REVISTA **ANGLO SAXONICA** SER. III **N. 16** 2018

ANGLO SAXONICA

ULICES • CEAUL
University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies
Centro de Estudos Anglísticos da Universidade de Lisboa

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Special issue **In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths**

Guest Editors

Luísa Maria Flora, Michaela Schwarz S.G. Henriques and **Randall Stevenson**

Número especial **Em Memória da Grande Guerra Re-Trabalhando Mitos**

Organizadores convidados

Luísa Maria Flora, Michaela Schwarz S.G. Henriques e **Randall Stevenson**

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IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE GREAT WAR: RE-WORKING MYTHS

Acknowledgements

The six essays published in this volume represent a selection of the thirteen shorter texts first presented at the International Conference *In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths / Em Memória da Grande Guerra: Re-Trabalhando Mitos*, hosted in October 2016 by the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon. The Editors would like to acknowledge all those who, in their diverse ways, have contributed to its organisation so that the event could take place within the time frame of the centenary celebrations.

The International Conference *In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths* would not have been possible without the support from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT), the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES) and its Director, Teresa Cid, for which we are grateful. The Conference project originated in ULICES's research group *English Studies: Literature* (*RG 1*), spurred on by an invitation to Luísa Flora by Professor João de Almeida Flor, then Director of ULICES, and was joined by Michaela Schwarz S.G. Henriques, of *English Studies: Culture* (*RG 2)*. She came to represent *RG 2* on the Scientific and Organising Committee of the Conference, while *RG 1* contributed with Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa, Luísa Maria Flora, Maria José Pires and Mário Vítor Bastos. The reliable assistance provided by Ana Daniela Coelho, another *RG 1* researcher, and by Sara Henriques, an *RG 4* researcher and a Science and Technology Management Grantee, once more proved that the spirit of cooperation can play an important role in the success of such events.

Both Paulo Farmhouse Alberto, the former Director of the School of Arts and Humanities, and Carlos Gouveia, then Head of the Department of English Studies, were thoroughly supportive of the Conference.

Cristiana Aguiar Lobo, Maria Francisca Bacelar Begonha de Alvarenga and Verónica Gouveia Pereira, three of our undergraduates, volunteered to help during the conference and proved invaluable.

Special thanks are due to Maria Alice Samara (FCSH-UNL) and Sofia Leite (journalist, RTP), who generously agreed to participate in our round-table session, enriching with their expertise the concluding debate of the Conference. We were very fortunate to have been able to show an excerpt of the documentary *Portugueses nas Trincheiras*, made by Sofia Leite and António Louçã (RTP, 2008), which the former kindly shared with us.

Our express gratitude must also go to a few other colleagues and organisations:

The National Museum of Ancient Art / *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga* kindly conceded us the right to use an excerpt from Jheronymus Bosch's "Temptations of St. Anthony" as our Conference brand, an opportunity of rare quality. Particular mention must be made of José Alberto Seabra Carvalho, the museum's deputy-director, whose generous collaboration with some of our Research Centre's ventures goes a long way back.

The musical performance organised for us at the Lisbon Higher School of Music (*Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa*, *Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa*) was the artistic highlight of our event. The School's Dean and Chairman of the Scientific Council, Miguel Santos Gonçalves Henriques, willingly lent a helpful hand in establishing the necessary contacts. His graceful welcome was an apt prelude to the virtuoso recital by Tiago Amado Gomes and Marisa Reis Silva. To all our thanks.

On a different note, the patronage of *Pastéis de Belém* and *Pastelaria Scala* was as tasty as the food rations during the war must have been unsavoury.

Inês Mateus, our graphic designer throughout the organisation of the Conference, was her usual creative, patient and committed self. She is, of course, also responsible for the design of the journal *Anglo Saxonica* and, as such, must here be doubly acknowledged.

The Guest editors of *Anglo Saxonica—In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths* obviously express their thanks for the help received during the publishing process from the general editors of *Anglo Saxonica*, Isabel Fernandes, João Almeida Flor and Teresa Cid, as well as

from its executive editor, Teresa Malafaia and the assistant editors, Ana Cristina Mendes and Carla Larouco Gomes, and the journal's copy editors, Diana Marques, a *RG 1* researcher and PhD student—University of Lisbon Grantee, and Mariana Pacheco Loureiro, a Science and Technology Management Grantee.

The Scientific and Organising Committee of the event had the privilege of welcoming as Keynote speaker Randall Stevenson, whose enthusiastic response to the Conference made him honour his promise—despite the numerous demands on his time —to join the editorial team.

The three editors are grateful to the peer reviewers, teaching and doing research at four different European universities, who were decisive in helping us bring together what we trust will be a very rewarding volume. This guest edited number of *Anglo Saxonica* is particularly indebted to Catherine Bernard (*Unité de Formation et de Recherche d'Études Anglophones*, *Université Paris Diderot*) for her willingness to help at all times as adviser, peer reviewer, or both. We extend our gratitude to two other colleagues in France, Christine Reynier (*Département d'Études Anglophones*, *Université Paul Valéry*, Montpellier) and Georges Letissier (*Faculté des Langues et Cultures Étrangères*, *Université de Nantes*) and to David Schauffler, an American colleague working in Poland (Institute of English Culture and Literatures, University of Silesia, Katowice). All patiently bore with us at a particularly difficult time of the academic year. Their reviews proved invaluable. Without their collaboration the volume would not have been possible.

One last tribute must go to all the authors here published. Their different contributions will hopefully be as challenging as the issues they have chosen to address.

Introductory Note

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Introductory Note

> Grave stones tell the truth scarce forty years, Generations pass while families last not three oakes. (Sir Thomas Browne)

The guest-edited 2018 number of *Anglo Saxonica—In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths* brings together a selection of essays that developed from papers originally presented at the October 2016 Conference in Lisbon (https://inremembrancegw.wordpress.com/home/). The volume aims at expanding some of the fundamental issues which were raised during the encounter, and which stimulated quite a few scientific debates between the participants and the audience. It resumes the diverse dialogues then initiated and will hopefully contribute to ongoing discussions in related fields.

By way of an introduction to this Introduction, it seems appropriate to recollect the most significant passage of the Conference Call for Papers. It highlights the organisers' deliberate choice of a manifold approach that would invite different inroads into a 100-year old topic.

"A century later, our view of the First World War, relabelled 'First' after its sequel number Two, is the product not only of eyewitness accounts, historical documents and memorabilia, but of the multiple discourses which have continued over the years to assess and re-assess an event that determined the course of the twentieth century. To the people who lived through that war, it was 'the Great War'—by its dimension (involving nations worldwide for the first time in history), by its initial idealistic definition ('the war to end all wars'), and by the enduring nightmares it engendered, and for which no one had been prepared. To make sense of these traumatic experiences, no single narrative would suffice, for such a war

> is simply too frightful, too chaotic, too arbitrary, too bizarre, too uncanny a set of events and images to grasp directly. We need blinkers, spectacles, shades to glimpse war even indirectly. Without filters, we are blinded by its searing light. Language is such a filter. (Winter ix)

There have been many and varied narratives. From the early ones, the collective sought to distil the myths that conveyed acceptable meanings, and to re-establish a sense of order and stability where disruptive changes and new insights had become too unsettling. Meanwhile, the generation that provided the original representations of lived experience has gradually died out, other sources have come to light, and different perspectives have been explored, revealing a more complex relationship between wartime experience and its expression in English literature and culture."

Aiming at re-working some of the myths of the Great War and re-considering the roles they have played in British culture, the International Conference *In Remembrance of the Great War: Re-Working Myths* was fortunate to draw a number of researchers that were quite conscientious. Two of the scholars who actively participated in the Conference have in the meantime published their own papers, six others could not elaborate on their respective contributions in time for the current volume. Deadlines being as merciless as we all know they are, we regret that this was the case. And as the centenary of the Great War draws to a close, completing its long cycle of international commemorations, the editors consider it opportune for this issue to be published.

The present volume is meant to be a testament to the Conference and its quality. This number of *Anglo Saxonica* is necessarily indebted, above all, to its contributors.

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The diversity—as well as the intertextual coherence—of the different approaches (aimed at deliberately when the 2016 Conference was first designed) is definitely substantiated by the essays in this publication. They not only explore some of the topics raised by the diverse re-readings and re-writings of War myths, but also reflect on the roles these have played and continue to play in British culture. The collection emphasizes a fabric

of complex relationships between wartime experience and its re-cycled variations as successive generations have made use of the past. By offering the dialogues here established among contributors from six different backgrounds (England, France, Germany, Portugal, Scotland, Spain), the editors hope to kindle the readers' curiosity and invite further enquiries.

The emotional links between past and present, the myths of the Great War, the relations between memory and history or the significance of remembrance for later generations have been among frequently addressed, often polemically debated questions in cultural and literary history.

In "Against Oblivion. Remembrance, Memory and Myth in Julian Barnes's 'Evermore' (1995)", Luísa Maria Flora builds on Jay Winter's research into sites of memory, to argue that the myth of war—as indisputably established by Fussell's 1975 *The Great War and Modern Memory* and reprocessed by recent (and not so recent) poetry and fiction —must be re-examined, both through the arguments of scholars such as Winter and Lynne Hanley and through contemporary revisionist approaches to Great War history. In "Evermore", the resistance against death and oblivion represented by Miss Moss, the story's protagonist, as well as the vital issue of any unattainable persistence of war memories are reminders of the fact that, no matter how solid the sites of memory may seem to be, oblivion will of necessity be everybody's destiny. The short story is read as a thought-provoking vindication of the role of literature and literature's imaginable meaning as an ultimate site of memory.

If Miss Moss's obsession represents one example of the lasting traumatic effect of the Great War on individuals and families away from the front, Randall Stevenson's essay, "What the Soldier Said: Silence, (Bad) Language and the Great War", addresses aspects of "silence" and "silencing" in the way war experience could, or could not, be communicated. Faced with severe censorship and propaganda at home, soldiers often relied on reporting their experience "directly, in their own voice". To no avail. As the author explains, what the soldiers could *not* say was channelled into the kind of language, "hoarse oaths", considered blasphemous and obscene. It constituted an essential part of the soldiers' "self-protection against the terrible assaults of reality". Ignoring "what the soldier said" in written accounts is represented as a central omission in studies concerning the

Great War. To quote the author, "Recollection of hoarse oaths offers twenty-first century readers a crucial addition even to the best of written history and literature in which the Great War is preserved".

Gilles Couderc's contribution to these selected essays brings another innovative dimension to the topics represented in the volume. In "Bliss and Britten: Building up Wilfred Owen as Myth", the author examines two distinct musical compositions on the First World War—Arthur Bliss's 1930 choral symphony *Morning Heroes* and Benjamin Britten's 1962 *War Requiem*—and how the composers had different purposes in mind when integrating their respective visions of the poet and his work. By detailing the musical and dramatic characteristics of each *opus*, Couderc explains how Bliss created *Morning Heroes* "worthy of Homeric fame and universal homage" in vindication of his dead brother and comrades, while at the same time celebrating "the heroism of the fallen and the unfallen". In likewise manner, the author shows how Britten's *Requiem*, which stands to this day as an indictment of War, undeniably established Owen as a myth. Britten's experience with war began in the aftermath of World War I, was reinforced by his witnessing the destruction and consequences of World War II, and included the Cold War with its nuclear threat. Against this background, Britten's re-working of Owen in his 1962 *opus* can already be considered a re-cycling process by a generation that had not served in the Great War.

This brings us to another iconic literary and cultural presence of the First World War, which is the study object of Teresa Gibert's "Revisiting John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' (1915)". Gibert focuses on how the tremendously popular war poem performed "an important consolatory and healing function in the immediate aftermath" of the Great War, making a long-lasting impression on Canada's collective memory. The essay provides a compelling panoramic view of how successive generations of Canadian writers and artists have sensibly re-worked or alluded to "In Flanders Fields" in innovative and intertextual ways, either to support or to challenge some of the myths of the war. Its canonical status has also led to its misuse for pro-war propaganda. The fame of Canada's best-known poem spread worldwide when its symbol, the poppy, became universally recognised as an emblem of war remembrance. However much imbued with public meaning associated with a specific event in History, such symbols offer

a vast space for personal memories. There are, though, other memory deposits, such as autobiographies, that aim to keep historical memories alive and try to convey to later generations what it had meant to live through war.

In "Seeking Freedom and Finding War: A Case Study of Two Pacifists, Vera Brittain and Dora Russell" Michaela Schwarz S.G. Henriques reflects on two well-known pacifists who were born less than half a year apart, and whose Edwardian middle-class upbringing and access to university education would suggest that their dedication to women's rights and questions of peace followed the same or similar agendas. Of both, Vera Brittain is the better-known campaigner because her bestseller *Testament of Youth* continues in print and has been adapted to different media. In either case, key experiences during the Great War were invoked to explain the roots of their pacifist attitudes. By looking at how each tried, in their various (autobiographical) narratives, to make sense of that experience and act accordingly, this essay intends to show how varied and personal the way to peace can be, and hence how hard it may always be for peace-minded people to achieve collectively what most people desired in 1918: No More War.

The nature of film representation of the Great War is the main objective of the last essay in this collection. In "From Court-Martial to Carnival: Film's Recreation of the Great War Fifty Years on", Anthony Barker focuses on four films—Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964), Richard Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got his Gun* (1971). Their actual conditions of creation and their particular production values are considered. During a period that privileged neutralist positions in documentary treatments of the conflict, these films convey leftist representations of the war, building one prevailing case: the war had abetted the muddying of the actual realities of class struggle. Each director presents his own distinctive mode of dealing with the realities of war on film. Circumstances of (unjust) death as the result of either court-Martial procedures and consequent sentences, or of the terribly harsh conditions common soldiers had to endure are described; the futile stupidity of the whole mission is particularly emphasised. "As the Great War passes from living memory and memorial into the history books, it will be harder to

retain the anger and frustration that its participants and their immediate children felt so keenly about the first technologized and industrialized war. The evidence would seem to suggest that anger and indignation have about the same life-span as a man."

This volume closes with an interview by Paula Campos Fernández with David Leighton, nephew of the British poet Roland Leighton, which includes reflections on the Great War and the poetry of that period, as well as on the "need to remember how easily disagreements can lead to violence that goes for beyond any sensible resolution of cultural and economic conflict".

In remembrance of the Great War, we trust that this volume will be a worthwhile opportunity for our readers to travel to less-known sites.

The Editors

Luísa Maria Flora,
Michaela Schwarz S.G. Henriques,
Randall Stevenson
July 2018

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Against Oblivion. Remembrance, Memory and Myth in Julian Barnes's "Evermore" (1995)

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Against Oblivion. Remembrance, Memory and Myth in Julian Barnes's "Evermore" (1995)

> Remembrance is an act of symbolic exchange between those who remain and those who suffered or died. They went through much; they lost or gave much; we give the little we can (…). (Winter, *Remembering* 279)

Miss Moss, the bereaved sister of a First World War soldier, is the protagonist of Julian Barnes's "Evermore", a story focusing on loss and grief, and on the attempt to perpetuate the memory of those who died.[1] For fifty years she has been travelling to the Somme battlefields to visit cemeteries and monuments dedicated to the war victims. What started as part of a process of healing developed into an aim in itself, her loyalty to her brother's memory grew into an obsession, her life eventually became devoted to death.

> Each year she wondered if this would be her last visit. Her life no longer offered up to her the confident plausibility of two decades more, one decade, five years. Instead, it was renewed on an annual basis, like her driving license. (E 94)

Miss Moss belongs to a generation the war has cast adrift. Honouring her dead brother and the thousands of soldiers who lay in those sites is what she has lived for (see Winter, *Sites*). Every year she crosses the Channel to visit his grave. She then also visits the Somme cemeteries and monuments dedicated to those whose remains have not been found and pays tribute to

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[1] First published in *The New Yorker*, November 13, 1995, 104-112. Henceforth abbreviated as E.

their sacrifice. Her "family history has collided with world history" (Winter, *Remembering* 180)[2] but, except for the fact that the parents have long been dead, the reader knows about no other relations. For two years she had been in a white marriage to Dennis, seriously shell-shocked "all down the rest of his life" (E 102), "hit by shrapnel and taken back down the line to hospital without a farewell to his best pal Jewy Moss" (E 101), before their mutual inability to communicate decided her to "return" him to his sisters (E 102). The reader merely learns that

> it was the only time she had behaved with such pure selfishness: she had married him for her own reasons, and discarded him for her own reasons. Some might say that the rest of her life had been selfish too, devoted as it was entirely to her own commemorations; but it was a selfishness that hurt nobody else. (E 101)

Her isolated existence and the repetitive nature of the pilgrimage reveal how she has been stuck in the perpetuation, enactment and re-enactment of the very same annual rituals, oblivious to the fact that the past can never be recovered.

Miss Moss inhabits the loneliness of those who live among ghosts.

Becoming old, she is as conscious of the ultimate futility of her effort as she has become of the futility of the soldiers' sacrifice, "an army which had thrown them away so lightly now chose [through the monuments] to own them again so gravely" (E 97).

Soon she will no longer be able to come and pay tribute to all those men. And she does not trust younger generations to carry on with such acts of remembrance:

> Soon—in fifty years or so—everyone who had served in the War would be dead; and at some point after that, everyone who had known anyone who had served would also be dead. (…) Then the great forgetting could begin, the fading into the landscape. The war would be levelled to a couple of museums, a set of demonstration trenches, and a few names, shorthand for pointless sacrifice. (E 110)

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[2] Winter is referring to real families, not to fictional characters.

Only annihilation, total oblivion awaits those victims.

While her private grief, "a calliper, necessary and supporting" (E 96), provides the core of the story, the main issues it calls upon are public and extremely relevant. The emotional links between past and present, the myths of the Great War, the relations between memory and history or the significance of remembrance for later generations have been among recently addressed, often polemically debated, questions in cultural and literary history. Miss Moss's lifelong obsession represents one (possibly extreme) example of the traumatic effect of the Great War on individuals and families, of the war's persistent resonance in millions of personal histories.[3]

My reading of Barnes's "Evermore" will argue that Miss Moss's apprehensions might be a little premature. In a quiet understated way, the short story itself functions as a thought-provoking vindication of the role of literature and its meaning as an ultimate site of memory.

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To try and attend to some of the issues Julian Barnes addresses in "Evermore", the present essay takes into consideration the decisive contribution made by Jay Winter in the same year the short story was first published. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Winter briefly revisits and moves away from Pierre Nora's massive *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-92), focuses his attention on international and comparative sites, and explores the cultural history of Europe in the twentieth century to articulate "specific historical questions related to the cultural consequences of the 1914-18 war"

[3] Dan Todman refers to Jay Winter's calculations that "more than half a million men under thirty had been killed. The dead were concentrated amongst younger men: more than one in seven of the adult male population under twenty-five had been killed, compared to those between twenty-five and forty, and one in twenty of those over forty" (Loc. 1020-21). Here Todman uses Jay Winter's *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, 1986, 66-72), to which I had no access. In "Evermore", Miss Moss reflects: "beyond a certain point, the numbers became unaccountable and diminishing in effect. The more dead, the less proportionate the pain" (E 97).

(Loc. 373).[4] His sites of memory are also "sites of mourning" (Loc. 379) and he claims that these are inseparably linked with a common European history of war.[5]

The remembrance of the war dead and the diverse monuments and commemorations which have been devoted to them provide a privileged research ground for the study of collective memory. In Winter's perspective, in the wake of the First World War, the cult of memory became a cult of mourning.

The collective effort of commemorating the war's lost generation became a collective struggle against forgetting. The war memorials erected after the conflict and the rituals connected with such sites were a process of coming to terms with bereavement and "a means of forgetting, as much as of commemoration" (*Sites* loc. 2426-33).[6]

In the last four years of continuing public tributes on the occasion of the centenary of the Great War, the visits, tours and journeys to such sites have persisted and have actually been extremely popular.[7] Throughout one hundred years, such acts of remembrance have had a fundamental role in the private as well as in the public quest for some meaning or consolation. They have been instrumental in the process of societal healing. They have been useful and used for political propaganda, sometimes for nationalistic indoctrination. However different the European sites may be, they have managed to provide a considerable grammar in how to deal with a formerly unimagined and unthinkable carnage. Virginie Renard distinctly interprets what they have come to evoke:

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[4] Nora's study centrally confronts French collective memory.

[5] "Everyone in mourning for a soldier was a victim of war, and to see the ways they were helped (and the ways they helped each other) enables us to appreciate the importance of kinship—familial or socially defined—in the process of coming to terms with bereavement in wartime" (*Sites* loc. 698).

[6] On some toxic dimensions of collective remembrance and the uses of forgetting see David Rieff.

[7] These trips are private and also school, community and group organized. See, among others, http://www.greatwar.co.uk/events/2014-2018-events-france.htm. Accessed 27th May 2018.

> The very names of these places—Verdun, the Somme, Passchendaele and Ypres—have become sites of memory that crystallize the whole conflict in a few syllables: it suffices to pronounce them to summon terrible events and their almost unimaginable loss of lives and devastation. (308)

Even before the end of the conflict, along with several early private activities of people and communities whose shared experience of bereavement had initiated the movements to commemorate their deceased, public action had emerged. To this day, villages and towns all over Europe (and beyond) show in market squares, local churchyards, at numerous crossroads, a display of plaques, little shrines, sculptures, diverse records which have become an integral part of the landscape. Small local memorials were before long followed by decidedly official governmentally commissioned monuments gravely owning the deceased. The imposing scale, impressive architecture and symbolical impact have served as a public exhibition of national heroism, as a form of tribute, also as a warning, however futile. As the war continued and finally came to an end, commemorative art "expressed sadness rather than exhilaration, and addressed directly the experience of bereavement" (Winter, *Sites* loc. 1866).[8]

To this day, all types of monuments are bearing witness to the war. Nonetheless, in spite of its lasting endurance, we cannot help being aware that the resonance, the emotional and cultural meaning of those sites will ultimately wear out. Miss Moss's fight against oblivion is certainly doomed even if not in a period as short as the one she assumed.

In the context of the Great War and its aftermath as in other private and social contexts, the process of collective remembrance and the issues of cultural memory, the intersecting of personal, family and community memories with public commemorative art all eventually announce the inevitable—a fading away of memory:

> aging takes its toll: people fade away, either personally or physically. The collective remembrance of old soldiers and the victims of war is (…) a quixotic act. It is an effort to think

[8] See chapter 4, "War memorials and the mourning process".

> publicly about painful issues in the past, an effort which is bound to fade over time. (Winter, *Remembering* 140)

The war's more obvious fatalities have necessarily been passing out of living memory.[9] The revisiting, re-examining and rewriting of the experience of war has, in the last decades of the twentieth century and in these early decades of the twenty-first century, been less engaged than before in the narratives of soldiers, focussing more upon stories of the witnesses and victims, showing a renovated attention to trauma and victimhood, both in social history and fiction.[10] Contemporary society is still, after one hundred years, troubled by the twentieth century's inaugural conflict in its appalling brutality as well as in its foreshadowing of the cruel century to follow. The endurance of multiple commemorative forms and remembrance sites has been remarkable.

Cultures noticeably depend on multiple processes of connection, on a

> [C]ontract between the living, the dead and the not yet born. (…) humans (…) do not have to start anew in every generation because they are standing on the shoulders of giants whose knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret. [And] in order to remember some things, other things must be forgotten. (…) The continuous process of forgetting is part of social normalcy. As in the head of the individual, also in the communication of society much must be continuously forgotten to make place for new information, new challenges, and new ideas to face the present and the future.[11] (A. Assmann 97)

Once the links between any individual's memory and his or her identity are severed, once the private sharing of a set of narratives about the past is finished, the preservation of a common connection to the past may become the domain of historians, archaeologists, and sociologists. But the legacy of the First World War has undoubtedly continued to be a much wider

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[9] See, among others, Peter Parker, particularly "Remembering War, Resisting Myth: Literature, Memory and the Last Veterans" (2010). See also Andrew Motion's five poems devoted to "Harry Patch" (2009), 5-9.

[10] See Winter, *Remembering*. Among others see also Joanna Bourke, or Beate Piatek.

[11] See also Rieff.

cultural and literary ground inhabited by different artists, particularly by literary creators and their many readers. In the dynamics of cultural memory, the Great War has been kept alive as an integral part of a shared transnational, though mostly European aesthetic inheritance. As a form of collective remembrance, it is active, part of a social process meant to "search for some redemptive meaning (…) at the heart of social and collective languages of mourning" (Winter, *Remembering* 189).

The dominant cultural and literary war myths are well-known and some revisionist approaches have been addressing them, often judging them as historically wrong, misguided or obsolete. While the official English state narrative during the centenary commemorations has presented the general efficiency of fight as indisputable and the soldiers' deaths as heroic and meaningful, the history of the war's understanding in collective memory and in English literature has gone through several significant moments: during and immediately after the war, throughout the 1960s, in the 1980s and the 1990s, and after the turn of this century up until the commemorations of the war's first centenary.[12] With the possible exception of the years between 1919 and 1926, during which Samuel Hynes records "no imagined version of the war (…) entered the canon", the chaotic disruptive experience of the conflict was at once exceptionally shocking for most writers and a challenge they knew they must confront.[13] Randall Stevenson notes that:

> All literary, linguistic, and rhetorical devices (…) may misleadingly endow reality with 'coherency' possibly absent from the events concerned. (…) Words hold horror up for the readers to see, but may also hold it back, or hold it away—

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[12] For recent commemorations see, among others, https://www.iwm.org.uk/projects-partnerships/first-world-war-centenary-partnership and http://www.greatwar.co.uk/events/ypres-salient-events.htm and currently https://www.iwm.org.uk/season/making-a-new-world Accessed 27th May 2018.

[13] "For a period of nearly a decade, there was a curious imaginative silence about the greatest occurrence of recent history" (Hynes 423). See also Winter, *Sites*. In 2017, Trott's pioneering study of the book market between 1919 and 1930 shows how the publishing industry played a decisive role in that "imaginative silence", and that the impact of the war on publications began earlier than has usually been accepted. See Trott, particularly "Publishing the First World War, 1919-1930", pp. 13-49.

> keeping events at a steady distance, even suppressing any urge to intervene in their terrible course. (221-222)[14]

No matter how often challenged and certainly challengeable, the literary canon first defined in 1975 by Paul Fussell has endured. In Fussell's persuasive argument, the war, i.e. the frontline combatants' experience of the war then transfigured into literature, was crucial to shape modern culture. It was a turning point, a radical rupture both with past forms of aesthetic representation and the understanding of war. *The Great War and Modern Memory* has remarkably explored how the experience of the First World War contributed to defining the ironic mode that would distinguish (Western) literature and culture throughout the twentieth century.

Of course, Lynne Hanley's lucid comment on Fussell's canon in her 1991 study, *Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory*, remains true to this day. He ignored "the devastation wreaked by war on women, children, civilians, animals, (…) the entire fabric of family, social and civilized life". And surely in the canon he imagined, the world was "inhabited only by soldiers" (31).

In 2003 Vincent Sherry maintains this last example when observing that Fussell "reserves this [ironical] modern sensibility for writers who report from the combat zone" (*The Great War* 7).[15] Sherry clearly articulates his critique of Fussell's restricted approach and emphasizes that:

> Even in shock and outrage, the Edwardian and Georgian literature that provides the backdrop for Fussell's focused concerns simply does not sustain the kind of consciousness he wants this war to have forged as the dominant modern sensibility. (…) His eloquent attentions are best spent on the psychologized record of this historical event, on the private crises of his individual writers, whose pathos is enhanced by the extremity of the frontline circumstance. (7)

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[14] Stevenson is here particularly addressing Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (first German edition, 1929).

[15] Sherry is highly critical of "the readiness with which Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* dismisses the claim that such a disruption [of traditions that appear immune from the sensibility usually attached to the label and category of modernism] occurred" (8). That issue is not the object of the present essay.

In 2017 Vincent Trott, in *Publishers, Readers and the Great War: Literature and Memory since 1918*, also highlights how Fussell's contribution to the war's cultural and literary legacy has remained influential, though drawing primarily from a small group of English poets and overlooking:

> the broad range of writing triggered by the war, much of which was traditional, patriotic and free of ironic reflections. Through portraying the war as a radical shift in cultural expression, moreover, *The Great War and Modern Memory* has become, like the literature it discusses, an important locus of First World War mythology, further characterizing the war as an irreversible rupture with the past. (3)

While poets, writers, some veterans (and some academics) have been instrumental in the shaping of those myths, in more recent decades this canon has been both challenged and reinforced.

With Hynes I here refer to myth not in the sense of "a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, (…) a tale that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant" (ix). Some of the elements of the "Myth of the War" have long retained their identities: the Old Men, the Big Words, the Turning Point, and Disenchantment:

> [T]hey are everywhere in the war narratives published in the myth-making years [the end of the Twenties] (…) the idealism betrayed; the early high-mindedness that turned in mid-war to bitterness and cynicism; the growing feeling among soldiers of alienation from the people at home for whom they were fighting; the rising resentment of politicians and profiteers and ignorant patriotic women; the growing sympathy for the men on the other side, betrayed in the same ways and suffering the same hardships; the emerging sense of the war as a machine and of all soldiers as its victims; the bitter conviction that the men in the trenches fought for no cause in a war that could not be stopped. (Hynes 439)

To this day, the whole mythology here depicted has crystallized into the prevailing collective memory of the Great War, the one more firmly entrenched in public consciousness and unquestionably more often revisited in literary texts. The persistence of this mythology in no way ignores the necessarily more complex dimensions of the realities it aims at evoking.

The matter of the First World War has become intensely disputed, arguably more than any other period in history. The popular images of the war illustrated by futility, mud, wire, and trenches, emphasizing the suffering and foulness in the frontlines, the trials of individual persons, the rotten "no man's land", the pervasive depiction of a totally pointless and avoidable conflict, so often presented by the war poets, have in the meantime been challenged by some historians who interpret the war and its origins from considerably different perspectives.

In his 2009 *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, Dan Todman has argued that the war was necessary, and "the British army played a major part in the defeat of the Germans in 1918: a great forgotten victory" (Loc. 73). Todman studies what he considers as a rather partial and inaccurate image of the conflict, especially as seen from the military angle:

> The war was depicted as a tragedy and a disaster. (…) Safely ensconced miles behind the lines, [the] generals were unable to grasp the realities of the new style of warfare they were facing. Their men were stuck, for four years, in the most appalling conditions, living in trenches scraped into the ground, surrounded by mud, rats and decaying corpses. (…) The war finally ended because of German disintegration at home and the arrival of the Americans. The pitiful survivors who returned to Britain were silenced by the trauma of their experiences—only the words of a tiny band of warrior poets could communicate the truth of what they had been through. (Loc. 52-58)

While the condescension of such an outline is apparent, it is both credible and indisputably documented that many combatants were proud to fight in what they deemed "as a war of ideals, a struggle between aggressive militarism and more or less liberal democracy" (Loc. 64).[16]

As formerly evoked the war was early on represented in literature, afterwards in popular culture, as the prolonged unacceptable sacrifice

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[16] Todman also defends that the passing away of a considerable number of veterans in the 1970s contributed to the reinforcement of the notions of horror and futility, which many had previously refused. "They no longer had the numbers or the vitality to influence popular culture" (Loc. 2544 *et passim*).

of millions of men, barely surviving in dreadful conditions, led by "incompetent swine" (Sassoon l. 4) and brought back to endure trauma, unemployment and the widespread misapprehension of those fortunate enough to have stayed at home. In Hynes's words, "war poetry would shape the way that subsequent generations would imagine the war they never saw" (259).[17]

The Great War was a literary war.

