke,” “conk out” and “pushing up daisies” were also popularized during the war. The linguistic boundaries between the fighting front and the home front, then, are porous; what begins as soldier’s slang, suited to the world of the trenches, is eventually brought back to the civilian world by returning veterans and used in that capacity where some sort of utility can be maintained. Civilians adopt the slang in turn—perhaps often unconscious of its origins—and what began as a bit of wartime flippancy eventually makes its way into the canon of daily speech.

These functionally ironic uses of language in war-time both imitate the combat experience and obscure its realities. While this irony is similar to what we find emphasized in Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, it should not obscure the much more urgent use of language by the war’s veterans: in the attempt to convey a real impression of what combat *feels* like, and what it might *mean* to the individual. What is at stake in this attempt varies from writer to writer; the memoirist trying to give a sense of what he or she has personally experienced on the battlefield is perhaps faced with a weightier and ultimately more important task than is the novelist attempting to achieve credible verisimilitude in a field where the charge of “romanticization” is never far away.

The important place that this concern over the meaningful communication of experience has traditionally inhabited in war writing is vividly evoked by the title of Arthur E. Lane's influential study of the First World War's British poetry, *An Adequate Response* (1972). War literature is, by and large, a literature with an ethic—or is at least broadly perceived of as such in many critical texts devoted to the subject. Wilfred Owen has famously claimed as the poet's portion the duty of telling the truth, and that in doing so "all a poet can do today is warn" (31), while the distance between experience and expression remains a perennial feature of war writing even now. As James Campbell has put it in his provocative article, "Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism," such works are primarily considered in terms of "an aesthetic criterion of realism and an ethical criterion of a humanism of passivity" because combat is seen as "a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience" (203). If our encounter with such literature really does carry an ethical criterion, then mere evaluation of art-as-such seemingly is not enough.

At stake in so many pieces of writing about war, then, is the matter of whether or not those writings have done the experience justice. This, then, will be our focal point over the next several pages, and the spine of the body of literary work that the war's memory occasioned during this period: the way in which successful war literature offers "the least mediated path between the realities of the trench and the innocence of the civilian reader" (Campbell, "Interpreting" 266).

The period between 1922 and 1945 saw the publication of virtually all of the literary engagements with the First World War that have now become canonical. Cyril Falls, in *War Books*, offers a summation of this field's qualities:

[The class of fiction] was well-filled while the War lasted, but very little was added to it until about two years ago [in 1928], when a flood began which reached its greatest height last year and is now receding pretty swiftly. The recent War novel differs very markedly from the earlier kind, though even while the War was in progress a few books, such as [Henri Barbusse's] *Le Feu*, were published which have much closer kinship with the novels of to-day than with those of their own time. [ . . . ] One may say that to an overwhelming extent 'War fiction' is concerned with the junior officer or man in the ranks, and especially the infantryman, the worst sufferer. And in the case of five books out of six it is not only bitterly opposed to war but marked by certain characteristics which are worth examination. (ix-x)

We have already had cause to conduct that examination above, so what follows will instead consider some of those exemplary texts in their own right rather than the broader attempt to unify them into a coherent canon.

The sheer number of such texts makes a capsule examination of this period prohibitive, so I have chosen to limit myself to four exemplary works from four different forms and genres that each, in its own way, exhibits a different strand of post-war literary engagement while simultaneously manifesting that spirit of speaking-back and reassessment that has marked this generation on the whole. I pay particular attention to the ways in which experience of the war's

literary art begins to become a multi-media and multi-platform experience—whether in the form of plays that were turned into novels, novels that were turned into films, poems that were collected and preserved by other poets, or other such transfers from one form to another. The authority of mere authors-as-authors has begun to diminish, by this point, and the war's memory is by necessity a much more collective experience.

This section, then, will focus primarily upon C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), and the 1931 edition of Wilfred Owen's poems edited by Edmund Blunden. All of these works contribute to the spirit of reassessment and "speaking-back" that so characterize the period's artistic and scholarly re-engagement with the war. Montague's *Disenchantment* constitutes the inception of a genre that would end up providing a substantive set of precedents for political memoirs and historical works of the sort already described above; Remarque's fictional engagement with wartime experience would perform similar service for those seeking a template for novels; the collection of Owen's poetry distills the anguish, vengeance and despair of the trench poet into some of its most vivid and powerful expressions, providing an example of the "war poem" at its most compelling while demonstrating the necessity of poetic collaboration for its preservation and dissemination.

Had I elected to examine drama in this section as well, the natural choice would have been R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1928), one of the most successful plays of its time and certainly the most successful war play. The trouble is that it would hardly have been emblematic of anything but itself: of all the literary forms to which the war has served as such an inspiring backdrop, none seems to have produced so few lasting works as that of drama. The

most popular stage plays (and, perhaps amazingly, musicals) about the war have all been produced within the last fifty years, with Joan Littlewood's *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963), Eric Peterson and John Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981) and Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* (2007, based on his 1982 novel of the same name) looming especially large upon the horizon. Of those plays about the war which were popular during the war itself, not a one remains of any interest now except to scholars;<sup>95</sup> of those plays produced within the war's aftermath, Sherriff's is the only one that continues to attract both popular and critical attention.<sup>96</sup>

Let us begin relatively shortly after the war's conclusion. I have had cause already to note above that 1922 has often been conceived of as one of the lynchpins of Modernism both

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, John Galsworthy's *Defeat* (1917), a sensational one-act play about a prostitute and an infantry officer, or J.M. Barrie's *Der Tag* (1914), a meditation upon the interior psychology of Kaiser Wilhelm II as he is tormented by spirits.

<sup>96</sup> *Journey's End*, first performed in December of 1928, overcame a slow and uncertain beginning to become a certifiable dramatic and literary sensation. Sherriff had initially encountered difficulties in finding a theatre company willing to stage the play, owing largely to the widespread uninterest in war-writing that has already been examined above. It was eventually staged with the help of George Bernard Shaw, who considered it a "useful [corrective] to the romantic conception of war" (Gore-Langton 66), and it arrived before the theatre-going public just in time to be buoyed up by the tremendous success of works like Remarque's *All Quiet*. A two-night engagement at the Apollo in Westminster quickly became a two-year engagement at the Prince of Wales Theatre in the West End, and by the end of 1929 the play boasted over thirty concurrent productions running around the world, with some (in translation) as far away as Budapest and Madrid. It swiftly became a film, beating the Milestone adaptation of *All Quiet* to the screen in 1930 by three months; in 1931 the film was itself adapted into another film—in German, though maintaining the original British army setting and characters and under the new title of *The Other Side*. The play is interesting in that Sherriff eschews the chronological anonymity that drama can sometimes offer and instead situates during very specific events—that is, during the massed German offensives of the Spring of 1918, otherwise known as Operation Michael. The play takes for its time and place the lines near St. Quentin and the days spanning 18 March through 21 March of that year. There is much in this which might have been left unsaid, or even purposefully generic, the better to emphasize the play's "everyman" quality—but Sherriff instead emphasizes the reality of both time and place to jointly and more forcefully emphasize the reality of the individuals who participated in such events.

in England and abroad. The year saw the founding of the influential Modernist journal *The Criterion*, the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the publication of the Shakespeare & Co. edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the release of Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. The year also saw the publication of Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*, the first performance of Edith Sitwell's *Façade*, and the controversial staging of Jean Cocteau's *Antigone* in Monmartre. Meanwhile, because other things keep ticking along as well, it must be noted that 1922 saw the publication of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *At the Earth's Core* and Edgar Wallace's *The Valley of Ghosts*.

For the purposes of the argument at hand, however, the two most important volumes to consider are Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* and C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment*—two works that jointly constitute a hinge in popular and artistic consciousness about the war, and which, when taken together, provide a provocative image of just what this moment of rupture-in-understanding meant.

It would be fair to describe Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* as a “romance,” of sorts. It carries within it the essence of the “school-boy chum story” made so famous in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, Kipling's *Stalky & Co.*, or the many works of Eden Philpotts—and transitions that tale into one of its many possible conclusions on the beaches of Gallipoli. Indeed, one early edition's dust-jacket depicts the petals of a rose falling into a raging fire, the whole accompanied by a banner reading “A Great Romance of Glorious Youth;” a poster for the 1931 film adaptation (as we will see, there was a boom in war films as well as books around this time) declares it to be “AN EPIC OF GALLIPOLI.” For all of this, it is a relatively slight book, especially when compared with the sensational works that would follow at the end of the

decade, as it lacks the profound introspection and spirit of reappraisal that marked them. These are not the only demands to be made of a book, however, and so it is instructive to note that *Tell England* went through some forty editions by 1969. All the same, the taste for war books that could be described with terms like “romance” or “epic” was on the wane, and it is not for nothing that, of the two popular war books released in 1922, one is thought to have signaled the end of an era while the other is thought to have heralded the dawn of a new one.

In a very real sense, the period begins with C.E. Montague’s literary essay/*belle lettre*, *Disenchantment* (1922), which was one of the earlier (and certainly the most influential) major British works to overtly consider the war from the perspective its title so vividly implies. Michael North has described it as “the first instance of what was to become a new genre, the postwar reassessment” (5), while Andrew Frayn positions Montague and his work as having been “instrumental in breaking the perceived ‘silence’ about the war” (135). This short but provocative work establishes the tone of hostile remembrance and reflection that would come to be so typical of the interwar literary scene, and highlights in its name the often fraught tension that existed between the “enchantment” and its own dissolution.

"Now that most of our men in the prime of life have been in the army," Montague begins, “we seem to be in for a goodly literature of disappointment” (1). We shall see shortly that this was to put it mildly; Montague was right to suspect that a generation of mostly literate young men might well have something to say about the war that had so affected them, and *Disenchantment* provided something of a starting point for the wave of literature that would follow.

The source of this “disappointment” is readily obvious, but what of the “disenchantment?” The enchantment in question was one of experience, Montague makes clear; it was something that the enlisted men felt, and felt to be real, rather than something they were merely told or persuaded of; “illusions,” he writes perceptively, “are not delusions” (18). However illusory it may have been, there was a spirit of camaraderie and pulling-together that characterized the days and months of the early war, when it seemed that a new epoch in history had dawned: that of final and total national unity. This was a unity that manifested itself in the universal striving for the common good, the collapse of class barriers, and the sense that even reality itself had somehow become more real—like Chesterton's cowboys finally finding their way back home. The same schoolboys and young soldiers who had populated the pages of books like *Tell England* rejoiced in having finally found a cause worthy of their souls; they would not rejoice for long:

It seemed hardly credible now, in this soured and quarrelsome country and time, that so many men of different classes and kinds, thrown together at random, should ever have been so simply and happily friendly, trustful, and keen. But they were, and they imagined that all their betters were too. That was the paradise that the bottom fell out of. (15)

As the first detachments of Kitchener's Army finally left the training grounds and made their ways to the various fighting fronts, certain lessons would be learned. Montague at one point describes the problems caused throughout the military bureaucracy by an “imp of frustration,” a “futilitarian elf” (16); “futilitarian” strikes me as being a useful word to keep around,

especially when it comes to describing certain mainstream approaches to the war's potential causes and meaning.

