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David Budgen

British Children's Books and the First World War 1914-2007

Submitted for the degree of PhD in History, University of Kent
March 2010

Abstract

This thesis traces the developments in understanding of the First World War through the medium of children's books. Utilising novels, school textbooks, comics and story papers, it examines the changing attitudes towards the conflict, assesses the reasons behind such varying viewpoints, and examines the role children's writers play in establishing such perspectives. Chapter one focuses on the war years, 1914 to 1918. This period saw a plethora of material being produced for the young. Children's books were propagandistic, and often presented a view of the Great War that was far removed from reality. Often, it is argued, writers fell back on interpreting the war using more traditional understandings of warfare that both they and their audiences were familiar with. Chapter two looks at similar sources for the period 1919-1945. It examines the material in the context of other debates that were occurring in society at that time regarding the legacy of the war. Moreover, it assesses the extent to which the war could be presented in the same way to children as it had been during the conflict, given the greater knowledge in society about the experience of the war. Chapter three traces these ideas through the period after the Second World War up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. It argues that modern writers have used the war to comment on their own society; negative aspects of the war came to represent the extent to which modern society had changed for the better. Because of this the understanding of the war has been reduced to a few key, yet unrepresentative events. Furthermore, writers have been actively engaged in defending their interpretation of the conflict from modern historians who have attempted to present a more nuanced view of the Great War. These debates are still continuing.

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Acknowlegements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. Firstly I would like to thank my supervisors, Mark Connelly and David Welch, who have been supportive over the years. Jackie Waller and the staff of the History office at the University of Kent have always been very generous with their time, providing me with many words of support and assistance. I would also like to thank Emma Long, Sheila Sweetinburgh, Gill Sinclair and Bill Giles who have encouraged me and commented on my ideas as they were being formulated; their advice and kindness has been invaluable, and I am extremely grateful.

The staff of the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, The British Library, The Newspaper Library at Colindale, The National Archives at Kew, The Glasgow University Archive, The Institute of Education Library in London, and the Templeman Library at the University of Kent have all been of great assistance in my research.

Most of all I would like to thank my parents, Christine and Richard Budgen, who have supported me through the ups and countless downs. Without their constant backing this thesis may not have been completed.

Introduction

In his 1883 travelogue, *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain launched a scathing attack on the early nineteenth century author Sir Walter Scott. Citing him as a major influence over the USA's southern states, he argued that the Scottish writer's chivalric romances had been one of the principal contributing factors to the outbreak of the American Civil War:

> It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a Major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them... Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition.[1]

Twain may have been famous as a humorist, but he was deadly serious in his criticism of Scott, and the impact of his romantic depiction of a "Middle-Age sham civilization".[2] Regardless of the validity of his argument, Twain's condemnation was indicative of a more general understanding of the power of books. Such a concept can be seen to be all the more important in the field of children's literature. In 1976, the writer and peace activist Bob Dixon lamented, "Over recent years, I've become more and more concerned about how writers influence children. Much of the material in children's books is anti-social, if not anti-human and is more likely to stunt and warp young people than help them grow".[3] Twenty years earlier, the American psychologist Fredric Wertham had embarked upon a campaign against 'horror comics' with his book, *Seduction of the Innocent: the Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth* (1954).[4] The debate raged on both sides of the Atlantic, and culminated in Britain with the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act (1955).

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[1] Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (London, 1986, first published 1883), p. 328.
[2] Ibid., p. 327.
[3] Bob Dixon, *Catching them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction* (London, 1977), pp. xiii-xiv.
[4] John Springhall has argued that, "Wertham's book was more responsible than any other critique of the medium for forcing self-censorship upon the American comic-book industry, and thus substantially altering 'product content'." John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta Rap, 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 127.

If pernicious literature had such an effect on young readers in the eyes of parents, politicians, teachers and activists, then books could also be used to instil worthy ideas and attitudes in children. As the structure and attitudes of society were remoulded over the years, then so too did the definition of 'worth' in such works. This can be seen clearly in children's books about the First World War. The shadow of the Great War cast over modern British society has been hugely significant. As many historians now agree, its meaning has changed frequently in the popular consciousness of the British public, as competing interpretations converged to create one single 'truth'. Where once there had been a general acceptance, an enthusiasm even, for the war, this was gradually replaced with a sense that the war had been futile. By the end of the century it was held up as an example of all that was wrong with British society of that era. The purpose of this thesis is to study the presentation of the Great War in children's books, comics and story papers throughout the twentieth century. It will not only trace the changes in understandings of the Great War between 1914 and 2007, but also demonstrate that these reflected the changing nature of British society in the ensuing years. Books conveyed images of the First World War, but could also help to engender a set of values in the young that did not necessarily have anything to do with the conflict. The thesis will also examine the correlation between the representation of the war in works of fiction and historiographical trends of the period.

Writers produced works about the war from its outbreak in 1914. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as Britain commemorated the ninetieth anniversaries of the conflict, there were still a significant number of books being published. Patriotic, imperialist writers had been replaced by authors with more liberal views on society and a sense of disgust at everything the Great War, and warfare in general, represented. In his study of Children and War in the era of the conflict in Vietnam, Howard Tolley claimed,

> Children's understanding of war begins to develop at a young age. English children make their first coherent utterances about peace and war at age six, and by seven or eight have fairly well-defined ideas about their meanings. School children in the United States form expectations about the probability of future wars by sixth grade.[5]

[5] Howard Tolley, *Children and War: Political Socialization to International Conflict* (New York, 1973), p. 5.

As William Tuttle noted of schoolchildren in the United States during the Second World War, "cognitively, their mental structures were set to receive".[6] Therefore, children were frequently seen as an important target for propaganda. In many ways, however, it can be argued that most children's literature is propagandistic; the need and desire to shape and guide the minds of the young is not limited to wartime. Indeed, as shall be seen throughout this thesis, the vast majority of books examined made attempts to influence the moral outlook of their audiences. Many reveal more about attitudes to such issues as race, class and gender than they do about the reality of the experience of war.

Some of these books have been examined by historians before. Michael Paris has looked at novels of the war years in terms of propaganda and what has been referred to as the 'popular masculine pleasure culture of war'. Though there is naturally some crossover in terms of sources used in the opening chapter, the direction my thesis takes is very different; this is not an examination of the concept of war as adventure. It does not only cover works of fiction, and it does not seek to stress continuities. Moreover, by bringing the study up to the present day, it examines the sources in comparison to the historiography of the First World War, answering important questions regarding the relationship between historical studies and popular interpretations of the past. For this reason, children's historical textbooks have been addressed alongside novels, comics and story papers, which is a new direction of study. Valerie Chancellor examined History textbooks in *History for their Masters* (1970), but ended her study in 1914, just as this thesis begins.[7] Nevertheless, the First World War came at a time in which the nature of childhood had changed greatly. The written word was a familiar part of the lives of young Britons, and had been growing in significance throughout the Victorian era. It is therefore useful to give a brief summary of the developments in education and literacy leading up to and during the period of time covered in this thesis.

Education and Literacy

The last few decades of the nineteenth century have traditionally been seen as an era of great reform and improvement in the education of the British people. The implications of the 1870 Education Act were deemed to be many; schooling was suddenly open to all

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[6] William M. Tuttle Jr., *'Daddy's Gone to War': The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (Oxford, 1993), p. 118.

[7] Valerie Chancellor, *History for Their Masters: Opinion in the English History Textbook* (Bath, 1970), p. 8.

and a literate nation was born. Some historians, however, have questioned the significance of this act, arguing that education, and most importantly literacy, had been steadily improving throughout the Victorian era. It has even been suggested that the deliberate involvement of the state in schooling actually stifled the development of education, though this could of course reflect more upon the political leaning of the historian.[8] State intervention in the education of the nation would hardly be presented favourably by historians sympathetic to a more *laissez-faire* system.[9] On the other hand, more left-wing perspectives have led to an understanding of state education as "a tool of social control" that "served to strengthen middle-class hegemony".[10] Thomas E. Jordan argued that "[I]n the first half of the nineteenth century, education was a hit and miss affair, designed, at best, to yield a better workman who knew his place".[11] Interestingly, both views are critical of the 1870 Education Act, the thought process behind such legislation, and the extent of its impact. Standards of education and literacy had been rising throughout the nineteenth century. Many children learned to read and write in Sunday Schools. Indeed, W.B. Stephen argues that the Education Act was partly passed in 1870 because the large number of working-class children in school by this stage made compulsory education a workable prospect.[12] In other words, the act was legitimising pre-existing nineteenth century concepts of childhood and education. Further proof of the literacy of the nation also pointed towards a tendency to overemphasise the importance of the 1870 Education Act.

Mass readership was evident in Britain long before the right to an education was enshrined in legislation. Stephen has argued that, "The widespread provision in earlier decades of the nineteenth century of religious literature for working-class consumption would have been pointless had not large numbers of such readers already existed".[13] Furthermore, the moral panics surrounding the public consumption of Penny Dreadfuls and Penny Bloods throughout the Victorian era gives some indication of a large readership present in Britain, a readership whom those at the top of society did not want to be unduly influenced by such reading matter.[14] Writing in 1850, Charles Dickens

[8] E.G. West, *Education and the State: A Study in Political Economy* (London, 1970), pp.129-32. West refers to estimates that between ⅔ and ¾ of the working classes were literate as early as the late 1830s, and notes that this percentage was nearer 9/10 by the mid 1860s.
[9] W.B. Stephen, *Education in Britain, 1750-1914* (London, 1998), p. 81.
[10] Ibid., p. 81.
[11] Thomas E. Jordan, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations* (New York, 1987), pp. 154-5.
[12] Stephen, *Education in Britain*, p. 78.
[13] Ibid., p. 149.
[14] John Springhall has shown that the "most vociferous critics of new forms of entertainment for the young were recruited from the ranks of the expanding professional middle class and the

used his semi-autobiographical tale *David Copperfield* to demonstrate the importance of literature in his early life. Early in the novel, after his mother had married the severe Mr. Murdstone, young David recalled the solace he took from books:

> My father had left a small collection of books in a little room up-stairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time, - they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii, - and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; *I* knew nothing of it.[15]

While it may be true that Dickens, and indeed Copperfield were hardly representative of the British population as a whole in the early nineteenth century, this passage serves as a neat summary of some of the key ideas behind the development of children's fiction during this period. Children's fiction had developed as a result of various works aimed at adults that appealed to young readers. The works of Fielding, Defoe and Smollett were complex and literary, and most definitely not aimed at children. Yet children *did* read them. The success of such works as *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* amongst the young pointed towards a strong market for children's literature. A young reader may not have picked up on some of the intricacies of the novels, but they could follow the plot well enough to be entertained. Though evangelical groups recognised the possible propaganda value of the children's novel, the success of the adult's novels with the young suggests that the agenda of the author, if not compatible with the world-view of the reader, could be completely ignored.[16]

Regardless of this argument, it can be agreed that the growth of literacy acted as a catalyst for a change in people's lifestyles, adults and children. As schooling was extended, so too did childhood itself, creating a wider market for children's entertainment.[17] Such changes were established to a greater extent by the Education Act 1918 (The Fisher Act), which raised the school leaving age to fourteen, further delaying

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intellectual clerisy rather than from the manufacturing or business middle class". Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, p. 71.

[15] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London, 1993, first published 1850), p.53.

[16] Indeed, Jonathan Rose has demonstrated the extent to which young readers frequently were not influenced by the political agenda of their favourite authors. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 321-2.

[17] Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London, 1995), p. 7.

the transcendence from childhood to adulthood.[18] Children's literature became a genre in its own right in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Beforehand, young readers consumed works that, although aimed primarily at adults, contained enough of those elements that children found particularly appealing. This section of society was hitherto an untapped market, and the popularity of such books allowed for the establishment of a new readership, the expansion of which paralleled the gradual improvements in education. Certain groups came to recognise the potential for disseminating their ideas to a readership that was perhaps more easy to influence than a discerning adult audience. As Jeffrey Richards has noted, "the appropriation by boys of certain adventure stories intended for adults, notably the sea stories of Captain Marryat, the historical novels of Scott and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, led the evangelicals to seize on the model as ideal for juvenile instruction"[19]. Such writers as W.H.G. Kingston and R.M. Ballantyne rose to fill a gap in the market, combining thrilling exploits with a Christian, and often imperialist ethos.

Novels were not the only focus of the Evangelicals' attention. The popularity amongst children of the 'penny-dreadfuls' throughout the nineteenth century inspired such organisations as the Religious Tract Society (RTS) and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) to publish their own story papers, the most famous being *The Boy's Own Paper* (First published in 1879) and *The Girl's Own Paper* (First published in 1880).[20] Michael Paris has argued that while "the Evangelical notion of Britain's divine right to empire" pervaded boys' fiction, writers at first "were hypocritically reluctant to condone the act of war". He saw the works of Charles Kingsley, and in particular, his novel *Westward Ho!* (1855) as the catalyst for the idea of "war as adventure" which permeated late Victorian boys' fiction.[21] Moreover, he suggested that "Kingsley directed his readers to the continuities between the heroic past and the heroic present, between the new apostles of empire and their Elizabethan forebears, the adventurers who had broken the Roman Catholic challenge to Britain's overseas expansion".[22] This was particularly important in the representation of the First World War, which was frequently placed within a framework familiar to those *au fait* with the boys' story version of British history.

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[18] John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain 1860-1960* (Dublin, 1986), p. 48.
[19] Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), p. 3.
[20] Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 86.
[21] Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture 1850-2000* (London, 2000), pp. 53-4.
[22] Ibid., p. 54.

Imperialist boys' adventure stories were to reach their pinnacle with the novels of George Alfred Henty (1832-1902), a former war correspondent for *The Standard* newspaper. His novels were didactic, though they stressed imperialist motifs more than Christian ideology; "He favoured muscular Christianity with the emphasis... upon the muscle rather than the Christianity".[23] Henty placed familiar tales of adventure onto historical events and eras, ranging from ancient Egypt (*The Cat of Bubastes*, 1889) to the Boxer rebellion in China (*With the Allies to Pekin*, published posthumously in 1904).[24] So, it can be seen that young Britons had already been exposed to a wealth of material stimulating a sense of patriotism while equating war with adventure long before the outbreak of fighting in August 1914. Since the publication of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh* Magazine, in 1871, a steady stream of stories prepared the nation for an ensuing conflict.[25] These persuaded readers of the threat Britain faced from all of the major European powers: France, Germany and Russia. Invasion stories suggested the threat from Germany, while at the same time calling for reforms in the armed forces, a concern exacerbated by the revelations about the nation's health highlighted by the condition of the troops in the Boer War. As the years progressed, Germany began to appear as the most likely menace to Britain, competing with her in terms of imperial acquisitions and naval strength, rivalling the country that had been largely unchallenged in such terms since Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805.

An examination of the presentation of the Great War to children must take into account both the actual process of learning and the history of education throughout the twentieth century. This is vital to the understanding of children's perceptions of the past. Perhaps more importantly when thinking about the use of history as propaganda, it indicates the intentions of the British establishment and their agenda for education. The teaching of History in the interwar years was largely traditional, although changes could be perceived at the time. Nevertheless, many history texts still adopted an approach that favoured a top-down view of the past.

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[23] Ibid., p. 49.

[24] Guy Arnold, *Held Fast for England: G.A. Henty – Imperialist Boys' Writer* (London, 1980), pp. 182-5.

[25] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 87. Paris sees Chesney's work as "Single-handedly created a popular sub-genre of war fiction – the tale of the great war to come". See also Joseph S. Meisal, 'The Germans are Coming! British Fiction of a German Invasion 1871-1913', *War, Literature and the Arts*, 2 (1990), p.43 and I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London, 1966), pp. 30-64.

The approach to the study of History altered significantly in the post-1945 era. There were several reasons for this. As Tom Arkell has noted, "The First World War, the formation of the League of Nations and the rise of fascism led to demands for a less chauvinistic syllabus with a more interdependent world perspective".[26] In 1875 it had been established that all children "should learn an outline of English history from the beginnings to the death of George III in 1820".[27] This was the great period of popular imperialism in which interpretations of the past reflected the establishment and bolstering of nation states to the degree that the teaching of History often reflected a tone that was patriotic almost to the point of nationalism.[28] There had been concerns since at least the 1920s that the History syllabus was overloaded; with such a vast time period to cover, teachers often felt that they were unable to cover everything in an adequate manner. The effect of this was that teachers were limited to a specific style of teaching, and severely constrained by the approach to different time periods. For many the oral lesson was the norm, with a particular concentration on political and military history.[29] Though by 1937 it was possible for A.C.F. Beales to comment that, in comparison with approaches prevalent a decade earlier, "The politico-militaro-dynastic tradition was dying hard", an analysis of textbooks of the period shows that developments in this area was slow.[30]

In the 1960s a movement towards skills-based teaching began to gather momentum. There was a growing clamour to move away from the traditional five-year course of "British history, with a cursory glance at modern European history".[31] This approach to the subject of History emphasised the importance of documents. It was seen to be preparing pupils for the rigours of the academic study of History, though this was largely a niche area in approaches to the past.[32] This had great benefits for teachers. They could move away from the dauntingly large chronological syllabuses beginning at the dawn of English/British history. The shift away from a cohesive narrative to a methodological approach allowed the subject to be viewed in new terms. The age-old question that had dogged the study of History was 'What is History for?' A critical factor in establishing the importance of History in the school curriculum was the attitude

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[26] Tom Arkell, 'History's Role in the School Curriculum', *Journal of Education Policy* 3 (1986), p.26.
[27] Ibid., pp 25-6.
[28] Ibid., p. 26.
[29] Ibid., p. 37.
[30] A.C.F. Beales, *A Guide to the Teaching of History in Schools* (London, 1937), p. 5.
[31] Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools, *The Teaching of History in Secondary Schools* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 15.
[32] Arkell, 'History's Role in the School Curriculum', p. 28.

of parents. In an almost utilitarian sense, the value of the subject was judged by many, often prejudiced by their own negative experiences of studying History, to be its role in leading to future career paths for the children. A methodological approach suggested that not only could studying be brought closer to academic standards, the skills would be useful preparation for a workplace outside of the study of History. As Arkell remarked, "the clear and uncomplicated message emerged that history is about the use of evidence almost exclusively; with the corollary that its content is almost immaterial".[33] So, the study of History in the last quarter of the twentieth century was characterised by the study of small periods of history often removed from a sense of chronology.

There were many dissenting voices challenging this approach from historians and commentators who have emphasised the need to engage with schoolchildren in a way that will not alienate them from the subject of History later in life. Storytelling is seen to be vital to the young mind when presenting the events of the past, in order to establish an interest in the subject; research and methodology can come later, at university. In 1970, G.R. Elton argued that for under-fifteens, the teaching profession "would do well to confine itself to stories of war, exploration, great men, and especially progress in science".[34] Similarly, at a conference in 2005, David Starkey remarked that, "The skills-based approach to the teaching of history is a catastrophe. It is, of course, also derived from a truly dreadful book, E. H. Carr's *What is History?*, which prioritises the historian over history and method over content, leading to an utterly vulgar notion of relativism".[35] Starkey argued that content, characterization and narrative *are* important, and are crucial tools in conveying the past to a young or popular audience. To a great extent this can be seen in the wealth of literature produced about the First World War. By the end of the twentieth century, it would probably be fair to say that poetry and works of fiction had had a huge impact on the public understanding of the war. Give the enormity of this influence, and the role of this thesis in analysing the effects of literature, it is now worth examining the historiography of the literary and cultural approach to the war.

[33] Ibid., p. 29.
[34] G.R. Elton, 'What Sort of History should we Teach?', Martin Ballard (ed.), *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History* (London, 1970), p. 221.
[35] David Starkey, 'What History Should We Be Teaching in Britain in the 21st Century?' http://www.history.ac.uk/resources/history-in-british-education/first-conference/starkey-paper accessed 27/11/2009.

Literature and the Great War

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War historians tended to direct much of their focus towards the areas of political and military history. A flurry of memoirs were published by military commanders, vindicating their war records, and several politicians, in particular the former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George followed suit.[36] There were also many literary reactions to the Great War, with the late 1920s seeing an apparent boom in the publication of war books, including works by Siegfried Sassoon, Erich Maria Remarque, Robert Graves and Ernest Hemingway. Nevertheless, such literature was largely ignored by historians, despite the importance of their cultural impact. As approaches to the academic study of history changed in the second half of the twentieth century, historians and literary critics finally began to turn their attention to more cultural aspects of the First World War. Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War*, for example, was published in 1965, and examined the work of Wilfred Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Isaac Rosenberg and Edmund Blunden, as well as civilian writers including H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett. Perhaps more influential though was the 1975 publication of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory.*

Fussell, a Professor of English Literature and veteran of the Second World War, argued that the Great War represented a cultural turning point in the modern age. The literature that emerged from the conflict was, for Fussell, essentially ironic in tone, and the experience of the war meant that the events of 1914-18 could only be presented in such terms. He argued that 1914 was a cut-off point for literature and history, and the sense of the ironic manifested itself in all war-literature afterwards. Fussell's work drew attention to one of the key arguments at the heart of the historiography of the Great War's cultural impact: the clash between traditionalism and modernity. In his research into John Buchan's *Nelson's History of the War*, a multi-part history which began to appear in 1915, Keith Grieves has noted that, "the principles which constantly engage his historical imagination were the similarities of the past and present which formed important continuities".[37] Buchan, like many other commentators at the time, was

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[36] George W. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs": A Study in the Politics of Memory', *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988), p.58. Among the leading figures of the Great War who published such memoirs were former First Sea Lords Sir John Fisher and Sir John Jellicoe, Commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli General Sir Ian Hamilton and Field Marshal Sir John French, Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force from the outbreak of war until December 1915.

[37] Keith Grieves, 'Nelson's History of the War: John Buchan as a Contemporary Military Historian 1915-22', *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993), p.535.

recognising parallels with the past, and interpreting the Great War through this familiar language and imagery. He would explore similar ideas in his Richard Hannay novels, which will be discussed at greater length later in the thesis. It was this approach that Fussell deemed to have been rendered obsolete. He noted that, "as late as 1918 it was still possible for some men who had actually fought to sustain the old rhetoric"[38]. "Every war", he argued, "is ironic because every war is worse than expected", but, "The Great War was more ironic than any before or since... It reversed the idea of Progress"[39]. For Fussell the Great War represented something wholly modern. Nothing would ever be the same again.

Influential as his thesis was, Fussell came under considerable attack from the generation of historians who emerged in the 1990s, as they attempted to counter some of the assertions that had been made by their forbears. In particular, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson remarked upon Fussell's "limitations of scope, of methodology, and of source material".[40] Dan Todman considered Fussell to be "spectacularly ignorant of the military history of the war", and criticised his "interpretation of a small number of soldiers chose[n] to represent the war accurately", which he took to represent the "experience of the army as a whole".[41] Fussell's survey was deemed to be too heavily weighted towards highbrow literature, and works that did not fit his understanding, such as David Jones' *In Parenthesis* or R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*, were either misinterpreted, condemned or ignored. He criticised Jones' epic poem because it,

> [P]oses for itself the problem of re-attaching traditional meanings to the unprecedented actualities of the war... Jones believes such an equation can be made, and to assert it he associates the events of front-line fighting not only with Arthurian legend but with Welsh and English folklore, Old Testament history, Roman Catholic liturgy, Norse myth, Chaucer, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the poems of G.M. Hopkins, and even the works of Lewis Carroll.[42]

In Parenthesis did not fit easily into his argument, and was thus deemed problematic. Similarly, Rosa Maria Bracco has drawn attention to Fussell's misinterpretation of R.C. Sheriff's play *Journey's End*. Stanhope, the play's protagonist, represented for Bracco, "a retrieval of heroism even within the context of the unprecedented horror of modern warfare", and suggests that Fussell's interpretation of a purportedly "horrific ironic

[38] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 2000, first published 1975), pp. 22-3.
[39] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[40] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, 'Paul Fussell at War', *War in History* 1 (1994), p. 68.
[41] Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, 2005), pp. 158-9.
[42] Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 146.

scene" in which Stanhope comforts a dying comrade is "not accurate".[43] Sherriff himself criticised an ironic, anti-war reading of *Journey's End*. Of his characters, and perhaps also his former comrades, Sherriff wrote:

> They were simple, unquestioning men who fought the war because it seemed the only right and proper thing to do. Somebody had to fight it, and they had accepted the misery and suffering without complaint... [*Journey's End is a play*] in which not a word was spoken against the war, in which no word of condemnation was uttered by any of its characters.[44]

Sherriff, like many soldiers, did not view the war as an epic display of pointlessness, futility and needless catastrophe. Writing in 1929, Sherriff exemplified the complex attitude many soldiers had towards their wartime experiences. He describes "life which sometimes was a living death, and sometimes – for brief moments – the only kind of life which, I have thought since, was worth living".[45]

It should be noted that such criticisms of Fussell were also made at its time of publication. Michael Howard remarked that the text contained "traces of naivety, petulance and ignorance, especially in Mr Fussell's historical judgments". He continued, "Mr Fussell betrays a lack of historical perspective which flaws his talents as a literary analyst".[46] Nevertheless, it should be noted that Howard also praised many of Fussell's arguments regarding the impact of the Great War on language and culture. Leonard V. Smith has argued that, "some of the impact of *The Great War and Modern Memory* can be explained by the way it supported the most venerable narrative explanation of the Great War, that of tragedy".[47] Fussell's work had such an impact partly because it was reaffirming an understanding of the war that was already deeply ingrained within society, an understanding based on what can be seen as a canon of First World War literature. Moreover, Fussell views these works as important influences that "create or at least ratify how the past is remembered".[48]

Like Fussell, the cultural historian Jay Winter also concentrated on highbrow art and literature in *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural*

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[43] Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middle-brow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 167-8. Fussell suggests that Stanhope does not realise the seriousness of the man's wound, while Bracco shows that this is not the case.
[44] Ibid., pp. 149-50.
[45] Ibid., p. 178.
[46] *Times Literary Supplement*, 'Armageddon and After', Michael Howard, 05/12/1975 p.1434.
[47] Leonard V. Smith, 'Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-five Years Later', *History and Theory* 40 (2001), p. 242.
[48] Ibid., p.245.

History (1995). Winter's approach, however, was significantly different. He acknowledged the narrowness of his focus, examining ideas of death, bereavement and mourning in various artistic works. His research was also more comparative, and he criticised Fussell for his concentration on English literature to the detriment of major European works. In *The Experience of World War One* Winter stated that Fussell's survey was "too exclusively Anglo-Saxon to do justice to the full range of war writing"[49]. He also challenged Fussell's emphasis on irony, citing an important work such as Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (*Under Fire*) which in his eyes was naturalistic rather than ironic. Irony and modernism could express anger, according to Winter, but it was left to more traditional forms to heal.[50]

In Winter's view, "The Great War was, in cultural terms, the last nineteenth-century war, in that it provoked an outpouring of literature touching on an ancient set of beliefs about revelation, divine justice, and the nature of catastrophe."[51] Rejecting the idea of a new language being formed in the trenches, he wrote, "the gulf between the romanticism of Barbusse, the expressionism of Kraus, the iconoclasm of Shaw, and the apocalyptic images of many 'modernist' writers, may not be as great as first appears. Modernists reconfigured conventions; they didn't discard them".[52] Instead, Winter suggested, a 'literature of bereavement' was created. Writers and artists drew inspiration from the apocalyptic imagery of such eminent figures as Dante and William Blake. Apocalyptic images perhaps unsurprisingly figured significantly in the works emanating from the Great War, and Winter asserted that these, "linked the 1914-18 war with an earlier time when chiliastic notions were part of ordinary language"[53]. In an effort to understand and come to terms with the losses sustained during the war, writers and artists turned to traditional and familiar forms. For the soldier-artists, 'modern memory' was not created, "but rather a memorial to their youth, their comrades, and the men they left behind".[54]

Other cultural historians have attempted to move away from the rather narrow canon of First World War literature, widening their surveys to encompass other types of fiction and cultural artefacts. Samuel Hynes' *A War Imagined* (1990) examined the impact of the war on British culture through the media of books, poems, films, journalism, painting, sculpture, even advertisements. By broadening the range of material

[49] J.M. Winter, *The Experience of World War One* (London, 2000, first published 1988), p. 228.
[50] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 115-6.
[51] Ibid., p. 178.
[52] Ibid., p. 197.
[53] Ibid., p. 202.
[54] Winter, *Experience of World War One*, p. 229.

examined, Hynes was able to argue that a Myth of the War emerged, a myth that was imaginative rather then dishonest. He argued that, "By the time the decade of the Thirties began, the Myth of the War had been constructed in its essential and persisting form, and that construction may be regarded as an act of closure, both for the war and for the decade that followed it".[55] Hynes has not been without his critics. Margaret Higonnet, for example, remarked that *A War Imagined* was "marked by a charmingly frank adherence to the classic assumptions that created our canon of "great war novels" and poems by soldier-poets".[56] Moreover, in its assumptions about the war the book "continues to apply a narrowly mimetic norm of value".[57] Other historians have sought to broaden the approach further and move outside the literary canon.

Rosa Maria Bracco's *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War 1919-1939* (1993) looked at the writers who "failed the test of literary criticism", yet dominated the bestsellers lists throughout the inter-war period.[58] For middlebrow authors, Bracco argues, "the story and the more or less subtle exhortation accompanying it were the motivating forces behind their writings"[59]. Their intention was not to create high art, yet their works were more widely read than those of more critically acclaimed authors who have come to represent post-war Modernism. Middlebrow fiction was "the staple of the circulating libraries; they adorned bookshop windows, filled review columns and, most importantly, made the bestseller lists".[60] Indeed, Bracco argues, much middlebrow fiction was a reaction against new, experimental, European forms: "One role of middlebrow literature in the inter-war years was to keep the canon of nineteenth-century fiction, as it understood it, alive and functioning by safeguarding it against modernism".[61]

Middlebrow writers were not simply repeating simplistic, deeply conservative views in a didactic manner. They assumed some kinship with their readers. These authors were predominantly middle-class, well educated, and many of them had either seen active service or occupied other positions in France or on the propaganda front. These were

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[55] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), p. 461.
[56] Margaret Higonnet, 'A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture' [book review], *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Sept., 1993), p. 607.
[57] Ibid., p. 608.
[58] Bracco, *Merchants of Hope,* p. 196.
[59] Ibid., p. 196.
[60] Ibid., p. 11.
[61] Ibid., p. 12.

"no Bloomsbury scenario of writers devoted exclusively to their art".[62] They "concentrated their attention on ordinary human beings because they considered themselves ordinary and regarded their work as a reflection of the concerns and aspirations of a wide public".[63] Many of the public's aspirations were focused on rebuilding, which Bracco suggests is "crucial to understanding the history of the memory of war".[64] Traditional forms allowed readers to psychologically return to the pre-war world, in contrast to the uncertainty brought about by experimentation and Modernism. Bracco perhaps best expresses this idea when she writes of middlebrow writers providing readers with a "'gold standard' of meaning". Similarly, George Mosse has argued that before the Great War, "The symbols which were to shape the Myth of the War Experience... had been taking form for over a century and now were fully in place".[65] During and after the war, elements of society dealt with the conflict using what Mosse refers to as a 'process of trivialisation', a "way of coping with war, not by exalting and glorifying it, but by making it familiar".[66] Both Mosse and Bracco suggest that the overwhelming reaction to the war and its aftermath emphasised traditionalism and continuity rather than a radical reconfiguration of understandings.

Subsequent researchers have looked further into the role of popular fiction in helping the public to understand the First World War, and have moved away from the literature of the period between the wars. Esther MacCallum-Stewart has examined works of popular literature produced in the twentieth century, and has particularly focused on works published after the Second World War. Looking at a variety of novels, from Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* to less critically respected fiction in the genres of horror and romance, MacCallum-Stewart identified what she terms 'the parable of war': "The First World War Parable constructs a terrible, bloody conflict, one in which the individual struggles for personal sanity, yet is ultimately abandoned to a grisly fate by uncaring commanders".[67] This 'parable' employs linear 'narrative devices' which can be divided into four generic groups:

> The first mirrors the experiences of the war poets, exaggerating their characteristics to explore social (most usually homosocial or homosexual) relationships. The second spotlights a minority group - miners, women and

[62] Ibid., p. 23.
[63] Ibid., p. 23.
[64] Ibid., p. 30.
[65] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990), p. 50.
[66] Ibid., p. 127.
[67] Esther MacCallum-Stewart, 'The First World War and Popular Literature' (D.Phil Thesis, University of Sussex, 2005), p. 81.

> colonial troops being dominant themes. The third introduces protest or rebellion. In this device, the thinking, rational individual stands against the system. But in the literary First World War, the system - that corrupt, senseless world of old men, blind civilians and stubborn generals, does not allow this. The inevitable conclusion, until the Regeneration trilogy finally found other avenues for protestors, was either death in combat, or the motif of Shot at Dawn. Finally, the parable calls into question the role of truth during war, [and] starts to determine morally 'correct' responses to World War One.[68]

This interpretation of the conflict is seen to dominate late twentieth century First World War fiction, "conforming to contemporary ideas and humanist responses about participation in warfare". MacCallum-Stewart notes that, "It does not reflect attitudes in the 1910s, nor does it accurately portray the war itself, as it manifests through a series of familiar tropes and emotional connections with the reader".[69] The potency of this representation has resonated strongly with late-twentieth century readers. It has significantly contributed towards a gap between the historical and literary understandings of the Great War, and remains a bugbear for many historians of the conflict.

A study of children's literature would appear to be a natural progression from surveys of pulp and popular fiction, and there have been a few tentative steps in this area. Michael Paris, in his studies *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (2000) and *Over the Top* (2004), has looked at novels of the war years in terms of propaganda and what has been referred to as the 'popular masculine pleasure culture of war', while Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig's *Women and Children First: The Fiction of Two World Wars* (1978) looked at girls fiction. Of these, only *Over the Top* specifically focuses on the First World War, though Paris' survey ends in 1919. Kate Agnew and Geoff Fox's *Children at War: From the First World War to the Gulf* (2001) does bring its survey up to the present day, but does not really examine the relationship between the depiction of the war in children's books and the historiography of the subject. As an introduction to some of the literature it is reasonably useful, though, as the authors state in their introduction: "Our purpose is to bring into closer focus books which we believe evoke a range of positive reactions among young readers".[70] Part of its remit was to recommend books on the subject of war for teachers and young audiences.

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[68] Ibid., p. 82.
[69] Ibid., p. 254.
[70] Kate Agnew and Geoff Fox, *Children at War: From the First World War to the Gulf* (London, 2001), pp. 1-2.

Michael Paris' approach to the Great War in *Warrior Nation* is not exclusively literary, and can be seen as part of a growing trend for research that examines other areas of popular culture. Looking at such artefacts as novels, toys and comics, as well as youth movements, he argues that before 1914, Britain was already "an aggressive warfare state committed to the use of violence to maintain commercial predominance and territorial expansion".[71] The British people were dominated by a culture that "legitimised war, romanticised battle and portrayed the warrior as a masculine ideal".[72] In essence, war defined the nation, and still does to some extent. Paris argues that although since 1945 "British society has in some respects become more pacific... never have so many people been so addicted to the pleasure culture of war in some form or other".[73] He writes,

> It is a curious contradiction that, while there are now more cultural artefacts emphasizing the horror and futility of war than ever before, there are also many more films, stories and video games offering increasingly violent and bloody action scenarios for entertainment, especially for the nation's youth.[74]

The current 'pleasure culture' of war differs slightly from that of the early twentieth century, especially concerning entertainment aimed at children and adolescents. Paris suggests that before 1914 there was a concerted effort to prepare young Britons for the Great War to come.

For Paris, the Great War was presented in very traditional terms at the time, and this view persisted throughout the interwar years. Other historians have recently attempted to trace developments in the depiction and understanding of the war through other areas of popular culture. As with Esther MacCallum-Stewart's research, Dan Todman's *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005) traced the distortion of the image of the Great War, and demonstrated the incongruous divide between modern and contemporary accounts and interpretations. Todman questioned how, "A war often entered into in a spirit of hope, enthusiasm and willing sacrifice, and won with resolution, determination and even fury, is now looked back on with a sense of regret, betrayal and failure".[75] He disagrees with the view that fashions the 1960s as the period in which the myth became established, instead arguing that the process was more gradual.

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[71] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 13.
[72] Ibid., p. 13.
[73] Ibid., pp. 222-3.
[74] Ibid., pp. 223.
[75] Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, p. 221.

Given the historiographical nature of this thesis, one of its main focuses is on the cultural legacy of the Great War, and it addresses many of the arguments mentioned above. In their research, Fussell, Hynes and others all tended to concentrate too specifically on high-brow literature. This can be misleading. The works examined in this thesis were aimed at perhaps the most easily influenced group within society: children. It is in childhood that ideas begin to take form that remains with people throughout the entirety of their lives. Children were not learning about the First World War through Sassoon or Blunden; they were much more likely to be influenced by the works of Percy Westerman, or, towards the end of the century, Pat Mills. Reflecting on his childhood reading the novelist Graham Greene remarked in 1951:

> Of course I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr. E.M. Forster was going to appear this spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilized pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman which I had not read before.[76]

Similarly, Fred Inglis harked back to his youth reading 'Bulldog Drummond' novels. Like Jonathan Rose, he particularly questioned the extent to which children fully accepted the values being presented to them:

> The fierce delight I found in *Bulldog Drummond* was not in releasing God knows what adolescent anti-Semitism; it sprang from pure admiration for the reckless, athletic courage of the hero, the simplicity and vividness of his moral and pugnacious reflexes, and, within the terms of the novel, his sense of fairness, his taste for schoolboy humour and lightheartedness which, since I was a schoolboy, was my taste as well.[77]

Inglis rejected, at least in hindsight, some of the more unsavoury aspects of the tales, but took from them ideas of masculinity, athleticism, fairness, justness and Englishness. So children were choosing the values that appealed to them, and ignoring anything they either felt to be distasteful or did not fully understand. This, of course, raises questions about multiple meanings of the works studied at different periods in the twentieth century. Issues surrounding the interpretation of these works raise various methodological issues, and it is now important to discuss these further.

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[76] Graham Greene, 'The Lost Childhood', *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (London, 1951), p. 13.

[77] Fred Inglis, *The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 52. Jonathan Rose questioned the extent to which readers unquestioningly accepted the values of writers and other propagandists. See below.

Methodology

The use of books, comics and story papers as the subject of this thesis raises certain methodological issues. Analysis of the text alone is not adequate to fully comprehend the historical significance of the works, though it is nevertheless an important tool. My approach has therefore incorporated elements of both literary criticism and book history. Most of the texts included here were, by and large, not great works of literature, and this has had implications regarding the archives consulted. Considered ephemeral at the time, not a huge amount of information surrounding these publications has survived. The archives of the Oxford University Press (OUP), for example, were weeded of material relating to much of their output of children's fiction, particularly the works of Herbert Strang.[78] Given that the authors who wrote under the pseudonym Strang worked for the OUP, this is particularly disappointing. A similar story can be found elsewhere. A lack of enthusiasm for maintaining meticulous archives was clearly not limited to British publishers, as Wolfgang Natter has found.[79] The archive of the publishers Blackie & Sons in Glasgow contains a lot of information, though complete sales figures are only available for the publications of G.A. Henty, a figure whom many of the wartime writers sought to emulate. Clues as to the popularity of authors more relevant to the thesis can be found in their contract agreements, though these can be rather general and imprecise. Sales figures for more recent works are also frequently unreliable. As other researchers have also found, publishers are notoriously reluctant to release such details into the public domain, and when they do they are often inflated or distorted.[80] Some sales figures, of course, do exist, and these have been used wherever possible. These give some indication of readership, though not a complete one.

Other archives and possible repositories of useful material have suffered assorted misfortunes. If the writer Percy Westerman did keep records, diaries, or an archive, they were destroyed in a fire on his houseboat on the River Frome in Dorset.[81] The Luftwaffe also wreaked havoc during the Second World War, resulting in an absence of an archive

[78] Email from Martin Maw, OUP Archivist, to David Budgen, 16/10/2009.
[79] Wolfgang Natter, *Literature at War, 1914-1940: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany* (New Haven, 1999), p. 174. Natter also remarks that much material from German archives was lost during the bombing raids of the Second World War. As can be seen below, this was also true of some British archival material.
[80] Esther MacCallum-Stewart, 'First World War and Popular Literature', p. 29.
[81] Email from Michael Paris, Professor of Modern History, University of Central Lancashire, to David Budgen, 23/05/2003.

for the Amalgamated Press.[82] The Religious Tract Society (RTS) has an archive at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London, but very little has survived relating to the Boy's Own Paper (BOP) as a result of bomb damage. There are, however, some useful resources. The Mass-Observation archive at the University of Sussex houses various surveys and reports on children's reading habits during the 1930s and 1940s. Some sales figures are also available for more popular writers such as John Buchan and Sapper.

Late-twentieth century archives, particularly for the comic industry have been even more difficult to find. DC Thomson, the Dundee-based publishers, is notorious for their refusal to allow anyone other than members of staff in their archive.[83] The instability of the industry has also been unhelpful; comics often merged with sister publications in an attempt to generate more sales and stave off their demise, while publishing companies went through numerous changes of ownership during the 1970s and 80s. Much material did not survive these upheavals, particularly given the aforementioned ephemeral nature of the product. Adults have traditionally liked to pass judgements on literature aimed at children, establishing a clear definition between works that will be good for children, and those that are 'bad', and of little importance. Until a new understanding of the medium emerged in the 1980s, comics were deemed to fall within the second group, and were rarely treated seriously, which may be another explanation for the lack of archival material available. It simply was not deemed to be important enough to keep.

There are, however, other approaches that can be taken to such sources. The novels examined, particularly those published in the first half of the twentieth century, tended to follow a tried and tested formula not just in terms of the narrative, but also in the look of the books, the illustrations within their pages and the design of their covers. In this sense, the thesis draws on elements of book history, a relatively new academic field. Book history incorporates elements from such more established academic disciplines as bibliography, social history and literary criticism, combining them to approach books in a manner that does not just focus on the text. Finkelstein and McCleery have suggested that book history "inherited from bibliography... a detailed system for describing books on the basis of their production attributes, which provided a universal standard drawing

[82] Email from Kelly Boyd, Lecturer in History, Middlesex University, to David Budgen, 11/11/2003.
[83] Email from Calum Laird, Syndication Department, D.C. Thomson, to David Budgen, 27/10/2003.

attention to the material object rather than its contents".[84] Although the text is important, and elements of literary criticism are used to analyse the narratives, other features of the books are equally valuable. Analysis of the text gives little clue as to the reception of the book, for example.

In many ways, it is easier to discern the intention of an author than the readers' interpretation of the text. Most readers would not have recorded their feelings, and one cannot assume that those who did were representative of the entire audience. The thoughts of those who reminisced later in life are also important, but unlikely to fully capture the spirit in which the books were initially read. Moreover, it should not be assumed that the author's agenda coincided with the needs of the reader. Jonathan Rose, for example, has challenged the widespread belief that "a whole generation was converted to imperialism by the novels of G.A. Henty, children's magazines, and classroom propaganda".[85] Instead, he argues, "the majority of those youths were working-class, and they seem to have been strikingly unaware of their empire".[86] For Rose, "reader response depends entirely on the frame of the audience, which in turn depends on their education and their other reading experiences".[87]

Roland Barthes argued in 1967 that, "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing", and suggested that such readings were convenient for critics.[88] There is certainly some truth to this assertion, and traditional readings of literature did have a tendency to ignore the role of the reader. In his research into working-class culture, Jonathan Rose has demonstrated the fallacy of assuming that readers responded to propaganda with unconditional acceptance. Similarly, Stephen Badsey has shown that audiences interpreted *The Battle of the Somme* film in their own way, rather than conforming to any expected reading, while Mark Connelly has noted that young cinemagoers during the Second World War were aware of the propaganda aimed at them, and not fooled by it. Historians should certainly not assume that a writer's intentions were imparted to artless readers who readily consumed works and took on the author's ideals.

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[84] David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 'Introduction', David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds.), *The Book History Reader* (London, 2002), p. 2.
[85] Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 321.
[86] Ibid., p. 321.
[87] Ibid., p. 322.
[88] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature and the Modern World* (Oxford, 1990, first published 1967), p. 231.

Equally, it would be unwise to disregard the author's intentions, and this can be gleaned to some extent from diaries, interviews, *and* analysis of the text. If a group of writers were attempting to instil in their readers certain values, than that *is* historically important. The historian needs to be able to strike a balance between authorial intentions, and audience reception in their research. Audience reaction can be difficult to assess. Memoirs can be useful, although these do not generally reflect the opinions of the average reader (if there is such a thing). Reviews are also indicators of reception. Reviews not only analyse the text critically, but also judge the work's suitability for a particular audience. In that sense, we can see a direct correlation between author, publisher, vendor, critic/journalist and reader. Robert Darnton has discussed this idea of a circular approach to book history that neither diminishes the author nor the reader:

> [P]rinted books generally pass through roughly the same life cycle. It could be described as a communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affects their texts, whether they are composing Shakespearian sonnets or directions for assembling radio kits. A writer may respond in his writing to criticisms of his previous work or anticipate reactions that his text will elicit".[89]

This will be seen later in the thesis. Late twentieth century writers were aware of the body of work that had preceded them, and keen to emulate and protect them. Writers engaged with historiographical debates and sought to defend a view of the war that they felt to be sacred.

When examining the presentation of the Great War to children, it is important to recognize that works of fiction were not the only written influences on young minds, and the Historical Textbook Collection of the Institute of Education in London has been an invaluable source.

As has been seen, there has been considerable debate generated around the nature of the First World War and its legacy. This thesis seeks to frame such debates within the context of children's books. It will attempt to establish the extent to which these ideas filtered down to the youngest members of society, and the impact this had. It will

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[89] Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books', David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds.), *The Book History Reader*, pp. 10-11.

investigate the place of children's books within the competing interpretations of the conflict that emerged during the interwar years, as well as demonstrating the role such works continue to play in shaping young minds in their views on society. The first chapter will focus specifically on the years 1914 to 1918, looking at the role of children's books and story papers as war propaganda, and the difficulties faced by authors in trying to present a war that was so unlike anything that had been seen before. Moreover, it will analyse the underlying themes of the texts and the values they promote. Chapter two will take a similar approach to the period from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second World War. As the war receded into the past, it became more suitable for historical study, so this chapter will be better positioned to approach the depiction of the war in school textbooks. It will look at the way in which these works aimed at children engaged with other debates taking place in society, how they presented the war given the greater understanding of the true nature of the conflict, and the role of children's books in the process of memorialisation. Finally, chapter three will focus on the post-Second World War era. The way in which children's books reacted to historiographical debates will be analysed, along with the changing approaches to History during this period. The chapter will attempt to establish the extent to which post-1945 works viewed the war given the radical change in the nature of society during this period.

The aim of this thesis is to examine a largely untapped area of research, and shed some light on the manner in which ideas about the Great War have taken hold throughout the twentieth century. Given the competing interpretations of the conflict that have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, the entrenchment of one particular view over another tells us a lot about the nature of society. The role of children's books in disseminating ideas about the war and its legacy is an important one. As will be seen over the next three chapters, ideas have been continually changing since 1914, and the presentation of the war to children has been vital in establishing particular understandings across the rest of society for future generations.

Chapter One
A Traditional War: 1914-1918

Introduction

When war broke out in August 1914, British troops had not been involved in a major conflict on mainland Europe since the Napoleonic Wars. In military terms, the Victorian age had been characterised by wars of empire, clashes that *were* important, though relatively small in scale, and far removed from everyday life in Britain. In British military history the First World War was seen to be an anomaly. A protracted conflict of attrition had not characterised recent British military endeavours, and the reality of warfare between 1914 and 1918 did not, by and large, fit the model of what Graham Dawson has described as "a popular masculine pleasure-culture of war".[1] Indeed, throughout the war years there was a clear attempt by writers to cling to traditional concepts of war, particularly when presenting the war to youths and children. Tales set in the far-flung reaches of the empire had been ubiquitous throughout the Victorian era, and it is perhaps little wonder that the First World War was often reconfigured to suit a framework that better fitted this tradition.

It can be seen, therefore, that the battle to sway the minds of children was a vital one, and changes in society meant that this battle could be waged on a range of fronts. The First World War was the first large-scale conflict involving Britain that could be presented to a widely literate nation. At the same time, there was a healthy market of children's fiction, stemming from the expansion in this area of literature in the nineteenth century. It also seems fairly evident that the First World War was a popular war, commonly supported by a wide range of people across British society, and that these people were complicit in the dissemination of propaganda, officially or unofficially, both as conveyors and receptors. Thereby, this chapter seeks to examine the presentation of the Great War to children between 1914 and 1918, the war years themselves. Given the importance of widespread literacy, it will consider largely written sources, which would have had some impact on the views of children at this time. Some, such as school textbooks, would have been a compulsory part of children's lives, though usually judgement of their suitability was down to the individual teacher's discretion.[2] The subject of History became compulsory for the

[1] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.4.
[2] Chancellor, *History for their Masters*, p.38.

first time in 1900, leading to a large increase in the publication of these textbooks.[3] Novels and story papers, on the other hand, would generally have been viewed voluntarily, though again parental influence often reared its head. This chapter seeks to establish how the Great War was presented to children in these written sources, and will examine the values that were conveyed. It will address the issues of traditionalism and imperialism in the depiction of this 'modern' and 'industrial' war. It will also look at aspects of readership, such as class and gender, and attempt to assess the reasons behind such a wealth of material aimed at youths and children.

The focus of the chapter will be largely upon written sources produced during the war years and aimed at children. In general these sources can be divided into three categories: Story papers, novels and educational textbooks. The vast majority of the novels of this period were adventure stories, often aimed predominantly at a young male market. Most were fairly generic, conforming in terms of both structure and design. A brightly coloured dust jacket depicting a scene of adventure would lead readers into the text itself, interspersed with several action-packed illustrations. These novels were fairly expensive, perhaps rendering them beyond the reach of working class children. In 1914 novels by Westerman and Brereton cost three shillings and six pence. By 1918 similar books were sold for anything between four and six shillings. Though average earnings did increase during the war, so too did the cost of living, particularly for those whose work was not directly related to the war economy.[4] However, as shall be seen throughout this chapter, the story papers conveyed many of the same values, often written by the same authors, at a fraction of the price. These publications would make children feel part of a community of, for example, *Chums* readers, as they wrote their letters to the editor and received sage advice in return. Aside from the adventure stories and wisdom of their elders, children could also read factual articles on a range of subjects from botany to engineering. Many of these articles were, however, focused on aspects of the military. There were a wide range of these story papers to choose from, and though they were often similar, there were significant differences in agenda. Perhaps the most obvious example of this was the famous *Boy's Own Paper*. Published by the Religious Tract Society, many of its stories conveyed a more Christian subtext than their more secular rivals. The majority of these publications depicted and commented on the Great War in some form or other.

The educational textbooks can be separated into two categories. Some were written for use in schools, though there were naturally questions about the role of the war in the classroom

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[3] Ibid., p.28.

[4] Winter, *Great War and the British People* (London, 1985), p. 235.

given the close proximity of the subject matter. How could a war occurring in the present be depicted in history books? Often general surveys of British or European history were reprinted with added chapters to show that Germany had been building towards the war since at least 1870, and was therefore the instigator of the conflict. Very few focused only on the war, and not enough was known about grand strategy. As such, focus on school textbooks will not be as prominent in this chapter as in those focusing on post-1918 Britain. There were, however, numerous non-fiction books published during the war with such titles as *The Blue Book of the War* or the Herbert Strang edited *Our Allies and Enemies* (1916). These books attempted to explain the war to a young audience, often disseminating unofficial propaganda under the guise of factual representation. Moreover, these books could be extremely popular. Blackie & Sons *Heroes of the Great War* was first published in April 1915. In that year it sold 4070 copies. The following year it sold 17400 copies, and by 1924-25, its sales figures had reached over 41000.[5] Educational book sales were extremely important to publishers. For the Edinburgh-based publishers Thomas Nelson and Sons, educational textbooks represented twenty-five per cent of their output, but eighty-eight per cent of their profit.[6]

The chapter will begin by examining the reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914. Novels and story papers had been predicting war and encouraging national preparedness for many years. A study of early responses to the conflict will establish the extent to which the war conformed to expectations, as well as examining the subsequent depiction of the war's opening moves. Next, the chapter will analyse depictions of the Western Front. It was the fighting in the trenches that came to fully represent the First World War in late twentieth century popular understandings, or what Samuel Hynes has termed 'The Myth of the War", often to the detriment of other theatres of conflict. The chapter will then focus upon the depiction of the war in areas outside the trenches of France and Belgium. Beginning with the sideshows, it will look at the influence of nineteenth century imperialist adventure stories on works set in the Middle East and Africa. Given the importance of the Royal Navy in the British national psyche, representations of the war at sea will then be examined, followed by the war in the air, which combined the modernity of new technology with the perceived romance of medieval tournaments. Finally there will be an examination of girls' fiction. The disparity between the depiction of the war in boys' and girls' fiction will be remarked upon, as well as the extent to which girls' tales reflected a perceived change in the role of British women during the First World War.

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[5] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/4/3/1, 'Educational Book Sales', 1888-1925.
[6] Heather Holmes and David Finkelstein (ed.), *Thomas Nelson and Sons: Memories of an Edinburgh Publishing House* (East Linton, 2001), p. xviii. These figures refer to the period 1878-1881.

The Outbreak of War

At the same time, an expanded official propaganda campaign was aimed at the British public, neutral countries (particularly the United States), and the enemy.[7] Children, therefore, were an important factor in these attempts to influence sections of society. The historian Niall Ferguson has suggested that, "the grim truth about war propaganda was that it had the greatest influence on the social group which mattered least to the war effort: children".[8] At first glance such a sentiment seems justified. Children could not fight, or work in munitions factories. However, they did occupy one important role; they were the soldiers of the future. At a conference on the teaching of History and Scripture held in Westminster in January 1917, Agnes Maude Royden proclaimed, "The future of the world depends on the spirit in which those who are growing up now are going to face its problems".[9] In 1914, five and a half weeks after Britain had declared war on Germany, the editor of *Chums*, a popular boys' story paper, urged his young readers to "get themselves fit to take part in the defence of the Empire when they are old enough"[10]. In this sense, both the participants in the Women's International League's conference, and the writers of adventure stories for boys agreed on the importance of educating children as hope for the future. Royden's attitude, however, was the antithesis of the militaristic jingoism of the boys' fiction authors, though this was unsurprising given her background. The daughter of a Conservative MP, a suffragette and, at least until the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War were revealed, a pacifist, her stance on the teaching of history needs to be seen in this context. This is not to question the pertinence of her opinions. She raised important questions regarding the future of History teaching: "Will the history teacher of the future teach us to regard as "patriotic" a narrow contempt (based largely on ignorance) of all nations but our own? Or will he, by the sincerity of his view, create that spirit of sympathy which makes understanding easy and co-operation welcome". "History", she argued, "is taught, not by the study of the normal so much as the abnormal. Battle, murder,

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[7] For more on British propaganda during First World War see Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-18 and After* (London, 1987). For a contemporary view see Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* (Torrance, California, 1991, first published 1928).
[8] Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), p. 239.
[9] Women's International League, *The Teaching of History and Scripture, Report of Conference at Central Buildings, Westminster, January 6,7,8 1917* (London, 1917).
[10] *Chums,* No. 1148, vol. XXIII, 12/09/1914, p. 9.

and sudden death are not the normal experience of the average human being, nor are many of us Kings and Queens, great heroes, or great criminals".[11]

Such opinions were the antithesis of the boys' papers ethos. When examined, however, in relation to the popular perception of history and the First World War throughout the twentieth century it can be seen that such views were prescient. The change in the teaching of history that Royden had called for in 1917 was not dissimilar to the thinking that distinguished the education system after 1945. In twenty-first century Britain, public sympathy has largely been directed towards the ordinary soldiery of the Great War. The volunteers of 1914 were nevertheless often acting upon a sense of duty and patriotism. Britain was reliant upon volunteers until the introduction of conscription in January 1916, and the future of the armed forces to a great extent depended on the willingness of civilians to lay down their lives for their country. In this sense the value of propaganda aimed at future soldiers can clearly be seen.