Literature has dominated the general perception of the war and, although less conspicuously substantial than war memorials, cemeteries and other monuments, quite a few war texts have become sites of memory in themselves.[18] The easy availability of such texts as well as the introducing of some in school and university curricula have made them an integral part of the wider canon of British literature.

The negative myths of the war experience are certainly much too unequivocal to correspond to any accurate comprehension of historical reality but, at least in literature, we deal in imaginative truthfulness and aesthetic emotion. The fact that most of the war writers (chiefly poets) were not socially representative of all those who fought does not necessarily mean that they were misguided in the ways they wrote about the war.[19] The fact that, in more senses than one, most of them belonged to a very restricted elite minority does not signify aesthetic or cultural irrelevance.

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[17] Hynes is adopting Arthur Waugh's first attempt at a history of war poetry of the Great War ("War Poetry", *Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1918), to which I have had no direct access. According to Waugh "The new poetry strove to be absolutely free of convention and of sentimentality; it set a new standard of truth-telling, and by telling truth it created the history of its own time in its own image" (259).

[18] "The poetry of Wilfred Owen (…) experienced a significant rise in stature: his poems became *lieux de mémoire*—literary sites which distilled and transmitted the mythology of war. (…) Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* also achieved a symbolic position in the latter half of the twentieth century" (Trott 201).

[19] "Skeptics argue that Owen and company did not share the working-class attitudes of the overwhelming mass of soldiers who served in the ranks. Such men, they hold, had lived difficult lives, and living in a ditch in Flanders was not fundamentally different from living in urban or rural poverty before 1914. They were proud of their war service, and did not shirk from boasting about it. Whether or not these claims are true is beside the point" (Winter, "Beyond Glory" 244).

"What matters is that the words of the war poets reverberated; and millions of readers have been drawn to their work, still in print long after the Armistice" (Winter, "Beyond Glory" 244).

In Trott's argument:

> This mythology—centred on horror, futility and disillusionment —can be traced back to the works written during the conflict itself, but its foundations were largely constructed during the interwar years. Still fresh in the memory, the Great War was a mainstay of British culture during the 1920s in particular. Writers and readers reflected on and evaluated the conflict, seeking to understand why it was fought and what it had meant. For these reasons, the literary response to the Great War is often explained in psychological or ideological terms. Scholars have frequently sought to determine why writers responded in a particular way to the war at particular times. Despite the importance of these considerations, we also need to view memories of the First World War as a product of the commercial forces of publication and reception. (199)

However critical we may be of Fussell's approach and constructed myth, or of the enduring mythical elements Trott analyses in their central connexions with the influence of publishers and with the readers' response, there is no doubt whatsoever that the First World War has indeed meant, possibly still means, a crucial defining moment in cultural, social and literary history.

As the old soldiers passed away and the centenary approached, there was a considerable increase in popular, cultural and academic attention. The trauma of the First World War had inaugurated a succession of very public memory booms, shaping modern ability to make sense of a profoundly changed world. Jay Winter writes that each memory boom "is an act of defiance, an attempt to keep alive at least the names and images of the millions whose lives have been truncated or disfigured by war" (*Remembering* 12).[20] The most recent one, of which the 2016 Lisbon

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[20] "The 'memory boom' of the later twentieth century arrived in part because of our belated but real acceptance that among us, within our families, there are men and women overwhelmed by traumatic recollection" (*Remembering* 43).

Conference *In Remembrance of the Great War* was a part, brings together our awareness that present-day literature has been reclaiming this past along with the current effort to try and understand why it has been going on for so long. In the words of Stevenson in 2013,

> the Great War's continuing presence, in the twenty-first century, [is] perhaps not even a matter of choice. Like the troubled mind of a trauma patient, the conscience of later ages continues to return repeatedly to the Great War, simply because its events were too deranged and desolate—too far beyond the destructiveness even of earlier conflicts—ever to have been fully contained in mind or conscience. Questions the Great War raises about the capacities of language, literature, and culture to contain experience—to 'hold the horror of the world', to prevent catastrophe, or to communicate effectively its nature when it occurs—remain thoroughly troubling, and perhaps ultimately unanswerable. For that reason alone, the Great War and its literature cannot be allowed to fade into any twilight of historical inattention, or of critical unconcern. (224-25)

No matter how accurate the historical documents are, how scientifically valuable they may be, the revisionist approaches, most of them originating in military historians, have also served and still serve commercial and political functions. The political agenda is often unconcealed. Likewise, the commodification of the First World War and of its dominant mythology is unquestionably real. In the sites of memory and in the merchandising they abundantly make available the war performs a central role in the selling of places.[21]

English literature of and on the war is, to this day, ambivalent: "proud, elegiac, angry and dedicated to protecting from trivialization the memory of men pushed beyond the limits of human endurance in a war which placed metal against men and assured that men would lose" (Winter, "Beyond Glory" 253).

Fiction keeps coming back to those myths, revisiting, re-examining and rewriting them, insisting on their imaginative value. In recent decades,

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[21] See, among others, Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood. See also Beaumont.

many writers have addressed them, quite a few have certainly profited from the public interest or from what Patrick French describes as: "the saturating cult of remembrance, the eroding stone memorials in every village decorated with fresh red wreaths, the hanging medals, the television solemnity, the slew of novels about contemplative officers on the western front" (230). The resilience of the First World War myths has gone hand-in-hand with interpretations continually troubled by the connexions between public history and personal memory. The revisiting of historical situations and the literary canon, the exploration of different dimensions of the war experience, its transformative impacts on people and society have been instrumental in novels such as Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting* (1971), Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-1995) or Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* (1993).[22] Though explicitly devoted to Barker's trilogy, the most popular of those fictions, John Brannigan's comment is appropriate to most of them: "History, after the Great War, is continually haunted by the memory of loss, and is constantly striving to regenerate the past" (Brannigan 24).

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Julian Barnes's 1995 "Evermore" is one among the many literary instances of the reclaiming of the Great War. Death and dying, grief and memory have been recurrent themes in his work.[23] The writer has admitted to being obsessed with death and conceded that "this obsession (…) comes from not wanting to be dead and not liking the idea of being dead, and being frightened by the idea of not existing anymore for eternity" (Guignery and Roberts 161).

The resistance against death and oblivion represented by Miss Moss, the persistence of the memory of the war, its cultural and emotional impact

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[22] For literary criticism see, among others, Renard and Piatek.

[23] See, among others, all the short stories in *Cross Channel* and in *The Lemon Table* (2004) as well as *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) and *Levels of Life* (2013). See also Guignery and Roberts, particularly "Julian Barnes: The Final Interview", pp. 161-88 *et passim*, and Hartung. "Evermore" is not studied in Hartung's essay.

throughout the decades, and the futile struggle against forgetting all come together in this short story. The death in 1917 in combat of her brother Sam has determined Miss Moss's choices, her life has been exclusively devoted to remembering and commemorating him in a doomed fight against total oblivion. Initially, in the first years after the cemeteries and war memorials had been erected, Miss Moss had found comfort in shared mourning.

Addressing the issues of collective memory and rituals and the need to come to terms with their proliferation in recent years, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan may help focus some of the meaning in Miss Moss's early visits:

> Collective remembrance is public recollection. It is the act of gathering bits and pieces of the past, and joining them together in public. The 'public' is the group that produces, expresses, and consumes it. What they create is not a cluster of individual memories; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Collective memory is constructed through the action of groups and individuals in the light of day. (…) When people enter the public domain, and comment about the past—their own personal past, their national past, and so on—they bring with them images and gestures derived from their broader social experience. (…) When people come together to remember, they enter a domain beyond that of individual memory. (Loc. 265)

Every year on Armistice Day she would come to the cemeteries and join the crowd of mourners in their ritual tributes to the deceased. "At first this holiday coincided with the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" (E 103). Back then she was seeking a mode of somehow positioning her private grief within a public sphere.

Later she changed her dates to avoid precisely the sort of commonality she had formerly valued:

> At first, back then, the commonality of grief had helped: wives, mothers, sisters, comrades, an array of brass hats, and a bugler amid grassy morning mist that the feeble November sun had failed to burn away. (E 95)

While Miss Moss's yearly pilgrimages may have begun as those of other mourners' journeys, i.e. as a ritual of bereaved people in search of some form of communion with their dead, as a tribute to the sacrifice of millions of young men, the official commemorations along with the commercial dimensions of dark tourism may have alienated her from such homages. The narrator provides no access to any clear interpretation of her behaviour. But her compulsive devotion to grief, the obsessive character of her "almost immutable" (E 94) annual routine, her neurotic alienation from any other visitors may encourage the reader to consider that Miss Moss is neither grieving for her long gone brother nor paying her respects to the generation decimated by the war. "Was it a vice to have become such a connoisseur of grief?" (E 94). At some point her visits have become about herself. If not at first, then later:

> Remembering Sam had changed: it became work, continuity; instead of anguish and glory, there was fierce unreasonableness, both about his death and her commemoration of it. During this period, she was hungry for the solitude and the voluptuousness of grief: her Sam, her loss, her mourning, and nobody else's similar. She admitted as much: there was no shame to it. (E 95)

For years the sister had sought to make sense of Sam's death by attempting to reconstruct her brother's final days in battle and scrutinising the inexplicable handwritten margins of his last three buff field-service postcards, "his final evidence" (E 91). She found neither answer nor closure. Renard comments: "Miss Moss tries to supplement the story of the past but it remains inaccessible, and this unreachability eventually drives her to the verge of madness" (276).

The fact that no meaning, redemptive or otherwise, is found undoubtedly relates Barnes's story to the dominant negative myths of the war experience formerly identified. The futility of the young men's sacrifices, the brutality of their war experience, the disillusionment and bitterness of both combatants and civilians saturate the story.

However, as Brian Dillon observes:

> Miss Moss concentrates her energies on tending to her private grief. As the object of her grief, Sam is dispersed into re-

> collections notable for their vagueness. His physical appearance is recalled by her thinking of one photo of him so impressed on her memory that she does not need to view it again. (…) The narrator neither takes the reader to the trenches to witness Sam in uniform, with his company, under fire, nor recounts his final home visit, perhaps altered appearance, shreds of remembered dialogues: the body of textual evidence readers of war literature expect.

Through the protagonist's obsessive endeavour to delay the soldiers' final erasure from history, Barnes addresses the forgetting that will of necessity be the future of each and every one of us. In 2000 he declared: '"Evermore' is about the fear that things will be forgotten, but of course history will be forgotten just as people will be forgotten" (Guignery 59).

For Miss Moss, who considers that "man is only a clerical error corrected by death" (E 94), remembrance is about some significant form of agency, however misguided or obsolete. Because "passive memory—understood as the personal recollections of a silent individual—is not collective memory", and as formerly cited "when people come together to remember, they enter a domain beyond that of individual memory" (Winter and Sivan loc. 265). She considers herself as the gatekeeper of memory. Her own private grief is paramount in her returning, after fifty years, to ritualistically mourn her brother:

> There was consolation in solitude and damp knees. She no longer talked to Sam; everything had been said decades ago. (…) But the hours she spent with him at Cabaret Rouge were the most vital of her life. They always had been. (E 106)

However, Miss Moss's zeal includes the annual visits to the "lost men", those "whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial ground given to their comrades in death" (E 96).[24] The war had been too

[24] The short story echoes Miss Moss's reading of the inscription at Thiepval memorial, whose full text proclaims: "Here are recorded names of officers and men of the British Armies who fell on the Somme battlefields July 1915 February 1918 but to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiepval_Memorial. Accessed 27th May 2018). Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and unveiled on 1st August 1932, the Thiepval

bleak, her mourning too protracted. Miss Moss has not come to terms with her bereavement. By the enactment and re-enactment of the very same annual rituals, thoroughly aware of the hopelessness of such endeavour, she nonetheless attempts to perpetuate the memory of those who died. If the millions of soldiers victimised by the war are forgotten, it is as if somehow they will have suffered premature deaths a second time.

> Might there be one last fiery glow of remembering? (…) If this [forgetting] happened to the individual, could it not also happen on a national scale? Might there not be, at some point in the first decades of the twenty-first century, one final moment, lit by evening sun, before the whole thing was handed over to the archivists? (E 111)

Miss Moss's private struggle against forgetfulness and the soldiers' final erasure from history may, in recent years, have found some public forms of redress, however fragile or controversial—"one final moment, lit by evening sun". Some historians and politicians have been trying to rescue the war from its persistent perception as a gigantic pointless waste of lives and means, by arguing that the conflict represented unavoidable, necessary, triumphant sacrifice. And, one hundred years after the Great War, the English literary and cultural imagination is still creatively haunted by the persistence of those old myths. "Peculiar in its challenge to the imagination, and in its role in the advance of modernity, the Great War also occupies a highly particular place in the history of literature, even in the history of the English language itself" (Stevenson 227).

In the search for some redemptive meaning for the enormous human and civilizational losses of the First World War, literature has had and may continue to have a significant part to play. Echoing "Tunnel", the coda story to *Cross Channel* where Barnes metafictionally revisits "Evermore" and questions of remembrance, memory and myth, Renard observed:

Memorial to the Missing of the Somme is a war memorial to 72,337 missing British and South African servicemen who died in the Battles of the Somme of the First World War between 1915 and 1918, with no known grave (https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-cemeteries-and-memorials/80800/thiepval-memorial/history. Accessed 27th May 2018).

> Fiction has the ability (…) to extrapolate from the resonant 'remaining fragments' to recreate the past and make it present and alive once more for its readers, giving rise to a paramemory of former times that also has the ability to reflect on itself, on its memorial functions and its mythifying processes. (326)

In their different ways, both historians and writers keep trying to preserve the memory of the Great War and stop the inevitability of forgetting history as well as people.[25] The long-established myths of the futility of the war—"Was it for this the clay grew tall?"—in Owen's haunting expression, have been revisited (l.12). Perhaps Miss Moss's lifelong misery has not been in vain.[26]

The victims were actually heroes who will be commemorated for evermore, i.e. in her chosen meaning "[f]or all future time" (E 100). And some deliverance from irrelevance and oblivion may have been achieved.[27]

Dealing in imaginative truthfulness and aesthetic emotion, writing against death, writing against oblivion, literature may be the ultimate site of memory. "[L]iterature gave the myth a more articulate form, and, as a *lieu de mémoire*, played and continues to play a decisive role in the fixation and endurance of the myth in the British collective memory" (Renard 75)

Although Miss Moss would not have anticipated that, perhaps whatever afterlife the war victims may hope for now rests precisely with the power of literature to breathe new life into them:

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[25] Ludmilla Jordanova's words might here be considered: "Historians rely on the memories of others when it comes to sources (…). The practice of history is, after all, a highly specialised form of commemoration" (138).

[26] "Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)" (J. Assmann and Czaplicka).

[27] "[T]he story's poignancy rests on the knowledge that all specificity will be forgotten, and the living memory of the war will perish in a general feeling of unease without detail" (Childs 128). Yet "Against all odds (…) the short fictions in *Cross Channel* make their bids for remembrance, in as much as they bring the past to our attention" (Holmes 45).

> EVERMORE. She wondered if there was such a thing as collective memory, something more than the sum of individual memories. If so, was it merely coterminous, yet in some way richer; or did it last longer? She wondered if those too young to have original knowledge could be given memory, could have it grafted on. She thought of this especially at Thiepval. (…) Grief and awe lived here; they could be breathed, absorbed. And if so, then [the] child might in turn bring its child, and so on, from generation to generation, EVERMORE. Not just to count the Missing, but to understand what those from whom they had gone missing knew, and to feel her loss afresh. (E 100-1)

Writing against death, writing against oblivion, literature may be the ultimate site of memory.[28] Or, in the words of Kate McLoughlin, "[w]henever war is written or read about, it is also actually happening and this must give both urgency and humility to our reading and writing" (3).

In "Tunnel" Julian Barnes, author and grandson, wrote:

> His grandfather had joined the Missing of the Somme. He had come back, it was true; it was just that he had lost everything later. His name might as well be chiselled on the great arch at Thiepval. (…) He was gone beyond memory, and no plump little French cake dipped in tea would release those distant truths. They could only be sought by a different technique, the one in which this man's grandson still specialised. (206)

Time will eventually erase everything. Words, monuments, memories. For evermore.

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[28] "Acts of shared remembrance require a time and a place at which they can be expressed. Without a place, or a substitute for a lost home, collective memory vanishes. War memorials create such a focus of attention, a site where the past can be evoked, re-created, perhaps misinterpreted, but in any event kept alive. (…) In future what forms these cultural patterns of remembrance will take is anyone's guess" (Winter, *Remembering* 179-80).

> What was he, finally, but a gatherer and sifter of memories: his memories, history's memories? Also, a grafter of memories, passing them on to other people. It was not an ignoble way of passing your life. ("Tunnel" 210)

If we as readers imagine those war victims they will have attained some, however passing, form of eternity.

"We will remember them" (Binyon loc. 16)[29]

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[29] Binyon's words are of course used in Remembrance Sunday services throughout the United Kingdom. Also, in yet another instance, the fourth stanza is used as an exhortation during the daily 8pm Last Post Ceremony at Ypres. "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old: / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn / At the going down of the sun and in the morning, / We will remember them" (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57322/for-the-fallen.%20Accessed%2025th%20May%202018. Accessed 25 May 2018).

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Abstract

Miss Moss, bereaved sister of a First World War soldier, is the protagonist of Julian Barnes's "Evermore", a story focussing on the attempt to perpetuate the memory of those who died. For fifty years she has been travelling to the Somme battlefields to visit cemeteries and monuments dedicated to the war victims. What started as part of a process of healing developed into an aim in itself. Becoming old, she is as conscious of the ultimate futility of her effort as she had always been of the futility of their sacrifice. Soon she will no longer be able to come and pay tribute to all those men. And she does not trust younger generations to carry on with such acts of remembrance. Only annihilation, total oblivion awaits those victims. "the collective remembrance of old soldiers and the victims of war is (…) a quixotic act. It is an effort to think publicly about painful issues in the past, an effort which is bound to fade over time" (Winter, 2006). Miss Moss's private struggle against forgetfulness and the soldiers' final erasure from history has, in recent years, found some new forms of redress, however fragile or controversial. At the heart of the so-called memory boom "is an act of defiance, an attempt to keep alive at least the names and images of the millions whose lives have been truncated or disfigured by war" (Winter, 2006). Some revisionist historians have questioned long-established myths of the futility of the Great War, arguing instead that the conflict represented unavoidable necessary sacrifice. And, against oblivion, perhaps as the ultimate site of memory, literature has persisted in the quest for some redemptive meaning.

Keywords

Remembrance; Great War; literature; Barnes

Resumo

Miss Moss, irmã em luto por um soldado da Primeira Guerra Mundial, protagoniza "Evermore" de Julian Barnes, uma história centrada na tentativa de perpetuar a memória dos que morreram. Ao longo de cinquenta anos, tem viajado pelos

campos de batalha do Somme, em visita a cemitérios e monumentos devotados às vítimas da guerra. O que começara como parte de um processo de fazer o luto tornara-se um fim em si mesmo. Ao envelhecer, entende que o seu esforço é tão fútil como sempre considerara o dos que se tinham sacrificado. Em breve não conseguirá regressar e prestar tributo a todos aqueles homens. E não confia nas gerações mais novas para dar continuidade a tais actos de memória. Apenas a aniquilação, o oblívio total espera essas vítimas. "… the collective remembrance of old soldiers and the victims of war is … a quixotic act. It is an effort to think publicly about painful issues in the past, an effort which is bound to fade over time" (Winter, 2006). A luta pessoal de Miss Moss contra o esquecimento dos soldados, contra o apagar final da sua memória histórica tem, em anos recentes, encontrado alguns modos de reparação, ainda que frágeis ou controversos. No centro do chamado 'memory boom' "is an act of defiance, an attempt to keep alive at least the names and images of the millions whose lives have been truncated or disfigured by war" (Winter, 2006). Alguns historiadores revisionistas têm posto em causa mitos há muito estabelecidos acerca da futilidade da Grande Guerra, argumentando que, pelo contrário, o conflito representou um sacrifício necessário e inescapável. E, contra o oblívio, talvez a literatura, em demanda de algum significado redentor, venha persistindo como sítio último de memória.

Palavras-Chave

Memória; Grande Guerra; literatura; Barnes

What the Soldier Said: Silence, (Bad) Language and the Great War

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What the Soldier Said: Silence, (Bad) Language and the Great War

A few weeks after the Great War began, on 2 September 1914, a secret meeting of distinguished authors was convened in London, at Wellington House. Twenty-five of the period's leading writers attended, including J. M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, H. G. Wells, and the Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges. Rudyard Kipling sent apologies, but—like several other absentees, including John Buchan, Hugh Walpole and Ian Hay—he soon became involved in the issues discussed. These concerned the dissemination and popularisation of war ideals: Wellington House was the base of Britain's War Propaganda Bureau. Headed by the cabinet minister and former literary editor C. F. G. Masterman, it was soon employing the authors named in producing small books or pamphlets supporting the British cause. To minimise evidence of government involvement, these were usually placed discreetly with established publishers, such as Oxford University Press, with a fee paid to the author concerned and an additional contribution made to cover the costs of production and distribution.

Some of the books produced—such as Ford Madox Ford's detailed study of German education and culture, *When Blood is their Argument* (1915)— seem unlikely to have had a significant effect on popular opinion. Others, though, were altogether more readable and potentially influential. In *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front* (1915), for example, Arnold Bennett offered an engaging, optimistic account of the conflict in France—almost a travelogue—despite being deeply disturbed even by the limited view of the trenches that the authorities had allowed him. A leading literary figure before the Great War, Bennett went on to develop an important role as a propagandist, writing more than four hundred articles about the war and finding himself briefly in charge of propaganda

operations towards its end. These operations had steadily expanded in scale and influence throughout the conflict.

Thomas Hardy was later to remark that 2 September 1914 was a day of "yellow sun shining (…) in a melancholy manner I shall never forget" (Waller 932). The authors' meeting that late summer afternoon deserves not to be forgotten: it marked both a zenith and yet also a nadir in literary history. In one way, the government's haste to employ authors highlighted the importance and the central role in public awareness still enjoyed by literature at the time. Probably never before, and certainly never since—as more and more new media have eroded the cultural centrality of the written word—has it seemed so essential to co-opt so many leading writers into disseminating the views of the state. Yet probably never before, or since, have so many authors so readily discarded or suppressed their freedom and autonomy of vision. In that way, the Wellington House meeting initiated a form of melancholy lasting throughout the Great War and beyond, invalidating readers' natural expectation that literature can be relied upon to provide an unfettered, unbiased vision of the world as authors see it.

This melancholy situation extended into other forms of publication and written communication, as reporting of the Battle of the Somme, in 1916, vividly exemplifies. Even after war correspondents had been allowed to send reports from the Front, after mid-1915, these remained so firmly controlled by military censors that newspapers were hardly more reliable than when they had depended exclusively on information supplied by the Admiralty and the War Office. On Saturday, 1 July 1916, during the first few hours of the Battle of the Somme, the British Army endured the most disastrous morning in its history: around 20,000 soldiers were killed, and there were nearly 60,000 casualties overall. Yet the following Monday, the *Times* reported "a good beginning", adding that "our casualties have not been heavy" and that "everything has gone well"—also recording the view of the British commander, Sir Douglas Haig, that "the general situation was favourable" (3 July, 8, 9, 10). As the former *Guardian* journalist C. E. Montague recorded in his war memoir, *Disenchantment* (1922), men who had lived through the Somme campaign read newspaper reports of it "open-mouthed (…) the fighting soldier gave the Press up" (98). Another former soldier, Eric Partridge, later concluded that official language—

riddled with the mendacities of Press and propaganda—had become "callously, cynically, mockingly, or desperately and sadistically debased" during the war (34).

Fighting soldiers had little opportunity to resist this debasement. By 1917, eight million items of army mail were being sent to and from the Western Front every week, but with little scope for soldiers to describe truthfully, in their letters, the conditions they experienced there. Soldiers in Fredric Manning's novel *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929/1977) indicate the constraints involved when discussing how to write home:

> 'I'm not writin' any bloody lies', said Madeley, 'I'm tellin' 'em I'm in the pink, an' so I am.' (…)
> 'Nothin' but the bloody truth, eh? "Dear Mother, by the time you get this I'll be dead.'
> 'If you do write the truth they rub it out in th' orderly-room', said Martlow; 'so you might just as well write cheerful. Me mother told me the first letters I sent 'ome was all rubbed out wi' indelible pencil, so as she couldn't read anythin', 'cept that it were rainin'.' (192-93)

Naturally enough, another soldier concludes that "writin' all manner o' bloody lies" to those at home is the only option military discipline allows.

Faced with constraints on letter-writing, the Press, and the literary sphere, soldiers might have been expected to rely on what must have seemed the only option still open to them: reportage directly, in their own voice. This option did offer substantial and various potentials, further discussed below, but even these were seldom straightforwardly realised. Soldiers naturally avoided descriptions of the Front which were only too likely to "give them the horrors" at home (188), as R. H. Mottram's central figure records in *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (1927). Even when they did attempt a full and true description, it was quite likely to fall on deaf ears. Because "civvies (…)/ (…) read the war news", George Willis complains in his poem "To my Mate", "they think you daft, or shell-shocked, if you speak what ain't a lie" (Noakes 362). In the war volumes of his epic novel *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* (1951-69) Henry Williamson's hero likewise finds that even when he can bear to describe trench experiences, while on leave, these count for nothing, as his father simply accuses him of pretending to know better than the newspapers.

The Home Front was evidently not inclined to "give the Press up". On the contrary, as Robert Graves recalled in *Goodbye to All That* (1929), "civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language" (188). Finding home so foreign, in this way, left soldiers in a condition of perplexing epistemic isolation; experiencing a cognitive gap—between home and abroad, civilian and military—as deep as any in British history. Many shared, as a result, feelings of belonging to a separate, excluded community, and able to communicate only within it, much as Wilfred Owen suggests in "Smile, Smile, Smile" (1918). Wounded soldiers, reading "Yesterday's *Mail*", are described smiling "at one another curiously"—knowingly—"like secret men who know their secret safe" (1: 190). By 1918, the poem suggests, the nature of the war had become a secret fully shared only by those who had been involved directly, and almost incommunicable to those who had not. "The great silence" was the phrase newspapers coined to describe moments on the first Armistice Day, 11 November 1919, when the nation halted for two minutes of "reverent remembrance", suddenly strangely stilling the rattle and roar of Britain's streets. Yet the phrase has been applied, equally aptly, more generally: to cultural conditions in the years immediately following the war, when returning soldiers rarely seemed to find means, or outlets, or a language, to communicate to an uncomprehending wider public the overwhelming events they had experienced.

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Yet within a few years of the Armistice, it became apparent that although—or perhaps because—soldiers had been so excluded by official forms of discourse, they had developed all the more vigorously a language of their own: not exactly a secret one, but esoteric or often partly foreign itself. Long-sustained policing of the British Empire, in India most extensively, had led the Regular Army to incorporate into daily use numerous foreign terms, including many—such as "blighty", "cushy" or "dekko"—from Urdu or Hindi. Recent service in France and Belgium had equally strong effects, army slang quickly transforming French terms such as "il n'y a plus" into "na pooh", or place-names such as Ypres into "Wipers". Experience not only of foreign locations and languages, but of the weird, unusual or foreign nature of war and military service further encouraged the invention of slang and non-standard items of vocabulary. When these were collected

by John Brophy and Eric Partridge, their glossary extended to more than fifteen hundred entries.

For others interested in army language, its copious inventiveness represented more than just the wit and verbal ingenuity of soldiers. In "What the Soldier Said: Collecting the Slang of the Great War" (1922) the journalist Wilfred Whitten suggested that the imagination involved seemed both inexhaustible and even to an extent redemptive, reconfiguring alien, shocking experience in familiar or more congenial terms. As Whitten notes, for example, a powerful, murkily-exploding shell was generally known as a "Jack Johnson", named after a black boxer famous at the time, while a less menacing one was cheerfully dismissed as a "pip-squeak". Slang of this kind, Whitten suggests, demonstrates "an instinct of self-protection against the terrible assaults of reality" and "the amazing powers of adaptation which the human mind can summon to the breach of all ordinary habit, outlook and experience". Such wit and linguistic inventiveness, he concludes, seek somehow to suppress a "sense of the unutterable" (480).

By the end of the 1920s, the nature of the war's "terrible assaults on reality", and on the lives of ordinary soldiers, had become more often and more vividly a subject of published literature. The great silence of the immediately post-war years was replaced—quite suddenly, critics have often suggested—by what seemed a hubbub of memoirs, novels and poetry by former combatants. The vividness of the experience this new writing presented—and its distance from what had regularly been communicated by official discourse—was often highlighted by emphases on soldiers' own speech, language and slang. Manning's central figure in *The Middle Parts of Fortune* extends his scepticism of "all the solemn empty phrases" in the newspapers into a conviction that written forms in general may offer only "dead words there on the paper (…) graven rigid symbols [which] could never again kindle with the movement and persuasion of (…) living voice" (42, 117). The novel's own tactics reflect this conclusion. Throughout *The Middle Parts of Fortune*—typically in the passage quoted earlier—copious inverted commas and slangy terms such as "in the pink" (used ubiquitously during the Great War) meticulously reproduce the idiosyncrasy and subversive vitality of soldiers' dialogue.

Similar reproductions of soldierly speech figure can be found in poems by Wilfred Owen—such as "The Chances", "The Letter" and

"À Terre" —and in Siegfried Sassoon's "Died of Wounds" and "In the Pin". They work to particular effect in some of Edmund Blunden's poetry. "Vlamertinghe: Passing the Chateau" begins with references to Keats and descriptions of a flowery pastoral prospect of "Bold great daisies, golden lights, / Bubbling roses, pinks and whites". Yet this florid rhetoric is soon brought up short by the colloquial interjection "But if you ask me, mate …" and the suggestion that flowers closer to the colour of blood would be more appropriate to the fate of the soldiers marching by (152). Contrasts between official or conventional rhetoric and the language of ordinary soldiers are further explored in "'Trench Nomenclature'", in terms familiar from Whitten's "What the Soldier Said". "'Trench Nomenclature'" praises the affirmative, inventive "name on name" soldiers find even for sodden, lethal sections of the Front – designating an inadequate earthwork as "*The Great Wall of China*", and another area as "*Picturedome*", though it offers a prospect only of "greyed corpses and morass". Like Whitten, Blunden finds in these "sharp Shakespearean names" a "genius" which "could compress / in a title what man's humour said to man's supreme distress" (173).