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Disenchantment* is the manner in which it prefigures later developments in war writing without necessarily prefiguring their actual arguments. It was common to find authors in the boom years complaining of the war having been fought for a lie, or at least prolonged in a dishonest fashion; Sassoon's "Soldier's Declaration," released during the war itself, would set the tone for this kind of thing. In Montague's case, however, the fundamental rightness of the war survives his evaluation, as does the basic goodness of those fighting it; his concern is moreover with the damage the war did to high-minded idealism and a belief in the importance of a lively, genial and martial spirit. Unlike many such books that would follow later in the boom, *Disenchantment* is not, fundamentally, an anti-war tract; while "Montague certainly challenges existing discourses about the war . . . the only apparent fear in [the book] is that lessons will not be learned" (Frayn, "What" 134). Indeed, so these concerns led Montague to "immediately regret . . . the title as too sweeping and misleading" (Bond, *Unquiet* 29).

The work concludes on a note of careful optimism and exhortation. "That is about where we stand as a nation," he writes; "disease and imbecility and an early and ignoble death, or else that stoic facing, through interminable days, of an easily escapable dullness that may be anything from an ache up to an agony" (254). The disease to be conquered, in this case, is disenchantment itself: the loss of ideals, the surrender to cynicism, the weakness of a battered spirit. What he calls for instead is that "supreme British virtue" championed by Ian Hay in *The First Hundred Thousand*—that of "holding on, and holding on, and holding on" (Hay 180)—that

first saw Britain through the similarly spirit-battering disasters of Mons, Ypres, and Loos. "This is an individual's job," Montague writes near the essay's conclusion,

and a somewhat lonely one, though a nation has to be saved by it. To get down to work, whoever else idles; to tell no lies, whoever else may thrive on their uses; to keep fit, and the beast in you down; to help any who need it; to take less from your world than you give it; to go without the old drams to the nerves—the hero stunt, the sob story, all the darling liqueurs of war emotionalism, war vanity, war spite, war rant and cant of every kind; and to do it all, not in a sentimental mood of self-pity like some actor mounting in an empty theatre and thinking what treasures the absent audience has lost, but like a man on a sheep-farm in the mountains, as much alone and at peace with his work of maintaining the world as God was when he made it. (258-59)

If such a sober and determined response helped define certain early reactions to the war, it is only fitting that something more or less like its precise opposite—positively reveling in that attitude of the disregarded actor, combining every possible strain of "war emotionalism, war vanity, war spite, war rant and cant of every kind"—would come to redefine it at the war books boom's outset. Let us now turn to Erich Maria Remarque—a thespian in the court of Mars.

The world of the First World War novel as it is now most widely understood could be said with some justice to begin and end with Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), first published serially in the magazine *Vossische Zeitung* in the late autumn of 1928 before being released as a single volume in 1929 under the original title of *Im Westen nichts Neues*. By 1930 the work had been translated into over a dozen other languages—including into English,

by A.W. Wheen—and had sold over a million copies in Germany alone. As Modris Eksteins notes, “Remarque's success was unprecedented in the entire history of publishing,” and, to echo the words of the *Nouvelles littéraires* in Paris, he had become the “author today with the largest audience in the world” (Eksteins 276-77).<sup>97</sup> None of this can be said to have been an accident (substantially true stories of Remarque's work finding early rejections notwithstanding); we have already seen Jerrold's complaint about the degree to which books require promotional help to succeed, and Remarque's novel benefitted from extensive and sensational advertisement on behalf of his publisher, the Ullstein Verlag. These advertisements did their work, and still continue, after a fashion, today; the cheap paperback edition of *All Quiet* that sits on my shelf has on its cover a small red banner declaring it to be “The GREATEST WAR NOVEL of ALL TIME.”<sup>98</sup>

There are three aspects of *All Quiet's* success that I wish to remark upon in the section that follows: the novel's context, the novel's contents, and the author's intentions. I acknowledge the death of the author, as we all must—and no author was ever so dead as Remarque, who wrote under a false name and even, substantially, the mantle of a falsified life<sup>99</sup>—but it is worth examining Remarque's motives for the fashion in which they catapulted a

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<sup>97</sup> It remains a curious fact that, along with the first film adaptation of *All Quiet* being an American one, there has yet to be any German film adaptation of this most famous of German novels. A German adaptation of R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* and G.W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* both came out at this time, covering similar subject matter, but this is as close as German cinema would yet get to such an adaptation.

<sup>98</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>99</sup> “Considerable mystery surrounds Remarque's war experience. [ . . . ] He first saw front-line action in Flanders in June 1917. At the front he was wounded, according to his own testimony, either four or five times, but according to other evidence, only once seriously. The German army minister, General Groener, was to . . . [declare] that Remarque had been wounded in the left knee and under one arm on July 31, 1917, and that he had remained in a hospital in

deliberately ahistorical novel into an ongoing dispute over how best to grapple with and remember an historical event.

We have already had cause to consider the ways in which the war books boom beginning in 1927 constituted an attack, of sorts, on establishment modes of writing about and remembering the war. Artists turned their pens to deeply personal and emotive accounts of war experience, and readers turned to those artists to hear what was trumpeted as being “the truth about the war.” Remarque's contribution to this attempted—it must be admitted somewhat disingenuously—to stay out of this ongoing debate and rising tension. In his brief preface to the novel, he declares that “his book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war” (i). The disingenuousness can be found both in the fact that *All Quiet* immediately (and, on the strength of its advertising campaign, purposefully) became a rallying-point for those who wished to accuse and confess, and in the fact that Remarque chooses to end the novel before actually exploring in any detail the lives of those who “may have escaped the shells” but were still “destroyed by the war” (i). This he would leave until its far less successful sequel *Der Weg zurück (The Road Back)*, brought out by the same publishers in 1931.

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Duisburg from August 3, 1917, to October 31, 1918. The minister dismissed as false the reports that Remarque had been either decorated or promoted” (Eksteins 278). There is further evidence, from a bunkmate in the Duisburg hospital, that Remarque's debilitating wound had been self-inflicted and that he had subsequently taken a job as a hospital clerk. “There do appear to be grounds,” concludes Eksteins, “for suspecting that Remarque's war experience was not as extensive as his successful novel, and particularly the promotional effort surrounding it, implied” (279).

*All Quiet*'s actual focus is on the men of a particular infantry squad as they negotiate the chaotic terrain of the Western Front. This is a chaos that is in equal parts emotional, spiritual, bodily and topographical; they are confronted at every turn by the kinds of terrors and catastrophes we have already seen enumerated in Jerrold's and Falls' respective lists of the common—sometimes too-common—tropes of First World War literature. Patriots spew their cant; callous and unintelligent commanders order pointless attacks; good men are wiped out for nothing; hideous injuries of both body and spirit are sustained; the war's overall unintelligibility and futility are everywhere remarked upon, and the ones to remark upon it are the teenaged philosophers who have ended up comprising the lowest ranks of a non-professional army:

The first death we saw shattered this belief [in the war's rightness]. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than [that of the teachers and politicians]. They surpassed us only in phrases and in cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces. While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one's country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger. (12-13)

It is difficult to read such passages and insist that Jerrold or Falls did not have something of a point.<sup>100</sup> In any event, even if they may not be wholly correct, they are observant in noting the

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<sup>100</sup> The hideous nadir of this philosophizing is likely to be found much later on in *All Quiet* when a soldier, standing amidst the shattered ruins of the French countryside after just having been inspected by the resplendent Kaiser, declares "it's queer, when one thinks about it . . . we are here to protect our fatherland. And the French are over there to protect their fatherland. Now

sudden rise in stature that the inexperienced youth enjoyed during the course of the war when it came to the value of his ideas, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the war's poetry.

While this study has not hitherto been as preoccupied with the war's poetry as one might have expected from an examination of First World War literature, it would be impossible to proceed further without acknowledging the position of the trench poets generally and of Wilfred Owen specifically in the war's literary and popular memory. The trench poets have become the most vividly remembered ambassadors of the trench experience for the English-speaking reader, second only to that provided by the various incarnations of Remarque's classic novel. Few indeed are the children who have not been presented with the works of Owen, Sassoon or Graves as an introduction to the "realities" of the First World War; as the recently completed *First World War in the Classroom* study indicates, in fact, some 74% of the history teachers in the United Kingdom use the war's poetry as a means of teaching it—as opposed to a mere 35% of English teachers who do the same thing (Einhaus and Pennell 28).<sup>101</sup> The likes of Sassoon and Graves, Rosenberg and Gurney, Sorley and Thomas, Brooke and McCrae have all left indelible marks on the poetic and mnemonic landscapes, and even the verse of non-combatants like Rudyard Kipling and Laurence Binyon has become unforgettable through repetition. Quite apart from the affairs of the classroom, there is scarcely an Anglophone schoolchild alive who has not solemnly intoned the words of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields",

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who is in the right?" (203). This is meant to be a question without an answer, but it is difficult not to have one leap readily to mind.

<sup>101</sup> Additionally, history teachers' use of war poetry in teaching the First World War falls only slightly below their use of contemporary historical documents (83%) and visual images (81%), but still above films (70%), documentaries (68%), web resources (66%), life writing (58%), material objects (48%), or oral history materials and memoirs (33%). Meanwhile, history teachers' use of *Blackadder Goes Forth* is still going strong (82%).

listened (perhaps indifferently) to the prayer invoked in Binyon's "For the Fallen", or reverently absorbed the politics of Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est."

Owen, in particular, has achieved the sort of immortality that can only come from a blazing youth and a too-early death—the Hendrix, Joplin or Cobain approach, to say nothing of the Keats whom Owen so admired. Many is the volume that has told and retold how he was cut down in action during the Second Battle of the Sambre on 4 November 1918—just one week before the Armistice. Indeed, as it is also always said, Owen's parents received the telegram announcing his death on the 11<sup>th</sup>, even as the bells were ringing out the general peace and the end of the war. If this is pure invention, it is hard for us to say so, but it is also difficult to deny that it has all of the hallmarks of a pious fiction.