The formation of boys' organisations such as Boys' Brigade and the Church Lads' Brigade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century recognised the importance of children as potential warriors. It has been suggested that in his formation of the Boy Scout Movement, "Baden-Powell was interested not simply in teaching boys how to develop "pluck", but in insuring that British middle-class youth were inculcated with the seemingly antithetical tribal values of national and group loyalty which he saw as essential to the survival of the British Empire".[12] The formation of such organisations was often founded upon the "combination of anti-intellectual and anti-urban" ideas, reacting to the fears of physical degeneracy threatening the security and future of Britain and her empire.[13] Baden-Powell feared that "the same causes which brought about the downfall of the Great Roman Empire were working today in Britain".[14] These fears were supported and perpetuated in the pages of the story papers as well as the works of boys' fiction, reflecting Edwardian anxieties that would be carried over into the interpretation of the Great War. The school stories that appeared in the pages of such publications as *The Boy's Own Paper*, *Chums*, *The Gem* and *The Magnet* idolised the boys that displayed sporting prowess, while the academically gifted were dismissed as 'swots'.[15] Baden-Powell's notion that "there is not much use having a big

[11] Women's International League, *The Teaching of History*, p. 2-3.
[12] Daniel Bivona, *British Imperial Literature, 1870-1940: Writing and the Administration of Empire* (Cambridge, 1998), p.196.
[13] Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell* (London, 1989), p. 359.
[14] Baden-Powell quoted in W.J. Reader, *'At Duty's Call': A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester, 1988), p. 39.
[15] See Jeffrey Richards, 'The School Story' in Dennis Butts (ed.), *Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context* (New York, 1992), pp. 1-22.

brain if a man has not a big body to carry it" was reinforced and disseminated directly to young readers and also manifested itself in representations of the Great War.[16]

The death of G.A. Henty had left an opening in the lucrative children's fiction market, an opportunity for a number of heirs to follow the highly successful literary blueprint that he had established. Henty's mantle, as noted in the *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*) in December 1914, was "too large for any one author".[17] His books had been extremely popular during his lifetime. In 1882, *Under Drake's Flag* had sold 2094 copies, though his sales would improve. *The Dash for Khartoum* sold 6465 in 1892; *Under Wellington* sold 10566 in 1899, while *With Buller in Natal* sold 17342 in 1901.[18] Sales of Henty's books continued during the First World War, though not in the same numbers. *With Buller in Natal* sold a further 650 copies between 1914 and 1918.[19] *With Kitchener in Sudan*, which had shifted 12664 copies by 1903, sold 239 in 1914, 394 in 1915, 234 in 1916 and 82 in 1917.[20] *With Kitchener in Sudan* was republished in 1917, and sold 2229 copies in its new edition.[21] *With Roberts to Pretoria* sold another 1118 copies between 1914 and 1917, while *Held Fast for England* sold 824.[22] *St George for England* was another of Henty's novels republished in 1917, selling 1498 copies.[23] Blackie & Sons also published a series of six shilling versions of Henty's books during the war: the six shilling version of *Under Wellington* sold 1205 copies between 1914 and 1917.[24] There were very few sales figures in the Blackie & Sons archive, with the exception of a complete record of Henty's sales. This, nevertheless, is still useful. Henty's sales are a useful though inexact measure of the sort of numbers that writers of boys' fiction could expect, or hope to achieve. Among Henty's successors, the "practised and ingenious writers busily turning out the adventures of dauntless heroes for young readers", Frederick Sadleir Brereton, Herbert Strang (the pseudonym of James L'Estrange and George Ely), and Percy Francis Westerman were perhaps the most prominent.[25] Brereton had combined his writing with a military career, and some emphasis was placed on the fact that he was a cousin of Henty. The authors behind Herbert Strang worked for the Oxford University Press, a position from which they could promote their work. Westerman was a former naval clerk who eventually made enough

[16] Baden-Powell quoted in Jeal, *Baden-Powell*, p. 358.
[17] *Times Literary Supplement*, December 10, 1914, p.561.
[18] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD/61/4/3/2, 'Statement of Sales of Henty's Books', 1893-1917.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] *Times Literary Supplement*, December 10, 1914, p. 561. See also Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 65.

from his writing to concentrate on literary pursuits full-time in 1911.[26] According to his obituary in *The Times*, he was "employed on coastal duties with the Royal Navy, but later held a commission, like Captain W.E. Johns, in the Royal Flying Corps".[27]

All three appeared around the turn of the century, writing along similar lines to Henty. Brereton's pre-war works included *With Rifle and Bayonet, A Story of the Boer War* (1901) and *The Dragon of Pekin, A Tale of the Boxer Revolt* (1902), subjects upon which Henty had also written.[28] He had served as a surgeon with the Scots Guards during the Boer War, and, according to his obituary in *The Times*, was recalled to service in 1914.[29] Likewise, Westerman's early works included *Under King Henry's Banners, A Story of the Days of Agincourt* (1914), suggesting that what has been referred to as the 'island story' was still very much a feature of children's literature at the beginning of the twentieth century.[30] John Stevenson has suggested "a whole generation had been brought up on the boys' books of G.A. Henty, the *Boy's Own Paper*, the tales of Rider Haggard and best-selling accounts of the Boer War which promoted an image of war as both honourable and glorious".[31] Jeffrey Richards has argued that "Captain Frank H. Shaw was product of, propagandist for and monument to a concept of Empire that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, and – contrary to what is often alleged by historians – survived unaltered at least until World War Two".[32] All of the above authors could be categorised as such, and it was seen as the duty of wartime writers to continue this tradition, and inspire the warriors of the future.

Indeed, the appearance of their publications could be seen as a continuation of the Henty brand. Cloth-bound, usually with an illustration on the dust-jacket and the cover underneath, the works of Westerman, Brereton, and girls' writers such as Angela Brazil, would have been easily recognizable by young readers. The cover of Brereton's *With Allenby in Palestine*, for example, depicts a soldier reporting to a senior officer in a desert setting. He is seated in front of a tent, and other soldiers can be seen working in the background. The illustration on the book's spine is of another soldier attempting to make a wireless communication. Similarly, the dust-jacket of Westerman's *With Beatty off Jutland* shows a naval battle in full flow. Water splashes as shells narrowly miss battleships, while the

[26] *The Times*, 25/2/1959, p. 12.
[27] Ibid., p. 12.
[28] Henty had written *With Roberts to Pretoria, A Tale of the South African War* (1902) and *With the Allies to Pekin, A Story of the Relief of the Legations* (published posthumously in 1904).
[29] *The Times*, 21/08/1957, p. 10.
[30] Robert H. Macdonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester, 1994), p. 49.
[31] John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (London, 1984), p. 49.
[32] Jeffrey Richards, 'Popular Imperialism and the Image of the Army in Juvenile Literature' in John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992), p. 106.

smoke from the battle envelops other vessels. On the spine, another battleship is narrowly missed by more shell-fire. Underneath the dust-jacket, a similar image is displayed, though in the stark primary colours of red and blue. The titles of these books, along with the exciting illustrations on the covers, all presented clearly to young readers, or adults buying the books for them, the nature of the tale contained within their pages. They would have been instantly identifiable in a shop, library, or on a book stall, while the inside dust-jacket contained list of the authors other works, along with others by similar writers. In *With Allenby in Palestine*, the other author was Henty.

It is difficult to assess how well the works of Brereton and Westerman sold. No sales figures exist for their books. As mentioned above, the sales of Henty's works give some clue as to the sort of figures his successors might hope to achieve. Some information can also be discerned from the contracts they signed. Westerman renegotiated his royalties with Blackie & Sons in 1927. He was to receive ten per cent for all books priced at 5/- and 6/-, and six per cent for those sold for 3/6d or less. Moreover, these new rates would apply to books published before 1927 which had sold over 6,000 copies. These included *A Lively Bit of the Front*, *The Submarine Hunters*, *The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge*, *Under the White Ensign*, *With Beatty off Jutland*, *The Fight for Constantinople* and *Winning His Wings*.[33] Brereton also renegotiated royalties with Blackie. For books sold at 5/-, he would receive ten per cent for the first 3,500 copies, twelve and a half per cent for the next 2,500, and fifteen per cent for sales beyond 6,000. For books priced at less than 5/-, he received seven and a half per cent on all sales, along with £25 in anticipation of future royalties.[34]

The outbreak of war in August 1914 resulted in little change to the attitudes conveyed in the boys' story papers. The pages of *Chums*, for example, were replete with advertisements for air rifles that would enable the young readers to serve their country if war came about. One such advertisement begged the question, "Do you want to become sturdy, keen-eyed, level-headed and self-reliant?" Any readers unsure of the answer were nudged in the right direction: "Of course you do! Then practice with a "KING" Air Rifle. *It will help you*".[35] Such advertisements if anything became more prevalent after the outbreak of war. *Chums* was just one of several publications issued by the Amalgamated Press, the publishing empire of Alfred Harmsworth, 1st Viscount Northcliffe. Northcliffe owned *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* amongst other newspapers, and a long history of publishing invasion stories before 1914. His first, *The Siege of Portsmouth*, appeared in the *Portsmouth Mail* in 1895.

[33] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/6/1/3, 'Authors' Agreements Volume 3 1919-1937'.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *Chums*, No. 1,099, vol. XXII, 04/10/1913 – my italics.

I.F. Clarke has noted the opportunism behind this publication, as Harmsworth was at the time standing as one of two Conservative candidates for Portsmouth in the general election of that year.[36] He became a hugely influential figure, not just in Britain, but also in the United States where his reputation and intervention played a vital role in encouraging the Americans to enter the war on the Britain's side.[37] In a letter to the writer H.G. Wells in October, 1916, Northcliffe remarked, "I suppose I publish more fiction in serial form than anyone in the world... affording people something to look forward to every week".[38]

Responding to H.G. Wells' comments on the fairness of interning Germans in England, Northcliffe demonstrated anti-German sentiments that suggested he believed much of the propaganda his publications were disseminating: "I would intern every one of them who had been naturalised within five years of the outbreak of war. At the end of July 1914, we behaved like lunatics in letting these people stream out of this country into the German Army. The freedom of a good many of the Germans in England is due in a great degree to snobbery and worse <u>in very high places</u>. They are here for no good or they would go to Holland or home".[39] It is little wonder that *Chums* supported the war so enthusiastically, and encouraged their readers to follow their example.

A strong emphasis was also placed on sporting prowess in the story papers, as attempts were made to ready the nation for war and stave off the feared physical degeneracy that had entered the popular consciousness during the Boer War, and provided the basis for the founding of Baden-Powell's Boy Scout Association.[40] Thus in June 1914, the editor of *Chums* could write, "You can always tell the sporting boy from one who either can't or won't play. The one has a keen look in his eyes and is on the alert. He may try to disguise the fact by affecting the fop – but he can't get away from the wholesome influence of sport".[41] This focus on sport continued throughout the popular children's fiction of the war. The heroes that frequented the novels of Westerman, Brereton, Strang and their like were frequently champions of boxing, football and 'rugger' at their respective public schools. Indeed, Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig have noted that in boys' fiction, "Flanders quickly

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[36] Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984*, p. 128.
[37] J. Lee Thompson, ''To Tell the People of America the Truth': Lord Northcliffe in the USA, Unofficial British Propaganda, June-November 1917', *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999) p. 245.
[38] British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add 62161, Northcliffe Papers Vol. IX, 'Letter from Northcliffe to H.G. Wells', 2 October, 1916. P.G. Wodehouse satirised Northcliffe in his novel *Heavy Weather* (1933). In it, Lord Tilbury, formerly Sir George 'Stinker' Pyke, is owner of the Mammoth Publishing Company, which produces such publications as *Tiny Tots*.
[39] British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add 62161, Northcliffe Papers Vol. IX, 'Letter from Northcliffe to H.G. Wells', 29/06/1918.
[40] See Jeal, *Baden-Powell*, p. 358.
[41] *Chums*, No. 1,136 vol. XXII, 20/06/1914, p. 750.

became the new and bizarre playing field for the Great Game".[42] The actions of Captain Wilfred Nevill of the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment, who famously issued the men under his command with footballs, in an effort to enhance their morale on the first day of the battle of the Somme in July 1916, can be read as the apogee of this sporting ethos.[43]

The first issue of *Chums* to be published after the outbreak of war appeared on September 5, 1914. In an editorial article focusing upon career advice, apparently in response to the requests of the readers, a life in the armed services was deemed a highly appropriate and desirable for goal for young boys: "Both the Army and the Navy are good fields for steady young fellows, particularly the Navy. In the Navy a specialist is often a lot better off than he would be doing his own job on shore. At the same time he is leading a healthy life and is seeing the world."[44] Clearly the issue had gone to press before the declaration of war had been announced. Indeed, this was acknowledged in the following week's publication. The editor wrote, "When I passed for press the last number of *Chums* – the one you enjoyed last week – there was no thought in our mind of the terrible war that has now gripped Europe".[45] Despite the outbreak of war, however, the editor's advice remained largely the same, as he encouraged the young to become involved in the war effort:

> During the last week or so I have had very many letters from the readers asking what they can do for Britain during the present crisis. If they are under thirty and over eighteen their duty is clear. They should join the Army – for the period of the war – in response to Lord Kitchener's request. If they are too young for the Army they can join rifle clubs, cadet corps, and the Boy Scouts... Those who cannot do any of these things should just go quietly on with their studies or their work. And they should join the Sharpshooters' League.[46]

The role of the Boy Scouting movement had been "to teach boys how to follow so that they would one day know when and how to lead", and works produced primarily to entertain children propagated this message.[47] At the same time, the Sharpshooters' League would be the perfect opportunity for young boys to hone their skills with the aforementioned air rifles that were advertised in each edition of *Chums*. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the outbreak of war did little to alter the advice given to young boys in these publications.

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[42] Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *Women and Children First: The Fiction of Two World Wars* (London, 1978), p. 71.
[43] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, (London, 2002) p. 172.
[44] *Chums*, No. 1147, vol. XXII 05/09/1914, p. 937.
[45] *Chums,* No. 1148, vol. XXIII 12/09/1914, p. 9.
[46] Ibid., p. 9.
[47] Ibid., p. 197.

The editor of *Chums* made it immediately clear to his young audience that the war would affect them, and their story paper of choice. He informed the readers, "plans have had to be abandoned and other plans have had to be made in a hurry". Meanwhile, their favourite authors were off fighting in foreign lands:

> Captain Frank Shaw had written one or two instalments of "Castaway Island", when he was called out to his military duties, and is now with his men in the Army Service Corps. In those circumstances we have had to postpone the serial expected from Captain Shaw. Captain Sanders (our old friend Sandy) is also hard at work. He is in the Royal Engineers, and his important duties have taken him abroad with his men.[48]

In this manner, young readers were immediately provided with an indelible link with the war. The men whose stories played a prominent role in their lives each week were fighting on the Western Front. This link was taken a step further in a June 1915 edition of *Chums*, which included in its regular 'The Editor Chats', 'Chums Authors and Readers at the Front". Alongside Captain Shaw and 'our old friend Sandy', four other authors were at the front. Moreover, the Editor also refers to letters from readers "who, in the midst of the war... kindly thought for the Old Paper".[49] One former reader, Sergeant A. Fagan of the 2nd London Division wrote, "It may interest you to hear that the silver watch I won in a 'Chums' competition about eight or nine years ago is still doing good work out here, and has proved invaluable in the firing line".[50] This further personalised the conflict; as well as family members of some of *Chums'* audience, past *Chums* readers and current writers were fighting on the Western Front.

These authors were clearly not the only influence on children of the period. The importance of state education was vital. On August 29, 1914, Joseph Pease, the President of the Board of Education, issued an address on the subject of 'Education and the War'. In it he drew attention to the problems faced by the education system brought about by the war: "Many teachers and students have been summoned to military duties, whilst others are asking themselves whether duty calls them to go or to stay; school buildings have been taken for military and hospital purposes; we have to fill the gaps in our ranks and to contrive makeshifts".[51] The notion of filling "gaps in our ranks" was an important one. It was an immediate recognition of the position of the state in the war effort; the stability of the home front was deemed as significant to the success of the nation as events on the fighting fronts.

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[48] Ibid., p. 9.
[49] *Chums*, No. 1189, vol. XXIII 26/06/1915, p. 755.
[50] Ibid., p. 755.
[51] TNA, ED 10/82, President's Address 'Education and the War', 29/08/1914.

Indeed, some teachers later attempted to evade military service by claiming that their current roles were vital to the war effort, and questions were raised in parliament regarding the number of conscientious objectors within the teaching profession.[52] Pease's address recognised the physical affects of the war on education, and the role of schooling in Britain's success. Moreover, he also referred to the role of education in justifying the war to the country's young:

> The teachers can do more than anyone else to help their scholars, according to their age and capacity, to see why the cause upon which we are united is just; to feel, if they cannot fully understand, the meaning of liberty and of that free national life which every country, whether great or small, is right to cherish and defend. The scholars can be shown that we are involved in war by stern necessity, that we are fighting in the cause of peace and against the spirit of aggressive domination which is the great enemy of peace.[53]

Schools were instilling a sense of patriotism in their pupils, as well as a sense of justness in their cause. These were the same attitudes conveyed in works of fiction, though the jingoism of these tales was unsuitable for the education system. A Board of Education Supplementary Circular entitled 'Teaching of History in Secondary Schools' stated:

> The events now proceeding in Europe and the crisis which the nation has to face call for knowledge as well as courage and devotion. Those responsible for the teaching of History in Secondary Schools will be considering how this, like other subjects of instruction, may best be made to serve national purposes.[54]

Produced in September 1914, a month after the outbreak of war, this memorandum placed pre-war ideas into a new context. A previous communication (Circular 599) had suggested "a useful conclusion to the course in History would be a year's work on the history of Europe in the Nineteenth Century".[55] The outbreak of war meant that the thought behind this suggestion needed to be both refined and redefined. It was deemed unsuitable for History lessons to cover much after 1871, largely for practical reasons; it was felt that there were not any suitable textbooks available that dealt with this period. Yet there was a desire to provide schoolchildren with the information that would lead to a better understanding of the events that had resulted in the outbreak of war: "It will clearly be necessary, either as an

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] TNA, ED 12/218 Circular 869, Memoranda on Teaching and Organisation in Secondary Schools: Modern European History, Sept. 1914, p. 2.
[55] Ibid., p. 2.

integral part of the Course or in the form of supplementary work, to carry on the narrative so as to explain how the present situation has arisen".[56] Many existing textbooks were updated to cover such topics.

A sense that the war needed to be justified to schoolchildren was not limited to Britain; subjects of the British Empire were also persuaded of the legitimacy of the conflict. Children in Mauritius, for example, were given an account of the reasons for the war. Prepared by the Chief Inspector of Schools, it began by stressing the benevolence of the Empire, and the reluctance with which the British entered any military action:

> The British Empire is the biggest empire that the world has ever seen. Though it was built up as the result of many wars, it is not by war that it has been held together. On the contrary, the countries and peoples in it are kept together in one strong brotherhood, by the love of peace and the love of freedom.[57]

In a pamphlet aimed at subjects of the British Empire, great emphasis was placed upon the concept of freedom: "We love peace, but we hate dishonour. We love freedom, for others as well as for ourselves".[58] Furthermore, the British and the allies were, "fighting for freedom and justice and the peace of the world".[59] The writers of boys' fiction agreed with such sentiments, though their approach to the matter was naturally different. By examining these differences, the conflicting views on how to present the war to young Britons can clearly be seen. There was little jingoism in this Board of Education circular; the desire was for the schoolchildren to develop an understanding of the world around them. The report's author deemed that, regarding the political and diplomatic events of the nineteenth century that had precipitated the Great War it was "unnecessary to add that in the treatment of this subject everything should be avoided which would encourage national animosities".[60] This suggests that the ideal presentation of the war and the preceding events was in contrast to the reality of the situation. In a country dominated by popular anti-German sentiments, it would perhaps have been unrealistic to imagine that all schoolteachers would remain impartial. Regardless of the stance of schoolteachers, the generation of boys' fiction writers clearly saw where their responsibility lay. Long before August 1914, Westerman, Brereton, Strang et al had been warning Britain's youth of the threat of Germany.

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[56] Ibid., p. 2.
[57] *The Causes of the Great War: An Account of the Reasons Why Great Britain is Fighting, Addressed to the School Children of Mauritius* (Port Louis, 1914), p. 3.
[58] Ibid., p. 7.
[59] Ibid., p. 8.
[60] TNA, ED 12/218, p. 3.

Herbert Strang's *Lord of the Seas* (1909) related the story of an American engineer, Bigelow T. Wragge, and his English protégé William Harding. A submarine, which Wragge had invented and built, had been stolen by his German business partner of twenty years, Carl Schlange. Wragge had sabotaged the vessel before fleeing to England, giving him time to plan his revenge, return to the Solomon Islands and regain his property. Inspired by the dual motives of financial gain and the glory of the Kaiser (the title *Lord of the Seas* refers to Wilhelm II and his naval ambitions), Schlange had sold the submarine to the German government, and a gunboat had been dispatched to collect her. There then ensues a battle between Wragge's followers and the Germans, though British ownership of the islands means that rival tribesmen, allied to the different factions, are the main protagonists in the conflict. Eventually, the cannibalistic tribe allied to the Germans turn on their masters, who as white Europeans are rescued by Wragge. Meanwhile, the treacherous Schlange is killed by a giant sea anemone as he tries to escape. Published five years before the outbreak of war, *Lord of the Seas* drew attention to the growing threat of Germany. Schlange had been Wragge's business partner for twenty years before attempting to murder him and steal his invention for the glory of the German Empire. The gunboat crew are likened to pirates, a comparison that gained prominence throughout the Great War as U-boat crews plundered allied shipping. At the same time Strang subtly draws attention to the need for Britain to prepare for a future conflict. After repelling a surprise attack from the Germans, Wragge exclaims, "What a fool I was not to put a canoe or two inside the reef to keep watch. This war business needs training like any other".[61] The importance of this statement is twofold. Firstly, it expresses the fear of Strang and his contemporaries that war was imminent, and Germany was the likely enemy. Yet by equating war with business, Wragge is placing conflict into a familiar context. Between 1914 and 1918, as will be seen throughout this chapter, writers often attempted to interpret the war using traditional imagery. *Lord of the Seas* shows that this process had begun long before the outbreak of war. The prominence of a submarine in the plot recognises the changing nature of warfare, but this message is hidden in a series of business metaphors and a tribal conflict harking back to the imperialist boys' adventures of the late Victorian period, and the 'Robinsonades' that preceded them.

Such a combination of traditional and recognisable imagery can also be seen in Percy F. Westerman's *The Sea-Girt Fortress: A Story of Heligoland* (1914). In a plot echoing Erskine Childers' turn of the century bestseller *The Riddle of the Sands*, the two

[61] Herbert Strang, *Lord of the Seas: A Story of a Submarine* (London, 1909) p. 190.

protagonists, Oswald Detroit and Jack Hamerton, an American and Englishman respectively, take part in an attack on the German held fortress on Heligoland Island, after an unprovoked assault on the east coast of England. At the beginning of the novel, Detroit voices his fears about German expansion: "The Germans are fortifying Borkum very heavily... In fact, they are turning the whole of the Frisian Islands that belong to them into fortresses. Guess they'll take the rest of the islands as well before long. John Bull is asleep, I guess, or he would demand an explanation". Hamerton responds, "John Bull sleeps with one eye open, old man. Take my word for it".[62] Yet Britain is not fully prepared. Westerman criticises the attitudes that Hamerton represent, the feeling that there would be "plenty of opportunity to consider the situation when the time arrives".[63] By the end of the novel, however, John Bull is awakened, and the Germans are quickly routed.

Crucially, *The Sea-Girt Fortress* was written before the outbreak of war, and the images depicted were more relevant to the perceived threat of Germany than the reality of the situation. Indeed, a critic in the *Manchester Guardian* praised the novel as "well-written and exciting", and noted that certain events in the tale were "very cleverly imagined".[64] He did, however, have certain misgivings about the level of realism achieved by the writer: "The naval battle at the end suffers now by comparison with the dread realities of which we read daily, and insufficient allowance is made for mines and submarines."[65] Authors were also on less firm ground when presenting the actual events occurring on the Western Front in 1914. Though these writers were praised for their ingenuity in the *TLS*, their decision immediately to depict current events was deemed "rash", demonstrating the "poverty of imagination when faced with the grim reality of modern war".[66] Indeed, the reviewer, Ronald Gorell Barnes, concluded that, "Tales of to-day and to-morrow are on surer, saner ground when they deal either with unwarlike, jolly adventures of boy and girl... or with such realistic scenes as are described in *Ian Hardy, Midshipman*... and in *Jack Scarlett, Sandhurst Cadet*", books that, "neither strain probability nor fall short of the spirit of adventure".[67] This demonstrates an awareness of a particular dilemma regarding the extent of the realism portrayed. Authors needed to find a balance between the complexity of the event they were depicting and the youthful simplicity of their target audience. In 1914, authors were hindered by both a lack of information and understanding. Even such writers as F.S. Brereton did not seem to be able to fully reconcile their familiarity with life in the

[62] Percy F. Westerman, *The Sea-Girt Fortress: A Story of Heligoland* (London, 1914), pp.23-4.
[63] Ibid., p. 24.
[64] *Manchester Guardian*, 21/11/1914, p. 4.
[65] Ibid., p. 4.
[66] *Times Literary Supplement*, 10/12//1914, p. 561.
[67] Ibid., p. 561.

military with that experienced by those on the Western Front, though his later military role during the war added credibility to his work.

Before the First World War, some writers had based their adventure stories on their own experiences. Agnes Blackie, in her history of the publishers Blackie and Sons, recalled "the brothers Robert and Alexander Macdonald, whose tales of adventure in New Guinea and the Australian 'outback' had the vivid authenticity of personal experience. Both brothers had been miners and prospectors in the places about which they wrote".[68] Conversely, when these writers were able to draw upon detailed knowledge of events, this could be considered detrimental to the spirit of adventure so vital to the success of these novels. Gorell Barnes suspected that in F. Harrison's *For England! For France!* (1914), for example, "boys will skip entire the detached sections... where the story breaks off and a military narration intervenes".[69] Samuel Hynes suggested that, "an ignorant middle-aged civilian will not write about war in the way that a young subaltern will, but he may write movingly nonetheless".[70] Though his comments were directed at some of the poetry published during the war, the statement could equally be applied to any form of literature, including that aimed at the young. Indeed, this raises important questions regarding the audience of such novels. Would it be suitable for a youth or child to have the war presented to them in a highly 'realistic' manner? Was military experience a necessity for these authors? It certainly accentuated the authenticity of the tale, and in Brereton's case, his name was always presented with his military rank, which rose from Captain to Major during the war. Ideas however, were often more important than 'accurate' descriptions of military encounters. Indeed, a stylised, artificial presentation of warfare was probably more appropriate for young readers, and certainly more entertaining.

In 1914 war seemed exciting to young readers, and a wealth of material reinforced such notions. The Great War was seen as continuation of past glories, another chapter in the 'island story', which would decisively reinforce the moral superiority of Britain and its empire. Those children who had read adventure stories in the years leading up to the outbreak of war would perhaps have been unsurprised by the eruption of conflict. Novels and story papers had consistently warned of the threat of Imperial Germany, and had established a genre of invasion fiction over a period of several decades. When war did break out, writers often fell back on such imagery to explain the conflict. Indeed, explaining the

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[68] Agnes A.C. Blackie, *Blackie & Son 1809-1959: A Short History of the Firm* (London, 1959), p. 48.
[69] Ibid., p. 561.
[70] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 31.

conflict became a key aspect of the presentation of the war to children. Textbooks and novels alike made clear Germany's acts of aggression, and the atrocities in Belgium became recurring themes as authors set out to convince the warriors of the future of the justness of the British cause. Moreover, this desire to justify the war united these aforementioned unofficial propagandists and official organisations and government departments such as the Board of Education. Early depictions of the fighting were often unrealistic, despite the military experience of some of the authors. Attitudes to war presented in books and children's magazines hardly changed as a consequence of the fighting; instead, the traditional view of warfare as exciting and adventurous was consistently reinforced. A sense of patriotism and duty was firmly encouraged. Young children were made aware of their possible future participation in the war, with football pitches, playing fields and scout meetings deemed the ideal training grounds for these likely combatants. Propagandists created an indelible connection between children and the war. Not only had their fathers and brothers gone to fight, but also their favourite authors, who could give them first hand accounts of life on the Western Front. Although the Board of Education encouraged a patriotic understanding of the conflict, they were wary of disseminating jingoistic platitudes within the classroom. Writers of children's fiction filled this gap. The frequently used sporting metaphors were representative of an important interpretation of the war; Germany was the other team, and children learned to hate them as such. The most important of these fields of combat upon which the great game could be played was the Western Front.

The Western Front

One of the recurring themes of this chapter is the need of authors to circumnavigate the narrative and moral difficulties of the Western Front by locating adventures within a context more familiar to the young readers. Sometimes, as shall be seen, this was achieved by setting stories at sea, or in far flung reaches of the Empire. This is not to say, however, that the Western Front was avoided entirely. In fact, the reverse was true. The initial war of movement, the protracted battle of attrition in France and Belgium, and the final stages of the conflict were all major themes in novels and story papers throughout the war years. Topicality was a key issue for these writers, whose works were often written soon after the events described. Frequently the presentation of trench warfare was at odds with reality, though this is hardly surprising. As Michael Paris has noted, the notion of a grand conspiracy to keep the truth of conditions on the Western Front secret from the public is perhaps overstating the case.[71] Nevertheless, there was a degree of censorship within the

[71] Michael Paris, *Over the Top* (London, 2004), pp. 39-40.

press, the best source of information for these authors. Between 1914 and 1919, Westerman, Brereton and Strang all produced novels set on the Western Front, as did Escott Lynn, Rowland Walker, Captain Charles Gilson and Captain Frank Shaw, among others. They examined most of the key battles of the conflict in a manner deemed appropriate for children.

The Western Front often conjures images of soldiers fighting in horrendous conditions, sharing squalid trenches with rats and lice. It is this rather simplistic view that has dominated the understanding of the Great War throughout the twentieth century. Yet, in the first months of the war, from the battle of Mons in August 1914 until the first battle of Ypres beginning in October of the same year, the conflict on the Western Front was one of movement rather than stagnancy. This was reflected in the works of boys' fiction. In Westerman's *The Dispatch-Riders* (1915) for example, two British boys are on a motorcycling holiday in Belgium in the summer of 1914. Intending to return to Britain and complete their schooling, they instead become involved with the Belgian army and help to challenge the encroaching Germans. Naturally, as they are British public schoolboys, the Belgians are only too happy to make use of their services, leading to a series of escapades. Other writers produced similar novels set in Belgium during the German invasion, including Herbert Strang's *A Hero of Liège* (1914) and Brereton's *With French at the Front* (1915), though Belgium is not the only setting in the latter novel.

With French at the Front follows the adventures of Jim Fletcher, a sturdy Englishman whose military background is varied to say the least. At the age of twenty-five he is a former Secret Service agent, and is later an officer in the Royal Flying Corps who sees action in the frontline trenches. At the beginning of the novel he is attached to the British Embassy in Berlin on the eve of war. Brereton does not limit his characters to participation in just one area of conflict. Fletcher, along with his friend Dicky Dance, has adventures escaping Germany, at sea, in the trenches and in the air. The characters are never allowed to linger in one place for too long. To some extent, this reflects the needs of narrative convention. The novel is made as thrilling as possible by the diversity of scenarios that would not be made possible by the concentration on an ordinary infantryman. It was the duty of the writers to entertain their young readers, perhaps even establish themselves as a child's favourite author, and ensure a continuing relationship with their publishing houses. Yet these authors were not simple hacks recycling endless adventures purely for the sake of profit. Their writing shows a clear belief in the justness of the war, and a desire to convince readers of that belief. Though this is apparent in many of the novels examined in this chapter, it is perhaps most prevalent in Brereton's novels. He would frequently abandon his protagonists

in the midst of some predicament to present the reader with an explanation of events on a political and military level. Chapter ten of *With French at the Front*, for example, gives a detailed account of the first four weeks of the war, outlining the reasons for Britain entering the conflict and the actions of her allies and enemies. Gorrell-Barnes in the *TLS* saw these educational sections as the only recommendations for the novel, believing that "the rest is melodramatic and sensational, and not the best reading for boys".[72] Here the reviewer recognised a disparity in the aims of these novelists; the desire to provide young readers with a thorough and detailed understanding of the war conflicted with the need to present war as adventure. On the other hand, reviewers in the *Manchester Guardian* had an alternative point of view. Of Brereton's *Under Haig in Flanders* (1917) they suggested that "Captain Brereton has a disconcerting way of inserting long historical digressions at critical moments", though they felt "the intervening fragments of narrative are capital".[73] A year earlier they had made similar criticisms of Brereton's *On the Road to Bagdad*, comparing it unfavourably with the simplicity of Percy Westerman's *Rounding up the Raider*, which "avoids the common error of grasping too much".[74] Nevertheless, Brereton's novel was still felt to be "readable".[75]

After the failure of both sides to make a significant and decisive breakthrough, the war became characterised by a protracted period of attrition that would not be lifted until 1918. This manner of conflict was essentially siege warfare, but on a scale that had not been seen before. In his book *Modern Weapons of War, By Land, Sea and Air* (1915), Cyril Hall lamented the lack of Romance surrounding the modern warrior: "To brain your enemy with a club, or run him through with clear, cold steel, was warfare with an honest ring; to scatter bursting shell upon him from a hidden gun or sink his ships with devilish devices under water is surely far less glorious".[76] He equated glorious warfare with a perception of the pre-modern world filtered through such cultural markers as the historical Romances of Sir Walter Scott, or the poetry of Alfred Tennyson. A nineteenth century interpretation of the past had become 'fact' and coloured wartime author's notions of conflict; individual warriors were nobler than mass armies, hand-to-hand combat more genteel and dignified than shells and snipers. In this manner, Hill demonstrated a key factor in the narrative problems created by the Western Front. A war of attrition severely limited the scope for adventure. Writers could circumvent such difficulties in a number of ways: protagonists could be sent on separate missions, for example, or they could become separated from their

[72] *Times Literary Supplement*, 10/12/1914, p. 561.
[73] *Manchester Guardian*, 03/12/1917, p. 3.
[74] *Manchester Guardian*, 11/12/1916, p. 3.
[75] Ibid., p. 3.
[76] Cyril Hall, *Modern Weapons of War, By Land, Sea and Air* (London, 1915), p.9.

companies and have to find their way back to their own lines. These often conformed to a basic pattern common in children's literature: the hero is introduced, embarks upon a quest, engages in a struggle, followed by a homecoming.[77]

The themes that permeated these novels were many. In terms of unofficial propaganda, these tales presented justifications for the war. The depiction of German atrocities in Belgium was common, and helped to persuade children that their country had the moral high-ground. The justness of the cause was rarely called into question. Even the writers of school text-books, maintained faith in the British cause. *A Short History of Modern Europe 1450-1915* by James Oliphant, an examiner for the University of London, attempted to show the young reader that the actions of Germany throughout the nineteenth century had been building towards a final act of aggression: "Ever since the fall of Bismarck", wrote Oliphant, "Germany had been cherishing the dream of world domination, and had been organising her national life so as to secure the means of realising it".[78] Though recognising the inability of historians contemporary to the period in question to cover such topical events sufficiently, there is still room in these works for polemic:

> No attempt will be made to describe the course of the war while it is still in progress. It must, however, be put on record that Germany has astounded and shocked the whole civilised world by the methods of warfare she has adopted, the inhumanity which has scarcely been paralleled since the atrocities of the Thirty Years War.[79]

Both fictional and factual accounts illustrated the atrocity stories that had shocked the British people after the German invasion of Belgium. With no other evidence available, it was difficult for both adults and children to separate truth from reality.

The Great War novels also helped to perpetuate the public-school ethos deemed so important by these writers. This culture has been seen as an important factor in the mobilisation of so many men at the beginning of the war. There had, however, been some criticism of the system regarding the usefulness of a classical education in the decade before the outbreak of war. Following the crisis of the Boer War the narrowness of a public school education was deemed to be a cause of the perceived disintegration of the empire.[80] In 1917, Thomas Pellatt felt the need to defend such a system accused of producing "machine-made citizens,

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[77] Dennis Butts, 'The Adventure Story' in Dennis Butts (ed.) *Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context* (New York, 1992), p. 74.
[78] James Oliphant, *A Short History of Modern Europe 1450-1915, for the Young Student and the General Reader* (London, 1915), p. 470.
[79] Ibid., p. 471.
[80] John R. Reed, *Old School Ties: The Public Schools in British Literature* (New York, 1964), p. 14.

men who acted and thought alike and who looked with snobbish disgust upon those who did not conform to their standards".[81] He argued that "the basis of British public school education is religion and morals, and you cannot inculcate these things in the minds of young folk through the medium of mathematics and science. You cannot... say be good because twice two is four".[82] Though supporting his views with a fairly facile argument, Pellatt clearly saw a connection between the attitudes of the public school-educated and the qualities needed in the theatre of battle. Moreover, the public school ethos filtered down into the state schools:

> All schools... aim at the solidification of this 'moral' base, as the foundation upon which they build, and the State schools do their best to work on the same lines. And from the moral instinct thus produced emanates the boy-scout movement, which solidifies the same spirit in the county schools. The great fallacy is that you can cut through the root from which this instinct springs, and at the same time go on producing from a purely materialist scheme of education... the type of boy who has carried us through this war.[83]

Tragedy and honour went hand in hand. Many former public schoolboys lost their lives in the Great War, but their deaths were deemed noble, and the process of memorialisation was instigated. In Bromsgrove School in early 1918, a fund was set up to build a memorial chapel for the fallen. By July 1928, £8,000 had been raised and the eminent architect Sir Giles Scott, who was responsible for Liverpool Cathedral, was appointed to design the memorial.[84] Of the 427 former pupils of Bromsgrove School who served in the war, 92 had not returned.[85] R. Cary Gilson, the headmaster of King Edward's School in Birmingham, intimated views about the honour of sacrifice at a prize-giving ceremony in July 1916:

> If our List of Academic Honours is a little shorter than usual there is another and more glorious list printed on the paper which you hold in your hands, the list of Old Edwardians who in the past twelve months have given their lives for their country. It is a list which, though we should be more, or less, than human if we could read it without the most poignant grief, yet should move us – and I claim the right to say so – to profound thankfulness and pride.[86]

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[81] Ibid., p. 15.
[82] T Pellatt, *Public School Education and the War: An Answer to the Attack Upon Eton Education* (London, 1917), p. 106.
[83] Ibid., p. 107.
[84] David Cross, *Bromsgrove School at War 1914-1918* (Kidderminster, 1997), p. 136.
[85] Ibid., p. 21.
[86] R. Cary Gilson, *Education: English and German – An Address Delivered to Pupils, Parents and Visitors July 31st 1916* (Birmingham, 1916), p. 4.

Having lost so many former pupils to the carnage of the Western Front, Cary Gilson's address was tinged with both tragedy and jingoism reflecting a belief in the wickedness of the German education system:

> This world-wide disaster and the piteous heart-rending tragedies of Belgium and Serbia, of Armenia and Poland, were conceived in the Universities and schools of Germany. They represent what one of the greatest forces in the World can do when it is corrupted and prostituted, and made the tool of wicked rulers instead of a power for good in the service of God and of humanity.[87]

There was a sense of loss, but this was combined with a sense of pride. At the heart of this sense of pride was a belief in the justness of the war. Gilson's loss was not just limited to his former charges. His son, Rob Gilson, a close friend of the writer J.R.R. Tolkien, was one of the victims of the first day of the Battle of the Somme.[88] Cary Gilson's sentiments filtered through into representations of death in the Great War novels.

With so many Britons falling casualty to the Great War, death was an important factor in children's fiction. Though it is true that most of these novels presented war as adventure, death was an unavoidable feature of conflict, and its portrayal needed to be handled sensitively. Those novels and stories produced between 1914 and 1918 were in stark contrast to the later twentieth century narratives of the First World War that have presented death as wasteful and futile. A case in point was the Rowland Walker novel *Oscar Danby V.C.* The depictions of death in the novel were all the more interesting because of the age of the protagonists. The heroes of Walker's tale were Boy Scouts, allowed to travel to the Western Front after proving their worth by foiling a German Spy. Throughout the novel, the Scouts seem to lead a charmed existence, frequently being placed in the face of danger, but emerging unscathed. It is all the more shocking therefore, when Shackleton, one of the boys, is finally killed: "They called him by name, they shook him gently, but, alas, he was dead. The smile of victory was upon his fair, upturned face, which was marred only by a thin streak of blood from a bullet wound in the forehead".[89] Within a few pages, the troop is depleted further with the deaths of the heroic Scoutmaster, John Holland, and MacGregor, another of the boys. Again, the manner of their deaths is startling. Despite tending wounded German soldiers, they are placed against a tree and shot as spies:

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[87] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[88] John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth* (London, 2003), pp. 155-6.

[89] Rowland Walker, *Oscar Danby V.C.* (London, 1916), p. 195. The name Shackleton could be an homage to the Antarctic explorer, Ernest Shackleton, though this would be extremely difficult to confirm.

> From the barrels of the six rifles there came a jet of flame, and the leaden messengers of death, and before Danby and the three remaining Eagles could realise what was happening, John Holland and MacGregor lay dead upon the ground. Death was instantaneous, and the Scotch laddie's head lay across the breast of his brave leader. Stupefied and bewildered, the lads looked helplessly on. They were powerless to avert the terrible tragedy which had befallen them. They had never dreamed that such a thing could be possible. Surely it was but a terrible nightmare they were passing through, and presently they would awake! Alas, it was no dream, for there on the ground lay the lifeless and blood-stained form of John Holland, the man they loved most on earth, and beside him, locked in the slumber of death, lay MacGregor, their school-chum and comrade-in-arms.[90]

Their deaths served to illustrate the extent of German brutality. If boys in France and Belgium could be shot in cold blood, the same thing could happen to young readers in Britain. The recognition of death in wartime was shocking, but at the same time the casualty figures in the newspapers and the visible effect of losses on local communities meant that the subject could hardly have been avoided. Instead, death needed to be interpreted as something noble, another familiar motif of past adventure stories. The deaths of John Holland and his scouts are not bloody or protracted. All three die instantly, and Shackleton even meets his demise with a smile on his face. Their deaths may have been tragic and sorrowful, but they are certainly not deemed to be futile.

Walker's depiction of death echoed the sentiments expressed by Cary Gilson. Such views were still prominent at the end of the war. In the *Boy's Own Annual* of 1918-19, a story by W.E. Cossons once again linked sport and war. 'The Giant's Robe: A Story of Football and Fighting' focused upon two brothers, Bob and Bill Middleton, expert footballers at their public school. Bob, the oldest brother, enlists in the army, leaving behind his lucky shirt for Bill. The story juxtaposes a football match, involving Bill, with a trench raid in which Bob dies. The words used to describe the attack, and the match, were almost interchangeable. Cossons described the football match by stating, "Inch by inch they pushed on, inch by inch they were pushed back. Right, left, forward and backward again – one struggling mass, Bill was somewhere in the middle of it when he tripped or slipped and fell, and two or three others fell over him."[91] In a strange twist, after Bob's death, his spirit inhabits the body of his brother, or at least the lucky shirt that he is wearing, and helps him win the match:

> On he went, straight as an arrow this time, but slower and slower, for he was nearly winded. The enemy was close on him. His head and heart were throbbing violently

[90] Ibid., pp. 204-5.
[91] W.E. Cossons, 'The Giant's Robe: A Story of Football and Fighting', *The Boy's Own Annual 1918-19*, p. 21.

> but the invisible player bade him keep on. He wanted to lay down and die – anything to still the agony of lung and brain – but he kept on.[92]

The sporting metaphors firmly rendered the First World War understandable to children, placing the conflict within a familiar, even a fun context. At the same time Bob's death is not seen as wasteful. As with the Boy Scouts in *Oscar Danby V.C.*, the nobility of the cause outweighed the tragedy of his death.

As the war continued, the presentation of the war did change slightly in some cases. In John Finbarr's *At All Risks* (1918), an English and a French boy in Paris lament their ages as they are too young to enlist: "fifteen is such a rotten age!" says one of them.[93] Later, as they bear witness to the Battle of the Marne in 1914, they are shocked by how different it is from their limited understanding of warfare:

> Alan's first impression was one of utter surprise. This was puzzling. Everything was so different from what he had expected. He had come to see a cavalry fight, and his imagination was full of pictures of mounted squadrons galloping at each other, with flashing swords or levelled lances... The valley was alive with flashes and echoing with noise. One heard the heavy reports of cannon, the drone and sharp bursting of shells, the snarling of a machine gun somewhere, and farther off, continuous musketry like the crackle of a wood fire... The strangest thing was that not a man or a horse was to be seen anywhere. The battlefield, wrapped in drifting smoke and flickering with fire seemed to be empty of any living thing".[94]

Such a description, emphasising the disparity between expectation and reality, would have been unlikely to have appeared at the beginning of the war. Later in the battle, Alan is shocked to see men dying, "Every man struck down meant bad news for somebody".[95] In the period after the end of the Second World War, many novelists attempted to juxtapose realism with misguided approaches to the war in order to emphasise the senselessness, but most novels during the war seemed happy to reinforce cosier images of the conflict.

Trench warfare, despite its heavy casualties and the static nature of the fighting, was an important aspect of boys' fiction. Educationally, its uses were manifold. As with pre-war adventure stories, the Western Front could be used to demonstrate the aspects of masculinity that was judged to be vital to young readers if they were to become soldiers of the future. The true nature of warfare was not ignored. The public were aware of the scale of the losses, but death could be depicted either as something noble, or better still, a representation of

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[92] Ibid., p. 23.
[93] John Finbarr, *At All Risks: A Boy's Adventures in the Great War* (London, 1918), p. 10.
[94] Ibid., pp. 78-9.
[95] Ibid., p. 83.

German inhumanity. Nevertheless, authors still frequently removed their heroes from the trenches, largely for narrative reasons, and placed them in situations that presented many aspects of warfare. Technology was particularly important; heroes would often be taken on diversions that would see them pilot an aeroplane or attack the enemy in a tank. The Great War was rendered exciting and novel, though often writers relied on age-old structures to give their stories greater appeal. The Western Front was not the only theatre of conflict, and the stagnancy of the Western Front could often be avoided by setting tales in other areas. Those conflicts known as the 'sideshows' frequently allowed novelists to hark back to the imperial adventures of the late Victorian period, demonstrating their debt to the formula of G.A. Henty and his contemporaries. The shift from a war of attrition in Europe to wars of movement in Africa and Asia was ideal for the writers of adventure fiction.

The Sideshows, race and empire

The modern memory of the First World War is almost entirely focused upon the Western Front, and it is no surprise that the engagements fought away from this setting have come to be known as the 'sideshows'. Militarily, the importance of these conflicts has been called into question. Gary Sheffield has suggested, for example, that the campaign in Mesopotamia "contributed little to enhancing the security of the British Empire, and even less to the defeat of Germany", while similar arguments have been made regarding the operations in Salonika, German East Africa, Egypt and Palestine.[96] The war of attrition on the Western Front naturally triggered a desire to alleviate the pressure on the troops there, and the British Empire needed to be protected. Although many historians have argued that the Great War could only be won by defeating the primary enemy in the main theatre of conflict, the Western Front, Britain's imperial interests were vital to their continued role in the war. The Dardanelles campaign, on the other hand, was a more complex subject. The historian John Terraine has referred to this particular conflict as "unhappy, but potentially decisive", the possibility of reaching Constantinople and knocking Turkey, one of Germany's major allies, out of the war, would have been a worthwhile goal, though the operation depended on a degree of organisation and surprise that was simply not there.[97] The so-called "easy option to avoid fighting the war to a finish on the Western Front" failed to achieve its aims, with the blame for the defeat firmly placed upon those in London rather than the combatants on the Gallipoli peninsular itself.[98] Nevertheless, between February 1915 and January 1916, a combined British, ANZAC and French force suffered nearly

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[96] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 96-7.
[97] John Terraine, *The Western Front 1914-1918* (Barnsley, 2003), p. 36.
[98] Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli* (London, 1995), pp. 419-20.

300,000 casualties before they were withdrawn, and, as the century progressed, the campaign came to be seen in the same context as the war on the Western Front; the lives of innocent men were once again deemed to have been sacrificed cheaply by inept planning. Regardless of their military significance, the 'sideshows' played an important part in the presentation of the war to the young between 1914 and 1918. As with other aspects of the war, the story they told was very different to the reality of the situation, and many depictions clearly demonstrate the greater suitability of the 'sideshows' for adventure narratives.

To state that the style of warfare in the 'sideshows' was very different to that practiced on the Western Front is perhaps unnecessary, but this was a critical factor in the usefulness of these conflicts to the writers of boys' fiction. Both the setting and the manner of conflict were vital in depicting adventures in a traditional and therefore familiar context. Such settings were more in keeping with the imperial adventure stories that had gained prominence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, this allowed writers to convey similar attitudes in these novels that were perhaps less applicable to the Western Front. At the same time, the stagnancy of the Western Front was not as evident in Mesopotamia, Palestine or German East Africa, though Gallipoli can be seen as a notable exception. Moreover, these encounters had clearly defined and apparently achievable objectives. The Gallipoli landings were meant to spearhead an assault on Constantinople that would remove Turkey from the war; in Mesopotamia British oil interests needed to be protected; the campaigns in Egypt and Palestine were initially intended to protect the Suez Canal. Though the Western Front clearly had objectives, the liberation of Belgium and the removal of German forces from France, this was to be achieved by the wearing down of the enemy, a slow and costly process. Finally, the diversity of the combatants added to the appeal and helped to reassure young Britons of the justness of the cause, as Herbert Strang explained to his readers:

> Volunteers came from all the British Dominions overseas: from Canada and Newfoundland, from the West Indies and South Africa, from Australia and New Zealand. India sent large numbers of her finest troops; even the negroes of Central Africa wished to give their help. Wherever the British flag flew, there were men ready to fight and to die for Great Britain and her great cause.[99]

It can therefore be seen that the conflict away from the Western Front was important on a number of levels. The nineteenth century depiction of imperial warfare had been fundamental in resurrecting the image of the army in popular culture.[100] The participants in

[99] Herbert Strang, *Great Britain and the War: A Book for Boys and Girls* (London, 1916), pp. 23-4.
[100] Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 3.

the war in the Middle and Near East had often been the subjects of imperial adventure stories, and were consequently familiar figures to children. In this sense, the sideshows can be seen as physically distant, yet culturally close to children's expectations of the nature of war.

Novels set in the 'sideshows' were numerous. Herbert Strang produced two novels set in Mesopotamia, *Through the Enemy Lines* (1916) and *Carry On!* (1917), as well as *Tom Willoughby's Scouts: A Story of the War in German East Africa* (1919) and *Frank Forester: A Story of the Dardanelles* (1915). F.S. Brereton's works included *At Grips with the Turk* (1916), *On the Road to Bagdad* (1917), *From the Nile to the Tigris* (1918) and *With Allenby in Palestine* (1919), while Westerman published *The Fight for Constantinople* (1915) and *Wilmshurst of the Frontier Force* (1918). Other popular novels of the period included the hugely successful *King, of the Khyber Rifles* (1916) by Talbot Mundy and T.C. Bridges' *On Land and Sea at the Dardanelles* (1915). These novels allowed authors to present war as exciting and noble. The large-scale slaughter that characterised the Western Front was not as pronounced in other theatres of conflict, though the Dardanelles campaign quickly became bogged down in trench warfare. Elsewhere, cavalry charges and small-scale conflicts typified the encounters; a war of movement allowed the narrative to flow more cohesively. Authors could write about settings they were familiar with, while that staple of both adventure fiction and popular imperialism, the gentleman adventurer, could be greater utilised in the landscapes of Mesopotamia or Palestine than in the trenches of Flanders and Picardy. This fascination carried over into the story papers as well, in the form of not only fictional tales but also educational pieces. *Young England*, for example, printed an article entitled 'Baghdad – To-day and Long Ago: The City of the Arabian Nights Comes into the Great War'. The author Horace G. Groser uses the topicality of the war in Mesopotamia to garner the interest of children. The reference to the *Arabian Nights* has the dual role of rendering the subject familiar to the young readers, while establishing a fantastical element to the war in the Middle East. In this sense it is both educational and entertaining, a key concept in children's literature.

While the campaign in the Dardanelles did not take place in an area strongly associated with Britain's imperial history, it was still understandable in an imperialist framework. In *Our Allies and Enemies*, the shift in alliances across the world was noted, rendering previous conflicts ironic: "In 1878 we were ready to sacrifice "our ships, our men, our money, too", to prevent Russia from getting in to Constantinople: In the present year, 1915, we are

sacrificing ships men and money in order to help Russia get into Constantinople".[101] The author goes on to claim, "in the plain, matter-of-fact Europe of the present day it is startling to meet with such topsy-turveyness".[102] However, this comparison also has the effect of linking fighting in the First World War with previous conflicts undertaken during the height of Victorian militarist imperialism. Indeed, the true nature of the fighting at Gallipoli was largely ignored. Westerman's *The Fight for Constantinople* largely ignores the protracted trench warfare that characterised part of the conflict. Instead, the leading figures of his novel are distracted on the journey to allow for more traditional adventures. At the beginning of the story, after hearing their orders, one British sailor exclaims, "We're off to the Dardanelles. We'll have the time of our lives".[103] Throughout the novel, nothing really happens to counter this view. The Gallipoli peninsula is depicted as a place where you can "use your revolver as a moral persuader"[104], while Turkish troops wear uniforms, "somewhat similar to those worn by the British during the last Sudan campaign".[105] Turks, who are in turn led by a conniving German commander, capture the two heroes of the piece. They escape and make their way back to the British fleet, noting details of gun emplacements along the way. When the German enemy's plans are foiled, the hero, Dick Crosthwaite, chides him: "Now try another plan; but take it from me, you've a couple of Englishmen to deal with".[106] These Englishmen are fulfilling the familiar role of imperial policemen. However, Turkish troops are not the 'savages' that imperial adventurers are used to dealing with: "The Turks had thoroughly mastered the principles of modern warfare under European conditions, and the task of the Allied Expeditionary Force was to be a very stiff one".[107] This suggests that, in order to defeat European powers, Turkish troops must become Europeanised themselves, a familiar motif in imperialist fiction.

The failure of the Dardanelles campaign allowed it to be placed within another context familiar to the British, that of the heroic failure. In Westerman's *A Lively Bit of the Front* published in 1918 at a time when it would have been difficult to portray the war and the Gallipoli landings in particular, as fun and games the author refers to the "heroic yet ill-starred Gallipoli campaign".[108] Earlier, *The Fight for Constantinople* had suggested that the

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[101] Herbert Strang (ed.), *Our Allies and Enemies* (London, 1916). "Our ships, our men, our money, too" is a line from a patriotic song quoted earlier in the book.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Westerman, *The Fight for Constantinople* (London, 1915), p. 18.
[104] Ibid., p. 42.
[105] Ibid., p. 51.
[106] Ibid., p. 110.
[107] Ibid., p. 136.
[108] Ibid., p. 12.

Gallipoli campaign will be difficult yet winnable. Perhaps the best summary came from the pages of *Young England*:

> Because it failed – because it was found impossible to storm our way across that craggy tongue of land which German science and Turkish tenacity had made impregnable – we are hugely disappointed. And because of the terribly costly nature of the effort, in valiant men, in anxious labour, in millions of money, we are full of profound regret. But if the undertaking failed, it nevertheless gave to the world such a new and astonishing proof of hardihood and audacious bravery on the part of our troops that for the British Empire *Gallipoli* will go down in history as a name of pride almost as much as of sorrow.[109]

The article was accompanied by an illustration by Colbron Pearse, of New Zealand troops attacking the Turkish trenches, though this image was reminiscent of any number of pictures of trench raids. The language of the final paragraph was telling. The Dardanelles campaign was, as Guy Waterford wrote, "closed with a feat of naval and military management which was a veritable miracle".[110] The operation was turned on its head, focusing on the skill of the retreat rather than the failure to break through to Constantinople. Similar imagery would be applied to the evacuation of Dunkirk in May 1940, demonstrating a clear understanding on the part of the British of how to sell a defeat.

The location of the 'sideshows' meant that attitudes towards race were more apparent than in the tales set on the Western Front, although commentary on national characteristics frequently appeared in these novels. Kelly Boyd has drawn attention to a lack of consistency in such depictions between 1855 and 1940, partly as a result of greater contact with people of different nationalities in this period.[111] Attitudes towards race were constantly shifting, particularly during the First World War. As Strang and others had noted, Britain's Dominions were very much involved in the conflict, forcing a greater subtlety in the depiction of these troops. His aforementioned 1909 novel *Lord of the Seas* is a useful indicator of such change. The German villains are rescued by the British and American heroes in the face of danger from Pacific islanders whose orders they had tired of, because it was "the duty of white men to hold out a hand to white men in extremity".[112] The outbreak of war further complicated an already complex subject. Attitudes towards race placed particular characteristics onto people of all nationalities, "the French and the Americans were described as separate races as easily as Africans and Asians were".[113] These

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[109] Guy Waterford, 'Last Days at Gallipoli', *Young England* 1915-16, p. 233.
[110] Ibid., p. 235.
[111] Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain. A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 124.
[112] Strang, *Lord of the Seas* p. 156.
[113] Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper*, p. 136.

characteristics could be endearing when applied to allies, and damning when attributed to enemies.