In these works and others, "what the soldier said" emerged from the great silencing of earlier years and could be heard clearly, widely and powerfully in literature by 1930. Yet it was never heard in its entirety. Other silencings remained, then and since. David Jones indicated their nature in introducing his Great War epic *In Parenthesis* (1937), noting that its composition had been "hampered by the convention of not using impious and impolite words"—a thoroughly misleading one,

> because the whole shape of our discourse was conditioned by the use of such words. The very repetition of them made them seem liturgical (…) [and] gave a kind of significance, and even at moments a dignity, to our speech (…) [which] reached real poetry (…).
> I say more: the 'Bugger! Bugger! Of a man detailed had about it the 'Fiat! Fiat!' of the Saints. (xii)

The exclusion Jones identifies widely troubled Great War authors. In *Under Fire* (*Le Feu*, 1916), Henri Barbusse relies heavily on dialogue, like Frederic Manning, but one of his characters raises a problem with its presentation when he asks the narrator about his attitude to "swearwords

(…) something that the printers won't much like to print". If these are omitted, the soldier continues, the picture offered of soldiers' lives "won't be very accurate; it's like you wanted to paint them and didn't put in one of the most glaring colours". The narrator reassures him that he will "put the swearwords in, because it's the truth" (155)—a promise largely maintained in *Under Fire*, though swearing is employed sparingly enough not to have deterred publishers, or the reading public, perhaps because the novel first appeared in a literary journal.

Other authors were less fortunate. Before Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) could be accepted for publication, its language had to be emasculated, in the view of its author, by editorial elimination of obscenities. Hemingway's compatriot John Dos Passos was likewise exasperated that "the printer refused to print the swearwords" (34) he had intended to appear in *One Man's Initiation* (1920)—an omission particularly irritating to an author fascinated enough by the vernacular to have claimed later that "U.S.A. is the speech of the people" (*U.S.A.* 7). Frederic Manning's commitment to "living voice" entailed inclusion of "all the fuckin' patter" (38), but this ensured that *The Middle Parts of Fortune* was confined to a limited edition, privately circulated in 1929, with the author named only as "Private 19022", Manning's army number. An expurgated but still pseudonymous version, *Her Privates We*—surely a raunchier Shakespearean title—followed in 1930, but it was not until 1977 that an unexpurgated text of *The Middle Parts of Fortune* became generally available. John Brophy and Eric Partridge were comparably constrained in documenting army songs and slang, omitting obscenities from their huge list of terms when it was first published in 1931. Even when their work was re-issued in the supposedly-liberated mid-1960s—and although acknowledging that "custom and opinion have changed"—they still chose to omit many obscenities, though intriguingly permitting "arse, balls, ballocks, piss and shit" (21).

Restraint, editorial intervention, or censorship of this kind leaves an odd lacuna in Great War literature. As David Jones recalled, and Robert Graves confirmed in 1929, "in trench-warfare (…) swearing had become universal" (45). Yet this locutionary dimension—known to have been in universal use, and often directly discussed by authors concerned—remains almost entirely missing from their texts. In Ernest Raymond's popular,

patriotic novel *Tell England* (1922), the padre is ready to acknowledge that swearing corresponds to "the rock-bottom level on which we are fighting this war", and should not be condemned by anyone "who hasn't foundered in mud under shell-fire" (190-91). In "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo", Wilfred Owen finds "much beauty / In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight" (1: 124). Yet this "beauty" or "rock bottom level" is at most only indirectly available to later readers, unless through unpublished recollections and memoirs. One of these, by Sidney Myers, suggests how Great War literature *might* have read, had it been published in a different moral climate. Myers recalls of the end of the Great War, on 11 November 1918, that

> At 10.40 a.m., Brig. Gen. Maxwell, commanding the 174th Brigade (…) rode up to the head of the column and informed the Adjutant that an armistice had been declared to commence at 11 a.m. The news was passed down the column—there were no cheers as might have been expected—almost as though it had been pre-arranged, a mighty shout went up 'F … the armistice, where's our f … ing breakfast'. (50)

Intriguingly, Myers still found it preferable in 1977 to employ ellipses—even in a typescript not intended for publication in any form—to diminish the force of the "f…" word. The extract nevertheless indicates very clearly the gap between official language and the "truth" of soldierly discourse that had opened up by the end of the Great War.

Divergences between "what the soldier said" and ways it was written down might be seen merely as a consequence—regrettable, misleading, but more or less inevitable—of changing public taste or morals, and the slow relaxation of embargoes on published obscenity. Robert Graves invited a straightforward interpretation of this kind—though with an added sense of frustration—in a little-known volume he published a couple of years before his popular *Goodbye to All That*. In *The Future of Swearing and Improper Language* (1927), Graves suggests that:

> some historian of the future will write of the social taboos of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He will postulate the existence of an enormous secret-language of bawdry and an immense oral literature of obscene stories and rhymes known (…) to every man and woman in the country, yet never consigned to writing or openly admitted as existing. (70-1)

In one way, Graves might be considered simply to be exaggerating. Could obscene language have been so thoroughly known, but suppressed, by *every* man and woman in the country? Historical and linguistic study of the 1920s tends to suggest that this might well have been the case—at any rate, more than is usually supposed. Christopher Hilliard's analysis of a famous court case in 1923, for example, describes a judge's conviction that an elegantly-attired, genteel-seeming defendant could neither have used nor even known a range of obscene vocabulary—which she had nevertheless, it transpired, vigorously employed in a series of poison-pen letters.

"Historians of the future"—including readers of Great War literature in the twenty-first century—might therefore conclude that soldiers' hoarse oaths would have been familiar enough to civilians, too, and that only "social taboos" prevented them from sharing this "rock bottom level" of war experience. In one way, this might be seen merely as a loss of authenticity or "truth"—making inaudible a key component of "what the soldier said", and regrettably diminishing "the movement and persuasion (…) of living voice". Yet swearing involves more than that, as Graves and many other combatants testified. Significantly, Owen finds that swearing offers not only "much beauty", but also a resource that "kept our courage straight". In his Great War memoir, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (1968), George Coppard recalls finding swearwords both a "proper way to talk" and "an unconscious protective shield to keep us from becoming crazy" (47). In *The Future of Swearing*, Graves likewise defines "a definite physiological function" in swearing—a response to what "the nervous system demands" in reaction to "intense bombardments and sudden panics" (44-5). In these views, swearing offers a particularly effective means—much more powerful than colloquial or vernacular language in general—of speaking back against the kind of "supreme distress" Whitten and Blunden identify.

Swearing provides in this way a key instance of Eric Partridge's conclusion, in his *Essays on Language* (1950), that "behind a war vocabulary there lies a fundamental, complex psychology" (58). Many later studies—linguistic, historical, psychological, or neuroscientific—extend this conclusion, and the others above. In one straightforward way, commentators have often confirmed Owen's judgement that "much beauty" can be found in oaths; or David Jones's, that they constitute "real poetry". Ashley Montagu's *The Anatomy of Swearing* (1967) finds oaths offering

"an originality, a virtuosity, a musicality, and an eloquence" (3). Steven Pinker's study of language, *The Stuff of Thought* (2007), likewise envisages that swearing shares "certain affinities with poetry", demonstrating "the evocativeness of metaphor; the pleasure of alliteration, meter and rhyme" (339, 372). Pinker's study also analyses swearing as "a coherent neurobiological phenomenon" (336), extending the kind of views Montagu offers of its role in restoring or maintaining "the normal psychophysical equilibrium of the individual" (72). Psychology experiments by Richard Stephens and others have confirmed this restorative function—in one celebrated case, by means of a trial requiring volunteers to submerge their hands for as long as possible in ice-cold water. This indicated that swearing can extend significantly the period in which immersion could be endured, and that it "increased pain tolerance, increased heart rate, and decreased perceived pain"—physiological or "psychophysical" evidence clearly supporting Owen's views of keeping "courage straight", or Coppard's, concerning "unconscious protective shield" (Stephens et al 1056).

Stephens's account of his findings also refers specifically, like Pinker, to swearing as a "neurobiological phenomenon", mentioning research that suggests it may "tap into 'deep and ancient parts of the emotional brain'" (1059). Pinker summarises some of this neuroscientific research, suggesting that swearing depends less on the left hemisphere of the brain—the part most concerned with "propositional speech, in which combinations of words express combinations of ideas according to grammatical rules"—than on the right hemisphere, and on other, deeper, evolutionarily-ancient cerebral structures (334). These include the basal ganglia, the amygdala, and the limbic system—responsible, according to Pinker, for strong emotion, primal responses of mortal fear or rage, and sometimes for their expression in screams and cries. Neuroscience, in this way, conceptualises swearing as an inexpungable, unavoidable, rock-bottom level of response to "supreme distress", and one potentially restorative or ameliorative in its effects. The Great War's "hoarse oaths" might therefore be understood not as merely bad or delinquent language, but as a kind of internal armament, or armour—an essential part of soldiers' "self-protection against the terrible assaults of reality". Omitting this component of "what the soldier said" from written accounts of the war is almost as misleading as suggesting that the soldiers fought without helmets, rifles, or uniforms.

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Robert Graves introduces other factors affecting the role of "hoarse oaths" —and the balance of language and silence generally, during and after the Great War—when *The Future of Swearing* describes a particular response to the documentary film, *The Battle of the Somme*. Released in August 1916, *The Battle of the Somme* included genuine footage of the army's work in France alongside staged scenes, set up with the help and approval of British propaganda. None of this material, of course—in a silent, black-and-white film—could communicate the kind of "colour" Barbusse's soldier feared might be missing from accounts of the war. "Living voice" may survive, tenuously, in literature, but it is generally still harder to recover from the many documentary films of the Great War—their grainy, flickering, soundless qualities if anything encouraging later generations to envisage the conflict as interred, remotely, in a very different age.

For civilians at the time, *The Battle of the Somm*e nevertheless made the war seem anything but distant. Many of its early audiences were deeply disturbed by what they saw on the screen. Debates ensued, in the letter pages of *The Times*, about the propriety of making into public spectacle the kind of scenes the film included—even though these had mostly been carefully constructed to mitigate the full impact of the conflict. Yet there were also *Times* correspondents who enthusiastically supported the film, one of them explaining that it contributed more to his "realization of what war is" than "all the (…) books [he] had read" (2 Sept 1916, 3). The film's huge popularity seemed to confirm this view. Shown throughout Britain in the latter months of 1916, in church and village halls as well as established cinemas, it may have attracted as many as twenty million spectators —nearly 50% of the country's entire population at that time. Its success indicated another kind of silencing, or side-lining, of the written word, or even words in general. Never again would literary authors—rather than film-makers and experts in visual media—appeal to governments as the most promising and influential creators of propaganda.

In *The Future of Swearing*, Graves identifies a very particular audience response to *The Battle of the Somme*—one strangely enabled almost to recover "living voice" after all. His "historian of the future" speculates that "a party of deaf and dumb children were taken to a silent

film called "The Somme" and had to be taken away because of the 'bad language' on the screen" (88). Graves uses this episode simply to highlight the lacuna described above, noting that— "beyond an occasional *damn* or *bloody*"— "not a trace" of the kind of bad language that could be lip-read on the screen "occurs in the 'realistic' War poetry published between 1914 and 1918" (88). Yet the episode he describes is also emblematic of more general concerns about the language and literature of the Great War. This wider, symbolic significance accrues from the suggestion that the audience members most in touch with the true, full range of soldierly discourse and experience—most able to "read" what they saw—were also, ironically, those least able to speak of what they knew.

Constraints of this kind can be seen as typical of experiences of the Great War—primarily, of frustrated attempts to communicate its true nature to the civilian population, but also of difficulties soldiers encountered even in trying to describe and assimilate events for themselves. Combatants' memoirs and diaries often highlight these problems. "The most practised pen cannot convey a real notion of life at the Front, as the words to describe war do not exist" (12) remarked Vernon Bartlett, later a journalist and politician, in *Mud and Khaki* (1917). "A bombardment is beyond my description", Private Len Smith's journal records—beyond the resources even of the most "clever writing" (np). "I can write nothing", Ford Madox Ford explains in his essay "A Day of Battle: Arms and the Mind" (1916), finding himself unable "to evoke pictures of the Somme (…) as for putting them—into words! No: the mind stops dead and something in the brain stops and shuts down" (456). One of Barbusse's soldiers in *Under Fire* likewise remarks that "when you talk about the war (…) it's as though you didn't say anything. It stifles words. We are here, looking at this, like blind men" (303).

As these comments suggest—Ford's and Barbusse's especially—the challenges of communicating war experience may have been primarily linguistic, or perceptual, but they were severe enough sometimes almost to resemble the kind of physical disability endured by the deaf-mute children Graves describes, or to be represented in comparable terms. In several 1920s novels, this "sense of the unutterable", or of stifled words, extends into forms of dumbness, literal or metaphoric. In Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* tetralogy (1924-8), the hero's brother is rendered

permanently speechless after the Armistice. The central character in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922) is figured mostly through silence and vacancy, and the human voice is similarly stifled, or just absent, in the darkling middle section of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Among later novelists writing about the Great War, Pat Barker describes in *Regeneration* (1991) the pioneer psychologist W. H. R. Rivers treating a soldier traumatised into dumbness by events in the trenches. Experiences at the Front likewise leave Sebastian Faulks's protagonist in *Birdsong* (1993) unable to speak for two years.

Psychoanalysis developed rapidly, during and after the Great War, in response to the need to treat traumatised ex-servicemen, and its practitioners soon recognised silencing and dumbness as among major symptoms they had to deal with. Published by Sándor Ferenczi, Ernest Jones and others in 1921, with an Introduction by Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis and the War Neuroses* describes how frequently "attacks (…) associated with mutism" figured among ailments associated with what was still generally known as "shell-shock" (39). The extent of their contemporary appearance suggests another interpretation of the "great silence" that followed the war. A generation of ex-servicemen, noted for its reluctance to speak of their experiences in the Great War, may have been silenced not only by a "debased" official language, or uncomprehending civilians, but by forms of the traumatised "mutism" psychoanalysis identified.

Or they may have encountered the kind of fundamental incongruity which Ford, Barbusse and others indicate between words and war—an inappropriateness, in containing certain experiences within the formal order of conventional language, which Paul Fussell analyses in his definitive study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Discussing the dubious effectiveness in describing the war of "rhetoric" and literary devices such as "assonance, alliteration, allusion", Fussell wonders if events might be "deformed" even by "sentence structures and connectives implying clear causality". He goes on to question whether there is "any way of compromising between the reader's expectations that written history ought to be interesting and meaningful and the cruel fact that much of what happens—all of what happens?—is inherently without 'meaning'" (172). In this view, the experience of the Great War may have overwhelmed, or

eluded altogether, the kind of "propositional speech" which Steven Pinker describes tidily operating "according to grammatical rules".

The inappropriateness or inadequacy of this form of language, with its tidy rules, might further explain the conclusion Melissa Mohr mentions in her history of bad language, *Holy Sh*t* (2013), that

> during and after World War I and World War II, people began to swear *more* than they had in the past. The particular horrors of these wars—the constant threat of death by poison gas and machine guns, trench warfare, incendiary bombing—led to feelings of rage and helplessness that needed an outlet in frequent swearing. (227)

Such feelings might also be reflected in the lexical inversions described by Hemingway's narrator in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). In response to mendacious propaganda and grandiose government proclamations, he reflects that "the things that were glorious had no glory (…) there were many words that you could not stand to hear (…) abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or hallow were obscene" (165). For Hemingway, it is debased official discourse, and not ordinary swearing, which is obscene, with the words omitted in the editorial emasculation of *A Farewell to Arms* an essential but excluded corrective. The growing allure of swearing might likewise correspond to an intuition—perhaps shared, as Graves suggests, among the whole population—that the conventionally polite or "official" language of "propositional speech" is unable, alone, to encompass the overwhelmingly violent twentieth-century history that Mohr summarises. Not unlike some of the aphasics who intrigue neuroscience—ones for whom damaged left cerebral hemispheres have disturbed almost all speech *except* oaths—generations since the Great War may have been shocked by their historical experience into increasing reliance on the residual, "rock-bottom" potentials of obscenity. Only the addition of more primal, compensating, re-equilibrating speech-forms—full of rage and vehemence; employing fully the linguistic resources of *both* cerebral hemispheres—might avoid Ford's fear that in the face of some experiences "the mind stops dead and something in the brain stops and shuts down".

All of which might lead only to the melancholy conclusion that Great War literature comprehensively omits exactly those words it most needed to employ and extol. Two or three other conclusions—more

affirmative ones!—may nevertheless be available. One of these follows from extending into later literary history the reconfigured understanding of 'bad' language outlined above—acknowledging that official discourse during the Great War was on the whole more damaging and culpable than anything soldiers said. Paul Fussell talks of a long-enduring "devaluation (…) even of language itself" (316) following from the mendacities practised by this official discourse and by contemporary Press and propaganda generally. Scepticism of "language itself" was certainly evident in the modernist literature developing alongside war writing during the 1920s—written by a younger generation of authors often hostile to literary figures, such as Arnold Bennett, who had flocked to that 1914 meeting in Wellington House. "All the great words (…) were cancelled for her generation (…) great, dynamic words were half dead now" (64), D.H. Lawrence's heroine concludes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). "I fear those big words (…) which make us so unhappy", Stephen Dedalus remarks in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), taking "glorious", like Hemingway, as one of his examples (38). "Little words (…) fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low", Lily Briscoe reflects in *To the Lighthouse*: "no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody" (202).

Words—whether big or little—and the conventions of "propositional speech" no longer seemed wholly reliable to these authors. Nor, of course, did swearing offer them much alternative, though Joyce does represent more accurately than any other novelist in the 1920s what soldiers said when one of them, in the "Nighttown" chapter of *Ulysses*, offers to "wring the neck of any fucking bastard says a word against my bleeding fucking king" (694). Each author nevertheless did attempt to represent deeper, more extra-rational or unconscious areas of their characters' minds—culminating in the dream-language of that "Nighttown" chapter, and in the subsequent "Work in Progress" Joyce eventually published as *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Origins of this key development in modernist writing might be attributed rather more to the disillusioning, linguistically-challenging experience of the Great War than critics have usually allowed.

Another potentially affirmative conclusion relies simply on the freedoms of readers and their perennial powers of imagination. Words omitted from Great War literature can still be putatively reinserted into its pages, or into imaginative reconstruction of the experiences they describe

—following the example of those deaf and dumb children, recovering the true language of soldiers when watching *The Battle of the Somme*. A century after the Great War, the dignity, poetry, or just "straight courage" of soldierly voices can still be partially recovered in this way, along with better understanding of the "terrible assaults of reality" that made hoarse oaths essential to endurance of the daily ordeals of the Front. Recalling soldiers' most profane and impious words brings readers closer to the "bottom line" on which their war was fought—to an obscene viciousness, perversity and destruction demanding responses in the most obscene language available. It also brings readers closer to the vitality and resilience of soldiers themselves—to their vehement, full-throated response to the military hierarchy, officialdom, and ultimately the whole unutterable experience of the Great War itself. A distant, imagined uproar of swearing offers in these ways an essential addition to what can still be heard of the Great War, confirming that its enormities did not altogether overwhelm or "stifle words", and that some inherently restorative neurobiological power could be found within "bad" language. Recollection of hoarse oaths offers twenty-first century readers a key addition even to the best of written history and literature in which the Great War is preserved. It encourages them to move beyond the "dead words there on the paper" Frederic Manning described, allowing the imagination still to "kindle with the movement and persuasion of (…) living voice".

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Abstract

The Great War's influences on language and representation are well documented. The effects of censorship and propaganda have been widely discussed; likewise, the inventiveness and vitality of soldiers' own discourses in forms of slang and the vernacular. Understandably, less attention has been paid to the role in this discourse of obscenity and blasphemy—of swearing, generally. Poets and commentators do mention its use, and importance, but swear-words themselves have vanished fairly comprehensively—or been excised—from published texts. This essay uses some of Robert Graves's reflections in the 1920s to discuss this excision, along with its implications for language, silence and authenticity in Great War writing—and in later literature, modernism included.

Keywords

Language; representation; swearing; censorship; silence

Resumo

Estão bem documentadas as influências da Grande Guerra na linguagem e na representação. Amplamente têm sido discutidos os efeitos da censura e da propaganda; a capacidade inventiva e a vitalidade dos registos discursivos próprios dos soldados através do calão e de linguagem vernácula. Comprende-se que, no interior destes registos, muito menor atenção tenha sido dedicada ao papel das obscenidades e da blasfémia—dos palavrões, em geral. Nem poetas nem comentadores referem o seu uso, e a sua importância, mas os palavrões em si mesmo desapareceram quase totalmente—ou foram erradicados—de textos publicados. Este texto utiliza algumas das reflexões de Robert Graves, durante a década de 20 do século XX, para discutir tal erradicação, ponderando as implicações que esta realidade terá tido sobre a linguagem, o silêncio e a autenticidade na escrita da Grande Guerra—bem como em literatura posterior, incluindo a literatura modernista.

Palavras-Chave
Linguagem; representação; palavrões; censura; silêncio

Bliss and Britten: Building up Wilfred Owen as Myth

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Bliss and Britten: Building up Wilfred Owen as Myth

On November 11 1985, Ted Hughes, UK's Poet Laureate, unveiled a tombstone in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner dedicated to the country's sixteen "War Poets", next to T. S. Eliot's. Among them, Wilfred Owen features prominently as the red garland that encloses their names quotes the most famous line of the Preface he drafted for the publication of his *Disabled and Other Poems,* "My subject is War and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity". Since his obscure death in 1918, Owen has become one of the Great War myths—that of the young promising poet killed in heroic action, as he died on November 4 1918, a week before the Armistice was signed. As early as February 1921, after Edith Sitwell and Siegfried Sassoon had brought out Owen's war poems, critic John Middleton Murry bestowed on Owen the title "The Poet of the War" in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, as if he alone embodied all the poets of that generation. Today Owen comes second only to Shakespeare among the poets studied in British schools, making him a household name. Visitors flock to the Forester's House in Ors, France, opened to the public in 2011, where Owen spent his last moments. Monuments have been dedicated to his memory in the three British cities where he lived. Owen appears in *Regeneration*, the first volume of Pat Barker's Great War trilogy, published in 1991 and made into a film in 1997. Owen has inspired two plays, Stephen MacDonald's 1982 *Not about Heroes*, which stages Owen meeting Siegfried Sassoon at Craiglockhart, and Xavier Hanotte's 2012 *La Nuit d'Ors, a Dramatic Fantasy in Three Scenes,* which imagines Owen's last night on the front, while the poet appears in three of Hanotte's novels and a collection of short stories. Three major biographies have attempted to explain Owen. The latest, Guy Cuthberston's *Wilfred Owen,* as well as Jane Potter's *Wilfred Owen*, *An Illustrated Life*, both published in 2014, appeared in time for the ceremonies in remembrance of the Great War.

If literature and film have contributed to making Owen a Great War icon, two contrasting musical works, Arthur Bliss's 1930 *Morning Heroes* and Britten's 1962 *War Requiem* especially, have been crucial in creating the Owen myth. If Bliss was the first composer ever to set Owen to music when he was only known to a limited circle of poets and critics, the worldwide success of Britten's *War Requiem* has given Owen unexpected prominence among the War poets of all times. Both works rely on the European cultural heritage, as Bliss recycles Homer's *Iliad* along with Walt Whitman's war poems and Britten sets to music some of Owen's Bible-inspired poems. Yet, their use of Owen serves different purposes. While Bliss's symphony memorialises his dead brother and comrades and celebrates the heroism of the fallen and the unfallen, Britten's work is the indictment of War by a fighting pacifist and "conchie" who will not let the dead bury the dead. This essay will first consider the circumstances and motivations that led to the compositions of the two works, then their ambition to evoke War for their audiences, and finally their call on intertextuality as they try to link time past and time present in their commemoration of the Great War in accordance with T. S. Eliot's "mythic method".

Contrasting inspirations

Bliss and Britten were contemporaries and very much aware of each other. Bliss (1891-1975) died one year before Britten (1913-1976), and their careers interconnected. Bliss's oratorio *The Beatitudes* was commissioned and first performed in Coventry in 1962 for the same occasion as Britten's *War Requiem*, who acknowledged his debts to Bliss on his seventy-fifth birthday (Reed and Cooke 52). Yet, their agendas were miles apart. Bliss's *Morning Heroes*, a symphony for orator, chorus and orchestra, was commissioned by and first performed at the 1930 Norwich Festival in the wake of the first commemorations of the Great War in Britain. As Bliss's autobiography indicates (96-97), he wrote his piece in memory of his comrade soldiers and especially his much-admired brother Kennard, who died in the Somme offensive in 1916 at age 24, while Bliss himself was home after having been wounded in the same battle. In the late 1920s, Bliss, who had served with gallantry, was still troubled by nightmares after

having been gassed at Cambrai in 1918 and plagued by survivor's guilt, which he had tried to assuage by converting to Catholicism, as it includes confession among its sacraments, before going back to France in June 1918. Bliss had attempted to memorialise his brother in a piece called *Battle Variations*, which he eventually abandoned before dedicating to him the slow movement of his 1925 *Suite for piano* (Kennedy 217). The symphony functioned as a therapy as his nightmares disappeared afterwards, recalling the advice Owen and his poet friend Siegfried Sassoon received at Craiglockhart Hospital in 1917: to write about their war experiences.

Britten's work was written for the Coventry Arts Festival Committee to celebrate the spirit of reconciliation and unity associated with the consecration of the new cathedral, completed in the 1960s, since the Blitz had destroyed the old one in November 1940. The event was of national importance as it involved major British architects and artists and was seen as the last stage in the country's cultural renaissance initiated with the 1951 Festival of Britain (Hillier 10). As a lifelong pacifist, Britten could only approve of the consecration's agenda. The three soloists he chose for the first performance, all friends of his, represented the nations engaged in World War II. His life-long companion, the tenor Peter Pears, a pacifist, stood for Britain, baritone Dietrich Fisher-Dieskau for Hitler's Germany and soprano Galina Vischnesvkaia for Stalin's USSR.[1] Born in 1913 in Lowestoft, Britten was a "war baby" as the town was bombarded by German warships in April 1916. What he heard or remembered about the war as a child was reactivated by reading the names of the alumni who had died during the Great War in the chapel memorial of Gresham, where he was educated. As of 1927 he took private music lessons with composer Frank Bridge (1879-1941) who had lost many pupils during the war, especially young composer Ernest Bristow Farrar, to whom he dedicated his 1924 *Piano Sonata*. Bridge pressed his utter horror and revulsion on Britten, who often argued his own pacifist case with his master (Carpenter 41). As a registered "conchie", Britten had no direct experience of war. Yet, he saw

[1] Soviet authorities found the proximity of former foes so revolting that they barred her from singing in the first performance, even though she did record Britten's piece in 1963 for the Decca recording that sold millions of copies (Carpenter 409).

the destructions inflicted by the Blitz in England on his return from the USA in 1942, which he evokes directly in his *Canticle III*, *Still Falls the Rain*, op. 55 of 1954, and the late war's "doodlebugs". In 1946, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings spurred him on to compose a full-scale oratorio for soloist, chorus and orchestra "almost like the *Messe des Morts*" whose telling title was to be *Mea Culpa* (Carpenter 405). Later, the shock of Gandhi's death prompted him to compose in his memory, but both attempts remained fruitless. The Coventry commission was a welcome opportunity for Britten to take up the pacifism of his pre-war years.

First conceived as a traditional requiem mass, his opus soon evolved into a work where the Latin text would alternate with poems by Wilfred Owen, whom he had long admired. Their prominence resulted in Britten's calling the piece his "Owen Mass", before choosing the final title late in 1961 (Cooke 24). His *War Requiem* looks back on both World Wars, as it is dedicated to four friends of his who died in or after World War II, but it also feeds on current events like the Cold War and the threat of nuclear warfare. Yet, its main protagonists are two Great War soldiers, the personas of Wilfred Owen, which links Britten's *Requiem* and Bliss's *Morning Heroes*, as the latter's final movement incorporates the recitation of Owen's "Spring Offensive" by the Orator, the first known setting of Owen's poetry to music.[2]

Representing war through drama

The two works aim at a representation of what war means to both soldiers and civilians through drama. *Morning Heroes* unfolds like Berlioz's five-movement *Symphonie Fantastique*, a work charged with autobiographical significance. It opens with the Orator's recitation of "Hector's Farewell to Andromache" from Book VI of the *Iliad*, while the second movement sets "First O, Songs for a Prelude", the opening poem from Whitman's *Drum Taps* collection of poems, which Bliss calls "The City Arming", as the

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[2] Britten knew Bliss's work, which he heard in 1931 and 1933, about which he had a poor opinion, though he may have had it in mind when composing his own. "Fine bits in the 2nd movement & some terribly ordinary bits"; "Truly dated, massacre of fine words" (Evans 68, 153).

chorus calls up the enthusiasm of those who enlisted in 1914. The third movement combines "Vigil", a translation of the Chinese poet Li-Tai-Po that evokes the suffering of the women at home,[3] and "The Bivouac's Flame", another *Drum Taps* setting of "By the bivouac's fitful flame", depicting the longing of the soldiers for those they left behind. The scherzo for the chorus sets "Achilles Goes Forth to Battle" from the *Iliad*'s Book XIX, translated by Chapman, followed by "The Heroes", a roll call of the warriors involved in the Trojan Wars, as its coda. The final movement is also in two parts. The Orator first recites Owen's "Spring Offensive" over timpani cords and the final chorus is a setting of "Dawn on the Somme", a poem written in the summer of 1918 by Bliss's friend, fellow-poet and soldier, Robert Nichols (1893-1944), who served in the Royal Artillery from 1914 to 1916 when he was invalided out.[4]

Bliss's symphony clearly hints at the theatre. Since Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and its final chorus or Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette*, "a dramatic symphony for chorus, soli and a choral recitative as prologue" (Honegger 976-77) the symphony has been invested with dramatic functions akin to those of the cantata or the oratorio. As he recounts in his autobiography, Bliss always found it easier to write "dramatic" music than "pure" music: "I like the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, a colourful occasion or the collaboration of a great player" (Bliss 71). His orchestra plays a dynamic role in the drama with the extended preludes for the first, third and fifth movement. The Orator's interventions for two very dramatic incidents, "the Homeric scene" (Bliss 97) of Hector's Farewell and the Great War scene of Owen's "Spring Offensive", in the two extreme movements, create the symmetry of a palindrome, accentuated by the roll call of the Heroes, which includes Hector. They provide the symphony with a dramatic frame, while the heroic theme, indicated by the title, acts like Berlioz's *idée fixe* in his *Symphonie Fantastique* and unites all five movements.

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[3] Li Bai or Li Po (701-762) is mostly known by Hans Bethge's translations in his anthology, *The Chinese Flute*, which inspired Mahler for his *Das Lied von der Erde*.

[4] He had published two volumes of poetry, *Invocation* (1915) and *Ardours and Endurances (*1917) and Bliss extracted his "Dawn on the Somme" from *Aurelia and Other Poems* of 1920.