What are not in doubt, however, are Owen's bravery in the field and his deep sensitivity in his poetry. It is not for nothing that he is routinely hailed as the most representative and influential British poet of the First World War, and there is much in his work that has managed to preserve its power undiluted even after the gulf of a hundred years. Few of the poets actually popular in 1918 could now manage to say that without adding years to their stay in Purgatory, and certainly Owen has come to eclipse every one of the poets included in Osborn's *The Muse in Arms* (1917)—animated though it was by the same spirit of deference to the experience of the fighting man. In short, as Cecil Day-Lewis writes in his introduction to one of the many editions of Owen's poetry, "his war poems . . . seem to me certainly the finest written by any English poet of the First War and probably the greatest poems about war in our literature" ("Introduction" 11). While Day-Lewis' celebrated 1963 edition would prove ample to the task of analysis before me if I were only to consider Owen's poems themselves, I have

chosen instead to examine the even more important edition of his poems released in 1931, edited by Edmund Blunden. This edition marks another step in a long line of literary collaboration intended to bring Owen's name before the reading public, and it would not be until this 1931 edition that the project would finally achieve success. The first edition of his poems, released in 1920 under the joint (if often acrimonious) editorship of Siegfried Sassoon and Edith Sitwell, was arguably a commercial and popular failure: only 730 copies of the first edition were sold, and a second run of 700 had still not sold out by 1929. In the same timeframe, however, the collected poems of Rupert Brooke had sold some 300,000 copies (Strachan, *The First World War* xvi). Owen has by now supplanted Brooke as the definitive English poet of the war, so we might fruitfully examine what happened between 1920 and 1963.

The first thing to note about the 1931 collection of poems is that the poems have not been released under Owen's name alone. This is instead a collaborative affair, or I suppose an even more collaborative affair than they had been initially. Sassoon's early tinkering with Owen's poems both during and after their creation has been much remarked upon, and has in this case been broadly supplemented by the editorial prowess of Edmund Blunden, another of the war's prolific poets and a man who was to end up being a prominent literary scholar. Additionally even to this, Blunden joined Sassoon (and Graves, and Manning, and Williamson, and many others) in releasing a quasi-fictionalized memoir of his war experiences: *The Undertones of War* (1928).

In compiling this new edition of Owen's poems, Blunden seems to have had a number of goals in mind. The first and most compelling was to bring Owen more forcefully before the

public eye. Blunden had been involved in some of the same literary circles of which Owen hovered on the outskirts, and he had maintained his friendship with Siegfried Sassoon since the war's conclusion. As one of the few who had been able (or inclined) to read the first edition of Owen's poems, Blunden had been struck by the necessity of preserving this voice from the chasm of forgetting. While he maintained the focus on the war-related aspects of Owen's art that Sassoon and Sitwell had so understandably privileged, Blunden also brought his expertise as a literary scholar to the new edition. This enabled him to achieve the secondary goal of presenting Owen's poems for the first time with a critical and editorial apparatus, which had been missing from the 1920 edition owing to Sassoon's conviction that "the poems printed in this book need no preliminary commendations from me or anyone else. [ . . . ] His poems can speak for him, backed by the authority of his experience as an infantry soldier, and sustained by nobility and originality of style" ("Memoir" v). We have already had cause to interrogate this putative "authority of experience," and it is perhaps instructive to consider that the poems seem to best maintain their power when they are unencumbered—and uninterrogated—by anything like historical scholarship.

Response to the new volume was warmly positive, with it running through nine successful editions by the time Day-Lewis would hit the scene. Louis Untermeyer, in an early review of the volume in *The Saturday Review of Literature*,<sup>102</sup> hails its tremendous power and

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<sup>102</sup> "Quick and Dead," jointly reviewing Blunden's edition of Owen's poems and Aldous Huxley's *The Cicadas and Other Poems* (1931). Untermeyer's view of Huxley's work in comparison to Owen's is scarcely laudatory; the volume is full of "songs accompanied by shrugs," and Untermeyer is quick to point out the difference between the extraordinary vivacity of the long-dead Owen and the sluggishness of Huxley, who "drags doubtfully through the midst of life" (114). Whatever else may be said of Owen's wartime poems, they do not drag, and they scarcely doubt.

reveals that the poems by Owen now considered most noteworthy were already well-established as such even in 1931: “a major spirit,” he writes, “is revealed in such poems as ‘Strange Meeting,’ with its dark music, ‘Apologia pro Poemate Meo,’ which once read can never be forgotten, the bitter and dramatic ‘Dulce et Decorum Est,’ and that magnificent sonnet ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’” (114). Untermeyer goes on to salute Owen as “the most reticent as well as the most realistic of war-poets” (114), though one wonders how much credit for reticence can be given to a man who was unknown in life and now forcibly silent in death.

In any event, Owen's star is no danger of falling. The *First World War in the Classroom* study reveals that 97% of its English teacher respondents placed Owen first on their list of taught authors (47), with some eventually going on to complain that some students took a knowledge of Owen's poems as being synonymous with a knowledge of the war itself (59).<sup>103</sup> Owen's own understanding of his poetical project would seem to bear this out, at least from his own point of view; his oft-examined hypothetical preface to his eventual collected works stakes out his subject as “War, and the pity of War”—not “deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power” (31). In this we see again the headlong flight from those aspects of the war that Douglas Jerrold described as being (among others) most central to them, and a movement instead towards an understanding of the war as a personal struggle of the living human against the threat of death. Owen's “Anthem for Doomed Youth” could be heard tolling over every page of Remarque's *All Quiet*, and the collapsed illusion of “Dulce et

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<sup>103</sup> “English teachers at the Exeter focus group talked about the challenge of students who enter their [upper-year] classes with preconceived ideas about the war established in [lower-year] History. Some students complained of having ‘done Owen’ or ‘this isn’t a history lesson.’ Interestingly, a History teacher at the same focus group appeared envious that these students had some prior knowledge (even if it was acting as a barrier to future learning)” (59).

Decorum Est" might well have been a chapter of Montague's *Disenchantment* in its own right.

As it is, though, Owen's poems have maintained their status as a textual monument to the war's fallen, and it is a monument likely to endure.

## CHAPTER 5:

### The Vietnam Generation and the Transition to Modern Scholarship

#### I. The “Vietnam Generation” and the Development of Oral/Experiential History

As we near the conclusion of this study, it would be worth examining the ways in which the “modern scholarship” described by Campbell, Winter and Gregory finally did come about—and what shape it bore when it did. The end of the commemorative period of 1964-69 through the late 1980s saw the development of a new set of historiographical and literary approaches to the study of the First World War—what Jay Winter, in an historiographical context, has called “the Vietnam Generation” (*Legacy* 4). That conflict’s political and aesthetic contours had a dramatic impact upon the sort of scholarship being conducted both during it and in its wake, and it provides a fascinating lens through which to view the development of First World War scholarship. This generation is a long and complicated one, encompassing both those scholars who were active as the Vietnam War raged and those who came of age at that time. The war and the heightened popular consciousness it helped create had indelible impacts upon First World War scholarship. Winter argues that “this was the environment in which darker histories of the Great War emerged . . . portray[ing] the Great War as a futile exercise, a tragedy, a stupid, horrendous waste of lives, producing nothing of great value aside from the ordinary decencies and dignities thrown away by blind and arrogant leaders” (*Legacy* 4). He cites Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), John Keegan’s *The Face of Battle* (1976), and Eric Leed’s *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (1979) as having most powerfully “helped create a tragic interpretation of the Great War, one in which victimhood

and violence were braided together in such a way as to tell a fully European story of the war, one to which the founders of the European Union clearly reacted” (6). To this we may add Martin Middlebrook’s seminal ground-up view of the Somme campaign, *The First Day on the Somme* (1971), as well as works of literary scholarship like Jon Silkin’s *Out of Battle* (1972) and Arthur Lane’s *An Adequate Response* (1972), both of which present the war’s literature—and especially its poetry—within the context of activist and anti-nationalist truth-telling in the face of oppressive power.

This notion of broad cultural and political reaction is a useful one to keep at the forefront as we examine this period of study. Much of the period’s scholarship was conducted against the backdrop or in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam, as Winter’s figuration of it suggests—a war which occasioned an unprecedented amount of popular and political opposition. Many scholars integrated this reactionary and activist spirit into their own work, bringing to the forefront once more that spirit of popular outrage and betrayal that had begun to be rejuvenated in the years that had seen a production like *Oh! What a Lovely War!* sweep to such success. Indeed, some such scholars took their scholarship as an occasion for protesting the war in Vietnam itself, writing against the failures and catastrophes of a bygone war as a means of (often obliquely) critiquing one that was still ongoing. Fussell, for example—in a 1996 interview with Sheldon Hackney of the National Endowment for the Humanities—declares overtly that *The Great War and Modern Memory* is “really about the Vietnam War as much as it is about the First World War;” he conceived of the book as being, in part, an answer to what he called “the race problem” that (he alleges) saw American troops in Vietnam treat their opponents as “nasty little yellow people without souls.” The point of *Modern Memory* was to

recall this sort of rhetoric as it came into play during the First World War, especially in Allied anti-German propaganda, while also “awaken[ing] a sort of civilian sympathy for the people who suffer on the ground in wartime” (4). This awakening of civilian sympathy through a conduit of conveyed experience is at the heart of the period’s historiography and literary scholarship.

Winter’s framing of this period as “the Vietnam era” carries with it a number of complications. While I substantially agree with calling the actual period involved a distinct one in terms of First World War studies, and I will indeed maintain Winter’s focus on Vietnam throughout my own chapter, I must acknowledge the challenges involved in placing the Vietnam controversy at the center of it. The major objections to it, in my view, are threefold; I will examine each in turn.

The first and most obvious is the Americo-centric nature of the name—a troubling feature indeed given how extrinsic to America so much of First World War studies have traditionally been.<sup>104</sup> Britain, France and Germany could boast no extensive involvement in the Vietnam War in the way that the Americans could, and nor could any Commonwealth nations apart from Australia and New Zealand.<sup>105</sup> British involvement was limited to a few short

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<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the volume from which I have drawn Winter’s four-tier breakdown of the war’s historiography was intended primarily to address what the distinguished military historian John Keegan calls, in its preface, “America’s generation-long forgetfulness of the war” (vii).

<sup>105</sup> Australia and New Zealand’s little-remembered involvement in the Vietnam War lasted for just over a decade (August 1962—December 1972), and was originally intended as a small-scale deployment of military advisors to echo the commitment of the American Eisenhower administration from as early as 1955. By the time all ANZAC forces had been withdrawn ten years later, some 60,000 Australian troops had served in the conflict, with over 500 dead and 3000 wounded; they had been joined by some 3,500 New Zealanders, of whom 37 were killed and 187 wounded. For more, see Ian McNeill’s *The Team: Australian Army Advisors in Vietnam*

months beginning in 1945 and concluding in 1946; the French were forced out of their colonial holdings for good after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954;<sup>106</sup> and the sole, slender extent of German “involvement” in the region was the fact that the German conquest of France in 1940 saw the French administration in Indochina fall under the control of Vichy France until 1945. All of this concluded before the war as it is now understood began in earnest, and also before the commencement of the American involvement that lent to it so much of its eventual character. Any British, German or French experience of the Vietnam War was limited to the vicarious, after a time, and it is consequently something of a stretch to place so much emphasis upon international reactions to the American presence. Nevertheless, this “vicarious” experience of the war’s combat dimension by those living in nations that had been the primary combatants in 1914-1918 was augmented by a tremendous degree of involvement through popular opposition.