In *A Lively Bit of the Front*, Westerman showed recognition of the racial tensions between allies. On their journey to the Western Front, a group of South African artillerymen deliberately push Te Paheka, a Maori soldier and friend of the protagonists. He decides to prove his worth in the boxing ring. Using guile rather than brute force, he defeats the South African champion van Eindhovengen and earns the respect of his comrades:

> In silence the spectators heard the fateful ten seconds called, then a vociferous cheer from Afrikanders, Anzacs, and Maoris alike greeted the victor. For that instant the sporting instincts of the men triumphed over racial prejudices, and for the rest of the voyage – and after – the Maoris and Afrikanders "hit it off" splendidly.[114]

Westerman rather simplistically solves altercations stemming from racial differences by employing motifs familiar to children. Te Paheka gains respect by defeating a bully, a common theme in school fiction, as well as a recurring analogy justifying Britain's entrance into the war in defence of Belgium.[115] Furthermore, sport is seen as a tool through which he can establish his masculinity, another recurring element to children's fiction.

Manliness was an important concept in the depiction of troops from the Dominions. The wide open spaces of Canada and Australia were seen as the ideal training grounds for masculine heroes. Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders were made strong by the outdoor lifestyle, in contrast with the inhabitants of industrial Britain. Malcolm Carr, Westerman's seventeen year old hero of *A Lively Bit of the Front,* was described as being,

> A full inch over six feet in height, and, although broad across the shoulders, was sparely built yet supple of frame. His features were clear-cut and slightly elongated. A massive chin betokened force of character. His deep-set, grey eyes gave promise of an alertness and keenness of vision that are the attributes of a healthy, open-air life.[116]

He is the perfect specimen of Anglo-Saxonism, created by the combination of British characteristics in a country in which he has the space to thrive. Brereton drew similar conclusions in his pre-war novel, *A Sturdy Young Canadian*, which relates the tale of George Instone, a penniless Canadian youth "born and raised in city limits".[117] He seeks success in

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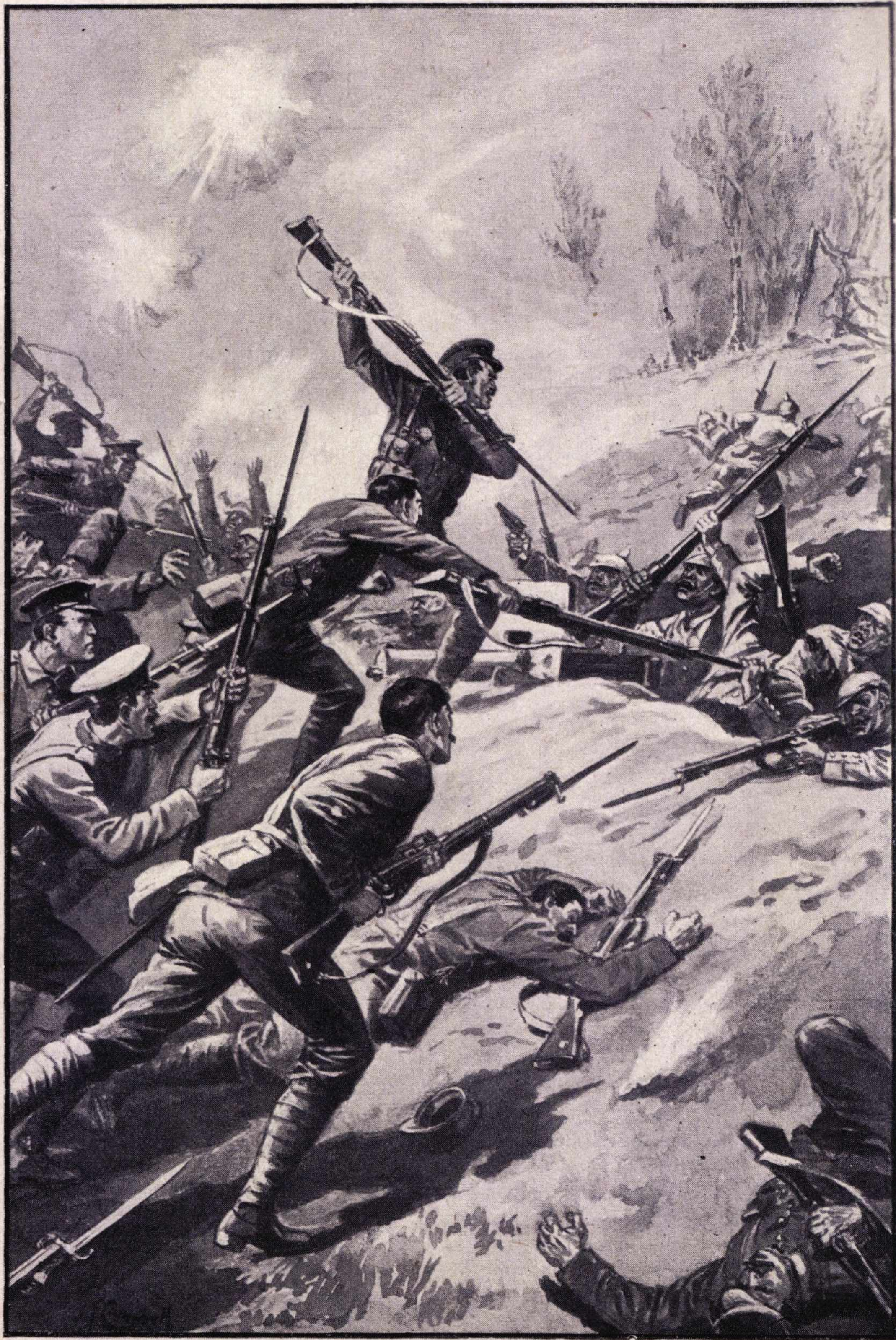
[114] Percy F. Westerman, *A Lively Bit of the Front* (London, 1918), p. 80.
[115] Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade, The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham, North Carolina, 1974), p. 128.
[116] Westerman, *A Lively Bit of the Front*, p.9.
[117] Captain Frederick Sadleir Brereton, *A Sturdy Young Canadian* (London, 1915), p. 13.

"the land of freedom indeed, the country where a poor man – a working man – is welcomed with widespread arms, and where social distinctions do not exist to keep irrevocably chained down".[118] Naturally by the end of the book, "George had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams". However, Brereton makes it clear that this is not a rare occurrence in Canada: "He had only done a little better than many young fellows have done out in the Dominion. There is room for all, room and to spare, that is for the hustler and the honest, clever worker".[119] Canada, like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, was a land fit for both ordinary workers and intrepid adventurers, the perfect candidates to fight for King and Empire on the battlefields of Europe. Articles in the story papers served to reinforce such notions. An account of the second battle of Ypres in *Young England*, for example, focused upon the role of the Canadians after the first use of poison gas by the Germans: "Heavy, indeed, had been the toll which death had taken of the gallant Division, but they had perished gloriously indeed, and the story of their heroism, with the service which they rendered to the cause of the Allied Armies, has added a glowing page to the Dominion's story".[120] The Canadians received the ultimate accolade in the "warm admiration which their exertions had excited in the British Army".[121] The presentation of their bravery was accentuated by a full page illustration of Canadian troops charging a German trench with bayonets fixed (figure 1). Though some of their comrades have fallen, they stoically continue, in contrast to the Germans who can clearly be seen fleeing.

Indian troops were also frequently depicted in novels and story papers, though they were never the main protagonists of the tales. In *With Allenby in Palestine* Brereton writes, "Still father down the line of these trenches were Indian troops, the actual front being held by dusky warriors who peered above the parapet with that steady calm so common to men of India, while here and there dotted amongst them were the Sahib officers, the Britishers who were in control of the battalions".[122] Unlike the heroes of the novel though, the sepoys are anonymous. Images of Indian troops were, however, extremely useful in demonstrating the unity of the empire in the face of such a violent struggle (figure 2) .

The depiction of enemies was altogether different; the savagery of non-Europeans was accentuated, placing Britain's enemies into a familiar imperial context. This was similar in many ways to the racial generalisations evident in the works of G.A. Henty and other imperialist writers. In Herbert Strang's *Through the Enemy's Lines: A Story of*

[118] Ibid., p. 10.
[119] Ibid., p. 360.
[120] 'The Gallantry of the Canadians', *Young England* 1914-15, p. 412.
[121] Ibid., p. 414.
[122] Brereton., *With Allenby in Palestine* (London, 1919), p. 40.



[Drawn for this Magazine] CHARGE OF THE CANADIANS AT YPRES. [by JOHN CAMPBELL.

Figure 1, Publications such as *Young England* frequently presented graphic depictions of the events of the Great War

Painted specially for this work] [*By G. D. Rowlandson.*

SEPOYS LACHMAN SINGH AND KUM SINGH FIGHTING THEIR GUN AGAINST TWO OF THE ENEMY'S MACHINE-GUNS.

At Barjisiyah, on April 14th, 1915, during the operations on the Persian Gulf, Sepoys Lachman Singh and Kum Singh, of the 120th

Figure 2, The justness of the war was given greater credence by the participation of the subjects of the British Empire. Images such as these appear frequently in the pages of the boys' story papers.

Mesopotamia (1916), for example, the hero Roger Burnet is attacked by a fanatical mullah: "Turning he looked into the wild features of the mullah. The sight braced him: he leapt towards the fanatic, struck out with all his strength, and hurled the lean and withered wretch upon his companion behind".[123] The mullah is described in animalistic terms, stripping him of his humanity and therefore justifying his death in the struggle. Other novels suggested that the Turks and Arabs were being manipulated by Germany. In Brereton's *With Allenby in Palestine*, an old Arab man whom the hero happens upon laments, "Doubtless the Sultan and others know for what reason they fight the British, yet I... would tell you that the men of Britain are our best friends in reality. Wherever they go, there their colonies are filled with contented, happy, free people. There are no slaves as you find in this country".[124] To these authors, and therefore their readers, the British Empire is a paragon of peace and freedom. It seems that one of the main factors behind Germany's entry into the war is jealousy of the extent of Britain's possessions and the manner of which they are governed. In this sense the Great War is very much an imperial conflict, with Britain's greater experience of Empire-building and governance often proving their superiority to the German enemy. Many of these stories also used the notion of crusades, particularly in their titles. *With Allenby in Palestine* is subtitled *A Story of the Latest Crusade*, while Joseph Bowes used *With Allenby in Palestine* as a subtitle to *The Aussie Crusaders* in 1920.

Anglo-Saxonism, the belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race manifested itself strongly in boys' fiction. Young British (most often English) protagonists demonstrated their supremacy across the Middle East and Africa. In Strang's *Through the Enemy's Lines*, Roger Burnet is the son of an archaeologist in his final year at a prestigious public school. While visiting his father in Mesopotamia during the summer he becomes embroiled in the Great War. His status as an educated Englishman sees him through. At one stage he is hidden from spies by a barber, who goes on to give him information: "These things I tell you... which my lips would not whisper in the ears of my dearest friend, because you are the son of your father, whom I loved".[125] Roger is shown to have great respect for his Arab companions. In Strang's view, the inhabitants of the Middle East seem destined to be ruled over by European empires. Roger's companion Yusuf claims at one point, "We lament and are sorry because you are not an Arab". When asked why he replies, "Because we feel in our souls that one who could devise so cunning a trick, in the twinkling of an eye, would bring praise and renown upon our race".[126] Comparing him to his Arab followers the author

[123] Herbert Strang, *Through the Enemy's Lines: A Story of Mesopotamia* (London, 1916), p. 66.
[124] Brereton, *With Allenby in Palestine*, p. 90.
[125] Ibid., p. 39-40.
[126] Ibid., p. 122.

states, "In spite of his youth, he had – as became a public schoolboy and the son of his father – a larger outlook than his hosts, who seemed to think, somewhat to his amusement, that the Turks were doing them the compliment of waging war with them".[127] The Turks also are depicted as people in need of strong western rulers. After escaping from the mullah early in the novel, Roger chances upon a kelak carrying Turkish munitions. He overpowers the three Turkish guards and sinks the kelak and its cargo, noting, "Orientals are, it is true, notoriously careless; but it was strange that German discipline had not tightened up their organization in such a matter as this".[128] Daniel Bivona has suggested that promoters of Empire in the late Victorian period "sought to formulate a system of rule for the colonies that would procure for imperial rule the appearance of innocence that grand moral projects commanded in the Victorian middle-class mind".[129] Such views were being presented to children throughout the Great War. In wartime it is vital that the enemy is depicted as irreconcilably different; in these tales the British needed to be shown as more adept and just than the Germans in the management of their subjects, demonstrating their moral superiority.

Of the alliance between Germany and Turkey Strang writes, "The present war was being conducted... with an energy and thoroughness to which Turkish history showed no parallel since the days when the Ottomans first overran the Byzantine Empire".[130] Brereton, in *With Allenby in Palestine: A Story of the Latest Crusade*, describes the Turks as an "honourable adversary".[131] Likewise, Westerman presents a discourse on Turkish history between two British naval officers in *The Fight for Constantinople: A Story of the Gallipoli Peninsula.* A companion of the hero of the story states, "The Turk is a funny chap. See how he crumpled up against the rest of the Balkan states in 1912". Dick Crosthwaite, the tales protagonist, counters, "On the other hand, the Turkish infantryman in '78 was reckoned one of the best 'stickers' in Europe". However, it is made clear that Turkish success depends on European influence. Dick continues, "Under European officers these fellows will fight pretty gamely, and from all accounts there's a good leavening of German officers and artillerymen in those forts".[132] In Westerman's view, the Ottoman Empire was tottering, dependent on German support to remain in existence.

Alongside the aforementioned authors of boys' fiction, other more celebrated writers were important figures in the depiction empire and the Great War. Jeffrey Richards deliberately

[127] Ibid., p. 130.
[128] Ibid., p. 78.
[129] Bivona, *British Imperial Literature*, p. 193.
[130] Ibid., p. 129.
[131] Brereton, *With Allenby in Palestine*, p. 19.
[132] Westerman, *The Fight for Constantinople*, p. 28.

neglects such novelists as H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling and John Buchan from *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, claiming that they were "seen primarily as adult writers".[133] Though this was true, to a certain extent, the tone of Buchan's work meant that it often walked a fine line between adult and juvenile literature. Indeed, Buchan's *Greenmantle* could almost be described as 'Hentyesque' in structure, its heroes being fully-fledged products of the British Empire. Furthermore, as Juanita Kruse has noted, "Though few consider Buchan's fiction to have great literary merit, it was extremely popular, particularly among children".[134] The Hannay stories certainly were popular; *The Thirty-Nine Steps* sold over 20,000 copies in 1915, while *Greenmantle* sold in similar numbers the following year.[135] They continued to sell well for many years after this. For this reason *Greenmantle* can be seen as a valid proponent of the boys' fiction ethos and is worthy of study in the overall canon of juvenile literature. Indeed, Buchan's novel bears similarities with the works of Strang and Brereton that were appearing at around the same time.

Buchan can be seen as a fervent imperialist, whose experience as private secretary to Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa in the wake of the Boer War, helped to shape his view of the empire. He became disillusioned with the anti-imperialist ideas that permeated British Society after the Boer War, and campaigned against them with his literary output.[136] Kruse notes that in the years preceding the Great War, Buchan came to believe in "a world-wide conspiracy bent not only on the destruction of the British Empire but of civilisation", an idea that came across clearly in *Greenmantle*.[137] In the second of Buchan's Richard Hannay novels, a much more complex work than *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the intrepid heroes were fighting for the future of civilisation itself.

The basic premise of *Greenmantle* involved the Germans plotting to ignite the Muslim world in a wave of anti-British feeling through the leadership of the mysterious Greenmantle, a figure capable of uniting the different factions. This idea was not necessarily farfetched. In Peter Hopkirk's book, *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire*, it has been argued that there were German attempts to provoke an Islamic Holy War against the British:

[133] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p. 9.
[134] Juanita Kruse, *John Buchan (1875-1940) and the Idea of Empire* (New York, 1989), p. 1.
[135] Kate MacDonald, 'The Fiction of John Buchan with Particular Reference to the Richard Hannay Novels' (PhD Thesis, University College London, 1991), pp. 334-5.
[136] Kruse, *Buchan and Idea of Empire* p. 63.
[137] Ibid., p. 91.

> If he [the Kaiser] had to fight, then here was his chance of bringing down the entire British Empire. He would rally the people of the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, Persia and Afghanistan against Britain's far-flung imperial interests. Together they would light the fuse leading towards the greatest, and most vulnerable, of these – India.[138]

Significantly for Germany, no Muslim colonies or subjects were presided over by the Kaiser, in contrast to the British Empire.[139] Similar plots could be found in other works of boys' fiction. For example, in Westerman's *The Fight for Constantinople*, the hero, after being captured, is pressured into signing a "bogus confession to the effect that the British and French were guilty of deliberate acts against the Moslem religion, and that the avowed object of their expedition was to stamp out Mohammedanism in the Near East".[140] The empire was the source of Britain's power, the object of the Kaiser's jealousy. Threats to these territories were therefore potent aspects of adventure fiction.

Richard Hannay, the hero of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and his companions, Sandy Arbuthnot (a Scottish laird) and John Scantlebury Blenkiron (an American spy), are charged by Sir Walter Bullivant with making their way to Constantinople where they will uncover and defeat the conspiracy:

> The Syrian army is as fanatical as the hordes of the Mahdi. The Senussi have taken a hand in the game. The Persian Moslems are threatening trouble. There is a dry wind blowing through the East, and the parched grasses wait the spark. And the wind is blowing towards the Indian border.[141]

This appeal makes use of several traditional images of empire that many, particularly the consumers of boys' fiction, would be familiar with. Referring to the "fanatical" forces of the Mahdi conjures up images of the heroic General Charles Gordon, who had been savagely slain in the Sudan in 1886. The failure to mount a rescue of the besieged British soldier from his dervish murderers in Khartoum was one of the major factors in the fall of the Gladstone government, and his death would have been a familiar image from novels, paintings, and even waxwork models in Madame Tussauds.[142] To Macdonald, Gordon was both "missionary and soldier, demonstrating in one person both the moral superiority of the

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[138] Peter Hopkirk, *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire* (Oxford, 1994), p. 1.
[139] Ibid., p. 4.
[140] Westerman, *The Fight for Constantinople*, p. 247.
[141] John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (Ware, 1994, first published 1916), p. 4.
[142] Macdonald, *The Language of Empire*, p. 80.

Christian and the energy and action of the fighting man".[143] Macdonald makes another important point that can be related to the underlying theme of Bullivant's speech in *Greenmantle*, namely the fear of 'otherness' that lies at the heart of the mission to prevent a Muslim uprising. He writes of the "land of the exotic and untrustworthy", where, "civilised behaviour must always be at risk"[144]. Edward Said suggests that such attitudes stem from an age-old Western vision of Islam and the East: "Until the end of the seventeenth century the "Ottoman peril" lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilisation a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life".[145] In *The Thirty-nine Steps*, Hannay had been able to blend in with his surroundings, taking on various guises in his bid to unravel the conspiracy. *Greenmantle* removed him from such a comfort zone, placing him in a setting that was mysterious, dangerous, intriguing, all part of the appeal of the imperial adventure story.

Perhaps the greatest dread comes from the threat to India. Memories of the Indian Mutiny, along with the fear of the loss of the centrepiece of the British Empire combine to add a new significance to the Greenmantle threat. Defeat across the empire would also surely lead to defeat in Europe. As Bullivant reiterates, "The war must be won or lost in Europe. Yes; but if the East blazes up our effort will be distracted from Europe and the great coup may fail. The stakes are no less than victory or defeat, Hannay".[146] Of course, in Buchan's novel the Muslim population are simply a tool with which Germany will attempt to defeat her enemies. Kruse remarked that, "Buchan's own British bias led him to portray all foreigners as somewhat childlike", though this was hardly surprising.[147] Buchan's staunchly imperialist views are evidence that he was a product of his time. Such ideology permeated adventure fiction from the late nineteenth century at least until the Second World War, and indeed beyond.

Buchan's depiction of foreigners echoed those of Strang in such titles as *Through the Enemy's Lines* (1916) and *Carry On! A Story of the Fight for Bagdad* (1917). Again a racial hierarchy can be seen in the works of this period. The Germans may be barbarians but they are white Europeans, and therefore able to easily manipulate their Turkish allies and other Muslim people of the Middle East. In *Greenmantle,* Hannay embodies the missionary

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[143] Ibid., p. 87.
[144] Ibid., p. 87.
[145] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, 1995), pp. 59-60.
[146] Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 7.
[147] Kruse, *Buchan and the Idea of Empire*, p. 53.

tradition alluded to by MacDonald. After receiving his orders he states, "It was like a story I had read of St. Theresa setting off at the age of ten with her small brother to convert the Moors".[148] Like Havelock of Lucknow or Gordon of Khartoum, Hannay sets out on a mission to defeat the 'uncivilised' in the name of the British Empire, probably at the cost of his own life. Nevertheless, death is largely to be expected for the Christian hero of empire, and a small price to pay for the freedom of the world (or at least the freedom of the world from Germany). As John Mackenzie has suggested, "Martyrdom often produced the icon through which the message could be conveyed in its most direct form: Nelson dying on *Victory*; Livingstone in the heart of Central Africa, kneeling in prayer; Gordon at the top of the flight of stairs in the palace at Kahrtoum facing the forces of Dervish darkness".[149] Also, for Hannay, the expedition provides welcome relief from the monotony of life in the trenches, which Hannay had been experiencing at Loos. In other words, attempting to prevent an Islamic Jihad, a situation in which an individual could have an effect on the outcome of the war, was a more familiar concept to Hannay than the protracted war of attrition on the Western Front.

In terms of the role of the traditional imperial hero, Richard Hannay should perhaps take second place in the novel. He is a pragmatic veteran of empire, with vast skills developed from previous experience in Africa. However, as the time-honoured romantic hero of empire he pales in comparison to Sandy Arbuthnot. Buchan uses his introduction of Sandy as an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of the British imperialist adventurer, claiming, "We call ourselves insular, but the truth is that we are the only race on earth that can produce men capable of getting inside the skin of remote peoples". Reassessing his words, Buchan feels it necessary to add, "Perhaps the Scots are better than the English, but we're all a thousand per cent better than anyone else".[150] Sandy is a figure firmly in keeping with the traditional Christian hero of Britain's imperial past, and a clear demonstration of why the British could successfully keep hold of their vast empire. In a long passage Buchan outlines Sandy's imperialist credentials:

> Lean brown men from the ends of the earth may be seen on the London pavements now and then in creased clothes, walking with the light outland step, slinking into clubs as if they could not remember whether or not they belonged to them. From them you may get news of Sandy. Better still, you will hear of him at little forgotten fishing ports where the Albanian mountains dip to the Adriatic. If you struck a

[148] Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 10.
[149] John M. Mackenzie, 'T.E. Lawrence: The Myth and the Message', Robert Giddings (ed.), *Literature and Imperialism* (London, 1991), p. 152.
[150] Ibid., pp. 14-5.

> Mecca pilgrimage the odds are you would meet a dozen of Sandy's friends in it. In shepherd's huts in the Caucasus you will find bits of his cast-off clothing, for he has a knack of shedding garments as he goes. In the caravanserais of Bokhara and Samarkand he is known, and there are shikaris in the Pamirs who still speak of him round their fires. If you were going to visit Petrograd or Rome or Cairo it would be no use asking him for introductions; if he gave them, they would lead you into strange haunts. But if Fate compelled you to go to Llasa or Yarkand or Seistan he could map out your road for you and pass the word to potent friends.[151]

Buchan paints a picture of an almost mythical figure, the archetypal imperial adventurer. He is at once the Scottish gentleman (Sandy is the son of the fifteenth Baron Clanroyden) and the blonde Bedouin, later to be epitomised by T.E. Lawrence, but already apparent in such figures as Charles Doughty. *Greenmantle* was written in the first half of 1916, before Lawrence had embarked upon the exploits that would see him propelled into the limelight.[152] The Lawrence legend would later become entwined within the character of Arbuthnot, particularly as Sandy would become a recurring figure in Buchan's novels.[153] The First World War would effectively be the last opportunity for a traditional imperial hero to arise, and it is often said that Lawrence of Arabia can be seen in this light. Mackenzie summarises the role of Lawrence (and implicitly Sandy) when he writes, "Lawrence was a member of a British generation which travelled with overweening self-confidence, using the badge of their Britishness as a passport to all kinds of cultural feasts and voyages of self-discovery".[154] In other words the empire was almost seen as a kind of British playground for those brought up on the ethos of muscular Christianity.

When his protagonists finally reach Constantinople, Buchan raises questions about the portrayal of the East in literature and the arts. Hannay says of the Turkish city, "I don't quite know what I had expected – a sort of fairyland Eastern city, all white marble and blue water, and stately Turks in surplices, and veiled houris, and roses and nightingales, and some sort of string band discoursing sweet music".[155] The reality is markedly different. Hannay declares, "The first pat I struck looked like a dingy colonial suburb – wooden houses, and corrugated iron roofs, and endless dirty, sallow children... I saw what I took to be mosques and minarets, and they were about as impressive as factory chimneys".[156] In short, "It was a

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[151] Ibid., p. 14.
[152] Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War* (London, 2002), pp. 53-4.
[153] Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 189.
[154] Mackenzie, 'Lawrence: Myth and Message', p. 156.
[155] Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 97.
[156] Ibid., p. 97.

dark world to me, and I don't like darkness".[157] It seems that the empire, for Buchan, needs to controllable and understandable. By failing to conform to the traditional imagery of the East, Constantinople develops a foreboding undercurrent.

However, Buchan acknowledges his inability to make a rational judgement about the nature of people and places in a rather surreal encounter with "a tall man dressed in skins, with bare legs and sandal-shod feet. A wisp of scarlet cloth clung to his shoulders, and, drawn over his head down close to his eyes, was a skull-cap of some kind of pelt with the tail waving behind it".[158] This figure is the leader of a mysterious group called Companions of the Rosy Hours, who reappear as dancers in 'the garden-house of Suliman the Red', where Buchan emphasises their uncivilised and unchristian nature and appearance:

> There was no mistake about the meaning now. All the daintiness and youth had fled, and passion, which belonged neither to day nor night, life nor death, but to the half-world between them. I suddenly felt the dancers as monstrous, inhuman, devilish. The thick scents that floated from the brazier seemed to have a tang of new-shed blood. Cries broke from the hearers – cries of anger and lust and terror. I heard a woman sob, and Peter, who is as tough as any mortal, took tight hold of my arm.[159]

Stereotypical views of the East as a place of depravity on the edge of civilisation come across strongly in the author's descriptions. Yet, unlike his contemporaries writing exclusively for the juvenile market, Buchan reverses such prejudicial opinions with the ironic revelation that "the maniac in the skin had" is none other than Sandy Arbuthnot. It seems that Eastern and Western values were no longer diametrically opposed.

Buchan did not fully believe in his demonstration of the fallacy of long-held widespread beliefs. When Hannay finally meets the true villain of the tale, Hilda von Einem (made all the more unnatural through the combination of femininity and wickedness) he is still acting in the character of a German supporting South African Boer. To keep up the charade he tells her,

> I know nothing of the East, but as I read history it is from the desert that the purification comes. When mankind is smothered with shams and phrases and

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[157] Ibid., p. 101.
[158] Ibid., p. 103.
[159] Ibid., p. 109.

> painted idols a wind blows out of the wilds to cleanse and simplify life. The world needs space and fresh air. The civilisation we have boasted of is a toy-shop and a blind alley, and I hanker for open country.[160]

This oration is merely a charade, and Hannay (and Buchan) reveals his true thought when he follows up with, "This confounded nonsense was well received".[161] For Buchan, and other writers of the period, the empire may have been the ideal setting for adventure and the development of masculine identity, but Britain was still at the heart of civilisation.

Of nineteenth century British imperial heroes in boys' papers the historian Kelly Boyd noted,

> Heroes were dispatched around the globe to conquer new lands and peoples. The masculinity of these heroes was unproblematized. They were gentlemen who unquestioningly supported the imperial agenda. As role models they were magnificent, displaying a sense of purpose, an athletic grace and a prescient awareness of how to deal with any situation.[162]

By the time of the First World War this depiction of masculinity had changed little, and the conflicts away from the Western Front were the ideal setting for the participation of such heroes. Sturdy sons of Empire toiled against the brutal Germans and their Turkish pawns in a setting far removed from the carnage of France and Belgium, but familiar to those who had been reading adventure stories before the war. The 'sideshows' were more visibly successful, they had lower casualty figures, and they were often pursued through a war of movement rather than attrition. These were conflicts in which individuals could flourish. It was important that these conflicts could be placed into a familiar context. For both adults and children the 'sideshows' distracted from the carnage of the Western Front, and clearly demonstrated the superiority of the British race. The writers whose work appeared in novels and story papers could convey notions of race and empire that perhaps had little to do with the actual conduct of the war. In essence, authors could create tales in which the settings, the character and the underlying motifs were all familiar to readers, rendering a 'modern' war understandable to young minds. The struggles in such places as Mesopotamia, Palestine and German East Africa were not the only areas of conflict that could be seen as familiar and a relief from the horrors of the Western Front. Britain maintained its empire through the

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160 Ibid., p. 142.
161 Ibid., p. 142.
162 Kelly Boyd, 'Exemplars and Ingrates: Imperialism and the Boys' Story Paper, 1880-1930', *Historical Research* 67 (1994), p. 145.

dominance of the Royal Navy, and the war at sea was another method of portray the Great War as a traditional conflict in the manner of Britain's past encounters.

The War at Sea

Since the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 Britain had, at least in the minds of its people, ruled the seas.[163] The weight of this heritage of naval supremacy had significant consequences during the First World War. In military terms, the Royal Navy was weighed down by its Nelsonian tradition. The inconclusive nature of the Battle of Jutland in 1916 was in sharp contrast to the 'new Trafalgar' that many had expected. This link with the past was so powerful that in Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon's defence of Jellicoe's conduct, *The Jutland Scandal* (1924), an entire chapter is devoted to the subject of how Nelson would have performed at Jutland. Bacon concluded that the famous Admiral would have done little differently: "Had Nelson lived in the twentieth century he would appear... to be totally different to the Nelson of whom they [modern critics of Jellicoe's conduct at Jutland] write"[164]. On the other hand, though the shadow of Britain's great naval heroes may have been at best an inconvenience to the modern commanders who were facing a new conflict with new technology and methods of warfare, such a great tradition was extremely useful in the dissemination of propaganda and the establishment of a sense of national identity in popular culture. This naval heritage was a vital theme in the presentation of the Great War to the young, one that again allowed the modern conflict to be interpreted through traditional imagery.

Nautical settings had figured prominently in pre-war children's literature. Science-fiction novels about submarines and other such contraptions, tales of pirates and buccaneers, numerous stories of shipwreck survivors stranded on desert islands playing upon the continued popularity of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*; British children had been inundated with maritime stories, reflecting both the naval heritage of the nation, and the status of its people as an island race. The British Empire, after all, had been founded and maintained largely through the endeavours of the Royal Navy, a military force that Britain itself was dependent upon for its own security. Emphasis on this maritime tradition was heightened by the German threat to Britain's supremacy that began to emerge in the last decade of the nineteenth century. As Kaiser Wilhelm II attempted to assert the role of

[163] Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London, 1994), p. 1. Halpern argues that at various periods throughout the nineteenth century, the French navy was more innovative than the Royal Navy, particularly in such endeavours as the construction of the first ironclad, *Gloire* in 1859, and later their role in the development of submarines and torpedoes. However, by the end of the century they had fallen behind and were no match for the British fleet.
[164] Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, *The Jutland Scandal* (London, 1924), p. 35.

Germany as a dominant world power, the rivalry between the new empire and its more established counterpart became stronger. Germany's industrialisation necessitated a strong navy, bringing it into conflict with Britain. The unveiling of HMS *Dreadnought* in 1905 heightened the naval race. Rendering other vessels obsolete, Britain and Germany, along with other nations, began to rebuild their fleets spearheaded by these technologically advanced, all-big-gun behemoths. Though Admiral Sir John Fisher, the First Sea Lord, was criticised for putting the naval race back on an even footing (both Britain and Germany needed to compete in the construction of dreadnought-class warships) the naval race nevertheless maintained popular focus on the navy, adding to the feelings about Britain's maritime past that permeated story papers and boys' fiction. Though many authors focused on writing sea stories for the young in the first two decades of the twentieth century, perhaps the most prolific of these was Percy F. Westerman.

In the five years leading up to the First World War, Westerman produced eleven novels for children with a maritime setting, playing on Britain's heritage. Some, such as *The Flying Submarine* (1912) and *The Rival Submarines* (1913), focused on new and imagined technology. Britain's naval past was a frequent topic covered in detail; Westerman set stories in the sixteenth century in *'Gainst the Might of Spain: A Story of the Days of the Great Armada* (1914), the seventeenth century in *The Quest of the Golden Hope* (1912) and the eighteenth century in his first novel *A Lad of Grit: A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea in Restoration Times* (1909). These tales reflected Westerman's own interest in the sea and sailing. Poor eyesight restricted him to a clerical role in the dockyard of his hometown of Portsmouth, though by 1911 his books were popular enough for him to resign and take up writing full time.[165] Westerman was extremely taken by the idea of sea scouting, derived from the movement established by Baden-Powell in 1908, and this was often a recurring theme in his writing.[166] As well as writing boys' novels, he contributed to yachting and sailing magazines, and was commodore of the prestigious Redcliffe yachting club in Devon.[167] Therefore, although he did of course set novels on the Western Front, Westerman was perfectly poised to interpret the war from the perspective that he was most familiar with, the naval conflict.

[165] *The Times*, 25/02/1959, p.12.
[166] Westerman was heavily involved in the Scout movement. The *Manchester Guardian* reported in 1938 on Westerman's involvement in the search for a sixteen-year-old Patrol Leader missing in Wareham, Dorset. Sadly, John Baker's body was eventually found in the River Frome. *Manchester Guardian*, 08/08/1938, p.10.
[167] W.O.G. Lofts and D.J. Adley, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* (London, 1970), pp. 348-9.

In 1915 Westerman published *A Sub. of the R.N.R.* and a year later *Rounding up the Raider*. In 1917 came *A Watchdog of the North Sea*, though 1918 was the year in which his production of naval stories was most prolific; *Billy Barcroft R.N.A.S*, *The Secret Channel* (a collection of stories), *Under the White Ensign* and *With Beatty off Jutland* were all titles in this genre. Finally in 1919 he published *A Sub. and a Submarine* and *The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge*. These novels were generally well received by critics in the press. The *Manchester Guardian* was concerned that *Under the White Ensign* stretched credibility in places, but felt that "Mr Westerman is as a rule a most plausible story-teller".[168]

In the first two years of the war, the Royal Navy had not been presented with the opportunity to engage the German High Seas Fleet in its entirety. The naval race between Britain and Germany in the decade before the war had stoked the tension between the two imperial powers. The anticipated clash between these two navies had failed to materialise. Small-scale battles at Dogger Bank, Coronel and the Falklands had helped whet the appetite of a British public sure of the superiority of British sea power. Indeed on June 3, 1916, days after the fighting at Jutland (though naturally written before the encounter), Captain Frank Shaw's serial, *With Jellicoe in the North Sea: A Story of the War at Sea* began in *Chums*. Importantly, the protagonist actually meets Admiral Jellicoe. Often stories and boys' novels only referred to high profile military figures in their titles, but their actual appearances in the stories were infrequent. Captain Shaw's story was one of the exceptions:

> He found himself face to face with no less a personage than Admiral Jellicoe himself – Jellicoe, whose name was a byword throughout the entire fleet, the man whose name had hardly been heard ashore before the war broke out, but whose reputation amongst men of the cloth stood second only to that of Nelson. This was the man in whose two capable hands rested Britain's ultimate destiny; behind his square brow lay the brain that would help materially in the winning of the greatest war history had ever known.[169]

They would have to wait until May 1916 for the 'new Trafalgar', which would not be the decisive encounter they had hoped for. Undoubtedly a British victory, given that the High Seas Fleet would not leave port again for the rest of the war, the battle nevertheless caused consternation in the press, and tainted the reputation of the Royal Navy. The battlecruisers *Queen Mary*, *Indefatigable* and *Invincible* had been sunk with single salvos. This helped to cloud the crucial issue of who had actually won.[170] German vessels, having sustained heavy fire, were still able to limp back to Wilhelmshaven having been protected by superior

[168] *Manchester Guardian*, 03/12/1917, p.3.
[169] *Chums*, No. 1243, vol. XXIV, 08/07/1916, p. 736.
[170] Geoffrey Bennett, *The Battle of Jutland* (Ware, 1999, first published 1964), p. 156.

armour. The public echoed Admiral Beatty's infamous observation "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today".[171] This did not, however, mean that the battle of Jutland was an unsuitable aspect of the war to be presented to children. The Herbert Strang edited *The Blue Book of the War* described the battle as having taken "its place in history as an engagement worthy to rank with any of the great sea fights on record", though it accepted that "it fell short of either absolute victory or defeat".[172] Beginning in August 1916, *Chums* printed Captain Frank H. Shaw's *The Hornets of Horn Reef: A Story of the Battle of Jutland*, a story that turned the lack of decisiveness to its advantage:

> The Battle of Jutland... was not the crushing victory that Jellicoe had looked for; it was, indeed, acclaimed a victory for German arms, until the lying arrogance was denied by indisputable proof. The enemy had been licked; he had been driven back to his harbours, from which it is unlikely he will ever emerge. And if he does, he will find a welcome awaiting him to which that of May 31 was trifling.[173]

The battle of Jutland, it appears, was further evidence of Germany's deviousness. Contrary to any sense of 'fair play', they had proclaimed victory despite being driven from the theatre of battle. Their shooting and armour may have been superior, but they were essentially dishonest, anathematic to the ethos of the boys' story papers.

Parallels can be drawn between the problems of narrative formed by the protracted conflict on the Western Front; naval warfare presented its own issues in terms of adventure. Conflict at sea had changed a great deal since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Rather than engaging at close range, battles took place between vessels with guns and torpedoes that had a range of up to 20,000 yards (about eleven miles).[174] At the Battle of Jutland in 1916, the battle-cruisers *Queen Mary* and *Indefatigable* were hit with one salvo each, and sunk within a few minutes with the loss of around 2,300 men.[175] The 'naval race' had seen great technological innovations that dramatically altered the nature of maritime conflict. This was recognised in *The Blue Book of the War*:

> The actual fighting during the battle was of a character very different from that experienced in a land engagement, or even from what used to take place at sea in the days of Nelson. There were no engagements at close quarters, no lying alongside, no boarding, no hand-to-hand struggles, no ramming of one ship by another. It was all a matter of long-range gun-fire.[176]

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[171] Ibid., p.84.
[172] Herbert Strang (ed.), *The Blue Book of the War* (London, 1916).
[173] *Chums*, No.1244, vol. XXIV, 19/08/1916, p. 816.
[174] Richard Hough, *The Great War at Sea 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1989), p 268.
[175] Ibid, pp. 222-44.
[176] Strang (ed.), *The Blue Book of the War.*

Moreover, this change in the conduct of warfare resulted in another transformation, that of the nature of heroism.

> Under such circumstances there was not much scope for the display of individual valour. The bravery of the men was of a passive kind, a standing by their guns, ammunition passages, observation posts, furnace fires, hospital quarters, and the like, with a full knowledge that at any moment a shell or torpedo might strike home and sink their ship and all its crew in the course of a few minutes.[177]

This became apparent with the losses and unclear outcome at Jutland. Modern naval warfare was generally not marked by close combat. Indeed, the heroic figure to emerge from the battle of Jutland was the 16 year old boy-sailor 'Jack' Cornwell, who remained at his post on the *Chester*, though mortally wounded. He was posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross. His actions can hardly be described as militarily significant; Cornwell's deed merits a short paragraph in Geoffrey Bennett's *The Battle of Jutland*, and is completely absent from Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command.* Yet his actions had captured the public's imagination, prompting, for example, Sir Frank Salisbury's famous painting.

At first glance it appears that Cornwell was a symbol of the changing nature and perception of warfare. His death reflected the combination of both heroism and tragedy. Artistic interpretations of his last moments were often romanticised, depicting a stoically brave lad doing his duty in the smoke of battle. Dying at such a young age, it would not be far-fetched to assume that his tale would be taken up as a symbol of the Great War's futility, a notion that would gain such prominence later in the twentieth century. Instead, however, the preeminent impression taken up by the public was that of Cornwall's heroism in the face of danger. His image adorned cigarette cards, while his story was retold in such publications as the *Boys' Own Paper*.[178] Before the war, Cornwell had been a boy scout, and this fact was used to encourage other young boys to follow in his footsteps. Rowland Walker's *Oscar Danby V.C.* was dedicated to those former scouts who had behaved heroically during the Great War, with particular emphasis on Cornwell. In September 1916, a 'Cornwell' badge was instituted, and the first was awarded in November of that year. At the time of writing it

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Mark Connelly has looked at the responses to Jack Cornwell's death in East Ham, noting the role of teachers and officials in ensuring "that the children were constantly aware of the example set". Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-39* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 92-3.

is still given to scouts "in respect of pre-eminently high character and devotion to duty, together with great courage and endurance", though now it is mainly awarded to scouts who have shown courage in overcoming illness.[179] This is not the only remnant of the nation's obsession with Cornwell to survive into the twenty-first century. Mount Cornwell graces the Canadian Rockies, while in the London Borough of Newham residents can still use the Jack Cornwell Community Centre in Jack Cornwell Street. In several towns, Cornwell Streets can be found in close proximity to streets named after Beatty and Jellicoe.

The shift in the presentation of the meaning of Cornwell's actions represents an important indication of the changing perception of the First World War. In the twenty-first century, the Scout Association links Cornwell's bravery with illness rather than military heroics, and frowns upon the nickname given to the Cornwell Award, 'The Scouts' VC'.[180] This was not the case in 1916. Much like the deaths of the Scouts in *Oscar Danby V.C.*, Cornwell's death was seen as tragic, but noble and heroic. It was an important story to take from the unclear outcome of the battle of Jutland, particularly as the nature of naval warfare was so different to that presented in pre-war fiction. The war at sea was presented to children as both modern and part of Britain's heritage. The result of this was confusion, as the Royal Navy grappled with its past. Often writers would employ the same techniques seen in the novels set in the trenches; an event would remove the protagonist from the front line, giving them the opportunity to have adventures as individuals, in keeping with literary customs. There was a similar contrast regarding the war in the air, seen as once as both novel but traditional. Yet the conflict above the Western Front was novel. It tapped into a culture established just before the war that had been of great appeal to children of all nationalities. Moreover, it would set the ground for a genre that would reach its zenith after the war, without notions of futility and waste.

The War in the Air

The war at sea, as has been shown, enabled authors to present the First World War in a context familiar to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of British history. There was, however, a conflict between the weight of tradition and the reality of technological innovation. Modern methods of warfare were markedly different from those employed during the glorious past of the Royal Navy. In the case of aerial warfare, the presentation

[179] Scout Association, *Scout Awards and the Cornwell Badge*, http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/library/hqdocs/facts/pdfs/fs295401.pdf, accessed 04/01/06.
[180] Ibid.

was more complex, largely because of the novelty of the subject matter. The Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) had only been established in 1912, and was a wholly modern sphere of warfare; this allowed writers a free rein to define a new genre, though it is perhaps unsurprising that many would fall back on older, more familiar traditions. The glamour and novelty of this recent advancement of technology appealed to youths consumed by a wealth of flying literature and magazines. Looking back on his childhood, the former pilot Cecil Lewis recalled the influences that propelled him towards enlistment in the R.F.C. in 1915:

> I hardly remember a time when I was not air-minded. At prep. school I was already making gliders out of half-sheets of paper, curving the plane surfaces, improvising rudders and ailerons, and spending hours launching them across the room from chairs and tables. I devoured the pages of *Flight* and *The Aero*. I could tell all the types of machines – Latham's Antoinette, Blériot's monoplane, the little Demoiselle. I followed the exploits of the Wright brothers in America and Cody on Laffan's Plain.[181]

Lewis was one of the founding members of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in 1922, and was Chairman of the Programme Board until 1926. In his memoirs he remarked upon the popularity of the Children's Hour in the BBC's early days, which influenced many young Britons in the same way that periodicals had inspired him as a child.[182] Boys' magazines frequently presented articles on aspects of science and engineering, and it should not be forgotten that this was the era in which Frank Hornby's Meccano (originally known as Mechanics Made Easy), and its numerous imitators, was becoming established as a favourite toy.[183] Though some Meccano sets were expensive, others were more affordable, though not of the same complexity. Model aeroplanes were also popular, and the outbreak of war added another dimension to their popularity; they could be marketed as war toys.[184] Entertainment and a technical education could be combined, to some extent countering the perceived over-emphasis on classics and sports at the public schools. This youthful obsession with aviation was not limited to British children. A 1909 poll suggested that French children admired pilots above all professionals. For them, the aeroplane "symbolised national security and *revanche* against Germany", as the bitter memories of the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1) filtered through to younger generations.[185]

It can be seen that, although this emphasis on the wonders of science and technology was important, the war in the air could also be presented in more traditional terms connected

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[181] Cecil Lewis, *Sagittarius Rising* (Harmondsworth, 1977, first published 1936), p. 16.
[182] Cecil Lewis, *All My Yesterdays: An Autobiography* (Shaftesbury, 1993), pp. 55-56.
[183] Nicholas Whittaker, *Toys Were Us: A Twentieth-Century History of Toys* (London, 2001), pp. 7-9.
[184] Ibid., p. 18.
[185] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers,* pp.119-20.

with the concept of national identity, a key facet to the character-building nature of boys' fiction. Writers of air stories began to hark back further than the writers of naval stories, to the romance of Arthurian legend and medieval chivalry, though it is important to understand that the employment of such imagery often owed more to nineteenth century perceptions of the past than the reality of the Middle Ages. As the twentieth century progressed, the Great War increasingly came to be seen as a 'modern' conflict, an image at odds with the presentation of the war in boys' fiction, which in turn would likely have resonated with Victorian audiences. This clearly reflects the close proximity of the First World War to the nineteenth century, a recurring theme of this chapter. If the Great War represented a significant change across many areas of British society, such change can be seen as gradual rather than instantaneous, and many of the novels and magazine articles aimed at children emphasised this measured progression, a conflict between modernity and the past.

As the war dragged on, it became more apparent to civilians on the home front that casualties on the Western Front were appalling. At First Ypres in October 1914 there were 54,100 British casualties; there were 61,000 at Loos in 1915, and 419,654 on the Somme in 1916. The war at sea was also costly; 6,097 men lost their lives at the battle of Jutland alone.[186] Modern warfare, it seemed was dominated by death on a scale that could in no way be interpreted as glamorous. The war in the air was different. Though undertaking extremely dangerous missions, with high casualty rates, pilots were not dying by the thousands in single encounters. Battles were deadly but small in scale, and pilots could rise to notoriety in an era when mechanised warfare had all but eliminated the celebration of individuality in conflict. Strang wrote two novels set around the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) during the war, *Burton of the Flying Corps* (1916) and *The Air Scout* (1918), while Westerman produced *The Secret Battleplane* (1916), *The Fritz Strafers* (1918) and *Winning His Wings* (1919). It is important that these novels appear so late in the war. They demonstrate the topical nature of boys' fiction, often focusing upon issues predominant in the news at that time. Concurrently, as mentioned above, they show an attempt to distract from the enormous casualty lists of the Western Front through a period in which these were increasing. Moreover, these tales were often well received. A review in the *TLS* described *Winning His Wings* as "a brisk and entertaining tale", though the reviewer draws a distinction between the 'episodic' works of Westerman and "the synoptic view of the war" as presented by Brereton.[187] *Winning His Wings* was also well-received in the *Manchester*

[186] Bennett, *The Battle of Jutland*, p. 155.
[187] *Times Literary Supplement*, 11/12/1919, p. 743.

Guardian, in which the tale was described as being "unusually well written with a sure sense of the scene".[188]

As has been seen above, many of the novels focusing purely on the war in the air did not appear until midway through the war. Yet the popularity of both aeroplanes and the 'aces' who flew in them could not be ignored. Many adventure stories set in other areas of the war allowed their protagonist to have some kind of escapade in these wonders of modern invention. Henry Charles Moore's *Under Jellicoe's Command: A Story of the North Sea* (1916) follows Dick Duggan, a teenager aboard his Uncle's North Sea steam trawler. After an encounter with the enemy, a passing seaplane takes Dick to rendezvous with the Grand Fleet. The experience of flying is terrifying for Dick, who manages to overcome his fear by calling upon those national characteristics common, in the view of children's writers, in all plucky young Britons: "His dread of being a coward was so strong that he quickly overcame his fear of an accident and of never again seeing his home".[189] A similar event occurs in Rowland Walker's *Oscar Danby V.C.* (1916). Danby, the boy scout of the title, seeing a British biplane being fired upon by Germans declares, "It must be jolly exciting".[190] Within moment, the plane lands and Danby replaces the injured wireless operator as they search for enemy artillery emplacements. Walker conveys a sense of both the thrill and the danger of aerial warfare:

> Now the whole battle-field was open beneath them. The winding river where the British troops were forcing a crossing, the broken bridge at Pont-Arcy, and the bridge of boats at Chavonne were all laid out like a miniature map beneath them... [T]hey had become the target for a score of guns far down below. The sound of the engine and propeller had prevented him from hearing the bursting of the shrapnel, and it was not till the splinters began to fly about him, and he saw a trickle of blood ooze down his fingers that he knew they were the centre of a hailstorm of lead.[191]

It is in this action that Danby wins the Victoria Cross, after he guides the landing of the aeroplane after the pilot is blinded. Yet this is only one of the escapades depicted in the novel, and a brief one at that. It seems that Walker uses the war in the air to add further excitement and a little diversity to his tale. Throughout the novel, the author also breaks away from the narrative to explain the events leading up to the outbreak of war, the character of the German nation, and the necessity of the fight. Walker, like other popular writers,

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[188] *Manchester Guardian*, 01/12/1919, p. 7.
[189] Henry Charles Moore, *Under Jellicoe's Command: A Story of the North Sea* (London, 1916), p. 29.
[190] Rowland Walker, *Oscar Danby V.C*, p. 169.
[191] Ibid., pp. 173-4.

attempts to cram as much adventure into the story as possible, the pace and diversity helping to mask any literary deficiencies.

The dual perception of the war in the air in terms of both technological modernity and medieval chivalry (or at least Victorian notions of medieval chivalry) demonstrates a key feature of air stories of this period. As Paris has noted, although the R.F.C. was a relatively recent innovation, dreams of flying had been prominent in European culture long before the outbreak of the First World War:

> For the Victorians, flight was the final frontier, the ultimate triumph of human ingenuity and technological aspiration, and some believed that the conquest of the air would transform human affairs and bring about a new age of peace and universal understanding.[192]

Crucially, the understanding of aeronautical issues was often limited to speculative imaginings. While it is true that the pioneering actions of such figures as the Wright brothers in 1903 and Louis Bleriot in 1909 made the subject of flight a topical one, the output of the writers of boys' fiction owed a great deal to the fledgling genre of science fiction. Westerman's *The Dreadnought of the Air* and other similar works were perhaps more in keeping with the novels of Jules Verne; even the title reflects this. Verne's 1886 novel, *Robur the Conqueror* had been given the alternative title *The Clipper of the Clouds*. Air travel, and therefore aerial warfare, was often interpreted in maritime terms, even as late as 1914 when the aforementioned Westerman novel was published. Many of the novels published during the war, and particularly those written at the beginning of the conflict, still maintained this element of science fiction.[193] Even so, the novel was well received. "A reviewer in *The Scotsman* described it as "a story which cannot fail to appeal to any spirited boy".[194] Fantastical inventions were still being imagined later in the war, though there is clearly an element of wish fulfilment in such ideas. A powerful weapon that could bring an end to the slaughter of the Western Front was an obvious fantasy.

In works aimed at a more popular audience, as opposed to technically minded air enthusiasts such as Lewis, the link with the genre best described as science fiction was indelible. It must also be noted that the role of the R.F.C. was, at least in the first years of the First World War, not specifically combat orientated. Their function was primarily reconnaissance, and it was only as the importance of this became more apparent that the need for pilots to be able

[192] Paris, *Over the Top*, p. 51.
[193] Ibid., p. 58.
[194] *Scotsman*, 26/11/1914, p 2.

to defend themselves more ably was deemed a necessity. In the 1915-16 annual of the popular boys' paper *Young England*, an article by Valton Spear demonstrated "What Airmen Have to Do in Wartime. The author methodically detailed the role of the R.F.C., examining the tasks of 'scouting', 'range-finding', 'bomb-dropping' and, in greater detail, 'fighting in the air'.[195] An accompanying illustration focuses upon the depiction of aerial warfare, with images including barrage balloons and anti-aircraft guns. Later in the same issue, a brief account is given of 'An Airman's Battle –Two Miles High' that is "as thrilling as any boy can desire".[196] It relates the tale of a dogfight between a British pilot and his German adversary. Calling attention to the ingenuity of the British protagonist, the reader is told that, after a fruitless machine-gun duel, the German plane was rammed, killing the pilot, who "proved to be a Bavarian officer wearing the Iron Cross".[197] In the early years of the war, therefore, we can further examine the complexity behind the representation of the war in the air. The risks associated with life in the RFC, piloting these early contraptions, generated a certain amount of interest. Pilots faced considerable danger before they even set foot in France. 8,000 died in training alone, more than were actually killed in combat. Yet, the 'dogfight' and the fighter ace also captured the public imagination. Allied pilots including Edward Mannock, James McCudden (both British), René Fonck (French), Billy Bishop (Canadian) and Eddie Rickenbacker (American) engaged in combat with such German pilots as Ernst Udet and Manfred von Richthofen, the infamous 'Red Baron'. Although such innovative methods of warfare could only do so much to alleviate the concentration on the duration and the stagnancy of the wider conflict, imagery of the air war was still resonant. It is true to say that their actions did capture the public imagination, though their proliferation in literature and magazines aimed at children was still largely secondary to the actions of their comrades in the older services.

Air stories of the First World War represent a curious paradox. For the conflict that took place on land and at sea there were clear precedents. This was not the case for the war in the air. Depictions of flight had often centred upon its novelty. Such writers as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne had theorised the implications of such machines on society, while the public had largely focused upon spectacular achievements, record setting and breaking. With the outbreak of war in 1914, the role of the fledgling RFC in largely reconnaissance missions hardly provided the excitement required by the young readers of adventure fiction. As the RFC became more assured, and pilots began to take part in daring encounters with their

[195] Valton Spear, 'What Airmen Have to Do in War-time', *Young England*, pp. 328-30, 1915-16.
[196] 'An Airman's Battle – Two Miles High', *Young England*, p. 333, 1915-16 – Although the collected annuals of *Young England* do not make clear the exact date of publication, this particular tale references the aforementioned article, stating that both appear in the same issue of the story paper.
[197] Ibid., p.333.

counterparts, the popular perception of the war in the air began to focus upon a number of air aces, pilots with high numbers of confirmed kills. This rapid development of the RFC is a strong factor behind the complex interpretation of aerial warfare. Writers now had the material to move away from the science fiction tales reminiscent of Jules Verne. They were presented with a type of warfare that allowed them to combine the bravery of individuals with the excitement and novelty of technological advancement.