The use of the Orator and chorus combination derives from Greek tragedy, which stages the myths borrowed from tradition. Bliss, literally raised on the Classics by his father, adapts it here for his own use. The part of the Speaker in *Oedipus Rex*, Stravinsky's opera-oratorio of 1927, a composer he greatly admired, may have been an example. The melodrama technique, which musicalises the text thanks to orchestral textures without resorting to song, was adopted as an alternative to an operatic duet which would have softened the impact of the farewell: "I am always aware that in those two movements, where narration joins with music, the emotional temperature in the audience rises" (Bliss 97). The Homeric scene is introduced by an elegiac orchestra prelude in compound time, where the cor anglais, the oboe and the clarinet and strings feature prominently in a short four-bar arching phrase that expresses the waste and sorrow of war (Bliss "Part I"). It then underpins the Orator's recitation, to which the orchestra provides a varied, attentive commentary. The Owen poem, coming after the violent choral Achilles scherzo, whose words are usually difficult to understand, is recited over F minor timpani chords, providing stark dramatic contrast and painting an aural image of the mystery and solemnity of dawn as well as of the fury of the sudden attack, in tune with Owen's poem (Bliss "Part V"). Bliss was a friend of Darius Milhaud's and very much aware of the music of the French *Groupe des Six*, which included Honegger (Bliss 56, 89). The melodrama technique recalls Honegger's experiments in his 1921 *Roi David*, described as "a dramatic psalm for soli, chorus and orchestra" (subtitle), rather than Edith Sitwell and William Walton's 1923-1926 *Façade*, another experiment with narration combined to music. But Bliss here foregoes the *Six*-inspired audacities of his previous production and his elegiac, pastoral mood is clearly indebted to the composers of the English musical renaissance of the 1900s.

As an oratorio, Britten's *War Requiem* also belongs to the stage. It echoes Berlioz's and Verdi's *Requiem*, two very theatrical pieces as regards the expression of terror and grief, whose dramatic purpose is more obvious as the Liturgy of the Dead recalls Tragedy. The *Dies Irae* and *Libera Me* introduce the essentials of Aristotelian tragedy, catharsis, terror and pity. The Sybil provides the dramatic spring of prophecy in the *Dies Irae*, while the *Inter Oves* introduces the scapegoats whose fault is the root of all tragic action: "*Et ab haedis me sequestra.*" Two of Owen's poems, strategically

placed at significant moments of the Requiem Mass, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" in the *Offertorium* and "At a Calvary near the Ancre" for the *Agnus Dei* clearly identify satanic Pride both as *hamartia* and Original Sin, the primary cause of the evils of war, musically characterised by a tritone, the musical interval called *diabolus in musica* and forbidden as such by the early Church. Britten took the implicit drama of the Requiem Mass one step further. He opposes three separate musical groups and the composer was very explicit about the staging of his work (Cooke 24). The organ and the boys' choir in the organ loft evoke a world removed from human contingencies. The two soldiers and the chamber orchestra take us to the battlefield and voice their private grief while the soprano, chorus and orchestra provide an image of the Home Front and convey the conventional pieties of public grief, affected by the echoes of Verdi's music. The laying out in space of the different groups dramatises the basic bipolarity of World War I between the front and home underlined by Paul Fussell, borne out by the titles of World War I poems, like Robert Nichols's *Ardours and Endurances*, Robert Graves's *Fairies and Fusiliers* or Ivor Gurney's *Severn and Somme* (Fussell 79-82). It also dramatises Britten's major theme in his operas, the opposition between the individual and the crowd and the tragic trope of public drama and private predicament. All are encapsulated in the title's oxymoron—as War and Eternal Rest make strange bedfellows—realised musically with the recurrent use of the disquieting tritone. The whole set-up provided such effective staginess that Vischnesvkaia literally had a fit during the first recording session as she could not understand why she was separated from the other soloists.

"The mythic method"

Very little action can actually be shown in a symphony, but enough is suggested to create a plot. Bliss's and Britten's work resort to dramatic monologues, or derived forms, and the use of "I" and "We" creates the illusion of protagonists acting out their parts: the fact that both composers wrote operas is no coincidence. *Morning Heroes* provides a number of scenes that indicate a dramatic progression. They oppose Hector and Achilles, while Li-Tai-Po's warrior's wife in "Vigil" stands for Andromache and all grieving women, thus reworking Homer's epic. Those scenes are

linked together by dramatic, musical and textual cross-references, while the Orator-chorus interaction provides movement. The historical and geographical references they convey, from the far-away past of Homer's Greece and Li-Tai-Po's China to the American Civil War, and from Whitman's time to Bliss's own war, propel the symphony forward in one single movement, space and time being made one, moving from enlistment to the theatre of war, and from there to Olympus. Homer's epic provides a narrative link and recalls Joyce's use of Homer in *Ulysses*, which Eliot analysed as the "mythic method", used in *The Waste Land*, his own epic poem which durably impressed Bliss.

> In manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. (…) It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. (…) Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythic method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art. (Eliot, "Ulysses" 483)

Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the acme of intertextuality with its "heap of broken images" and "fragments shored against (…) ruin" (*Collected* 63, 79) truly seems to have inspired the composer as the symphony mingles and recycles fragments of history as well as personal recollections.[5] Over the implicit narrative of the Trojan wars, which his father was fond of retelling his sons and illustrating with ink sketches (Bliss 17), Bliss imposes the bloodiest episode of America's history, the country where his father was born and to which Bliss felt a strong allegiance, seen through the eyes of Whitman, as well as that of the recent history of England and Bliss's own

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[5] The inclusion of the Li-Tai-Po poem may also derive from family connections as Bliss's Uncle Kennard had lived and worked in China for many years and was reputed to have been given the title of Mandarin (Bliss 16).

early enlistment. Moreover, Chapman's translation of Homer provides the link between Keats and Owen, the former being the latter's favourite poet (Cuthbertson 31), through Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". By borrowing Whitman's Civil War poetry to comment on the Great War, Bliss deliberately turned to the pre-World War I generation of British composers of the great English choral tradition, Charles Villiers Stanford, Charles Wood, Frederick Delius, Gustav Holst and Vaughan Williams. They had fervently read William Michael Rossetti's 1868 expurgated edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Kramer 26), set Whitman to music and may have provided a model for Bliss's own anthological libretto. The American poet, free from religious or political dogma, provided enough democratic idealism, symbolism and mysticism. With his belief in the soul's ability to transcend time and death, he presented a valid alternative to biblical texts and Christian faith and offered the prospect of a numinous future. Present in Parts I and II, the Good Grey poet, who claims Homer and Virgil's *Aeneid* as his lineage with "First O Songs for a Prelude", is also present in Part V. It opens with an epigraph "Now, Trumpeter for thy close", from the concluding section of Whitman's "Mystic Trumpeter", section 8, which clearly rings a new tone for the final apotheosis:

> Now trumpeter for thy close,
> Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,
> Sing to my soul—renew its languishing faith and hope;
> Rouse up my slow belief —give me some vision of the future,
> Give me for once its prophecy and joy. (Whitman 482)[6]

This suggests strong associations with the many Trumpeters, nine in total, that appear at different times in *Revelations* and contribute to its narration. This is Bliss's own *Dies Irae*, *Tuba Mirum* and Second Coming rolled into one. This part moves from the general to the personal as it is explicitly devoted to the dedicatees of the symphony, Bliss's brother and comrades, and the only time when the war front is directly evoked, more by words

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[6] The poem was set to music by Gustav Holst, among others, also involved in the war as a non-combatant. His *Mystic Trumpeter*, for soprano and orchestra, op. 18, was first performed in 1905. Bliss knew Holst and took his music to Holst, but Bliss does not mention the work in his autobiography.

than by music, contrary to the shrill-demented Achilles scherzo. Owen's poem, revised in September 1918 while Owen and Bliss himself were back on the front, takes us to the battlefield, with a group of soldiers bracing themselves before going over and into the No Man's Land to meet their fate, and records Owen's own experience at Squash Valley and Fig Wood near St Quentin in April 1917 (Hibberd 426). Its Keatsian vision of summer, sun, buttercups and midges and its wealth in nature imagery recalls what Bliss described as the acute awareness of natural beauties soldiers developed with the proximity with war and death (Burn 667). The poem then describes the blast and fury of battle, the dead whom "God caught (…) even before they fell" and the amazed survivors unable to speak of their comrades. Woodwind music from the first movement underlines the poem's final question "Why speak not they of comrades that went under?" and leads to the choral "Dawn on the Somme", which concludes the symphony in an apotheosis (Bliss "Part V"). Owen's friendly sun, now personified as Apollo,[7] draws to Olympus the dead soldiers as so many companies of "morning heroes". A brief coda which associates the symphony's essential themes provides a subdued conclusion to this final part, which ends, like Eliot's "Hollow Men", in a whimper: "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper" (*Collected* 92).

Britten shaped his *War Requiem* text like an opera libretto with a complex and meaningful architecture. The Requiem Mass mingles two narratives, first Christ's Second Coming depicted in the *Dies Irae* sequence and recalled in the final *Libera Me,* and Christ's Sacrifice and Passion, as recalled in the *Offertorium* and *Agnus Dei*. The six parts of the liturgy provide a general framework of six scenes, in which Britten inserts the Owen poems to which they are linked by ironical cross-references and foreshadowing, so that the impression is that of a succession of scenes leading to a climax in a way that also recalls Eliot's mythic method.[8]

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[7] Bliss's own "Hymn to Apollo", invoking Apollo as the god of healing, *Apollo latromantis*, physician, seer, but also Sun God, dates from 1926.

[8] Britten had known Eliot personally in the late 1940s and they attempted to work together in 1948, but Britten waited for the end of his life to set two early Eliot poems, one of which Eliot incorporated in *The Waste Land*.

The opening *Introit & Kyrie* sequence takes the mourners inside a procession with a faltering funeral march. It is followed by the four sequences of the *Dies Irae, Offertorium*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*, which lead to the Eucharist. The *Libera Me* implies a recessional, indicated by another march, followed by the burial of the dead and their final transition to everlasting peace with "In Paradisum". On this pattern Britten superimposes, through some of Owen's most controversial and blasphemous poems, the narrative of two soldiers on the front, gradually driven to despair before their own death, burial and reconciliation with "Strange Meeting". Seven of the poems show scenes from the war front, while in "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" for the *Offertorium* and in "The End" after the *Sanctus* Owen gives the Scriptures a bitter twist.

In his parody of the *Offertorium*'s liturgy of sacrifice, Britten displays savage irony to match Owen's. Britten's "Canticle II, Abram and Isaac" of 1952, a cantata for three voices based on the Chester miracle play, shows the patriarch about to sacrifice his son in allegiance to the God of Israel, only to be stopped by God's Angel, who promises him a long line of descent. He then sacrifices a ram, thus indicating the end of human sacrifice and the basis for a new covenant ("Canticle II"). Owen's "The Parable" parodies the Scripture in a mock-archaic style in the context of the trenches. Reverting to his original Chaldean name predating his alliance with Jehovah, Abram sacrifices his son instead of the Ram of Pride, heedless of the Angel's message. Britten inserts Owen's parody right in the middle of the *Offertorium*. The boys' melody for the "Domine Jesu Christe", which leads to "The Parable" directly derives from "Canticle II". "The Parable" is narrated by the baritone as Abram and the Tenor as Isaac, who unite their voices for the part of the Angel, like in "Canticle II". This pure C major passage is soon polluted by the tritone as Abram kills his son. The transgression of the divine order "And half the seed of Europe one by one" interrupts the boys' "Hostias et Preces", whose melody is now disrupted by the organ's dissonances, as if tainted by sin (Britten "III.")

Britten proceeds likewise with *Sanctus*, in which he inserts Owen's "The End", the poet's parody of the Second Coming. It opens with the jubilation of the Soprano and her praise of the Lord of Hosts to the sounds of a stylised oriental gamelan, which also illustrates the baritone's "After the blast of lighting from the East" in "The End". The tritone and timpani

accompany the Baritone's questioning of Resurrection "Shall life renew these bodies?". The answer is provided by two Titanic deities, Age and Earth, who turn the Christian Doomsday into some geological accident akin to the death of a star, while the orchestral postlude suggests the end of the world with an Eliotesque whimper (Britten "IV. Sanctus.") The Baritone's questioning recalls the Tenor's "Futility" poem, which interrupts the Soprano's effusive "Lacrymosa" in the *Dies Irae* sequence. The soldier's initial tenderness for a dead comrade turns to blasphemy as he questions Genesis and Creation: "Was it for this the clay grew tall?" His repeated question also denies Resurrection and Eternal Life posited with the chorus "*qua resurget in favilla*".

For the number before the Eucharist, imposing for once his voice and choice on the chorus, the Tenor initiates the *Agnus Dei* section, with Owen's "At a Calvary near the Ancre". The poem, dated late 1917 or early 1918, expands a letter of Owen to his mother, dated mid-May 1917, where he articulates newly found beliefs: "One of Christ's essential commands: Passivity at any price! Suffer dishonour and disgrace; but never resort to arms. Be bullied, be outraged, be killed but never kill!". He then calls himself "a conscientious objector with a very seared conscience", a description that also fits Britten (Hibberd 310-11). Further on he writes, "Christ is literally in no man's land. There men often hear His voice. Greater love hath no man than this that a man may lay down his life —for a friend", deliberately misquoting John's Gospel's 15: 13 "for his friends" used by propagandists to say that any soldier who died in battle was a modern saviour. Recalling Christ's sacrifice in a Calvary scene, the poem shows the scribes and priests, here the war-mongering politicians and clergy who encouraged hate of the Germans, like the Bishop of London claiming that God was on the British side. All bear the mark of Evil and attend the Crucifixion while Christ's disciples hide in fear, thus reminding scribes and priests of their direct responsibility for his death as well as for the soldiers'. Owen's gospel of love, "But they who love the greater love/ Lay down their life. They do not hate", is isolated for full emphasis, and the Tenor's final "*Dona nobis pacem*", instead of the regular liturgical "*Dona eis requiem sempiternam*", defiantly claims peace for the soldiers only (Britten "V.").

Making Wilfred Owen a Great War myth

The visions of the war and of Wilfred Owen the two works choose to show differ greatly. Bliss's synopsis of his symphony explains his choice of texts and leaves no doubt that, as a soldier who enlisted, was wounded and fought throughout the war, his aim was to vindicate his comrades and their sacrifice, his "morning heroes" worthy of Homeric fame and universal homage (Bliss 256-57). In this way he obeys the brief of Nichols, Owen and Sassoon, i.e. to make the ones at home understand and remember what their lives was like on the Front. Yet choosing Nichols's "Dawn on the Somme" at the close of his symphony for the final apotheosis, with Apollo raising the dead to Olympus, shows how Bliss differs from Owen and Sassoon. Nichols paid Owen's poems a generous tribute in his *Anthology of War Poetry 1914-1918* of 1943. Its Preface explains that, even if his initial ardour and the will to fight had gradually given way to grief for the dead and compassion for those who endured, he "ended the war only confirmed in the faith that was [his] in the beginning" (Charlton 54-55). Bliss, like Whitman's "Mystic Trumpeter", viewed the war as immensely sad but heroic, a vision which he apparently maintained to the end of his life. His wife recalls that when advice was sought as to the sleeve for the record of *Morning Heroes* made by EMI in 1974, he selected a great Fifth Century Greek vase showing Hector and Achilles fighting (Bliss 287). For Bliss the Classic scholar, the model of his funeral ode is undoubtedly Pericles's Funeral Oration extracted from Thucidydes's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which American Civil War scholars have suggested as a potential model for Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, all part of Bliss's American heritage.

As *The Musical Times* indicated in 1930 (H.G. 886), Bliss's position certainly sounded crude, offensive and dangerously close to a glorification of war to those who had read Sassoon, Graves and Blunden, R. C. Sheriff, Richard Aldington, Remarque or Barbusse, whom Bliss must have known. Like his brother, he shared the bitter disillusion of a Sassoon, as their letters from the front indicate, but he was impelled to go back and fight and put on a brave face, like Sassoon and Owen, whose "Spring Offensive" is one of his most consensual poems. Bliss clearly identified the latter with his brother, "poet, painter and musician", as a symbol of all the young talents

killed in or by the war, like composer George Butterworth killed on the Somme, or Ivor Gurney, his former fellow-student at the Royal College of Music, who survived the war in dire mental conditions. *Morning Heroes* was a way for him to come to terms with the trauma of his brother's death and of his own survival in a world that had become alien to him, as can be inferred from the very personal reasons in the choice of his poems, akin to Eliot's "broken images" in Eliot's own war poem, which Bliss could still quote from in 1969 (Bliss 276).

In 1930, his choice of Owen was courageous as the poet was practically unknown to the general public or, like Sassoon, denounced by critics as unpatriotic, as he showed a nation divided between the soldiers on the battlefield and the Home Front. Both were excluded from W. B. Yeats's anthology *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935* of 1936 for aesthetic reasons, as Yeats thought that passive suffering was not an appropriate theme for poetry. The publication of Edmund Blunden's autobiography, *Undertones of War*, in 1928, and his augmented edition of Owen's poems in 1931 initiated a slow reappraisal of Owen's poetry. As "The Poet of the War", he was celebrated during World War II and Blunden's edition of his poems was republished in 1955. Dennis Welland's 1960 *Wilfred Owen, A Critical Study*, the first work of major scope devoted to the poet, coincided with a change of mind in British public opinion as Owen was becoming part of the literary canon and of the country's A-level exams. With the Sixties and "Flower Power", there came a reassessment of the poetry of 1914-1918, as indicated by Cecil Day Lewis's edition of Owen's poems in 1963, and Wilfred Owen's biography, *Journey from Obscurity*, written by his younger brother Harold and published in three volumes between 1963 and 1965.

Britten's *Requiem* eerily tapped or foreshadowed that vein but his vision is much darker and his tone more bitter. It is that of a pacifist and a "conchie", compounded with his experience of the World War II destructions at home, the horrors of the Shoah seen in Bergen-Belsen in July 1945, the shadows of the Cold War and totalitarianism, the fear of the bomb and his left-wing mistrust of an Establishment that had sought a compromise with Hitler. Britten had read Sassoon, Graves and Blunden. His were the times of Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1938) and Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) which showed the absurdity of the war, the futility

of the sacrifice of human lives and the cruelty of senior officers. To people of Britten's generation, like his mentor, the poet W. H. Auden, or his friend, the novelist Christopher Isherwood (Parker 93, 350-82), Wilfred Owen was a hero and embodied the generation either willingly sacrificed or driven to despair and blasphemy by its elders. Britten literally became besotted with Owen during the *Requiem* composition and probably transferred his feelings for young Wulff Scherchen in the late 1930s to Owen, especially after Isherwood provided him with a picture of Owen in uniform in 1961 (Carpenter 119). Britten owned the 1955 edition of Owen's poetry edited by Blunden in 1931 as well as Sassoon's 1920 edition. In 1958, during a BBC programme in his honour, Britten asked for Owen's "Strange Meeting" and "Kind Ghosts" to be read. The same year, he set the latter in his *Nocturne*,[9] whose imagery and music prefigures the *Requiem*'s "Strange Meeting". That long piece echoes Owen's Preface to his collection of poems and articulates Owen's *ars poetica*, with which Britten so completely identified that he placed it on the first page of his score. Owen's words echoed the concept of "parable art" Britten had learnt from Auden and made his throughout his work (Mitchell 17). With his *War Requiem*, Britten assumed the mantle of combating poet which had fallen from Owen's shoulders and turned him into a mythical figure for the late twentieth century. For all the blasphemy and the bitter denunciation, for all the cataclysms of brass and drums, what is remembered from the *Requiem* is its sympathy with suffering, the voice of the soprano keening in the "Lacrymosa" and the next-to final duet of the soldiers "Let us sleep", a lullaby whose music echoes the ethos of Bliss's setting of Nichols. Britten's music, like Bliss's, ends in a whimper and in silence, perhaps that of Armistice, as suggested by Kate Kennedy in *Silent Morning*, or that which leads to private recollection and meditation. The Great War commemorations of the past years have brought out new recordings of Bliss's symphony while Britten's *Requiem* has never disappeared from the concert hall. The Owen myth to which both contributed lives on.

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[9] The sixth piece in the *Nocturne for tenor, 7 obbligato instruments and strings* op. 60, with the cor anglais as the solo instrument.

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Abstract

On November 11 1985, Ted Hughes, UK's Poet Laureate, unveiled a tombstone in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner dedicated to the country's War Poets, which prominently featured Wilfred Owen as it quoted his Preface's most famous line: "My subject is War and the pity of War". Since his obscure death in 1918, Owen has become part of the Great War myths, that of the young promising poet killed in heroic action. This paper's objective is to examine how that myth was gradually born in the arts, first with Arthur Bliss's 1930 choral symphony *Morning Heroes*, which recycles Homer's *Iliad*, along with Walt Whitman's war poems, and with Benjamin Britten's 1962 *War Requiem*, which definitely made Owen's a household name and the most popular poet in the UK after Shakespeare, the hero of several biographies and plays, which combines in an ironic counterpoint the Mass for the Dead and Owen's own Bible-inspired poems.

Keywords

Owen; myth; Bliss; *Morning Heroes*; Britten; *War Requiem*

Resumo

A 11 de novembro de 1985, Ted Hughes, o poeta laureado do Reino Unido, desvelou no Canto dos Poetas da Abadia de Westminster uma pedra tumular dedicada aos poetas da Guerra que destacava Wilfred Owen ao citar o excerto mais famoso do seu Prefácio: "A Guerra é o meu tema e a compaixão da Guerra." Desde a sua morte obscura em 1918, Owen tornou-se parte dos mitos da Grande Guerra, no caso, o mito do jovem poeta promissor morto em acção heroíca. É objectivo do presente trabalho examinar como tal mito foi gradualmente nascendo nas artes: em 1930, através de *Morning Heroes*, a Sinfonia Coral de Arthur Bliss, que recicla a *Ilíada* de Homero e os poemas de guerra de Walt Whitman, em 1962 através do *War Requiem* de Benjamin Britten. Britten indubitavelmente tornou Owen um nome familiar, o poeta mais popular do Reino Unido a seguir

a Shakespeare, o herói de várias biografias e peças teatrais. Em contraponto irónico, *War Requiem* combina a Missa dos Mortos e os poemas de Owen inspirados na Bíblia.

Palavras-Chave

Mito de Owen; Bliss; *Morning Heroes*; Britten; *War Requiem*

Challenging the Myths of the Great War: John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" Revisited

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IN FLANDERS FIELDS

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
  That mark our place; and in the sky
  The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
  Loved and were loved, and now we lie
    In Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
  The torch; be yours to hold it high.
  If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
    In Flanders fields.

John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" (1915) deserves critical attention when dealing with issues of remembrance of the Great War because of the centrality of this poem in current performances of war commemoration not only in Canada, the home country of its author, but also in the United Kingdom and in other parts of the former British Empire. Furthermore, McCrae's poem inspired the poppy emblem as a memorial symbol which was originally linked to the First World War, later extended to the Second, and at present is often used to pay homage to the victims of all wars since 1914. Remembrance poppies are common at

wreath-laying ceremonies throughout the United Kingdom and some of the Commonwealth Countries, where many people also wear them, close to their hearts, every year from the last Friday in October to the end of the day on 11 November.

Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae was a Canadian soldier, doctor and poet. Born in Guelph (Ontario) in 1872, he graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1894 and a degree in medicine in 1898. He served in the South African War leading an artillery battery for one year and resigned from the army in 1904, having experienced mixed feelings about warfare (Prescott 42; Graves 90). McCrae furthered his medical career in Montreal while teaching and doing research at McGill University for about ten years, until he volunteered for service in 1914. He was appointed Medical Officer in the First Brigade of Canadian Field Artillery, and was sent to the Belgian front. In April and May 1915 he tended hundreds of soldiers wounded during the Second Battle of Ypres, a battle in which chlorine gas was used as a weapon against the Allied troops. McCrae expressed the difficulties he experienced when he tried to describe that devastating ordeal in the journal he was keeping. In an entry dated 2 May 1915, he recorded the death of Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, who was killed by enemy artillery fire at the age of 22 (Prescott 94; Graves 228; Raby-Dunne 75). Helmer died instantly as his body was blown to pieces when a canon shell burst while he was on his way to check on a Canadian battery positioned on the bank of the Yser Canal. In the absence of a chaplain, McCrae conducted the burial service for Helmer, whose fragmented remains were interred in a makeshift cemetery located just behind the advance dressing post where the doctor was caring for the wounded at Ypres. The following day, feeling deeply affected by the loss of his close friend and former student at McGill University, McCrae wrote the fifteen lines which would become one of the most quoted war poems in the English-speaking world.

McCrae's biographers have documented several contradictory versions about the exact circumstances in which the poem was written (Prescott 95; Graves 230; Raby-Dunne 78). According to Cyril Allinson, a young soldier who witnessed the scene while he was delivering the mail, McCrae kept looking at the poppies that sprang up among the simple wooden crosses marking the graves of the nearby cemetery. Allinson would

later report what he had seen, and how he had reacted as the first reader of the poem, handed to him by McCrae as soon as it was finished.[1]

By mid-June of 1915, McCrae was ordered to leave the artillery and was transferred from the front lines to serve as Chief of Medical Services in a Canadian hospital located near Boulogne-sur-Mer. His health deteriorated in the period between 1915 and 1918. He died of pneumonia on 28 January 1918 at a hospital set up by the British Army in Wimereux. His body was buried in the military section of the Wimereux Communal Cemetery. Alexis Helmer's grave is now lost whereas McCrae's grave has become a "site of memory". Many Canadians pay their respects by decorating it with poppies, crosses and small flags. In addition to the plaque located at the Wimereux Cemetery, other plaques honoring McCrae were unveiled in 2014, when commemorating the Centennial of the First World War. In 2015 a stamp and a collection of coins were issued by Canada Post and the Royal Canadian Mint respectively to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of "In Flanders Fields". People continue to pay tribute to the poet by visiting McCrae House, his stone cottage birthplace, which was turned into a museum in 1968.

McCrae's fame today is inextricably linked to "In Flanders Fields". The poem was in circulation among the troops before it was first published anonymously in the December 8, 1915 issue of London's illustrated magazine *Punch*, tucked away in the right bottom corner of page 468. It had previously been submitted for publication to *The Spectator*, but it had been rejected by this journal. Two years later *The Spectator* would publish McCrae's last poem, "The Anxious Dead" (1917), which dealt with the same theme, but never became as famous as the earlier poem. Eventually,

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[1] "His face was very tired but calm as he wrote. He looked around from time to time, his eyes straying to Helmer's grave. The poem was an exact description of the scene in front of us both.

The word blow was not used in the first line though it was used later when the poem appeared in Punch. But it was used in the second last line. He used the word blow in that line because the poppies actually were being blown that morning by a gentle east wind.

It never occurred to me at that time that it would ever be published. It seemed to me just an exact description of the scene" (qtd. in Mathieson 264).

The Spectator did publish "In Flanders Fields" in 1919, once it had been reprinted by other journals and widely anthologized.

In addition to its popularity with the general public, the poem soon inspired a number of literary responses, some of which were published as early as 1918. Perhaps the most influential response was that of an American, Moina Michael. Two days before the Armistice was declared, she found "In Flanders Fields" reprinted in an issue of the *Ladies Home Journal*, and although she had previously read McCrae's poem many times, at that precise moment she was so impressed that she wrote a poem entitled "We Shall Keep the Faith", echoing McCrae's thirteenth line: "If ye break faith with us who die".[2] According to her autobiography, *The Miracle Flower*, a book she dedicated to the memory of John McCrae, she felt such a great emotional impact—which she described as a "full spiritual experience"—that she immediately "pledged to KEEP THE FAITH and always to wear a red poppy of Flanders Fields as a sign of remembrance and as an emblem of 'keeping the faith with all who died'" (47).[3]

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[2] Her poem would be included, together with twenty-four poems by McCrae and four other poems by four different authors, in the collection *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* edited by David Wheeler in 2012 (27). The other authors were R. W. Lillard, C. B. Galbraith, John Mitchell, and Donald Joseph Connolly.

[3] Later on the same day, she bought one large poppy for her desk and twenty-five small artificial red silk poppies. She pinned one of the small poppies on her cloak collar and distributed the others among the conference delegates, to whom she also showed McCrae's poem. This was the first step of her campaign for the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy, which earned her the title of "Poppy Lady". There was another "Poppy Lady", Madame Anna Guérin, who was present at the 29th September National American Legion convention as a representative of the French YMCA Secretariat in 1920. Upon her return to France, she founded the "American and French Children's League" through which she organized women, children and war veterans to make huge amounts of artificial poppies which were sold in America between 1920 and 1924. Madame Guérin also traveled to Canada, where she convinced the representatives of the Great War Veterans Association, which would later become the Royal Canadian Legion, to adopt the poppy as their emblem for remembrance, a decision they took in July 1921. The first lapel Poppies to be worn in Canada were made, beginning in 1922, by disabled veterans under the sponsorship of the Department of Soldiers Civil Re-establishment in order to provide them with a small source of income.

The First British Legion Poppy Day Appeal took place on 11 November 1921, with thousands of poppies selling across the United Kingdom. At present, the funds raised from the sale of the poppies and associated merchandise are used to support both former military service people in need and the families of those killed in armed conflicts. According to some reports, there is an increasing interest in these campaigns, which are enthusiastically supported by many people, but contested by others. For instance, "No poppy, thank you" is the last line of Martin Bell's aptly titled poem "Reasons for Refusal". The key issue of this bitter controversy can be formulated as a question: Is this just remembrance, or is it war propaganda? In fact, the arguments for and against the use of the poppy symbol are very similar to those heard about "In Flanders Fields". While its first two stanzas raise no objections, the third is a permanent subject of dispute. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) Paul Fussell observed that "it is an interesting poem because it manages to accumulate the maximum number of well-known motifs and images, which it gathers under the aegis of a mellow, if automatic, pastoralism" (259). However, he complained about the "recruiting-poster rhetoric" of lines 10-12 and argued about the last stanza as a whole: "We finally see—and with a shock—what the last six lines really are: they are a propaganda argument—words like *vicious* and *stupid* would not seem to go too far—against a negotiated peace" (250).

Apart from Fussell's comments, "In Flanders Fields" received little scholarly attention in the twentieth century, in spite of the fact that the period of reassessment of issues of war memory and commemoration had begun as early as 1964, when the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration of World War I coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the declaration of World War II (Tylee 1). The situation began to change in the present century as a result of the development of a new interest in "exploring the relations of power that structure the ways in which wars can be remembered" (Ashplant xi). In 2005 Nancy Holmes held up to scrutiny the artistic merits of McCrae's poem and thoroughly surveyed its reception, analyzing its complexities in the context of Canadian culture. In 2014 Neta Gordon used "In Flanders Fields" as a point of departure to examine how contemporary Canadian literary accounts of the First World War "respond to images, concepts, issues, and dilemmas introduced in McCrae's poem,

in particular the difficult question of what our debt to those war dead entails, especially as that debt inheres with the concept of collective memory" (1).

As an extremely popular war poem, "In Flanders Fields" certainly performed an important consolatory and healing function in the immediate aftermath of the First World War for those who were mourning the loss of more than 60,000 Canadian lives on the European battlefields. Furthermore, far from being forgotten as the years went by, the poem has made a lasting impression on Canada's collective memory. Celebrated and beloved by the general public, it tends to be simply perceived as "a poem that continues to inspire us and call to action" (Grandfield 30), without having a clear idea of what "inspiration" and "action" may entail. Indeed, it has become an iconic poem recited with reverence and patriotic pride at solemn commemorative ceremonies every Remembrance Day. Nevertheless, taking advantage of the fact that many Canadians grew sentimentally attached to the moving lines they learned in their childhood, "In Flanders Fields" has often been misused as a pro-war propaganda tool. Moreover, in the essay "Treason to their Memory", Mary Janigan convincingly argues that it was used to fan antagonisms between French- and English-speaking Canadians during the Conscription Crisis of 1917, which she calls "the most divisive and regrettable election campaign in Canadian history" (75).[4]

Without doubt, "In Flanders Fields" has been "exploited by the Canadian state as military propaganda" (McCutcheon 771).[5] It should be noted, however, that two of the initial sympathetic responses it inspired

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[4] Janigan contends: "'In Flanders Fields' might have reinforced the Western Front with patriots, but it also reinforced Canada's two solitudes. The sons of English Canadians enlisted, fired with the desire to take the torch from failing hands. Their fathers and mothers, their friends and relatives, subscribed to war bonds and believed Union government allegations that francophone Quebecers were traitors" (96). Janigan concludes affirming: "And 'In Flanders Fields'—with its haunting evocations of lost lives and its fierce call to arms—provided the ammunition that Canadians would deploy against their fellow Canadians" (97).