A second likely objection to Winter’s positioning of the Vietnam War as the effective backdrop for this period of First World War scholarship is one of simple chronology: having already established the previous “generation” of historiography as that which transpired between the 1950s and the late 1960s, it is somewhat complicated to declare this to be separate from the Vietnam era in the first place. American involvement in Vietnam officially commenced in 1955 with President Eisenhower’s deployment of the Military Assistance

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1962-1972 (1984), Kevin Lyles’ *Vietnam ANZACs – Australian & New Zealand Troops in Vietnam, 1962-72* (2004), and Albert Palazzo’s *Australian Military Operations in Vietnam* (2006).

<sup>106</sup> This battle found its arguably definitive chronicle in Bernard B. Fall’s *Hell in a Very Small Place* (1966), a volume worth noting here for being a well-regarded work of history that was written by an active participant (albeit in the capacity of a deeply embedded journalist) in a conflict that was still going on. Fall would eventually be killed in action in 1967 while reporting on Operation Chinook II in Thừa Thiên Province, but his volume’s reputation has nevertheless endured for decades.

Advisory Group (MAAG) to offer support to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and the first deployment and engagement of American combat groups came in November of 1965,<sup>107</sup> resulting in the infamous Battle of Ia Drang. Both years fall within Winter's "fifty years on" generation; these are not tidy overlaps. While all of this is undeniably true, Winter has characterized the period as the "Vietnam generation" not strictly for its encompassing of the Vietnam War—which it does not, entirely—but rather for the ways in which the generation's scholarly and critical concerns were in many ways shaped by reactions to that war both during and after. This reaction has a familiar flavour; the next decade of popular and academic thought in the west would be marked by the Vietnam War in much the same way as the 1920s and early 1930s were marked by the First World War—with veterans of both conflicts experiencing strikingly similar difficulties in returning to civilian life and public intellectuals using both as pretexts upon which to call for the cessation of modern war in perpetuity. As we have had cause to note earlier, Winter characterizes the "Great War Generation" as that which encompasses both the war years themselves and the decades of reaction that followed; while I have split them up in this study in service of my own purposes, his original characterization of that period serves as an additional example of why he is comfortable in framing the one covered in this chapter in the manner that he does.

The third and perhaps most critically important objection is that this primary focus on Vietnam obscures a far more significant strain of scholarship that begins to flourish at this time: that of feminist critics in both historical and literary circles. As Claire Tylee has persuasively

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<sup>107</sup> Col. Harold G. Moore's *We Were Soldiers Once . . . And Young* (1992), written with Ia Drang war correspondent and veteran Joseph L. Galloway, provides the best modern account of the engagement from an on-the-ground perspective.

shown in a 1995 article in *Women's Studies Quarterly*,<sup>108</sup> this sort of emphasis upon a primarily martial, masculine, white and middle-class understanding of the war excluded the experiences and contributions of the countless people—and even nations—that did not fit comfortably within those demarcations. The old form of “modern memory,” then, has received significant challenges in the 1970s and 1980s from scholars focused on feminist, post-colonial and Marxist examinations of the war’s history and art; critics like Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Mary Cadogan, Patricia Craig and Catherine W. Reilly worked to reclaim the wartime experiences of women, ethnic minorities, non-combatants, and those other persons who do not easily fit into a memory defined by what Sharon Ouditt has called “futility, murderous absurdity, the old lie, satire, savagery, and sadness, and, at its heart, the brave, innocent white male” (259). Gilbert and Gubar’s enormous *No Man’s Land* trilogy shed light on the position of women’s writing in the early twentieth century, building upon the earlier impact and success of their *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Cadogan and Craig’s work, in volumes like *Women and Children First: The Fiction of Two World Wars* (1978), drew new attention to literary works written by and for members of the home front—including juvenile readers—that helped shape the civilian memory of the war while being displaced in wider popular memory by the poems and memoirs of the combatants. Reilly’s landmark bibliography of the war’s English poetry altered the landscape of the war’s literature still further, revealing that the bulk of English poetic responses to the conflict were written by civilians, and that a considerable number of those civilian writers were women. The field’s previous and near-universal emphasis on the features Ouditt describes began to give way to other experiences and modes of understanding.

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<sup>108</sup> “‘The Great War in Modern Memory’: What Is Being Repressed?” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 23.3/4 (1995):65-77.

This final objection is not one I wish to challenge, but rather to embrace. It would seem to be no coincidence that an era that saw the rise of unprecedented mass protest, popular political engagement, ongoing decolonization, civil rights reforms, and many other similar things would also involve a revitalized course of First World War studies motivated by an interest in the subaltern, the proletariat, the marginalized and the ignored. Indeed, to say that Winter's approach focuses too much on Vietnam at the expense of other developments would be to miss the role of that war in helping to shape the conditions that gave rise to such expanded consciousness and scholarship in the first place. Much of what was novel in the "Vietnam Generation's" approach to the war's history and literature would come to serve as a foundation for the sort of expansive and revisionist work that I have already described as so much marking contemporary approaches to the war.

Thus, for example, Martin Middlebrook's collation of an historical narrative out of the collective voices of hundreds of "regular" people served as a remarkable precedent for the creation of other narratives out of other, still-more-neglected voices. Fussell, in attempting to set down a definitive (if elegiac) articulation of what the First World War was and meant to the English-speaking world, inadvertently created a totemic representation of all that has grown entrenched and stale in the discipline, thereby giving successive generations of scholars a point of departure rather than one of conclusion. Everywhere we see scholars attempting to examine the same old subject with dramatically new lenses. The new tools worked—many of these works remain remarkably good, and even (as in Leed's case) arrestingly novel<sup>109</sup>—but they also

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<sup>109</sup> He offers, for example, a startlingly interesting Marxist analysis of the war's combat conditions as being characterized by the fighting labourer's *alienation from the means of destruction* (Leed 95; emphasis mine). Few turns of phrase could be so evocative.

suggested that yet more varied fields existed in which they might be deployed. As we have seen, this is a challenge that those dedicated to the study of the First World War have been more than willing to take up.

Some of the members of this generation, then, were just beginning to reach the turbulent age of young adulthood as the conflict in Vietnam became a matter of international import. The complexities of this where multi-national perspectives and participation are concerned have been acknowledged above, but it remains the case that the almost two decades of American military participation in the Vietnam War turned it into a conflict in which young people from many countries still felt they had an important stake. The war galvanized an international (and often overtly internationalist) protest movement unequalled in the annals of western history; “the whole world is watching” was a popular chant of resistance aimed at those in power, and in some ways it was true.

Marshall McLuhan famously opined that “television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America—not on the battlefields of Vietnam” (Qtd. in Lisle 158); the necessary relationship between home front morale and the success of military ventures is here rightly emphasized, but the particular relevance of McLuhan’s observation lies in its consideration of the effect that an unmediated—or at least far less-mediated than had hitherto been the case—conduit between the civilian living room and combat in the jungles of Vietnam has on how the nation experiences and remembers the war. If the protest movement hoped to remind those in power that they faced the scrutiny of both the world at large and their own posterity, it remained the case that “the whole world” really was able to watch the war as it unfolded—in full colour and sound, and

almost in real time, but from the insulated safety of their homes. By the time Francis Ford Coppola needed to emphasize the privileged combat experience of a fictional soldier like Colonel Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* (1979), the mere sight and sound of war were not enough to seem shockingly distant from the viewer; instead he loves the smell. Even as this sort of “access” (of a sort) to the combat experience was becoming more and more available to a rising generation, the conduit of access stretching into the experience of a past generation was gradually beginning to close.

From the perspectives of both popular memory and academic engagement, likely the most significant event during this period was the sharp increase in the number of First World War veterans beginning to pass away. While the notion that all men and women who served in the war were of legal fighting age is something of a fiction, as we have seen,<sup>110</sup> it remains the case that even those on the youngest end of the spectrum were by this point in their seventies and eighties. This had two important consequences where this study is concerned, and these consequences have worked intriguingly at odds with one another over the intervening years.

The first of these consequences, and the most obvious, is the severing of the line of living memory that had previously carried on from the time of the war to the present day. The continued presence of the war’s veterans—and also of those who had only experienced it as civilians—ensured that projects like the 1960s’ *Great War* documentary series would have a large pool of eyewitness accounts from which to draw their more personal material, and the ground-level perspective of the war would still percolate throughout the general culture

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<sup>110</sup> Richard Van Emden tentatively puts the number of underage soldiers in the British Army alone at between 170,000 and 190,000 (368), but see 367-74 of his *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (2006) for the problems faced in making any final reckoning about such numbers.

through the words of those veterans willing to share their experiences with their immediate families.<sup>111</sup> These memories held power even when veterans did not wish to share them, and the potency of a silence that will not speak has become an enduring trope of the veteran narrative. As Siegfried Sassoon put it, “we were the survivors; few among us would ever tell the truth to our friends and relations in England” (Qtd. in R. Stevenson 91). To this unwillingness to speak was added—in both the First World War and the Vietnam War—a corresponding unwillingness on the part of civilians to listen . . . at least for a time.

In any event, with this loss of living memory, the authority—if we may call it that—over the preservation of the war’s history has shifted from those who actually participated in it to those who have taken up the torch of remembrance in their stead. This process has seen a tremendous impulse on the part of both family members and various professional and academic agencies to create repositories of memory in the forms of recordings, interviews, and archives. Museums reaped a considerable bounty of bequeathed documents, journals, letters, telegrams, photographs, and other personal ephemera, and those looking to write books about the soldiers’-eye view of the war had greater access than ever before to the sort of records that could enable such an enterprise. Thus, it is no surprise that we see a great increase in the number of books after this period—that is, in the 1980s and 1990s—that were aggressively promoted as being from the perspective of “those who were actually there.” It is a primacy that is still routinely asserted; the 2013 Penguin reprinting of Lyn MacDonald’s enormously popular

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<sup>111</sup> It is also the case that absences of certain family members, experienced second-hand, also carried power. The English novelist Susan Hill writes of having been entranced as a child by the image of her Great Uncle, killed on the Somme: “They had a photograph of him in his uniform and I used to take it down and look at it. He had such a young face, even as a child I could see that; he was not much more than a child himself” (180).

oral history *They Called it Passchendaele*, for example, which is drawn together from the recollections of over 600 participants in that 1917 campaign, includes a paragraph on its back cover overtly contrasting the book's "underlying human realities" with previous writings that focused on the campaign's (presumably unreal and inhuman) political and strategic dimensions. "This book," it breathlessly concludes, "portrays events from the only point of view that really matters." This new approach did not stop at simply privileging the opinions and recollections of infantry combat veterans; it rather excluded all other opinions and recollections as valueless. This supremacy having been asserted, the duty of preserving this catalogue of witness fell to a new generation, and it found itself divided as to how best to approach this matter.