It can be seen that, in terms of popular culture, the war in the air functioned on several levels. To a certain extent it provided a distraction from the carnage of the Western Front, allowing the public to celebrate individual achievement, skill and bravery, personified by the fighter aces. This in turn enabled writers to hark back to an earlier tradition, and this is illustrated in the aforementioned article from *Young England.* The battle is almost like a joust; after the fighting at distance fails, the pilots move closer for a more brutal, almost hand-to-hand struggle. It is perhaps unsurprising that Escott Lynn should write a novel later in the war entitled *Knights of the Air*, and similar imagery has been resonant throughout the twentieth century. Cecil Lewis reflected on the nature of aerial warfare and categorically reflected the appeal:

> To be alone, to have your life in your own hands, to use your own skill, single-handed, against the enemy. It was like the lists of the Middle-Ages, the only sphere in modern warfare where a man saw his adversary and faced him in mortal combat, the only sphere where there was still chivalry and honour. If you won, it was your own bravery and skill; if you lost, it was because you met a better man.[198]

He continued, "[I]f the world must fight to settle its differences, back to Hector and Achilles! Back to the lists!"[199] In this sense, Lewis echoes the views of Cyril Hall, whose *Modern Weapons of War, By Land, Sea and Air* (1915), lamented the scale of destruction that characterised modern warfare.[200] It will be seen in later chapters that the war in the air, unlike the trenches of the Western Front, largely maintained its element of romance. On the other hand, although these novels enabled a veneration of the individual warrior hero that would have been as familiar to young readers of the nineteenth century as to those growing up in the era of the Great War, aerial warfare was also modern and innovative. For George Mosse, "The mystique that grew up around aviation... restored myth to modern technology".[201] This was also true of the other theatres of conflict. The Royal Navy and the Army, however, had a weight of tradition to contend with. The R.F.C. did not have past

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[198] Cecil Lewis, *Sagittarius Rising*, p. 45.
[199] Ibid., p. 46.
[200] Hall, *Modern Weapons of War, By Land, Sea and Air*, p. 9.
[201] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 119-20.

glories to live up to, allowing the seemingly contradictory forces of tradition and modernity to exist side-by side without being detrimental to their image.

Throughout the Great War, the war in the air provided an element of escapism for young readers. It was both modern and traditional, appealing to those with scientific minds as well as those with romantic notions of combat. Air fiction would become extremely popular in the inter-war years, but it was between 1914 and 1918 that the genre became established. Whereas pre-war air stories had often been focused upon fantastical tales more akin to science fiction, the war years saw an increase in realistic combat stories set in the air. Early novels included flying as one component of the story, part of larger adventure taking the protagonists around numerous locations. By the end of the war the genre was becoming further defined, and was scene as an exciting setting for adventure after a conflict characterised by horrendous casualties in the trenches. After the war, Westerman would increasingly turn to the publication of air stories as they became evermore popular. Indeed, his creation of the character John Standish can certainly be seen as a precursor to William Earl Johns' more recognisable James Bigglesworth: Biggles. The airman became a symbol for an old-fashioned style of combat, the absence of which had been lamented by many of the writers of boys' fiction.

Girls' Fiction and the Great War

Though, to a certain extent, the differences between girls' and boys' fiction would gradually be eroded as the twentieth century progressed, such distinctions were very much evident in the fiction created throughout the war years. War was seen as a male domain, and the works of Westerman, Brereton, Strang, and their like were clearly aimed at a predominantly male market. Nevertheless, war affected all areas of society, and naturally found its way into works produced for young girls. Indeed, the experience of war greatly expanded the role of women in British society, and this was could be seen in girl's fiction. In 1919, the *Manchester Guardian* made reference to these developments reflected in works of girls' fiction, noting that, "The change in the manner of girls' stories is significant of the age we are living in, an age of W.A.A.C.'s and Wrens."[202] The changing role of women in society during the First World War has been a fiercely debated subject for historians. Arthur Marwick has suggested that "the war starkly revealed Edwardian assumptions about women", and "offered unique possibilities for bringing about changes in their position and

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[202] *Manchester Guardian*, 01/12/1919, p. 7.

status".[203] Although recognising the conservative nature of society and the continued prominence of women's domestic roles after the war, Marwick felt that "within the framework of a 'traditional' conception of women's role in society... the possibilities of a happier and more fulfilled life were much greater".[204] Others have argued that any possible change in the status of women was largely temporary for the duration of the war. Susan Grayzel has noted of the role of women that "the end of the war found that their societies' expectations of and for them had changed remarkable little".[205] Although women were moving into different areas of war work between 1914 and 1918, Grayzel argues that a more traditional role was encouraged: "Through the bodily labor of reproduction, women provided the raw ammunition of war, and, in a variety of public wartime forums, this kind of gender-specific national work was repeatedly underscored".[206] In Britain and France, producing offspring was seen to be a patriotic duty, although this vision of women's role in society was not one that appeared frequently in works aimed at young girls.

When war broke out, already established writers such as Brenda Girvin, Bessie Marchant and Angela Brazil turned their attention to stories of nurses, munitionettes and young girls dealing with both German spies and their altered position on the home front. The headmistress in one of Brazil's school stories conveys this change as she addresses her pupils at a Christmas assembly,

> Our women, too – Society women who had been, perhaps justly, branded as 'mere butterflies' – put their shoulders to the wheel, and have shown how they, too, could face dangers and difficulties and privations. As nurses, ambulance drivers, canteen workers, telephone operators, some have played their part in the field of the war; and their sisters at home have worked with equal courage to make munitions, and supply the places left vacant by the men.[207]

Girls' fiction was rarely concerned with the actual experience of fighting. Instead they frequently focused on aspects of citizenship and social status largely unrelated to the war, much like the writers of stories for boys. As Cadogan and Craig have noted, novels more often than not simply "encouraged [girls] to worship the male heroes at the front, and to knit comforts for them".[208]

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[203] Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914-18* (London, 1977), p. 12.
[204] Ibid., p. 163.
[205] Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (London, 1999), p. 243.
[206] Ibid., p. 86.
[207] Angela Brazil, *A Patriotic Schoolgirl* (London, 1918), p134.
[208] Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *Women and Children First*, p. 59.

Indeed, the theme of knitting was a potent symbol for the women's role in the war, as can be seen in Edith Lelean's *The War on the Western Front*, a patriotic play intended to be performed by schoolchildren. More of a recital than a play, girls and boys were to take separate roles in presenting the events of the war, at least as far as 1916. While the boys were assigned the duty of narrating the history and rationale behind each nation's involvement in the war, the girls remained on stage as 'knitters':

> From early morn, as it is fitting,
> Till dewy eve, you'll find us knitting
> Khaki sock or sock of grey;
> The clicking needles tell of battle,
> Shrieking shrapnel, roar and rattle,
> Hear what their clicking has to say.[209]

Similar motifs were used in Alicia Adélaide Needham's 1915 knitting song *Soldier, Soldier, Dear Unknown*, dedicated to the BEF and written from the perspective of a girl knitting mittens for a soldier:

> Soldier, soldier, dear unknown,
> I wonder as I knit,
> Will you be a Corporal
> Who will wear this mit?[210]

Later in the song she proclaims,

> And if my little mitten
> Be dyed a deeper red,
> Its saffron turned to crimson
> With blood in honour shed,
>
> The radiance of that scarlet,
> The glory of that stain,
> Would make my little work box
> Seem like a sacred fane!

By referring to the knitting of socks and mittens, Lelean and Needham emphasised the domestic role of women and girls, seeing their role as supporting their male counterparts engaged in the fighting. There were, however, other connotations. The *tricoteuses* who knitted at the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in France at the end of the eighteenth century had entered the lexicon of popular culture. In Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two*

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[209] Edith Lelean, *Canadian Patriotism: The War on the Western Front. A Patriotic Play* (Toronto, 1916), p. 3.
[210] Alicia Adélaide Needham, *Soldier, Soldier, Dear Unknown. A Knitting Song* (London, 1915).

Cities, Madame Defarge's 'knitted register' documented those who were to be slain, representing her use of the Revolution to fulfil her own personal vendetta.[211] While these First World War depictions clearly did not have such sinister connotations as those of Dickens, a connection can still be made; both establish a link between knitting and storytelling, setting them out as feminine traits.

Yet the above stanzas reveal a certain complexity. While clearly reinforcing gender roles, the language used by Lelean and Needham raises questions regarding the extent to which the Great War was presented realistically to children. "Shrieking shrapnel" does not conjure images of 'clean' traditional warfare. Later verses refer to "the cries of women, children / victims of the Prussian hate", and, "vile hands ever / stained with the best of Belgian blood".[212] At the same time, Needham's references to "the radiance of that scarlet", shows some awareness of the bloodshed. In some ways this demonstrates the multifarious reactions to the war; those on the home front were not unaware of the losses, but they believed in the justness of the war and were able to frame their reactions within traditional understandings of sacrifice.

The idea of Belgium's violation was prominent in girls' fiction. In Bessie Marchant's *Molly Angel's Adventures: A Tale of the German Occupation of Belgium*, the 13-year-old Molly is left stranded in Belgium with two younger friends, a brother and sister, recovering from measles, just as the German army invades. Their parents having left them under the supervision of Madame Delacroix while they recover from their illness, they set out on a journey to the French coast in an effort to return to England. As in the fiction aimed at male readers, the conflict between Germany and Belgium is shown to be grossly unfair. The young boy, Buffy, exclaims, "Father says Germany is the greatest military power in the world! Why, it is like a mouse setting out to lick an elephant".[213] Later in the novel, after hearing of the death in battle of her youngest son, Madame Delacroix's father rebukes her for expressing grief and devastation:

> "Peace, woman!" cried the old grand-pére, standing up and straightening his poor bent back. "Had the lad run away from his duty, then your tears might have flowed like rain. But a soldier who meets death facing the foe, for him shall be twined the laurel and the bay, and tears shall be dry, for he has gone to his rest in a blaze of glory".[214]

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[211] Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London, 2003, first published 1859), p. 179.
[212] Lelean, *Canadian Patriotism*, p. 16, p. 10.
[213] Bessie Marchant, *Molly Angel's Adventures: A Tale of the German Occupation of Belgium* (London, 1915), p. 28.
[214] Ibid., p. 50.

In many ways, *Molly Angel's Adventures* bears comparison with Percy Westerman's novel *The Despatch Riders*, the tale of two adolescents on a motorcycling tour of Belgium as war breaks out. The differences between the heroes and heroines of boys' and girls' fiction can be seen. Molly Angel fulfils a maternal role, escorting her young charges away from the oncoming war towards the safety of home. The protagonists in Westerman's novel move towards the conflict, offering their services to the Belgian army who are only too happy to receive help from two English teenagers.

As has been noted above, the adolescent adventures depicted in the works of boys' fiction often take the form of a dual quest; the leading characters are on a journey that is both physical and psychological. The former may involve the hunt for a German spy, or the delivery of secret information for example, while the latter is the quest for masculine identity. A similar structure can be seen in the works of girls' fiction. Female protagonists are shown to prove themselves in particular situations specific to the role of women and society. In *Molly Angel's Adventures,* Molly's aunt, who has come to France to look for them, rescues the children. Having married Mr Angel's brother without the knowledge of his family, when her husband is subsequently killed in the war she must prove herself to them. She embarks on a search for the missing children to justify a future role in her previously unknown family. Therefore, her physical journey allows her to embrace her designated role in society. While the aunt in *Molly Angel's Adventures* is largely a peripheral character, Marchant's *A V.A.D. in Salonika: A Tale of a Girl's Work in the Great War* takes this theme further.

In *A V.A.D. in Salonika,* an unconscious man, John Standish, is found trapped by a rockfall. He is rescued by Joan Haysome, and cared for by her family. When Standish regains consciousness, he asks Joan to go to his lodging house, and ensure that his papers are locked away safely. On the way, Joan is unable to quell her feminine urges, and stops to buy a hat. The delay means that an enemy agent, posing as a friend of Standish, gets to the papers first, and Joan compounds her error by spending the day with her aunt (who runs the boarding house) before reporting the matter. Shunned by Standish and to a certain extent her family, she overhears a woman talking of her daughters who have signed up to go to Salonika:

> "My daughter wants to go to Salonika with her V.A.D.," said a comfortable motherly voice close to Joan, although the speaker was invisible. "I think I shall let

> her go too. We are compelled to send our boys into the danger zone, so why should our girls be withheld? We do not love our daughters better than our sons".[215]

The attitude displayed here makes an interesting comparison with the views on the war that developed throughout the twentieth century. If the Great War is seen as the moment when the 'old men' sent the 'young men' off to their deaths, Marchant suggests the only fault in this lay with the fact that women were not sent as well.

As in boys' fiction, the war was depicted as the purger of sins, an instrument of redemption. Joan goes to Salonika to atone for her mistake, a mistake borne of frivolousness associated with her femininity. In the hospital she treats the badly wounded John Standish while his story is related by one of his comrades:

> A swell he was, Miss, one of the scientific blokes that invents poison gas, and all that sort of thing. He was very busy inventing a new stuff warranted to put men out of action in the least possible time, and yet not to kill them, when by some piece of carelessness he let a blooming Germany spy steal his papers, and not only his papers, but a lot of Government stuff with which he had been entrusted. He couldn't be court-martialled or punished in the ordinary way, but they wasn't going to let him off scot free, so they just drops him, they wouldn't look at his scientific work, they wouldn't look at him. Some men in his place would have gone over to the enemy after being treated rotten like that. Gentleman John just walked into the nearest recruiting place, and joined up as a private soldier.[216]

Again, many of the assumptions prevalent in boys' fiction are also evident here. Standish is seen as a 'gentleman', and naturally inspires the awe and respect of his working class comrades. As in the works of boys' fiction, the higher classes automatically command respect. At the same time he believes in the overall justness of the war, enlisting as a private despite the obvious waste of his scientific ingenuity and the injustice he has been served. As with the works of Westerman, Brereton and their contemporaries, Marchant emphasises the differences between Britain and Germany; it is important that Standish's poison gas was nice and humane.

It comes as little surprise that by the end of *A V.A.D. in Salonika*, Joan has redeemed herself by capturing the German spy who had stolen the vital documents. The novel concludes with the engagement of Joan and Standish, as she returns to England and the domestic sphere. Not all girls' fiction dealt with characters that were compelled by shame or circumstance to become involved in the war effort. In Marchant's *A Girl Munitions Worker: The Story of a*

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[215] Bessie Marchant, *A V.A.D. in Salonika: A Tale of a Girl's Work in the Great War* (London, 1917), p. 88.
[216] Ibid., p. 114.

Girl's Work During the Great War, Deborah, a soldiers daughter spends "from seven o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock at night" in a munitions factory in Canterbury.[217] Despite these long hours, Deborah manages to find time to volunteer to collect clothes for the Red Cross, leading her almost inevitably to the hunt for a German spy. While visiting an old man's house, a kitten knocks over a pile of newspapers:

> Then Deborah found herself staring at a broad printed page that was not English at all. A copy of the German *Tageblatt* it was, and Deborah who was something of a German scholar, saw with a little thrill of dismay that it was of quite a recent date. Wrapped up in the German paper was a much-bethumbed map of Canterbury, and she noticed that the map was heavily scored in places with blue pencil.[218]

In children's fiction a foreign accent and a British map were often enough to mark a character out as a German spy. The motif was so familiar that it was immediately ridiculed in some publications. One issue of *Chums* from August 1914 contained S.S. Gordon's tale, *Wescott and the German Spy: A Laughable Long Story of School Life*, in which two boys see a strange gentleman drop a map of the local district. Retrieving it they see his name is written on it: "Wilheim Schlossenboscher!" gasped Jennings. "Anybody would be excused for thinking that chap German if he saw all that name".[219] Although the boys never really believe that he is a spy, their prejudices nevertheless shine through, as Jennings exclaims, "Every time I see that name written on it, I get a headache".[220] Aware of the apparent absurdity of the spy fever, the boys play a trick on Wescott, an overweight Billy Bunteresque character, who after great humiliation discovers that Schlossenboscher is actually the new German master at their school.

One of the most popular writers of girls' fiction was Angela Brazil. Her school stories, published by Blackie & Sons, were much vaunted, and advertised alongside the works of Westerman and Brereton. Indeed, it seems that she was better paid than some of her male counterparts. Brazil maintained a long working relationship with Blackie & Sons, and in 1946 received £75 in anticipation of royalties for *The School on the Loch*, an amount she had received for all books from 1919 onwards. She also received 10% on the first 5,000 copies sold, and a further 12 ½ % on sales beyond that.[221] She continued to write school stories between 1914 and 1918, but often tailored them for a wartime audience. *A Patriotic Schoolgirl* (1918), for example, followed the adventures of two sisters, Dora and Marjorie, at

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[217] Bessie Marchant, *A Girl Munition Worker: The Story of a Girl's Work During the Great War* (London, 1916), p. 11.
[218] Ibid., p. 35.
[219] *Chums*, No. 1144, vol. XXII, 15/08/1914, p. 892.
[220] Ibid., p. 893.
[221] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/6/1/3, 'Authors' Agreements vol.3 1919-1937'.

boarding school. References to the war are dotted throughout the narrative: the girls share their train journey to school with three Tommies, their cousin Elaine works as a V.A.D at a local Red Cross hospital, a hero fighter pilot lands nearby and is idolised by girls from schools in the surrounding area. The cover of the book shows a teenage girl with bright red lips and an appealing look in her eyes draped, like Britannia, in the Union Flag. Yet Brazil does not really get to grips with the war in the way that one would expect given that the novel was published in 1918. At one stage Marjorie is allowed to air the fear that "the war will be over before I've left school".[222]

Like her counterparts writing boys' fiction, Brazil glossed over, and even sentimentalised the true horrors of war. In *A Patriotic Schoolgirl*, the protagonists meet soldiers who have lost limbs at a Red Cross hospital. One of the soldiers, Jackson, remarks,

> "The only thing that troubles me... is that I'd paid a quid out in Egypt to have my leg tattooed by one of those black fellows. He'd put a camel on it, and a bird and a monkey, and my initials and a heart. It was something to look at was that leg. And I've left it over in France. Whish I could get my money back!".[223]

Though much of the children's literature depicting the Great War was aimed at a male audience, a significant number of novels were written specifically for girls, though as Cadogan and Craig noted, "Girls' wartime fiction was not particularly impressive".[224] Indeed, Brazil used her works in an attempt to instil her own class prejudices in her young followers. Born in Preston in 1869, her surname was originally pronounced like the country, though after her father's death she changed the pronunciation to rhyme with 'dazzle'.[225] Moreover, *A Patriotic Schoolgirl* was semi-autobiographical. Her brother had married the sister of a piano manufacturer, whom Brazil had felt to be beneath her sibling. They had a son, Jackie, who was an invalid. In the novel, Brazil cast herself as the strict but likeable Miss Norton of Brackenfield College, the school attended by the story's protagonists. She reduced her sister-in-law to a barmaid, apparently one of the lowest positions in society she could think of, while Jackie became the angelic Eric, a small boy in a spinal carriage, whose condition is made worse by his mother's neglect.[226] Brazil used her novel to reinforce codes

[222] Brazil, *A Patriotic Schoolgirl*, p. 89. Such sentiments echo those iterated by one of the protagonists in John Finbarr's *At All Risks*, who, because he is too young to enlist remarks that, "Fifteen is such a rotten age!". Finbarr, however, undermines such sentiments with a graphic description of modern warfare that shatters his protagonists' illusions about glorious cavalry charges and chivalric combat. John Finbarr, *At All Risks: A Boy's Adventures in the Great War* (London, 1918), p. 10.
[223] Brazil, *A Patriotic Schoolgirl*, p. 113.
[224] Cadogan and Craig, *Women and Children First*, p. 59.
[225] Gillian Freeman, *The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil* (London, 1976), p. 13.
[226] Ibid., p. 86-7.

of behaviour that she believed in, and, in this case, to attack those whom she felt to be a threat, or a disgrace to her family.

On the other hand, Brazil did draw upon her own experiences, and those of people around her, to comment upon aspects of the war. Her sister, Amy, was a nurse, while her brother was a doctor, and she used this to inform her depiction of wounded soldiers. Furthermore, her readers would often write to her during the First World War, telling them of their loss. Molly Alford of Camberly, for example, wrote, "A great friend of ours was reported missing, believed killed, now reported killed but we still hope he may be a prisoner. He was only 20 and such a nice looking boy with a mop of curls which he plastered down.... It is awful. Oh! How I wish it was over".[227] Another, Dorothy Abbot of Finchley told Brazil of a soldier she was writing to: "My lonely soldier; everyone knows about him, he's my special War Charge. I write to him and send him parcels. It's so nice to think I've got something to 'do in the war'".[228] There is little doubt that these influenced Brazil's approach to the war. Her schoolgirls write letters to soldiers on the front, while others lose family members as a result of the conflict. Brazil also maintains a propagandistic edge to her tale. When one of the girls is discovered to have helped her German Prisoner of War brother to escape, her shame causes confusion among the other girls. Marjorie asks the school's Principal, Mrs Morrison, "Is it right to forgive the enemies of our country?" Mrs Morrison's reply is unequivocal: "When they are dead".[229]

Essentially, while presenting the adventures of the female protagonists, traditional gender roles were being reinforced; girls saw the war through the eyes of nurses and munitionettes, who returned to the domestic sphere as their narrative arc reached its dénouement. This was symbolic of the perceived gender divide that permeated society. Many of these novels were aimed at middle class children, the cost prohibiting their availability to all. Given the middle and upper class origins of the suffragette movement, many of the authors were as interested in placating the next generation of young radicals as they were in rendering the Great War understandable to a young audience. Indeed, novels aimed at young girls frequently ended with the marriage of the female protagonist to a soldier. Thereby, women were defined through their relationships with men, and patriarchal society was reinforced.

Despite the radical changes in the lives of British women brought about by the experience of the Great War, much of this change was not reflected in girls' fiction. Like their male

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[227] Ibid., p. 95.
[228] Ibid., p. 95.
[229] Brazil, *A Patriotic Schoolgirl*, p. 287.

counterparts, women writers reinforced pre-war codes of conduct and behaviour. The school setting of many stories acted as a factory for producing young women who would conform to pre-established standards of behaviour and know their place within society. Many tales followed proven formulas and incorporated wartime themes and sub-plots seemingly for the sake of topicality. Indeed, for girls' writers the war proved the validity of the values they has been espousing for years. Just as the Western Front became the perfect setting for establishing and developing the masculine identity of male protagonists in boys' fiction, the home front allowed female characters to embody the qualities of femininity and domesticity, even in the face of the upheaval brought about by the war.

Conclusion

Historically, propaganda was far from a new concept in 1914. Its novelty in this period lay in the scale of its perpetuation, and the extent to which Government became involved. As suggested above, the widespread changes in Britain's education system ensured that the majority of the population were potential receptors. Moreover, changes in the publishing industry allowed ideologies to be conveyed through an array of different media. Less affluent members of society, though perhaps unable to afford expensive novels, were still influenced by cheaper magazines, story papers and newspapers. Thus, the anti-German sentiments of such figures as Alfred Harmsworth were disseminated to a wide audience. Powerful figures could visit their "own xenophobia and anxiety upon impressionable readers".[230] As W.J. Reader noted, "the boys' magazines circulated at all social levels... and were likely to be familiar to many of the men of Kitchener's armies".[231] Children were a prime focus for these unofficial propaganda campaigns. Young and easily influenced, the warriors of the future were susceptible to the opinions and prejudices of certain publishers and writers, especially if these ideas were wrapped in stories of adventure and excitement. Most of the novels and story papers were not officially endorsed, and therefore did not uniformly toe the government line. Thereby, an examination of these works reveals a complexity of agendas. Some of these divergences are obvious. The subtle differences, for example, between the messages emanating from the Religious Tract Society's Boy's Own Paper and their more secular competitor, Chums, are largely understandable. On the other hand, the lack of surety in the depiction of the carnage of the Western Front manifested itself in multiple ways.

[230] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 87.
[231] W.J. Reader, *'At Duty's Call'*, p. 29.

The young male readership of the story papers and novels were used to reading stories of empire, in which British heroes dispatched non-European enemies using their superiority in intellect, morality and technology. Despite the role of Germany as Britain's main enemy throughout the First World War, the sideshows allowed writers to continue in the vein of pre-war fiction. These relocated heroes back to imperial theatres of conflict, away from wars of attrition and white European foes. Presentation of the enemy was not an issue limited to the war years. Subsequent depictions of the war throughout the twentieth century have focused upon class differences within the British army and injustices perpetrated on soldier 'victims'. Often, as shall be seen in later chapters, the enemy has dwindled in importance, becoming a sideshow to the 'futility' of the situation. Nevertheless, between 1914 and 1918, the young of Britain had been subjected to a wealth of propaganda, both official and unofficial, that had taught them that the war was just, noble, worthwhile, and even glorious. The necessity of such propaganda during wartime is fairly evident. The extent to which such ideas were able to diminish or flourish in the years following the Armistice will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Reassessing the First World War: 1919-1945

Introduction

The last chapter examined the plethora of material depicting all aspects of the First World War between 1914 and 1918. Reading matter for the young was produced for multifarious reasons. Primarily written to fulfil a demand for topical stories, they were also prime examples of the fine line between education and propaganda. They did, however, frequently concur on their representations of a just war conducted against a genuinely threatening enemy in the name of freedom and justice. Some figures in society felt uncomfortable with the dissemination of a jingoistic form of patriotism to the nation's youth, particularly the Board of Education who attempted to steer teachers away from the propagandistic tone that tainted other children's book. Yet by and large, the vast majority of fictional tales and factual books not intended for use as school textbooks conformed to a singular reading of events. Moreover, these interpretations transcended class boundaries. Authors writing about the conflict would often publish in a range of media that varied in price; children from less well-off backgrounds who could not afford the expensive hard-back books could read tales by the same writers in the story papers.

The end of the war naturally had an effect on the production of literature and the understanding of the subject as presented in the classroom. Victory had been achieved, but society was now able to reflect upon its involvement and the costs. The British may have emerged triumphant from the Great War, but their victory had come at a dear price, the reality of which would become clearer in the ensuing decades. By November 1918, Britain had lost three quarters of a million of her men, and been economically crippled by four years of war. Had the sacrifice been worthwhile? Certainly, many of the commentators from this time, or at least those that have retained lasting literary credibility in the following decades did not believe so. Many of the war veteran memoirists published in the late 1920s and early 1930s presented a view of the conflict as one of futile suffering and waste, though the complexity of their views has often been simplified through subsequent interpretation. Calling into question the justness and conduct of the conflict was a significant reaction to the First World War, but it was not the only one.

While the longevity of certain anti-war literature has added credence to their arguments, there were many opposing views. Moreover, as Janet Watson has demonstrated, "the story of the war that has entered popular culture was a product much more of the time in which it was created than of the time it ostensibly represented".[1] She notes, for example, that Robert Graves' recollection of a German cousin had shifted from "damnably nasty" in 1916, to a more neutralised description in 1929's *Goodbye to All That*.[2] There was undoubtedly a change in the perception of the First World War in the decades that followed the cessation of hostilities, though there was not one universal understanding. Interpretations reflected the complexity of the Great War, and the standing of British society during the interwar years.

Several factors need to be taken into account when examining the literature of the post-war period, and the extent to which it spoke for the nation. The spate of novels, memoirs and autobiographies that appeared at the end of the 1920s has been pored over by countless academics. Some have argued that it was a decade before writers were ready to deal with the subject, citing the publication of works by Sassoon, Graves, Hemingway and Remarque, among others, as signifiers of public opinion, articulating the thoughts of a nation. Of course, writers did not suddenly begin producing work about the Great War in the late 1920s. Bernard Bergonzi noted that "there had been a steady trickle of war books appearing from 1919 onwards, ranging from artless personal narratives to official histories of regiments or campaigns, which had attracted dedicated readers".[3] Bergonzi was writing in 1965. This was a period in which the Great War had reasserted itself in the consciousness of the nation, as Britain commemorated the fiftieth anniversaries of the conflict between 1964 and 1968. The mood during the interwar years, however, was very different. Although Bergonzi singled out C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922) as one of the few works produced before 1928 that dealt with the First World War, subsequent studies have revealed the extent to which war fiction dominated the bestsellers list of the 1920s. In particular, Rosa Maria Bracco's *Merchants of Hope* (1993) argued that "the popular literature of the Great War reveals the reality and the strength of the resistance against an ironic interpretation of the war", as posited by Paul Fussell.[4] The focus of Bracco's work was authors who demonstrated "not a sign in their writings of aesthetic consideration of how the subject matter and the

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[1] Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 217.
[2] Ibid., p. 222.
[3] Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (London, 1965), p. 146.
[4] Bracco, *Merchants of Hope*, p. 196.

literary medium suit each other" and have therefore, with one or two exceptions, slipped from public consciousness.[5]

Not covered by Bracco's remit was the wealth of genre fiction inspired at least by aspects of the First World War. Interwar fiction was populated by countless war veteran protagonists, all indicative of the complex reactions to the war. Many of these works hovered between the realms of children's and adults fiction, and could by no means be considered high-brow literature. It must, however, be recognised that the likes of 'Bulldog' Drummond and Lord Peter Wimsey have had greater longevity in the public imagination than many of the works cited in Bracco's study. As works that have been greatly popular with young readers, a discussion of the works of Dorothy Sayers, Sapper and Edgar Wallace, is useful in understanding this period, and will be addressed later in this chapter. Indeed, many children's writers seemed to take inspiration from these middle-brow authors, their own works being simplified versions of popular fiction.

This chapter seeks to look at the interwar years from an altogether different perspective. Much has been made of the literary and cinematic output of this period, but little has been said of the depiction of the Great War in children's books produced during these turbulent years. Works of literature tended to reflect the thoughts and feelings of one person, the author, though this would be filtered somewhat through the audience. School textbooks, on the other hand, reflected a more general understanding of the war in a manner that was deemed to be appropriate for young readers, while the children's novels, stories and genre fictions were clearly written to some extent with commercial value in mind. Moreover, the continuation of some of these works in ongoing series suggests that the writers were acutely aware of and fully understood the audience they were writing for.

There were changes in attitudes to the Great War while it was being fought; a belief in the justness of the cause did not seem to waver, though mounting casualties began to diminish the positive spirit with which some had greeted the war. The interwar years were different. The two decades that followed the end of the Great War were equally turbulent in their own way, culminating in the outbreak of another war that would dwarf its predecessor, particularly in terms of the experience on the home front. The economic instability, social disharmony and rise of Nazism all affected the depictions of the Great War, but this does not mean that traditional views of the war were rendered obsolete.

[5] Ibid., p. 196.

The portrayal of the war will be discussed throughout this chapter, focusing upon both fiction and non-fiction. The importance of pulp and popular novels will also be addressed, as such literary forms were often enjoyed by young readers. Rather than a huge sea change in the interpretation of the Great War, the works aimed at children were often marked by their sense of continuity and traditionalism. It will be argued that although there were shifts in perceptions of the conflict that can be traced throughout the twenties and thirties, these works existed alongside an established view of the First World War that owed little to the disillusioned tone of some of the war literature produced during this period.

The Aftermath of War

The end of the Great War posed a number of questions for those charged with educating Britain's children. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the outbreak of war in 1914 had caused significant upheaval in the schooling of the nation's youth. School buildings had been commandeered for the war effort, while many younger male teachers had either enlisted or been conscripted to serve in Britain's armed forces.[6] It was estimated that around 23,000 members of the teaching profession served in the Forces in some capacity.[7] Within the classrooms there was naturally felt to be a need to talk about the war, and this in turn became a concern for both schoolteachers and the Board of Education. With so many British citizens at war, including fathers and brothers of the children, and a government making widespread use of propaganda as a war-winning weapon, educationalists needed to ensure that they were treading the fine line between patriotism and jingoism, though not all did so.

After the war, such issues were redefined somewhat, though they did not completely disappear. In both the field of children's fiction and history teaching, the end of the war brought about several key changes. On the one hand the conflict was over. The British propaganda machine was now obsolete, and the vilification of Germany was no longer imperative to the British government and people. After four years of devastation the overwhelming desire in society was for a return to normality. On the other hand years of conditioning meant that the negative connotations associated with Germany were

[6] Eric Hopkins, 'British Children in Wartime' in John Bourne, Peter Liddle and Ian Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War 1914-45 vol.2 Who Won? Who Lost?* (London, 2001), p. 15.
[7] National Union of Teachers, *War Record: A Short Account of Duty and Work Accomplished During the War* (London, 1920), p. 93. This is an estimate, as the source was only able to quote exact figures for members of the N.U.T.

difficult to shake. Discussing his forthcoming story 'The War of Revenge' in the story paper *The Champion* in March 1922, Leslie Beresford seemed to be continuing the Germanophobic tone of the Amalgamated Press' pre-war output:

> What will be the next war, and what will it be like? That may seem a curious question to ask, seeing that all the big nations of the world have been sitting round the conference-table at Washington, and trying to turn the dream of everlasting peace into a reality. Whether or no that reality could ever be, there is an old and wise saying worth remembering: "When the strongman armed keepeth his house, his goods are at peace". One must always remember that among the honest people of the world there is always the burglar ready to steal any man's goods. One must be prepared for the gentleman when he comes. It is the same with nations, and, though I do not prophesy, I think we shall find our burglar nation to be a gentleman whom it took us recently five years to cudgel into better behaviour.[8]

It was understandably difficult for some in society to let bygones be bygones, and, indeed, the coming of the Second World War in 1939 ensured that such views resonated throughout the twentieth century. So, it can be seen that there were often conflicting messages in the depictions of the Great War presented to children, a discrepancy between society moving forward and, at the same time, harking back. In many ways it could also be argued that the inter-war years brought the conflict closer to the children of Britain, as war veterans were reintegrated into society and became more visible.

Between 1914 and 1918, the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Great War were absent fathers, siblings and neighbours, known only through brief periods of leave, letters home as well as such sources as novels, story papers and newspapers. In the interwar years this dynamic shifted. Soldiers returned to their families and workplaces, and attempted to resume their position of influence within the domestic sphere. Many veterans found work as teachers after the war, so children were much more able to interact with those who had actually experienced combat.[9] The sight of injured war veterans on Britain's streets was also a familiar one. The editor of *The Champion* made reference to this when he discussed the notion of charity on Armistice Day 1922. He wrote:

> The whole crux of the matter is just this: There are a lot of us today to whom the giving away of an occasional small dole to others less fortunate would not deprive ourselves to any appreciable extent, and yet how often do we ignore the all-too-pitiful demands of the poor? Take a stroll down almost any important

[8] Leslie Beresford, 'War by Wireless! – Mr Leslie Beresford discusses the new story – "The War of Revenge"', *Champion*, 04/03/1922, p. 167.
[9] R.L. Delderfield addressed such issues in his 1972 novel, *To Serve Them All My Days*, which follows a returning soldier and shellshock victim who takes up a post as a History teacher in a country public school.

> street in any of our big cities or towns, and not how many there are who, by selling matches (a nerve-racking and hopelessly unprofitable form of hawking), or flowers, or bootlaces, are mutely drawing the attention of their more fortunate fellows to their sad plight! Ex-service men, heroes who have carried their lives in their hands in the greatest war in history, to ensure the safety of ourselves today[10]

As will be discussed elsewhere in this chapter, interwar fiction was permeated with the influence of the First World War, even in works that did not specifically focus on the conflict as the main setting for their narrative. This could be said to be an accurate reflection of Britain in the post-war years. Around six million men passed through the ranks of the armed forces in some capacity during the Great War. The vast majority of these men returned to Britain and took up roles in society. Throughout their lives, be it in the home, the classroom or elsewhere, Britain's children were confronted daily with the memory of the war.

Moreover, children would have been faced with multifarious interpretations of the conflict, from the grief of mourning families to ex-soldiers proud of their achievements and satisfied that their experiences had not been undergone in vain. Their interactions with living participants of the Great War were but one aspect of the impact of the conflict in interwar Britain. After the war, local authorities across the country embarked upon a massive programme of memorialisation. War memorials in towns and villages provided communities with a solid, visible reminder of the events of 1914-18, and local schoolchildren were often involved in the ceremonies that greeted the unveiling of these symbols, as well as the yearly commemorations that took place on Armistice Day.

Many schools also had their own plaques and monuments to former pupils who had given their lives in the conflict. In the last chapter the impact of the Great War on Britain's schools was examined, particularly the attempts to reconcile a profound sense of loss with a belief in the justness of the cause that former pupils had given their lives for. This feeling of bereavement would have lingered throughout the interwar years. Indeed, there was some consternation surrounding some of the institutions for the young in the wake of the First World War. A memorandum on cadet work in secondary schools from 1922 examined the changed attitudes brought about by the war: "At the present moment, now that the War is over, there is a very real danger lest Cadet Corps work should be regarded as an essentially Military Movement. This is a profound

[10] *Champion*, 11/11/1922, p. 406.

mistake".[11] Instead, the memorandum argued, it should be emphasized that "The real object of Cadet work is training for citizenship, and as such should be a definite part of School education".[12] Such reactions suggest a movement away from militarism in British society, particularly militaristic propaganda and conditioning aimed at children. The need to defend youth organisations in the period after the war suggests that some in society were remembering the perceived enthusiasm that had inspired so many young men to answer the call to arms in 1914, and recognising a connection between this phenomenon and the widespread impact of militaristic youth movements in Edwardian Britain. In 1923 it was announced that the funding from the War Office that Cadet Corps had enjoyed since 1908 was to cease, ostensibly for reasons of financial prudence.[13] There were mixed reactions to such a decision, though the *Daily Telegraph* felt it to be "a retrograde step".[14] There was still some support for the Cadet Corps, and in 1924 the Youth Section of the No More War Movement wrote to Charles Trevelyan, President of the Board of Education, claiming that schools were actively encouraging membership of these youth movements by permitting drill to take place during the school day.[15] Similar debates continued throughout the interwar years, with questions being raised in 1935 about the legitimacy of rifle clubs.[16] N.D. Bosworth Smith, of the Board of Education, felt that rifle shooting was "of definite educational value, and does not share the taint of militarism which is attached to O.T.C.s (Officer Training Corps)".[17]

In the interwar years the publishing industry also began to recover from the hardship of wartime. Blackie & Sons, publishers of Westerman, Brazil and Brereton among others, moved to a new 13 acre site in Glasgow because its original premises were deemed too small to cope with demand.[18] Their fortunes had started to improve during the war. In the financial year ending in February 1916, they had posted a profit £13,700-0-6d, which was hit by depreciation of machinery, and income tax.[19] By February 1918, their profit was £25,109-6-11d.[20] During the Second World War their business was again affected.

[11] TNA, ED 12/195 'Activity during school hours', 1922.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] *Daily Telegraph*, 03/01/1923.
[15] TNA, ED12/195.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/12/1/12, 'Blackie's Printing Works in Peace and War, at Work and Play', n.d.
[19] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/1/2/2, 'Minute Book No. 2, Directors Meetings, 1912-1925'.
[20] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD 61/1/3/3, 'Minute Book General Meetings, 1912-1926'.

In 1940, one third of the factory floor was given over for the production of powder shells for the Ministry of Supply.[21] The famous publishers Macmillan and Co. were offered many war books to publish throughout the interwar years, though it is perhaps a misnomer to suggest that the subject matter of the Great War guaranteed publication. They refused a number of titles, including Christopher Hughes' *Five Years of Soldiering*[22], K.I Wiggs' *Unemployment in Germany since the War*[23], W.W. Davies' *Cost of Peace*, and even Rudyard Kipling's *Memories of France*.[24] Many of these works never found publication. Nevertheless, reading remained a popular pastime for the young between the wars. In 1935, a schoolmaster from the Midlands conducted a survey of thirty secondary school boys, aged around thirteen. He discovered that "on a wet day, twenty-one preferred to read", and that of these boys, "one selected a boys annual, eleven books of the Percy Westerman type, [and] nine the novels their parents read".[25] Furthermore, Mass-Observation discovered in a survey of two hundred parents that 76% of fathers and 46% of mothers actively encouraged their children to read, though there was a wide discrepancy between attitudes of middle class and unskilled working class parents.[26] Slightly older teenagers could also be fairly discerning in their choice of literature. When asked if they read the *Times Literary Supplement* and/or other book reviews, thirty four out of fifty sixth formers replied affirmatively to another Mass-Observation questionnaire. The most popular publications for gleaning information about books were *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*.[27]

As has been suggested above, the Great War was prominent in the minds of many in the period after 1918. Yet the question of how the subject could be fitted into the education system was a difficult one. History teachers had always been reluctant to cover events recent in the memory; as has been noted above, a contributing factor to the outpouring of imperialist children's fiction at the end of the nineteenth century was the perception that such tales were not finding their way into the classroom. Strictly speaking, the First World War was too recent to be considered history. An analysis of school history textbooks of the interwar years supports this notion. The vast majority of resources for

[21] Ibid.
[22] British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Archive of Macmillan and Co. Add. 56027, 02/12/1931 to 25/05/1932.
[23] British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Archive of Macmillan and Co. Add. 50628, 01/06/1932 -14/12/1932.
[24] British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Archive of Macmillan and Co. Add. 56029, 21/12/1932 – 12/07/1933.
[25] *Observer*, 19/05/1935, 'Letters to the Editor', p. 13.
[26] MOA, FR2086, 'Childhood Reading,', Feb. 1944, p. 4.
[27] MOA, FR62, 'Literary Questionnaire', Mar. 1940, p. 6.

schoolchildren that dealt in some way with the war often did so as part of more general works covering British, European or even global history.

Outlines of the Great War were often tacked on to already existing textbooks, suggesting that the subject was too recent to be focused upon in any great detail in a history curriculum, though it was too important to be completely ignored. In many ways this was a continuation of a process already seen during the First World War. There were very few textbooks that dealt exclusively with the events of 1914-18, though there were a great many designed to be consumed during children's leisure time that covered the subject. Again, these were often variations upon and continuations of the literature published during the war. Sales figures for textbooks of this period are frequently scarce, though some could sell in large numbers. George Townsend Warner's *A Brief Survey of British History* for example, was first published in 1922, and had sold 399,159 copies by 1949, including 176172 in its first year of publication.[28] Others sold less well, but still in significant numbers. Blackie's *Britain and Her Neighbours* for example, was initially published in six volumes in 1913-14. A seventh volume, looking at the twentieth century, sold 1720 copies in 1923-24, and 3790 in 1924-25.[29] An analysis of textbooks published during the interwar years gives an indication of the way in which educators felt the war should be presented to children.

School Textbooks

One of the most striking aspects of the school textbooks was their similarity. The Great War was almost always presented from the perspective of military and political history, usually beginning with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and ending with either the Armistice or the formation of the League of Nations. This in itself suggests a sense of hope springing from the four years of carnage, an implication that would gradually change over the ensuing decades. The books themselves were often dense, covering huge sweeps of history. The writing style was frequently dry, and very formal; many needed notes in the margins to draw attention to the key points. To a large degree this was a reflection of the general approach to history and the representation of the past during this period; the Great War had not yet achieved its mythical status, so was interpreted and presented in the same manner as other major historical events. The fields of social and cultural history were yet to make a significant impact, and these books were a far cry from those produced in the period after the Second World War,

[28] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGD61/4/3/3, 'Sales of Royalty Books 1924-1974'.
[29] Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Archive, UGH61/4/3/1, 'Educational Book Sales 1888-1925'.

particularly those that appeared from the 1970s onwards. In the late twentieth century, military campaigns became largely peripheral to the subject, though there were a few notable exceptions; the experience of living in a trench, and the Battle of the Somme made fairly frequent appearances.

The tone of the interwar textbooks was also notably different from those that would follow later in the century. There was little sense of futility, military commanders were not written of in terms of callousness, cowardice and incompetence, and there was an overall sense that the war had been just and worthwhile. This is not to say, however, that the suffering or the scale of the casualties was ignored. Textbooks mentioned the battles of the Somme, and Paschendaele. They referred to the treacherous conditions and the appalling loss of life. The key difference between these works and the textbooks that would follow after the Second World War was that although interwar versions of events *did* recognise the war as a tragedy, it was seen as one that had been foisted upon the British people by outside forces. The First World War was therefore seen as necessary to preserve the British values of freedom and democracy, to thwart an aggressive foreign power hell-bent on conquest, and to protect British citizens from the threat of invasion.

An examination of school textbooks published during the interwar years reveals a fairly consistent understanding of the events that led to Britain's declaration of war on Germany in 1914. It must be said, however, that the presentation of these events became a little more nuanced as the war became more distant. Many of the textbooks published in the 1920s placed the blame for the war firmly at the feet of Germany, and the Kaiser in particular. D.B. Horn argued that "Germany pursued a short-sighted policy which would lead almost inevitably to war. German statesmen were sincere in their professions of a love of peace, but the peace which alone would satisfy them was a peace imposed upon Europe by dread of the German sword."[30] He suggested that the personality of the Kaiser and his cohorts was a key factor in bringing the world to the brink of conflict: "The blustering, arrogant speeches of William II and the Pan-German chorus created a widespread dread of German power and suspicion of German aggressiveness, which the acts of the German government did nothing to appease."[31] Similar sentiments were echoed in other textbooks. Samuel Gardiner contended that the German people had been conditioned since the 1870s to feel entitled to a greater role in the world:

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[30] D.B. Horn, *A History of Europe 1871-1920* (London, 1927), p. 152.
[31] Ibid., p. 152.

> With German method and thoroughness the German people had been taught for more than thirty years that the German nation was the greatest in the world, with the right to leadership of the world, and that all means were lawful to Germans by which they could attain their ends, and that it was the enmity of her rivals alone which prevented her from assuming her destined role.[32]

S. Reed Brett noted of Kaiser Wilhelm that "The most outstanding feature of his character was egotism of the worst and most dangerous type".[33] He continued, "More sinister than Germanic power in itself was the volcanic nature of the Kaiser, for no one could foresee in what direction his next eruption would take place or what use he would make of his power".[34]

Earlier, in 1926, Gardiner had remarked in another textbook that,

> The friends of the German Emperor, William II., might deny that his reckless ambition was the chief cause of the great [sic] War, but even they could not deny that he might easily have prevented it. He had long intended to have a war, his preparations were complete, the time seemed favourable, a pretext provided, and he seized it.[35]

The blame for the instigation of the First World War was clearly put upon Germany, with a particular emphasis on her leader. Indeed, in his analysis of the end of the war, Gardiner poured scorn on the defeated Wilhelm II, noting that "The blind devotion which his people once felt for him was now changed to scorn or hatred, and he sought a shameful shelter in Holland".[36] This admonishment of the German ruler and his regime was part of a much larger attempt to justify Britain's entry into the war, and reconcile that with the knowledge of how much it had cost the country, both in both human and economic terms. This emphasis on the role of the Kaiser was one aspect of Germany's war guilt, made more potent, it would seem, by Germany's conduct once war had broken out. Moreover, the significant threat to Britain's interests, the efforts of the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey to negotiate between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, the smallness of Britain's army and the surprise with which the public greeted the outbreak of war all pointed towards Britain as a nation that had in no way contributed to the crisis of 1914. Gardiner focused upon the efforts of Grey to "arrange a congress of

[32] Samuel R. Gardiner, *A Student's History of England: From the Earliest Times to the Conclusion of the Great War Vol.3 1689-1919* (London, 1922), p. 1000.
[33] S. Reed Brett, *British History 1815-1936 – A School Certificate Course* (London, 1949, first published 1933), p. 336.
[34] Ibid., p. 337.
[35] Samuel R. Gardiner, *Outline of English History B.C. 55 - A.D. 1919* (London, 1926), p. 502.
[36] Ibid., p. 512.

the Great Powers", noting that he failed because "Berlin had decided not to give way".[37] In the eyes of the writers of school history textbooks, Germany had been determined to provoke a war at all costs.

Cyril Robinson's 1922 text book showed children that Britain's entry into the war had been partly for historical reasons, as well as an intense sense of jealousy that had been behind Germany's thirst for power:

> No hostile Power has ever held, nor could hold, the opposing Flanders coast without grave prejudice to our national security. Whether or no the majority of Englishmen were conscious of the fact, a challenge had been offered which something more than the obligations of our honour compelled us to accept; and from the very first moment that we entered on the four years' struggle, nothing less than the Empire's existence was at stake. Yet, strange as it may seem, our act inspired in the Germans a wild ecstasy of hatred: they had counted on the benevolent neutrality of England, and England (so they verily believed) had played them false![38]

Similarly, the use of historical parallels was reinforced in Kenneth Bell's 1924 book *The Way of History*. In it he consistently referred to the Great War in comparison with Britain's last large-scale conflict on mainland Europe, the Napoleonic Wars:

> Thus the British Empire, just a century after the defeat of Napoleon, was launched on another great struggle for existence. Once again she was fighting against a despotic Power, wonderfully efficient and terribly strong, supported by a people eager for military glory and for the mastery of the world. Once again she had allies whom she was only partly in sympathy. She was fighting for her free institutions alongside of Russia, where such institutions had never been allowed to develop.[39]

The language Bell employs suggests that the war was seen, at least in his opinion, as a continuation of previous conflicts and political relationships, not a harbinger of modernity. This itself was a furtherance of the depiction of the war in many of the wartime textbooks, novels and stories, with their emphasis on notions of chivalry and honour that harked back to a nineteenth century perception of the middle ages.[40] Bell even continued the Napoleonic analogy to explain the end of the war:

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[37] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, p. 1001.

[38] Cyril E. Robinson, *A History of England: The Nineteenth Century and After 1815-1921* (London, 1922), p. 266.

[39] Kenneth Bell, *The Way of History* (London, 1924), p. 2 (Part of the New World Series, covers 1815 to the present day).

[40] Mark Girouard examines the nineteenth and twentieth century perceptions of chivalry in *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (Yale, 1981). See also Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2000) and Stefan

> The British Empire came out of the war faced by a situation very like that of 1815. It is true that the war of 1914-18 had destroyed not one despotism, but three, and given the chief share in victory not to such allies as the Russia of Alexander or the Austria of Metternich, but to the democracies of America and France. The war had been fought for liberty against militarism, and there seemed no fear of victory being used to set up anything resembling the Holy Alliance.[41]

As with the wartime interpretations of the Great War, it was a useful tool to be able to present the conflict to young readers in terms with which they would be familiar. This could range from the drawing of parallels with past events, as mentioned above, to the simplification of events to provide a link between different cultures. Thus W.R. McAuliffe's *Modern Europe Explained* (1937) could note of the assassination of 'Archduke Francis Ferdinand' in Sarajevo, "The scene was set exactly as for a royal procession in England - troops lined the sanded streets, overhead fluttered flags and bunting, military bands blared among all the trappings of majesty."[42] The Anglicization of names was also a fairly telling indicator of the attitudes of writers and the ideas they were trying to convey; Archduke Franz Ferdinand frequently became Francis Ferdinand, while many of the textbooks and novels referred to the Kaiser as William II.

If the arrogance of Wilhelm was seen as a vital contribution to the outbreak of war, the apparent conduct of the German army further cemented the justness of the British cause. Robinson informed young readers that "The Belgian people were cowed into submission by a calculated policy of murder and rapine; and, over the level plains where harvest was still gathering, the German host, like some monstrous piece of mechanism, accurate in movement, irresistible in numbers, swept southward upon France".[43] Later in the text he demonstrated the barbarity of the Germans through their use of poison gas, "the sight of their tortured victims, livid from choking lungs, roused in our men such spirit as no failure or discouragement could quench. For now at least we came to realize, if we did not so before, with what manner of foe it was we had to deal".[44] Samuel Gardiner had drawn similar conclusions about the nature of the German enemy in 1922, noting that "the German was the first to employ poison gas on the battlefield, to bomb open towns

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Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

[41] Bell, *Way of History*, p. 303. The Holy Alliance was a coalition between Prussia, Austria and Russia established in 1815 and the author's reference is clearly linking this with the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War. Again the author is attempting to establish a connection between the Napoleonic Wars and the events of 1914-18.

[42] W.R. McAuliffe, *Modern Europe Explained* (London, 1937), p. 12.

[43] Robinson, *History of England*, p. 268.

[44] Ibid., p. 274.

from airships, and to sink unarmed merchant ships without warning." Like Robinson, Gardiner showed that such underhand methods were not an effective way of waging warfare. In fact, according to these authors, they were only really effective in reinforcing the determination of the Allied troops. The use of such techniques, it was argued, was supposed to "strike [Germany's] enemies with terror". Instead, "he only succeeded in rousing England to greater efforts, in steeling France to sacrifice all rather than succumb, and in earning the moral condemnation of the whole world".[45] Britain, in their defence of Belgium and entry into the war was deemed to have fulfilled the morally superior role of the underdog.

It was not just the perceived atrocities that were used to fortify the position that Germany had been entirely responsible for the war. The size of Germany's army was seen to be a sign of Germany's warlike intentions, and a crucial factor in the carnage and massive loss of life that had characterized the Great War. Kenneth Bell described the German army as "the finest machine for the destruction of human life ever created".[46] On the other hand, Britons, it was argued, "having no thought of attacking any other country and trusting to the navy for protection of [their] own... felt it a blessing that [they] counted [their] soldiers by thousands and not by millions".[47] Moreover, this huge force did not play by the same rules that the British claimed to cherish. The image of poor, defenceless Belgium, so important in the propaganda of 1914, was also prevalent in the textbooks aimed at children in the 1920s. Robinson remarked that "They [the Germans] had little or no regard for the etiquette or chivalry of war; and ugly tales were told of the misuse of the white flag, of traps which traded on our men's humanity, and of the Germans who deliberately surrendered and then struck down their captors from behind."[48] Gardiner also made strong reference to the apparent war crimes committed in Belgium. He argued that "the German army showed that it was bound by no law, human or divine."[49] Moreover, the violence was not random, but premeditated, a clear demonstration of the reprehensibility of Britain's enemy: "Villages and towns were scientifically destroyed, on the excuse that the inhabitants had fired on the invaders; men, women and children were shot down to pay for the fault of one offender or simply because the German soldiers were drunk."[50] D.C. Somervell argued that, "Belgian neutrality hastened our action, unified the national resolve, and gave our policy a moral

[45] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, p. 1009.
[46] Bell, *Way of History*, p. 278.
[47] Gardiner, *Outline of English History*, p. 506.
[48] Robinson, *History of England*, p. 274.
[49] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, p. 1008.
[50] Ibid., p. 1008.

justification not more complete, but much more obvious than it would otherwise have been; for all of which we may be profoundly thankful."[51]

The causes of the First World War have been endlessly debated since 1914. With such a varied series of events all contributing to the outbreak of war, the issue was still an important component of any school syllabus focused upon the Great War at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Less contestable was the nature of the war on the Western Front. Wartime writers had attempted to tone down the horrors of the conflict, but this was a more difficult task in the 1920s, when many soldiers had returned home and the truth about their experiences was more widely understood. Nevertheless, 1920s textbooks often failed to accentuate the depictions of suffering in the way that later history books would. This is perhaps understandable for several reasons. Firstly, most of these textbooks looked at the war from military and political perspectives. Dwelling on the dreadfulness of the conditions would not necessarily fit into this historical approach; the distress underwent by soldiers was mentioned, but it did not need to be investigated in laborious detail. Secondly, it would perhaps not be appropriate to reveal the true character of trench warfare to young readers. One of the reasons for the fairly anodyne depictions of the Western Front during the war had been the protection of the immature audiences. It was only natural that such concerns would continue into the period immediately after the end of the war. Therefore textbooks would often refer to the harsh conditions, but approach such issues from a point of view that would patriotically draw attention to the bravery of the British soldiers. In his description of the retreat from Mons, for example, Cyril Robinson remarked that,

> Incredible feats of marching were accomplished. Under the scorching suns and steady moons of that high August our men raced grimly southward, staggering under their packs, blistered by the hard French *paves*, blinded with the dust, without sleep for days together, often without food. Regiments lost touch; divisions were parted; and panic-stricken journalists wrote home that all was over. But they were wrong. The marvellous discipline of our professional soldiers survived that most searching of all tests."[52]

Likewise, his commentary on the Gallipoli campaign equally recognised the squalid conditions experience by the Allied troops. He referred to, "the horror of our men's sufferings – the heat, the thirst, the stench, and, perhaps worst of all, the flies – is enough

[51] David Somervell, *History of Western Europe 1815-1926* (London, 1928), p. 60.
[52] Robinson, *History of England*, pp. 268-9.

to stagger thought".[53] Interestingly, these harsh conditions were all natural. There was little reference to the role of the enemy in Robinson's depiction.

Curiously, the battle that came to be seen as synonymous with the notions of futility and waste in the second half of the twentieth century, the Battle of the Somme, did not have the same significance attached to it during the interwar years. The military historian Gary Sheffield has suggested that the first day of the Battle of the Somme "took on its iconic status" during the revival in interest in the Great War sparked by the various anniversaries that occurred in the 1960s.[54] An examination of many post-Second World War analyses of the battle demonstrates the emotions that have become attached to the events of 1916. Sheffield describes it as "the most notorious battle in British military history", and, "one of the greatest human tragedies ever to befall these islands".[55] Martin Middlebrook, whose book *The First Day on the Somme* was so influential after its initial publication in 1971, described the battle as "the most tragic day of the war for Britain".[56] Earlier, A.J.P. Taylor had said of the battle, "Kitchener's army found its graveyard on the Somme. Not only men perished. There perished also the zest and idealism with which nearly three million Englishmen had marched forth to war".[57] Children learning about the battle from their school textbooks would not have come away with the same impression.