[5] See the two posters of the Victory Bond campaign which quote lines 13-14 and 12 from the last stanza of "In Flanders Fields" (Vance plates 6 and 7). Jonathan F. Vance's caption for plate 6 reads: "John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' became a powerful weapon in mobilizing support for the war" (n.p.).

—"In Flanders Now" by Edna Jaques[6] and "In Memory of Lt.-Col. John McCrae" by Stella M. Bainbridge[7]—were poems concluding with unequivocal calls for world peace. In contrast with the respectful attitude expressed in both of them and in other contemporaneous literary responses, McCrae's rondeau was later subversively transformed or parodied through innovative uses of intertextuality for various satirical purposes, including that of rejecting any glorification of war, and more specifically, the moral and political questioning of Canada's engagement in a war fought on foreign soil.

A number of Canadian writers have carefully re-worked or significantly alluded to John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" (1915) either to support or to challenge some of the myths of the First World War.[8] While many believe that the Great War gave birth to the Canadian nation, some maintain that WWI also inflicted injuries and left permanent scars on it. Sherrill Grace has examined the

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[6] First published in the *Calgary Herald* in 1918, "In Flanders Now" was soon reprinted by many newspapers and anthologized in Canada and the United States. This poem includes the hopeful proclamation that "And blood will never flow again / In Flanders' fields" (lines 14-15) and ends with the equally optimistic words: "And 'Peace on Earth' has just begun / In Flanders' now" (lines 21-22). Defining Edna Jaques as "Canada's bestselling but largely forgotten poet of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s" (90), Candida Rifkind argued: "Her war poetry—a genre she began after the First World War when she wrote an internationally popular response to John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' titled 'In Flanders Now'—captured the shift towards patriotic sentimentality but also the pacifist anti-modernism of the early 1940s" (110).

[7] "In Memory of Lt.-Col. John McCrae", an eighteen-line poem first published in Montreal by *The University Magazine* and included just below McCrae's "The Anxious Dead" in the third edition of the anthology *In the Day of the Battle: Poems of the Great War* (1918), concludes with the line "And peace enshrines our tears". Stella M. Bainbridge is the author of a poem entitled "Peace" (1919), which was also published by *The University Magazine*.

[8] Löschnigg explains: "The Great War of 1914-18 has become a Canadian foundation myth. It has been interpreted as the birth of the Canadian nation in the mud of Flanders, and in the victories of the battlefield. As Canadians fought with distinction on the side of the British, thus the national myth, the dominion's support of the mother country won it the respect that led to Canada's full sovereignty" ("Canada in Flanders" 213).

> significant shift (…) away from an earlier realism, satire, or battle action account to an art characterized by the stress laid on the *process* of remembering, on the attention to trauma aftershocks, on the need to expose a range of betrayals and lies that cost Canadian lives, on the healing power of commemoration through art (…) and on the profound impact war has had on the home front. (*On the Art* 96)

Grace underscores the importance of the "works in which the First World War refuses to stay over there or release its victims but insists on permeating home ground and haunting the future" (*On the Art* 77). One of such works is Joseph Boyden's first novel *Three Day Road* (2005) which, according to Hanna Teichler, revisits World War I as "one of the formative narratives of Canadian national self-consciousness" (240) through the perspective of Cree characters and claims recognition for the participation of indigenous people.

When modern Canadian drama has dealt with the complex issues related to the remembrance of the Great War, it has often questioned its mythology through the presentation of characters who are traumatized Canadians. For instance, the protagonist of Guy Vanderhaeghe's play *Dancock's Dance* (1996), Lieutenant John Carlyle Dancock, is a shell-shocked veteran haunted by the specter of a soldier he shot in the battlefield for refusing to obey the order to "go over the top" before an attack.[9] The play, which was first performed in 1995, is set in the Saskatchewan Hospital for the Insane during the late fall 1918 outbreak of influenza. When most of the regular staff is dead or dying, Lieutenant Dancock, who has been interned there, becomes the courageous leader of the surviving patients while he is fighting the demons of his own post-traumatic stress disorder. Within the locked doors of the asylum, the ghostly soldier makes the ultimately disenchanted Lieutenant Dancock understand that he misapplied the code of duty he had been taught. The former officer partly seeks redemption by protecting the helpless Rudy Braun, an inmate of

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[9] Having surveyed how Canadian writers and artists have mapped the Canadian cultural landscapes formed by the memories of war they inherited, Sherrill Grace concludes: "Ghosts haunt the film footage and the pages of Canadian representations of the war" (*Landscapes* 210).

German background—not a German, Dancock corrects the Superintendent, but an "immigrant of German descent" (166)—who is terrorized by the cruel orderly Kevin Kennealy. The fifth scene starts with a monologue of the orderly, who enters drunk and in a quarrelsome mood, swearing and cursing "the Hun" (87). Rather than celebrating peace, he celebrates the allied victory in belligerent terms by means of a boxing simile in which he conceptualizes himself as if he were one of the fighters who managed to "black old Kaiser Bill's eyes" (87).[10] Then, he begins to recite "In Flanders Fields", but after the first two lines, according to the stage directions, he "*can't remember the words, mumbles in cadence, recalls a few more lines*" (87). He finally remembers the last three lines of the poem and "*raises the flask in a toast*" shouting "To the glorious dead!" (87). Martin Löschnigg has rightly pointed out how "the maudlin patriotic sentiment" voiced by "the opportunist orderly" Kennealy in this scene stands in sharp contrast with Lieutenant Dancock's commitment, "sense of fairness and respect for the enemy" ("'Like dying on a stage'" 161-62). Curiously enough, one of the ten lines Kennealy fails to remember in his monologue is the controversial "Take up our quarrel with the foe", which is exactly the one we would expect to hear from such a violent man.

Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977), a fictional biography now widely acknowledged as Canada's classic war novel, has become a text as iconic and as influential as "In Flanders Fields" though for opposite reasons.[11] P. S. Sri has set these two texts in contrast, highlighting how Findley's "satirical and unsparing vision of the Great War" (27) forms the

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[10] Kennealy's boxing simile exemplifies Paul Fussell's theory about the "gross dichotomizing" between us and the "enemy": "'We' are individuals with names and personal identities; 'he' is a mere collective entity" (75).

[11] Robert Ross (1896-1922), the protagonist of the novel, enlists in the Canadian army at the age of nineteen, fights in France, is wounded in Ypres in 1915, recuperates in England and returns to the front, where he rebels against Captain Leather. Ross disobeys an order not to release the horses stabled in a barn under German bombardment, kills Captain Leather and Private Cassles as they are trying to prevent his escape with the horses, is wounded, flees with the horses he has freed, takes refuge in a barn which is set on fire, is arrested, court martialed *in absentia* (while he is being nursed) and convicted of insubordination and murder.

core of *The Wars*, "a penetrating post-colonial and post-modern text that effectively deconstructs and demythologizes the sentimental patriotism" of McCrae's poem (35). Tracing the details of Timothy Findley's growing up "in an upper middle-class Toronto family for which war was omnipresent", Sherrill Grace has perceptively explained how the author's

> life-long antipathy for war informs his portrayal of the character of Robert Ross, fuels the passion with which he recreates and imagines trench warfare, and drives the narrative search for meaning that commands a reader's attention and has intrigued so many critics since the novel's publication. ("Remembering" 221, 223)

Grace emphasizes Findley's concern with memory and bearing witness in order to challenge the official history of the war, undermining and contradicting the dominant narrative, insisting that readers must "resist the easy path of blind acceptance of myths of noble sacrifice for king and country" (234). In her extremely favorable review of *The Wars*, Margaret Atwood hailed its protagonist as "an essentially Canadian hero" and interpreted his last heroic act as "a protest against the death-force of the war, not an endorsement of it" (294).

"In Flanders Fields" was the only poem by John McCrae which Margaret Atwood chose for *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (61). She began her introduction to this anthology by praising the work of the compiler who preceded her two decades earlier, acknowledging that she "first came to Canadian poetry through two collections edited by A. J. M. Smith: the third edition of his *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1957) and *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960)" and stating that, when she "was an extremely young poet", she became aware of the existence of a Canadian tradition in poetry thanks to those two books (xxvii).[12] In the opening paragraph of her introduction Atwood drew attention to her acquaintance with McCrae's poem:

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[12] A. J. M. Smith includes "In Flanders Fields" in his 1960 anthology (110-11). Donna Bennett and Russell Brown excluded McCrae when they compiled their two-volume anthology entitled *Canadian Literature in English* (1982) and also from both *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (2002) and *An Anthology of*

> Furthermore, as a Canadian born in 1939 I had "In Flanders Fields" hammered into my head at an early age, and will doubtless never be able to shake the notion that what one properly does with torches is to hold them high: otherwise you get haunted. Consider what follows, then, as the propitiation of both a collective ancestral ghost, and of the individual spirit of a sage and generous man.

With these remarks in honor of A. J. M. Smith, Atwood humorously summarized what "In Flanders Fields" meant for her, indicating the two main ways in which she would use it throughout her fiction. The first effect is substantiated by her protagonists' quotations from McCrae's poem, which they were obliged to learn by heart in their school days, in an age when memorizing and reciting verse were staples of childhood. The poem is brought back to their minds on the occasion of Remembrance Day or when they ponder death-related issues. It is so deeply ingrained in their psyches, that they recall some of its lines without effort, although they never express any enthusiasm about it. The second way in which "In Flanders Fields" has had an impact Atwood's writings concerns a recurrent theme in many of them: the return of spectral soldiers, and by extension, of all the dead who come back as ghosts in order to haunt the living.

Margaret Atwood has made a very extensive use of McCrae's poem, and has resorted to quoting from it or alluding to it over and over again in her novels and short stories.[13] For instance, in one of the sections of *Life*

Canadian Literature in English (2010). John McCrae is not even mentioned in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* (2015). However, in *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009) D. M. R. Bentley briefly refers to "the popular success of McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' (1915)" (142) and Susan Fischer has singled out "the most famous poem of the war" as one of the many Canadian poems about the Great War which "employed voices from the grave, as if dead soldiers acquired immortality" (226). Joel Baetz not only included "The Anxious Dead" and "In Flanders Fields" in *Canadian Poetry from World War I: An Anthology* (81), but also a frontispiece photograph of McCrae with an extract from one of his diary entries used as a caption. In his introduction Baetz referred to his strong attachment to "In Flanders Fields" (1).

[13] For a detailed survey of Margaret Atwood's literary treatment of war issues, including the presence of spectral soldiers haunting the protagonists of some of her fictional writings, see Gibert 2018.

Before Man (1979), which is focalized through the character of Elizabeth and dated 12 November 1976, the narrator uses a very poignant image to describe the artificial poppies worn on lapels in the days leading up to Remembrance Day as "red cloth petals of blood spattered out from the black felt hole in the chest, pinned at the center" (57). The allusion to McCrae's poem is immediately made explicit by the literal quotation of three lines from it: "If ye break faith with us who die / We shall not sleep, though poppies grow / In Flanders fields" (57). Although McCrae's name is never mentioned in *Life Before Man*, the narrator's comments following this quote underscore the nationality of the poet—"A Canadian wrote that"—and the relevance of his most famous work for his fellow citizens. In the context of this particular scene, the line "*We are the Dead*", which is italicized for emphasis, may be interpreted as Elizabeth's perception that her country is inhabited by people leading death-in-life existences exactly like the one she feels she is leading after the suicide of her lover and the break of her marriage. "A morbid nation" (58) is how she regards a society with the habit of making their schoolchildren repeat such gloomy lines year after year. Elizabeth belongs to a generation used to memorizing poetry, an activity she seems to have enjoyed at the time, and even recalls how she was once chosen to recite McCrae's poem in public. The proof that she still observes Remembrance Day is that she has bought a poppy, although her lack of enthusiasm is conveyed by the fact that she has not worn it, but simply kept it in her pocket, "her thumb against the pin" (58) in a symbolic gesture of minor self-harm.

Atwood reworks her recurrent image of the artificial poppy—conceptualized as a wound made by a bullet—in "Poppies: Three Variations", a piece which has been classified as a prose poem by some literary critics and as an example of flash fiction by others. In its first section, the violent effect caused by the vision of the "small red explosions pinned to your chest, like a *blow* to the heart" (114) has the same intensity as the one provoked by the sight of the "red cloth petals of blood spattered out from the black felt hole in the chest" which had impressed Elizabeth while walking in the streets of Toronto in *Life Before Man* (57). Atwood uses the first stanza of "In Flanders Fields", followed by its author's name, as an epigraph to open "Poppies: Three Variations", an experimental short narrative which is divided into three sections, each one consisting of a

single long paragraph with no breaks. The words of McCrae's stanza appear in italics woven into each section of Atwood's text so that the full stanza may be read three times if we select the embedded italicized words as they shoot off the page, an uncommon device which has been received with mixed reactions. This highly intertextual parodic piece, which combines satirical and elegiac elements in a clever manner, was first published in the November 1992 issue of the monthly magazine *Saturday Night* and included not only in Atwood's collection *Good Bones* (1992), but also anthologized by Callaghan and Meyer in the two editions of *We Wasn't Pals: Canadian Poetry and Prose of the First World War* (2001 and 2014), by George Bowering in the collection *And Other Stories* (2001) and, on the centenary of McCrae's poem, in Amanda Bett's collection of essays, poetry, fiction and visual art, *In Flanders Fields: 100 Years: Writing on War, Loss and Remembrance* (2015), where the embedded words are printed in red rather than italicized (135-40).

Switching between the past and the present, the opening section of "Poppies: Three Variations" focuses on the meaning of warfare for two different generations: the one whose thoughts about war were based on memory (because they had first-hand experience of battle) and the one whose thoughts are filtered through post-memory (because war is for them a distant historical event rather than part of their direct experience). The two perspectives are presented through the juxtaposed pattern of a first-person narrator alternately memorializing her now-deceased uncle and relating his recollections of the war in which he fought as a young soldier both to her own memories of him as an old veteran and to her current perception of war issues. She begins by stating that he once served either in Flanders or perhaps in France. She is not sure about this geographical detail and does not seem to care much about its exactitude, because what attracts her attention is how those fields look at present: they must have regained their greenness and are profitably cultivated again, "though they keep throwing up rusty shells, broken skulls" (*Good Bones* 114-15). Her uncle used to march in Remembrance Day parades, each year more slowly and with fewer veteran comrades, while the rest of the family commemorated the Armistice by buying poppies, formerly made of felt and nowadays made of plastic. One of the most striking features of this passage is its strong emphasis on the act of buying the poppies in

comparison to the less important act of wearing them. The artificial poppies are presented as a sign of the commodification of war, a sign immediately related to the buying and selling of tiny lead soldiers, which are no longer made of poisonous lead, but of supposedly less toxic plastic, and which are often advertised as marked down products. The narrator reinforces the idea that the commodification of war is not a novelty by referring to a series of objects decorated with one of the two Canadian flags imprinted on them, either "the red rusted-blood one the men fought under" in colonial times or the "new leafy flag", that is, the national flag with the red maple leaf which was adopted in 1965. She remembers that her uncle still owned some household items (such as placemats, cups and saucers) exhibiting the old flag as a proof of loyalty to his country, and comments that in our time the same kind of items with the new flag may be bought as bargains. We are led to assume, although it is not explicitly stated, that today's utilitarian customers are primarily attracted by the discounts and feel encouraged to purchase these price-reduced items not because of their patriotic decorations, but in spite of them.

Together with plastic poppies and other Canadian-themed artifacts, modern shop windows display an increasing assortment of plastic soldiers from "every part of the world", thus giving an indication of the global dimension of our contemporary military conflicts, and additionally, of many people's persistent interest in playing wargames. Yet, warfare was far from being a game or a pleasurable activity for the narrator's uncle, who had neither seen nor heard McCrae's larks, because there was too much smoke (or fog) and roaring in the battlefront. Instead of glamorizing the war he knew so well, he evoked the sordidness of trench warfare, with thousands of rotted corpses breeding flies and the dreadful scene in which a fellow soldier was suddenly blown to pieces while whispering next to him during a bombardment. His niece does not mention the mutilated bodies buried in makeshift graves or in military cemeteries in Europe, but ends her account with a chilling image inspired by them, rephrasing an utterance of the dead soldiers who, in the second stanza of the poem she is quoting and responding to, proclaimed that "short days ago" they "loved and were loved" (lines 6 and 8). She imagines how the armless or legless tin (or plastic) soldiers "that have been owned over the years, loved over the years, lost over the years" are now lying under our feet, and though they do not

speak like those of McCrae's poem, they are silently "listening to everything we say, waiting to be dug up" (*Good Bones* 115).

Apart from the italicized words drawn from the first stanza of "In Flanders Fields", the second section of "Poppies: Three Variations" contains only one reference to McCrae's poem. The third-person narrator focuses on the present lifestyle of an unnamed female protagonist whose main concerns revolve around the difficulties she faces to keep fit and healthy, her increasing forgetfulness, her fear of being harmed by street violence and, above all, the small domestic fights arising from her quarreling relationship with her male partner. Mortality looms in the background and takes shape in the line "We are the dead", the only one she can remember from a poem "she had to write out twenty times on *the* blackboard, for talking" when she was ten years old (116). In the third section of Atwood's brief narrative we hear again the voice of a first-person narrator who, when she was a schoolgirl, associated Flanders exclusively with the Flanders lace of nightgowns until she learned that this foreign place name was also connected to a war fought in a faraway country by grandfathers and other ancestors. She observes that "the trenches, the *fields* of mud, the barbed wire, became our memories as well", but admits that such second-hand memories were gradually erased like fading photographs or, to use another simile, were eroded like statues eaten away by rain (118). Now the veterans' grandchildren do not spend much time memorializing the long dead combatants because they have their own "lives to get on with" and "other things to think about", including the bothersome news about terrorists who blow up airports, or about hurricanes, famines and other disasters, while the guns are still firing because they "have never stopped, just moved around" and can be heard "below thought, below memory, *below* everything" (119-20). Death, violence and destruction are the common denominators of the three sections of "Poppies: Three Variations", which are pervaded by the struggle to cope with these three elements inherent in human nature.

The image linking the artificial poppies worn on clothing with the blood of the soldiers whose sacrifice is yearly commemorated reappears in the form of "petals of spilled blood" in the last chapter of *The Robber Bride* (1993), a novel which ends with a funerary ceremony performed on "November 11, 1991, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the eleventh hour

of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" (540). Tony, Charis and Roz are gathered together in order to scatter Zenia's ashes in the lake at this precise moment, chosen by the first of them, a military historian whose obsession with the First World War can be interpreted as the result of her efforts to emotionally distance herself from the unbearable memories arising from the Second. Since it is Remembrance Day (nicknamed "Bloody Poppy Day" by Tony), each of the three friends "has a poppy stuck into the front of her coat" (541). Charis thinks about November as the "month of the dead, month of returning" and ponders how "the French decorate their family graves with chrysanthemums, the Mexicans with poppies", whereas Canadians "go in poppies. The flower of sleep and forgetting. Petals of spilled blood" (541). At this point, Tony evokes, with amusement rather than fear, the possibility that the dead may "come back for revenge" (542). On the contrary, Charis is frightened by her certainty that the mere absence of a body does not prevent the dead from returning and terrified by her inability to control her own desires: "The dead return in other forms, she thinks, because we will them to" (543). But the dead summoned here are not the soldiers of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields". By quoting the paradoxical line "*I am the enemy you killed, my friend*" from the shocking last stanza of Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting" (line 40), what is brought to the reader's mind is an anti-war poem, written in 1918 and first published in 1919 (the year after the poet's death) in the spirit of reconciliation.

The time setting of *The Robber Bride* (23 October 1990—11 November 1991) roughly coincides with that of the Gulf War (2 August 1990—28 February 1991), which is one of the numerous armed conflicts discussed in this novel, especially by Tony, whose expertise as a military historian is set in contrast with the ignorance exhibited by her two friends. Tony's exasperation leads her to put forward a series or war images which she thinks would shake Charis out of her naïve attitude:

> Sometimes Tony would like to take Charis by the lily-white hand and lead her to the piles of skulls, to the hidden pits filled with bodies, to the starved children with their stick arms and ballooning stomachs, to the churches locked up and then burned with their sizzling prisoners howling inside, to the crosses, row on row on row. (36)

While all of these images seem to be inspired by photographs or documentary films, it should be noted that the words used to convey the last picture are unequivocally drawn from the second line of "In Flanders Fields": "Between the crosses, row on row". By transposing McCrae's words to the new setting of her novel and placing them at the end of a list of atrocities stemming from war, Atwood achieves a satirical effect which undermines any idyllic perception of military cemeteries which readers may have previously had.

Iris Chase, the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* (2000), refers to John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" on three occasions in her fictional memoir. The first occurrence takes place as Iris records in disparaging terms a student graduation ceremony she had to attend when she was already an elderly woman. Her depiction of the scene successfully conveys her reluctance to listen to the trite speeches full of clichés she had heard so many times before. After some sarcastic remarks about how bored she was by the school chaplain's "prayer, lecturing God on the many unprecedented challenges that face today's young people" (38), Iris recalls that she allowed her mind to drift while "the others gave voice in turn: end of the twentieth century, toss out the old, ring in the new, citizens of the future, to you from failing hands and so forth" (38). The last of these conventional phrases is a literal quotation from McCrae's poem: "To you from failing hands we throw" (line 11).

Iris quotes from the poem again, in this case its first two lines, "*In Flanders fields the poppies blow, Between the crosses, row on row*", as an example of the type of poetry which her private tutor, an old maid with a taste for romantic novels who was nicknamed Miss Violence, taught her to read out loud (155). Later in her memoir, she explains her change of heart about those poems, perhaps including McCrae's among them: "The poems that used to entrance me in the days of Miss Violence now struck me as overdone and sickly" (389). These two instances illustrate how Iris deliberately seeks to scorn the traditional discourse of public remembrance by mocking McCrae's poem, a satirical attitude which suits the daughter of Captain Chase. Iris depicts her father as an idealistic young volunteer who enthusiastically "enlisted at once" and "joined the Royal Canadian Regiment" with his two brothers (70). After being wounded on three different occasions (at the Somme, at Vimy Ridge and at Bourlon Wood),

he returned from Europe as a disillusioned veteran, physically and psychologically maimed, suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder which would not only ruin his life, but also damage those of his wife and his two daughters (Gibert, "Haunted" 50). In fact, when Iris derides McCrae's poem in the two instances described above, she seems to be echoing her father's views of the war as a wasteful slaughter and his contempt for "all the talk of fighting for God and Civilization" (77). However, when she resorts to McCrae's poem a third time, she uses it with a different tone and for a different purpose. Near the end of the novel, Iris confesses that she is the author of the romance which was posthumously attributed to Laura, a book she wrote as a "memorial" to her sister, about whose suicide she felt guilty. She defines this kind of memorial as "a commemoration of wounds endured (…) and resented" and contends that "without memory, there can be no revenge" (508). Then, she concludes with two very short paragraphs:

> *Lest we forget. Remember me. To you from failing hands we throw.* Cries of the thirsty ghosts.
>
> Nothing is more difficult than to understand the dead, I've found; but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them. (508)

The first italicized quotation, originally from Deuteronomy 6:11 ("Then beware lest thou forget the Lord"), was drawn from the Bible by Rudyard Kipling for the refrain of "Recessional" (1897): "Lest we forget—lest we forget!" The three words, which are repeated eight times in Kipling's poem, were recommended by the poet himself as one of the tombstone epitaphs for the battlefield cemeteries when in 1917 he was appointed the literary advisor of the Imperial War Graves Commission. They also constitute the motto selected by Captain Chase, who refused all other inscriptions suggested for the war memorial he sponsored in his hometown to honor his two brothers (one killed at the Ypres Salient and the other at the Somme) and his fallen comrades.

In this context, the quotation of the eleventh line of McCrae's poem—"*To you from failing hands we throw*"—acquires a solemn tone as it becomes one of the cries of the "thirsty ghosts" haunting Iris, who becomes painfully aware of how difficult it is to understand the dead and how dangerous it is to ignore them. In the last of the six Empson lectures

which Atwood delivered at the University of Cambridge in 2000, precisely the year when *The Blind Assassin* was first published, she devoted close attention to "In Flanders Fields" and even quoted the poem in full in the ensuing book which came out two years later, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (165-66). The paragraphs following the poem clarify what Atwood meant when she wrote about the "thirsty ghosts" in *The Blind Assassin* (508): "They want the blood of the living, or at least they want the blood put at risk in behalf of their cause" (*Negotiating* 166). Acknowledging that "at the time of its first publication, this poem was thought to be about the sustaining of belligerence toward enemy aliens during World War I", she argues that eighty years later "something powerful remains, because it embodies a very old and a very strong pattern" (166). And she concludes, almost paraphrasing the words of the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* when she wrote about the danger of ignoring the ghosts (508), by insisting on the necessity to pay attention to the ghosts and to always do what they request from us, because "the dead make demands, says the poem, and you can't just dismiss either the dead or the demands: you'd be wise to take both of them seriously" (*Negotiating* 166).

Neta Gordon's comments on the "prosopopoeiac disturbance" (33) created in McCrae's poem may shed light on one of the factors which have played a key role in its continuous influence for more than 100 years. The poem has certainly helped to endorse the conventional discourse of noble and glorious sacrifice, but it has also been turned into a powerful tool to subvert it while encouraging the exploration of the traumatic memory of warfare. Within the revisionist context of contemporary Canadian literature, "In Flanders Fields" stands as a symbol of the national military myths to be critically reassessed and ironically debunked rather than perpetuated.

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Abstract

A number of Canadian writers have carefully re-worked or significantly alluded to John McCrae's iconic poem "In Flanders Fields" (1915) either to support or to challenge some of the myths of the Great War. Celebrated and beloved by the general public, this extremely popular war poem has made a lasting impression on Canada's collective memory. While it continues to be recited with reverence and genuine patriotic pride at solemn commemorative ceremonies every Remembrance Day, it has also given rise to bitter controversies about its presumed healing powers and alleged traumatic effects. Taking advantage of the fact that many Canadians grew sentimentally attached to the moving lines they learned in their childhood, "In Flanders Fields" was exploited by politicians to fuel antagonisms within the country and has often been misused as a military propaganda tool. Paradoxically, two of the initial literary responses it inspired were not belligerent poems, but sympathetic elegies for the dead in WWI, concluding with unequivocal calls for world peace. In contrast with the respectful attitude expressed by McCrae's contemporary writers, his rondeau was later subversively transformed or parodied —by Margaret Atwood in particular—through innovative uses of intertextuality for various satirical purposes, including that of rejecting any glorification of war, and more specifically, the moral and political questioning of Canada's engagement in a war fought on foreign soil.

Keywords

War commemoration; spectral soldiers; ghosts; haunting; parody

Resumo

Um número expressivo de escritores canadianos tem cuidadosamente re-trabalhado o poema icónico de John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields" (1915), ou a ele aludido, de forma significativa, para apoiar ou para desafiar alguns dos mitos da Grande Guerra. Celebrado e amado pelo público em geral, este poema, extremamente popular, permanece de modo duradouro na memória colectiva do Canadá.

Embora continue a ser declamado, com reverência e genuíno orgulho patriótico, nas comemorações solenes de cada *Remembrance Day*, tem igualmente originado amargas controvérsias sobre os seus presumíveis poderes curativos e alegados efeitos traumáticos. Aproveitando-se do facto de muitos canadianos terem crescido sentimentalmente ligados aos versos comoventes aprendidos na infância, "In Flanders Fields" foi explorado politicamente para espicaçar antagonismos no país, frequentemente abusado como um instrumento de propaganda militar. Paradoxalmente, duas das respostas literárias iniciais que o texto inspirou eram poemas contra a guerra, elegias compassivas pelos mortos da 1ª Guerra Mundial, que terminavam com inequívocos apelos pela paz mundial. Em contraste com a atitude de respeito expressa por escritores contemporâneos de McCrae, o seu rondeau foi mais tarde transformado de forma subversiva ou paródica—em particular por Margaret Atwood— através de usos inovadores de intertextualidade para diversos propósitos satíricos, incluindo o repúdio por qualquer glorificação da guerra, e, mais especificamente, para promover o questionar moral e político do envolvimento do Canadá numa guerra combatida em território estrangeiro.

Palavras-Chave

Comemorações da guerra; soldados espectros; fantasmas; assombração; paródia

Seeking Freedom and Finding War: A Case Study of Two Pacifists, Vera Brittain and Dora Russell

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Seeking Freedom and Finding War: A Case Study of Two Pacifists, Vera Brittain and Dora Russell

Dear Vera Brittain,

> I wanted really to ask you if I could come and see you to talk over the campaign about nuclear tests and nuclear war. I was with the women who marched on Sunday and was so glad to see you there and hear your fine speech. (…) I feel that something more than protests linked with political parties is needed. And I think it has to come from women (…) a different kind of approach.
>
> Could you spare the time for me to come and see you and discuss the possibility? (Russell to Brittain, 14 May 1957)

The year is 1957, the context a protest march of women in black sashes (12 May 1957), organised by the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests (NCANWT), that would rapidly escalate into regular Easter marches from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment Aldermaston to London,[1] sponsored by NCANWT's successor, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).[2] Mrs Russell's participation in these early beginnings of post-World War II protests against renewed threats to peace and the survival of humankind was the continuation of campaigns for peace and women's rights that she had conducted for as long as her contemporary Vera Brittain. Yet, of the

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[1] The first such march began on 4 April 1958 and was the only one moving from London to Aldermaston (Duff 132 ff).

[2] For details see Liddington (ch. 9).

two Brittain is better-known, since her first autobiographical volume *Testament of Youth* (1933) has not only entered the canon of British WWI-literature, it has also been re-issued several times (e.g. 1978, 1980, 2004) and adapted to TV and film.[3] Dora Russell, on the other hand, is often only referred to as the second wife of the philosopher and peace activist Bertrand Russell, an unjustified shadowy existence as she continued campaigning for her causes throughout her long life.

The two peace-minded women shared not only the same age—Mrs Brittain was born on 29 December 1893 and Mrs Russell (née Black) on 3 April 1894. Both had also grown up in Edwardian middle-class environments and both achieved the rare privilege of gaining access to university, albeit to different institutions: Vera at Somerville College, Oxford, and Dora at Girton College, Cambridge. In either case life at university meant a decisive step towards freedom and self-realisation—soon to be overcast or even interrupted by war. More importantly, both claimed in their autobiographical narratives[4] that key experiences in the

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[3] Mark Bostridge claims that Vera Brittain's autobiographical record of WWI is the only canonical text written by a woman, next to male contemporaries such as E. Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), S. Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), and R. Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929) (loc. 121). In 1979, the BBC adapted *Testament of Youth* to a TV-drama in five episodes. In 1980, inspired by both the TV-drama and the book, the ballet choreographer Kenneth MacMillan created a one-act ballet called *Gloria*, dedicated to the generation lost in WWI. In 1998, Bostridge adapted Brittain's wartime letters to 15 quarter-hour BBC Radio Four episodes. In 2008, there was a BBC drama documentary by the title *Vera Brittain: A Woman in Love and War*, and in 2014, *Testament of Youth* was made into a feature film, released in 2015, that dramatises the love story between young Vera and Roland Leighton. For details see Bostridge (ch. 5).