As a result, the second consequence of the departure of the living witnesses stands in stark opposition to these attempts to preserve the authority of experiential memory. The slowly withdrawing authority of the veterans' living testimony cleared the ground for new interpretations of the war, its conduct and its meaning. These new interpretations have taken many forms and have been undertaken in many different directions, but of particular note are a reasserted emphasis on practical engagement with expert military theory and a willingness to conceive of the war in terms not primarily tragic, futile, or ironic. If many of the scholars of the "Vietnam Generation" felt compelled to still give such recollections pride of place, scholars yet to come would take this work in many new and unanticipated directions.

All of the above, then, with all of its abstract contours, took place against the backdrop and in the aftermath of the unpopular American military engagement in Vietnam. In the wake of the collapse of French power in Indochina, the Eisenhower administration had agreed in 1955 to dispatch the MAAG to take over the duty of providing training and advice to the armed

forces of South Vietnam. Over the next twenty years—during which period both South Vietnam and the United States saw their respective leaders assassinated, only to be replaced by more hawkish successors—this modest contribution would balloon into an all-out industrial-scale conflict with around 1.5 million American soldiers seeing combat by the war’s end, and some 60,000 dead and 300,000 wounded. It was a war of coalitions, too; the forces of the United States joined those of Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines in supporting the South Vietnamese against the Viet Cong and their counterparts in the North, backed by Cambodia, Laos, China, Russia, Cuba, North Korea, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Such an array of associated powers—disdaining to fight *each other* except by proxy—offered a prelude to the sort of geopolitical realities that had seen the disasters of 1914 unfold. Evocatively had Eisenhower spoken in 1954 of a principle that has come to be known as “domino theory”: “You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences” (Qtd. in Schmitz 16). The dominos of 1914—with names like “Gavrilo Princip”, “Blank Cheque,” “Edward Grey” and so on—had already fallen, and it is not surprising to see that works focused on the First World War's complex origins (like Tuchman's *The Guns of August*) remained tremendously popular.

Certainly one of the most evocative and prominent features of the Vietnam War was its savagery. This war brought sinister words like Agent Orange, My Lai, Black Ops and Frag into the modern lexicon; it brought self-immolating monks, dead college protesters, screaming victims of napalm, and summary executions into the American living room; it created a

generation of tortured and disaffected young men who returned home to a country even more inhospitable to them than the England of 1918 had been to its returning veterans. The scars of each nation would never fully be healed, and can be seen etched in stone at both the Menin Gate in Ypres and the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington DC--each comprised (in part) of an intentionally stupefying list of names that fade to dull grey with distance.

This, then, was the cultural milieu in which this generation's First World War scholarship and literature found itself: cut off from the personal authority of living combatants, amidst controversies over that authority between those who wished to maintain it and those who wished (at last) to offer alternative readings of the war, and with a new international war that managed to be longer, more dreadful, and more accessible to the civilian public than ever before. If McLuhan is correct about the war having been lost in the living rooms of America, it may also be the case that a new set of approaches to the First World War's purported futility, chaos and barbarism was born in the jungles of Vietnam. For at least one titanically influential author, this was, in part, the case.

## II. Paul Fussell and the Birth of "Modern Memory"

It would be difficult to examine this period of historical and literary scholarship without giving pride of place to its most enduringly influential text: Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*. In this landmark text from 1975, Fussell (an American scholar and veteran) looks at a selection of writings from certain soldier-authors on the Western Front and examines the implications of these writings' prominence when it comes to how the war should best be understood. It is difficult to properly express how influential this book has been, or how widely it has been hailed since it arrived on the scene; it won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award upon its initial publication, and is on the list of the Modern Library's one hundred most important non-fiction books of the twentieth century. It has never been out of print, and comes in three distinct editions: the original 1975 volume from the Oxford University Press, the 2000 follow-up to same (a 25th Anniversary edition that included a new afterword from the author), and the most recent,<sup>112</sup> being a lavish new illustrated edition from Sterling released in 2012 on the occasion of the author's death. It is greatly expanded with full-colour plates throughout, and the layout (though not the content) has been substantially revised.

In drafting this section, I have been struck by the difficulty involved in attempting to properly categorize Fussell's study. It is a critical zephyr, changing from page to page; one section offers a close reading of Graves' *Goodbye to All That* or Jones' *In Parenthesis*, while another examines the impact of the war on slang or breakfast habits. One page meditates on

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<sup>112</sup> There is yet another new edition of the book, issued by Oxford to coincide with the first of the war's centenaries, but it is simply a reprint of the 2000 edition with a moderately altered cover.

the importance of sunrise to the British poets of the trenches, while the next flies off on a survey of the satiric opinions of a mid-century American novelist. It is the work of a literary scholar that is routinely placed in the history sections of bookstores and libraries, but a work examining history that has shaped how literary scholars respond to the war. Jay Winter unhesitatingly characterizes it as an historical work, and the work of an historian at that (“Approaching” 5), while Fussell characterizes himself as “a sort of half-educated, untrained military historian and cultural historian” who receives invitations to speak in front of History departments but resentful silence from English departments (“Conversation”).

*The Great War and Modern Memory*, though overtly about the British experience of the First World War, is jointly contingent upon the lens of Fussell’s experiences in the Second and his contemporary ongoing reaction to the American war in Vietnam. The book “is really about the Vietnam War as much as it is about the First World War” in Fussell’s view, as we have noted above;

As a former soldier, what struck me is the absolutely heartless way that war was being pursued by the Americans . . . I was very struck by that. And one thing I was trying to do in *The Great War and Modern Memory* was to awaken a sort of civilian sympathy for the people who suffer on the ground in wartime, and that's really an act that I've been performing, oh, ever since 1945, I suppose. (Fussell, “Initial” 4)

Much as Silkin intended with the readings offered in *Out of Battle* three years earlier, Fussell looks to the writings of authors like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves to offer

a critique of the modern culture of war through the lens of a conflict all but cut off from living memory.

Fussell has faced a steady stream of criticism from historians of the war for his over-reliance on an archly editorial tone and a tendency to indulge in errors of fact when it makes for a good narrative. There is a now-famous critique of the book by the military historians Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson that first appeared in *War in History* 1.1 (1994), in which the two compare it to his later, similar work on the Second World War.<sup>113</sup> Their criticisms of the latter book lie beyond the scope of this analysis, but when it comes to the first they are critical of what they see as Fussell's hostility to anything resembling "official history" and of his reliance upon largely subjective literary engagements to tell the *real* truth. We have already had cause to note Fussell's suggestive idea that the war "seems to have been written by someone;" as a consequence, his own approach to the war is primarily geared towards considering it as a text, of sorts, rather than strictly or even primarily as an historical event.

For his own part, Fussell has responded to his critics in the Afterword to the 2000 edition of his work, after a fashion. His errors of fact and polemical tone remain in that edition and in the new illustrated edition, and to criticisms about these aspects of his work he offers the rejoinder that his critics are heartless, and that they were unreasonable to expect him to be accurate in a work of this sort.<sup>114</sup> As he has elsewhere conceded in an interview with Roger J. Spiller,

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<sup>113</sup> *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (1989).

<sup>114</sup> He praises the work of Sir Martin Gilbert, for example, who in "delivering the raw data of various military and naval encounters . . . often concludes by reminding readers of the butcher's bill and implicitly inviting them to mourn along with him." "It is as if," he continues, "to Gilbert, 'objective' history is not merely impossible but inhuman, offensively heartless and insensitive."

Historians sometimes get very angry at what I do, and what I have to say is that although I use historical data, I am essentially writing an essay. One critic thought he was dumping on *The Great War and Modern Memory* when he called it a gothic elegy, but I agreed with him; it is a gothic elegy. If I were really working in history, it probably wouldn't be readable. One has to color it emotionally. One has to make the reader cry and laugh to get anywhere with the sort of work that I want to do. (Fussell and Spiller 368)

He goes further even than this, as well, insisting that it would be literally impossible to present too cynical a view of the war (363); as a consequence, those who criticize his excesses in this direction apparently have their legs taken from under them before they even have a chance to begin.

Fussell is emphatic that he wished to get back to what the real, regular men doing the real fighting had to say and think about the war experience, and to wrest command of this idea

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His critics, then, “expecting a work of historiography as commonly defined . . . encountered something else: a book in which historical data was called on to enhance the elegiac effect” (“Afterword” 338). His motives notwithstanding, Fussell's opponents may be forgiven for finding this to be a rather convenient means of brushing away direct criticisms of his methods or claims. Such critiques may have humanitarian grounds on which to object as well, however, and the now-famous photograph chosen by Fussell for the cover of his book offers an example of why. “I came across this picture by sheer accident in the War Museum, and sensed that the boy's expression was unmistakably 'twentieth century.' If anyone ever looked aware of being doomed to meaningless death, it is this boy” (“Afterword” 342). The image features a young man in khaki and a tin helmet standing alone against a post, hands on his hips, legs and feet secured in hip-height waders. This is essentially all that may be said of the image, for it is all that we are privileged to know. Fussell's entirely subjective reading of the man's expression—which to me seems rather to be one of irritated boredom—and his decision to use this man as a totemic representation of “doomed youth” robs the man of his own subjectivity and, fittingly, his own history. It is striking how swiftly Fussell's rhapsody about this photograph follows upon his scathing rebuke of historians who ignore the personal dimensions of history to make a broader point.

away from the intellectuals, the generals, the politicians—the “official” narrative. He consequently spent three months in the Imperial War Museum's archives reading all (he claims) of the diaries and journals that offer “the unpretentious notations of the rank and file” (“Afterword” 340-41). Having done this, he has still managed to write a book that offers as exemplary subalterns such luminaries as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Wilfred Owen—men, that is, who were recipients of expansive educations, enjoyed a great deal of leisure in their civilian lives (Sassoon was as notorious for his fox-hunting as he was for his literary salons, for example), and differed dramatically from their millions of contemporaries by seeking to immortalize their experience in verse in the first place. These authors maintain a commanding presence in the war’s literary canon and rightfully attract the attention of scholars and readers alike, but “regular” or “representative” they emphatically were *not*.