Most of the textbooks that examined the Battle of the Somme failed to mention the 20,000 who died on July 1, 1916. Robinson's description of the battle seems to be particularly oblivious to the scale of the casualties:

> On 1 July we launched our grand offensive on the River Somme. For months we had planned and studied the details of its strategy. Nothing now was left to chance. Emplacements had been built for a whole host of powerful guns. These were the first to concentrate on the enemy's defences and pound them into dust. Then, as the infantry went forward to occupy the debris, the guns' elevation lifted and a curtain fire preceded the advance. An accurate time-table had been prepared, and every unit knew precisely at what minute to leave cover and at what point to stop. Aeroplanes, fitted with wireless installations, were to give headquarters tidings of the progress at the front. Most wonderful of all in this battle of many wonders, huge, armoured monsters, known for secrecy as "tanks," crept ponderously forward over ditch and hedge and hillock, nosing out the machine-guns which our artillery had spared and enfilading nests of enemy

[53] Ibid., p. 280.
[54] Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London, 2003), p. 160.
[55] Ibid., p. xii.
[56] Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London, 2001, first published 1971), p. 272.
[57] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1990, first published 1965), p. 61.

sharpshooters. No battle in history had ever been conducted on so magnificent a scale; and first and last millions of men took part in it.[58]

Gardiner, in *A Student's History of England* (1922), gave the battle much shorter shrift, noting that, "The battle of the Somme relieved the pressure at Verdun and allowed the French to regain the ground they had lost".[59] Bell's *The Way of History* (1924), however, recognised that the battle "only partly succeeded in its early stages, and soon became a terribly expensive and very slow advance in face of an unbroken German line."[60] Likewise, S. Reed Brett's *British History 1815-1936* also commented on the cost of trench warfare, though the language used was hardly expressive. Of the battle he noted that, "Allied progress was both slow and costly", and that, "In October and November the rains made the ground so water-logged that the campaign ended without the capture of either Bapaume or Peronne".[61] Gardiner's 1926 textbook was even more equivocal, remarking that "a great struggle had been proceeding on the river Somme south of Arras and east of Amiens, where the French and English tried to break through. They did not altogether succeed but they did not altogether fail, as they gained some ground", though he went on to question this, suggesting, "whether this was worth the cost may be doubted".[62] Lucy Hanson's *The Story of the People of Britain* merely observed that "In the west the French held Verdun against all attacks, and in July the British began the great battle of the Somme".[63] It tended to be the textbooks published later in the interwar years that recognised the true cost of the conflict. W.R. McAuliffe's *Modern Europe Explained* (1937), for example, informed children that 800,000 men had died on the Somme, and that trench warfare "was productive of so great loss of life with so little result".[64]

Even so, the obsession with the first day of the Battle of the Somme that has manifested itself in the history books and fiction of the latter half of the twentieth century is notable by its absence. This is not to say that the Somme was a forgotten aspect of the war. On the contrary, *Battle of the Somme*, an innovative propaganda film, had broken box office records in 1916.[65] As Nicholas Reeves has argued, however, even exposure to such an

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[58] Robinson, *History of England*, p. 289-90.
[59] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, pp. 1006-7.
[60] Bell, *Way of History*, p. 289.
[61] Brett, *British History*, p. 354.
[62] Gardiner, *Outline of English History*, pp. 508-9.
[63] Lucy Hanson, *The Story of the People of Britain Book IV: 1815-1919* (Cambridge, 1923), p. 239.
[64] McAuliffe, *Modern Europe Explained*, pp. 15-16.
[65] Stephen Badsey, '*Battle of the Somme*: British War Propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3 (1983), p.108.

evocative film did not create a view of the Somme that would hardly be recognised by society ninety years on:

> [T]he film served above all else to reinforce and strengthen existing attitudes towards the War. By and large, public opinion in Britain in the summer of 1916 was still entirely convinced of the justice of Britain's cause... Thus, where a late-twentieth-century audience sees *Battle of the Somme* as powerful propaganda for the horror and futility of war, fitting the film into its own firmly established views about the special character (and special pointlessness) of this particular war, audiences of 1916 fitted the film just as successfully into their own (very different) notion of the War.[66]

Indeed, Robinson's account appears to demonstrate an acceptance of the nature of the conflict:

> [I]f a war of sheer exhaustion was what lay ahead, then the balance of manpower seemed to favour the Allies. Russia, as has been said, was good for countless millions. France would continue the fight to her last man; and we now had good promise of also of a new Ally [Italy]... Our own reserves – the reserves of a world-empire – were slow no doubt in coming into play; but they were large. The Colonies were arming, ready and eager to take a part in England's war.[67]

In the textbooks that were produced in the 1920s, there was little criticism of the conduct of the war and the role of the generals and politicians. Samuel Gardiner's *A Student's History of England* did say of the Gallipoli campaign that, "faulty generalship lost the day", though failed to expand upon this, and certainly did not apply similar terminology to the descriptions of the fighting on the Western Front.[68]

As has been noted above, the nature of the textbooks did change to some extent as the years went on. As the Great War became more distant, writers were more critical of the nature of the conflict than they had been in its immediate aftermath. McAuliffe aimed his book at 13 to 15 year olds, attempting "to explain, correct, and amplify what might be termed "newspaper history" – in other words, to enable the pupil to assess the value and import of what he reads in the newspapers, and to understand the political and economic complexities of modern Europe".[69] This was a recognisable change from some of the older textbooks, perhaps reflecting the changing nature of the audience. Youths of the same age group in the early 1920s would have been subjected to the

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[66] Nicholas Reeves, 'Official British Film Propaganda', Michael Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 37.
[67] Robinson, *History of England*, p. 285.
[68] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, p. 1004.
[69] W.R. McAuliffe, *Modern Europe Explained*, p.v.

pervasive propaganda campaign instigated by the British government during the war. By 1937, children of a similar age would not have been born until after the Great War. This was aimed at a different generation, and the writer recognised this. His comments on the end of the war were particularly potent: "In Paris and London triumphant crowds went mad with victory; it was not long before they learnt that its fruits were as bitter as the ashes of defeat".[70]

The aftermath of the war was to have a powerful effect on how the conflict was presented to children. In the years after 1918 the history of the Great War was extremely malleable. Samuel Hynes has written of the literary reactions to the after effects of the war, arguing that the period was characterised by a sense of loss, a notion that focused upon "not only the physical ruins of destroyed landscapes, and dead and mutilated men, but the social, intellectual, and moral ruins of the old, pre-war society... Post-war England stood, shakily and gloomily, on the rubble of the war's destruction".[71] This depiction of the interwar years has remarkable resonance. Areas of British society did suffer terribly after the war; the loss of loved ones and friends was made worse by the economic problems that dogged the country after the war. But this was not a universal experience for the people of Britain. While some areas of the country floundered, others were prosperous. The school textbooks tended to reflect these varied responses to the war. Initially they were jubilant and celebratory, a continuation of the works aimed at children during the First World War. This was reflected in both the interpretations of events and the understanding of other nations. Robinson's description of Britain's Russian allies was especially patronising:

> [T]hough inferior to the German in intelligence and training, [the Russians] were magnificent material, endowed with a courage unsurpassed by any people, half-fatalistic (for there is much of the Oriental in the Russian character), half-born of a childlike faith in their religion and their Tsar".[72]

As the years passed, sombreness crept into some of the works, but there was still a greater belief in the justness of Britain's cause in 1914. In 1922 Gardiner had reflected on the results of the war. It appeared that something significant had been achieved, a positive result not only for Britain, but the entire global community:

> The one great positive result of the war is that the attempt by Germany to dominate the world by force has been defeated. Further, owing to the

[70] Ibid., p. 22.
[71] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 311.
[72] Robinson, *History of England*, p. 275.

> thoroughness of the defeat, the Slavs, Poles, and other subject races of Eastern Europe have secured their independence, and a League of Nations has been formed to maintain peace, to free the world from the burden of excessive armaments and the constant dangers of new wars: an ideal project which requires that the Great Powers should be capable of throwing aside their mutual jealousies.[73]

Moreover, there was a sense of optimism as Britain entered the post-war period, a notion that the Great War had highlighted the inequalities in a society that had recently made enormous sacrifices for the good of the country:

> In England before the war many attacks were made on economic and social evils, and many theories advanced for their removal. To-day the prevailing system which gives comparatively so little reward to the masses of the community stands generally condemned. It is not merely a question of higher wages being obtained by those who labour with their hands. Demands are made by the workers for a share in the management of national and industrial concerns, for greater educational advantages, and for a higher social status. How these deep-seated changes are to be effected and what will be their results is the secret of the future. Every country in greater or less degree, according to the conditions prevailing in it, is faced with the problem of avoiding revolution by raising the general standard of life and satisfying the just social and political aspirations of its citizens.[74]

As the decades between the wars progressed, the feeling of optimism diminished somewhat and similar debates about the future direction would occupy the minds of the British people as they partook in another costly industrial conflict.

An analysis of the school textbooks produced during the interwar years can tell the historian many things about the interpretations of the war of 1914-18 that were prevalent in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. It can be seen that many of these books concurred with each other on such issues as the causes of the outbreak of war, and the legitimacy of Britain's involvement in the struggle. It must also be recognised that, although the post-war problems suffered by the British people affected their understanding of the achievements of the war, textbooks still did not resort to the language that characterised the literature behind what Samuel Hynes has termed the 'Myth of the War'.[75] This was not because history books were attempting to remain objective. Indeed, the reverse was often true; frequently Britain was referred to as either 'we' or 'us', a far cry from the detachment of late twentieth century works. The reason

[73] Gardiner, *Student's History of England*, p. 1015.
[74] Ibid., p. 1016.
[75] In using this term, Hynes stipulates that he is not suggesting "a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true." Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. ix.

for the tone of books differing from post-Second World War works was that the sense of the Great War as futile, and the language that accompanied such notions was yet to establish a strong foothold in the nation's consciousness.

Of course, textbooks were only one medium through which children would learn about the First World War. It should also be noted that a textbook forced upon young readers in the classroom may not have had the same impact as one that they would come to voluntarily. A survey of adults memories of childhood reading produced by Mass-Observation in 1944 discovered that, "Except among the middle class any suggestion that parents help their children to choose their reading matter or take much care over what they read is rare".[76] There were numerous other factual accounts of the Great War that sought to educate, and perhaps more importantly entertain their audiences. Again, these books were often a continuation of those published during the war. Sometimes they focused specifically on the war, and sometime they were part of more general histories. Their ubiquity was representative of an important aspect of early twentieth century childhood; this was the great period of self-education.

As in the school textbooks, the representation of the Great War was relatively unified, though significant changes could, however, be detected in the books aimed at children during the interwar years. For example, *Arthur Mee's Hero Book*, published in 1921, examined a range of notable figures from the annals of history. Alongside such luminaries as Sir Francis Drake, Socrates, Abraham Lincoln and the passengers of the *Mayflower*, Mee included a chapter entitled 'The men who won the war'.[77] The focus of this chapter was extremely varied. The Boy Scouts who were the last to leave the torpedoed hospital ship *Britannic* was the first story told.[78] The definition of heroism for Mee was clearly self-sacrifice; most of Mee's heroes had either given up, or been prepared to give up their lives for their comrades (figure 3 and 4). One story in particular can be linked with some of the school textbooks that had seen the war as an opportunity to bring about improvements in society. Mee told the story of George, "a boy from a Sheffield slum", who lived in "a squalid hovel, dimly lighted by a candle, with two broken chairs and an empty box for a table, and with a little lad pining for

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[76] MOA, FR 2086, 'Childhood Reading', Feb. 1944, p. 6.
[77] Arthur Mee, *Arthur Mee's Hero Book* (London, 1921), pp. 273-315.
[78] Ibid, p. 275. Mee claimed the hospital ship *Britannic* was torpedoed, but in reality it sunk after hitting a mine off the Greek island of Kea in November 1916. A certain amount of importance has been attached to the *Britannic*, partly because it was the sister ship of the infamous *Titanic*. Curiously Mee makes no allusion to this fact.

AS THE CRY RINGS OUT "WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST," THE SCOUTS ON A DOOMED SHIP DEMAND TO BE TREATED AS MEN

Figure 3 From Arthur Mee's *Hero Book*. Many writers exemplified the heroism of children, and particularly Boy Scouts, during the First World War.

THE MAN WHO WON THE WAR

Figure 4 From Arthur Mee's *Hero Book.* The mass civilian armies of the First World War shifted notions of heroism. Ordinary soldiers were now idealised.

affection and dying for want of care".[79] Following the death of his drunken father, George goes to sea, and sweeps the North Sea for mines. After his trawler strikes a mine, "George gave up the bit of board that would have saved him," for an injured comrade, "and sank into the sea".[80] This story is a useful window into Mee's ideology. Firstly, George's impoverished background meant that the story could evoke feelings of both sympathy and empathy in young readers. By rising to a heroic status from an extremely humble background, George would have augmented the aspirations of children reading the book. Throughout the story, it is made clear that George's strength comes from his faith in God, another key component in the author's message. Finally, as a child protagonist (at least at the beginning of the story), the readers could further identify with George. Many of the First World War heroes in Mee's book were children, and those who were not generally came from ordinary backgrounds. These were generally not the 'great men' who appeared in the other chapters of the book. Mee demonstrated that the Great War had democratised heroism.

During the First World War, many children's books drew attention to the soldiers of the Empire who were fighting alongside the British in all theatres of war. The depiction of, amongst others, Australian, Canadian, New Zealander, South African and Indian troops added a sense of exoticism to children's publications. This carried through into the interwar period, and can be seen in *Arthur Mee's Hero Book*. Mee included a section on 'The Men of Anzac', heralding the bravery of the Antipodean forces:

> [n]ever were seen more daring men, never was heard the tramp of more fearless men in a land they did not know. It is a crowning deed of bravery, carrying us, as we read it, down the great days of history. We think of Balaclava and Thermopylae, where men went out in the thrill and glow of life knowing it was their last hour; we think of all the sorts of men who have been heroes since, and of all the glory of this story the light of Anzac shines undimmed.[81]

In a similar manner to other children's books of the period, Mee cites historical battles with no explanation for the readers; it was assumed that they would understand the reference.

Alongside Mee's work there were also such publications as *The Wonder Book of Empire*, *The Wonder Book of the Navy* and *The Wonder Book of Soldiers*. These were

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[79] Ibid., p. 279. George is purported to be a boy discovered by a Mr. Robert Holmes, police-court missionary for Sheffield. No surname is given for George.
[80] Ibid., p. 280.
[81] Ibid., p. 295.

updated yearly, and presented lots of facts and figures, alongside pictures and details of the nature of soldiering or life at sea, depending on the edition. They were, however, not entirely focused on the war. Their primary function was to present the current status of their subject matter, though references to the Great War were visible. Although such books existed, they were not as prominent as they had been during the war years. There was some continuation of precedents set during the war, but publications during the interwar years were just as likely to cover issues and events that had nothing to do with the First World War. So, although there were still Great War stories, their importance was diminishing throughout the interwar years. It is now important to establish whether this trend was filtering through into works of fiction as well.

Fiction

1919 saw the continuation of Great War themes in the genre of boys' adventure stories. In that year Percy Westerman published *A Sub and a Submarine*, *The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge* and *Winning His Wings*. Frederick Brereton's *With Allenby in Palestine* and *With the Allies to the Rhine* were also in print, while Herbert Strang's *Tom Willoughby's Scouts* was available in the same year. These novels, however, should be seen as products of the war, rather than the interwar period. All of these works focused upon events that took place at the end of the war; they were part of the last wave of novels reliant on topicality for their success. Geoff Fox has suggested that during the interwar years, "there was plenty of material to be mined from the immediate past without venturing into fantasy, and writers such as Percy F. Westerman, Charles Gilson and Rowland Walker kept an eager market well supplied".[82] This is true to some extent, but the period after 1918 did see the First World War diminish as a subject for the children's literature produced by the above authors. This is hardly a startling revelation. As mentioned above, the Great War had been a topical subject for writers between 1914 and 1918. The nation's youth could follow the events through their novels and periodical papers, and keep abreast of events. There had also been a strong propaganda element to wartime fiction; an affinity between propaganda aimed at children and that focused on the adult population during the war years was evident. The necessity to preach the justness of the war and prepare children for their role in the struggle naturally became less of an imperative in the aftermath of the war. The Great War remained a popular subject between 1919 and 1939, but after the initial jubilation of victory, its attractiveness gradually waned throughout this period.

[82] Geoff Fox, 'From the Great War to the Gulf: 1914-2000', Kate Agnew and Geoff Fox, *Children at War*, p. 14.

Stories about the war appeared throughout the interwar years, but as time wore on they needed to compete with other adventure stories. Westerman, Brereton and Strang all stopped writing novels about the Great War after 1919. Escott Lynn's *Tommy of the Tanks* was published in 1919, and even after four years of war, still maintained a similar tone to that of the early war stories. His understanding of the solidity of Britain's cause was emphatic:

> It has been said that the murder of Julius Caesar delayed the civilisation of the world for a thousand years. Had Germany won the war, civilisation would have been put back hundreds of years; mankind would have returned to the horrors of feudal days; might would have triumphed over Right, bloodshed over the blessings of peace.[83]

Such a statement could easily have come from one of the historical textbooks referred to earlier in the chapter. However, after 1919, Lynn's output of First World War stories declined, and he returned to writing such tales as *Robin Hood and His Merry Men* (1924) and *Rebels of the Green Cockade: A Tale of Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia* (1923). Still, the abundance of fiction they had already produced by these authors was republished at various intervals throughout the interwar years. Westerman's *The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge*, for example, was republished as late as 1938, while Rowland Walker's *Oscar Danby V.C.* (1916) was given as a school prize in 1931.[84] Like Lynn, most of these authors returned to producing the type of stories they had been writing before the war.

This did not mean, however, that other writers were not continuing the tradition of adventure stories in First World War settings. In her analysis of boys' story papers, Kelly Boyd came to the conclusion that "by the end of 1916 most papers had abandoned the pretence of setting stories in the services or at the front... The majority of the stories in the papers returned to the themes of pre-war publications. School, sport and detective fiction retained a central place in the magazines".[85] She went on to argue that "The realities of the Great War removed it from boys' story papers until well after its cessation", before suggesting that "Only in the popular 'Biggles' flying stories of W.E. Johns... would the war be recuperated for popular consumption".[86] Yet, the Great War had continued to provide writers with vehicles for exciting tales, in both novels and story

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[83] Escott Lynn, *Tommy of the Tanks* (London, 1919), p. 5.
[84] Author's own collection.
[85] Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper*, p. 98.
[86] Ibid., p. 98.

papers. After 1916, the pages of such publications as *Chums*, *Young England*, and even the Religious Tract Society's *Boy's Own Paper* were replete with war stories. There most definitely was a decline in such stories after the war, but this was hardly surprising as the topicality of the subject became more distant, and there were still a large number of war stories for children to read throughout the twenties and thirties. Herbert Strang, for example, may have stopped writing novels about the war, but the subject still loomed large in many of his edited collections. His 1924 anthology, *At Duty's Call*, contained two Great War stories. One, George Atwar's 'With the Northern Patrol: An Episode of the Naval Blockade', was, as the title suggested, a story of the war at sea. The second was set during the German invasion of Belgium, and made reference to the perceptions of evil Germans and heroic Britons:

> Jaques fell to wondering what these German soldiers could be like, whose deeds were filling the world with horror. Before he had seen pictures of them in the newspapers, he has imagined them to be evil-faced demons with fiery eyes and, perhaps, horns sticking up on either side of their helmets; while the English soldiers, he had thought, must be like the picture of "St. George" he had seen hanging on the wall of the schoolroom, clad in shining silver armour, with glittering sword and lance.[87]

Such imagery may at first appear to be a form of parody, in the same way that boys' story papers during the First World War sometimes poked fun at the spy fever that had gripped the nation and the tired joke this had become. Yet the rest of the story does little to refute Jaques' preconceptions, at least in terms of the respective characters of the English soldiers and German troops. Similar stories would appear in Strang's annuals throughout the interwar years, though admittedly not as frequently as during the war years. Strang's publications were in no way unique.

One of the major works of interwar fiction was Ernest Raymond's *Tell England*. Published in 1922, and aimed at an adult audience, it nevertheless held great appeal for adolescents. By 1939 it had sold around 300,000 copies, and was adapted into a motion picture by Anthony Asquith in 1931.[88] It was the tale of three friends, Rupert Ray, Edmund Doe and Alfred Pennybet, and successfully combined two of the most popular genres of children's adventures, the war story and the school story. The novel begins by establishing the friendship of the three boys at Kensingstowe, a public school, before the outbreak of war. When war breaks out, all three enlist; Pennybet is killed on the

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[87] Alfred Gilbert, 'How Jack Trapped the Uhlans', Herbert Strang (ed.) *At Duty's Call* (London, 1924).
[88] Ernest Raymond, *Please You, Draw Near: Autobiography 1922-1968* (London, 1969), p. 69.

Western Front, while Edmund and Rupert are sent to Gallipoli. Later in the novel, Edmund dies heroically, and Rupert is left alone in reflection on the Western Front at the end of the war. Raymond described the "central backbone" of his novel as "the sacrifice for England's sake of a generation of schoolboys", but the novel was not really a condemnation of the war.[89] Rupert and Edmund's Commanding Officer tells the two new recruits that they are lucky to be alive at that point in time: "You've timed your lives wonderfully, my boys. To be eighteen in 1914 is to be the best thing in England".[90] Yet this was not parody, a representation of the 'old men' who had sent a generation to their deaths. Other soldiers mock such sentiments, but for Raymond such ridicule was misguided:

> Yet the Colonel was right, and the scoffers were wrong. The Colonel was a poet who could listen and hear how the heart of the world was beating; the scoffers were prosaic cattle who scarcely knew that the world had a heart and all. He turned us, if only for a moment, into young Knights of high ideals, while they made us sorry, conceited young Knaves.[91]

This echoed Raymond's own view of the war. During the First World War the author had been an army chaplain, serving across a range of the war's theatres, but he felt that "the Gallipoli campaign had a glamour, a tragic beauty, all its own".[92] To modern ears, such sentiments may appear misplaced, but his attitude stemmed from his knowledge of history and mythology:

> When sometimes I stood in dreams on the low hill of Helles, above V and W Beaches, I saw across the mouth of the Dardanelles the roadsteads of Asia where Agamemnon moored his thousand ships, and on the rolling Troad plain beyond them, the little hill of Troy. There by Troy was Mount Ida from whose summit Zeus sat watching the Trojan War.[93]

The success of *Tell England* does, however, point towards an understanding of the war that is traditional rather than modern. If this was the popular version of the war, it was in stark contrast to some of the other books of this era that have come to define people's reactions to the Great War.

Tell England was not a critical success, with most reviewers railing against what might be seen as mawkish sentimentalism. One critic described the novel as "unreadable" and

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[89] Ibid., p. 5.
[90] Ibid., p. 167.
[91] Ibid., p. 170.
[92] Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days: Autobiography 1888-1922* (London, 1968), p. 127.
[93] Ibid., p. 127.

"nauseating".[94] However, as with so many works of popular fiction, its sales figures flew in the face of the critical consensus. *Tell England* echoed the sentiments of the war poet Rupert Brooke, whose verses had been so popular during the war. The continued success of the novel throughout the interwar years and beyond suggests that the war of attrition had not killed such responses. Geoff Fox has posited the theory that "it may even have been *because* of these horrors" that the Raymond's work was so successful, "for such a book suggests that the suffering has not been in vain".[95] Readers may have wanted to read adventure stories, or heroic tragedies, but the notion that the Great War had been futile was one that the British people were not yet ready for. Writing of war correspondent Philip Gibbs' *Open Warfare: The Way to Victory*, published in 1919, Samuel Hynes has remarked, "Gibbs was an experienced journalist, and he knew what his readers needed in 1919: brave, consolatory language that would shore up their faith in the war they had won, a monument of words".[96] Such notions could equally be applied to *Tell England.* Indeed, even Raymond recognised the novel as a product of its time. Writing in 1968, he noted

> If I read it now, which I find difficult to do because parts of it make me shiver, I am hardly able to believe that I am the same person as the young man who wrote it... [T]he naïve romanticisms, the pieties, the too facile heroics and too uncritical patriotism – at these I can almost cry aloud in distress.[97]

He felt that in parts *Tell England* was reminiscent of an "exceptionally unripe Victorian sentimentalist".[98] Nevertheless, the novel had resonance in interwar Britain, and reflected the manner in which many people wanted to memorialise the war. There was a sense of naivety underpinning *Tell England*, which Raymond freely admitted to. Yet it was markedly different from post-Second World War literature in that it underscored the tragedy of the war without coming to the conclusion that it had been futile.

Numerous other publications kept the memory of the war alive in a manner that would be alien to late twentieth century children. Between September 1930 and October 1931, two years before the first appearance of James Bigglesworth, the Aldine Publishing Company (APC) published *Aldine War Stories*. These were short novelettes, 64 pages in length, which went on sale twice monthly for the price of 4d. In many ways these were a continuation of the fiction of the war period. Indeed, Rowland Walker, who in

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[94] Frances Birrell, quoted in Geoff Fox, '*Tell England* and the Perfection of Death', *Children's Literature in Education* 22 (1991), pp.257-8.
[95] Fox, '*Tell England* and the Perfection of Death', p. 272.
[96] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 278.
[97] Raymond, *The Story of My Days*, p. 179.
[98] Ibid., p. 179.

1916 had published *Oscar Danby V.C.* wrote one of the stories, *Dog-Fight Frazer*, which was released in April 1931. In all, twenty-eight stories were published, including *The Secret Barrage*, *Dare-Devils of the Dardanelles*, *Heroes of the Ridge*, *Chums of the Salient*, *From Coronel to Jutland*, *Hal of the Armoured Cars* and *Sterne of the Secret Service*. The titles of these stories would have been familiar to any children who had read the works of Westerman, Brereton, Lynn and others. Thought the actual reason for the cessation of the publication of Aldine War Stories is unknown, several factors should be taken into account. Throughout its history, the APC had hardly been a resounding success. John Springhall has given some indication as to their status before the First World War:

> Aldine's chief editor, the indefatigable Walter Light, worked from dingy offices in Crown Court with just one assistant, and office boy, and a secretary, putting invented names to stories to give the impression that he could draw upon a large pool of writing talent. The A.P.C's directors, with their assets and uncalled capital all heavily mortgaged, just could not afford to pay writers market rates for new material.[99]

Though the APC had shown signs of greater profitability during the Great War and throughout the 1920s, "by the early 1930s signs of a return to prewar deficits were evident".[100] It should also be noted that Aldine War Stories was just one of the company's publications. After the demise of the First World War-set tales, the APC was still publishing *Aldine Wild West Yarns* until November 1933. It could be argued that *Aldine War Stories* had simply run its course, and that other forms of adventure tale were beginning to take precedence. On the other hand, similar publications remained popular. From 1931 The World's Works Ltd published *Great War Adventures*. Priced at one shilling, four of these works were published each year into the 1940s, when Second World War stories began to be incorporated. Contributors included Lowell Thomas and Frank Richards, and there was great emphasis on the fact that these were true stories. At the height of the war books debate, alongside such works as Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, children were able to read stories that were, in tone, remarkably similar to those published over a decade earlier, in both works of fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, George Mosse has even argued that part of the success of Remarque's work lie "in the fact that it could be read as schoolboy's adventure story".[101] This should perhaps not be overplayed too much, as a 1940 survey of sixth formers

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[99] John Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature': The Penny Dreadful Publishing Business Since 1860 in *The Economic History Review* 47 (1994), p. 581.
[100] Ibid., p. 581.
[101] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 142.

reveals a remarkably nuanced understanding of First World War fiction among some readers. When asked their opinions of particular authors, several remarked upon their fondness for Edmund Blunden. One boy stated that, "*Undertones of War* [was] the best war novel I have read, his prose is better than his verse". Another described it as, "a very enthralling and movingly realistic picture of the war", while a third described Blunden as, "the best novelist of the war beating [R.H.] Mottram by a short head".[102]

The authors of *Aldine War Stories* were indicative of another trend continued during the interwar years, the use of war veterans as writers to legitimatise the stories told. *The Secret Barrage*, for example, was written by someone using the pseudonym of Ex-Private Rex. Not all of the writers were so keen to retain their anonymity. Horace H.C. Buckley, late of the Coldstream Guards, wrote *Great Event*, a memoir of his experiences on the Western Front. It was given greater credence by Lieutenant-General Sir Torquhil Matheson, who wrote the foreword. It was, in Matheson's words, "a narrative of the experiences of a young officer in the Great War, without any details of war horrors, written essentially for boys".[103] Buckley wrote the account as a reaction against "story-writers [who] love to make up yarns with plots and schemes in which some villainous spies play a large part".[104] He also noted that, during the war, his comrades had become entranced by spy stories, in particular a "two-shilling shocker" by Carl Graves called *Secrets of the German War Office*.[105]

In January 1928, *Chums* started a new serial entitled, 'From Coronel to Falkland Islands'. The editor described the story as "one of the finest naval stories it has ever been my lot to read, and I know it will hold my attention from start to finish".[106] The author was Captain E.R.G.R. Evans, the former commander of HMS *Broke*, which had achieved notoriety in 1917 when, alongside HMS *Swift*, it had engaged six German destroyers, sinking three and driving off the remainder. Evans of the *Broke*, as he came to be known, was a *bona fide* war hero, and his tales would have been lent greater authenticity by this fact. For any children unaware of his war record, a brief biography was included in the issue.[107] In the same issue of *Chums*, another new story was beginning, Major A. Corbett-Smith's 'The Retreat from Mons', which was followed by

[102] MOA, FR62, 'Literary Questionnaire', Mar. 1940, p. 27.
[103] Horace H.C. Buckley, *Great Event* (London, 1930), p. vii.
[104] Ibid., p. 63.
[105] Ibid., p. 70.
[106] *Chums*, No. 1843, vol. XXXVI, 07/01/1928, p. 521.
[107] *Chums*, No. 1845, vol. XXXVI, 21/01/1928, p. 533.

a sequel in April, 1928, 'When the Old Contemptibles Turned'.[108] However, a common theme can be traced between all of these stories; they tended to stray away from the war of attrition on the Western Front. The editor of *Chums* recognised this. Major Corbett-Smith's tale, he noted, "gives you the vivid picture of those early days of the Great War when it was a war of movement".[109] Moreover, "he tells of that wonderful return to battle of men who, according to all the laws of warfare, and the German belief, were broken and defeated".[110] The use of the term "laws of warfare" gives a clue as to the depiction of the war; the war of the trenches, the grinding down of gigantic armies, was horrific, but there were other areas of the conflict that could be interpreted through old-fashioned notions of warfare, ideas that conformed to rules of combat and plucky heroism. In this sense, Boyd's assertions can be understood. In his famous critique of boys' story papers, the journalist and author George Orwell summarised the contents of such publications:

> Examination of a large number of these papers shows that, putting aside school stories, the favourite subjects are Wild West, Frozen North, Foreign Legion, Crime (always from the detective's angle), the Great War (Air Force or Secret Service, never the infantry), the Tarzan motif in varying forms, professional football, tropical exploration, historical romance (Robin Hood, Cavaliers and Roundheads, etc), and scientific invention.[111]

In other words, boys' fiction concentrated on scenarios that were both exciting and completely removed from everyday life. Writers did not stop producing works that depicted the events of the First World War after 1916, but many of the stories that were published shifted the emphasis onto areas of the conflict that were both more palatable and more exciting to young readers. Flying and spying were hardly the experiences of the majority during the Great War.

Flying stories

In keeping with the notion that topicality was critical to the output of these writers, Percy Westerman had altered the focus of many of his stories in the interwar years. Before the outbreak of the First World War, Westerman's speciality had been the maritime story, and this was reflected in much of his wartime output. Alongside the aforementioned tale of the Zeebrugge Raid of 1918, Westerman had also written another

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[108] *Chums*, No. 1858, vol. XXXVI, 21/04/1928, p. 1.
[109] Ibid., p. 1.
[110] Ibid., p. 1.
[111] George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 1: An Age Like This* (London, 1970), p. 520.

twelve adventure stories focusing on the war at sea, including *The Sea-Girt Fortress* (1914), *A Sub of the R.N.R.* (1915), *Rounding up the Raider* (1916), *A Watchdog of the North Sea* (1917), and *With Beatty off Jutland* (1918). Westerman's final Great War-set novel gave some indication as to his new direction: *Winning His Wings: A Story of the R.A.F.* (1919). One of the most romantic aspects of the Great War, particularly in comparison with the carnage and heavy losses of the Western Front, was the war in the air. As George Mosse has noted, the appeal of aerial combat lay in the notion that, "technology was once more transcended, and through this transcendence the war was easier to confront and to bear".[112] Children's fascination with anything aeronautical did not diminish throughout the interwar years, indeed it only grew stronger, and Westerman incorporated such interests into many of his interwar novels. William Earl Johns, the creator of the most famous fictional aviator, Biggles, began his career in children's fiction as an illustrator, and in 1931 provided the pictures for a serial written by Westerman.[113]

In the previous chapter it was shown that the technological novelties of the Great War became an important factor in authors' attempts to appeal to young readers. Given the nature of the conflict, this could be an important aspect of tales set on all fighting fronts. However, as the fighting dragged on it was the war in the air that truly captured the imagination of the public. Children were enthralled not only by the modernity of the new technology, but also the way in which the war in the air could be reconfigured to fit a more traditional and romantic understanding of conflict. Stefan Goebel has noted that "The war in the air fought by the new, one-seater planes was portrayed as the last arena for true chivalric endeavour in the machine war; aerial encounters seemed to resemble knightly tournaments".[114] This chivalric depiction of aerial warfare was perpetuated by the pilots themselves, with many memoirs employing the imagery of Arthurian legends.[115] Goebel suggests that such imagery was compensatory: "It pictured the kind of battle the war as a whole should have been and was not".[116] This fascination continued into the interwar years, and as the technology improved, and the Royal Air Force took on a more prominent role in Britain's control of her empire, flying stories became one of the major sub-genres of children's adventure fiction.

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[112] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 123.
[113] Peter Berresford Ellis and Piers Williams, *By Jove, Biggles! The Life of Captain W.E. Johns* (London, 1985, first published 1981), p.124.
[114] Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 224.
[115] Ibid., p. 224.
[116] Ibid., p. 227.

One of the striking aspects of children's fiction produced in the first half of the twentieth century is the level of detail within the stories. Authors would use highly specific technical language to tell their stories of adventure, and young readers would consume such tales vehemently. This indicates two aspects of such fiction: firstly, readers were interested in, and able to comprehend, at least to some extent, the details that were being presented to them. Secondly, it can be seen that the authors had a certain amount of expertise in order to write about subjects in such a knowledgeable manner. During the First World War, some children's writers either enlisted or were conscripted, and would continue to write stories when they could. Other writers had military experience, but were unable to reconcile their own understanding of war with the very different conflict of 1914-18. Many of their novels bore close resemblance to the newspaper reports of the time. Yet in the years between the two world wars, many veterans were writing of their experiences. Some, like Graves and Sassoon, wrote to condemn the conduct of the war, and the effect of the conflict on post-war society. Others, such as Herman Cyril McNeile, Sapper, used their experiences to write adventure novels, pulp novels that permeated the bestseller charts throughout the twenties and thirties. These works were not aimed at children, though they were certainly consumed by young audiences during the interwar years.

One of the most important writers to emerge during this period, who became famous for his depictions of the Great War, was W.E. Johns. Johns' work has often been dismissed by critics and historians. This was partly because his tales of the ace aviator, James 'Biggles' Bigglesworth, were written for children. As the years progressed, the Biggles stories gradually became sillier, moving away from reality as the character turned to detective work after the Second World War. Because of this, the early Biggles stories have often been forgotten, or at least misremembered, to remain in keeping with the later characterisation. Late twentieth century interpretations of the Johns' hero have condemned the character as "racist and chauvinistic", though, as Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig have suggested, Biggles was by no means alone in possessing such personality traits.[117] In 1975, a London Conference of Librarians attempted to ban Biggles books, though as Brian Alderson indicated in an article for the *Times*, this was largely an example of "the frailty of the Official Mind when confronted with aesthetic decisions".[118] However, in such books as *Biggles Learns to Fly* (1935), *Biggles in France* (1935), *Biggles of 266* (1956, but taken from short stories published in *The Modern Boy* in 1932), and *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* (1934), Johns dealt in a

[117] Cadogan and Craig, *Women and Children First*, p. 85. *The Times*, 29/12/1975, p. 8.
[118] Cadogan and Craig, *Women and Children First*, p. 85.

surprisingly realistic fashion with the war in the air. Johns had served in the First World War. With the Norfolk Yeomanry, he had fought at Gallipoli in December 1915 and Salonika in September 1916, where he contracted malaria.[119] While recovering he decided to put in for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), and returned to England in September 1918.[120] After serving as a flying instructor, Johns was sent to the Western Front in August, 1918, though he was shot down in September and spent the last few months of the conflict as a prisoner of war. After the war, Johns continued his career in the newly formed Royal Air Force (RAF), eventually retiring in 1927.

It can be seen, therefore, that W.E. Johns was vastly experienced when it came to the Great War. He had served in extremely hazardous conditions in the land war, followed by a prolonged stay in the air service, giving him an understanding of its formation, and its role during both during both wartime and peace. The early Biggles stories certainly reflected this knowledge. In a later republication of *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, Johns reflected on the Great War and the early stories from a post-Second World War perspective:

> In 1914 war flying began with pilots trying to drop stones on each other. The pistol followed, then the carbine, and the first casualties occurred. The next step was an ordinary ground machine-gun. Later this was fixed to the machine. A great stride was made when a timing gear was produced to allow first one, then two, machine-guns to fire forward through the airscrew – at that time incorrectly called a propeller. Even in 1918 armament was still primitive compared with the types that fought in the Battle of Britain. Air combat was mostly a matter of "catch as catch can", with every man for himself. Tricks and ruses were common. Discipline was casual, for the senior officers of the R.F.C. had not had time to grow old.[121]

There is a great emphasis on technology in this excerpt, but Johns also recognised the other key factor that made the war in the air such a popular subject for children's fiction: the importance of the individual. Remarking on the extent to which air combat had changed in the years since publication, Johns noted, "Discipline and speed may have been stepped up, but the human factor is the same".[122] The war in the trenches had robbed the individual of influence on the battlefield, and added a certain degree of chance to modern combat. Artillery and bombs were the main cause of death on the Western Front, accounting for nearly 59 per cent of British casualties.[123]

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[119] Berresford Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles!*, pp. 24-6.
[120] Ibid., p. 32.
[121] W.E. Johns, *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* (London, 1961, first published 1934), p. 7.
[122] Ibid., p. 8.
[123] John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire* (London, 1980), p. 132.

In his study of imperial fiction, Daniel Bivona attempted to decipher the appeal of T.E. Lawrence, noting that he was "at the centre of the most triumphant feats of a war which had seemed, by the spring of 1918, to have sealed for all time the coffin of individual heroism".[124] Andrew Rutherford reiterated such notions, remarking that Lawrence "had a gift amounting to genius for irregular warfare; and fighting in what E.M. Forster called the 'last of the picturesque wars' – a war, moreover, in which individuals could still have a decisive difference – he seems at times like a glorified Stalky let loose in Arabia".[125] Like the exploits of Lawrence in Arabia, the war in the air was different. Inherently modern, yet based around the actions of individuals, aerial combat gave the participants greater influence. The fate of the pilot was, to a great degree, in his own hands. Skill was elevated and lauded in a war characterised by huge armies engaged in attempts to wear down the enemy. Moreover, the ability to place such events within a pre-established historical context was vitally important. Bivona demonstrated the connection between Lawrence and several Victorian predecessors, including Sir Richard Burton, who had assumed various disguises to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1853, and Charles Doughty, who adopted Arab dress in his travels through the Arabian deserts.[126] Likewise, equating aerial combat with pre-modern forms of combat detached the endeavours of the First World War fighter aces from the indiscriminate slaughter of the war on the Western Front.

On the other hand, Dennis Butts has challenged the idea that the popularity of airmen was "a natural reaction to the feeling that individualism was being crushed by the mass-destruction of modern war".[127] On the contrary, he argued, "much greater emphasis seems to be place upon the group to which the central character belongs", though Butts saw the Biggles novels as an exception to this rule.[128] This may be true to some extent, though such an argument fails to take into account several aspects of the flying story that were of great significance. Firstly, whether the stories and novels focused on individuals, or the groups around them, these were still vastly removed from land warfare between 1914 and 1918. Secondly, the longevity of the Biggles tales suggests that, though cited by Butts as the exception, it was Johns' fictional aviator that had the greatest cultural impact. The name Biggles has become synonymous with the early days

[124] Bivona, *British Imperial Literature*, p. 135.
[125] Andrew Rutherford, *The Literature of War: Five Studies in Heroic Virtue* (London, 1978), p. 39.
[126] Bivona, *British Imperial Literature*, p. 137.
[127] Dennis Butts, 'Imperialists of the Air – Flying Stories 1900-1950', Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p. 134.
[128] Ibid., p. 134.

of aerial combat, while such contemporaries as Westerman's Standish of the Air Police have been lost to history. Finally, as has already been stated, Johns' own First World War experiences and position in the RAF during the Twenties furnished his stories with a greater sense of realism.

The appeal of the Biggles stories was particularly important for several reasons. As with some of the non-fiction books about the First World War, the language of the novels was particularly revealing. Given Johns' wartime experiences, the technical expressions used are entirely understandable. However, the success of the tales suggests that such terminology would have been understood by the child readers. Throughout the interwar years, British children were immersed in a wealth of material that both provided exciting stories of aerial combat and explained the technology behind it. Such publications as *Popular Flying* and *The Modern Boy* were targeted at a similar audience to that of the Biggles novels. Indeed, Johns began his literary career writing stories for these magazines, including the first Biggles tales. Nevertheless, a glossary of terms used often appeared in the books to help young readers with the terminology. Thus, they would learn that the Bowden lever was used to fire machine guns on certain aircraft, and that a Smudge fire was a "usually kept alight on aerodromes to show landing machines the direction of the wind".[129] This was also a demonstration of Johns' agenda, which he often proclaimed in the introductions to his novels. He stated that his intention was not only to entertain, but also he had the "more serious purpose of presenting a picture of war flying as it was in its infancy".[130] Again, the influence of Johns' own experiences can be seen. He had been associated with the RFC, later the RAF, since its inception, and wanted to educate children about a subject of which he felt passionately. Importantly, it was only his experiences in the war in the air that he was happy to share. Berresford Ellis and Williams noted that, "In later life he hardly ever mentioned these years of military service, although he would often recall numerous experiences from his career in the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force."[131] The Biggles stories did not attempt to disguise the dangers present in aerial combat, the protagonist's reflection, "Thank goodness I'm not in the infantry", was probably an indication of Johns' own feelings about the Great War.[132]

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[129] W.E. Johns, *Biggles, Pioneer Air Fighter* (London, 1961, first published 1954), pp. xiii-xvi.
[130] Ibid., p. xi.
[131] Berresford Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles*, p. 19.
[132] Johns, *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, p. 55.

As mentioned above, the early Biggles stories did not attempt to gloss over the realties of the war in the air. Any tendency to romanticise the period was a manifestation of Johns' own attachment to the RAF, and the conventions of children's adventure fiction. Nevertheless, the author did include some poignant scenes, particularly after major characters were killed in dogfights. Later Biggles adventures may have portrayed him as a sturdy, square-jawed hero, but this was not the case in the First World War stories. In the first of his adventures, a short story called 'The White Fokker' published in *Popular Flying* in 1932, Biggles is described as "a fair-haired good-looking lad, still in his teens".[133] His confidence is noted, but is seen by Johns as a facade: "His careless attitude told one story, but the irritating falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale told another".[134] Indeed, Biggles could be highly emotional. In *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, the protagonist's reaction to the death of a new young pilot, Tom Ellis, can in no way be seen as glorifying war:

> "Biggles picked up a tumbler from a card-table as he passed, looked at it intently for a minute, and then hurled it with all his force at the fireplace. It struck the chimneypiece with a crash. Splinters of glass flew in all directions. No one moved. No one spoke. Major Mullen did not even look up.
> Biggles kicked the table out of his way with a snarl that was half a sob, flicked a pack of cards into the air with a vicious sweep of his gloves, crossed to the fireplace, and, resting his head on his arms, stared with unseeing eyes into the grate".[135]

The experience shatters Biggles' mind, and he embarks on a suicidal attack on the enemy, as explained by Major Mullen, the Commanding Officer of the squadron:

> He's going over German Lines, and he'll shoot at everything that moves on legs, wheels, or wings. His machine will probably be a 'write-off' when he comes back – if he does. The odds are about ten to one he doesn't. But it's no use trying to stop a man in that state. He's stark, staring, fighting mad. I've seen it before. If he kills somebody and doesn't get killed himself he'll be as right as rain when he comes back.[136]

This recognition of the mental strains placed on the aviators of the Great War makes a useful comparison with the traditional understanding of 'shell shock' and the experience of the trenches.

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[133] William Earle, 'The White Fokker', *Popular Flying* 1 (1932), p. 19.
[134] Ibid., p. 19.
[135] Johns, *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, p. 73.
[136] Ibid., p. 74.

'Shell shock' was an important feature of interwar society, and therefore literature. Fiona Reid has remarked that the condition "became culturally significant partly because of the way that the shell shock victim symbolised the frustrations of ex-officers and their families".[137] She argued that "the issue of shell shock had revealed great weaknesses and inconsistencies amongst those holding power and responsibility".[138] Although it is perhaps surprising to find such an issue dealt with in a children's adventure novel, it can be argued that Johns' presentation differed from other literary and cultural works of the period. Indeed, his solution to Biggles' bout of hysteria was to seek revenge with great ferocity. Biggles works the mental trauma out of his system by going on a rampage. With a "face [that] was chalk-white", and eyes that "blazed with the inward fire that was consuming him", he flew over enemy lines searching for the enemy.[139] Biggles' anger is reserved for the enemy, and when faced with a group of mounted Uhlans, he recomposes his chivalric demeanour: "for the sake of the horses he held his fire and satisfied himself by zooming low over them. The last he saw of them was loose horses galloping wildly in all direction".[140] Johns gives an explanation for Biggles' and the other members of the RFC's fragile state of mind: "Nerves stretched taut under the strain of continually facing the prospect of sudden death, until they reached the stage where it only needed a touch to snap them, leaving the owner a nervous wreck".[141] The solution for such a condition, it seemed, was an outpouring of rage directed at the enemy. Biggles' final act of retribution involved dropping what appeared to be a body over enemy lines. A group of forty or fifty Germans gathered round the supposed corpse, only to discover that it was in reality a nail bomb, which explodes, killing them all.[142] The murderous escapade had the desired effect, though, and Biggles regained his composure.

Biggles' adventures were not the only flying stories produced during the interwar period, though they were certainly the tales with the greatest popular appeal. The stories of George Ernest Rochester were also extremely popular during this period. Rochester's major creation was a young pilot known as 'The Flying Beetle'. Like 'Bulldog' Drummond, Lord Peter Wimsey, and later Biggles, Rochester's protagonist is a war veteran operating as a government agent. In *The Flying Beetle* (1935) he foils a plot by Sir Jaspar Haines, a wealthy country gentleman, to spark unrest in India and instigate another war. If the plot sounds reminiscent of Buchan's *Greenmantle*, the villain is

[137] Fiona Reid, ''Have you Forgotten Yet?' Shell Shock, Trauma and the Memory of the Great War in Britain, 1914-1930' (PhD Thesis, University of the West of England, 2006), p. 16.
[138] Ibid., pp. 16-7.
[139] Johns, *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, p. 74.
[140] Ibid., p. 77.
[141] Ibid., p. 75.
[142] Ibid., pp. 82-3.

more akin to Carl Peterson, Drummond's nemesis. Haines is introduced in a manner very similar to the opening of *Bulldog Drummond*, leading a meeting of six masked villains:

> You do not know me, and you do not know each other. But during the years that have passed since this cursed England emerged triumphant form the World War, you have been watched by those on whose behalf I am here tonight. I do not think that we have chosen amiss in selecting you for the work there is to be done. You hate this England, yes?[143]

Though the war books debate had supposedly highlighted the change in society that forever altered the perception of the Great War, children's fiction could still invoke more traditional feelings of patriotism. Haines' meeting is interrupted by the Flying Beetle, who informs the plotters, "England may have her enemies, but she also has her sons. They did not all die on the battlefields of Flanders!"[144]

After *The Flying Beetle*, Rochester revisited the characters adventures in the Great War in *The Trail of Death: War Adventures of the Flying Beetle* (1936). Again, the depiction of war was very traditional, and could easily have been published between 1914 and 1918. The main character dispatches enemies with ease in a manner far removed from any realistic representation of the conflict. In one story, 'The Dawn Patrol', The Flying Beetle is outnumbered by a squadron of Fokkers:

> Remorselessly, in fighting formation, the Fokkers came thundering on towards the lone Camel. What did it matter to them that the Englander had the momentary advantage of height? Were they not ten to one? The chances were that the Camel would turn and run rather than face certain death by showing fight. But the Flying Beetle did not turn and run. Steadily he kept on, the nose of his machine up, until the Fokkers were within a quarter of a mile of him and two thousand feet below.[145]

In the war fiction of the interwar years, British pluck was still a prominent characteristic, and war stories could still be presented as they had been a generation earlier. Geoffrey Royle's tales of Curtis Carr Super-Airman in the *Champion* also fitted the model of the First World War air ace turned secret agent or detective. First appearing in *The Champion* in January 1922, Carr was described as "an ex-officer of the Flying Corps, whose war record was emblazoned upon the memory of every Britisher in every nook

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[143] George E. Rochester, *The Flying Spy* (London, 1935), p. 8.
[144] Ibid., p.16.
[145] George E. Rochester, *The Trail of Death: War Adventures of the Flying Beetle* (London, 1936).

and corner of the world".[146] As with Rochester's first Flying Beetle tale, Royle gives Carr credibility and status with numerous references to his war record, but allows for more fantastical adventures by locating his stories in the post-war era. Thus Carr can set himself up as a "private detective, acquiring his own biplane – built to his own plan, which made it into a super-craft of its sort."[147] Children were swamped with such tales throughout the interwar years. It must, however, be noted that these were flying stories, and their appeal lay as much in the technology as the thirst for knowledge about the Great War. These were not tales of trench warfare, which had diminished during this period.

Indeed, the fascination with aviation was not limited to the fighters of the First World War. The experience of flying itself was enough to excite young readers. In G. Gibbard Jackson's *Twenty-six Flying Stories* (1933), for example, very little attention was paid to military aviation, with the exception of the use of balloons during the Great War.[148] Mosse's analysis of the appeal of aviation used language that eschewed any military connotations: "[T]he adventure of flying, the conquest of speed and space, the loneliness of the pilot, had all the makings of myth, and the conquest of the sky, where the gods lived and from which they descended to Earth".[149] However, as has been noted above, many of the stories that appeared in the children's magazines or the Aldine tales and their like were focused upon the war in the air. Indeed, the end of Rochester's *The Trail of Death* contained a thirty-five page catalogue of books about aviation, including memoirs of such flying aces as James McCudden and Stanley Orton Bradshaw, and a biography of Albert Ball. It was one of the areas of the war still easily able to be interpreted in terms of adventure. An interesting counterpoint to the realism of the Biggles stories and their ilk came from the United States.

Robert J. Hogan's adventures of *G-8 and His Battle Ace*s were pulp novels that combined traditional flying stories with elements of the supernatural, a recipe that would have been unimaginable in interwar Britain. Hogan did have experience of aviation, but a bout of "Spanish" influenza prevented him from ever reaching the battlefields of the Western Front.[150] Following the first novel, *The Bat Staffel* (1933), Hogan went on to write a further 110 novels with such titles as *The Vampire Staffel* (1934), *Squadron of*

[146] Geoffrey Royle, 'The Flying Detective!': the Amazing Exploits of Curtis Carr Super-Airman', *Champion*, 28/01/1922, p. 19.
[147] Geoffrey Royle, 'The Flying Detective!': the Case of the Armour-Plating' *Champion*, 04/02/1922, p. 34.
[148] G. Gibbard Jackson, *Twenty-six Flying Stories* (London, 1933), pp. 53-7.
[149] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 119.
[150] Nick Carr, *The Flying Spy: A History of G-8* (Chicago, 1978), p. 7.

Corpses (1934), *Wings of the Juggernaut* (1935), *Sky Coffins for Satan* (1940) and *Wings of the Gray Phantom* (1942), before the final book was published in June 1944.[151] The fantastical elements of Hogan's stories are evidence, and the lack of such counterparts in British aviation fiction is testament to the United States' different experience of the war, and it is perhaps unsurprising that the G-8 stories were not published in the United Kingdom. They did, however contain elements of British popular fiction of the interwar period, suggesting that there was at least some shared understanding of the conflict. G-8 and his Battle Aces were waited on by an English manservant named Battle, much like many of the other great pulp heroes of the twenties and thirties.

Popular Fiction

In Britain and the United States, there was a preponderance of Great War themed novels throughout the interwar years, beginning long before the stirrings of the war books debates of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Responses to the Great War were various. The legacy of the Great War was not only apparent in works that depicted the conflict itself. Many different literary genres can also be seen to have tackled themes stemming from the war and its impact on society. The public were subjected to a raft of literature of varied quality written by war veterans from both sides of the Atlantic. Alongside the works of such authors as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Ernest Hemingway, such diverse names as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and J.R.R. Tolkien could be added to the list of writers who had served in the First World War. It can be argued that their experiences inform their work, both implicitly and explicitly; from description of landscapes to tone and atmosphere, the First World War looms large in the literary output of the early twentieth century. Moreover there has always been a firm connection between children's literature and popular fiction. In the nineteenth century the market for children's literature had been established after the realisation that many novels intended for adults were of great appeal to younger readers. As Clive Bloom has noted, "Popular genre writers have *always* appealed to young readers and were always considered 'immature' by readers who were antagonistic towards popular culture".[152] After the war, these novels, though not specifically aimed at a juvenile audience, would have been another means of learning about the war for children desperate to understand. Many of these books were of dubious literary merit, making them all the more appealing to young readers. As with the Biggles stories, some were also written by veterans of the

[151] Ibid., pp. 153-5.
[152] Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 4.

First World War, giving them a legitimacy that in future decades would largely be confined to those writers who had criticised the conduct of the war and drawn attention to the sense of misery.

Herman Cyril McNeile, for example, had been a career soldier, serving in the Royal Engineers between 1907 and 1919. He wrote his first books in the trenches under the pseudonym Sapper, a nickname for Royal Engineers. In 1920 Sapper introduced the character of Captain Hugh 'Bulldog' Drummond, a veteran of the Great War who had served in His Majesty's Royal Loamshires. *Bulldog Drummond* was written and set after the war, though the legacy of that conflict, as in so much post-war fiction, loomed over the narrative. Drummond's servant, James Denny, was his former batman, and his circle of friends consisted of other former members of the regiment. His adventures begin after he places the following advertisement in a newspaper:

> Demobilised officer... finding peace incredibly tedious, would welcome diversion. Legitimate, if possible; but crime, if of a comparatively humorous description, no objection. Excitement essential. Would be prepared to consider permanent job if suitably impressed by applicant for his services.[153]

Drummond was the archetypal British hero, a brave, jovial amateur driven as much by a thirst for excitement as love of country. He was a character suited to the interwar years who and, like John Buchan's Richard Hannay, was a perfect fit for the genre. Margery Fisher has noted that Buchan's characterisation of Hannay came from his need for "a man with some experience of danger" who "had fought in the Boer War, had some experience of ciphers as an Intelligence office, [and] had been a mining engineer with administrative as well as technical duties".[154] Both Hannay and Drummond were to some extent alienated from society by their experiences, though more in the sense that they found everyday life tedious. This did, however, make them the perfect heroes for these fairly generic yet entertaining adventure stories. In the case of Drummond, his escapades reflected another legacy of the Great War. Whereas Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* had drawn attention to the tragedy of the war without questioning its legitimacy, Sapper's hero failed to demonstrate such a nuanced approach to the conflict. Drummond had enjoyed the war, and his experiences were an attempt to recreate the experience as best he could in peacetime. Moreover, his books were widely read.

[153] Sapper, *Bulldog Drummond* (Thirsk, 2001, first published 1920), p. 2.
[154] Margery Fisher, *The Bright Face of Danger* (London, 1986), pp. 192-3.