[4] Each wrote about her life in three volumes: Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree: My Quest for Liberty and Love* (1975); *The Tamarisk Tree: My School and the Years of War* (1980); *The Tamarisk Tree: Challenge to the Cold War* (1985); Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (1933); *Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby* (1940); *Testament of Experience: An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1925-1950* (1957). As references to some volumes are frequent, these will appear abbreviated as follows: volume 1 of *The Tamarisk Tree* (*TT*1); *Testament of Youth* (*TY*) and *Testament of Experience* (*TE*).

Great War had a fundamental influence on their postwar development into campaigners for both women's rights and peace.

By studying main aspects of these histories, I will endeavour to outline the ways in which differences in personality, social environment, and education affected their individual reading of the signs of their time and consequent engagement with causes subsumed under the umbrella terms of feminism and pacifism. It may explain why these feminist and peace campaigners knew of each other but never came close, worked towards similar ends sometimes in the same organisations, yet hardly ever together. Their cases exemplify the difficulty inherent in organizing educated individuals for global causes such as women's equal rights and peace. By their differences, their personal stories are still of interest today, especially as both women understood themselves as historically situated beings whose lives could serve as a lesson to others, to quote Vera: "I belong to the few who believe in all sincerity that their own lives provide the answers to some of the many problems which puzzle humanity" (*Chronicle* 13), while Dora offers the record of her long life on the understanding that "[t]o study the pattern of human lives (…), and what we may learn from them is, I suppose, the reason for our interest in biography" (*TT*1 10).

Growing up before the War

Dora's and Vera's autobiographical descriptions of their respective childhoods clearly reveal two distinct personalities and more differences than similarities in their social milieu and the way they experienced it. Both acknowledged a sheltered upbringing. Yet, while Dora remembered her carefree youth positively: "our lives were very much directed by our parents and, by the school, regimented (…) I lived and worked, enjoyed and sorrowed from day to day, on the whole in harmony with my surroundings and my parents" (*TT*1 33), Vera's recollection sounds mentally claustrophobic:

> I suppose it was the very completeness with which all doors and windows to the more adventurous and colourful world, the world of literature, of scholarship, of art, of politics, of travel, were closed to me that kept my childhood so relatively contented a time. (*TY* 30-31)

Indeed, Mrs Russell recalled a childhood in a civil servant's household in Thornton Heath, Surrey (on the southern outskirts of London), that was full of fun, outdoor activities, reading, dancing, amateur theatricals, etc., supervised by doting parents and a wide circle of indulgent family members (*TT*1 13 ff). This "fairytale world" of her childhood became associated in her memory with a unique tree in her parents' garden—a tamarisk tree. She later chose to include this tree in her autobiographical titles as a symbol of both her happy childhood and "the dreams and ideals for which we were striving" (*TT*1 10).

In contrast to Dora's active and gregarious upbringing in London's suburbia, Vera's and her younger brother Edward's childhood was "serene and uneventful", lacking in "external stimulus" besides (*TY* 21, 27). They grew up in provincial surroundings near Leek, Staffordshire,[5] as their father worked as co-director of a paper mill in the area. Supervised by a governess, they spent most of their youth in each other's company, a harmonious affair since their personalities ideally complemented each other: Vera was volatile, intense, rather more confrontational and ambitious, prone to introspection (and fears never conquered), and communicative; Edward was easy-going, conciliatory and musically inclined (*TY* 24; Berry and Bostridge loc. 454 ff). As reading material was eclectic and sparse in their parents' materialistically-oriented household, imaginative Vera began inventing stories and found in her brother an enthusiastic audience. Thus was born her dream to become a writer, which would turn into her life's ambition (*TY* 27, 40).

The second of four children, Dora was an extrovert, self-confident, tomboyishly plucky and compassionate child, always ready for a challenge by her equals or superiors, while holding a protective hand over the "underdog" (*TT*1 70, 13). Her father Frederick Black (later Sir) had worked his way up in the Civil Service through further education and therefore attached great value to his own children's schooling, regardless of sex. Consequently, Dora was sent to a kindergarten at four (the only girl among boys) and from there to a private co-educational primary school

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[5] They moved several times: from Newcastle-under-Lyme (where Vera was born) to Macclesfield (where Vera's brother Edward was born less than two years later) and, in 1905, to Buxton in Derbyshire for the children's schooling.

(*TT*1 13-14). Her excellent performance there won her a scholarship to Sutton High School.[6] In 1911, intent upon furthering his daughter's chances of a university education, Mr Black sent Dora to a private "finishing school for young ladies" in Germany and, upon return, tutored her personally in Latin and Greek. In 1912, Dora took the Little-Go at Cambridge, a preliminary entrance examination, and to her surprise not only got a First, but was also awarded a scholarship in Modern Languages at Girton College.[7] Dora greeted the news of her success, however, with tears of sorrow (*TT*1 32). For the first time in her life she realised how much her destiny had been shaped by others who seemed to know better what was good for her, treating as a temporary whim her own often-voiced ambition "to train for the theatre" (*TT*1 34). Her childhood had literally been carefree because her relatives had assumed the care for her safety and future in the "smug" Edwardian middle-class context of suburban London, where, besides, already a number of privileges for someone gifted like her had eased her way. "Accepting what appeared to be the decision of fate" (*TT*1 34), Miss Black went to Girton College in 1912.

Typical of the conventionality of Staffordshire's provincial milieu, Vera's father Thomas Arthur Brittain saw the need for his daughter's education only in so far as it gave her the means to land an advantageous marriage (upward mobility was important) and become an "ornamental young lady", wife and mother (*TY* 32). So Vera was sent to Buxton's day school "for the daughters of gentlemen", followed, in 1907, by an expedient

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[6] Sutton High School, which already offered an unusually rich and varied syllabus for girls' schools at the time (see *TT*1 22-23), was one of several schools belonging to the Girls' Public Day School Trust (or Company, as the organisation was called before changing to "Trust" in 1906). Founded in 1872, the Company opened its first schools in 1873, "offering a cheap and thorough day-school education on the model of the North London Collegiate School" (Woodham-Smith 44-45). The latter had been established in 1850 by Miss Frances Mary Buss, who was later to become involved in the kindergarten movement in England. By 1900, the organisation had opened 38 schools (see Spencer 76; Stewart 47-48).

[7] For details about Cambridge examinations and the early history of Girton College, the first of its kind in England to offer university-level education for women, see for example McMurran and Tattersall; Gorham (64 ff).

move to St Monica's School,[8] in Kingswood, Surrey, as Vera's maternal aunt Florence was the partner of its founder and headmistress, Luise Heath Jones (*TY* 27 ff; see Gorham 18-19). During these few years of contact with the outer world, Vera became aware of the existence of women's colleges. At last, there was hope for her long-cherished ambition to leave the much resented "stuffiness of complacent bourgeoisdom" of her upbringing, assume a life of independence and achieve greatness as a writer (*TY* 31-32). To this end she would work hard.

Feminist Awareness

Gorham claims that Vera's early and continuous revolt against the traditional treatment of women as second-rate citizens, and the centrality "feminism" assumed in her life go to show that she "was born feminist" (174). Her ambition to escape from her provincial upbringing and seek an independent existence certainly reflects this revolt. What encouraged her belief in the possibility of a self-sufficient life as a professional woman writer was her introduction, under the guidance of Miss Heath Jones, to the suffrage movement and to feminist thought, most notably to Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911). Schreiner's feminist classic, with its argument about the central role women's labour had played in the evolution of mankind, and the call to women to seek through education a fit outlet for her abilities in whatever profession modern society had to offer and thus to continue, through their personal development, to help humankind evolve,[9] resonated well with Vera's plans for her own future (Berry and Bostridge loc.786 ff). It is said to have fully converted her to feminism

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[8] St. Monica's was "a finishing school for wealthy girls" whose ambivalent curriculum reflected its headmistress's progressive attitude towards education, on the one hand, and "Victorian ideal of femininity" on the other. It was insufficient, as Vera would soon realise, to prepare its students for higher education (Gorham 19-20; *TY* 32-33).

[9] Schreiner's historical perspective on woman's labour is, in fact, a description of the progressive loss, from the past to the present, of her traditional (manual) tasks in the service of humankind, in part because man took over from her, but also because of the invention of labour-saving devices that reduced the need for manual work. While in modern society men would have a great variety of more intellectual or highly skilled

(*TY* 41-42; Berry and Bostridge loc. 771), or rather, the kind of feminism, as Gorham adds, that consisted in "a desire to enter the world of men" (73). Against all odds,[10] she managed to win a "Somerville Exhibition" (a minor scholarship) in English Literature in March 1914 and passed the Oxford Senior Local in July. The "gate to liberty", as she put it (*TY* 77), was open—the very moment the War broke out, which she then perceived as "an infuriating personal interruption" (*TY*, 93).

Contrary to Vera's early revolt against sex discrimination, Dora had not felt the need to rebel, since under her parents' democratic educational policies she had grown up self-confidently, hardly touched by the differential treatments of boys and girls.[11] She became critical of society and actively assumed control of her life as a woman in her own right in the intellectual

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professions at their disposal, women ran the risk, because of their successive exclusion from education and public functions, to see their labour contribution reduced to their sexual function in the form of sexual reproduction or prostitution. In Schreiner's words, this was the equivalent of sinking "into the condition of complete and helpless sex-parasitism" (117), which would eventually atrophy "all the other elements of human nature in her" and ultimately arrest "the evolution of the whole race (…) in her person" (157). As Vera had never felt much attracted to sex, always giving priority to her literary ambition (*TY* 26, 48-9; Gordon 194 ff), Schreiner's call to women to make all modern labour their own as their intellect was equal to men's, and in so doing contribute to the evolution of humankind and escape sex-parasitism, must indeed have been to Vera a timely confirmation of the rightness of her course (see also Berry and Bostridge loc. 796).

[10] Contrary to Dora Russell, who began her studies at Girton in 1912, Vera had to return home to the life of a debutante after her school years as her father was against investing in her further education. Under the influence of an old family lawyer and John Marriott, an Oxford Extension lecturer, her father came round to accepting her desire to higher education by 1913, and she began the arduous preparations for both the Somerville scholarship examination and the Oxford entrance exam (*TY* 59 ff; see Berry and Bostridge loc. 989).

[11] She was, however, aware of ongoing discriminations. Although her parents were a devoted couple, her father was clearly "the boss" to whom her mother Sarah (née Davisson) had to present the weekly tradesmen's bills for payment (*TT*1 19). Dora also recalled that when young she and her girlfriends disliked their "swelling breasts", unconsciously aware of the limitations that would soon come with womanhood; or that she and her sister "Bindy" (baptised Edith) used to call each other "boys" because of the "male power and prestige" that came with it, as she explained years later (*TT*1 40).

world of Cambridge, where she joined, among others, the freethinking "Heretics Society".[12] Under its influence she rapidly discarded any religious belief and set as her goals in life to find out what she personally "felt and believed about the purpose of the universe (…) [and] the riddle of the destiny of all mankind in this world" (*TT*I 36).

When World War I broke out, Dora Russell and Vera Brittain had begun or would begin a new stage in their lives that offered the kind of freedom that each needed to forge a life of her own. Yet, contrary to the gregarious, competitive and easy-going Dora, privileged by a liberal family background and upbringing near London and confident of her abilities, the more serious, introspective yet ambitious Vera, used to being alone and self-consciously aware of the patronising treatment of her sex in the provincial world of her family, had to fight hard for her eventual self-realisation. In many other ways, as Deborah Gorham and others have pointed out, Vera remained rather conventional, reflected, for example, in her acceptance of the public-school code of "manliness", her patriotic response to war (80-83), and her lifelong care for her looks (Berry and Bostridge loc. 2983; Gorham 186). Politics were viewed by both from a distance, as they still were, to use Vera's words, "abysmally ignorant", "romantically idealistic" and "utterly unsophisticated" by later standards (*TY* 43).

The Impact of the War

Brittain's involvement in the War as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment)[13]

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[12] The Heretics Society had been co-founded in 1909 by the writer and polymath C. K. Ogden (1889-1957). Its members had to swear to reject "all appeal to Authority in the discussion of religious questions" and to accept a conviction only when based on reasonable argument (Florence, "The Cambridge Heretics" 228; *TT*1 42).

[13] For a background to the VAD programme, a discussion of the ambivalent situation and status of VADs created by competing discourses, and how individual participants responded to those, Vera Brittain included, see Ouditt (ch. 1). Ouditt also explains that not all women volunteers would be accepted to become a VAD. Recruitment focused on upper-middle class women like Vera because of their breeding (20 ff).

nurse from 1915 to 1919, her romantic motives, her personal losses[14] and sufferings are vividly conveyed, based on letters and diary entries, in her bestselling memoirs *Testament of Youth*. In it she also mentions the two months in 1917 during which she nursed German soldiers, an experience which she later declared to have been the roots of her pacifist convictions, as she then realised "that the qualities common to all human beings, of whatever race or country, far exceed the national and political differences which sometimes divide them"—a "discovery" of spiritual quality, she claimed, that "made me resolve to devote my life to examining the causes of war and doing what I could to prevent another" (*TY* 373-80; *Humiliation with Honor* 11, 28). As a written record for posterity of what the War had done to her generation, *Testament* also stands as her lasting appeal to peace.

The publication of *Testament of Youth* in 1933 meant to Vera not only "the final instrument of a return to life from the abyss of emotional death" (*TE* 76), as she dramatically described the effect.[15] The book also turned out, at long last,[16] to be her break-through to much-coveted fame as a writer. "Paradoxically", as Mark Bostridge concluded, "the war that devastated Brittain's youth also helped to create her as a writer" (loc. 126).

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[14] Roland Leighton, her unofficial fiancé, died of shot wounds on 23 December 1915; their close friends Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson died in 1917—Geoffrey was shot in action in April, Victor died of wounds in June; her brother Edward was shot in June 1918.

[15] This is an obvious overstatement, as her emotional healing process and hence her return to literary creativity had begun when in 1920 Winifred Holtby, a colleague at university with similar writing ambitions, became her close friend, working partner, eventual room-mate and companion until her untimely death in 1935. She filled the void left after the death of Edward, Vera's former confidante, providing the emotional support, understanding, encouragement and reliable help Brittain needed in order to go on writing and campaigning (see Bostridge loc. 203 ff; Berry and Bostridge loc. 3086 ff).

[16] Beginning with Roland's death, and throughout the 1920s, Brittain had tried to put her war experiences into some literary form, most of which never reached the publisher (see Bostridge ch. 4). The novels that did get published, *Dark Tide* (1923) and *Not Without Honour* (1924) deal with feminist issues centring on her experience as a "provincial young lady" (see Mellown, "Reflections" 215 ff).

Yet, in this apparent contradiction lies the key to understanding the authoress and her approach to life.

Why—I wondered when reading Brittain's account of her gradual involvement in the war effort—did young Vera so readily abandon her Modern Languages course at Oxford, for which she had fought so hard in order to escape from her provincial prison and gain independence? Dora, who had higher education thrust upon her, did not interrupt it as we shall see. Why exchange a life of her own for the subservient female role of men's little helper? Was it—as Vera claimed—only because she wanted to share the hardships which her newly found lover Roland Leighton, Edward's friend at school, had to face at the Front, "and not being a man and able to go to the front, I wanted to do the next best thing" (*TY* 213-14)?

Her change of heart may have had more reasons—though less conscious to her—than that of love alone. As Bostridge has pointed out (loc. 1712), Vera understated the support she received from her parents in her struggle to enter university, while exaggerating the single-handedness of her own efforts—that is, in reality it had not been as difficult as she made it out to be. Furthermore, as Deborah Gorham has explained, public pressure on women to also volunteer for war work exerted a strong pull (99-100). Besides, Brittain's academic year 1914-15 at Oxford had consisted mostly in studying elementary Greek and Latin for her end-of-term exams (Pass Moderations), while the strict regulations imposed on women and their behaviour at Oxford curtailed the freedom Miss Vera had apparently expected (73 ff). In view of these unbargained-for limitations, active participation in the war effort promised a better escape from convention and provinciality. It meant, as she mused in 1915, that her "days (…) of sheltered physical comfort and unruffled peace of mind" were over (*TY* 138)—which was exactly what the future writer needed: suffering became a form of feeling intensely alive, as her diary narrative makes clear time and again. "I would rather suffer aeons of pain than be nothing" she once confessed to Roland (*TY* 196). What began as suffering for her lover—nursing wounded soldiers meant to her nursing Roland "by proxy" (*Chronicle* 166), the "aches" and "pains" of her daily drudgery were not minded as they represented "satisfactory tributes to my love of Roland" (*TY* 164)—gradually became very personal and her own when the men closest to her successively died in the War. Lessons of loss were counter-

balanced by freedom from former constraints and a gain in knowledge about living: "After twenty years of sheltered gentility I certainly did feel that whatever the disadvantages of my present occupation, I was at least seeing life" (*TY* 213). As Ouditt succinctly put the experience Vera shared with many war nurses that escaped former confines: "Paradoxically, to be at the site of death was seen to be equivalent to being at the heart of life. It was, effectively, an entry into history" (31).

By witnessing and documenting the loss of part of her youth in the course of a historic event—Edward, she dramatically declared, represented "all my past" and Roland "all my future" (*TY* 190)—Vera Brittain had acquired the necessary human insights and material that qualified her for the kind of "labour" in public (on Oliver Schreiner's equal-rights terms, see fn. 9) which was not only best suited for her skills—the profession of a writer—but which could be exercised on equal terms with her male colleagues.[17] At the same time, the success of her book secured her the kind of fame and financial resources that stabilised her public position and independence. As far as her place in public was concerned, Vera had by the 1930s fully achieved her feminist ambition in Schreiner's sense. Her apprenticeship years in the War, on the other hand, made her in the eyes of the public an authority on questions of peace and war, life and death (*Chronicle* 15; Fell 15). It legitimised her postwar peace campaigns in writing and speech, which she then pursued mostly on behalf of the League of Nations Union, the English internationalist organisation that aligned with the League of Nations in their efforts to further international cooperation, "collective security". By 1933 she had also found the literary

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[17] In fact, autobiographies were generally only published if they came from men of some public standing, as only these were expected to have something important to say. Brittain saw this confirmed when she mentioned her autobiographical project to an aspiring literary "arbiter", who promptly exclaimed, "'I shouldn't have thought that anything in *your* life was worth recording!'" (*TE* 79, italics of the original). Whether autobiographical or not, as Fell pointed out, "published literature and public debate about the war in the interwar years" was a "male world" (15). This was, in fact, what gave Brittain the energy to persevere with her long-time project: before fully embarking on *Testament of Youth*, she had carefully read the recent literature on the War by her male colleagues. They confirmed her in the urgent need to add to these her view of the War (*TE* 76-77).

formula—the voice of historically situated subject(s) (mostly her authorial "I") speaking for the many, or, as she put it: "to put the life of an ordinary individual into its niche in the contemporary history, and thus illustrate the influence of world-wide events and movements upon the personal destinies of men and women" (*TY* 12)—that promised success in the meaningful application of her literary skills.[18]

As her choice of literary form makes clear, innocent young Vera rebelling against her provincial surroundings had, through the lesson of the War, matured into a political being who saw her life as part of and subject to historical processes (see *TY* 472). Her change, upon returning to Somerville after the War, from reading English to reading History (from 1919 to 1921)[19]—"trying to understand how the whole calamity had happened" (*TY* 471)—was a logical consequence. Her literary recipe also points to a personal need: for the volatile and sensitive Vera, often alone in her struggles and anxieties, writing herself into her literary creations was her way—had probably been her way from the start—of coming to terms with life's adversities and finding the courage to move on (see Berry and Bostridge loc. 454).[20]

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[18] Apparently, Brittain had perceived the power of this literary device already in her sixth form when editing St. Monica's school magazine (*TE* 77-78).

[19] Upon completing her History degree in 1921, Vera became part of the early female Oxfordians officially accorded the degree. Under mounting pressure—and Brittain had with her pen contributed to the campaign for women's right to be admitted to a university degree—Oxford University passed the statute to that effect on 11 May 1920 (Berry and Bostridge loc. 3173 ff). Cambridge University—Dora Russell's *Alma Mater*—lagged behind in this respect for another 28 years (see Chambers). See also Vera Brittain's *The Women at Oxford: A Fragment of History* (The Macmillan Company, 1960).

[20] As far as Brittain's wartime writing is concerned, similar conclusions have been drawn by a number of critics who have analysed her work "as an act of mourning, voicing the ongoing trauma of bereavement" (see Fell 15). For an analysis of Brittain's subjective writing method in relation to its influence on the novel in the early twentieth century, see Andrea Peterson.

While Brittain depended on the medium of writing to make sense of her life's experiences within an informed context so that it would be representative for others, Miss Black perceived the lessons of life intuitively, absorbing them with both mind and body, before her understanding of them was committed to paper. A bluestocking, like Vera, she cherished the human intellect that made understanding possible. To her, however, the thoughts of our reasoning faculty did not represent "pure reason in the academic sense", but rather "the creative impulse that springs from a combination of the reasoning faculty, intuitions, imagination, instincts [*sic*] of the organism that is man" (*TT*1 43). Hence, the development of her thoughts on peace based on her home-front war experience was less straightforward. As her younger brother Frederick was still too young for military service in August 1914, she felt "no immediate personal anxieties" (*TT*1 45) then. A brief spell as a volunteer, helping to receive and distribute refugees arriving from Belgium, brought her face to face with the human suffering of dislocation and loss and her "fairytale world of the tamarisk tree began to fade into the past" (*TT*1 45). Back at Cambridge for her final year, she perceived the void opening up in her generation with the rapid disappearance of male colleagues from university, made permanent by their deaths, among these Rupert Brooke, a Fellow of King's College, in April 1915. She became aware of the growing resistance to military service by conscientious objectors at Cambridge—most notably Bertrand Russell, whom she would briefly meet in 1916 (*TT*1 50)—and knew of her friend C. K. Ogden's vehement opposition to the War, which transpired in his editorship of the *Cambridge Magazine*[21] (*TT*1 45-46). For lack of

[21] The *Cambridge Magazine* was first published as an open university magazine on January 12 1912. Under the continuous editorship of C. K. Ogden, it became a mouthpiece for controversial (and often little-known) topics such as birth control. During World War I it was one of the few magazines that offered the reader a summary of the Foreign Press, and regularly featured translated anti-war articles coming from the Continent, including Germany (Florence, "Cambridge" 12-42). For details about the magazine's important role in providing balanced information about international politics and events during World War I, see Kolinsky. Dora temporarily helped Ogden edit the magazine (*TT*1 64).

meaningful alternatives (she no longer wanted to support the war effort) she continued postgraduate studies of the eighteenth-century French hedonists at London University College after finishing her course in Modern Languages with First Class Honours in June 1915.

The cruelty of the impersonal war machine came home to her when in 1917 she accompanied her father, then Director General of Munitions Supply, on a war mission to the United States. In vain, her father appealed to American oil magnates to share their resources with England, as petroleum was almost impossible to come by in war-torn Europe. With indignation Dora observed "that it was a matter of complete indifference to these oil men if all our tankers went to the bottom; the greater our loss, the greater in the end would be their gain". The US had not entered the war to help "their beleaguered cousins", as Europeans deludingly thought; they had entered at that late date only "because they saw advantage to themselves in doing so" (*TT*1 57).

This realisation was the final straw that made her turn against war —not only on account of the deplorable motives and ends involved by war profiteers, but—even more so—on account of the long-term negative effects modern technological warfare had particularly on her own generation. She viewed the losses it had suffered as a serious break in the sequence of generations, necessary to guarantee, through the modifying influence of the young, an adequately adaptive change in the next. As the predominant survivors of her generation were women, there was hardly any continuity since these were denied political power. What persisted in society was the traditional structure "with its national rivalries, its outmoded diplomacies, its faith in wars, its patriarchal authority" (*TT*1 58). Patriarchal social and political structures had to be changed, and if women (now in surplus numbers) were to do it, they had to become full citizens.

Her quest for "liberty and love" began with a search for alternative lifestyles and turned into lifelong active campaigns for what she believed necessary and possible at given moments in history to redress the destructive imbalance male dominance had engendered and, in so doing, create the basis for lasting peace. Upon returning to her postgraduate research in London Miss Black joined the bohemia in dress and lifestyle, began moving in the intellectual circles of Bloomsbury and

Club 17,[22] went on a Girton Fellowship to Paris for her research and there immersed herself in the city's intellectual and artistic life, and, in 1920, ventured all by herself into post-revolutionary Russia on an audacious tour via the North Cape.[23] The vision Dora perceived when looking at the people (of the Communist Party politics she remained critical) was of a utopia come true: a new society created by the people for the people (see *TT*1 ch. 6). She realised that the course of History could be altered by ideas if people's belief in them were strong enough —that is, History was human-made, shaped by human consciousness (*TT*1 10), not— as was the prevalent assumption—an impersonal process determined by economic or material conditions. The latter could be changed if the beliefs and attitudes that had created them could be altered, that is "we need the past to set us free" (*The Religion* 247):

> On personal conduct, on our standards of personal relationship, man to woman, parents to children, are built the customs and laws of States and ultimately their national and international policy. It is here, then, with man and woman that we must begin. (*Hypatia* 78)

Modern patriarchal society then bore the hallmarks of male consciousness. The implications become clear in the light of the radical bio-psychological approach Dora developed in her writings from the 1920s onward,[24]

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[22] Club 17 or 1917 Club (in no. 4 Gerard Street, Soho) was founded by and for the "politically inclined" intellectuals in commemoration of the Russian October Revolution. Dora humorously described it as a place "to which—it is said—the aspiring unknown repaired to meet the 'arrived' and famous, while the latter stayed away to avoid such encounters" (*TT*1 66). Evelyn Waugh's elder brother Alec described it as "the rallying point of left-wing opinion", a place of conviviality that attracted a very heterogeneous crowd interested in debating unconventional issues concerning not only politics, but also the arts, literature and modern ideas (183).

[23] There Miss Black met and talked with people that became legendary, such as the American journalist John Reed, the anarchist Emma Goldman and the Communist revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai, who showed her what was being done for the emancipation of women.

[24] Throughout her life, Dora would contribute numerous articles reflecting her views to journals, magazines and newspapers; and from 1926 to 1931/2 on a regular basis

of which the following is a very rough outline.

Human beings are primarily biological organisms (animals), whose minds are body-bound. When consciousness and hence a search for meaning and purpose set in, the female of the species experienced her existence and self-propagation as meaningful partaking in Nature's creation of life, while the male, aware of his dependence on the female because of his physical needs (yet unaware or uncertain of his propagation), tried to escape from his biological bondage into his mental world and there find ways to control Nature—and by extension woman—(through myths, philosophy, religion, politics, science and technology), and to expand his self in space and time. The world he created with his mind became the mirror image of his split and hence unbalanced inner nature: mind over body, male over female, reason over emotions, mechanical over natural, etc. Of the many conflicts and tensions resulting thereof, war was just an extreme manifestation. By denying the importance of nature's forces on the grounds of a belief in the superior value of the mind and spirit (a dualism to which Descartes had subscribed philosophically) and by excessively harnessing them (of late through machines), the male of the species "turned his back on the creative life and inspiration that lay within himself and his partnership with woman" (*The Religion* 236). Reform and work for peace had to begin here, with man and woman. Feminist and pacifist objectives neatly coincide at this point as such a cooperative enterprise required that women be accepted as equal partners into a relationship that through its complementarity would be the beginning of social change—an acceptance that was all the more justified when based on our shared human nature:

> If we are to make peace between man and woman, and by their unity and partnership change the ideas that govern our politics and our outlook on the world, it is essential that men should make a more determined attempt to understand what

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to the Spanish paper *El Sol*. Books include *Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge* (1925); *The Right to Be Happy* (1927); *In Defence of Children* (1932); *The Religion of the Machine Age* (1983). The latter is the sum total of her thought on our modern machine age and how it came about.

> feminists are seeking (...). First and foremost, man or woman, we are human beings. (*HYP* 79)

Ideals versus Reality

Shared humanity, as may be recalled, became Brittain's leading argument against war. As has been shown, both her feminism and pacifism were rooted in her personal life history. They remained connected in the way she realised her feminist ambition of a career as a woman writer (in a male world), and used her pen to campaign for peace and women's rights. In the 1920s, she would write and lecture on women's equal rights issues such as birth control, education, employment, marriage and motherhood, while she vested her hopes for lasting peace, as already mentioned, in the promise of "collective security" offered by the League of Nations Union (see Mellown, "Reflections"; Gorham 176 ff). The question of peace to her at this point was a political affair best controlled by international organisations.

When she married the political scientist and Labour activist George Catlin in 1925, Brittain not only kept her maiden name (then unusual), but also managed to safeguard her feminist priorities by insisting on an unconventional arrangement in an outwardly conventional marriage: during the academic year, Catlin would fulfil his obligation with Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, while she remained in London, pursuing her career in the company of her close friend Winifred Holtby (see fn. 15). This "semi-detached" marriage, as she called it, suited her well in more than one sense: in Holtby she had all the support she needed to succeed in writing, while her friend's help enabled Brittain to prove her feminist claim that marriage and career were not incompatible (Gorham ch. 9).[25]

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In 1921, Dora had—quite against her will and feminist convictions, and only because she was in love—also agreed to contract a conventional marriage with the philosopher Bertrand Russell—an aristocrat and 20 years

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[25] For a study of Brittain's "semi-detached" marriage arrangement, see Katie Roiphe.

her senior—because she was pregnant with his first child, for whom he wanted to secure the right to the family's title.[26] Their one-year stay in pre-industrial China had, however, convinced her that their emotional bond was solid enough to warrant the kind of modern partnership she envisioned as the foundation for social reform: an enterprise for raising children, in which both would cooperate equally, while each was free to pursue personal inclinations on the understanding that monogamy was a patriarchal institution. Its many legal and moral constraints had proven detrimental to the kind of freedom that love in its various forms needed in order to be the positive force that overcame difference, and opened the way to mutual understanding and happiness:

> For love is *knowledge* of a person; a being on the side of a person; a concern for that person's uniqueness; a refusal to subjugate him (or her), unless by his own willing consent in love, to anyone else's needs but his own.
> (…) it can only be liberated by checks to power. (*In Defence* 32, 125)[27]

This was the understanding on which Dora accepted the conventional marriage mould. What is certain is that her life with Bertrand afforded the kind of comfort and amenities that enabled her to have a family *and* engage

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[26] Bertrand Russell had begun courting bright young Dora in 1919 when realising that she was willing to have children (contrary to his other lover at the time) (*TT*1 68 ff, 78; Monk 557 ff). Dora knew of his desire for children and did nothing to prevent pregnancy (*TT*1 78). Feeling protective towards him and soon in love, she willingly gave up her postgraduate studies in order to accompany him on a one-year lectureship stay in Peking, where she became pregnant. In her view, however, as she had once explained to Russell, "[c]hildren were entirely the concern of the mother" (*TT*1 68), a point which the late Victorian liberal did obviously not share. Russell's insistence on patriarchal rights, whatever his other "modern" views, was a clear warning, which Dora—much to her lifelong cost—did not heed.