Yet stronger criticisms have been offered, striking at the work’s status as a scholarly one to begin with. Fussell indulges in what can only be called gross sensationalism on numerous occasions in a bid to support his book's overarching thesis, which is that war generally—and the First World War even more so—is a fundamentally ironic enterprise. He makes claims about the war in a manner calculated to bring out their apparent irony and stupidity, but it is easy to go too far with this—as he does when he blandly asserts in the book's early pages that the war saw “eight million men killed because an archduke and his wife had been shot” (Fussell, *Great* 7-8), or when the ineloquent Sir Douglas Haig's attempt to offer some words of inspiration to the BEF during the German Spring Offensive of 1918 (which resulted in the rout of the British army along a considerable front) earns him a comparison by Fussell to Hitler (*Great* 17). This is the kind of thing that is of a nature so trivializing, reductive and vicious that it is little wonder the

historians Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson have declared that “what makes it necessary to stress Fussell’s limitations of scope, of methodology and of source material is that he notices none of them” (68).

Fussell’s selectiveness manifests itself further in what he chooses to address: given his extreme focus on the war’s ironic and literary character, the omission of the death of H.H. “Saki” Munro in 1916 is almost inexplicable. Saki was one of the most famous English literary ironists of his time, and the supremely ironic manner of his death—cut down by a sniper in the act of scolding an enlisted man for lighting a too-noticeable cigarette at night—would seem to make him an ideal inclusion in a book of this sort. At another point, Fussell says something factually incorrect about Kipling’s *The Irish Guards in the Great War* (1923) and then uses this error as a platform from which to breezily attack Kipling’s character.<sup>115</sup>

There are other things he fails to mention, and with considerably more important consequences. He views the war as always an ironic and chaotic enterprise, and so studiously neglects to include anything about those elements of the war that were neither ironic nor especially chaotic. The reader will look in vain for anything useful in this book about the war in the air, or at sea, or on the many non-Western fronts that saw real gains being made in measurable and consequential ways. The war’s purposelessness and futility are again and again hammered home, but without giving any recognition to the experience of the many countries and peoples (such as those within the former Austro-Hungarian Empire) for whom the war was the complete opposite of those things. As Sir Hew Strachan has trenchantly observed,

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<sup>115</sup> Specifically that Kipling nowhere mentions his son in the course of this history. This is plainly and factually false; aside from the work having been explicitly dedicated to John Kipling, he is referred to at several points throughout the account—including that which narrates his death.

for eastern Europe there was another lesson from the First World War, and it was a very different one from that with which it is commonly associated in the west today. War was not futile. For the revolutionaries, as for the subject nationalities of the Habsburg Empire, the war had delivered. (*First World War* xviii)

In addition to all the above, there have been further well-deserved criticisms from feminist scholars who have noted that Fussell's characterization of "modern memory" is often exclusively masculine. Even his gestures towards sexuality and romantic love are primarily homosexual and homosocial. Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1990) is probably the best book-length engagement with a strict counterpart to Fussell's ideas in this regard, while her 1995 article, "'The Great War in Modern Memory': What Is Being Repressed?", directly addresses the ways in which Fussell's work excludes "women's war writing, not bounded by the horizon of the parapet, [which] might aid in altering our perspective" (66). This exclusion has the consequence of "constructing a joint Anglo-American memory of the Great War which defines 'British' in an exclusive way (excluding both women from anywhere and men from the British Empire overseas)" (67).

In taking Fussell's work—and in taking it to task—in this fashion, I do not mean to diminish its considerable merits. He has offered what were, at the time, a set of novel and interesting readings of the war's cultural history as understood through a particular lens, and it is only fair to say that he is open about privileging that lens throughout most of the text. It is also important to acknowledge the place of his work in shaping how we now approach the war's literature and history: emotively, ethically, and primarily without regard for operational

or tactical elements. This has been the shape of much First World War scholarship throughout the 70s, 80s, 90s and 00s. Fussell and his colleagues of the 60s and 70s helped inaugurate a mythic reading of the war which still confronts us, and which it is now our duty to unravel.

### III. Conclusion

Sir Hew Strachan, in considering the problems posed by our distance from the causes and events of the First World War, remarks upon the difficulty this causes in properly understanding the war's legacy. "We may wonder," he writes,

why the belligerents of 1914 were ready to endure so much, but we do so from the perspective of a new century and possessed of values that have themselves been shaped by the experience of both the First World War and of later wars. It behooves us to think as they did then, not as we do now. (Strachan, 2005 xviii)

How, then, do we think now? As we have seen, there has been a dramatic and strengthening trend, almost from the moment the war ended, of viewing it as a sort of political and moral catastrophe. To this is joined a shifting popular awareness of military action as being thought of most profitably at a platoon or squad level—a product (in part) of the Vietnam War's literary and artistic outpourings and of the shifting realities of combat in a modern age. This tremendous focus upon war as an undertaking of small units of individuals is dramatically at odds with the conduct of the First World War and of most major wars prior to it, which were undertaken at the very least by battalions and more commonly by divisions, corps, or even entire armies. It seems a rare thing to get three writers as diverse in agenda and outlook as the fascist publishing icon Douglas Jerrold, the modernist scholar Sharon Ouditt, and the war correspondent Peter Englund to agree emphatically upon something, but we have seen in their diverse commentary a united acknowledgment of the seeming incomprehensibility of war from the perspective of the individual. This incomprehensibility does not necessarily have to be privileged, however. The individual in a platoon may have felt he did not matter to the wider

course of the war, and would likely have been right in doing so. This did not (and does not) mean, however, that the war was consequently futile, meaningless, or incapable of being understood. It is rather a matter of competing value systems.

Recent years have seen a remarkable shift in those value systems where scholarly inquiry into the war is concerned, even if the shape of popular memory remains more or less consistent. On the one hand, and perhaps most importantly, there has been a shift away from a totalized focus on the experience of the trenches and towards the experience of those—like women, conscientious objectors, labourers, children, prisoners, and other civilians caught up in the war—who did not have the opportunity to prosecute their involvement in the conflict through the force of arms. This broadening of the scope of cultural history as well as of the literary canon has seen increasing interest in aspects of the war that have otherwise comparatively been ignored, and especially have shifted the narrative away from one of static and passive endurance of dangerous terror to one that includes much more potential dynamism.

A concomitant shift has taken place in the military study of the war. Predominantly British scholars like Gary Sheffield, Brian Bond, Dan Todman and William Philpott have popularized alternative readings of the war's progress, consequences and legacy—with a particular emphasis on the comprehensibility and rationality of its military conduct. With this has come a reappraisal of the war's purported futility, chaos and barbarism: if it is understood instead as a necessary conflict conducted with understandable and even sympathetic goals by all parties involved, the measures taken by those involved to win it demand to be approached from a fresh perspective. "Yet," as Heather Jones writes,

while the “learning curve” argument remains at the forefront of current military historiographical debate,<sup>116</sup> it is not universally accepted, and there is also a need for more comparative work to contextualize developments in the British army during the war with those occurring in other armies, particularly the French and the American, and with the international political, economic, and cultural historiography. (862)

It has been the intention of this dissertation to begin this process of comparative work from a (primarily) literary-scholarly perspective, integrating different historiographies into how the war has hitherto been understood through creative prose and poetry.

As we have seen, the place of the First World War in history—and in various forms of writing about history—has been a subject fraught with complexity since the moment the war began. From the first it was conceived of not only as an event or set of events, but as one(s) which would necessarily pass into history. Rather than allow this to happen organically (or however organically as such things ever do happen), there were overt attempts to historically aestheticize and aesthetically historicize the war even while it had yet to conclude. Samuel Hynes has described this phenomenon in largely positive (and even redemptive) terms. Early

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<sup>116</sup> This argument splits the British experience of the Western Front into two phases. The first, from 1914-1916, saw a series of failures (most notably Mons, Ypres, Loos and the Somme) deliver a shock to the military system that ended up teaching many necessary lessons. The second, running from the end of the Somme campaign in 1916 to the end of the war in 1918, took these lessons to heart and saw the development of new infantry and artillery doctrines that saw the British maximize their advantages in the field and bring the war to its successful conclusion. That something as simple as this should have proven to be viscerally controversial among public commentators and historians suggests the extreme tensions that still exist between the various branches of study where the First World War is concerned. In any event, for a more comprehensive overview of the debates surrounding the “learning curve” position, see William Philpott's *Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (2014), Gary Sheffield's *The Somme* (2004), or Paddy Griffith's *Battle Tactics on the Western Front, 1916-18* (1994).

literary critics, essayists and other establishment voices “did not make the darkness [of war] their subject,” he writes. “Rather they attempted to lighten it, to familiarize it, and so make it both imaginable and endurable. They did so, primarily, by placing the war in history” (18). This placement was not one of primacy, but rather one of equivalence; certainly it was a war, with all of the heightened senses, increased danger, strained sympathies and varied deprivations that war brings—but there had been wars before, and both art and Britain had survived.

A dominant theme in the historiography and criticism surrounding the war is that neither art nor Britain *did* in fact survive it, at least in the abstract; the comforting cloud of Edwardian certainty was blown away irrevocably, the story goes, and the triumphant ascendance of Modernism across Europe heralded a new way of approaching art and ideas. There is something to this, admittedly, though it is easy to exaggerate on both counts, but it is nevertheless a profound transition with which the survivors of the war and successive generations found themselves grappling.

Throughout this study, then, we have seen that these generations did not so grapple in isolation from one another, and that this grappling is not something which began in the 1960s and 70s. If something new really did begin to happen because of the war where history and art are concerned, it began to happen at once and scarcely stopped. It is difficult to insist that clean distinctions can be placed between the generations as described by Winter, or to suggest alongside Campbell or Gregory that we may trace recognizable concerns in the war's literary and historical scholarship only as far back as the 1960s and 70s. This effort at division and subdivision serves the purpose of narrative-building in that it tends to make things smaller and more easily comprehensible. This can sometimes trouble our understandings or create

understandings that are false, but the alternative is also daunting. Frank Furedi, in *The First World War: Still No End in Sight* (2014), declares that “writing about meaning is a tricky if not a dangerous enterprise,” as “the search for it appears to possess a general and eternal quality” that runs the risk of collapsing “into a banal discussion about the human condition in isolation from the influences through which it is experienced” (1). And, as the French theorist Raymond Aron has rightly noted, “history is not absurd, but no living being can grasp its one, final meaning” (136); attempts to separate modern First World War scholarship from its much earlier origins seem doomed to walk an uncomfortable line between these two extremes.

Cautiously, then, we may reach three conclusions which form the basis of this document’s contribution to scholarship.