Sapper's novels had been selling over 20,000 copies a year during the war, and *Bulldog Drummond* was no different.[155]

Something similar could be said of another popular fictional detective of the period, though this character added further layers to the interpretation of the war. Dorothy L. Sayers' famous creation, Lord Peter Wimsey, was the protagonist in novels aimed at adults, but like the works of Sapper and Buchan, his adventures were readily consumed by teenagers. In a 1940 survey of fifty sixth formers, twenty-three rated Sayers as their favourite writer of detective fiction.[156] Wimsey was a veteran of the First World War, and greatly affected by it. At the beginning of the first Wimsey novel, *Whose Body?*, a short biographical note lets it be known that between 1914 and 1918 Lord Peter was a Major in the Rifle Brigade.[157] Wimsey has been deeply traumatised by the war, and is drawn towards crime-solving as something to occupy the mind, partly because of his inability to adjust to civilian life. He demonstrates a macabre sense of humour in his 'hobby' of amateur detection when he exclaims to Inspector Parker, "I hope you're full of crime – nothing less than arson or murder will do for us tonight".[158] Wimsey's ambivalent attitude towards death could be interpreted as a repercussion from his war experiences, and he demonstrates admiration for his quarries, at one point telling a frustrated Parker, "Don't be an ass, stumpin' about the room like that. Worse things happen in war. This is only a blinkin' old shillin' shocker... We're up against a criminal – *the* criminal - the real artist and blighter with imagination – real, artistic, finished stuff. I'm enjoying this, Parker".[159] Unlike the Bulldog Drummond tales, however, there was a much more serious side to Sayers' protagonist.

The literary historian Samuel Hynes has suggested that "One could go through examples of popular writing in the Twenties, pointing out the themes and attitudes and stock characters that the war had created – how Agatha Christie's first detective story, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1921), is set in wartime, with a convalescent soldier as narrator, and Hercule Poirot making his first appearance as a Belgian refugee, how Dorothy Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey is as shell-shocked damaged man." For Hynes,

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[155] MacDonald, *The Fiction of John Buchan*, pp. 353-6.

[156] MOA, FR 62, 'Literary Questionnaire', Mar. 1940, p. 8. H.P. Elderton and G.L. Wallace's survey asked the sixth formers to name their three favourite authors of detective fiction. The other writers were ranked as follows: Agatha Christie (18), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (8), Edgar Wallace (7), Sapper (6), Ngaio Marsh (4), Margery Allingham (3). Many of these writers had written about the Great War, and several are discussed throughout this chapter.

[157] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Whose Body?* (London, 1989, first published 1923), p. 7.

[158] Ibid., p. 23.

[159] Ibid., p. 34.

these works demonstrate that "the war was a shaping presence in post-war writing of all kinds."[160] Moreover, this presence was partly defined by a sense of loss which would characterise the post-Second World War understanding of the Twenties. Mid-way through *Whose Body?,* Wimsey suffers a breakdown as he relives his war experiences. His servant, Bunter, a former war comrade whose relationship to Lord Peter is as Denny's was to Bulldog Drummond, tries to reassure his friend and employer:

> 'Hush! no, no – it's the water,' said Lord Peter, with chattering teeth; 'it's up to their wastes down there, poor devils. But listen! can't you hear it? Tap, tap, tap – they're mining us – but I don't know where – I can't hear – I can't. Listen, you! There it is again – we must find it – we must stop it... Listen! Oh, my God! I can't hear – I can't hear anything for the noise of the guns. Can't they stop the guns?'
>
> 'Oh dear!' said Mr Bunter to himself. 'No, no – it's all right. Major – don't you worry.'
>
> 'But I hear it,' protested Peter.
>
> 'So do I,' said Mr Bunter stoutly; 'very good hearing, too, my lord. That's our own sappers at work in the communication trench. Don't you fret about that, sir.'[161]

After Lord Peter has calmed down, Sayers an affection and camaraderie that could only emanate from a shared wartime experience by the two socially opposite men: "'Thought we'd had the last of these attacks,' he said. 'Been overdoin' himself. Asleep?' He peered at him anxiously. An affectionate note crept into his voice. 'Bloody little fool!' said Sergeant Bunter."[162] On hearing of Lord Peter's panic attack his mother remarks, "Waking up poor Bunter in the middle of the night with scares about Germans, as if that wasn't all over years ago... but he was so dreadfully bad in 1918... and I suppose we can't expect to forget all about a great war in a year or two".[163] Perhaps Lord Peter's view of the war and attempt to busy himself with solving murders can be seen as a metaphor for the societal attitude towards the conflict and the need for escapist literature. Reading fictional detective stories to escape from reality could not completely stifle bad memories, but it could cause a distraction. In a 1944 Mass-Observation survey a 66 year-old schoolmaster and clergyman revealed that, "I enjoy rubbishy detective

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[160] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 351.
[161] Sayers, *Whose Body?*, p. 132.
[162] Ibid., p. 133.
[163] Ibid., p. 135.

stories... The reason is, I think, that when I read a novel, I want to be taken clean out of humdrum life".[164]

As many historians have already established, it was the literature of disillusionment that achieved longevity and survived to influence the post-Second World War understanding of the subject. In some cases it has been argued that some of these works, such as Graves' *Goodbye to All That* or R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End*, have been repeatedly misinterpreted to fit a model of the Great War characterised by notions of waste and futility. Bracco and others have highlighted the wealth of material representing an alternative representation of the First World War and the Western Front, literature that often owed more to the patriotic sentiments of wartime Britain than the malcontent musings of those writers whose prose and poetry have endured. One area that seems to have been neglected, however, is the influence of the Great War upon other forms of fiction.

The shadow of the Great War loomed large over British society throughout the 1920s and '30s, manifesting itself not just in depictions of combatants and the fighting fronts, but also in ideas and emotions that underpinned the very fabric of society. War veterans were not only writing about their experiences on the battlefield. In his hard-boiled detective novels, Raymond Chandler comments on the change in values in post-war society through the use of allegorical images. In the opening scene of *The Big Sleep*, for example, the protagonist, Philip Marlowe, observes:

> Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the visor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.[165]

Later in the novel, as Marlowe plays chess, he looks at the chessboard and comments, "The move with the knight was wrong, I put it back where I had moved from. Knights

[164] MOA, FR 2018 'Books and the Public', Feb. 1944, p. 84.
[165] Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels* (London, 2000, *The Big Sleep* first published, 1939), p. 9.

had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights".[166] For Marlowe, and therefore Chandler, chivalry has been tainted by a corruptness that dominates society. However Marlowe, (the hero and therefore the character the reader roots for) despite his shabby and cynical appearance, stands for truth and justice and in many ways is a modern-day knight. As Clive Bloom notes, "Marlowe... is an Arthurian knight (looking for Mrs. Grayle and the Lady in the Lake) who smokes a pipe, wears pyjamas, acts graciously towards women, believes in honour, plays chess and looks nostalgically backward to a golden age".[167] It is no coincidence that Chandler originally intended to name his protagonist Malory.[168] When looking at Marlowe it can be said that the overriding atmosphere created is not one of irony, but of cynicism, and this cynicism stems not from the war itself, but the war's aftermath.

Chandler's work also represents another important aspect of the Great War on literature. As has been stated before, when writing about the literature of war veterans, a familiar list of names usually crop up: Owen, Sassoon, Blunden, Graves, Rosenberg et al. However it is important to realise that Chandler enlisted in the Canadian army in August 1917, and in March 1918 he was sent to France with the 7th Batallion of Canadian Expeditionary Force. In June 1918 he was transferred to the RAF. Chandler's tone is not one of bitterness. His novels may lament a certain loss of innocence and integrity in post-war California, but the Great War seems to have resulted in a sense of cynicism and regret rather than irony and bitterness. Chandler, alongside Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and, to a certain extent, Ernest Hemingway, were pioneers of the hard-boiled detective fiction genre.[169] They were also all veterans of the Great War in one way or another. Indeed, Ernest Mandel sees the First World War as vital to the development in popularity of the detective novel in the interwar period, describing it as a "watershed" between the "stories written by Conan Doyle and Gaston Leroux and the great classics of the twenties and thirties".[170] He noted that the novels written after the war had a different "rhythm and style of sustained tension", and asks the question, "Has the machine-gun staccato of world war one something to do with that transformation?"[171]

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[166] Ibid., pp. 152-3.
[167] Clive Bloom, *Cult Fiction* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 48.
[168] Ibid., p. 48.
[169] Some of Hemingway's stories could be said to have some of the tone of the hard-boiled detective novels. Indeed, the short story *The Killers* was filmed twice, by Robert Siodmak in 1946 and Don Siegel in 1964. Both films, and in particular Siodmak's interpretation, can be seen as classic examples of the hard-boiled genre's cinematic counterparts.
[170] Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London, 1984), p. 23.
[171] Ibid., p. 23.

Great War veterans were prominent in interwar fiction and drama. In Edgar Wallace's novel *The Ringer* (1925), adapted from his play, *The Gaunt Stranger*, the title character is a war veteran, whose criminal activity begins after the armistice. Wallace's anti-hero administers justice to those beyond the law:

> Men who had good reason to hate and fear him had gone to bed, hale and hearty, snapping their fingers at the menace, safe in the consciousness that their homes were guarded by watchful policemen. In the morning they had been found stark and dead. The Ringer, like the dark angel of death, had passed and withered them in their prime.[172]

Later in the novel a brief history of The Ringer is given:

> We know almost for certain that during the last war he was an officer in the Air Force – a solitary man with only one friend, a lad who killed himself after an ill-founded charge of cowardice made by his colonel - Chafferis-Wiseman. Three months after the war ended Chafferis-Wiseman was killed. We suspect, indeed we are certain, that the murderer was The Ringer, who had disappeared immediately after the war ended - didn't event wait to draw his gratuity.[173]

The Great War and one event in particular, is the catalyst for The Ringer's vigilante actions. The police are not portrayed as unintelligent, however, the former military man, whom the reader sympathises with, bamboozles them. There is a sense that society has failed The Ringer, forcing him to mete out his own form of justice. Wallace agrees with such sentiments, allowing the title character to escape after horrifically murdering the shyster lawyer (who incidentally lives in Flanders Lane, Deptford) responsible for the death of his sister.

Wallace's *The Ringer*, much like the popular adventures of Bulldog Drummond and Lord Peter Wimsey, fitted into a particularly British understanding of the war. The protagonist was a war veteran scarred by his experience, with the 'ill-founded charge of cowardice' against a comrade that sets him on the path of the vigilante echoing the notion of the veterans' betrayal by society. Though fictitious, *The Ringer* had a clear grounding in reality with its grimy backstreets, shyster lawyers and petty crime.

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[172] Edgar Wallace, *The Ringer* (London, 1970, first published as *The Gaunt Stranger*, 1925), p. 6.
[173] Ibid., p. 88.

These works were all aimed at adults, though it is fair to say that many of them would have been consumed by young readers during the interwar years. There is evidence, for example, that the novels of Dorothy Sayers were popular with Britain's youth. A Mass-Observation survey of 50 sixth formers in 1940 revealed that twenty-three of them named the crime writer as their favourite author of detective stories. A further seven mentioned Edgar Wallace, while six listed Sapper.[174] All of these writers were just as much of an influence on the young as authors who were writing specifically for children. Indeed, it would be these writers whose fiction would have the greatest longevity. There was, however, some room in other works of fiction to take more fantastical approaches to the war.

Science Fiction

Alongside more realistic works there had been several science fiction responses to the First World War, while it was happening. Arthur Machen's *The Terror* (1917) had imagined Mother Nature railing against the barbarity of the war, with previously harmless animals such as sheep and cattle murdering humans who were now rendered beneath them in the ranks of the civilised because of the barbarity of the Somme and Verdun. In the United States, Edgar Rice Burroughs, more famous as the creator Tarzan and John Carter of Mars, wrote *Beyond Thirty*, a futuristic tale. Published in 1916, and set in 2137, Burroughs' tale imagined a world in which the United States had sealed its borders two hundred years earlier to remain isolated from the Great War.[175] In it, an American naval captain accidentally drifts towards Britain and discovers that society has regressed in those two centuries to an extremely primitive state. H.P. Lovecraft also used the war as background for tales of fantasy and science fiction. In his short story, *Dagon*, an American merchant marine officer escapes from a German sea-raider during the period of the war when "the Hun had not completely sunk to their later degradation", and drifts in a small lifeboat.[176] After becoming stranded on "a slimy expanse of hellish black mire... putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish"[177], the narrator witnesses a

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[174] MOA, FR62, p. 19.

[175] *Beyond Thirty* was serialised in *All Around Magazine* in 1916, but did not appear in book form until 1955. It was retitled *The Lost Continent* for its first mass-market paperback appearance in 1963. In *Warrior Nation*, Michael Paris refers to Michael Poole's *Emperor of the World* (1924), a story that seems to have had strong parallels with Burroughs' novel. Set in 2134, it imagines that society was all but destroyed by a global conflict, and the survivors were reduced to living in caves and wearing animal skins. Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 181.

[176] H.P. Lovecraft, 'Dagon', *The Call of Cthulu and Other Weird Stories* (London, 2002), p.1. *Dagon* was written in 1917, and first published in *Vagrant* in 1919.

[177] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

creature "vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome... like a stupendous monster of nightmares".[178] Lovecraft would revisit the Great War in *Herbert West – Reanimator* (1921). In it, his titular surgeon experiments on soldiers on the Western Front as part of his efforts to raise the recently deceased.[179]

Many other wartime sciencefiction tales represented an element of wish-fulfilment. As in Arthur Machen's *The Terror*, they often demonstrated an abhorrence of modern mechanised warfare with enormous casualty lists, and imagined super-weapons that would somehow bring an end to the conflict, generally through the threat of its use; these writers did not want to contemplate even more death and destruction. Attitudes did change somewhat in the inter-war period. Many tales dealt with futuristic conflicts, using science fiction to comment upon the carnage of the First World War. Michael Paris has remarked upon a story in *Chums* from 1930, set on Venus, in which humans witness a "terrible war fought between the technically superior inhabitants of the planet – a war even more terrible than the slaughter of the Western Front".[180] He felt that such tales were influenced by the popularity of the Flash Gordon Saturday cinema serials. This may well be the case, although the impact of the Great War cannot be ignored; surely the Western Front was the ultimate representation of technologically advanced weaponry leading to Armageddon. Elsewhere, some writers were using visions of the future to preach a sermon that would have been familiar to those who had grown up in the first decade of the twentieth century.

In Leslie Beresford's *The War of Revenge*, published in the Amalgamated Press' story paper, *The Champion*, in March 1922, an imagining of a new conflict is presented. Set in the 1960s, Beresford depicted a Germany that had been festering for decades, and plotting vengeance for all that time. The story begins with the people of Britain and Ireland waking up to see posters in the streets proclaiming Germany's intentions:

> In retaliation for the humiliating peace treaty of 1919, which the German Government was forced to sign, the hour has come when German honour must

[178] Ibid., p. 5.
[179] Esther MacCallum-Stewart has seen *Herbert West - Reanimator* as "a sophisticated reconstruction of the war prior to the War Books Controversy writers", and has argued that Lovecraft's depictions of the war represented a "seemingly British perspective" on the conflict that was prevalent in some American publications. MacCallum-Stewart, 'First World War and Popular Literature', p. 220.
[180] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 182.

> be avenged. Ignored by the signatories of the Washington Conference of forty years ago, and therefore not pledged to Peace the Imperial Government considers itself fully justified in announcing that on and from the morning of Tuesday, April 13th, 1962, a State of War will exist between Germany and Great Britain unless the conditions imposed by the Imperial German Government and handed to the British Ambassador at Berlin a week ago – namely, on April 1st 1962 – have been accepted by Great Britain.[181]

I.F. Clarke has argued that between 1919 and 1939, literature that imagined future wars was dominated by "the argument for peace by the revelation of the terrors to be expected from gas and air attacks on cities".[182] With Britain having had its confidence shaken by the experience of the Great War, "the mood shaping most of this fiction was a profound sense of anxiety and doubt about the future".[183] Beresford's story, however, does not seem to have conformed to such a model. The tone of the story was as warmongering as tales in the Amalgamated Press' pre-1914 output, as demonstrated by Beresford's introductory warning about the likely threat of Germany in the future.

Given that he had set his tale in 1962, Beresford could have let his imagination run wild. In some ways he did, with the Germans using such weapons as green rays and red gas. Yet even this military hardware could be seen as refinements of the weapons of the First World War. When he imagines an attack on London, the description would have been familiar to children who had been brought up with tales of the Western Front:

> There came overhead a sharp whistle in the sky, which speedily grew into a menacing scream. It seemed to be joined by other screams, one following the other. And then, after a moment of sudden silence, half a dozen blazing balls of fire seemed to drop down from the sky over London. In half a dozen places, amid a terrible roaring of explosions, flames leaped upwards in a great lurid glow, in which huge masses of masonry could be seen hurtling here and there.[184]

After the Germans follow up their air raids with attacks from wireless controlled automatons, giant pods with legs and wiry arms like tentacles, it becomes clear that Beresford's imagination had run as far as H.G. Wells' 1898 science fiction classic *The War of the Worlds*. Beresford's green rays and red gas was reminiscent of Wells' Heat Ray and Black Smoke. Despite the futuristic setting, *The War of Revenge* was largely

[181] Leslie Beresford, 'The War of Revenge', *Champion*, 11/03/1922, p. 171.
[182] Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*, pp. 162-3.
[183] Ibid., p. 166.
[184] Beresford, 'The War of Revenge'. p. 199.

harking back to very traditional imagery and plot devices in its depiction of the next clash with Germany. The main villain, as in so many of the tales produced between 1914 and 1918, was a German spy, his missing fingers prefiguring Alfred Hitchcock's adaptation of Buchan's *The Thirty-nine Steps* by thirteen years.

Most British science fiction representations of the Great War were very traditional. Heavily influenced by such writers as Wells and Jules Verne, they are yet another example of attempts in post-war Britain to return to a sense of normality, to pre-war standards. They may have been fantastical, but they were generally deferential to the memory of the conflict. Even the apparently war-mongering tale from *The Champion* seemed to emanate from a genuine desire that the world should never again be overcome by such a catastrophic war. They were a far cry from, for example, Hogan's tales of G8, with its science fiction trappings. There was a clear difference between the manner in which American and British popular pulp and children's writers approached the Great War, which, as will be seen in the conclusion of this thesis, has to some extent continued to this day.

Conclusion

It is evident that after 1918 the Great War was still incredibly close to the children of Great Britain. Past conflicts may have become fixed in the British psyche, acting as key components in the nation's sense of identity, but the sheer scale of the First World War had marked it out as different from past conflicts. It did not just linger in the memory, it shaped the lives of all those who had experienced those tumultuous years and the nature of the war meant that it British society as a whole was affected. Its influence was all encompassing. Writing of the final period of the interwar years, Samuel Hynes has suggested that the understanding of the conflict that came to be accepted as truth in the second half of the twentieth century was already firmly established:

> There would be another war – by the early Thirties most thoughtful Englishmen believed that. And it would be fought by a new generation. That generation is another significant difference between the Twenties and the Thirties. Its members had been children while the First World War was being fought, and had come of age in its aftermath, in the post-war atmosphere of ruination and public chaos. These young people would differ from their elders in many ways, but perhaps most importantly in the fact that for them the Myth of the War had already taken form when they reached maturity; it was a part of their world, it was the truth about war.[185]

[185] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 467.

Hynes' assumptions that the modern interpretation of the war had largely been established by the end of the interwar period may be true to some extent, particularly regarding the literature of the period. However, an analysis of the material produced for children in the twenties and thirties throws the universality of such a conclusion into doubt. The effects of the Great War upon British society were many. Britain entered the interwar years as victors, with hopes of a bright new future. Many historians agree that the quality of life for the majority of the population improved after the war. The benefits, however, were sometimes overshadowed by other factors. The infrastructure of Britain had been severely weakened by the cost of maintaining Britain's involvement in such a large-scale industrial conflict, and the instability of the world economy would also impact upon the nation and the lives of its citizens. Furthermore, the political upheaval throughout Europe, culminating in the rise of dictatorships in such countries as Spain, Italy and Germany, heightened the sense of uncertainty within Britain. In this climate, the benefits of the First World War became less apparent. Throughout the interwar years, the understanding of the war had been gradually changing. The propaganda value of texts about the war tended to be of lesser importance in times of peace, and some of the more horrific aspects of the conflict were more easily addressed. Yet the traditional understanding of the conflict remained remarkably resilient.

School history textbooks often reinforced notions of the justness of Britain's cause, while story papers and novels often continued in the manner of their wartime forebears. The subject of the war had always been likely to diminish in significance after the conflict, and First World War narratives needed to compete with other adventure stories in the two decades after the Armistice. Indeed, adventure stories set in the trenches were few and far between throughout the interwar years, and it was through aviation stories in particular that the view of war as adventure could flourish. Great War stories remained remarkably popular during this period and sat happily alongside the image of the war depicted in the more famous works published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Varying interpretations coexisted alongside each; there was no singular understanding. The signs of a shift towards the modern understanding of the Great War can be traced to some extent in the works of the interwar years, but they were by no means concrete at this stage in history. Indeed, writing in 1977, the children's writer Geoffrey Trease lamented the traditionalism, even outdated world-view of interwar children's fiction:

> A new story in 1920 or 1930 tended to be a fossil in which one could trace the essential characteristics of one written in 1880 or 1890. The British must

> always win. One Englishman equals two Frenchmen, equals four Germans, equals any number of non-Europeans... The common people subdivide into simple peasants, faithful retainers and howling mobs. The Cavaliers were a good thing, so were the French aristocrats except for their unfortunate handicap in not being English.[186]

In Trease's view, the Great War had not heralded a new age, but the continuation of children's fiction perpetuating a mythical idea of society.

There were critical approaches to the war, but these tended to emphasise the notion of tragedy as opposed to futility. It would take another large-scale conflict, along with other factors to elevate this position to one of dominance. The next chapter will demonstrate how these different interpretations competed with each other after the Second World War, and how the notion of the war as a symbol of futility took hold.

[186] Geoffrey Trease quoted in Rosalind Ellwood, 'Children's Historical Fiction As a Background to National Curriculum History, Key Stage 2 for 7-11 Year-olds' (MA Thesis, Loughborough University of Technology, 1991), p. 4.

Chapter Three

Entrenchment: 1945-2007

Introduction

The previous chapters have shown that the subject of the Great War permeated all areas of popular culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The field of children's literature was not an exception. The advent of the Second World War, however, had marked a period in which the events of 1914-18 receded in the popular consciousness, at least as indicated by a dearth of published works for children. The Second World War now became the foremost setting for exotic tales of action and adventure; First World War stories were generally few and far between. In the children's fiction of the war years, writers had often found it necessary to remove their protagonists from the stagnancy of the trenches in order to sustain a traditional adventure narrative. This was largely avoided in the interwar years by a proliferation of spy and flying stories. Many of the narrative problems faced by the likes of Westerman and Brereton still remained, and indeed were increased by the emergence of the comic as a replacement for the text-heavy story papers. It was difficult to depict a war of attrition, characterised by a lack of movement, in the pages of a comic book. The characters could not remain statically in the trenches; the young reader craved excitement, not a realistic portrayal of the monotony of life on the Western Front.

Brian Bond has argued that there was a rediscovery of the First World War as a subject for literature in the 1960s, a time in which the conflict was seen through the prisms of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and American involvement in Vietnam.[1] Similarly, Emma Mahoney has suggested that "the canon of war myths [were] already embedded in Britain's cultural landscape by 1964".[2] There is certainly some truth to this, though in terms of children's fiction this resurgence tended to gather pace a little later. Children's novels about the Great War did begin to re-emerge in the 1960s, but it was the 1970s and 1980s that saw the greater interest in the subject reflected in works aimed at the young. Something similar was happening in the field of comics. Until the publication of Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun's *Charley's*

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[1] Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 51-53.

[2] Emma Mahoney, 'The Great War on the Small Screen: A Cultural History of the First World War on British Television 1964-2005' (PhD Thesis, University of Kent, 2006), p. 37.

War in 1979, First World War tales were largely limited to true stories rather than fictional adventures, and were generally few and far between. To some extent, the paucity of Great War stories reflected the limitations placed upon the war comics as a result of genre conventions. It also demonstrated a shift in the focus of periodical reading matter; the old story papers often had a strongly educational nature that was much diminished in the later comics, particularly from the 1960s onwards.[3] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the stories that appeared after the Second World War reflected the changing interpretations of the earlier conflict. The thirst for exciting war stories remained undiminished, but it was the Second World War that now fulfilled this need. The modern understanding of the Great War was radically different from that posited in the fiction familiar to children who had lived through the war and interwar years, and was subtly changing shape throughout the 1950s and '60s until the understanding of the war became relatively homogeneous.

This chapter will argue that First World War stories published from 1945 onwards were more at odds with the depiction of war as exciting and glorious. Indeed, the Great War came to be seen as an anomalous event, indicative of the futility of war, a tool through which authors could condemn the forces of militarism and violence. In terms of their methods of disseminating values and ideas, this reveals a greater connection between the flag-waving, patriotic, imperial writers who wrote during the First World War, and the modern liberal writers of the late twentieth century. Both groups can be seen as arch-propagandists, taking established conceptions and templates, and placing them into a context understood by readers contemporary to the time of writing. Moreover, they both sought to educate their youthful audience about the nature of the First World War, examining the legitimacy of the conflict and the experience of those in the front line. However, changing political and social mores meant that these later tales were approached from a perspective that would not have been possible in the work of those writing between 1914 and 1939.

Comics, novels, story papers and even school text books built upon an image of the Great War that had been forged in the decades after 1919. In particular, they reiterated ideas that had been the focus of the revival in interest stimulated partly by the fiftieth

[3] As a counterpoint, one of the most successful British comics of the second half of the twentieth century had been created as a means of instilling in children a sense of morality felt to be lacking in American comics. Created by the Reverend Marcus Morris, *Eagle* ran from 1950 to 1969, and was relaunched in 1982, before finally ending its run in 1993. Graham Kibble-White, *The Ultimate Book of British Comics: 70 Years of Mischief, Mayhem and Cow Pies* (London, 2005), pp. 112-23.

anniversary of the conflict in 1964, and the slew of war books that were published around this time. In educational books and works of fiction, writers attempted to illuminate the events of 1914-18 for children. The vast majority of works sought to instil in children a horror of war that was sometimes contradictory to the presentation of other conflicts.[4] Though many of the authors referred to in this thesis would probably deny this, their works often revealed more about the post-1945 world that had shaped their own sense of identity than they did about the experiences underwent by British subjects during the First World War. Some of these writers drew direct parallels between the incidents of the past and issues inherent to modern society. By portraying the Great War as an act of folly, or attacking the attitude of the military hierarchy, or commenting on the changing role of women, writers were expressing values and fears that were more pertinent to the last half of the twentieth century. In her examination of documentaries about the First World War, Emma Mahoney looked upon television programmes as a form of memorialisation, characterised by an overwhelming sense of mourning.[5] Although this element did exist in children's fiction, there was also something polemical about the written works. Such writers as Pat Mills and Michael Morpurgo were writing with anger; their characters may have been victims, but they were not passive in their victimhood.

Using novels, comics and school textbooks this chapter will examine the changing nature of such depictions, and the reasons behind these. It will demonstrate the effect of the Second World War and subsequent conflicts upon the popular understanding of the First World War. Earlier in this thesis it was argued that during the war, and in the decades that followed, there was not a unified consensus regarding how the events of 1914-18 should be interpreted and remembered. For children, simplistic adventure stories placing emphasis upon notions of glory and the justness of the Great War sat happily alongside such works as Ernest Raymond's *Tell England*, which recognised the tragedy of the conflict while managing to avoid the accusations of meaninglessness that would come to dominate post-1945 works. After the Second World War, the image of the earlier conflict that began to take hold focused upon key aspects of the war that supported the argument that it had ultimately been a fruitless endeavour. Such issues as the squalor of trench warfare, the injustices of the class system, military executions and the purported callousness and ineptitude of the generals have come to dominate the

[4] The final chapter of Michael Paris' *Warrior Nation* clearly demonstrates the ubiquity of warfare as a subject for works of popular culture in the period after 1945, though the First World War no longer fitted this model at that stage.
Paris, *Warrior Nation*, pp. 222-63.
[5] Mahoney, 'The Great War on the Small Screen', pp. 249-50.

children's literature of the post war period. Kate Agnew has noted that, "twentieth century authors and publishers are concerned not to inculcate an active sense of patriotism in their young readers, but rather to educate them about the misery of war".[6] This attitude, it will be argued, is equally as propagandistic as the works of the authors who produced adventure stories about the Great War between 1914 and 1919. Towards the end of the twentieth century historians began to reassess some of the preconceptions about the First World War, questioning some of the more popularly held beliefs about the subject. This more nuanced understanding of the conflict and its consequences found its way into aspects of the education system, though the notion of the war that had became established by the 1960s has been particularly hard to shake. Moreover, those who have grown up believing the war to have been essentially meaningless and futile have fought to re-establish this point of view, using children's literature as a propaganda tool. Late-twentieth century children's authors have railed against the revisionist historians, and many of their works have sought to challenge such views. They have engaged with the historiographical debates, ensuring that children will accept their version of events.

The chapter will begin with an analysis of post-Second World War school textbooks in order to comment upon the correlation between how the war was presented at home and in school. This will be followed by a general summary of the representation of the Great War after 1945, looking at the manner in which the war of 1914-18 was superseded by the Second World War, and the reasoning behind this. The chapter will then examine representations of the Home Front and the fighting fronts in modern children's literature, before turning attention to the late-twentieth century values and themes that come across in such works. Its intention is to trace the link between the academic study of History and its representation in works of popular culture, and to approach an understanding of how and why this relationship exists.

School Textbooks

Before examining the approach to the First World War in works of fiction, it is first necessary to observe the presentation of the conflict in school textbooks, which would have been seen as more legitimate representations of the conflict for young readers. The changing approaches to the subject of History have already been discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and it has been established that for various reasons, the study

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[6] Kate Agnew, 'The First World War' in Geoff Fox and Kate Agnew (eds.), *Children at War* (London, 2001), p. 57.

of the subject in schools moved towards a more skills based approach than had been evident in pre-Second World War schools. A study of post-1945 textbooks corroborates this notion. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, textbooks had hardly changed in their presentation of the Great War. Very few were specifically about the First World War; as before, they largely took the form of generalised histories with specific chapters focused on the years 1914-1918. Mostly their approach to the war was based around political and military interpretations of the conflict. S. Reed Brett's *British History 1815-1936* for example, had initially been published in 1933, while a revised edition appeared in 1949. It covered most of the major theatres of conflict alongside the political machinations that had led to the outbreak of war. Yet it said virtually nothing about the experience of the soldiers as individuals, the conditions they were forced to live and fight in, or the relationship between the military commanders and their men.[7] The Battle of the Somme, that ultimate symbol of futility, was only afforded a single paragraph.[8] However, the 1960s had seen a renewed interest in the Great War, in both the fields of popular culture and academic research, which had been gathering momentum. This filtered through into the school textbooks, which meant that those works dealing with the First World War in the last three decades of the twentieth century would have been largely unrecognisable in comparison with their predecessors of ten or twenty years earlier.

Moreover, the vast majority of these textbooks drew their inspiration from the historical and literary climate of the 1960s that had done so much to establish the notion of the Great War as a futile act. In 1968, the Library Committee of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) published a list of four thousand books recommended for secondary school libraries. The NAIS was an American organisation founded in 1962, but the list was also published in Britain. Among the recommendations were several books about the First World War. These included E.E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*, Cyril Falls' *The Great War 1914-18*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, Alistair Horne's *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*, Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* and *The Proud Tower* and Leon Wolff's *In Flanders Fields*.[9] They also favoured collections of the poetry of Owen, Graves and Masefield.[10] They perpetuated the notion that the people of Great Britain had been duped into supporting the war by a massive

[7] S. Reed Brett, *British History 1815-1936: A School Certificate Course* (London, 1949, first published 1933), pp. 334-64.
[8] Ibid., p. 354.
[9] Library Committee of the National Association of Independent Schools, *4000 Books for Secondary School Libraries: A Basic List* (New York, 1968), p. 75.
[10] Ibid., p. 75.

propaganda campaign in the years leading up to 1914. In 1986, for example, Vincent Crinnion wrote,

> Before 1914 people from all social classes accepted that war was a natural and honourable way of settling international disputes... Ordinary people grew up to accept this general attitude. At school children were taught the virtues of their own country and the sins of neighbouring nations. Popular daily newspapers exploited and sensationalised military items. Often they reacted to the actions of foreign countries in a hysterical and prejudiced manner. Many war novels became bestsellers.[11]

This was not exactly untrue, but it could equally have applied to any point during the twentieth century as well. Moreover, recent scholarship has suggested that the outbreak of the First World War was not necessarily greeted enthusiastically by a nation conditioned to believe that war was just and noble.[12]

Yet the image portrayed in the textbooks was unequivocal; in 1914 a nation unable to recognise the militaristic tone of the pro-war propaganda stumbled readily into a conflict that they welcomed because of their inability to comprehend the reality of war. This interpretation understandably fostered bitterness. Alfred Gilder, the son of a victim of the Great War, wrote:

> Dead heroes? You can't forget them, but my own childhood often had me thinking whether my father's life added one jot to anything but military pride of the 'donkeys' in that conflict, men whose uniforms were never soiled by French mud, whose boots were never anything but highly polished, treading only on the thick carpets of headquarters and never scuffed or soaked rotten by endless days and nights spent in the noisy hell of waterlogged trenches of the Somme, Verdun or Ypres. How many generals were buried alive in a trench at Bethune?[13]

Gilder died in 1985, and his memoir was written in the later years of his life. His bitterness at the loss of his father and his mother's subsequent struggle to raise five children is understandable, but his choice of language is fairly modern. In particular, the use of the term 'donkeys' suggests a view of the war forged in the 1960s, influence by Alan Clark's 1961 book of that title.[14] Emma Mahoney's work on the role of veterans in

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[11] Vincent Crinnion, *The Great War* (London, 1986), p. 13.

[12] Adrian Gregory, 'British War Enthusiasm: A reassessment' in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 67-85.

[13] Alfred Gilder, *A Widow with Five Children to Support: Memories of a Great War Victim in Long Eaton* (Newport, 1995).

[14] Dan Todman has stated that "the *bon mot* about lions and donkeys dates originally from the Franco-Prussian War rather than the First World War. There is no evidence that it was reused at the time about the British army". Todman, *The Great War*, p. 80.

documentaries about the First World War has demonstrated the unreliability of memories of events decades after these have occurred.[15] The reshaped view of the war was potent, and frequently reiterated in school textbooks.

History textbooks of this era were also extremely graphic in detailing the horrors of the First World War. During the interwar years many works had significantly said little of the manner of fighting; casualty figures were rarely mentioned, and the costliness of the war was not often alluded to. There was no such ambiguity in the late-twentieth century textbooks. For example, Crinnion's description of the aftermath of a battle was particularly explicit:

> The dead and the wounded hung like scarecrows on the wire, their torn clothing flapping in the wind. Sometimes the bodies stayed there, piled against one another, forsaken. Their bleached bones were a horrible monument to the failure of the artillery bombardment, to the stupidity of the commanding tactics, to the deadly accuracy of the enemy's guns.[16]

Even relatively simplistic works noted that, "in the trenches, life must have been a living hell".[17] Given the horrific nature of the fighting, modern readers wondered why they had continued to fight. Paul Dowswell pondered such questions, and provided an answer:

> Looking back, many people wonder why soldiers allowed themselves to be led to their deaths in such huge numbers. At the time, most soldiers were obedient to their officers in a way that would be unthinkable in today's less reverential societies. Military discipline at the Front was also very harsh. Cowardice or desertion was punished by firing squad. During attacks, military policemen patrolled the trenches, ready to shoot dead any soldier who did not go over the top when the signal was given.[18]

In this sense, children's textbooks were frequently reiterating the same points that were being made in works of fiction. Regarding the issue of militarily policemen summarily executing soldiers during battles, this is not only an emotive assertion, but also an erroneous one. This again demonstrates a contrast between the works of the interwar period and those that appeared after 1945. With both textbooks and other cultural sources focusing repeatedly on the same narrow aspects of the Great War, it is hardly surprising that, at the end of the twentieth century it was such issues as the conditions in the trenches and military executions that came to dominate the popular understanding of

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[15] Mahoney, 'The Great War on the Small Screen', pp. 94-114.
[16] Crinnion, *Great War*, p. 29.
[17] Pam Robson, *All About the First World War 1914-1918* (Hove, 1996), p. 25.
[18] Paul Dowswell, *History Through Poetry: World War I* (London, 2001), p. 17.

the subject. Between the two world wars, there was a clear difference not only between the style of novels and textbooks, but also between their content and agenda.

Before the Second World War, children's novels about the war were generally works of entertainment, traditional adventure stories with a patriotic bent. They were not serving the same purpose as the textbooks. At the end of the twentieth century, there was a greater correlation between the ideas aimed at children in the school and in their leisure time. Books such as *Private Peaceful* (Michael Morpurgo, 2003) and *War Game* (Michael Foreman, 1989) conveyed the same perception of the war as many of their educational counterparts. Indeed, many of the authors of children's fiction saw their work as educational. Kate Agnew suggested that Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* sparked a TV debate over the nation's failure to pardon soldiers shot for desertion in the First World War.[19] Lawrence Harris' novels were clearly created with notions of learning in mind; the main characters are modern schoolchildren who learn about the war through various processes and plot devices, their newfound understanding then disseminated to the reader, while in *Private Peaceful*, Morpurgo considered it important that children should know about the military executions during the First World War.[20]

Christopher Martin's *Battle of the Somme* was published two years before Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, but it employed terminology that would have been at home in that seminal work: "Faith in authority, belief in God were severely shaken by the horrors of the 1914-18 battles. Twentieth century cynicism and desolation of spirit were born among the shell holes and shattered skeleton trees of fields like the Somme".[21] Moreover, the advent of the Second World War rendered the justifications and sacrifices of the First World War worthless. Writing of the newspaper editor J.L. Garvin, whose son Gerard was lost on the Somme, Martin noted that he "lived on to see the victory turned to ashes in a second greater war".[22] Other works were highly critical of the British High Command. Of the Somme campaign, David Evans wrote, "Haig appeared to work to the theory that given enough men and enough guns, a breakthrough would be inevitable". Again, the notion of callousness and ineptitude crops up: "Instead of learning from this experience, Haig continued with similar attacks during the

[19] *Guardian*, 01/10/2005, p. 22.
[20] Morpurgo's postscript demonstrates to the reader that one of the author's intentions had been to raise awareness of the execution of soldiers during the Great War. Michael Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful* (London, 2003), p. 187.
[21] Christopher Martin, *Battle of the Somme* (Hove, 1973).
[22] Ibid., p. 116.

following days and the fighting raged until mid-November".[23] The constant repetition of such views has enabled them to become more widely accepted.

By and large, historical textbooks were approaching the subject of the war in a similar manner. They were taking as their inspiration the historians who had perpetuated many of the prevalent ideas about the war that had gained ground in the post-1945 era. Robert Hull's *A Prose Anthology of the First World War* (1992), for example, quotes the Australian historian John Laffin, who's *Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* was a highly subjective and much criticised account of the conflict.[24] Of General Sir Henry Rawlinson he wrote:

> It is not a matter of hindsight to say that, in effect, Rawlinson was planning to bring about heavy casualties among his own men. He was simply giving German machine-gun bullets a better target. His four row advance was an almost incomparable tactical blunder.[25]

The use of such a one-sided view alongside quotes from actual participants in the conflict is questionable, though it is fair to say that this is not entirely typical of school textbooks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the modern revisionist understanding of the Great War, there have been some textbooks that have demonstrated recognition of the alternative views on the conflict, without resorting to the type of emotive language that permeates most works on the subject. Robert Lobban's *The First World War*, for example, examined the role of General Haig and the difference between modern perceptions and the reality of his achievements:

> General Haig, the British Commander received certain criticisms for the failure of the Somme offensive, but the year had certainly marked the advance of Britain to the ranks of the great military powers. The German High Command had been astonished to see her put such a large and effective army into the field, and henceforth Britain was to play an ever larger part in the land battles of the war.[26]

He also recognised that, "In many ways, moreover, the soldiers felt much more separated from the civilians at home than they did from the upper class officers".[27]

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[23] David Evans, *The Great War 1914-18* (London, 1981), p. 32.
[24] In his review of Brian Bond's *The First World War and British Military History*, Trevor Wilson noted that Laffin's work was 'preposterous', but had "set the cash registers ringing". Trevor Wilson, 'Review: Brian Bond (ed.) The First World War and British Military History', *Albion* 24 (1992), p. 695.
[25] Robert Hull (ed.), *A Prose Anthology of the First World War* (Hove, 1992), p. 24.
[26] Robert Lobban, *The First World War* (Oxford, 1982), p. 75.
[27] Ibid., p. 100.

Though generally such works have been few and far between, an examination of the National Curriculum website suggests that the revisionist view of the war began to filter through into the education system at the end of the twentieth century. Examples of pupils' work have been published online to give an indication of the National Curriculum in action. It can be seen that the children surveyed had been taught to question the modern understanding of the war, and analyse some of the apparent 'myths' in greater detail. One essay attempted to answer the question, 'Does *Blackadder* give an accurate interpretation of World War One', while another posed the query, 'To what extent does General Haig deserve the reputation 'Butcher of the Somme'?.[28] One child responded, "I think that General Sir Douglas Haig should be seen as more of a national hero than a merciless butcher", though he then went on to rather spoil this insight by suggesting that "British losses were even higher" during the Second World War than they had been during the earlier conflict. Curiously, the marker had suggested this was "a very good point".[29] Other children made similar points about Haig's reputation, and had clearly been taught from a very modern perspective on the war, making use of more recent secondary sources.

Other textbooks also attempted to convey a more balanced position on the First World War. Stuart Ross' *War in the Trenches*, for example, raised the issue of Haig's purported callousness and lack of imagination, but counters such ideas with an alternative point of view:

> Haig's defenders point out that in very difficult circumstances he created a huge first-class army from raw recruits. He was more willing than some of his colleagues to use the new techniques of aerial, chemical and tank warfare. His unflinching confidence and determination sustained the Army through terrible times. Millions would have died whatever tactics had been used and Haig's subordinates never lost faith in him.[30]

Similarly, Louis L. Snyder's account of the Somme noted that, despite the cost in human lives, the battle also "had two important results. It relieved the pressure on Verdun, and it forced the Germans to retreat on a 100-mile front running from east of Noyon to Arras in northeastern France."[31]

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[28] http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/nc-in-action/items/history/9/1634.aspx?return=/search/index.aspx%3FfldSiteSearch%3Dhaig, accessed 29/01/2008.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Stewart Ross, *War in the Trenches* (Hove, 1990), p. 45.
[31] Louis L. Snyder, *World War I* (London, 1981), p. 50.

In the face of overwhelming public revulsion towards the war, particularly towards the end of the twentieth century, it can be seen that some textbooks were attempting to distil a more nuanced understanding of the conflict that took into account different trends in academic research. Though some of these works were clearly painting the war as futile, others were demonstrating an awareness of the historiographical debates that were taking place, recognizing that different historians were coming to different conclusions. Moreover, the fact that these more balanced views were being presented in the last three decades of the twentieth century, not just the 1990s, suggests that the competition between different interpretations of the conflict was never far from the surface. It was partly for this reason that some writers of fiction felt the need to present what they felt to be a more truthful view of the subject, one that did not attempt to absolve the Generals of their crimes or justify their methods of warfare.

It was not only in their depictions of the battlefields, particularly the Somme, and attitudes towards the military commanders that modern textbooks differed from their interwar predecessors. The movement towards a greater understanding of cultural and social history meant that many hitherto unmentioned aspects of the conflict could now be explored. For post-Second World War textbooks, the Home Front became a more prominent area of study. Moreover, many books began to address the role of women in the conflict. Yet, with the new approach to History often focusing on source questions and method, subjects were not necessarily covered satisfactorily. Fiona Reynoldson's book about life on the Home Front, for example, dealt with the role of women in small paragraphs that did little justice to the complexity of the subject. Its main source of information was Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, though odd sentences quoted here and there hardly gave any insight into the role of women.[32] A series of questions at the end encouraged children simply to regurgitate the sentences they had just read. Pre-1945 textbooks had covered historical events in detailed narratives, often tinged with a pro-British analysis. The difficulties of teaching such wide-ranging curricula had been immense for history teachers, but their replacements sometimes appeared to eschew any detailed understanding of context in favour of short sentences designed to capture the essence of the information. In such cases a sense of chronology was often lost.

There was a certain amount of opposition to changes in the study of History. In 1989, for example, the Conservative MP Sir John Stokes asked the Secretary of State for Education, "Why cannot children be taught about England's heroes instead of vague

[32] Fiona Reynoldson, *The First World War 1914-1918: Book Two – War in Britain* (London, 1988), p. 42-3.

subjects such as social trends".[33] This new approach to History even went as far as to include 'source questions' in examinations which required pupils to analyse and interpret a random primary source devoid of any information that would contextualise the material. At a conference on the teaching of History in British schools held at the Institute of Historical Research in 2005, Sean Lang, chair of the group that produced the Historical Associations report into 'History 14-19', reflected on the unhistorical nature of the emphasis on decontextualised sources. As an example Lang spoke of a source taken from an Edexel GCSE paper, showing an image from the *Illustrated London News* of British soldiers kicking a football into battle. The image is a well-known one, and the famous event it depicts has been discussed elsewhere in the thesis.[34] Lang drew attention to the source papers glaring omission of any reference to the picture's basis in historical fact:

> Now in any analysis of the source, the fact that it is based on something which actually happened is really quite important. Not only does the gloss not say this, but the question does not say it and neither does the mark scheme. In fact, in the mark scheme, a real answer is published with this particular question, and the pupil who claimed that the image was misleading because it showed something that did not happen was rewarded. Some of the analysis in the mark scheme simply said that this was an example of British propaganda in order to build up the war effort. In fact, it is a much more interesting source than that because not only was it based on a real event, it was also used as propaganda by the Germans, illustrative of the absurdity of the English in kicking footballs across the front line. It is a very, very good source to use, but so much of this was missing that you end up with a situation where anachronistic answers are certainly rewarded and accurate answers may even be penalised.[35]

Lang used this example to point to flaws in the use of source questions within the History syllabus, but it is also illustrative of several other key factors in the understanding of the Great War. Tom Arkell, writing in 1988, suggested that modern children were less able to empathise with their ancestors because the pace of change had increased so significantly throughout the twentieth century. The daily life of a child in the 1980s would have been radically different from that of the early life of their grandparents, though the same could not necessarily have been said of a child born in the 1880s.[36] This meant that late twentieth century children had to take greater conceptual leaps in order to understand the past. So the inability of both children and

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[33] TNA, ED 34/332, 'Mr John Marshall to ask the secretary of state for Education and Science, if he will make a statement about the teaching of history within the national curriculum.'

[34] Chapter One refers to the association between the Great War and sportsmanship. The actions of Captain Nevill in July 1916 were a significant representation of this, and such imagery was replicated in stories and pictures aimed at adults and children.

[35] Sean Lang, Talking about history in British education. http://www.history.ac.uk/education/conference/lang.html accessed 29/01/2008.

[36] Arkell, 'History's Role in the School Curriculum', p. 24.

their teachers to comprehend why Captain Nevill would have ordered his men to kick footballs towards the enemy on the first day of the Battle of the Somme is perhaps understandable, though unforgivable from an educational perspective.

These sources demonstrate some of the problems arising in the teaching of the Great War. With a clash of ideas occurring between academic and popular history, it has not been guaranteed that children's textbooks, or their exposure of young minds to the subject in the schoolroom, will be presented with the same ideas. Teachers need both the time and the inclination to keep abreast of historiographical developments, and this has not always been possible. Furthermore, the emotive nature of the subject has also been an influence on the manner in which the war is taught to children. In the United States, there has been much criticism over the years regarding the tone of many history textbooks, particularly as they often promote patriotism over truth.[37] Though this has not generally been the case in Britain, the First World War is the subject that probably came closest to that situation, given the strong feelings garnered on both sides of the critical debate. This was also one of the factors behind some of the fictional works representing the Great War; if history textbooks were not supposed to be polemical, then the role of defending specific views on the First World War should naturally fall to the writers of fiction who were not so constrained in the need to appear fair and balanced, and supportive of modern academic thinking.

The Great War in the post-1945 era

As a subject of popular fiction, there can be little doubt that the First World War had lost its lustre in the years following 1945. There were several reasons for this. It has already been established that different interpretations of the conflict were jostling for prominence throughout the interwar years, while the outbreak of another war in 1939 paved the way for a new subject to be addressed within the realms of popular culture. Many of the publications that presented Great War tales refocused to accommodate the more contemporary conflict. The quarterly publication *Great War Adventures*, for example, was renamed *War Adventures*, and largely shifted its focus to the Second World War until its demise in 1941. W.E. Johns' fictional aviator, Biggles, began flying missions against the Nazis in such novels as *Biggles Defies the Swastika* (1941) and

[37] For further discussion about the accuracy of American textbooks see James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, 1996) and Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* Boston, 1979).

Biggles Sees it Through (1941). The children's literature of the First World War that celebrated the conflict as a theatre of adventure was popular up to and during the Second World War, though during the 1939-45 conflict it tended to appear largely in republications of older works. Throughout the 1950s the generation of authors that had produced such works were dying out. Percy Westerman died in February 1959, aged 82. Charles James L'Estrange, one half of the writing duo who published under the name Herbert Strang, died in 1947, while his writing partner George Herbert Ely passed on in 1958. Frederick Sadleir Brereton died aged 86 in 1957, and Christopher Lawrence, who published under the pseudonym Escott Lynn died in 1950. By the time of the resurgence in interest in the Great War in the 1960s, the generation of authors who had made a living writing about that subject had passed on, while W.E. Johns had largely shifted his attention to science-fiction novels.

The period immediately after the Second World War also witnessed a renewed interest in the literature aimed at children and the values inculcated in them by such material. In particular, the 1950s saw a moral panic about the nature of children's comics that transcended continents. In the United States, based partly on the research of Dr. Frederick Wertham, so-called Horror Comics became the focus of much ire.[38] Such consternation was evident on the other side of the Atlantic, leading to a British campaign against the perceived threat of some comics. The campaign came about partly because of the popular understanding of comics as the preserve of children. The campaign condemned all American 'horror comics', ultimately culminating in the Children and Young Persons Act of 1955. In his 1955 treatise George Pumphrey recognised the importance of the comic book for young Britons: "For the vast majority of our children comics are the main out-of-school reading matter. We cannot therefore ignore them for, taken in regular weekly doses, they must be a major moral, educational, and psychological factor in many children's lives".[39] The concern of Pumphrey and his contemporaries appears to have been that comics, and particularly American comics, had a detrimental effect on young readers, thereby disseminating this effect throughout society. He deemed it "a great relief to parents to find that the depravity of the American-type comics has, as yet, had no appreciable effect on our native comics produced by reputable firms".[40] His criticism stemmed from a lack of understanding,

[38] See Frederick Wertham's *The Seduction of the Innocent* (New York, 1954).
[39] George H. Pumphrey, *Children's Comics. A Guide for Parents and Teachers* (London, 1955), p. 11.
[40] Ibid., p.15.

and often revealed a degree of snobbery that clouded his judgement. Writing of his first encounter with an 'objectionable comic' in 1946 he remarked:

> [I]t was loaned to me by Ethel, a nine-year-old. Ethel was poorly dressed, her untidy hair was always falling over her face, and she never was very clean. She craved for personal attention from adults and would do anything to get it, even if it meant a reprimand. She had fits of naughtiness and uncontrollable temper, and it was not unusual for her to be cruel to other children. She was of at least average intelligence but her school work was well below the standard for her age. Although we held many meetings to which parents were invited I never met Ethel's parents.[41]

Pumphrey's concerns stemmed from assumptions borne of class and educational differences. As Sara Selwood and Diana Irving have noted, "There was a considerable reluctance amongst the educated classes to believe that brazenly commercial cultures could be central to the lives of the working classes".[42] Such conjectures have dogged the understanding of children's reading material since at least the nineteenth century, based on the conviction that young readers are universally "passive, non-critical and open to influence".[43]

Whereas the works that were produced during the war years could almost be seen as a brand, with their similar bindings and covers easily identifiable to those shopping for books, the same could not be said of those produced after the Second World War. The emergence of paperbacks in the 1930s, and in particular Allen Lane's Penguin books in 1935, had huge effects on the construction and design of books. Most of the works of Great War fiction published after 1945 did not look alike, nor be seen to come from the same stable. Nevertheless, the imagery used in designs for book covers were still often extremely evocative. Those of 1914-18 had generally been extensions of the illustrations contained within the book. Late twentieth century works focused on symbols of the war that had gained resonance since that period. Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* has an image of a butterfly in no man's land on its cover, highly reminiscent of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. More interesting, perhaps, was the change in cover of Mills and Colquohoun's *Charley's War*. The first few stories of the comic were collated into a graphic novel in 1983. The cover showed a gothic image of a soldier in a gas-mask on a horse (also wearing a gas-mask) in a eerie cemetery. There were clearly associations with death and the horrors of war, but by the time the tale was

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[41] Ibid., p. 7.
[42] Sara Selwood and Diana Irving, *Harmful Publications: Comics, Education and Disenfranchised Young People* (London, 1993), p. 21.
[43] Ibid., p. 29.

republished again in 2004, the cover simply showed a red poppy on a black background. More sombre in tone, with a greater connection to the imagery associated with armistice day and the memorialisation of the dead, the radical change in design of the cover seems to have reflected the changing perception of the Great War since the 1970s.

A key factor in approaches to children's fiction and the so-called 'pleasure culture of war' is the influence they have over young readers. In chapter one it was argued that whether or not the novels and stories about the Great War gave children a true understanding of the conflict, these works often said more about aspects of British society and the values associated with them; attitudes towards such issues of race, empire and gender than they did about the reality of the Western Front. This in turn raises questions about the reception of such works. Children may well have been exposed to ideas, but that does not necessarily mean these were unconditionally accepted. Such debates continued throughout the twentieth century. The anti-Horror Comics campaigns of the 1950s were based upon the presumption that children were easily influenced and therefore would accept anything they read. The moral guardians failed to take into account the multifarious reactions to the same stories. In an example from the United States, the actor Bruce Campbell recalled his childhood in Michigan in the 1960s, a period in which popular entertainment was saturated with images of the still relatively recent Second World War. Moreover, for the British and the Americans there were not really any competing interpretations of the Second World War as there had been surrounding the Great War during the interwar years, at least not in the field of popular entertainment. Campbell noted the difference between his reaction to the popular television series *Combat!*, an adventure series following American troops in action across the battlefields of Europe, and that of his brother:

> In the late sixties, war films like *Kelly's Heroes*, *The Devil's Brigade* and *The Dirty Dozen* seemed to be everywhere. Our favourite TV show, *Combat*, only encouraged this preoccupation with war, and Vic Morrow soon became my first favourite actor. He was the embodiment of laid-back cool and I loved how his cigarettes bounced on the edge of his mouth when he talked... Don took all this make-believe stuff a little too seriously. The difference between us was fundamental: I'd watch *Combat* and think, *Gee, it would be fun to be an actor like that guy*. Don would watch the same scene and think, *Gee it would be fun to be that guy*. He went on to join the army reserves and got to play the ultimate "war game" in Kuwait during Desert Storm.[44]

[44] Bruce Campbell, *If Chins Could Kill: Confessions of a B Movie Actor* (New York, 2002), p. 3.