[27] What sounds utterly romantic and surrealistic to us must here be understood as part of a quest for a happier life than traditional institutions had so far afforded. Dora (and Bertrand) were not the only ones to try out alternatives in the early decades of the twentieth century (see Roiphe). Some had been inspired by examples from Bloomsbury intellectuals, set earlier in the century, although these had initially been guided by a more aesthetic ideal (see Johnstone ch. 2).

in the campaigns she considered conducive to social reform: birth control for working-class women,[28] sexual reform,[29] and education. The latter comprised the pioneer project of a progressive school, *Beacon Hill*, which Dora and Bertrand Russell opened in 1927 in order to offer their own (John—born 1921, and Kate—born 1923) and other children the kind of democratic co-education that would create self-sufficient, whole human beings capable of contributing to social reform.[30] Regardless of hardships —and there were many after Bertrand Russell had left—Dora Russell continued to fight for a balanced society whenever the occasion arose, an activist and campaigner to the last.

As is well known, Vera Brittain joined Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union in 1936 (founded in 1934), after having become disillusioned with the League of Nations Union and its changing policies (Bennett 193).

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[28] In 1923 she joined a group of intellectuals who aimed at making birth control respectable by making it legal. Initial success led, in 1924, to the founding of the Workers' Birth Control Group, which continued campaigning into the 1930s, when birth-control information became increasingly available (*TT*1 171 ff).

[29] In 1929, Dora was co-organiser of the widely publicised *World League of Sexual Reform (on a Scientific Basis)* Congress in London (8 to 14 September). Its main organiser was the Harley Street gynaecologist Norman Haire. Incidentally, it was one of the few occasions where Vera and Dora crossed paths. As the recent author of *Halcyon, or the Future of Monogamy* (Kegan Paul, 1929), Vera had been invited as a minor speaker, presenting a paper on "The Failure of Monogamy". Although in favour of law reform and sex education to enlighten women in particular so that they could assume control of their lives, she was wary of pronouncements on fidelity/ infidelity in marriage, contrasting with Dora's outline of the need for love freed from conventional shackles in a marriage understood as partnership in "Marriage and Freedom" (see Bostridge loc. 4773-4794).

[30] Although initially run by both Russells, the school was Dora's project, as became evident when Bertrand left both the school and his second wife in 1932, unable to cope with the emotional strain that accompanied their "infidelities", which in Dora's case involved two children by another lover. The divorce was an ugly one in which Bertrand made use of all the male and aristocratic privileges he could command to make Dora's life miserable (*TT*1 243 ff; Monk 78-136). These hardships notwithstanding, she carried on with her project until war strictures forced her to close it down in 1943. For details about the school, see among others the second volume of Dora Russell's autobiography.

With this move her pacifism became unconditional, she renounced any form of war and her campaigns against war became associated with Christian values. It must have been one of the hardest periods in her writing career as she was quite alone in England (her two children had been shipped to the US), Winifred Holtby had died and her total opposition to a war that even former pacifists found necessary because of Hitler and his regime left her ostracized (see Gorham 250 ff). Writing was once more resorted to—this time using the literary device of explanatory letters to her son—as a means of coming to terms with her feelings of "humiliation", persecution and "loss of respectability", and "suffering", interpreted as a spiritual experience and way to deeper understanding (*Humiliation with Honor*). She kept up her campaign against the war, was founding member of the Bombing Restriction Committee (in opposition to the saturation bombing of German cities) and actively participated in PPU's Food Relief Campaign.

A life written and a life lived

As the case study of these two women goes to show, there is no simple way to peace. Even if, on the surface, aspects such as social class, age, gender, education, and historical context coincide in two cases, suggesting similar outlooks, personal factors are more decisive. Vera took suffering personally —her self-conscious awareness of sex discrimination in her parental home, her experience as a VAD nurse during the Great War—and derived her causes from there when the right words could be found (e.g. Olive Schreiner's appeal): campaigning for women's right to "labour" in the public (male) sphere, and opposition to the senseless destruction of human beings who had more in common than what kept them apart. To provide others with possible answers to questions in life based on her personal witness accounts became her mission and ambition—and her fulfilment when it led to fame and recognition. To this end she would readjust customary arrangements such as her marriage, while remaining in the conventional mould of respectability. Her stance during the Second World War was the only time when she conscientiously risked her safe haven for ulterior ends—and it was hard. No sooner had the war ended, than she asked herself: "How (…) could I use my one gift of interpretation through

writing and speaking to assist so many in such painful need?" (*TE* 380). Writing was her life, to be able to do so meant freedom, and the War had taught her how to use it so that it could serve as a personal testament for posterity.

Dora had grown up absorbing life through living before she made sense of it, and her approach to thinking and knowing makes this clear. In a letter to her husband Vera once poignantly observed, while working her way painfully through theory in preparation for her book on marriage: "I don't believe some of the writers—e.g. Mrs Russell—read anything much, but are simply acute observers" (qtd. in Gorham 212). Learning to understand life as a whole by living it was in many ways more important to Dora than trying to make sense of experiences through writing or reading books—to her books functioned as a source of inspiration and complimentary knowledge. What she learnt during her quest for alternatives to western society, which she held responsible for the recent wars, took a long while to be written—in fact, she was 89 when *The Religion of the Machine Age* came out. But the conclusions drawn from her early experiences—her humanist philosophy[31]—guided her in her multiple campaigns for the kind of social reforms, beginning with man and woman, that in her view would eventually lead to lasting peace. In the course of her all-comprehensive, idealistic pursuit she paid the price of marginalisation, especially when Bertrand Russell left her stranded, but she never gave up. Action bore the promise of change toward her ideals of "liberty and love"—freedom from patriarchal constraints, which would make love in its various forms the unifying force—that she identified with her Tamarisk Tree, unto the last.

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[31] Beverly Earles included Dora Russell as a humanist woman in her PhD dissertation "The Faith Dimension of Humanism", and published her analyses in two subsequent articles: "The Faith Dimension of Humanism" and "Outstanding Humanist Women—Dora Russell in Particular". Dora Russell's approach to human nature and history based on human consciousness was years ahead of her time. When in the 1990s the study of the human brain in action—and by extension of human consciousness—became possible with the help of advanced computer technology, important aspects of her philosophy found support in a number studies in the neurosciences. For details see M. Henriques.

In view of these differences between the two pacifists—Vera and Dora—it does not come as a surprise that Brittain's answer to Mrs Russell's request for an audience to explain her next project of a women's campaign for peace reads:

> I am so sorry to have to disappoint you but I have absolutely no time this summer for campaigns (…). I need every moment (…) for literary work. Not only is Gollancz publishing, next month, my book of TESTAMENT OF EXPERIENCE —the sequel to TESTAMENT OF YOUTH—but I have been commissioned to write (…) a short history of Women at Oxford (…).
> Incidentally, TESTAMENT OF EXPERIENCE contains (in the account of the original attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) a strong protest against nuclear warfare which might be useful for quotation. (Brittain to Russell, 15 May 1957)

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Abstract

In 1957, following an impressive protest march by women against nuclear bomb testing, the feminist and educator Dora Russell wrote to Vera Brittain congratulating her on her speech held on this occasion. Would she consider joining forces with other well-known women to organise women for peace nationally? Brittain had a different agenda—she joined forces, instead, with the CND-movement, which had been inspired by the women's protest march. And Mrs Russell went her own way.

This was one of the few instances of direct contact between two unusual women, born less than half a year apart, who shared an Edwardian middle-class upbringing, which they tried to leave behind when acting on their feminist convictions. Both successfully completed a university education—and in both cases, their fight for peace in later years was the outcome of what they had lived during the Great War. By looking at how each tried, in their various (autobiographical) narratives, to make sense of that experience and live accordingly, this essay intends to show how varied and personal the way to peace can be, and hence how hard it may always be for peace-minded people to achieve collectively what most people desired in 1918: No More War.

Keywords

Dora Russell; Vera Brittain; feminism; pacifism

Resumo

Em 1957, após uma notável marcha de protesto organizada por mulheres contra os testes de bombas nucleares, a feminista e educadora Dora Russell escreveu a Vera Brittain para a felicitar pelo discurso então feito. Aceitaria ela unir as suas forças às de outras mulheres reconhecidas para, a nível nacional, organizarem as mulheres para a paz? Brittain tinha outros objectivos—preferiu associar-se ao CND, ele próprio inspirado pela marcha de protesto das mulheres. E Mrs Russell seguiu o seu caminho.

Foi uma das poucas ocasiões de contacto directo entre duas mulheres fora do comum, nascidas com menos de meio-ano de diferença, partilhando uma educação de classe média Eduardiana, que tentaram deixar para trás ao praticarem as suas convicções feministas. Ambas tinham concluído a educação universitária com sucesso—e, em ambos os casos, a sua luta pela paz em anos posteriores resultara daquilo que tinham vivido durante a Grande Guerra. Observando como cada uma delas procurou, nas suas diversas narrativas (autobiográficas), encontrar um sentido para tais experiências e viver de acordo com os seus princípios, este ensaio pretende mostrar como o caminho para a paz pode ser variado e pessoal, logo como pode sempre ser difícil, para quem procura a paz, alcançar colectivamente o que a maioria desejava em 1918: Guerra Nunca Mais.

Palavras-Chave

Dora Russell; Vera Brittain; feminismo; pacifismo

From Court-Martial to Carnival: Film's Recreation of the Great War Fifty Years On

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From Court-Martial to Carnival: Film's Recreation of the Great War Fifty Years On

As the centenary of the First World War draws to its conclusion (it has been protracted because there have been so many landmarks to recall and commemorate in the period 1914-18), it might be profitable to look back at some of its events and antecedents. In Britain, the commemorations were largely orchestrated by the Imperial War Museum.[1] Academia has not been far behind in organizing conferences and lectures to cast light on every aspect of the Great War. Commercial enterprises have also noticed the occasion, but awareness of the catastrophe of 1914-18 is so much a part of the DNA of the twentieth century that one could argue that interest in the warfare has been general over the entire century rather than concentrated around its centenary.

This article is concerned with the nature of representation of the Great War. Historically, this has entailed studying certain evolving ideas about responsibilities but within the context of a very stable iconography about the conflict itself. As enumerated by Pierre Sorlin, the prevailing images are those of the trench, the night patrol through barbed wire and the "disfigured landscape, with broken trunks, ruins, shell-holes and craters filled with water (…). And above all, there was the omnipresent mud". These are stock images, neither true nor false, but necessarily partial and

[1] Itself a product of the First World War, the National War Museum was proposed to Lloyd George in a letter by the financier Sir Alfred Mond and founded in 1917. Renamed the Imperial War Museum in 1921 and subsequently rebranded IWM in 2012, it was responsible for archiving and curating all relevant material associated with British military history post-1914. The IWM has been, to use its own formulation "leading the First World War Centenary Cultural Partnership and Programme" ("First World War") with a full array of commemorative activities (exhibitions, readings, seminars, screenings, concerts, etc.).

limited (Sorlin 20-21). Ian Becket argues that "[i]n the public mind, the memory of modern war is now largely encapsulated in a series of visual references. A campaign, even an entire war, can be summed up in a single image" (Beckett 87).

For him, the images of the First World War are those largely derived from Geoffrey Malins and J. B. McDowell's *The Battle of the Somme*, a documentary widely seen after its release on 10 August 1916, supplemented by a rich array of still pictures in circulation. While these images are undeniably grounded in material reality, it is possible to argue that narratives of the war have also been constructed around social conceptions which have changed over time. Along with the idea of generalized senseless slaughter has grown the picture of working-class Tommies going over the top to certain death, junior officers brainwashed by public school educations into blindly following orders and senior officers (invariably of another generation) remaining safely out of danger issuing those orders. This article will argue that the rigidity of this picture was the product of a certain historical moment and of a certain ideological context, roughly corresponding to the high-water mark of leftist ascendency in the west (broadly-speaking between 1955 and 1975). This period is also the time around the fiftieth anniversary of the First World War, which saw a surge in interest in the subject both for the usual commemorative reasons but also because witnesses to the war were elderly and this was one of the last opportunities to obtain their oral testimony. The combination of new currents in historical revisionism (some have argued that Alan Clark's book about the generals *The Donkeys* (1961) was part of a new taste for *popular* histories) and the urgency of obtaining fresh first-hand information created the conditions for a reappraisal of the Great War.

My argument would be that earlier reactions to, and representations of, the war, were more "neutralist". Two foundational texts about experience of the war were Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928, first translated into English in 1929) and R. C. Sheriff's stage play[2] *Journey's End* (1928). As popular successes, both were made into major

[2] *Journey's End* had an unbroken two-year run at the Apollo Theatre in London, starring a young Laurence Olivier.

motion pictures in 1930. Both have a common theme in the horror of war and the death of ideals and consist of narratives in which their *dramatis personae* are progressively eliminated by the attrition of combat. Remarque's characters are common German soldiers and Sheriff's are junior officers, but in both cases there is strangely little blame ascribed to anyone. In Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet* (1930) and James Whale's *Journey's End* (1930), the theme is still the Universalist "pity of war", the idea of "never again" that had informed the formation of the League of Nations in 1920. For this reason, Remarque's book was one of the very first that Hitler banned and then sought to burn. Nowhere in these texts were there ageing generals back at the chateau quaffing champagne.

Another major historical consequence of the Great War was its incidental function as a catalyst for the Russian Revolution in 1917. Following the establishment of the Soviet Union, there was then a haven for alternative explanations for the causes and consequences of the war. Class-based analyses of the war were actively promoted in the cause of fomenting international socialism; the sacrifices made unequally during the war were a ready instance of social injustice and the evils of capitalism, usually in the form of imperialist greed. These positions remained present but largely recessive in the 1930s as the international situation deteriorated and national defensive interests took priority. The war of 1939-45 changed the perspective once again. Here was a war where right and wrong seemed more clearly delineated, especially following the exposure of the Nazi death camps. This was a defensive people's war where combatants and non-combatants alike had a better idea of what they were fighting against, even though political allegiances remained muddy. Also gone was the sense of irrational stalemate – this was a war full of mobility, of contrasting theatres of operations. The determination felt during the war and elation felt when it was over gave rise to a plethora of novels and films evoking excitement as well as danger, from the River Plate to the River Kwai. In the aftermath of 1945, the Cold War set in, bringing with it censorship and a sense of fear about interpreting geopolitical affairs too liberally. As McCarthyite persecution began to abate and as the 1939-45 war established itself as providing adventurous derring-do and uplift, so there was a return to the Great War as the place where the west's iniquitous behaviour could be laid bare. The oral history movement sought to register the past not in terms

of grand narratives but rather as a corrective to those narratives. Towards the end of the 1980s, another generation of revisionist historians would notice that things were not so black-and-white.[3]

The examples chosen for a leftist representation of the Great War in film culture are four works made over a 14-year period: Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964), Richard Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971)—two American and two British films. To put these films in context, 1960s television documentary treatments show that the neutralist position on the Great War was still official discourse.[4]

Paths of Glory, released before Christmas 1957 in the USA and UK, is an important opening salvo in the fight to claim the First World War

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[3] Some 87 British generals were killed on active service in the First World War, even though they were under order to stay out of danger. Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of British forces and something of a hate-figure of popular WWI mythology, worked 18 hours a day, drank only water and lived simply. He spent much of his time in forward positions and in 1918 kept his headquarters on a train so he could move around his active service units. In contrast, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, commander of allied forces in the Second World War, made his headquarters in the Palace of Versailles yet no one would think of calling him a champagne general.

[4] As represented by the BBC documentary *The Great War* (broadcast in 26 episodes from 30 May to 22 November 1964). Made as a co-production with the Canadian and the Australian Broadcasting Corporations, this was a kind of validation of the British Commonwealth as a vital entity with a shared history, just at the moment that Britain was renouncing its imperial claim on all its former colonies. The BBC advertised for war participants and interviewed widely for the series. The other important organization involved was the Imperial War Museum, which made available to the series much of its archival material never before seen. Eight million people regularly tuned in to this documentary in Great Britain, and one episode (the fourth) commanded an audience of eleven million (or 17 per cent of the population). In emulation of this series, CBS in America also made a 26-episode documentary entitled *World War One* using US archival resources, and this was broadcast between 22 September 1964 and 18 April 1965. The BBC series is also reputed to have influenced the making of the classic ITV documentary series about the 1939-45 conflict, *World at War* (1974), produced by Jeremy Isaacs. In view of the impressive viewing figures achieved by these series, it is reasonable to suggest that the conventional establishment view of the Great War, centring on generalized misadventure, was still more dominant than the rival leftist view.

for conspiracy and class conflict. Because the film addresses issues in the French army, and France was in the throes of a painful decolonization process, the film could not be released in France until 1975. Mutinies and the disobeying of orders had been a feature of the war, but neither they, nor the way they had been dealt with, was widely advertised, and would certainly not have been the welcome subject of a film. Kubrick's film was based on the 1935 novel *Paths of Glory* by Humphrey Cobb, who had served in the Canadian army during the war, and who had written his book picking up on 1934 posthumous exonerations of four French soldiers executed for disobeying orders in 1915. Shifting the focus of the war from conflict between enemy combatants to conflict between members of the same national and military force was the common element in subsequent anti-war treatments. Your own side bombing you is the trope of both Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, written at the beginning and the end of the 1960s respectively. Kubrick recalled having read Cobb's novel and acquired the rights from his widow, in the form of a screenplay worked on by Jim Thompson. Thompson's script was further adapted by Calder Willingham and Kubrick himself; these three men, together with their star Kirk Douglas, were all variously targets of McCarthyite suspicion and enemies of the blacklist. Dore Schary of MGM, who had originally backed the project, was fired when the studio refused to back another anti-war film, following its losses on *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951). Made by Douglas's production company, Byrna, the film subsequently received the backing of United Artists and went into production with a budget of a million dollars. It was shot almost entirely in Bavaria using German locations and German extras from a local academy.

Cobb's novel focuses on the war experiences of his three sacrificed common soldiers, starting and finishing with them. Colonel Dax (the Kirk Douglas protagonist) is a minor figure, and the generals are also recessive. In this way, the pity of war shares the frame with a narrative of victimization. The screenplay brings the generals to the front of the story making hierarchy and careerism its driving force. The war itself is wonderfully contextualized by sublime tracking shots of the trenches and action sequences of great complexity. The enemy is made abstract by deploying an impregnable military objective bizarrely called "the anthill" and by the

total absence of any German soldiers. Sending men to take the anthill at any cost is what each member of the chain of command must relay to his incredulous subordinates and this is duly dramatized. Kagan argues that the story is also symptomatic of the Eisenhower-McCarthy years, being "full of pointless brutalization, absurd and arbitrary power, and smothering conformity" (65). When Dax demurs, he is threatened with removal, which he declines out of loyalty to his men. Generals Broulard[5] (the politician and strategist) and Mireau (the disciplinarian careerist) are marked as class enemies in their love of power and riches (Kubrick makes extensive use of opulent Bavarian palaces for his scenes of military politicking). Mireau is destroyed by his readiness to fire on his own men, but Dax is no less destroyed by his making clear what he thinks of his superior officers. And, in any event, the surviving members of Dax's company are being sent back to carry on a deadly and unwinnable campaign.

The central event of the film is a court-martial, the outcome of which is determined by *realpolitik* and the closed-door declarations of the generals. The French army has contemplated the Roman practice of "decimation" when a tenth of a fighting force is ritually executed for poor military performance to motivate the remaining nine-tenths. Dax is able to negotiate this number down to three symbolic victims. In a subsequent sequence, we see a brave soldier selected for execution by an army superior whose cowardice he has witnessed. The victims are really only introduced in the latter part of the film and they are not given the usual sentimental treatment. Even the brave man cracks up under the arbitrariness of it all. Visually, the trial is characterized by the grandiosity of its palatial setting and by the empty formalism of military procedure. Any attempt to contextualize, relativize or humanize the soldiers' conduct is brushed aside and the verdict delivered without reflection. Naremore (81) claims that *Paths of Glory* reflects Kubrick's "interest in the underlying irrationality of order". The execution in the palace grounds also emphasizes the distance between the generals' and the soldiers' experiences of war. The film ends

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[5] The despicable Broulard is played by Adolf Menjou, an actor who had agreed to testify in the HUAC hearings. Bertolt Brecht, who along with Dalton Trumbo had refused, is a major influence on the radical stylizations of film treatments of the Great War.

with the surviving soldiers carousing in a tavern, as we learn of their imminent return to the front lines. There they listen sentimentally to the folk song of a German barmaid—the only enemy national in the film and herself nervously afraid. The film suggests that their fate will be that of the French regulars who appeared in Abel Gance's film *J'accuse* (1919), made a few months before the end of the war. When the (film) shooting stopped, many of them were sent back up the line and were killed before the film could be released.

Unjust death by firing squad contrasted with unjust death by military incompetence and mismanagement in the field is one of the themes of Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964). Like *Paths of Glory*, *King and Country* is aware of the difficulty of affirming the value of individual lives in the face of undiscriminating mass slaughter. But while Kubrick's film deals with the manoeuvring of the power-hungry, Losey's is much more concerned with the operations of justice. It invests much more intensively in an individuated victim. *Paths of Glory* equivocates on whether cowardice on any significant scale has taken place at all. *King and Country* seeks to rationalize and justify cowardice in the given context of the Great War. In order to do this, the trial must be more than perfunctory, even if its outcome is just as pre-determined. As the posthumous pardons granted to WWI mutineers show, the military was prepared to concede the rationality of fear when the conflict was over; just not while the military outcome was still at issue. As Broulard says to Dax, "You're an idealist and I pity you, as I would the village idiot, for fighting in a war that we've got to win. Those men didn't fight, so they were shot".

King and Country is based on an episode from a novel, *Return to the Woods* (1955) by J. L. Hodson, in which a man, Hargreaves, returns to Passchendaele after the passage of both world wars and recalls an event from 1917, when he was the defender of a deserter. From this 1950s perspective, Hargreaves can see the point of military valour, of military virtues in general. The deserter episode was selected from the novel's range of war reminiscences by playwright John Wilson for his pacifist stage drama *Hamp* (1964). Losey's regular collaborator Evan Jones then reinforced the anti-war theme in his adapted screenplay. It was budgeted at 86,000 pounds and shot at Shepperton Studios in three weeks (Rahm 163). The title *King and Country* was affixed in post-production to complement

the opening pan around the Royal Artillery War Memorial in Hyde Park, London, with its stark representation of sacrifice. Patriotic commitment performs the same function in this film that literary citation from Gray's "Elegy" does for *Paths of Glory*—they are both smokescreens for the highroad to meaningless death. Although the characters are trapped in their war-assigned roles in *Paths*, the film is open and expansive, cutting from the battlefield to airy châteaux; the micro-budgeted *King and Country*, on the other hand, is claustrophobic and tautly dramatic. The trenches are a muddy stage set under constant rain; this later mutates into a muddy improvised prison and courtroom. The film begins with Hamp already a captive. The war is represented by the hellish conditions and by the noises off.

Once again, common soldiers have been asked to show extraordinary endurance and courage. But Hamp has experienced a kind of breakdown and simply walked away from the front line. He is easily caught and returned to his unit for punishment. Much of the film concerns the nature of his mental state, with the regimental medical officer particularly indicted for failing to diagnose shell-shock. But everyone is aware that these are general, not specific conditions; no one can find much specific extenuation for Hamp's behaviour.

What differentiates *King and Country* from *Paths of Glory* thematically is the extent to which the film invests in legal procedure. Without being unduly sympathetic to Hamp, the army organises a proper field court-martial. Neither the defence (Dirk Bogarde as Hargreaves) nor the prosecution is perfunctory—witnesses are duly produced and no one seems bent on either convicting or exonerating Hamp. The scale of the film is intimist since everyone seems to know each other on a personal level. Hamp is not a very compelling witness on his own behalf—conceding the facts of the case and not offering much commitment to soldiering, despite being a volunteer from 1914. The verdict of guilty, but with a recommendation of mercy, is actually a fair one on the evidence. It is only when the telegraph comes from HQ saying that the company is to be sent back up to the front and that an example needs to be set that we sense the generals back in the château. The ordered execution is carried out with compassion rather than cynicism. His unit commander administers an injection of morphine, and the firing squad to a man aim to miss him.

Hargreaves, his defender, puts an end to proceedings by shooting him in the head with a pistol.

Tonally, there are decisive Brechtian elements in *King and Country*. The film uses documentary stills throughout to evoke the wider context of the war, presumably those supplied by the Imperial War Museum.[6] These cutaways provide a political context to the micro-action. Secondly, there is a plangent harmonica soundtrack to the film by Larry Adler, suggesting music made by the common soldiers themselves. And lastly, the Tommies provide a kind of ironic chorus to the main action. We hear them commenting around the fringes of the trial; we see them challenging the few privileges of their officers; catching and trying a rat (in open mockery of the legal proceedings) and formally executing it. On the night before Hamp's execution, they break into his cell and carouse with him till morning, ensuring that he is drunk throughout his greatest period of suffering. This trench *bacchanalia* ensures that when the officer padre comes to offer him communion, Hamp vomits violently. These elements of farce are carrying the film away from realistic drama towards parody and burlesque. These features were relatively common on the English stage at the time.[7]

These features contrast with the more Socratic arguments of the field officers. Together with the associative play of still images, there is a game of literary citation, reminding audiences that the Great War has been perceived as a poet's war. The film opens with a voiceover from Hamp (Tom Courtney) reciting A. E. Housman's "Here Dead We Lie":[8] This is the expected pity of war declaration, which calls us to sympathise with

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[6] As well as the stills provided by the Museum, there is a certain amount of artful morphing between these photographs and the fictional scene.

[7] We find them for example in John Arden's anti-imperial, anti-military *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), which its author describes as "a realistic, but not a naturalistic play".

[8] Here dead we lie because we did not choose
To live and shame the land from which we sprung.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
But young men think it is, and we were young.

Hamp. At the end of the film, the commanding officer cites the nihilistic opening lines of Masefield's poem "Biography".[9] Hargreaves, however, has the soundest grasp of the general situation. He quotes Lewis Carroll's "The Lobster Quadrille": "There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail". The absurdity of the war requires the explanatory resources of nonsense verse, and this is the direction that treatments of the Great War would progressively take.

The working-class insouciance of *King and Country's* supporting cast provides the main satirical attack of both the stage musical (first performed 19 March 1963) and the film musical (1969) versions of *Oh What a Lovely War!* The idea for the stage play came from research[10] into the popular songs of the Great War, identified as authentic proletarian culture and a form of political resistance. This work was taken up and adapted for the stage by Joan Littlewood and Gerry Raffles of Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in London. Both Littlewood and Raffles had been under official surveillance in this period for their known communist sympathies. Theatre Workshop was built around the actors' own research and performing improvisation. Even after a script had been prepared, it was torn up and reconstructed around the songs and skits. Essentially it was to be the common soldier's view of the war, as represented by the working-class Smith family—no strategy, no greater good, just a sense of what it was like to be cannon fodder. The production refused to dignify the military with uniforms. The cast wore Pierrot clown costumes, and the aesthetic was that of an end-of-the-pier entertainment. The didactic element was provided by projected images and "an electronic newspaper" above and behind the performers, relating war statistics,

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[9] When I am buried, all my thoughts and acts
Will be reduced to lists of dates and facts,
And long before this wandering flesh is rotten
The dates which made me will be all forgotten.

[10] The fruit of this research was a radio play entitled *The Long, Long Trail* by Charles Chilton, first broadcast in December 1961. Chilton had found much of his material in a 1917 book called *Tommy's Tunes* which recorded the soldiers' propensity for adapting popular songs with contemporary bawdy and insubordinate lyrics.

particularly levels of casualties.[11] However, censorship of a kind was waiting in attendance on the play's commercial success. It transferred to the West End later in 1963 and thence to Broadway in 1964, each shift moving it further away from its early radicalism. It is relatively easy for a musical to shed the values of protest and take on the celebratory tone of performance. By the time it was in movie production in the summer of 1968, it had lost the anger of its conception and become a creation of the theatrical establishment.

The film was the directorial debut of distinguished thespian Richard Attenborough, future President of RADA and BAFTA. Attenborough gathered together the royalty of British film and theatre (Olivier, Gielgud, Richardson, Redgrave, Hawkins, Mills, More) to play the historic figures in the run up to the outbreak and conduct of the war, overwhelming the film with star turns. The exclamation mark was moved for the film title. *Oh What a Lovely War!* became *Oh! What a Lovely War*, hinting at the possibility that the war could be rendered lovely. The clownish mockery was further undermined by restoring the war-time uniforms and going for exact period detail. Literalism and symbolism jostle unevenly in the film. The tonal quality of end-of-pier frivolity is replaced by a real end-of-pier scenario, as many sequences are shot on Brighton's west pier. The use of colour is also very discordant in the film, as it carries the narrative away from those IWM pictures towards something more festive. The film has trace elements of its Brechtian original, in the everyman character of Joe Melia, who talks and sings directly to camera and who hands out symbolic poppies. Attenborough was very definite that there should be no blood in the film, which would be fine if he had not opened out half the film to greater realism. The banner headlines of the cost of war-time sacrifice and suffering, which made the Theatre Workshop production so indignant, are more muted in the film. Additionally, the film attempts to deliver a history lesson, offering dramatized exchanges between its famous *personae*. There are heavy-handed pastiches of upper-class indifference to suffering (a

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[11] The famous pacifist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote to say that he was surprised that it was allowed on the London stage. The leftist Oxford Historian A. J. P. Taylor was an historical advisor to the production and when he came to publish *The First World War*: *An Illustrated History* in 1963, he dedicated it to Joan Littlewood.

gratuitous scene between Dirk Bogarde and Susanna York comes to mind) and a great deal of waltzing, dining and drinking from the generals. Sir Douglas Haig (John Mills), for example, is seen taking tickets for the pier, intriguing with other generals at a ball and directing the war from a helter-skelter on the pier.

The film's exuberance is in sharp contrast to the control and focus of *King and Country*. Adler's stark harmonica music is replaced by a tendency to drop into song and dance in a manner associated with the highly professional film musical rather than the artisanal energy of an East End sing-along. Frequently, when not going for show-stoppers, it descends into arrant sentimentality. The production values are those of Paramount Pictures, who financed the film. Perhaps some of its waywardness can be put down to the historical moment of its making, that tempestuous summer of 1968. It was shot in Brighton and in the South Downs in Sussex. Students from the newly opened University of Sussex[12] were used as extras on the film.

This was indeed the age of the contemporary anti-war artwork, not focused on historical reconstruction as such but very much addressing the issues[13] of the day. Although two of the three films here discussed were American-financed, they were mostly careful to keep US troops out of the picture. US soldiers burst onto the pier in *Lovely War* in an aggressive march-past (to the tune of "Over There") and jostles the startled British officers but otherwise Americans play no part in the representation of the war.

The shift to the carnivalesque in anti-war plays and films of the 60s is the result of the failure of reason to explain what had happened.

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[12] The University of Sussex was to gain a reputation as a hot-bed of student radicalism in the late 60s and 70s. Its students were particularly active in their opposition to the Vietnam War.