First, and most significantly for our purpose: In contrast to the shape of First World War scholarship implied in the models offered by Winter, Campbell and Gregory, we may find much that is familiar beginning during the war itself rather than only in the 1960s and 70s. While that latter period was indeed a wellspring of novelty in many ways, and in many fields, and was home to events and persons who toppled understandings of the past while establishing new approaches to the future, the priorities of First World War literature, literary scholarship, and historiography were not irreconcilably different from those that had preceded them by many decades. Indeed, this earlier scholarship is instead a foundation upon which these novelties are built. This may seem like a relatively safe claim to make, but it is important to emphasize such a thing in a discussion of a war that is so frequently marked as a site of radical discontinuity. In sum, then, I have shown that scholarly consensus about both the development of modern First World War scholarship and the very “modernity” of that scholarship demands revision.

Secondly, and pursuant from the first, we find that similar approaches as well as concerns can be found in the war's earliest scholarship and literary engagements as can be found in that which is current today. Winter's formulation of the history of the war's historiography places us in a novel "transnational generation," but to privilege this reading of modern scholarship is to overshadow many of its essential continuities with that which predominated in the 1960s and 70s—and earlier still, as we have seen.

A focus on privileging the testimony of the combatant, a concern about differentiating art of lasting value from the vast swaths of less important work being created, a complex awareness of the difficulties involved in mediating personal experience through text—all of these mark the work of those first coming to grips with the war and its meaning as much as they mark those of authors removed from the conflict by decades. We do see a greater awareness in later literature and scholarship of the roles played during the war by women, children, minority populations and others removed from the action on the fighting front, but this is not entirely unprecedented and is more of a difference of scale rather than of kind.

Thirdly, and perhaps most contentiously, certain scholarly assumptions about the war, its conduct, its outcome and its legacy have become uprooted over the intervening century, and much that is still hailed as "modern" is in dire need of update or replacement—as this dissertation has shown throughout. Heather Jones has rightly spoken of First World War historiography's incredible capacity for periodic regeneration (857), with the most recent flourishing in this direction having been in progress since the 1990s. Rich new cultural historiographies have made more aspects of the war than ever accessible to students, and new research continues into those aspects than at any other time in history.

As we have also seen, this regeneration carries military and operational as well as civilian and cultural dimensions. Work by historians like Sheffield and Todman has built upon “revisionist” approaches by predecessors like John Terraine and Brian Bond, with those specializing in strategic, logistic and tactical history attempting to provide a new understanding of the military decisions that were made from 1914 onward. The need for more accessible accounts of such decisions (and their attendant opportunities, limitations and rationales) is tremendous, as numerous elements of the present study have shown: it surely should not be possible for student and lay reader alike to be steeped in the words of soldier-poets and soldier-memoirists without having some sense on a technical level what this soldiering actually entailed, and why. Too often such lessons are left to be learned from the works of the poets and memoirists themselves, whose views—to say the least—are not always entirely objective. Even the desirability of such an objectivity is contentious: must we agree with Paul Fussell that it is essentially impossible to take too cynical and condemnatory view of the war, or must we rather side with Sir Hew Strachan in viewing it as a rational enterprise, fought for understandable reasons, achieving (in part) laudable ends? The truth likely lies somewhere in between.

In summation, this dissertation argues for a new understanding of the origins, the history, and the future of First World War studies as they relate to the study of the war’s literature. It has staked a claim for an expanded understanding of the war’s earliest literature that turns back once more to the voices of home-front and establishment authors, and has shown that these very authors—in spite of often being treated as foils against which the poets and memoirists would later react—very often had the same concerns that would continue to

animate the war's literary and historical study into the 1960s, 70s, and beyond. The dissertation has also subjected the scholarship of the 60s and 70s to an evaluation through the lens of both earlier ideas and newer, "revisionist" ones; this combined reclamation of the old and celebration of the new has upended some of the assumptions about scholarship during that transitional period, and has posed a challenge to the ongoing influence of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*. In doing all of this, the dissertation has synthesized information and ideas from disparate—and sometimes competing—disciplines in an attempt to chart a new and more holistic course for the study of the war. The novelty of these ideas would seem to be highly contingent upon the discipline: what is obviously important and compelling to the historian may yet be new and controversial to the literary scholar, and vice versa. This study has attempted to bridge this gap and consider the two alongside each other.

With all of this having been said, what might the immediate future hold for the study of the First World War? Certain trends within the field are already apparent, as we have seen, such as a wholly revitalized approach to the war's operational dimensions, but there have also been developments occasioned by the critical concerns of cultural and literary scholars more generally. A profound interest in the war's book and publishing history continues to grow, with scholars like Jane Potter, Andrew Frayn and Ann-Marie Einhaus providing fascinating new insights into the era's literary culture. Extensive and comparative trans-national projects echo Jay Winter's conviction that the hostilities of the war need not carry over into its scholarship, and recent projects like the *Cambridge History of the First World War* and the *Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War* maintain the far-reaching variety that earlier counterparts exhibited.

I wish consequently to conclude by offering two recommendations, if we may call them that, for possible directions that should be taken by literary and cultural scholars focused on the First World War. It is likely that such scholarship may embrace these trends anyway, as they are rooted in wider developments to begin with, but I articulate them here to provide some sense of what is at stake in all that has been examined heretofore. Novelists, poets and dramatists writing new works about the war are perforce included under the banner of “literary scholars” in spite of their creative intentions; to write convincingly about the war at such a remove requires first that one study it in at least some depth.

First, it is absolutely imperative that scholars from the historical and literary disciplines maintain an active and open dialogue with one another—a need that is imperative for the study of the war as much as it is for any other subject. This is doubly true given the war’s status as an unquestionably real and impactful world event: it is a thing that actually happened, with material consequences and remnants, and it is inadvisable to consider it solely (or even primarily) through the lens of the abstract. With apologies to Modris Eksteins, the war *was* more a matter of history than of art.

For this to work, a certain amount of mutual hostility will need to be relaxed. Frustrated historians like Sheffield, Bond, Todman, Richard Holmes and others have already made a point of the nuisance they have found certain literary intrusions to be into their seeming bailiwick. Holmes, as we have seen above, especially laments that “most people have already read Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks, before [the historian can] get to them” (*Tommy* xvii)—a lament that may well be echoed by historians more generally.

It is a frustration that is easy to understand, even if one sometimes bridles under the rancor with which the historians express it. There is a sense that well-intentioned amateurs have entered a field with strictly-defined parameters, precise technical language and a complex history of ideas, only to take the barest minimum of interest in what has been going on and extract only that which tends to support what they had already intended to say. The paucity of articles or monographs even exploring the possibility that anti-war authors like Sassoon or Owen might simply have been incorrect or off-base in their particular criticisms suggests how entrenched these established ideas already are.

Whatever the ethics involved, it is somewhat behind the times, and that is bad enough; while this seems to be perfectly acceptable where literary treatments of military matters are concerned, I can imagine no other subfield of our discipline in which such constant acceptance of the norms perpetrated by idiosyncratic forty-year-old scholarship would still be considered sufficient. To the extent that we must bring other fields into our own work at all—and, indeed, *we must*—we must do so in a fashion that gives due regard to both their complexity and their modernity. We have a duty to find in them all of the best that is being said and taught, and not simply to perpetuate stereotypes of a bygone era.

For this sort of unity to be achieved, modern stereotypes must also die. Frustrated historians must acknowledge that literary scholars are doing their best with the material at their disposal, and that they certainly are not busybodies deliberately trying to undermine the historical discipline. Literary and cultural scholars must likewise acknowledge that those concerned with the precise delineation of the war's strategic, tactical and logistical realities are not somehow war-mongers themselves, or barbarians, or callously indifferent to human

suffering—all charges I have seen leveled at them in perfect seriousness.<sup>117</sup> There is plenty of goodwill to spare for both sides, and they ought not necessarily to see one another as occupying opposing “sides,” perhaps, in the first place. The study of the First World War offers numerous opportunities for a common striving towards a larger goal, and—with some effort—the history/literature problem may one day be a thing of the past.

To help ensure this (and here I move to my second recommendation), on the level of literary production and instruction, it is important that the ongoing widening of the war's literary canon and potential subject matter be encouraged and—if possible—hastened. That so many of the stories and poems written (and subsequently taught) about a five-year global

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<sup>117</sup> We have had cause already to note Fussell's claims in his Afterword to *The Great War and Modern Memory*, but we may also consider the case of Julian Putkowski. Putkowski is an independent scholar who has made a considerable name for himself in the circles devoted to the study of those British soldiers who were executed at various points throughout the war. His seminal work on the subject, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* (1996), helped reignite interest in the topic and sparked new demands that those who had been executed as a result of courts-martial during the war be retroactively pardoned. In a controversial 2008 essay, Putkowski took aim at scholars—like Brian Bond, Gary Sheffield, Dan Todman and others already mentioned—who have been attempting to develop a new understanding of the war's operational dimensions. His treatment of them is scathing: “Prompted by authoritarian convictions or institutional demands, revisionists select facts with which to bolster their own emotional response to the First World War, and by extension war in general. Their own emotionalism is never explicitly acknowledged [ . . . ]; instead, such failings are projected onto what are frequently imaginary opponents” (24). The implication is that revisionists never act in good faith or because they believe what they say is true, but rather only due to “authoritarian convictions” or “institutional demands.” His final claim about “imaginary opponents” is rather left in the dust by his unwillingness to engage with any of his opponents at length—throughout the piece, his sole focus is on a single blog post by an author (Todman) whose rigorously sourced 300-page book is mentioned once and then ignored. Having failed to engage with any such work, Putkowski goes on to allege that “[there is not] much evidence of critical reflection by other revisionist agencies, including members of the Douglas Haig Fellowship or the British Commission for Military History, perhaps because their accommodation of barbarism and the brutality of war is rather too well-entrenched” (25). While it is tempting to respond to such claims with the scorn they deserve, I highlight them here rather to demonstrate the sort of challenges that still face those attempting to redraft a more holistic historiography of the war.

conflict involving half the world's population should remain confined to a thin stretch of mud in France and Flanders is a scandal, though certainly evocative of the shape of modern memory. I suppose we can continue in this vein indefinitely—the centenaries of 2014 gave ample evidence that there is considerable life in the “Suffering Tommy” school yet—but we may at least drop the pretense of teaching it as a *world* war.