Campbell establishes the key factor in his enjoyment of *Combat!*: the lead actor looked 'cool'. He was also operating in a combat situation more akin to pre-First World War tales of adventure that were not restricted by debates surrounding the justness of the cause and the scale of the losses. Furthermore, his analysis of the difference between his reactions to the series and those of his brother give an indication as to the multiple reading of these cultural works, and the influence they may have had over their audiences. Similar ideas can be applied to children's novels.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the post-Second World War encroachment of American popular culture on British television, cinema and literature, the British journalist and author Harry Pearson had similar recollections of his childhood in the 1960s. In his memoir and paean to the hobby of wargaming, Pearson remarked upon his four-year-old daughter's inability to understand that Britain had once been at war with Germany, particularly given Pearson's friendship with a German family:

> When I was Maisie's age they didn't need to teach you about the war. The war was all around you. Your body absorbed it like vitamin D. We watched it on TV and at the cinema; we read about it in comics and listened to the grown-ups talking about it. The names of planes and battles were part of our everyday vocabulary. To us, Cromwell was a tank not a Puritan regicide. When we saw a lemonade bottle floating in the river we yelled, 'Sink the *Bismarck*!' and threw stones at it until it smashed. The sixties was an era of sweeping social change, but we spent our childhoods staring backwoods... To me, the Summer of Love was a six-week school holiday filled with Stukas, swastikas and bazookas.[45]

It was, as Campbell and Pearson remarked, the Second World War that dominated popular culture, draining, in the words of Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, "the Great War of its image", and this would be the case throughout the last half of the twentieth century.[46]

This did not mean, however, that the First World War disappeared from the annals of popular culture during this period. In popular children's comics, the Great War did sometimes appear alongside Second World War stories, though admittedly it was the conflict of 1939-45 that took precedence in such publications. Alongside the fictionalised war stories, these comics often carried true stories, in a sense maintaining

[45] Harry Pearson, *Achtung Schweinhund! A Boy's Own Story of Imaginary Combat* (London, 2007), pp. 2-3.
[46] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 202.

the notion of education through entertainment that had characterised the novels of George Alfred Henty, or the publications of Arthur Mee for the Amalgamated Press in the first decades of the twentieth century. *Victor Book for Boys 1980*, for example, tells the tale of 'the First Carrier Strike', in which seven Sopwith Camels launched from the converted battle cruiser HMS *Furious*, and "blacked the 'eyes' of the German Fleet".[47] Moving away from the illustrated lessons, *Battle* used photographs in 'Over the Top at Passchendaele'. Interestingly, the 'pleasure culture' of war promoted throughout the rest of the comic made way for the depiction of a battle that had "taken a fearful toll in lives and brought both British and German armies to the point of sheer exhaustion".[48] Pictures are described as "grim", while the problem of smiling and cheerful British soldiers is rectified with the statement, "Strapped to their chests are canvas bags containing gas masks".[49] It is ensured that any suggestion of levity is countered by the fact that their lives are dominated by the prospect of a painful death.

These 'true' stories were often used to demonstrate the inextricable link between the First and Second World Wars. The events of 1914-18 were seen as a prelude to the 'just' conflict of 1939-45. In *Valiant Annual 1975*, for example, a story entitled 'The Sniper' told the tale of a 'fearless lieutenant' in October 1914. The lieutenant is shot in the back by the German sniper of the title, while another soldier is killed trying to rescue him, falling on the injured lieutenant. After being shot at for the rest of the day by the sniper, he is rescued undercover of darkness, his dead comrade having protected him from the sniper's bullets:

> The doctors who examined him shook their heads in despair. He was too far gone. They treated his wound but did not expect him to live through the night. They ordered a rough grave to be dug for him, and the cold earth waited for the dying man...[50]

Needless to say, the lieutenant survives. Though seemingly a minor story, the final paragraphs reveal its significance:

> The man who had cheated death was Lieutenant Bernard L. Montgomery – who later became the legendary "Monty", victor of El Alamein in the Second World War, and one of the greatest generals in British history.
> Thus did a small, seemingly unimportant incident in the First World War have a far-reaching significance in the second world conflict.[51]

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[47] *Victor Book for Boys 1980*, p. 115.
[48] *Battle Annual 1984*, p. 18.
[49] Ibid., pp 16-7.
[50] *Valiant Annual 1975*, p. 116.
[51] Ibid., p. 116.

This story neatly summarises the fundamental appeal and effect of 1970s and '80s war comics.

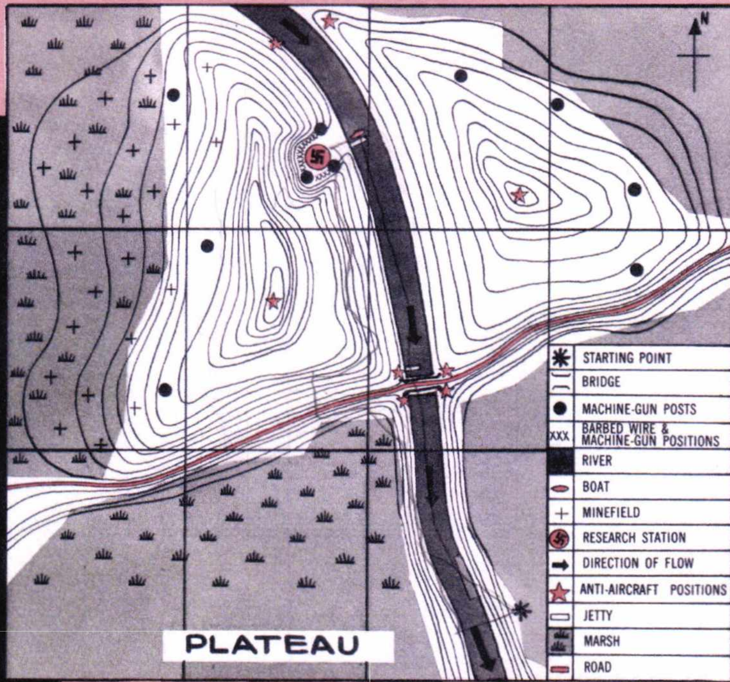
'The Sniper' is perhaps more typical of the First World War story as presented in British comics of this era. Firstly, it is not presented in the form of a comic strip. Instead, as with many of the factual stories, there is a page of text, complemented by a full-page illustration (figure 5). This style of presentation harks back to the days of the boys' story papers that had first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, and were in many ways the precursor of the modern comic. Secondly, it depicts a traditional view of heroism. The "26-year-old lieutenant, armed only with a sharp infantry sword" is the epitome of the dashing imperial hero, displaced to the battlegrounds of France.[52] His subordinates risk and indeed give their lives to save him, echoing, for example, the death of Khiva in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, protecting Captain Good, along with numerous similar examples within the canon of children's adventure fiction.

Perhaps the most interesting aspects of 'The Sniper' are the assumptions that are made about the readership. In one solitary sentence, highlighted in bold type, the story reveals the hero to be Montgomery, alluding vaguely to El Alamein. Yet the vagueness does not suggest to readers, as could perhaps be construed from a cursory glance at the story, that the victory over Rommel's forces was hardly worthy of mention. In fact, the reverse was true; this future battle of 1942 underpins the story's relevance. It is assumed that the reader is already aware of the battle of El Alamein and its significance. The pages of these boys' comics and annuals were filled with articles detailing military history, while quizzes and games encouraged the development of quite specific knowledge in the young readers. In *Warlord Annual 1979*, for example, a map of a plateau detailing barbed wire and machine gun positions, along with the location of mine fields, is given (figure 6). The reader must plot the quickest and safest route to a German research station: "You are, naturally, equipped with wirecutters, rope, weapons etc".[53] Likewise, a quiz in *The Victor Book for Boys 1975* asks readers to identify the badges of two British army units, while an article in *Battle Picture Weekly Annual 1979* compared British rifles and machine guns of the Second World War with their German and Japanese counterparts.[54] Thereby it can be seen that the young readers of *Battle*, *Warlord*, *Victor* and the like, were understood to have a detailed knowledge of British

[52] Ibid., p. 116.
[53] *Warlord for Boys, 1979*, p. 29.
[54] *The Victor Book for Boys 1975*, p. 32, and *Battle Picture Weekly Annual 1979*, pp 82-6.

Figure 5 The Sniper, from *Valiant Annual 1975*

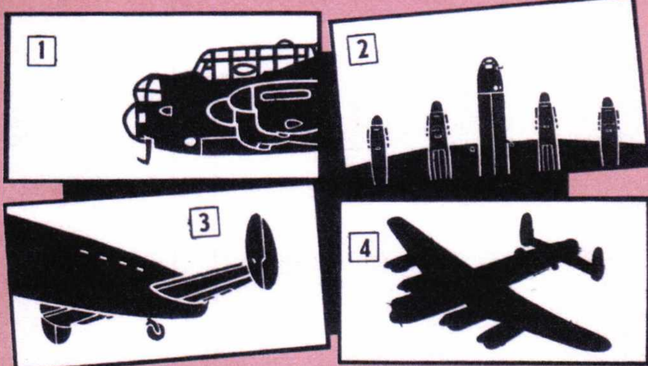
MISSION BEHIND ENEMY LINES!



You are dropped at night behind enemy lines. Your mission is to destroy a heavily guarded secret research station in a cave hewn out of a steep mountainside. You are, of course, an excellent mountaineer and are very experienced in operations in occupied territory. From the starting point, marked ✱, simply decide your quickest and safest route to — and from — the research station. The enemy reach it by boat from the jetty at the bridge. You are, naturally, equipped with wirecutters, rope, weapons etc. Study the map closely before deciding on your routes in and out. Then, see if they match mine, given in the answers below. This is an excellent test for Agents hoping to operate on their own with only their wits to keep them alive!

AIRCRAFT RECOGNITION

This is a recognition test, lads. See how quickly you can guess which famous World War Two aircraft is being drawn. To make it more difficult, I have left all squadron and nationality markings off the plane, but I'm sure all my Agents will have no problems in deciding which aircraft it is!



ANSWERS

The plane is a Lancaster bomber.

IN—My route would be to cross the river right at the starting point, well out of sight of the ack-ack positions at the bridge. Keep as close to the river as possible (it may even be necessary to wade in the water in preference to stumbling through the marsh) until you can see the bridge. Then, keeping close to the ground, climb over the corner of the plateau and then down to the road. When you are sure that the road is clear, nip across quickly. Now comes the difficult part! You must avoid the marsh and the minefield, and climbing the easier, west side of the mountain would mean almost certain detection by one of the machine-gun crews. Neither can you climb to the very top of the mountain as the anti-aircraft gun-crew would spot you. My route, therefore, is to climb the southern cliff and traverse the eastern side of the mountain, about half way up, keeping well into the shadows. When you near the station climb down to the river to avoid the barbed wire. Then sneak into the station.

OUT—The research station blown, the fastest way out is by the river. Pinch the Jerry's boat! The ack-ack guns won't be able to harm you as they cannot depress far enough. You have been successful. Well done!

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Figure 6 This game from *Warlord Annual 1979* is fairly typical for war comics. Young readers were expected have a great deal of knowledge about military matters.

military history, gleaned from all manner of sources. Moreover, large numbers of children were reading these comics. In 1976, Bob Dixon noted that *Battle* and *Warlord* both had circulations of around 200,000.[55] However, factual stories appeared sporadically, and, like their fictional counterparts, were more likely to focus on the Second World War.

Yet the Second World War stories that filled the pages of British comics were fairly generic offerings for young readers, particularly when compared with one of the most important British comic strips of the post-war era. In 1979, a new story appeared in the pages of *Battle*, written by Pat Mills, and illustrated by Joe Colquhoun, a veteran of the comic industry who had worked on such comics as *Champion, Lion* and *Tiger* in the 1950s and 1960s.[56] *Charley's War* followed a 16-year-old recruit, Charley Bourne, from June 1916 until the end of the Great War and beyond.[57] It ran in *Battle*, later *Battle Action Force* and *Battle Storm Force*, from 1979 to 1986, with nearly 300 episodes produced by Mills and Colquhoun.[58] Early episodes were repeated after 1986, and *Judge Dredd Megazine* began rerunning the story in September 2003. In 2004 Titan Books began to republish *Charley's War* as a series of graphic novels on a yearly basis. At the time of writing four such publications have been released.

Dave Hunt, the editor of *Battle*, felt that the anti-war message of *Charley's War* was of greater importance than its popularity amongst readers and had taken risks in the establishment of the new story. One of the more popular stories in *Battle* was *Johnny Red*, the tale of a British pilot fighting alongside the Soviets in the Russian Air Force during the Second World War. Colquhoun was the illustrator for *Johnny Red*, but was removed from that story to work with Mills on the newly commissioned *Charley's War*. To move the illustrator from a story already proven to be popular with readers was a gamble, particularly given the unconventional nature of the new comic strip, and can be taken as an indication of the seriousness with which all of the collaborators viewed the project and the importance they attached to its subject matter.[59] He and Pat Mills were

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[55] Dixon, *Catching them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction* (London, 1977), p. 47.
[56] Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One* (London, 1983), p. 5.
[57] Charley fought the Bolsheviks in 1919, was seen on the dole in the 1930s, and re-enlisted alongside his son in 1939. By this time, however, Pat Mills was no longer writing for *Charley's War*.
[58] David Bishop, 'The Killing Fields', *Judge Dredd Megazine* 211 (2003), p. 25.
The changing title of these comics gives some indication of the instability of the industry. Children's publications were frequently merging and reorganising in an effort to survive in a fairly crowded market.
[59] Ibid., p. 25.

both passionate about the intended message and possible impact of a story set in the trenches.

Battle was just one of the many boys' comics that focused predominantly on the subject of war. Its rivals included *Warlord* and *Victor* (both DC Thomson), *Valiant* (Fleetway), as well as the monthly complete stories that appeared in *Commando* (DC Thomson) and its counterparts. Tales set during the First World War often appeared in the pages of these publications, although there were no regular stories that could compare to *Charley's War*. Mills and Colquhoun's creation was unique in terms of scale and structure, and clearly benefited from the extent of the research carried out by both writer and illustrator. As for other First World War stories, *Cadman the Fighting Coward* was the only long-running story set during the First World War contemporary to *Charley's War*. In war comics, as in many other facets of popular culture, the conflict of 1914-18 was greatly overshadowed by the events of 1939-45.[60] The highly popular *Commando* stories were almost all set during the Second World War, with one or two exceptions. Likewise, most of the stories in *Battle*, *Victor* and *Warlord* took place in this later conflict.

Many of the novels published during this era were vastly different from those written between 1914 and 1918. As the Great War re-emerged in the public consciousness, more and more novels were gradually released that dealt in some way with the subject. Whereas earlier texts had been set in a variety of theatres of war, there was now a greater emphasis on life on the Home Front, which was more in keeping with some modern perceptions of the conflict. There were, of course, many representations of the fighting fronts, though as shall be seen, these tended to focus on the conflict that took place in France and Belgium, and these will be discussed later in the chapter. Yet the depictions of the Home Front marked a radical change from previous portrayals, and will now be discussed in greater length.

The Home Front

One marked difference between post-Second World War depictions of the Great War, and the works of the wartime writers was the prominence of the Home Front as a setting in novels. As has been noted in chapter one, writers had tended to concentrate on the experience of combat, or at least adventures set around the front lines. In boys' fiction,

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[60] Antonio Altarriba Ordoñez, 'War Comics: The New Realism', *Unesco Courier* July/August 1999, p. 62.

the Home Front was simply the starting point for the protagonists' adventures. Where there were exceptions, these were usually aimed at a young female audience, and frequently did more to reinforce traditional gender roles than enlighten understandings of the nature of the war. In short, fiction of the war years, with some exceptions, was largely focused on adventure, and the abnormalities of wartime Britain; children's writers were generally unconcerned with everyday life. The massive upheaval brought about in society by the impact of two world wars was a major factor in the shift away from such narratives. As the First World War increasingly came to be seen as an historical aberration, its representations in popular culture tended to both reflect and inform public attitudes towards the conflict.

In academia, the nature of history was changing; a new emphasis was being placed on social and cultural history, a movement that would become more important over the coming decades. This led to a different understanding of both world wars that affected popular perceptions of the conflicts. Moreover, the experience of the Second World War had helped shape perceptions about the role of the Home Front during wartime. Indeed, the perception of Britain put across during this period to help maintain morale during the Second World War had a lasting effect on perceptions of that conflict that remained firmly established long after the fighting was over.[61] The main focus of the First World War was on the soldiers, those who had borne the brunt of the loss and suffering on the Western Front. The Second World War was different. Its greatest horrors (the concentration camps, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the battle of Stalingrad) were not events that physically affected the British people. Furthermore, British military casualties between 1939 and 1945 were significantly smaller than those of 1914-1918. Between 1940 and 1944, the British Army were not continuously facing the German enemy in mainland Europe as their predecessors had done two decades earlier. Life on the Home Front became entwined with a sense of patriotism that would come to define British national identity throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

As society developed, so too did the understanding of the role of ordinary people within that society. In British popular culture the Home Front became as important as the fighting fronts. Some historians have noted that British collective memory focused (and still focuses) upon a "triptych" of events taking place in 1940: the evacuation of

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[61] Connelly, *We Can Take It!* (Harlow, 2004), pp. 267-300.

Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the blitz.[62] Though ostensibly military operations, they achieved longevity in the British national consciousness through their association with the Home Front and civilian life. The Battle of Britain and the blitz took place in the skies above British soil and demonstrated the resilience of the British people. The evacuation of Dunkirk was characterised by the efforts of British civilians, a miniature armada of 'little' ships, rescuing the army from the jaws of defeat. The Second World War, then, came to be seen as the British people's 'finest hour', and popular culture of the post-war era served to reinforce this. Situation comedies, such as *Dad's Army* (1968-77) and *Goodnight Sweetheart* (1993-98) and John Boorman's semi-autobiographical film *Hope and Glory* (1987), all supported the notion that life on the Home Front was hard, but fair and even enjoyable.[63] It was a period that was seen as representative of the nation's strength and identity. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that much of the fiction about the First World War aimed at children in the second half of the twentieth century also focused on the Home Front, a setting that had played only a minor role in earlier works of fiction.

It was important, then, that many children's books of the Great War should also focus on the Home Front. There were naturally key differences between the two global conflicts. The spectre of class difference was more apparent in the tales set between 1914 and 1918; the rich were frequently seen as the one obstacle in the way of everyone else's happiness. Nevertheless, there were many shared signs that provided an indelible link between the two eras; there were evacuees, air raids, rationing, and most importantly, a sense of the nation pulling together. In chapter one it was demonstrated that the writers of children's fiction during the First World War were often rendering the war understandable by placing it into a recognizable nineteenth century context. The same principle was at work in the latter half of the twentieth century. Writers were familiar with the popular perception of the Home Front during the Second World War, and interpreted the earlier conflict appropriately.

[62] Ibid., p. 55.
Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991), p. 1. Calder recognised that the experience of the Second World War for the British people was reshaped to fit into a national story that depicted the Spanish Armada and the Battle of Trafalgar as "events in which the hand of destiny was seen".
[63] For a more in depth discussion of Boorman's *Hope and Glory* see Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*, pp. 173-9. For an analysis of the place of *Dad's Army* and *Goodnight Sweetheart* in British popular culture see Connelly, *We Can Take It!* pp. 78-84 and p. 181.

Another of the most notable indicators of the changing nature of society apparent in depictions of the home front was the representation of women. The First World War had been a 'total war'; all areas of society were focused to a great extent on the war effort. Britain's ability to fight was therefore partly facilitated by women, who often fulfilled roles that had been hitherto inaccessible, though the novelty of this has perhaps been overplayed by historians seeking to demonstrate a radical shift in society brought about by the impact of 'total war'. Changes in society in the 1960s and 1970s meant that the role of women was beginning to be reassessed; this in turn was reflected in academic studies of the period. With this development in academic and popular culture, it is hardly surprising that such ideas were assimilated into representations of the Great War. Women became important figures in children's fiction, though this is perhaps unsurprising in novels focused on the home front. Though some young girls must have read them, the works of Percy Westerman and Herbert Strang during the war and interwar years were directly aimed at young boys. Their themes and ideology were intended to influence the warriors of the future, the likely defenders of empire. Girls had their own writers. The works of Bessie Marchant, Angela Brazil and others were seen as the female Westermans and Hentys.

In contrast, the fiction produced at the end of the twentieth century was aimed squarely at children of both sexes. Therefore, female protagonists who had only appeared in the works of the writers of girls' fiction now became important figures in a much wider range of tales. Furthermore, the portrayal of female characters in the post-Second World War era was significantly different from their earlier counterparts. One of Bessie Marchant's protagonists in *A V.A.D. in Salonika* had allowed a German spy to escape after being distracted by a hat in a shop window; modern female characters in children's literature now tended to have greater dreams and aspirations. This partly reflected the authors' knowledge of the changes that would occur in society after the First World War. It also demonstrated a change in attitudes towards the roles of civilians and combatants. Jean Bethke Elshtain noted an absence of female interpretations of war in works of literature, and suggested the reason for this absence was "to do with how war gets defined (where *is* the front?) and with who is authorized to *narrate*".[64] The experience of 'total' war meant that, alongside more traditional interpretations of the conflict, civilians could claim participation in the struggle, which entitled them to significant roles in post-Second World War literature.

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[64] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Brighton, 1987), p. 213.

The two world wars came to be seen as pivotal moments in British history, catalysing changes in society. Novels and textbooks reflected this change in emphasis, often placing the role of women on both home and fighting fronts at the centre of their agenda. In James Riordan's *War Song* (2001), for example, two sisters discuss their role in society after hearing about the execution of the British nurse Edith Cavell in 1915:

> 'I wouldn't mind being a nurse', said Floss.
> 'Garn, nursing ain't for the likes of us', retorted Doss. 'That Cavell was a vicar's daughter with pots of dosh'.
> 'That's as maybe... But this time last year we could've been dusting for two measly bob a week. Now we can do a "man's" job for three quid. Makes you think, dunnit?[65]

Here the issues of gender and class become interlinked. Until the outbreak of war, the opportunities of Florence and Dorothy are severely restricted. While much literature focuses upon the tragedy of the war in the trenches, Home Front tales often concentrated on the inequalities of life in Britain and the effect of the war upon these. *War Song* begins with the two central characters at school, about to attend a housewifery lesson: "While the boys at George Street Elementary School did woodwork, the girls donned white pinafores and trooped out of the school building to the model house next door. There they learned to sweep, dust, polish, cook, wash, iron, make beds, and bathe a life-sized doll".[66] The purpose of this scene is clear. The author was demonstrating to modern young readers, and female readers in particular, just how different life had been at the beginning of the century. Yet literature also demonstrated the extent to which war brought about social change. In Alison Leonard's *An Inch of Candle* (1980), for example, the protagonist Dora's brother, Richard is jailed for refusing to go to war. Dora and Richard's father, who previously had considered it "a waste to educate a girl", decides to put the money saved for Richard's education towards sending Dora to university.[67]

Indeed, an aversion to depicting combat in children's literature of the late twentieth century meant that many of the works set in and around the time of the Great War featured women as their central characters. Using similar motifs to Leonard's novel, Linda Newbery's *Some Other War* (1990), *The Kind Ghosts* (1991) and *The Wearing of the Green* (1992), follow a brother and sister, Jack and Alice, through the Great War.

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[65] James Riordan, *War Song* (Oxford, 2001), p. 8.
[66] Ibid., p. 7.
[67] Alison Leonard, *An Inch of Candle* (London, 1986, first published 1980), p. 173.

Jack enlists in the army, while Alice serves as a nurse in the V.A.D. and their experiences are juxtaposed to demonstrate the horrors of the war for all involved. Indeed, one of the major themes of the novel was the stark contrast between people's perceptions of the conflict and the reality of the war. Many authors tackled this idea. In *Charley's War* Charley's experience at the Somme is intercut with letters from his family in London, who clearly do not understand the hardships and horrors he is facing. Johnny's father in Lawrence's *Lord of the Nutcracker Men* is desperate to go to war in 1914, and disappointed when he is initially thwarted in his ambition due to height restrictions. His view is changed when he finally does experience combat and the trenches. The underlying theme in many of the novels was that the entire nation had been misguided in its enthusiasm for the war.

With such a vastly different approach to the war in comparison to previous generations, modern works have tended to puncture the values for which the Great War was fought with more truthful revelations. There was a great feeling that the British public had been misled into fighting, and late-twentieth century authors often appear to have been determined to illustrate the absurdity of war enthusiasm in 1914. In particular, there has been an emphasis on both the silliness and tragedy of spy fever that apparently gripped the nation during the First World War. In Dennis Hamley's *Very Far from Here*, for example, two young boys get caught up in a spy chase instigated by a retired headmaster newly arrived in the village. Early in the novel, Eddy, a twelve year old boy, is waiting for the retired schoolmaster Mr. Foskett in his study and passes time by looking at a row of books. He comes across a volume entitled *The Invasion of 1910*:

> He looked at the author's name. It was funny and French-looking. 'Le Queux'. He opened the book. To his faint surprise he saw at once that it was a story. A minute or two of glancing at the pages showed it had to do with foreign – German? – troops swarming all over Britain. He looked at the beginning to see if there was a list of pictures. A sentence caught his eye on one of the front pages before the book really started. It said 'First published, 1906'.[68]

Other books in the collection included, *The Riddle of the Sands, The Coming Invasion of England* and *The War Inevitable*.[69] Mr Foskett is convinced that there will be an invasion, but is shown to be a crack-pot, believing the Germans will invade silently using bicycles, machines that have "offensive possibilities which have not been fully

[68] Dennis Hamley, *Very Far from Here* (St. Albans, 1976), p. 28.
[69] Ibid., p. 29.

realized".[70] Gradually the villagers of Howard's Bay become convinced that a new arrival, Mr. Brown, the owner of a cycle shop, is actually Mr Braun, a German agent. Yet Mr Brown eventually reveals himself to be an ordinary civilian, and the misguided Mr Foskett pays the price for his warmongering when he is dispatched in an automobile accident.

In James Riordan's *War Song*, the two protagonists become embroiled in a possible spy plot at the beginning of the novel, though again, their fears are later revealed to be unfounded. Similarly, in Ian Lawrence's *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, a local butcher, Fatty Dienst, whom the protagonist's family has known for years, is driven from his home and forced to flee the town. When Johnny asks his father where Dienst has gone, he receives the reply, "I suppose he's gone home to be with all the *other* butchers. To join *that army* of butchers".[71] This confuses Johnny: "I didn't understand; they had always been friends. Many times I had seen Dad laughing at Fatty's jokes, or the German winking as he slipped an extra slice of ham in with the rest".[72] Later, Johnny's father, who had turned against his former friend and been eager to go to war, expresses regret at his actions after learning the shocking reality of the conflict in the trenches. In these examples further evidence can be seen of both the similarities and disparities between pre-Second World War and post-1945 fiction. Many authors, as was shown in chapter one, either wrote spy stories or included subplots involving espionage and enemy agents in their work during the war. Though at first glance these appear to corroborate the notion that Britain was swarming with enemy saboteurs, there were examples of stories that mocked such conventions. Indeed, it could even be argued that such themes were presented for narrative rather than propagandistic reasons. Yet the modern writers used spy fever as an example of the manner in which a nation was conned into taking up arms against the Germans. The spies were shown to be ordinary men persecuted by reactionary crowds responding to propaganda produced by members of society who should have known better. It was seen as indicative of the underhand manner in which the war was sold to the population.

Another common motif in children's fiction was the loss or removal of one or more parents of the child protagonist. Often this was an inevitability of the narrative; young heroes could not have exciting adventures with their parents in tow. Again, a shift occurred throughout the twentieth century. In the novels of the war years, the hero

[70] Ibid., p. 46.
[71] Ian Lawrence, *Lord of the Nutcracker Men* (London, 2002), p. 10.
[72] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

would often live with their father, who would either die at the beginning of the story, or else become separated from their offspring somehow. The change in tone of war fiction across the twentieth century necessitated a reversal of roles. The teenage heroes of the war years needed to be removed from their parents because their adventures would take place on the Western Front, far from home. A greater concentration on the Home Front in later fiction meant that young protagonists remained at home with their mothers, though their fathers were often abroad, fighting in the war. In Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* for example, the Peaceful brothers live with their mother, their father having died several years prior to the storyline. In *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, the young boy hero has been sent to live with his aunt, though his mother works in the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich in London. Indeed, his mother dies in 1923 of sulphur poisoning, another tragic legacy of the Great War on the Home Front. Pat Mills also brought the dangers of being a munitions worker into *Charley's War*. Charley is home on leave soon after the huge explosion at Silvertown in London 1917 (figure 7). Zeppelin raids are frequent, and provoke fears of further devastation. Mills uses this setting to demonstrate the dangers faced on the Home Front, and the sacrifices being made by the working classes.

The effect of the Great War upon the family unit has been an important theme in children's books. This was perhaps one of the greatest differences between post-1945 works and their pre-war counterparts, and there are several reasons for this. Firstly, this marked a transition in the style of the First World War children's novel. During the First World War, most children's novels were adventure stories. In order that young protagonists should experience adventures, they first needed to be removed from the protection of the family unit.[73] If young literary heroes were not orphans or runaways, they were invariably separated from their loving family by some other means, eventually finding themselves in the thick of the action. On occasions child protagonists would even gain permission from their parents to visit the battlefields of Europe.[74] For the wartime writers of children's fiction, the Great War was the 'playing ground' in which young boys and men could establish their masculine identity. Late twentieth century fiction took an alternative view. Traditional notions of masculine identity were

[73] This was not a phenomenon specific to First World War boys' fiction, but a traditional technique of children's authors and can be seen in many works of fiction, from the escape of the Darlings to Neverland in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* to the evacuation of the Pevensie children in C.S. Lewis' stories set in Narnia.
[74] This occurs in Rowland Walker's *Oscar Danby V.C.* (1916), in which a troop of Boy Scouts are rewarded for their role in the capture of a German spy by being allowed to accompany their leader to the Western Front. Likewise, in Henry Charles Moore's *Under Jellicoe's Command* (1916) the young hero is given permission by his mother to continue with his adventures in helping to thwart an enemy agent.

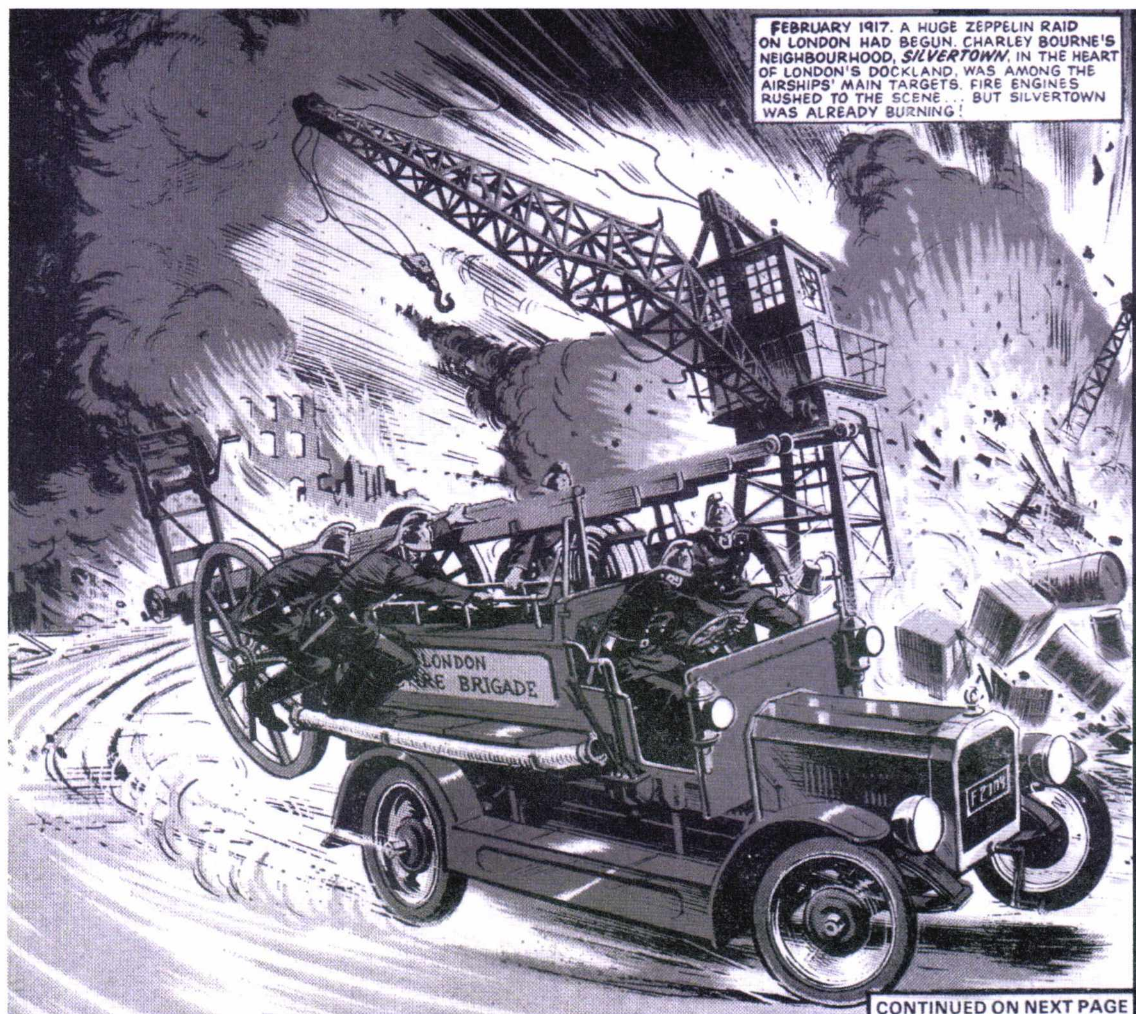

Figure 7 The bombing of Silvertown in Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*

undermined as the myths about the glory of war were shattered. The movement away from the depiction of the First World War as a great adventure shifted emphasis from young warriors to the family unit.

Often writers would attempt to demonstrate the effect of the war upon families and domestic life. The appearance of a fatherless family is a fairly common motif in children's fiction. Frequently this signifies the effect of the war taking away family members. James Riordan's *War Song*, for example, depicts the struggle of a family coping without a father. At first he is absent because of his military service in Mesopotamia, though this takes on a new dimension when, greatly traumatised by his experiences, he commits suicide. Similarly, in Iain Lawrence's *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, a young boy, Johnny, is sent to live with his aunt in the country. His father, a toymaker by trade, enlists in 1914 after the lowering of height restrictions, and his mother joins the workforce at the Woolwich arsenal. The novel follows Johnny as he comes to an awareness that the war is not as glorious and exciting as he had been led to believe. His father sends increasingly disturbing letters home, alongside toy soldiers that Johnny begins to feel are actually influencing the increasing carnage on the Western Front. The separation from his father is seen as crucial. At the beginning of the novel he relies on his father to explain why Britain is at war, so his absence leads to a great deal of confusion for Johnny. His suspicions about the supernatural consequences of his play are symptomatic of his confused state of mind brought about by the upheaval in his family life and the shattering of his assumptions about warfare. This growing awareness of his father's traumatic experiences challenges Johnny's views about war and adventure, adding to the uncertainty of life in wartime Britain.

A similar situation manifests itself in Patrick Cooper's novel *Wings to Fly* (2001). The story is related by Sarah, an elderly woman looking back on her childhood in the fishing village of Hallsands, Devon. Tales of childhood japes are interspersed with flash-forwards to the present day and Sarah's recollections which she relates to her granddaughter. Remembrance of the Great War has been present throughout the twentieth century; the effect of the war on the entire nation and the passing on of their memories to future generations is one reason for the intense emotional reaction attached to the First World War. In using a narrative framework that looks back on the events of 1916 and 1917 from a period at the end of the twentieth century Cooper demonstrates the poignancy of the Great War and its legacy. Sarah is still affected by events that had happened to her as a thirteen year old. Moreover, the setting of the novel on the Home Front adds another dimension to the understanding of the longevity of the war's

influence and how it shaped society; the soldiers in the trenches were not the only ones to carry the weight of their experiences throughout their lives. At one stage in the novel Sarah's granddaughter (also named Sarah) takes her on an outing to Plymouth, where Sarah visits a war memorial:

> The dead were listed by year, and then by rank:
>
> **Commander James Philpott**
> **Midshipman Philip Drewry**
> **Able Seaman Richard Addy**
> **Able Seaman John Barnes**
>
> The list went on and on and on. I got out my glasses to see it better. Sarah came up close.
> 'What are you looking at, Nan?' she asked.
> I pointed to a name:
>
> **Able Seaman Edward Coleman**
>
> 'That's your great grandfather. My father,' I said. She looked for a long while. We both did. Although there was nothing to look at, only a name stamped in brass.
> 'I never knew,' she said softly.[75]

In Cooper's novel, the process of memorialisation is achieved by the sharing of information between the generations. The familial link between grandmother and granddaughter provides the younger character with a metaphorical window into the events of 1914-18, making them more personal. In cinema and literature this technique is often used as a means of making past events relevant to modern characters whom the audience is (presumed to be) more able to identify with.[76] Because wars are seen to be events that should be remembered, the process of memorialisation becomes increasingly important. The two world wars are seen as events that each coming generation must be told about, to keep the memory alive, hence the establishment of an indelible familial link between the present and the past in many of these novels. Yet in *Wings to Fly* Patrick Cooper's intentions seem somewhat contradictory. His novel is about memory, and in his postscript he reveals a sense of sadness behind "an overwhelming feeling of

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[75] Patrick Cooper, *Wings to Fly* (London, 2001), p. 21.

[76] Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, for example, is set during and in the immediate aftermath of the D-Day landings, yet the narrative is framed by scenes set in a military cemetery, where the family of the now elderly Private Ryan gain some insight into his experiences during the Second World War. Similarly, in Ken Loach's Spanish Civil War set *Land and Freedom*, the story is framed by scenes set in late twentieth century Liverpool, in which a teenage girl discovers her grandfather's diaries in a shoebox after his death, and discovers for the first time that he had fought in the International Brigades.

things passing", but takes solace in the fact that "the story lives on".[77] Yet the authorial voice is in conflict with that of Sarah, the protagonist. As a ninety-five year old she remarks,

> The fireplace in my sitting room works, even though I hardly ever use it. I'll take out all those old papers and burn them in it later. I don't want anyone going through them after I've gone. Whatever they might mean to my great-grandchildren will not be what they mean to me. They are my memories, and they go with me.

She continues, "When the politicians wrote on the war memorials, '**Their names live forever**', they meant well, but they were wrong. They don't, and they shouldn't either. We all have our own time, and when it's over, it's over."[78]

Alan Garner's *The Aimer Gate* (1978) continues the trend of late twentieth century fiction by focusing largely on the home front and veteran family members. The short novel follows Robert, a young boy whose Uncle Charlie helps with the harvesting while on leave from the Western Front. The story itself is ambling and not much happens in terms of plot. The impact of the war, however, is subtly implied throughout the novel. Opening with Robert collecting a Boer war veteran, an amputee, the reader gets some sense of the child's reaction to war. The veteran, Faddock Allman engages in soldiers' banter with the young boy; as Robert carries him along on a cart, Allman shouts "Retreat! Forward! Charge!"[79] The veteran of a previous war is happy to engage with the young boy's idealised view of soldiering, though it must be noted that Allman has been both physically and mentally wounded by his experience. At Robert's house, Allman remains outside in his cart, despite the heat of the sun, because "he did his soldiering in Mesopolonica [sic]. He's used to it".[80]

The leg stumps of Faddock Allman are a physical representation of the horrors of war, though in some ways they contrast with his own attitudes. The character of Uncle Charlie adds to this complexity. Throughout the novel he refers to the war as 'work', and maintains a cheerful disposition. The darker side of his life is worked subtly in by the author, and is never fully clarified. Late in the novel Uncle Charlie demonstrates his skills with a rifle. While Allman sings, "You can go where you please, you can shin up trees... but you can't get away from the guns", Uncle Charlie's disposition changes:

[77] Cooper, *Wings to Fly*, p. 122.
[78] Ibid., p. 119.
[79] Alan Garner, *The Aimer Gate* (London, 1978), p. 10.
[80] Ibid., p. 55.

"His face had gone different. It was thinner, and Robert couldn't tell what was in the eyes".[81] Garner turns a rabbit shoot into a metaphor for the western front:

> But through the noise came another, a scream, a squeal, and, in terror, rabbits broke out of the last standing corn. All day they had worked inward from the scythes, and now they ran. Uncle Charlie watched. Over the field, between the kivvers, dodging, driven by noise, the rabbits went and their screaming pierced all noise... "When there's too many", said Uncle Charlie, "you can't tell them from poppies. They're all alike the same, you see".[82]

Again, a complex attitude towards the war is revealed. Violence and horror are seen in the rural community, and little difference is shown between hunting rabbits and shooting Germans. Yet this is by no means a depiction of the war as either positive or natural. As mentioned above, Charlie sees the war as 'work', a chore that needs to be done. Moreover, he is pessimistic about his chance of surviving. He amuses Charlie by talking of his trip back to the Western Front, via 'Funky Villas' and 'Plug Street'. He reveals, however, "I'll go a shorter way, meself. I reckon I just about shall. I might just go the aimer gate this time. I've done enough traipsing".[83]

Class

The theme of class is one that has dominated modern understandings of the Great War. The conflict has come to be seen as the ultimate indictment of the class system, as aristocratic generals callously sent thousands of men to almost certain deaths. The ordinary soldiery grudgingly obeyed because of their conditioning within the British class system that taught them to conform. Such representations are problematic, and therefore discussed at greater length elsewhere in this chapter. With a renewed focus on class differences in the trenches, it should come as little surprise that such ideas would also be explored in depictions of the Home Front. Novels and comics published after the Second World War, and particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, have attempted to demonstrate that the destructiveness of the class system in the trenches was merely the transportation of the basis of an unfair domestic society to the battlefields of France and Belgium. This was exemplified in Michael Morpurgo's novel *Private Peaceful*, one of the most successful children's books to deal with the First World War in the post-1945 era.

[81] Ibid., p. 73.
[82] Ibid., pp. 75-6.
[83] Ibid., p. 71.

Morpurgo's main anger was focused upon the military executions carried out during the First World War. However, in setting the scene for the shocking conclusion, Morpurgo contrasts the lives of British soldiers on the Western Front with their old lives back in England. As with many of the novels dealing with the Home Front, Morpurgo gives us a cosy portrait of rural life:

> When we weren't poaching the Colonel's fish or scrumping his apples... we would be roaming wild in the countryside... Sometimes we'd go down to the river bank and watch the kingfishers flash by, or we'd go swimming in Okemont Pool hung all around by willows, where the water was dark, deep and mysterious, and where no one ever came.[84]

Children's stories dealing with the Great War have been replete with this quaint rustic imagery. Tapping into an association of the countryside with goodness, gentleness and individualism, writers depicted benevolent communities espousing homely values, uninfected by the deficiencies of urban living. The impact of the Great War on the countryside was seen to be as devastating as the creeping industrialisation that had changed the face of Britain throughout the nineteenth century. Industrialisation represented change, which was to be resisted at all costs. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* paints a rosy picture of life in Britain before the war in his description of the idyllic summer of 1914:

> One lolled outside on a folding canvas chaise, or swam, or walked in the countryside. One read outdoors, went on picnics, had tea served from a white wicker table under the trees. You could leave your books on the table all night without fear of rain. Siegfried Sassoon was busy fox hunting and playing serious county cricket. Robert Graves went climbing in the Welsh mountains. Edmund Blunden took country walks near Oxford, read Classics and English, and refined his pastoral diction.[85]

When sketching this brief period of history in 1975, Fussell was acutely aware that British society as a whole was being misrepresented. His point, however, was that the cultural impact of the Great War upon the nation contributed to an idyllic picture of the Edwardian era that contrasted with and accentuated the suffering and carnage of the Western Front. It represented, said Fussell, a period in which "the word *machine* was not yet invariably coupled with the word *gun*".[86]

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[84] Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful*, pp. 43-4.
[85] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 14.
[86] Ibid., p. 14.

This traditional view of the countryside and its inhabitants was inherently connected to the British class system, shaping the understanding of society as presented in children's books. The historian Martin Wiener has drawn attention to the various forms of anti-urbanism that had been prevalent in British culture since at least the beginnings of the industrial revolution. Alongside a general fear brought about by the growth of industry and the insidious onset of change that came with this, Wiener identifies a second brand of antiurbanism, the romanticising of rural life by urban dwellers: "In the course of the nineteenth century, the social location of rural fantasies in the towns shifted. Attitudes that had first been most noticeable among the working classes, recently displaced from the country, appeared increasingly among the middle classes."[87] Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this 'rural myth' embedded itself deeper in the British psyche, consistently used to evoke a sense of identity that all areas of society could relate to. Nostalgic visions of rural life, no matter how far removed from reality, were a vital component to a sense of Englishness that was prominent in all areas of popular culture, from the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth at the beginning of the 1800s, to Sunday night television serials in the late twentieth century. During the Second World War the Ministry of Information used the rural myth to engender a sense of national identity at a time of general uncertainty. This was to become important in the depiction of rural communities in depictions of the Home Front during the Great War.

In *Wings to Fly* Patrick Cooper idealised the villagers of Hallsands, a small fishing community in Devon, notoriously swept away by severe floods in January, 1917. Hallsands was lost to the sea because of dredging offshore to provide for the expansion of the naval dockyard at Plymouth. As part of his research, Cooper listened to a recording of a fisherman, a child in Hallsands during the great storm, for an oral history project. He was a man with a "strong, clear, well-earthed voice", a man "who knows who he is, but has not lost his sense of wonder, or humour". This he deems to be representative of rural communities. But more importantly, the author sees the story of Hallsands as a having a meaning significant to modern society:

> What remains is the stories – and the story of the old village of Hallsands has never been more relevant: a man-made, wholly avoidable ecological disaster, its roots in greed, its victims a whole community. At a time of global warming, the message is obvious.[88]

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[87] Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 49.
[88] Cooper, *Wings to Fly*, p. 122.

This was a metaphor for society. The detached, urban-based government, the same government that had asked hundreds of thousands of young men to lay down their lives for King and country, was responsible for the destruction and displacement of an entire community. To accentuate the point, Cooper juxtaposes the tale of Hallsands with that of Julian, a flying ace horrifically injured, relating his story to a young village girl. This was a tale of rich versus poor, loftiness as opposed to common sense, greed against decency. This has also been the central conflict in so many of the novels and stories depicting the Great War. For many post-1945 writers, ordinary Britons during the war had as many enemies at home as they did abroad. In so many First World War-set novels and stories, the narrative's conflict comes from the class tensions between rich and poor.

One of the major differences between fiction produced during the Great War and the tales that followed in subsequent years was the use of hindsight to increase both tension and the emotional impact of the story. A story set, for example, in June 1916 gains significance to an audience aware of the outcome of the opening moves of the Somme campaign that began in the following month. Perhaps one of the best examples of this could be seen in two episodes of the popular science-fiction serial *Doctor Who* broadcast on 26 May and 2 June 2007. *Human Nature* and *The Family of Blood* were written by Paul Cornell, based upon his 1995 *Doctor Who* novel, also titled *Human Nature*.[89] The plot of the television episodes saw the extra-terrestrial Doctor assume human form to hide from a group of murderous aliens known as The Family. Robbed of his memory by the transformation, he becomes John Smith, a schoolteacher at a public school for boys in 1913. Given the role of time-travelling within the episodes, many of the characters, along with the audience, are aware of the events to come, and this is reflected in much of the dialogue. When, for example, some of the older boys make racist comments to the Doctor's companion, Martha, a maid remarks, "in a few years, boys like that might be running the country". "1913", Martha responds, "They might not".

The episodes also reinforce the idea of the Great War being a conflict in which old men sent young men to their deaths, often inspiring them in the forms of literature examined in the first chapter of this thesis. In one scene, the Doctor/John Smith is seen taking the boys for shooting practice with a Vickers machine gun. The headmaster arrives and encourages the boys: "Those targets are tribesmen from the Dark Continent".[90] Latimer, a particularly sensitive boy, expresses a sense of revulsion that they only have spears,

[89] Paul Cornell, *Human Nature* (London, 1995).
[90] *Doctor Who* 'Human Nature', broadcast 26/05/2007.

which is met with derision by the headmaster: "Oh, dear me. Latimer takes it upon himself to make us realise how wrong we all are. I hope, Latimer, that one day you may have a just and proper war in which to prove yourself".[91] To reinforce the foresight of the headmaster's statement, Latimer immediately has a premonitory vision of his future in the muddy trenches of World War One.

Throughout the two episodes the dialogue is permeated with indicators of the war to come. The school nurse, Joan Redfern, is dismayed by the military training of her young wards, a sense that has been exacerbated by the loss of her husband at the battle of Spion Kop[92]:

Joan Redfurn:	I find myself as part of that school watching boys learn how to kill.
Doctor/Smith:	Don't you think discipline is good for them?
Redfern:	Does it have to be such military discipline? If there's another war, those boys won't find it so amusing.
Doctor/Smith:	Well, Great Britain's at peace, long may it reign.[93]

In the same conversation Redfern remarks upon a diary that John Smith has been keeping of his dreams (in actuality these are memories of his life as the Doctor): "All those images of mud and wire. You told of a shadow. A shadow falling across the entire world".[94] Reminders of previous wars are strewn throughout the narrative. John Smith appears to be a History teacher, and reads passages to the boys about the Battle of Waterloo and Mafeking. At a village dance, a veteran of the Crimea collects money on the door. All this, however, seems superficial in the face of the war to come.

In the second episode of the two-part story, 'The Family of Blood', the monstrous aliens attack the school trying to find the Doctor. The boys, armed with the Vickers gun and rifles defend the school in scenes clearly designed to remind the audience of the future

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[91] Ibid.

[92] The battle of Spion Kop was a British defeat during the Boer War in 1900. The historian Thomas Pakenham has seen the battle as being an event of great importance for the future of the British army: "From their mistakes, humiliating as they were, Buller's nineteenth-century army – GOC, generals, officers and men – were all learning how to fight a twentieth century war". Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1992, first published 1979), p. 307. The images of the dead buried in their defensive trenches have a certain resonance with the casualties of the First World War, though whether Cornell intended for Redfern's back-story to have such significance is debateable. The character's loss, however, could certainly be linked to the widows of Great War soldiers after 1918.

[93] *Doctor Who* 'Human Nature'.

[94] Ibid. Such a statement is reminiscent of Sir Edward Grey's declaration that "The lights are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime". It may be reading too much into the plot to note that the conversation between Joan Redfern and Smith/The Doctor takes place as they pass a line of street lamps.

battles of the First World War. Indeed, even the evil aliens have a particular contempt for the men who would send young boys off to war. One of the aliens assumes the form of a schoolboy, Baines, and chastises the headmaster for purveying the link between war, honour and glory:

Headmaster:	"The school is armed."
Baines:	"All your little tin soldiers. But tell me, sir, will they thank you?"
Headmaster:	"I don't understand."
Baines:	"What do you know of history, sir? What do you know of next year?"
Headmaster:	"You're not making sense, Baines."
Baines:	"1914, sir. Because the Family has travelled far and wide looking for Mr Smith, and, oh, the things we have seen. War is coming. In foreign fields, war of the whole wide world with all your boys falling down in the mud. Do you think they will thank the man who taught them it was glorious?"

Naturally, the Doctor defeats the Family and resolves the storyline, though the final scenes reinforce the role of the Great War in setting the tone of the episodes. The story ends with the Doctor and his assistant Martha in 2007 attending a Remembrance Day service. Latimer, now an old man in a wheelchair catches sight of them and sheds tears as a hymn plays in the background. Then the credits roll.

Cornell had originally intended to set the story just before the outbreak of the Second World War, but decided that he was "fed up with Nazis".[95] He decided to make use of 1913 as a setting because "I wanted the war that was looming on the horizon during the book to be a genuinely meaningless one."[96] The novel certainly conveyed such notions. One of the major differences between the novel and the television adaptation could be seen in the character of Timothy Latimer (Timothy Dean in the novel). In the novel, Timothy was depicted as a conscientious objector enlisted as medical staff, rather than a conscript. The final chapter, as in the television episode, takes place at an annual reunion of members of the Norfolks in 1995; though as a former conscientious objector he is unable to talk to the other veterans whom he has been to school with. Timothy, now an old man, is an outcast somewhat; he still wears the pacifist's white poppy, because "it stands for what I am. I can't ignore that for their friendship".[97]

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[95] http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/ebooks/human_nature/notes.shtml, accessed 05/08/2009.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Cornell, *Human Nature*, p. 253.

As stated above, representations of the First World War were not as visible in the post-1945 period, particularly in works aimed at children. Many school textbooks of the 1950s argued the same points that had been made throughout the twenties and thirties. The subject all but disappeared from works aimed at children, though there were some exceptions. The Great War gradually returned to the theatre of public consciousness in the 1960s and gained momentum as a *cause célèbre* in the years that followed. Though tales about Britain in the era of the Great War were varied in their tone and setting, it was the brutality and costliness of the fighting, and the sheer scale of the military losses that inflamed the passions of writers and commentators from the 1960s onwards. It is therefore important to look at depictions of the fighting fronts as seen through the eyes of the post-Second World War generation.

The Fighting Fronts

It has been noted above that there were few representations of the First World War in the years that followed the end of the Second World War. The Great War receeded in the realms of popular culture until it was resurrected by the commemorations that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict. One literary work, however, did deal with the Western Front, albeit in a symbolic manner. That most infamous battle of 1916, the Somme, had a direct impact on one of the most widely-read and influential works of fiction of the late-twentieth century, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. A trilogy consisting of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of the King* (1955), Tolkien's epic can be seen as one of the most important works of the fantasy genre, the popularity of which soared after the publication of Tolkien's work. Set in a mythical land, Middle Earth, populated by elves, dragons and talking trees, *The Lord of the Rings* was seemingly far removed from the 'real world'. Yet, the influence of the Great War can certainly be seen, as Tolkien himself admitted, throughout the text. Tolkien claimed that the work was "neither allegorical or topical", refuting suggestions that the central conflict at the heart of his work was a metaphor for the battle against Nazi Germany:

> I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one

> resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.[98]

Tolkien acknowledged the role of the reader in the interpretation of his work, while denying any undue influence over them. If readers took the novels to be allegories for the Second World War, this was entirely a consequence of the recentness of that experience. Later in the century Pat Mills would make similar arguments regarding the topicality of *Charley's War* and the issues brought up within that particular tale. For Tolkien, "Its sources [were] things long before in my mind, or in some cases already written, and little or nothing in it was modified by the war that began in 1939 or its sequels".[99] Tolkien seemed offended by any suggestions of an allegorical slant to the stories, perhaps feeling that they undervalued the creative role of the author. Nevertheless, the influence of the First World War and his own experiences fighting in the battle of the Somme in 1916 were evident in the trilogy of novels, a fact which the author tentatively admitted.

Before the war, while at King Edward's School in Birmingam, Tolkien and his friends, Rob Gilson, Geoffrey Smith and Christopher Wiseman had formed what came to be known as the Tea Club and Barrovian Society (TCBS), so called because the primary purpose of the group was to drink tea and exchange drolleries at Barrow's stores.[100] Gilson was killed on the first day of the Somme, and in a letter to Smith dated 12 August 1916, Tolkien wrote of "the greatness which Rob has won".[101] Geoffrey Smith was also killed in the Great War, leaving only Tolkien and Wiseman (who had joined the Royal Navy) the only surviving members of the TCBS. In his introduction to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien remarked,

> One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression; but as the years go by it seems now often forgotten that to be caught in youth by 1914 was no less hideous an experience than to be involved in 1939 and the following years. By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead.[102]

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[98] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings – Part One: The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York, 1965, first published 1954), p.11.
[99] Ibid., p. 11.
[100] John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth* (London, 2003), p. 6.
[101] Humphrey Carpenter (ed.), *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 1981), p. 9.
[102] Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 12.

That Tolkien should be writing about the war in his introduction over forty years after the event clearly showed the impact those events had upon him. However, it is interesting to note the lack of bitterness in his words. Tolkien was middle-class, the son of an English bank manager in Bloemfontein, South Africa. His father died when he was four years old, and he returned to England with his mother. Despite certain hardships it could be argued that Tolkien came from the same class as the select group of war poets whose work is taken to represent British feeling about the war. Yet Tolkien does not appear to concur with their views. As Janet Brennan Croft has noted, "What Tolkien forged from his experiences differed greatly from the writing of 'canonical' World War I authors like Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon in both subject matter and tone, but he writes about many of the same themes they do."[103] Above all else *The Lord of the Rings* is a story of hope over adversity and belief in a cause, two of the major factors in the continuation of the war on behalf of soldiers of both sides. The greatest responsibility in the novel is given to the simplest characters, the hobbits, creatures that can perhaps be seen as representations of the stoical British 'Tommy'. Like the British Army between 1914 and 1918, the hobbits stoically persevere and ultimately succeed.

The influence of the Great War on *The Lord of the Rings* manifested itself in several different ways. In the second book of the series, *The Two Towers*, Tolkien drew upon the propaganda disseminated to the troops between 1914 and 1918. When the Riders of Rohan, allies of the stories heroes, defeat a group of enemies in battle, their prisoners are "amazed, for Saruman had told them that the men of Rohan were cruel and burned their captives alive".[104] In the same book, the reaction of Treebeard, another ally of the protagonists, to Saruman's destruction of the forest perhaps mirrored Tolkien's own memories of his response to the deaths of his friends: "Many of these trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost forever now".[105] In this sense Tolkien's reaction corroborates Remarque's attitude, although Tolkien has none of the latter's bitterness or need to attribute blame.