[13] Robert Murphy cites a number of anti-war films from the second half of the 1960s (7): *The Blue Max* (1966), *The Night of the Generals* (1967), *How I Won the War* (1967), *The Long Day's Dying* (1968) and Tony Richardson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968)—this last being the one that most closely resembles *Lovely War* in tone. Paramount also released the film version of Heller's *Catch-22* exactly a year after *Lovely War* came out and there could be little doubt that the film was directly confronting the war in Vietnam in the shape of the iniquities of the American army.

The court-room dramas of the earlier period attempt to understand the military's treatment of their own personnel in conventional rationalist terms but collapse before the overwhelming irrationality of the historical context—generals shelling their own troops, rats having a longer life-expectancy than men, soldiers asked to charge positions known to be impregnable, daily casualties too large to fit on scoreboards, women willing their menfolk to the slaughter. Savage indignation, the supposed motivation for satire, is somewhat mitigated by the conventions of song and dance. Theatre Workshop's choice of popular song, undercut by the troops' own scatological lyrics, was a way of channeling that anger, but there are always risks in any entertainment form. For example, towards the film's climax, we see a church service at which hymns are sung. The more respectable part of the congregation sing "Onward Christian soldiers" while the rank and file sing "We are the rag-time Infantry"; subsequently, the choir sing "What a friend we have in Jesus" while the soloist sings "When this lousy war is over". These polished musical performances cancel each other out, creating thematic dissonance. Wandering through the scene is the typical English rose Elizabeth May Smith (Angela Thorne), now a battle hospital nurse. All pretence of a working-class identity is dropped as she speaks in voice-over in the clipped vowels of the British patrician classes. Attenborough confessed that his film lacked the "virulence" of the class conflict of the stage original—he mentions for example that Joan Littlewood wanted nothing to do with the film, believing that commercial cinema simply could not do the job.

If the challenge in all these representations of the Great War was to convey the extent of its madness, realism was proving to be ineffective and song and dance only of mixed value. What was required was a descent into the madness. In the madness was to be found the indignation and the politics. In 1964, Dalton Trumbo adapted his own novel *Johnny Got his Gun* (1939) for the cinema. Trumbo had formed a friendship with the Spanish director Luis Buñuel while they were both in exile in Mexico and he collaborated on the script and it was intended Buñuel should be its director. He was an acknowledged master of screen surrealism for political ends, and *Johnny* was a book that had been written largely for a political purpose. Trumbo was a committed communist for most of the 1930s. He wrote his pacifist novel about the First World War in 1939 mainly to

keep America out of a European conflict. The book was successful precisely because America at the time was deeply wary of engagement. In 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Trumbo turned around and suppressed his novel in order to get the USA into the war. The consequence of this was a blacklisting for Trumbo, and a life lived on the move until he could reemerge in the 1960s as the screenwriter of *Spartacus* (1960)— Kubrick and Douglas's follow-up film to *Paths of Glory*— and Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960).[14]

The stimulus for the movie adaptation of *Johnny* was clearly the Vietnam War—the pacifist cause was once again running high and in the case of Vietnam the conduct of the war was nightly being shown and debated on US television. The other element of the *zeitgeist* that made a movie version propitious was the emergence of a drug culture. The peace movement and drug culture were almost synonymous in America. The sorts of access to a higher reality which were claimed by drug users were, at least amongst the young, laying siege to the mainstream in the mid-1960s and so it was possible to return to the First World War as a phantasmagoria *par excellence*. The main character of *Johnny* is a veteran so pumped with medically-administered drugs that he can range freely over his war-time experience as a kind of hallucination. It is a pity that Buñuel did not remain with the project; it took so long to raise the finance through small independent investors[15] that it had in the end to be directed by Trumbo himself, a first-time director at 66.

Johnny has two connections with *Lovely War.* The first is its opening credits containing stills of the crowned heads of Europe consorting together. The second is its musical reference. The song playing over the arrival of the Yankees in *Lovely War* is George M. Cohan's "Over There",[16]

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[14] Trumbo is thought to have been a script doctor on Preminger's *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (1955), about an airman veteran of the First World War who dares to question the wisdom of US generals in respect of the future of air power and who is hounded out of the military for challenging army and navy entrenched interests. This film is a harbinger of the anti-militarist films to come.

[15] See Cook for the film's problematic financing and release (305-9).

[16] There is a third if one remembers that the actor James Cagney, who played George M. Cohan in the successful film musical *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) dir. Michael

a rousing recruiting song penned in 1917 during the first days of American entry into the war. Despite the intervening three years of carnage, the song manages to maintain the patriotic tone[17] of summer 1914. So *Johnny Got his Gun*, both book 1939 and film 1971, are about what happened next to its protagonist Joe Bonham. Given the novel's political history, it could only have been filmed in a climate of rampant protest. When the novel was republished in 1970 to accompany the preparation of the film, Trumbo added an addendum to his 1959 introduction relating the book's anti-war theme to the situation in Vietnam. This laments the discontinuation of the practice of issuing official figures on war disfigurement.[18]

Trumbo's strategy for addressing the horror of war is to concentrate on disability as a state of being. There is precisely one scene in the trenches (presented in flashback and then reprised in a fuller version) in this film. Joe is ordered to bury the corpse of a Bavarian caught on the wire. He and his unit are shelled as they flee the burial, he dives into a water-filled crater, there is flash and the screen goes black. Thereafter, the real time of the film is taken up with medical treatments, the behaviour of medical personnel

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Curtiz, had also played Joe Bonham in the radio play made from *Johnny Got his Gun*, broadcast on 9 March 1940.

[17] Johnnie, get your gun
Get your gun, get your gun
Take it on the run
On the run, on the run
Hear them calling, you and me
Every son of liberty
Hurry right away
No delay, go today
Make your daddy glad
To have had such a lad
Tell your sweetheart not to pine
To be proud her boy's in line.

[18] "If there are no concrete figures, at least we are beginning to get comparative ones. Proportionately, Vietnam has given us eight times as many paralytics as World War II, three times as many totally disabled, 35 per cent more amputees (…).

But exactly how many hundreds or thousands of the dead-while-living does that give us?" (Trumbo xx-xxi)

and Joe's speculations about what has happened and what is happening to him, his memories and his hallucinatory experiences. The book *Johnny* can deal with these matters straightforwardly but the inwardness of the narrative is a problem for the film. Trumbo adopts a technical as well as an imaginative approach. The hospital sequences are in black and white, the memory sequences are in a rich saturated colour and the fantasy sequences are in a gauzy washed-out colour. Joe is mentally dealing with his feelings about his past life and how it has been abruptly cut off. Secondly, he is dealing with his (and Trumbo's) feeling about war in general. The horror-of-war sequences take a specifically carnivalesque direction, a struggle between Joe's desire to make himself an exemplar of war and the army's desire to hide him away. Joe's fondest wish is to be a sideshow freak in a travelling circus, "a piece of meat that keeps on living". In fantasy sequence, we see his father and his mother, as fairground people, proceeding through the desert inviting others to pay 15 cents to see "Joe Bonham the self-supporting basket case".

In the black and white sequences, Joe's struggle is to show that he is sentient, given that his doctors have declared him brain-dead, only capable of maintaining heart and lung functions. Having no arms, legs or face, he cannot communicate and is only capable of head movements declared to be merely reflexes. His limited triumph comes when he manages to communicate through Morse code nods—but when the military learns that he wishes to be presented in public, they resolve to continue hiding him away. He then begs to be killed, which they also refuse to do. It appears that the military respect neither the sanctity of life nor of death. Remember that Joe was blown apart performing a burial that made no sense in that context. This form of naked conspiracy against the interest and wishes of soldiers is what underpins the anti-war movements of 1914-75. The fact that Trumbo's WWI generals are also doctors in this tale is most telling. The film ends with Joe leaving to live out his days in an ever-darkening room without human contact or understanding, enacting a particularly savage realization of Conrad's dictum that "we live, like we dream, alone". The film's concluding caption is:

> WAR DEAD SINCE 1914: over 80,000,000
> MISSING OR MUTILATED: over 150,000,000
> *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*

The memory sequences are designed to give us a sense of the potential for life lost. They are however extraordinarily keyed in to Trumbo's own experience.[19] The over-determined father sequences are understandable in terms of a generational conflict that was surely present during the First World War, but which became acute during Vietnam when America was riven by distinctly pro- and anti-war generations. However, there is too much specific grievance in that motif to make it work well alongside the political message.

The fantasy sequences are remarkable for their boldness in an American film. Trumbo uses Donald Sutherland, a prominent anti-war campaigner, as Jesus in two extended scenes—the first is when he plays cards with the troops who are marked for slaughter. A metaphor throughout the film is that life is gambling and that the longer you are in the game, the more certain you are to lose. Christ's card-playing buddies, including Joe, have already lost and so they protest vainly about it. The second sequence is of Jesus in his carpenter's shop making cartloads of white crosses for graves. There Joe seeks personal advice from Jesus, but Sutherland's Jesus is a curiously reticent and resigned figure. He tells Joe he should leave because "you're a particularly unlucky young man" and that "it's cruel to pretend that anyone could help you". At the beginning of the film there is a certain amount of religious discourse about the nature of reality and of the spirit, and the insubstantiality of the material—Joe's mother (played by blacklistee Marsha Hunt) is aligned with this part of his upbringing. By stripping Christ of all transcendental significance beyond his cultural value as a symbol, the film reinforces the supremacy of the material, Joe's material condition of dismemberment, from which all else flows. A brief

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[19] Almost everything that Joe recalls is an incident from Trumbo's early family life, particularly the scenes with his father, which are the ones most closely related to the war polemic. His father, expresses disappointment with his own life and his own smallness or mediocrity, particularly with a critical inability ever to make money, declares his son to be similarly mediocre and then says: "For democracy, any man would give his only begotten son". The film treads a fine line between memoir and didacticism and the father is one of its problem areas. Trumbo, for instance, insisted on shooting the scene of Joe's father's death in the very room where his own father died. Joe's loss of his father's fishing pole, the only thing he says has any real value to him, clearly has some phallic significance.

shot where we see Christ driving a train full of the dead with a white scarf flowing out behind him is a scene conceived by Buñuel. Trumbo himself appears in the film as a mustachioed philosopher arguing that war can be rational. Just as matter exposes spirit, so unreason prevails over reason in this didactic Brechtian sequence.

These films are therefore a sample of the newly-emerged counter-culture's position on wars past and present. They were made or heavily influenced by exiled or blacklisted directors and writers using material from the First World War to shape an argument about how war had helped to occlude the reality of class struggle. Their strategy was largely to ignore the official enemy and concentrate on what leaders were asking of their subordinates. They assert, as a conclusion drawn from 1914-18, the irrelevance of courage in combat in the face of stupidity and overwhelming adversity. The duplicity of recruitment and the rigged nature of judicial process are foregrounded in the earlier pictures; later ones focus on the sufferings of survivors and those left behind. Much of recent historiography has been concerned with the effects of the war on the home front.

It is tempting to argue that the counter-culture's view of the First World War then became the hegemonic one. A remake of Sheriff's *Journey's End* transposed to the Flying Corp, *Aces High* (1976), directed by Jack Gold from a screenplay by Howard Barker, has the same atmosphere of doomed youth as its original but this time it interpolates pompous generals who, indifferent to the feelings of subordinates, send them to their deaths. This stereotype was so well established that it could be used as the basis for the comedy TV show *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC 1989), where, far from impugning cowardice, we are expected to empathize with the central characters' efforts to be sent home. Another indicator of the counter-culture's appropriation of the war had occurred a year before, when the thrash metal band Metallica acquired the rights to the film *Johnny got his Gun* to feature in their video of the anti-war anthem "One"[20] from the album … *And Justice for All* (1988).

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[20] The band found it was cheaper to purchase the film than to pay royalties. In the seven-and-a-half-minute video, scenes from the film with dialogue play over the music and lyrics in a mêlée of despair and nihilism.

However, we do still continue to argue over the Great War's meaning and to apportion responsibilities differently. When screenwriter and novelist William Boyd put together his own film *The Trench* in 1999, about the final days before the Battle of the Somme, the plot had returned to a more neutralist position.[21] The ordinary soldier was still the principal sufferer but officers were not so clearly their tormentors. The 2017 film version of *Journey's End*, directed by Saul Dibb, is grim but not particularly rancorous. Reappraisal of events as momentous as those of the Great War is natural and inevitable. Popular stereotypes come under pressure from these reappraisals, albeit more slowly. The centenary has seen many television documentaries, including the revisionist *Dan Snow's Battle of the Somme* (2014) and Snow's mini-series *Passchendaele 100* (2017), which ask us to look at the generals and their tactics more soberly. They share the tone of the 2017 *Journey's End* in being closer to the 1930 film than to any of the 1960s treatments of the war. For example, critic Chris Packham writes about the recent version of *Journey's End*: "Though set at a specific moment in time, the film could be about terminal cancer patients or condemned prisoners, a deeply felt catalog of the behaviors of men who know they're about to die".

As the Great War passes from living memory and memorial into the history books, it will be harder to retain the anger and frustration that its participants and their immediate children felt so keenly about the first technologized and industrialized war. The evidence would seem to suggest that anger and indignation have about the same life-span as a man.

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Abstract

From the vantage-point of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Great War, it is useful to remember that there was a revival of interest in the war around the time of its fiftieth anniversary, that is, in the years 1964-68. This period is interesting for the fact that it culminates in 1968, the generally agreed high-water mark of leftist aspiration in the west. Films about the war are normatively dominated by a liberal-left understanding of its dynamics and so this article seeks to explore how they could not fail to reflect a contemporary leftist agenda. The four films which constitute the corpus of this paper are Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), Losey's *King and Country* (1964), Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and Trumbo's *Johnny Got his Gun* (1971), films made just before, during or just after the 50th anniversary. The critical role of American black-listees and exiles is clear in this list, but what I would like to explore is the formal treatment of the war, either generically through the filter of military court-martial procedures or (subsequently) in the use of carnivalesque elements to reflect outraged social perceptions of its absurdity. One of the problems with film representation of the Great War is that it has remained in our imaginations, like the conduct of the war itself, remarkably static. Finally, I will suggest ways in which these handlings seek to reprocess clichés about the war and bring the conflict into a modern, more politicized, frame of reference.

Keywords

1960s war films; clichés revisited; formal treatment of war

Resumo

A partir do primeiro centenário da Grande Guerra, é útil trazer à memória o renovado interesse pela guerra que surgiu entre 1964-68, quando do 50.º aniversário. Ao culminar em 1968, momento geralmente considerado como apogeu das aspirações de esquerda no ocidente, é um período interessante. Os filmes sobre a guerra são dominados por uma compreensão das suas dinâmicas que parte da

esquerda liberal. O presente artigo procura explorar como tais filmes não teriam podido evitar reflectir a agenda esquerdista sua contemporânea. Quatro filmes constituem o corpus deste trabalho: *Paths of Glory* (1957) de Kubrick, *King and Country* (1964) de Losey, *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) de Attenborough e *Johnny Got his Gun* (1971) de Trumbo. Todos foram feitos imediatamente antes, durante ou após o 50º aniversário da guerra. Sendo claro o papel crítico que neste elenco desempenham os americanos exilados e na lista negra, o que gostaria de aqui explorar é o tratamento formal da guerra, quer genericamente através do filtro dos procedimentos militares nos conselhos de guerra, quer (e subsequentemente) do uso de elementos carnivalescos para reflectir percepções sociais de indignação perante o seu carácter absurdo. Um dos problemas da representação fílmica da Grande Guerra reside no facto de ela ter persistido nas nossas memórias de modo notavelmente estático, como aliás aconteceu com a própria condução da guerra. A concluir, sugiro os modos como tais tratamentos (da memória) da guerra procuram reprocessar estereótipos sobre a guerra, trazendo o conflito até um quadro de referências mais moderno e politizado.

Palavras-Chave

Filmes de guerra da década de 60; estereótipos; tratamento formal da guerra

INTERVIEW
DISCURSO DIRECTO

Roland Leighton in uniform, taken in 1915
by an unknown photographer.
From David Leighton's family papers

Roland Leighton as Man and Poet[1]

Interview with David Leighton

Interviewer: Paula Campos Fernández
London, 24th March, 2017

Roland Aubrey Leighton was born in London in 1895. He grew up in an active literary environment, as he was the adored son of Robert Leighton, a writer of adventure stories, and Marie Connor Leighton, a successful romance novelist. At Uppingham School in Rutland, he edited the school magazine, where he published his first poems, won the Classic prizes, and was later to become a quartermaster sergeant in the Officer's Training Corps. During his time at Uppingham he met those who would become his closest friends: Edward Brittain and Victor Richardson. It was also in those days that he met Edward's sister, Vera Brittain, the well-known pacifist and feminist writer, who would later become his fiancée. In 1914, Roland was awarded the Classical Postmastership at Oxford. But the Great War broke out and, like so many of his generation, instead of continuing his studies he volunteered for the army at the first opportunity and was eventually posted to France in early 1915. Of those who had been school prefects with him in 1914, only one quarter survived a further two years. During his time at the front he exchanged a great number of letters with Vera, where they discussed British society, the war and literature. Some of his poems were included in the correspondence sent to Vera. On 23 December 1915 Roland died of wounds in Louvencourt, France, after

[1] My interest in Roland Leighton started in the early summer of 2016, when I discovered his poetry. Later, during the seminar "English Literature: Silence, Memory and Identity", lectured by Professor Luísa Maria Flora from September 2016 to January 2017 at the School of Arts and Humanities (FLUL), University of Lisbon, I had the opportunity to develop this interest in Leighton's work together with a deeper knowledge of the historic and literary context of the Great War.

having been shot through the stomach by a sniper while inspecting wire in the trenches at Hébuterne. He was only 20 years old.

His work feeds on the British romantic poets, as clearly reflected in his first youth poems, published during his school days in the Uppingham's *The School Magazine* (e.g. "Triolet" or "Clair de Lune"). In this first period, however, some of his poems already show his taste for a decadent aesthetic, present in the French symbolists, in Swinburne's poetry or in the one written by Adela Florence Nicolson under the pseudonym Laurence Hope: *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India*; all of these authors are among his favourite readings. The presence of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic and orientalism in Leighton can also be noticed in poems like "The Crescent and the Cross" and "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz".

Notwithstanding the significant classic training Leighton received at Uppingham Public School, his readings reveal his interest in modern literature: *The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Schreiner (1883), *Walden or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau (1854), *An Iceland Fisherman* by Pierre Loti (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy (1891) or *On the Eve* by Ivan Turgenev (1860) are among his readings. Significantly, all these novels have some elements in common, such as human isolation, the presence of nature, the melancholy state of mind, and the tendency for contemplation that we find in most of his poems.

The outbreak of the Great War contributed to the transformation of poetry in general. The pastoral element of traditional lyrical poetry is no longer useful to express the contradictory reality in which the young poet-soldier has to live. This new reality will be responsible for and shape the fragmentary conception of Modernism. The conflict between the pastoral world and the dystopian reality of the war and Leighton's attempt to try to bring them together is magnificently reflected in his poem "Violets".

The initial, heroic and idealized vision Leighton had of the war was directly inherited from the military education system of the public schools at that time. On the other hand, the author's mother, the novelist Marie Leighton, read to him works by Henry Newbolt, Conan Doyle, Quiller Couch or John Masefield, that also contributed to creating this vision. The

first poem published by Leighton in Uppingham's *The School Magazine* when he was 18, "L'Envoi", already reflects values of manliness, such as courage, fame and camaraderie.

Another poem by Leighton, "Ploegsteert", written after two months at the front, echoes some of Rupert Brooke's famous 1914 sonnets (particularly "The Dead") in which the value of honour and patriotism together with a heroic vision of death are praised. The contents of the volume *1914 & Other Poems*, which Brittain had given to Leighton, Leighton, was, however, met with growing rejection of and disenchantment with the idealized vision of the battle. His direct contact with war, where absolute horror was part of his everyday life, made him understand its total uselessness. War had been reduced for him to a complete waste of human life, as he reports to Vera plainly in one of the letters he sends her in September 1915, in which he also completely rebels against the values exalted by Brooke's poetry, which he had so fervently admired only a few months before.

In various of the last poems Leighton wrote, the subject of death and the image of the tomb appear recurrently. Among these poems are "Dust, only dust, and passion's foetid breath" or the one recently found "For I shall be born in a brothel". The title of another poem he had started to write in September 1915 and which is unfortunately missing today, is also revealing: "Broken I came from out the Ditch of Death". Pessimism and an ironic tone can also be found in the letters he sent to Vera during his last months at the front.

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David Leighton was born in England in 1931. He was evacuated to Canada during the Second World War and studied at Bryanston, an English public school, for four years until he returned to England. He later became a Lieutenant in the British Intelligence Corps in Austria during compulsory military service and studied Spanish and French at Oxford University. He had a business career before becoming a foreign language lecturer in Adult Education in Britain and an English teacher at a German technical college. Nowadays he is still a Member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (London) as well as an Oxford MA.

Our interviewee considers himself something of a dilettante. At present he continues to work enthusiastically on propagating and supporting the works of his uncle, the poet Roland Leighton, and his aunt Clare Leighton, the wood-engraver artist.

Note: The opportunity for the present interview with Roland Leighton's nephew, David Leighton, was occasioned by my intent to pursue research on the virtually unknown figure of Roland Leighton and his short but promising career as a poet of the Great War. The interview took place in London, on the 24th of March 2017.

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How did you come up with the idea of publishing Roland's poems in 1981?

I was the first person who did any of that. Publishing is rather a grand word, I just had it printed. I saw this BBC program in 1979, *Testament of Youth*, a TV mini-series and I realised that it was really something that ought to be done. That's when I went through papers and I just had that little version printed privately. Then, I sent a few copies to the Western Front Association. I thought that Roland's poems deserved to be published.

I noticed that Roland's poem titled "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz", a manuscript I found at the First World War Poetry Digital Archive, was not included in this booklet. I was wondering, was there any special reason for that?

I left out the lines "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" mainly because I wanted to present a coherent sequence of poems leading from the school experience, via Vera, to death. Like some others of Roland's short pieces those lines didn't seem relevant to that sequence.

Have Roland's poems ever been translated into any other language, as far as you know?

As far as I know, the only other translation of Roland's poems is one I made into French for the Louvencourt Visitor's Book of his poem "Vale".

And so, farewell. All our sweet songs are sung,
Our red rose-garlands withered;
The sun-bright day
—Silver and blue and gold—
Wearied to sleep.

The shimmering evening, like a grey, soft bird,
Barred with the blood of sunset,
Has flown to rest
Under the scented wings
Of the dark-blue Night.

(See David Leighton's translation below)

Et donc adieu. Finies nos chansons douces,
Flêtries nos guirlandes de roses, jadis rouges;
Le jour brillant
D'azur, d'argent et d'or
S'endort, tout fatigué.

Le soir miroitant, cet oiseau mou et gris,
Barré de sang au coucher du soleil
A fuit vers son repos
Sous les ailes parfumées
de la nuit bleue et obscure.

In some of the correspondence between Vera Brittain and Roland while he was at the front in France, Roland mentions his doubts on what he is destined to be in life. He wants to continue to be part of soldier life, but at the same time he is aware of his need to be creative, as well as intellectually motivated.

Yes, yes. In one of those things he says, he said he was destined for the Indian Civil Service but I don't think he was… Well, I'm sure he would have been well respected by his men because he was brought up with an unselfish attitude, and you need to think of the men first. Surely, he would have been a popular officer, no doubt. But it wouldn't have been enough for him.

Do you think he would have become an editor?

He had an interest in editing and edited Uppingham's *The School Magazine* while he was at school. I'm sure he could have become an editor. I'm sure he could have done that.

Both of your grandparents were writers: Robert Leighton wrote boys' adventure books and Marie Connor Leighton was a prolific romantic novelist. Roland must have developed his literary interest and talent from a very young age under the influence of his parents. Could you tell us more about how Roland was raised at home?

Roland's father, Robert Leighton, was trained in youth as a printer and bookbinder. Later, he also became a literary editor of the *Daily Mail* at the time. He wrote about forty books of adventure stories, most of them had historical themes, and they were all aimed at what we will now call teenagers. These were considered an influence in the building of the British Empire. The best known writer of that kind was G. A. Henty. Although full of literary merit—I ought to say—completely, completely politically incorrect nowadays. One of my favourites was *In the Land of Juju.* They produced very nice editions, illustrated, and were much used as school prizes, specially in public schools.

On the other hand, Roland's mother, Marie Leighton, was a very successful romantic novelist, and published most of her novels in serial form in the popular press (65 novels). She was the family's main bread-winner, so this is why Roland said he was always a bit of a feminist, because he could see his mother earned more, up until the First World War.

Tempestuous Petticoat, later written by Roland's sister Clare, tells a great deal about the Leighton household. Roland was terribly spoiled. Marie had had a child who died in infancy and she took particular care of Roland. And she was really very unkind to the other children. He was her favourite, always dressed up in fancy clothes when small… And Roland was such a sponge for poetry and she loved poetry. So Marie used to read him poems as a child when she went to say goodnight to him in bed. And the sort of poems she read to him were Henry Newbolt's, who wrote war poems and glorified warfare:

The sand of the desert is sodden red,
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

Very very belligerent poetry, but he was very popular around the First World War.

The public school system helped to create an ideal of war and a certain model of what a man had to be like. How do you think this type of education may have influenced all these young English boys before and during the Great War?

As a male to have superior education meant that you were brought up to feel that it was your responsibility to take responsibility. You were destined to have a role and there was absolutely no question of rebelling against it for many people. Especially in the Public School System. Because we were brought up to believe that we all needed to be leaders.

Roland had a very close and special relationship with his mother, as it is described in* Boy of my heart, *a book Marie wrote and published anonymously after Roland's death. It is very interesting to see how naturally he writes to her in French sometimes. There's a particular letter that Roland writes to his mother the month before he died in which he quotes a poem by Verlaine "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit" in order to express what he is going through at the front: "Qu'as-tu fait/ ô toi que voilà/ pleurant sans cesse/ dis, qu'as-tu fait/ toi que voilà/ de ta jeunesse".

That doesn't surprise me at all because he went into French at School. But his mother Marie was educated in France for quite a while, she was partly raised there. She was really keen on French so she used to get them to recite French verbs and poems.

That Verlaine's poem has reminded me of that poem by Rubén Darío… [He recites a few lines]: "Juventud, divino tesoro, ¡ya te vas para no volver!…Cuando quiero llorar, no lloro, y a veces, lloro sin querer…"

Your aunt Clare Leighton, Roland's younger sister, would later become a talented artist and wood-engraver. Did you meet her in the US? What was it like to meet her? Could you tell us more about her figure and work?

Well, I had met her before as a child, but meeting her as a grown up was very powerful, really. The halves of the family had grown completely apart and she had her own life. Going over there, made me feel "Gosh, it's alright to like literature, it's alright to like poetry, you don't have to be a military officer in order to be worthy". And that was a big education for me. She had never had a child so she saw me as a bit of a son as well. It was very fruitful and that's why she made me the sole executive of her estate and everything. Ever since then, I've tried to propagate her work, giving talks and that sort of thing.

Clare had a longterm relationship with a leftwing journalist, H.N. Brailsford, who was the editor of a leftwing magazine. He decided to use modern artists to illustrate it and selected some of Clare's work to illustrate the journal. And they eventually went to live together. As he grew older and weaker, more demanding, her own work suffered. She just felt she couldn't go on so she took up a contact that she had in the States and lectured at University for a while. Eventually, she was able to earn her own living by writing and woodengraving. She had a very interesting life. In England she describes the life in the country in her book *Four Hedges.* In her autobiography, she also writes about her own thoughts on teaching art.

Once in America, Clare writes about countrylife in North Carolina. I stayed with her in Connecticut. What was so nice about it, I found she had a very wide range of friends and contacts… She wasn't too keen on coming back to England, she did, twice, but it was unhappy for her. Her book *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian* is exactly the book where you see what the Leighton family was like, it's really very amusing.

What can you say about your father, Evelyn Leighton? What was the picture of Roland you had from him?

Well, my father was the youngest. Roland always seemed to be very superior, there was no doubt that Roland was Marie's favourite. Neither my father

nor my aunt Clare talked about this very much, but they admired Roland.

Once Roland died, he certainly would have had some extra esteem inside, I'm sure: "I've got to be as good as he was now…"

My father was rather a distant figure and he really cut himself off from the family. He was brought up to be a naval officer. In those days they used to train naval officers from the age of thirteen. It was a way of getting a good education if you couldn't afford a lot of money and they gave you as much attention as any public school would. By the time he left he was 17, as he was in the Navy at the end of the First World War. He was a midshipman then, who is not a commisioned officer but is clearly marked out to become one. All the navy officers at that time had quite a good education, as part of the functions of the Navy was to be diplomatic and be as nice and pleasant as they possibly could. They were all fairly well read. My father was always very driven but at the same time he had a literary talent that was never used. I got a few notes that he wrote there. Then, when he retired he wrote a certain amount of a pantomime as well.

Being aware of your own personal family history and its relationship with the Great War, how did you experience the Second World War?

I had a very easy time indeed. In 1940 my mother, my sister, my grandmother, we all went over to Canada and we lived there for four years. That's when I went to a very military school in Canada. We all dressed up in military uniforms. It was a private school, the local wealthy old boys of the school paid for a lot of English evacuees to be educated there. I was one of those and I was very very lucky. And then we came back to England in an air-craft-carrier in 1944, that was just when the Atlantic was getting a little bit safer because it was clear that the Allies were going to win… So it was less risky to come back.

In 2015, a ceremony in Roland's honour took place at the local council of Louvencourt, France, where he is buried in the British Military Cemetery. This village named a road "Allée Roland Leighton". How did you experience this ceremony? Why is it important to younger generations to still be learning about the First World War through these events today?

The ceremony was very moving. I quoted Charles Péguy's poem "Heureux ceux qui sont morts, car ils sont retournés/ Dans la première argile et la première terre". Our son Caspar read Roland's poem "Vale" in my French translation and then in English. Our grandson aged 12 unveiled the new plaque indicating the "Allée Roland Leighton". All of us need to remember how easily disagreements can lead to violence that goes far beyond any sensible resolution of cultural or economic conflict.

In a published review of the Louvencourt Ceremony, you wrote "It becomes clear that nationality is hardly relevant. The real enemy is human greed and pettiness". What is your opinion about Europe's current situation with the new rise of nationalism and about UK's Brexit?

Where can one start? I see Brexit as a total disaster. As soon as the result of the Referendum was known I wrote letters of apology to two of my closest friends on the European mainland, distancing our whole family from what we thought was the great leap backwards into the twentieth century. I know there are serious problems within the EU, but they will not be solved by individual countries running away. Unfortunately, to appreciate this, one needs wide horizons, and many people throughout the EU, understandably, do not have them. Hence populism has grown and politicians are taking advantage of it. We need more education, a narrower gap between rich and poor. In the UK, the Liberal Democrat Party campaigns for a second referendum when the terms of exit are known; the first referendum inevitably was responded to in ignorance of the consequences. It attracted anyone with a reason to be discontented with anything; it was easy to blame the EU for everything. Island-dwellers, of course, tend to be "insular", which may be why UK first agitated to leave. Also I suspect there is a legacy of frustrated imperial arrogance—a bit like the generation of 1898 in Spain, perhaps.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

NOTAS SOBRE OS COLABORADORES

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