This may be remedied in any number of fashions, though the most likely would see teachers of early twentieth-century literature and history expand the scope of representative works to include those written by propagandists, establishment authors, or authors on other fronts. Even returning to comparatively neglected classics like Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* (1920), Cecil Lewis' *Sagittarius Rising* (1936), Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front* (1923), H.M. Tomlinson's *All Our Yesterdays* (1930), William Faulkner's *A Fable* (1954), or Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) could go some way towards redressing the balance and providing a counterpoised view of the Western Front. All of this would be much easier than getting writers to do something that goes against the canons of established success, but we need not lose hope there either. Recent works like Alex Capus' *A Matter of Time* (2009) and Andrew Krivak's *The Sojourn* (2011) show that some authors are now willing to move beyond the Western Front in finding ways to examine the war's psychological, spiritual and material impacts in fiction.

It would also be worthwhile to place a greater emphasis in classrooms—and in broader conversation—on the literary establishment that the canonical war authors putatively overthrew. It recontextualizes these individuals as “war authors” as well, rather than strictly as civilians. The time for such a recontextualization is ripe; as Jones has shown, recent

developments in the war's historiography have demonstrated that "the home front and front line are no longer seen as separate spheres as was the case in much of the earlier 1960s and 1970s social history, but rather as profoundly interconnected" (869). This blurring of the lines complicates the relationship between "civilian" authors and the trench poets and memoirists reacting to them, and a greater degree of attention should consequently be paid to authors who now deserve to be considered on the same level, and with the same energy, as the likes of Sassoon, Graves or Owen.

Nevertheless, previous engagements with these authors' contributions have seen them addressed in such civilian terms,<sup>118</sup> as "home front" authors, even when their war work saw them engage with military matters or even travel to the front in person. A more spirited engagement with them and their ideas reasserts the importance of these authors within the canon of the war's literature and presents them as a necessary supplement to the more familiar works of the trench poets and the memoirists. The importance of reckoning with these propagandizing establishment authors is threefold.

First, as we have seen in Chapter 1 and 2, it reasserts the actual literary landscape of the time rather than that which has retroactively come to exist based on the received opinion of what works we now consider to have been "important." These authors were hugely popular during the war and quite widely read; the reputation of the poets and memoirists would grow only gradually until the war books boom of 1927-1933. Even those literary propagandists who still enjoy a secure position within the academic and popular canons—Ford Madox Hueffer

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<sup>118</sup> The chapter dedicated to their contributions in Bernard Bergonzi's seminal *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 1980), for example, is entitled "Civilian Responses," and runs for a mere ten pages (136-45) out of the book's 241.

(later Ford), Arthur Conan Doyle, and H.G. Wells, among others—are not typically conceived of as having been “war authors” producing “war books.” Consequently, the traditional designations applied to these writers within the literary canon deserve to be revised.

Second, it provides a critically useful window into what the war was *about*, from a British perspective, rather than just what it was sometimes *like*. This latter perspective is a prevailing merit of the poems and memoirs noted above; the two perspectives should be seen as useful complements to one another, not as mutually exclusive. It is important to hold in mind this question of what the war was *about* because of the impact that this vantage point has on the ways in which the war’s literature is understood. The writings of the propagandists help to reveal a broader national context in which the canonical authors were writing, and a renewed focus on the propagandists as writers in their own right rather than just as foils inspiring a more positive reaction will help to foster a more holistic understanding of the war, its conduct, and its consequences.

Third, it allows us to analyze a “war literature” that is not primarily reflective but rather both *active* and *reactive*—it was produced while the war was going on and with no certainty of its outcome or even of imminent developments. Much (though not all) of the literature popularized during the boom of 1927-33 was written in a bid to offer distant and nuanced commentary on events that its authors had, as we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, found it too difficult or uncongenial to address at the time. We are already familiar with a sort of war-time literature that captures the heat, the passion, the uncertainty of the moment—that is, the trench poetry. To examine the work of the propagandists is to find examples of this sort of immediacy in prose as well, and on a level that trades intimacy for a broader perspective. This

new approach allows for a whole host of new and fascinating subjects to be examined; the soldier under fire at Ypres may not have had much occasion to grow outraged about the plight of the displaced Belgian refugee, for example, but the author writing in Whitehall or Battersea could—and did.

If the opportunity provided by the ongoing centenaries is reason enough to engage in some intellectual stock-taking, there are yet more pressing reasons that militate more towards compulsion than mere opportunity. A renewed study of the propagandists as war authors in their own right—contributing something of value, engaging with events that affected them, suffering alongside their countrymen, even acting (yes) in good faith—would better reflect recent historiographical developments that have offered serious and intriguing challenges to the conventional understanding and representation of the First World War. To put the matter plainly, as we have seen in Chapter 1 and 2, it is no longer tenable to say that the propagandists simply “lied” and that the poets and memoirists heroically told the truth in reaction; it was never as simple as that, and it has been becoming less and less simple with each passing year. It would not be fair to say that some sort of “enchantment” is once again being woven over those who would study the war, but we may perhaps view the earlier disenchantment in a somewhat different light.

Let us conclude, perhaps surprisingly, with a few short words about clerks.

Andrew Frayn, in his recent study of the British prose produced in the war’s aftermath,<sup>119</sup> has linked the rise of the reassessment/disenchantment mode of literary engagement with a corresponding boom in intellectual criticisms about the stability and

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<sup>119</sup> *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914-1930* (2014).

potential longevity of the western world. He ties this most notably to the work of Oswald Spengler, whose *Decline of the West* (1926) was being published in two volumes during precisely the same period. Meanwhile (in a development not covered by Frayn's study), Julien Benda's highly influential *La Trahison de Clercs* (1927)<sup>120</sup> was provocatively declaring and condemning the collapse of Enlightenment values throughout Europe generally and in France especially, with a corresponding rise in nationalism, racism, militarism, and unthinking conservatism. These new anti-values (must we say debits? burdens?) he blamed for the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War, among other disasters, and in *Trahison* he offers dire warnings for the danger still facing Europe even in the wake of Versailles.

This danger had emerged, in large degree, from what Benda identified as a newfound rapacity among the intellectual classes, as shameful as it was (of late) needful. "Since the Greeks the predominant attitude of thinkers towards intellectual activity was to glorify it insofar as (like aesthetic activity) it finds its satisfaction in itself, apart from any attention to the

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<sup>120</sup> Translated almost immediately into English by Richard Aldington as *The Great Betrayal* (1928) in Britain and *The Treason of the Intellectuals* in the United States. Aldington notes that Benda has made the direct translation of "clerks" from the French rather difficult, defining it in the treatise as "all those who speak to the world in a transcendental manner." This is rather a tough row to hoe, translation-wise, and Aldington is further concerned about the degree to which "clerk" has come to mean in Britain a minor and sedentary functionary, and in America the mere minder of a store. He notes, however, that Benda often uses the word in contrast to the French word for "layman," and herein finds the justification for his translation (ix). Reaching back to Chaucer's contrasting of laymen and "clerkes"—that is, of laymen and those speaking authoritatively of spiritual, scriptural, philosophical and historical matters—he consequently places "clerks" in quotation marks throughout the work and intends for it to be understood "in the medieval sense" (ix-x). I have dwelled upon this matter at this length not to suggest any incoherence or complication on Benda's part, but rather to provide a more comprehensive background to the ways in which Benda's critiques may be applied to those corresponding secular British "clerks" whose reputations rose (and faded) like fireworks during the Edwardian and Georgian eras. It is fitting, perhaps, that the likes of Hardy, Kipling, Housman, Doyle, Barrie and Chesterton should all have died when they did; they outlived their own time, but not by much.

advantages it may procure” he writes (151), approvingly describing what Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges and Hannah Arendt would later call “the life of the mind” as an endeavour that was its own reward; the modern world had in contrast “made the ‘clerk’ into a citizen, subject to all the responsibilities of a citizen” (158), who had now to appease a public appetite with his intellections. In this now generalized and necessary pursuit of the main chance, the public intellectual found him- and herself in the unadmirable position of both being and not being blamed for these activities; while various institutions recognized the clerks' needs enough to attempt to purchase their authority, the public was ever-ready to denounce a clerk for pursuing something for financial gain rather than simply out of humble sincerity or intellectual conviction. Consequently,

if he is reproached for not looking upon national quarrels with the noble serenity of a Descartes or a Goethe, the ‘clerk’ may well retort that his nation claps a soldier’s pack on his back if she is insulted, and crushes him with taxes even if she is victorious. If shame is cried upon him because he does not rise superior to social hatreds, he will point out that the day of enlightened patronage is over, that to-day he has to earn his living, and that it is not his fault if he is eager to support the class which takes a pleasure in his productions. (158-59)

These “noble serenities” may leave much to be desired qua serenity, given that they are ascribed (respectively) to a philosopher of Descartes' audacity and to an author capable of perpetrating *The Sorrows of Young Werther* upon the world. It is also worth noting that this schema carries with it certain geographical and temporal limitations: if the “noble serenities”

are best located in the early 1600s and late 1700s, and in France and Germany, where does that then leave the British “clerk” of the early 1900s?

The important factor in Benda’s critique is consequently the degree to which the modern “clerk” is “eager to support the class which takes a pleasure in his productions” (159). If we choose to see in this a necessarily oblique allusion to those men-of-letters (or their French equivalents) who wrote to delight the readership of the *Daily Mail* and the rest of the Northcliffe press, we are perhaps not straying too far beyond Benda’s intent. We have already seen that Paul Fussell and Ernest Hemingway have both noted the way in which the public literary intellectual ceased to be trusted like a secular priest due to the betrayals he or she ostensibly perpetrated during the First World War, but this is a distrust that may simply have been a long time in building. Edward W. Said has noted, in *Representations of the Intellectual*, that “the world is more crowded than it ever has been with professionals, experts, consultants, in a word, with *intellectuals* whose main role is to provide authority with their labor while gaining great profit” (xv). This latter notion is what makes criticism so easy, but, as Said goes on to say, “in the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters—someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public” (12); it is this clerky capacity that seems to have such difficulty in maintaining the respect it deserves where the British “clerks” of the First World War are concerned—those men and woman, to repeat a phrase from earlier in this study, who were concerned more with what the war was *about* than with what it was sometimes *like*.

It is notably easier to write about a war than it is to fight in one, and both the clerks on the home front and those who in subsequent decades have represented various standpoints

about the war have been concerned with maintaining the sort of humility that such a distance requires. The author of the present study has been similarly concerned, and wishes to conclude by acknowledging the difficulties involved in attempting to revise the view of a universally agreed-upon tragedy away from that tragic perspective in the first place. It is important, in doing so, not to push too hard or to speak too loudly: the pain and suffering of a war require a modicum of silent respect even when ideas about that war—and about that pain and suffering—must be undermined or exploded. This dissertation has attempted to make the case for such a new understanding of the war, its conduct, its consequences, and its legacy, and in so doing may well have committed the very offenses decried above. If it has done so, it remains the author's hope that this may be forgiven, even if not forgotten, and that a more holistic understanding of the war may be pursued in good faith by all of those who are engaged in its study.

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