As has been noted above, Tolkien explicitly denied any allegorical aspects of his work. In a letter to Professor L. W. Forster in December, 1960, he wrote, "Personally I do not think that either war (and of course not the atomic bomb) had any influence upon either

[103] Janet Brennan Croft, *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 2004), p.14.
[104] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings – Part Two: The Two Towers* (London, 1970, first published 1954), p. 150.
[105] Ibid., p. 91.

the plot or the manner of its unfolding. Perhaps in landscape".[106] He admitted that, "The Dead Marshes and the approach to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme".[107] The language of the text seems to support this. In *The Two Towers*, the creature Gollum leads two of the protagonists, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee, across the Dead Marshes to the land of the enemy, Mordor:

> Sam tripped, catching his foot in some old root or tussock. He fell and came heavily on his hands, which sank deep into sticky ooze, so that his face was brought close to the surface of the dark mere. There was a faint hiss, a noisome smell went up, the lights flickered and danced and swirled. For a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass, through which he was peering. Wrenching his hands from the bog, he sprang back with a cry. 'There are dead things, dead faces in the water,' he said with horror. 'Dead faces!'[108]

Gollum responds to the hobbits,

> Yes, yes...All dead, all rotten. Elves and Men and Orcs. The Dead Marshes. There was a great battle long ago, yes, so they told him when Sméagol was young... It was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves, and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at the Black Gates. But the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping.[109]

Tolkien was to a certain extent mythologizing the war, creating a unique work from experiences familiar to those alive in the first half of the twentieth century. As he has stated, his work is not allegorical, at least not intentionally, although the author has little or no power over their work once they have finished writing. However, as Tolkien himself acknowledged, some of the landscapes of Middle-Earth bear resemblances to those of the Western Front between 1914 and 1918. Indeed, Tolkien even began constructing his artificial universe during his war service. In 1955 he wrote to the Houghton Mifflin company:

> The mythology (and associated languages) first began to take shape during the 1914-18 war. *The Fall of Gondolin* (and the birth of Eärendil) was written in hospital and on leave after surviving the battle of the Somme in 1916. The

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[106] Carpenter (ed.), *Letters of Tolkien*, p. 303.
[107] Ibid., p. 303.
[108] Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 235.
[109] Ibid, pp. 291-2.

> kernel of the mythology, the matter of *Lüthien Tinúviel* and *Beren*, arose from a small woodland glade filled with 'hemlocks' (or other white umbellifers) near Roos on the Holderness peninsula – to which I occasionally went when free from regimental duties while in the Humber Garrison in 1918.[110]

So the seeds of Middle Earth were sown in the trenches of the First World War, though they incorporated other influences. Tolkien was a renowned medieval scholar, and his knowledge of history and mythology also helped shape the stories. He brought his experience of the Great War to his tale, using it to add colour to a story steeped in tradition. In this sense, his work can be seen in a similar context to David Jones' epic poem *In Parenthesis*, which depicted the Great War using medieval and mythological imagery. Indeed, Stefan Goebel has argued that, "The language of medievalism in war commemoration presented an alternative vision of time which turned the trauma of war into a coherent narrative", a notion that has perhaps been overlooked by those who have interpreted the war largely through the works of more canonical writers.[111]

Tolkien's experience of the Great War had come at the Battle of the Somme. He had reached the Somme on 4 July, 1916 as a Signals Officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers, but by the end of October he has succumbed to trench fever and was eventually invalided back to Britain. In the post-1945 era the Battle of the Somme came to represent the 'futility' of the Great War. With 60,000 casualties including 20,000 dead on the first day of the battle, and an advancement of just seven miles in nearly five months of fighting, it is easy to see how these horrific events of 1916 were seared into the mind of the British public. Yet in 1916, the Somme was not a synonym for pointlessness and waste. Gary Sheffield has argued that the British people "grieved, squared their shoulders, and determined to continue the war", despite an acute awareness of the human cost.[112] Indeed it was in the decades after the end of the Second World War that the Battle of the Somme cemented itself in the popular imagination as a symbol of ineffectuality and military incompetence.

For those who were there, the memory of the Somme was pervasive. In a review of *The Golden Virgin* (1957), the critic Oliver Edwards noted that for novelist and Great War veteran Henry Williamson "it is always July 1, 1916, that day of doom and destiny, and his capacity to think back to it is astonishing... Wherever Mr Williamson is, there is the

[110] Carpenter (ed.), *Letters of Tolkien*, p. 221.
[111] Goebel, *Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 29.
[112] Sheffield, *The Somme*, p. 153.

chalk country of the Somme"[113]. That those who survived the battle of the Somme should be forever affected in some way by their experience is perhaps unsurprising. Yet in the post-war period, the battle came to represent so much more. It became a metaphor for the futility of war, and frequently recurred as the setting for Great War tales. Importantly, the opening episodes of *Charley's War* take place on the battlefield of the Somme, a name synonymous in the British popular consciousness with the conflict of 1914-18. It is the first day of the Somme that has implanted itself in the psyche of the public. John Terraine writes, "The literature of 1 July 1916 is endless. Salutary at first, a proper corrective to the streams of propaganda clap-trap about 'laughing heroes' and 'the Great Adventure' which had previously gushed forth, after a time it developed into a mischievous mythology".[114] Indeed, Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day of the Somme* was one of the sources studied by Mills in his research for *Charley's War*.[115] However, as Terraine notes, "1 July was a freak", whereas 2 July 1916 was the day "the British Army decided to 'make', not 'break', to its eternal honour".[116] While emphasising the horror of the first day of the battle, the story continues well beyond this point, deviating from the traditional view. It can be seen in the Somme story that the realism, or at least the adult themes and imagery of *Charley's War* distance it from other war comics. Major characters die unexpectedly in the attack, while others suffer visibly from mental anguish. There is a sense that no character is safe in the conflict, creating a degree of tension lacking in the comic's contemporaries.

The idea of the unexpected is an important part of *Charley's War*. Mills demonstrates that war is not conventional. One of the techniques employed by Mills is that of subverting stereotypes. The character of 'Mad' Mick at first appears to conform to the Irish stereotype; he has a penchant for rum, and a tendency to "lose me temper sometimes!"[117] However, another picture of him knitting "to keep my hands busy" counters this image.[118] Likewise, Charley's first adventure sees him encountering a German sniper who takes pot shots at him as he tries to rescue a British runner. Bedecked in sinister body armour, the sniper is the epitome of the fervent Hun, who enjoys killing. However, when he returns to his own dug-out, it is seen that he is an outsider, contrary to atrocity propaganda. His comrades despise him: "Ach, you make me sick Kurt. The rest of us fight for the Fatherland – but we do not take pleasure in

[113] *The Times*, 19/09/1957 p. 13.
[114] Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire* (London, 1981), p. 111-2.
[115] Email from Pat Mills to David Budgen, 07/04/2004.
[116] Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire*, p. 112.
[117] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One*, p. 20.
[118] Ibid., p. 20.

death like you". He remonstrates, "Bah! You Saxons are weak. But we Prussians are strong! We are like the Teuton knights of old. We will crush all who stand in our way – until Germany rules the world", but is met with the response, "What a bore you are, Kurt! Pipe down!" [119] The stereotypical fanatical German is shown, and then immediately discredited as a universal figure. The sniper's Prussian heritage is also important. While demonstrating that the hitherto unseen enemy is just as human as the typical Allied soldier Mills, at the same time draws upon fears of Prussianism that had been dominant in the invasion stories published in the first decade of the twentieth century, and identified the enemy to the British people. Again, traditional images sat alongside the modern, conflicting with and complementing each other.

The figure of the sniper in his suit of armour exemplifies this connection between the medieval and the modern. Such imagery appealed to an audience versed in representations of the middle ages and the chivalric tradition, as well as the *Star Wars* generation. Pictures of men, horses, and even dogs in gas masks, while historically accurate, were also ultramodern. But as Mills pointed out, "World War One WAS a science fiction war… The truth is. We are already living in a post holocaust/post science fiction war world".[120] The technology of the First World War was the same technology that had been imagined in the previous decades by science-fiction writers such as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. The historian John Terraine remarked upon the appearance of modern weaponry, "the 'Big Berthas' and the 'Emmas' were such impressive-looking engine of destruction that they acquired almost a science-fiction aura". [121] New technology characterised the war; traditional themes of fiction merged with contemporary technological advances. In the Great War, the tank, the submarine, the aeroplane and poison gas were all new, or at least recent additions to the theatre of conflict. Such striking imagery, and its association with the modern, added to the significance of *Charley's War* in the mind of the young reader.

As has been stated before, the survival of major characters was not guaranteed in *Charley's War*. This is seen in the death of Ginger, one of Charley's friends in the early stories, who is killed suddenly by a shell. Charley collects his remains in a bag. An officer sympathises, "I'm sorry, soldier. Your friend Ginger, must have been a brave chap for you to want to bury him specially". Charley replies, "Not really, sir. Most of

[119] Ibid., p. 22.
[120] Email From Pat Mills to David Budgen, 23/02/2004.
[121] John Terraine, *White Heat: The New Warfare 1914-18* (London, 1992, first published 1982), p. 98.

the time, Ginger was scared stiff. But he was my mate, sir".[122] It was rare for a children's comic to show the suddenness and sheer unexpectedness of death. It was also rare for a war story to emphasise a lack of heroism. Mills tries to emphasise that war is not a great adventure, played out by heroes; it is gruesome, and gory, and carried out by ordinary people.

Later, the ghost of Ginger, who at first appears as a skeletal grim reaper figure, clothed in the union jack and sinisterly uttering, "Your country needs you", visits Charley. This scene is reminiscent of a poster from the Vietnam War, with a skeleton dressed as Uncle Sam in the stars and stripes. In *Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves also recalled seeing the ghost of a former comrade:

> At Béthune, I saw the ghost of a young man named Private Challoner, who had been at Lancaster with me, and again in 'F' Company at Wrexham. When he went out with a draft to join the First Battalion, he shook my hand and said: 'I'll meet you again in France, sir.' In June he passed by our 'C' Company billet, where we were just having a special dinner to celebrate our safe return from Cuinchy... Private Challoner looked in at the window, saluted, and passed on. I could not mistake him, or the cap-badge he wore; yet no Royal Welch battalion was billeted within miles of Béthune at the time. I jumped up, looked out of the window, and saw nothing except a fag-end smoking on the pavement. Challoner had been killed at Festubert in May.[123]

The spectre of Ginger, while not really expressing literal realism, nevertheless reflects a fascination with the supernatural and the spiritual that can be seen in such examples as the Angel of Mons myth, or the Crucified Canadian.[124] It is important that *Charley's War* looks at actual events, in a contemporary manner, while still ably demonstrating Edwardian sensibilities.

The legacy of the Great War in the popular BBC television series *Doctor Who* has already been discussed in this chapter. However, it has twice been used as a setting since its inception in 1963. In 1969, for the final outing of Patrick Troughton in the role of the Doctor, the first three episodes of *The War Games* were seemingly set in the trenches. *The War Games*, is interesting, not only because of its representation of the Western Front, but also because of the reception of modern audiences, particularly those who looked back on the episodes at the end of the century, having been exposed to other representations of the war in the intervening period. The plot of *The War Games* revolves around a plot by an evil Time Lord to kidnap human soldiers to fight in various

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[122] *Battle*, 20/10/1979.
[123] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Harmondsworth, 1967, first published 1929), p. 102.
[124] See Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 115-7.

time zones (including, for example, the American Civil War and the Napoleonic Wars, as well as Ancient Rome) as training for the creation of a galactic army.[125] Yet, in the first three episodes it is assumed that the Doctor and his assistants have arrived mid-battle in the First World War.

The Great War setting was important for several reasons. Firstly, the series was dealing with a conflict that was particularly bloody and very costly in terms of human life. Indeed, James Chapman has suggested that this was a controversial move at the time, with letters being written to the BBC complaining about the effect the story would have given the predominance of children amongst the series' audience.[126] Previous chapters have demonstrated that different interpretations of the First World War competed alongside each other throughout the twentieth century. In the case of some of the reaction against *The War Games*, it can be seen that there was a marked difference between approaches to the First World War in the 1960s, when the modern consensus was still jostling for position as the true interpretation, and later in the century when authors felt it vital that children should learn about such horrific events. Indeed, *The War Games* contains many elements that would come to define the interpretation of the war later in the century, from callous commanders in chateaus miles behind the front line, to the Doctor's near-demise at the hands of a firing squad.

Later reactions to *The War Games* have been indicative of the shift in the understanding of the Great War. Moreover, these understandings come from wholly modern sources, and demonstrate an unawareness of some of the works that defined the Great War in the years before 1945. The comprehensive *Doctor Who* website *Outpost Gallifrey* contains several modern reviews of the *The War Games*, several of which comment upon the familiarity of the First World War setting. One reviewer, Douglas Westwood observed: "[F]ans of Blackadder Goes Forth will see very definite [sic] similarities between that and episodes 1-3 of the War Games.....the chataeu [sic], the trenches, the captain, the general, the adjudant [sic] with his form obsession....I guess Ben Elton was a DW fan as a child."[127] In a similar vein, Paul Clarke suggested that,

> [T]here are, inevitably, some very stereotypical characters on display, most notably Arturo Villar. I also never cease to find it unintentionally hilarious when

[125] James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who* (London, 2006), pp. 72-3.
[126] Chapman quotes an article that appeared in the *Morning Star* suggesting that "this wholesale killing of people is unsuitable, to say the least". Ann Lawrence quoted in Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS*, p. 73.
[127] http://www.gallifreyone.com/review.php?id=zz, accessed 05/08/08.

> von Weich first appears, complete with bald head, monocle, and dueling scar. Possibly the aliens have been watching *Blackadder Goes Forth*...[128]

Eddy Wolverson felt that the setting of the First World War was a powerful one:

> [W]hat could be better than the TARDIS materialising in the middle of no-man's-land on a Great War battlefront in France? It provides so many wonderful opportunities for storytelling (and believe me, in ten episodes Dicks and Hulke exploit them all), and due its predominantly 'historic' setting the production value also seems higher than that of contemporary stories.[129]

Again, however, he returns to the same point of reference as the other reviewers: "The sets of the trenches and the chateau are beautifully created; were it not for them being shot in black and white there would be nothing to distinguish them from programmes like *Blackadder Goes Forth*, made almost twenty years later!"[130] The cultural reference for these reviewers was the popular BBC comedy series *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton. They demonstrate little awareness of the influences behind the Blackadder series. Dan Todman has noted the influence of *Oh! What a Lovely War* on the popular sit-com, a production contemporary to Troughton's Doctor Who adventure, connecting it to a series of cultural works that appeared in the 1960s and gained greater resonance as the century continued.[131] There was, however, an earlier work that could be seen as an influence on *Blackadder Goes Forth.* R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* (1928) was, like Curtis and Elton's creation, set in a dugout on the Western Front.[132] Though it may not have had the same satirical tone as productions that followed, it must be assumed that if modern reviewers recognised elements of Blackadder in a production made forty years ago, then it is more than likely that the hugely successful *Journey's End* and other sources of its ilk had been the true source of influence. Regardless of its heritage, the modern reactions to *The War Games* suggest an understanding of the Great War emanating from post-Second World War sources.

The Somme was not the only battleground covered. Michael Foreman's *War Game*, like Ian Lawrence's *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, looked at the first months of the war up to

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Todman, *The Great War*, p.116. Alongside *Oh! What a Lovely War*, Todman cites A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War: An Illustrated History* as sources that "came to dominate subsequent opinion because of their ubiquity". Ibid., p. 145.
[132] Indeed, a year before *Blackadder Goes Forth* was broadcast, Jeremy Northam and Timothy Spall had appeared in a television production of *Journey's End.*

the Christmas truce of 1914. Here was yet another signifier of the callousness of the trenches. If the British and the Germans could get along in 1914, why could they not do this for the rest of the conflict? Why did the First World War not end there? These are the questions that have dominated the understanding of the conflict. These interpretations have been critically acclaimed as well. *War Game* was made into an animated film in 2001, with Kate Winslet providing the voice of the protagonist's mother. It was not the only novel to be successfully adapted for performance; *Private Peaceful*, which had been nominated for the prestigious Whitbread Award, was turned into a touring play in 2006, and was critically acclaimed. Similarly, Morpurgo's *War Horse* was also dramatised as a play, and performed at the National Theatre in London throughout 2008-9.

<u>Other Theatres</u>

The primary Great War setting for children's novels and stories was the Western Front and the Somme offensive of 1916 in particular. Tales dealing with other theatres of conflict were rare. Elyne Mitchell wrote *Light Horse to Damascus* (1981), one of the few exceptions. Mitchell, an Australian, was a respected children's author who had written the popular *Silver Brumby* novels about horses in the Snowy Mountains of her homeland. Her reason for writing about the Australian Light Horse in the First World War was personal. Mitchell's father was General Sir Harry Chauvel, who had commanded the ANZAC Mounted Division Light Horse during the Great War, and the book was dedicated to his memory. Bearing some similarity to her other equine tales, the novel follows a young man, Dick, and his horse Karloo, who sign up for the Australian Light Horsemen. Their adventures begin with their deployment to Egypt in November, 1914, and Mitchell follows them through to the capture of Damascus in October, 1918. Mid-way through the novel, Mitchell included an account of the famous capture of the wells at Beersheba on 31 October, 1917.[133]

Mitchell's account reinforced notion that the ANZACS were hindered as much by the British High Command as they were the enemy: "This was the second Battle of Gaza,

[133] The attack on Beersheba was an important event in Australian military history, and was dramatised twice in the 1980s and '90s. *The Lighthorsemen* (Simon Wincer, 1988), was a dramatic account of the Australian mounted infantry's assault on Beersheba, climaxing in a heroic charge against the Turkish guns. Stylistically, it was reminiscent of older imperial adventures or westerns. Curiously, the film was virtually remade as an episode in the *Young Indiana Jones* series, *Daredevils of the Desert* (1992). Wincer returned to direct, as did several of the original cast members. Visually, the two productions were nearly identical, with the exception of a romantic subplot added to the Indiana Jones adventure.

undertaken by the British Commander, even though both General Chetwode and General Chauvel had opposed his plan. This Battle of Gaza, like the first, was a grim defeat".[134] This had been a common motif in Australian perceptions of the conflict since the end of the war and continued in the 1980s. Peter Weir's hugely successful film *Gallipoli* (1981), for example, showed the poor Anzac to be defeated, not only by the Turks, but also by the incompetence of the British. Likewise, *Anzacs* (1985), an Australian television series broadcast in Britain in 1987, follows a group of Australian soldiers from the ill-fated landings at Gallipoli to the armistice in 1918. The series was released on DVD in Australia in 2003. The sleeve notes told the following story:

> In 1918, when the French army was in a semi-mutinous state and the British armies were faltering under the pressure of a massive German attack, the Australian Imperial Force did two things for which they should always be remembered. In April they stopped the German offensive and saved France and three months later they launched their own attack and broke the German army so completely that it never stopped retreating until the last day of the war. For a long moment, Australians stepped decisively onto the world stage and altered the cast of European history.[135]

The note concludes, "The A.I.F., within a year of having been one of the greatest small armies ever raised in the history of mankind, simply disappeared. Its story disappeared with it". A reader of these notes would assume that there has been some sort of underhand conspiracy, an attempt to write Australia out of the war. The reverse was true. The Anzac myth had been promoted to such an extent that the official history of the war had to be re-written to support this view. Cecil Aspinall Oglander, writer of the official history of the Gallipoli campaign recalled, "This chapter was a difficult one to write because the truth about the Australians had never been told and in its place a myth had sprung up that the Anzac troops did magnificently against the odds".[136] Aspinall-Oglander changed his account as a direct result of a complaint from the Australian High Commission.[137]

Aside from these few examples, very little attention was paid to events away from the Western Front. The other theatres of war did not fit the concept modern writers had of the conflict. This was a reversal of attitudes during the First World War. In chapter one it was shown that writers used the sideshows for various reasons, one being the similarity between campaigns in those areas of the war and pre-existing knowledge of

[134] Elyne Mitchell, *Light Horse to Damascus* (London, 1971), p. 102.
[135] Sleeve notes to *Anzacs* DVD, 2003.
[136] Cecil Aspinall-Oglander quoted in Andrew Green, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories, 1915-1948* (London, 2003), p. 112.
[137] Ibid., p. 113.

imperial conflicts. Yet in the period after the Second World War, writers focused almost entirely on the Western Front. The sideshows were too much like conventional warfare to successfully bolster the messages writers were trying to convey. It is rather telling that Elyne Mitchell is an Australian, a nation who's identity was forged more in the sideshows than Britain's had been.

Modern Values and the Great War

Children's books and stories about the First World War have not just concentrated on attempting to accurately convey the reality of life in those times. Authors have been focused upon giving young readers what they deem to be a truthful understanding of the conflict, but they also strongly reflected the societal attitudes of the era in which they were writing. British society had change radically in the years after the Second World War. Modern approaches to the issues of class and gender underpinned the descriptions of both the home and fighting fronts during the Great War; the changing reflections on the subject as depicted in children's fiction clearly demonstrated a shift in societal attitudes throughout British history since the First World War. As has been stated earlier in this thesis, the appearance of working class characters during the war and the following decades had often been more in keeping with the portrayal of subjects of the empire than of fellow Britons. In Brereton's *With Allenby in Palestine* (1919), for example, the cockney dialect of the protagonist's batman is treated almost as a foreign language that needs to be translated by a more worldly-wise officer. One only needed to look at the works of a post-Second World War author such as Enid Blyton to see that issues of snobbery and xenophobia, the very attitudes condemned by George Orwell in his famous treatise on the boys' story papers, were still prominent in children's fiction. Yet, in the latter half of the twentieth century, this did not really apply to the First World War. The jingoism and sense of superiority articulated in earlier works of fiction was to some extent reversed.

Over time, the conflict came to be presented largely in terms of upper-class generals callously sending thousands of men to their almost certain deaths, at least in popular culture and some history books. In one sense this was the ultimate indictment of the British class system, with the working classes sacrificing their lives for the benefit of imperialists and profiteers.[138] Perhaps more importantly, this was also a celebration of

[138] On the contrary, Alexander Watson has argued that "On both sides most joined the army with the simple motive of defending their homes and loved ones from an enemy they were told was ruthless. Combat did little to change this view; the wasted landscape of no-man's-land and the

the direction in which modern British society had moved. The First World War was a demonstration of what Britain had moved away from. As had happened so often throughout their history, the British were engaging in a complicated dialogue between past and present. Authors were applying a late-twentieth century mindset to events experienced several generations earlier; they were mythologized to explain the journey of the British people, and also to draw attention to the continued inequalities of the class system, particularly during the seventies and eighties. After the resurgence in interest in the Great War during the 1960s, modern children's writers began to readdress the issue throughout a period of social and political turmoil, and it was only natural that the First World War would be re-examined through the lens of modern society and its ills.

For modern writers, the ordinary soldiery grudgingly obeyed because of their conditioning within the British class system they were upholding and that had taught them to conform, not to mention the threat of capital punishment if they did not obey the rules. Such representations are problematic. With this renewed focus on class differences in the trenches, it should come as little surprise that such ideas would also be explored in depictions of the Home Front. Novels and comics published after the Second World War, and particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, attempted to demonstrate that the destructiveness of the class system in the trenches was merely the transportation of the basis of an unfair domestic society to the battlefields of France and Belgium. Furthermore, issues of class were frequently associated with differences between rural and urban society, and the notion of inherent goodness being the defining characteristic of the rural poor. This rather conservative view of Britain was exemplified in Michael Morpurgo's novel *Private Peaceful*, one of the most successful children's books to deal with the First World War in the post-1945 era.

The popular and long-established British comic *Victor's* contribution to the legacy of the First World War came in the adventures of Cadman, the Fighting Coward. These variations on George MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman* stories told the tale of a cowardly officer who was frequently hailed for his bravery after being aided by his considerably more capable, yet lower-class batman. The Cadman stories associated cowardice with other negative character traits such as greed and selfishness, and made it clear that these

threat to personal safety presented by the men opposite did nothing except confirm that the enemy was highly dangerous". Though there was anger at the perception of profiteering, and a combination of horror and fatigue at the experience of the fighting fronts, the men kept fighting to protect their families at home, and to justify the sacrifices already made. Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 83-4.

were linked to the protagonist's class background. In this sense the depiction of cowardice was contemporary to the attitudes of the time, the seventies and eighties. This is best depicted in a 1981 story. Having accidentally destroyed an enemy field gun while attempting to retreat, the protagonists are rewarded with a mission in England to test a new tank. The differences between Tom and Cadman are emphasised strongly. On a train Cadman travels first class while Tom sits in the third class compartment; Tom lives in a rundown cottage (suitable perhaps for Wordsworth's Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman) with his widowed mother and sisters, while Cadman returns to a manor house where his father worries about "wear and tear on my cigars and wine cellar".[139] Later in the story, Cadman's attempts to steal some money lead him to being blackmailed by a German spy. Tom is on hand to extricate him from the situation, at the same time blackmailing the Major into paying for repairs to his mother's cottage. Cadman is both a traditional and modern figure, and thereby his presentation is conflicting. He is simultaneously a representation of the cowardice despised in British imperialist ideology, and the epitome of the modern upper class twit.

This image, while not wholly modern, had gained resonance in the various class conflicts that dominated Britain throughout the twentieth century, and was seen as the basis behind the enormous casualties on the Western Front. It was also intrinsically linked to elements of social unrest in the 1970s and '80s, although this is more relevant to *Charley's War* than *Cadman*. Moreover, this notion had resonance with the readers. An anonymous contributor to a New Zealand website offering business advice and tips about behaviour in the workplace drew heavily from the Cadman stories for an article on disruptive influences in the workplace. "Anyone who has worked in an organisation of any size", they wrote, "will almost certainly be able to identify someone from personal experience who acts like a "Cadman"."[140] Furthermore, they fully accepted that Cadman's cowardice was simply a representation of the British class system at the time.

In *Charley's War*, when Charley returns home on leave, the reader is introduced to Oiley again, having gained a considerable amount of weight; he has literally grown fat on the misery of others, charging people to use his bomb shelter and dealing in goods washed up from allied shipping after u-boat attacks. Oiley is just one of the representations of the gulf between civilians and soldiers. Mills and Colquhoun show a group of 'rich people' on a tour of the bombsites in the east end of London, in March 1918. From their motorcar, which further illustrates their difference, they make insensitive comments:

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[139] *Victor Book for Boys 1981*, p. 105.
[140] http://www.workplacesolutions.co.nz/cadman.htm, accessed 05/08/2008.

> Isn't that little slum boy sweet? He's wearing his father's cut-down trousers! But **where** is the bomb damage? I know... Let's ask a passing peasant![141]

Charley denounces them as "ghouls" and is met with the response, "No manners! That's the trouble with these common types!"[142] While these characters are blatant stereotypes, the story nevertheless reveals the divisions caused by the experience of war, between civilians and soldiers, and upper and lower classes. For example, Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries note the uproar caused by the publication of an article, 'How they Starve at the Ritz', in the socialist newspaper *The Herald*. A reporter claimed to have been able to order "a six-course meal including four rolls, hors d'oeuvre, smoked salmon, a wide range of soups, fish, meat entrées and desserts and unlimited servings or cream and cheese".[143] The article became a leaflet, and was sent to factories around the country, reinforcing the idea of a discrimination against the poorer areas of society.

Charley's attitude to the 'sight-seers' reflects the gulf between soldiers and civilians: strangers or family. Private Norman Demuth recalled:

> One thing I found when I eventually got home was that my father and my mother didn't seem in the least interested in what had happened. They hadn't any conception of what it was like, and on occasions when I did talk about it, my father would argue points of fact that he couldn't possibly have known about because he wasn't there. I think his was probably the approach of the public at large. They didn't know – how could they?[144]

Likewise, Charles Carrington reflected, "One got annoyed by the attempts of well-meaning people to sympathise, which only reflected the fact that they didn't really understand at all".[145] Mills attempts to demonstrate this societal schism, using Charley as a literary tool, the author's voice attacking the establishment. With Charley placed at the centre of the story, and having him experience the events and circumstances of the Great War, on all fronts, the stories require an attention to detail generally unseen in war comics. While a work primarily of fiction, Mills and Colquhoun drew on a variety of sources to add an extra dimension to *Charley's War*; while many of the Second World War stories, such as *Captain Hurricane*, used the setting merely as a hook upon which to

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[141] *Battle Action Force*, 07/01/1984.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front* (London, 2004), p. 216.
[144] Private Norman Demuth quoted in Max Arthur (ed.) *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (London, 2002), p. 169.
[145] Captain Charles Carrington in ibid., p 169.

hang generic action sequences and explosions, *Charley's War* can be seen as a story that was attempting to instil in children something other than what Graham Dawson describes as "a popular masculine pleasure-culture of war".[146] This 'realism' is an important factor in the story's role as not just entertainment, but a tool of education, albeit one that would probably not find itself in the national curriculum.

The theme of class was also at the heart of Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*, although, in contrast to some of the other stories about the Great War, Mills' protagonist was an urban-dweller, a teenage from the East End of London. The sixteen-year-old Charley Bourne is immediately introduced as a poorly educated, very naïve working class figure. Reflecting the notion of a society keeping those at the bottom down, he is barely literate, innumerate, and unable to tell left from right.[147] His sister has a "proper glamorous job… usherette in the new picture palace", while Charley himself dreams of a "holliday [sic] down to Margate".[148] Charley's class is an important factor in the story. Writing of the researching of *Charley's War*, Pat Mills stated, "I only know of four WW1 books actually written by working-class soldiers. Surprising when one considers that they were the war's main victims".[149] Indeed, throughout the stories Charley is more a victim of the class system rather than the war itself.

Initially, Charley is teased by his comrades because of his naivety and lack of sophistication. However, the true enemy is revealed in the day before the first attack on the Somme. An overweight General sporting a monocle addresses the troops. His words, "By Gad, How I envy you men on your way to glory", echo those of the Commanding Officer to Rupert Ray in Ernest Raymond's *Tell England: A Study in a Generation* (1922). However, in *Charley's War* the General's words are not accepted at face value. When Charley's friend Ginger retorts, "It's all right for you, mate! You won't be there! I'll swop [sic] places with yer any day"; the General's face contorts in anger as his monocle is sent flying.[150] Ginger has openly questioned the class roles of society, although the thousands of soldiers surrounding him make his rebellion anonymous. At this stage in the story the reader is also introduced to Charley's nemesis, Lieutenant Snell.

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[146] Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.4.
[147] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One*, pp 7-8.
[148] Ibid., p. 11-7.
[149] Ibid., p. 4.
[150] Ibid., p. 42.

The officer class is seen as the true enemy of the ordinary soldiery during the Great War. In the build up to the attack on the Somme, while the troops complain about their bully beef, Snell and the other officers eat caviar and drink champagne.[151] This was a far cry from the depiction of officers during the Great War. In Brereton's *Under Haig in Flanders*, for example, a Sergeant Higgins owns a pub in Somerset, and regales his customers with war stories:

> "There's officers and officers", he would tell the village folk, who visited his bar of an evening and drank a glass of his ale. "One gets to be able to tell between them. Some's fair to middling, some are good, and others very good. There ain't many that you could call less than that. No; on the whole, the army attracts the best of our young gentlefolk".[152]

This was not a description that Charley Bourne would have recognised. During the attack on the Somme, the character Toots becomes entangled in barbed wire, becoming an open target for the German machine guns. Toots' last words again signify who the real enemy is: "The generals said the wire wasn't going to be here! The generals lied! They Liiiiiiiiiied!"[153] Clearly the blame for the tragedy of the first day of the Somme lies entirely with stubborn, ignorant, callous, upper class generals. In this way *Charley's War* conforms to the view of the war that had been firmly established since the 1960s through such diverse sources as Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* and the play *Oh! What a Lovely War*, both of which had been partially inspired by the works of Basil Liddell Hart.[154]

The vilification of the officer class is explicit in a scene in which Snell visits the battalion headquarters. Charley has played a practical joke on his superior, resulting in a brown stain on his trousers. When he enters the officer's mess, a Colonel is stating, "War can be such a bore! I've brought my foxhound pack over! I thought of organising an officer's hunt this weekend!"[155] Another officer, on seeing Snell remarks, "I saaay! Aaaawfully bad form... chap turning up in the mess like thaaat!"[156] The officers are caricatures; more relevant to a perception rather than the reality of the class system, and certainly unrelated to the officer's of 1917, the year in which this particular story is set.

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[151] Ibid., p. 43.
[152] Captain F.S. Brereton, *Under Haig in Flanders: A Story of Vimy, Messines and Ypres* (London, 1917), p. 10.
[153] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One*, p. 51.
[154] Alex Danchev, *Alchemist of War: The Life of Basil Liddell Hart* (London, 1999), p. 76.
[155] *Battle*, 05/09/1981.
[156] Ibid.

Conversely, there are some positive depictions of officers, yet they eventually serve to illustrate the aloofness and incompetence of the generals. Lieutenant Thomas is Charley's first commander during the Somme offensive. In a raiding party prior to the battle, he sees the depth of the German fortifications:

> How can I tell the men the truth – without being court-martialled...? I saw the German dug-outs. They're so deep, they'll survive the shelling. But the Generals will never listen. And when I lead my men 'over the top' – It's they who will be massacred by German machine-guns! You fools... You poor, blind, brave fools! When the Battle of the Somme begins - it's you who will die on the poppy fields of France![157]

However, Thomas' realisation of the senselessness of the Somme offensive is in reality a demonstration of the benefits of hindsight and a reiteration of what John Terraine calls the 'futility myth'.[158] It is also a means of heightening the tension in the prelude to the attack. Later Thomas is court-martialled for disobeying orders in order to save the lives of his men, and sentenced to death (figure 8).[159] Charley is chosen to be a member of the firing squad, but refuses, and is given twenty-eight days field punishment Number One.[160] Michael Morpurgo created a similar character in the novel *War Horse* (1982). Captain Nicholls is none too complementary about his fellow officers: "None of them in there seem to have heard of machine-guns and artillery. I tell you, Joey, one machine-gun operated right could wipe out an entire squadron of the best cavalry in the world".[161] Nicholls is proved right when he is killed in a cavalry charge.[162] Both Mills and Morpurgo depict a divided army, which turns on its own highly capable men rather than admit the mistakes, or blasé attitude towards casualties, of the high command. Furthermore, it is suggested that sadistic officers were cancelling out decent, caring counterparts. Yet, these good officers' voices are inherently modern. They represent the author's own views, with many decades to separate them.

The Great War and the inter-war years were reinvented from a modern perspective. The issue of class in *Charley's War* is not just a reflection of the perceived inequalities of the Edwardian period; the stories also reflect the problems of 1970s and '80s Britain. The publication of Mills and Colquhoun's long-running story in 1979 coincided with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government sweeping to power in May of the same

[157] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One*, p. 27.
[158] Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire*, p. 205.
[159] *Battle*, 08/09/1979.
[160] The soldier would be tied to a wagon wheel, with the hub of the wheel in their back, for several hours a day. See Arthur (ed.) *Forgotten Voices*, p. 69.
[161] Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse* (London, 2002, first published 1982), p. 38.
[162] Ibid., p. 52-3.

Figure 8 The execution of Lieutenant Thomas, a good officer who recognises the folly of the attack on the Somme, in Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*

year. For many, the subsequent years were ones of upheaval, as Britain's infrastructure was radically altered. High unemployment alongside industrial tensions placed the notion of class at the centre of the conflict. There was an ideological and at times physical clash between those at the top, who saw the unemployed as a burden, unwilling rather than unable to help themselves, and their opponents on the political left.[163] *Charley's War* and its contemporary counterparts very much reflected this.

Parallels have often been drawn between the inter-war years and the 1970s and '80s, connections highlighted by Mills' depiction of an unemployed Charley in a dole queue in the 1930s. In both eras, the feeling of disaffection in society brought about by unemployment and industrial unrest led to clashes between the people and the state. In the years between the two world wars, resentment manifested itself in a variety of ways. It can be seen in the General Strike of 1926, or the Jarrow march of 1936; it can also be seen in the rise of extremist parties, preying on the disillusioned. Such imagery was potent though it may not represent an entirely balanced view of the inter-war years. Stephen Constantine notes, "For the majority of British people, life in Britain before the Second World War was a good deal better in material terms than it had been just before the First World War".[164] Paul Addison notes that, contradictory to the idea of a revolt against the established societal hierarchy, many working-class people voted Conservative, "either from deference to social superiors or judgement of what would benefit them most".[165] However, as has been seen with other historical accounts, myth has frequently taken on a greater significance than the reality.[166] Thereby, the General Strike could be linked with the miners' strike of 1984-85, as well as the steel strike (1980) or the national dock strike (1984), while Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) drew parallels with the rise of the National Front in the 1970s. As Constantine remarks, "No discussion of unemployment in the 1980s seems complete without a comparison with the depression of the 1930s".[167]

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[163] For an example of the British Government's thinking on the issues of unemployment and social housing see Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993), p. 671. See also, Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain - A Political History: New Edition 1945-1992* (London, 1993, first published 1979), pp. 346-350.

[164] Stephen Constantine, *Social Conditions in Britain 1918-1939* (London, 1983), p. 42.

[165] Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1994), p 24.

[166] Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz*, for example, argues that the perception of the Blitz (1940-41) as a time of 'standing alone' and 'muddling through' in absolute unity disguises some of the darker undertones of the period, such as class-conflict and higher crime rates. However, the myth is now taken to be the reality, and its imagery is still drawn upon in an attempt to invoke the same perceived spirit.

[167] Constantine, *Social Conditions in Britain*, pp. 1-2.

Such disaffection was reflected in popular culture. In television Alan Bleasdale's *The Monocled Mutineer* (1986) looked at the Étaples Mutiny of 1917, while incorporating themes relevant to contemporary society. Four years earlier Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982) had located these same themes in a 1980s setting, while James Mitchell's *When the Boat Comes In* (1976-1981), starring James Bolam, addressed similar issues in the inter-war period, following a demobbed soldier from his return home to Tyneside to his death as a volunteer for the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. At the same time, British cinema also focused upon issues of class. The film historian John Hill saw 1981's *Chariots of Fire* as embodying elements of Thatcherism, an idea made all the more pertinent after Argentina's invasion of the Falkland islands the following year[168]

There is a clear correlation between *Chariots of Fire* and war, again linking the 1980s to the inter-war period. The Master of Caius college pays tribute to those who had 'died for England', and "may be linked to a certain 'return of the hero' which also characterized American cinema in the 1980s".[169] Such films reiterated the notion of the lost generation that had come to define the public's memory of the war.[170] This relationship between sport and war was also explored in such diverse films of the period as Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), or even John Huston's *Escape to Victory* (1981), which reinforces George Orwell's description of football as "war minus the shooting".[171] *Chariots of Fire*, alongside the Merchant-Ivory productions such as *A Passage to India* (1984) and *A Room With a View* (1985), "looked to an aristocratic past".[172] In contrast, many British films of the 1980s examined class from an anti-Thatcherite perspective. The few films to deal with the Falklands war were generally negative. *For Queen and Country* (1988) looks at the disillusionment of a St. Lucia-born soldier whom, after returning from the war, is threatened with extradition. Again, the depiction of the returning soldier neglected by an ungrateful, ambivalent or inept government is analogous to the experience of First World War veterans and the 'home fit for heroes'

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[168] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford, 1999), p. 20.
[169] Ibid., p. 21.
[170] It should also be noted, however, that Britain's disaffected youth in the seventies and eighties were sometimes depicted as a 'lost generation'. The journalist and author Keith Topping accompanied a picture of the punk-rock band The Clash with the caption "Razor-edged poets of the lost generation". Incidentally, Topping had also co-written books with Paul Cornell, whose Doctor Who novel *Human Nature* is discussed elsewhere in this chapter.
Keith Topping, *The Complete Clash* (London, 2003), p. 161
[171] George Orwell quoted in Peter J. Beck, 'Projecting an Image of a Great Nation on the World Screen Through Football: British Cultural Propaganda Between the Wars' in Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (ed.), *Propaganda: Political Rhetoric and Identity 1300-2000* (Stroud, 1999), p. 266.
[172] Ibid., p. 28.

debacle. In *Charley's War*, Pat Mills ended his involvement in the story with Charley and his former sergeant, Old Bill, in a dole queue in the 1930s, a familiar sight in Thatcher's Britain, where unemployment remained at over three million between 1982 and 1986.[173] The parallels were clear enough to prompt Beatrix Campbell to follow in the footsteps of George Orwell in *Wigan Pier Revisited*, an indictment of Thatcher's Britain.[174]

Mills claimed, however, that his intention had not been to create a story that was a condemnation of contemporary Britain and the establishment of Thatcherism. He describes his influences as his "early childhood and seeing how I and others were affected by the class war".[175] While *Charley's War* was, as has already been noted, a criticism of the class system, the author had not consciously created something that was analogous to the 1970s and '80s. However, as many literary critics have asserted, interpretation is the responsibility of the reader, not the writer. Roland Barthes articulated this when he wrote, "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing... a text's unity lies not in origin its but in its destination".[176] The destination of *Charley's War* was a young, contemporary readership. The depiction of class in Mills and Colquhoun's work was relevant to events occurring at the time of writing. When Jack Bourne tells his cousin Charley of his adventures aboard *HMS Kent* at the Battle of the Falklands in 1914, the small, distant islands provide a link between the past and the present.[177] It is rather telling that a relatively small and forgotten battle (though psychologically great at the time) is portrayed, rather than a famous engagement, such as the clash between the British Grand Fleet and the German High Seas Fleet at Jutland in 1916. The Falklands had gained relevance because of 1982, and remained in the consciousness of those readers who followed *Invasion* a tale of this recent conflict, which ran alongside *Charley's War* in the pages of *Battle*. Like its First World War counterpart, *Invasion* depicted an evil officer, albeit an Argentinian one, who was completely unrepresentative of his men. In the final story Capitan Sanchez takes a young islander hostage as the British surge towards Port Stanley. He is thwarted by a sympathetic Argentinian soldier (a conscript), and killed by one of his own mines. As the Union Jack is hoisted over

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[173] Ibid., p. 6.

[174] Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties* (London, 1984).

[175] Email from Pat Mills to David Budgen, 23/02/2004.

[176] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in Walder (ed.) *Literature in the Modern World*, p. 231.

[177] *Battle*, 07/01/1984 – 03/03/1984.

Port Stanley, the young Falklander and his rescuer bolster the reputations of their countrymen:

> Sanchez was evil, but Argentinian soldiers are not like that, Tommy, we are glad the conflict is over…
>
> I know, Ricardo, the Brits will treat you okay…and I'll always be your friend after this…[178]

While there are certain traditional stereotypes depicted, clearly there is an attempt to move away from the blanket xenophobia that had previously characterised war stories in comics.

In spite of Mills' protestations that *Charley's War* was not an analogy for modern times, class is clearly at the heart of the tale. Charley's nemesis, Snell is not simply a stereotypical villain; he is the personification of the British social order. Mills stated: "I loathe the class system, symbolised by Snell, the establishment and world forces that turn generations of young men from all over the world into cannon fodder. I felt this way long before I wrote *Charley's War* and nothing has changed my view since".[179] It is the same class system seen in *Oh! What a Lovely War*. The play and subsequent film had some influence on Mills, although it was "something that visually articulated what I already felt and needed to see externalised".[180] Indeed, the final image that Mills and Colquhoun presented of the end of the Somme was reminiscent of the denouement of the cinematic version of *Oh! What a Lovely War*, with the soldiers marching across a picturesque hillside juxtaposed with an image of their graves (figure 9). The conflict between Snell and Charley is an analogy of the class war, representative of the Edwardian era, and the legacy of the Victorian age. Class has always characterised British society to some extent. In 1941, George Orwell referred to Britain, or more particularly, England, as the most class-ridden country under the sun".[181] Furthermore, his words about the First World War supported *Charley's War's* depiction of the officer class. Referring to the soldiers of the Great War he noted, "The only enemy they ever named was the sergeant-major".[182] This class-consciousness was heightened by the radical changes brought about by Margaret Thatcher's government after 1979.

[178] *Battle*, 29/08/1987.
[179] Interview with Pat Mills at http://charleyswar.tripod.com/battle/id28.html, accessed 07/10/2005.
[180] Email from Pat Mills to David Budgen, 23/02/2004
[181] George Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius', Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 2: My Country Right or Left*, p. 87.
[182] Ibid., p. 79.

Figure 9 The end of the Battle of the Somme in Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*

Privatisation of state-owned assets, unemployment, the riots in Brixton (April 1981 and September 1985), Toxteth, Moss Side (both July 1981) etc, the year long miners' strike and the Falklands conflict all added resonance to a story about class conflict, whether this was intended or not. Whatever the intention of the author, the reader approaches the text with their own thoughts, feelings and preconceptions, shaped by the society they lived in.

Furthermore, Mills made it clear that inequality was not limited to the fighting fronts. Charley's brother-in-law, Oliver (Oiley), is a slick, profiteer, exploiting the war to line his own pockets. He is eventually called up for military service, but soon returns home with a self-inflicted 'blighty' wound.[183] Again, the selfishness of the capitalist businessman can be contrasted with the depiction of other soldiers who have harmed, or attempted to harm themselves in order to escape the Western Front. When Charley and Pop, an aging soldier trying to avenge the loss of his two sons in the war, prevent another soldier, Lucky, from shooting himself in the foot, the protagonist asks, "Do you think it was right Pop? What Lucky was going to do?" Pop replies, "It's not for us to judge, lad. Lucky's no coward. What he planned took guts".[184] However, when Oiley lets a tank run over his foot, Charley's attitude is different. Oiley justifies his decision saying, "For once in my life I've got to do something brave".[185] Afterwards he exclaims with glee, "Guess what Charley? I lost three piggies! I'm a cripple! I'm out of the war! They're sending me back to blighty!"[186] Yet Charley forces him to eat the twenty pounds he has been offered for claiming to have witnessed the 'accident' (figure 10). There is a clear contrast between the soldier on the verge of breaking psychologically, and the rich coward, who enjoys double helpings of meals "'cos of all the deaths".[187] Later, when Charley returns home on leave, the reader is introduced to Oiley again. Having gained a considerable amount of weight; he has literally grown fat on the misery of others, charging people to use his bomb shelter and dealing in goods washed up from allied shipping after u-boat attacks. Oiley, and some of the generals depicted in the series, could almost have been based upon the caricatures of capitalists that permeated Soviet propaganda throughout the twentieth century.

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[183] Feeling that he could not cope with the prospect of going into battle, Oiley allows a tank to run over his foot.
[184] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War Book One*, p. 33.
[185] *Battle*, 03/10/1987 (originally published January 1980).
[186] *Battle*, 10/10/1987 (originally published February 1980).
[187] Ibid.

Figure 10 Charley's reaction to the self-inflicted blighty wound of his brother-in-law, Oiley, in Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*. Oiley would later reappear as a profiteer back in London.

Similar ideas can be found in works of literature about the war. Both Pat Mills and Michael Foreman have used the images of soldiers kicking footballs into battle to demonstrate the naivety of the soldiers, and the callousness of the officers. In Foreman's *War Game*, soon after the Christmas Truce of 1914 (another potent symbol of the futility of war), the main protagonist, Will, is involved in an attack on the German trenches:

> They were on the attack. Running in a line, Will in a centre forward position, Lacey to his left, young Billy on the wing. From the corner of his eye Will say Freddie dive full-length, then curl up as if clutching a ball in the best goalkeeping tradition. 'Daft as a brush,' Will thought. Suddenly, they all seemed to be tackled at once. The whole line went down. Earth and sky turned over, and Will found himself in a shell hole staring at the sky.[188]

In Mills and Colquhoun's *Charley's War*, the British soldiers are shown kicking footballs towards the enemy on the first day of the battle of the Somme. Mills' story suggests that the soldiers are nonchalantly kicking footballs because they assume that the artillery barrage has decimated the German forces. Again, the revelation that this is not the case emphasises the notion that the British were betrayed by their own generals. One Germans soldier remarks, "The Tommies are mad! They treat war like a game! And they will die for their madness".[189] This carnage is then juxtaposed with a letter from Charley's brother Wilf, who writes of watching "a good game down the Rec last Saturday", describing one team's victory as a "massacre".[190] Similarly, in James Riordan's *War Song*, one of the main characters, Floss, criticises the jingoism of the newspapers using the metaphor of football:

> 'The papers are still banging the drum,' exclaimed Floss angrily, 'even though thousands lie dead.' She had picked up a copy of the *Daily Mail* in the train and now read out one of their patriotic jingles.
>
> > Who's for the game, the biggest that's played?
> > The red crashing game of a fight?
> > Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid?
> > And who thinks he's rather sit tight?
>
> 'Makes you sick, doesn't it?' she continued. 'People like that think war's a game of football played on the green fields of Eton!'[191]

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[188] Michael Foreman, *War Game* (London, 1995, first published 1989), pp. 86-7.
[189] Mills and Colquhoun, *Charley's War 2 June – 1 August 1916* (London, 2004).
[190] Ibid.
[191] Riordan, *War Song*, p. 82.

The use of football terminology to describe a battle was hardly new to First World War children's fiction. The story of 'The Giant's Robe' that appeared in the *Boys' Own Paper* annual of 1918-19 employed a similar motif, though its agenda was very different.

Conclusion

Societal attitudes changed dramatically in the years after the Second World War, and this both filtered into and was shaped by popular culture. Notions that had once been outrageous were now generally accepted. Reflecting on Ian Fleming's James Bond novels in 1981, the poet Philip Larkin lamented these changed attitudes:

> So far from being orgies of sex and sadism, as some outraged academics protested at the time, the books are nostalgic excursions into pre-Carnaby Street values, Gilbert and Sullivan as opposed to the Beatles. England is always right, foreigners are always wrong.... Girls are treated with kindness and consideration, lust coming a decorous third. Life's virtues are courage and loyalty and its good things; a traditional aristocracy of powerful cars, vintage wines, exclusive clubs, the old Times, the old five-pound note, the old Player's packet.[192]

Though Larkin was referring to novels written specifically for adults (though no doubt consumed by children as well), these sentiments echo the changes in society that marked the shift in understanding of the Great War; it could equally be applied to Captain Hugh 'Bulldog' Drummond or Buchan's Sandy Arbuthnot. Patriotism was, of course, still evident in society, but the blind patriotism that had apparently led so many men to their deaths on the battlefields of France and Belgium was regarded with suspicion, particularly among more liberal elements in society. It was unsurprising that the Great War largely vanished from the pages of children's literature in the period following the end of the Second World War. A new and unquestionably just conflict had usurped it in the popular consciousness. To reassert itself the Great War needed to be reshaped in order to fit in with the ideology of a different generation.

The image of the First World War that emerged in the 1960s and gained further ground in the 1970s was one that was interminably connected with the mores of that society, rather than the generation of 1914. The depiction of the war centred on key themes: futility, class, gender, sexuality, as emphasised by the scale of the losses, the execution of British soldiers for cowardice and desertion, the altered role of women and certain

[192] *Times Literary Supplement*, 'The Batman from Blades', Philip Larkin, 05/06/1981, p. 625.

other significant events. All were present in the First World War, but none of these issues had been the focus of pre-Second World War understandings of the conflict. The approach had shifted from one partial representation of the conflict, focusing on traditional notions of bravery and heroism, to another that was equally unrepresentative.

Moreover, the use of the Great War to convey a set of values and ideas continued after the Second World War; though the message was different, the technique was the same. Pre-1945 novels had encouraged children to know their place, to be wary of foreigners, to be patriotic; after 1945, these messages were gradually reversed. The First World War was reinvented to fit a modern society that had been through another global war, and was embarking upon a fifty year conflict with the Soviet Union characterised by a stalemate that if broken could result in annihilation, along with the odd small-scale conflict. Britain's former colonies began to break away and seek independence, resulting in the dismantlement of an empire that had flourished for several centuries. If the period immediately after the Second World War was a turning point for Britain, it is hardly surprising that new depictions of the Great War were radically different from what had occurred before.

Conclusion

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal argued that "Seeing the past in our own terms, we necessarily revise what previous interpreters have seen in their terms, and reshape artefacts and memories accordingly".[1] This is certainly true of the First World War. The conflict that raged between 1914 and 1918 helped to shape the modern age, but has needed to be refigured and reinterpreted constantly to reconcile itself with modern mentalities. This thesis has attempted to trace the popular understanding of the First World War through works aimed at children since 1914, and in doing so, shed some light on the way in which the conflict has been used to perpetuate generalisations about race, gender, class, warfare, and numerous other facets of twentieth century society. In this sense, it is as much about the legacy and impact of the conflict upon British society, and more general developments in the nation psyche, than it is about representations of the events of 1914-18.

Children's books *are* important. Their power to mesmerise is potent, and it is little wonder that many modern authors have attempted to utilise the medium to impart their own world-view to young readers. Francis Spufford's memoir of childhood reading conveys the ability of books to enthral their audience:

> Once in a public library my attention was caught while I bent down to the lowest shelf of biographies. Time passed – a quarter of an hour, half an hour? My head was tilted way over on one side, and all the saliva in my mouth flowed into the cheek on the down side. Then someone visible only as a pair of legs coughed Excuse me. Sorry, I said thickly. As I moved back to the vertical to get out of her route to the lives of Sherman, Shostakovic and Schubert, the spittoon overflowed, and I dribbled extensively on the carpet tile at her feet.[2]

It is this ability to enrapture their audiences that makes books such potent sources of propaganda. The young were voracious readers during and after the First World War; in 1921 it was estimated that children read ten times as much as their grandparents had when young.[3] Many of them were reading about the war.

Yet an examination of the key historiographical debates surrounding the war must take into account the post-1945 era that forged the modern construction of the conflict. The

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[1] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 325.
[2] Francis Spufford, *The Child That Books Built* (London, 2002), p. 7.
[3] Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), p. 133.

understanding of that conflict as one of futility, callousness and injustice became solidified after the Second World War. At the end of the twentieth century children's authors were still producing novels based on the events of the Great War, many of which have been highly acclaimed. In many ways these differed wildly from the output of their pre-1939 forbears. They often focused upon a very narrow understanding of the war, and specific aspects of the conflict, insinuating that such experiences were universal, and frequently misrepresenting the reality of the situation.

The decades since the 1960s have seen the emergence of competing interpretations of the First World War. On the one hand is the popular understanding, underscored by the works of such historians as Sir Basil Liddell-Hart and later Alan Clark, alongside certain novels and memoirs of the late twenties and early thirties. They placed much emphasis, or were at least perceived to be placing emphasis upon the futility of the war, the scale of the losses, the mistakes of the generals and their basis in the inequality of the class system. On the other hand, there has been a growing revisionist movement challenging the contentions of the above writers. John Terraine and Gary Sheffield, for example, have argued that the British army was on a steep learning curve throughout the First World War, but emerged from the conflict as a modern and skilful fighting machine in 1918.[4] The revisionist interpretation has faced an uphill struggle to gain a foothold in the popular perception of the war; academics may toil away proving their points with meticulous research, but this means little in the face of nearly a century of highly emotive works of culture. Moreover, the castigation of these artefacts of popular culture by historians who see them as perpetuating an unbalanced view of the war misunderstands the role of such views in contributing to the nation's identity and values. Exaggeration does not negate their cultural significance, and attempts to move away from such sources can often be interpreted as snobbery, or even right-wing polemic, despite the best intentions of historians. Since the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 the First World War has been remoulded to fit the demands of modern society.

The term that most frequently occurs within the revisionists' analyses of First World War historiography is 'myth'. Sheffield's *Forgotten Victory* is subtitled 'Myths and Realities', while Dan Todman's *The Great War – Myth and Memory* was published in 2005. Similarly, John Terraine, who had staunchly defended the conduct of the generals and a more nuanced understanding of the war in a period when such views were deeply unfashionable, subtitled 1980's *The Smoke and the Fire*, 'Myths and Anti-myths of War,

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[4] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp 221-64.

1861-1945'. These works all make valid points. The popular understanding of the Great War *has* often been based upon misconceptions and exaggerations, which can be problematic when attempting to establish an apparently truthful or balanced version of events. Despite the efforts of academic historians, the myth remains potent. It should be remembered, however, that in the field of cultural history 'truth' can be a slippery term, and is often accepted based on its usefulness. When military historians write of 'myths' they equate them with untruths. Yet the term 'myth' can be seen to have a much deeper meaning, which alters the understanding of the popular perception of the First World War. Myths have often been used to present idealized interpretations of the past as a commentary on the present.

Stephanie Barczewski has examined the legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood and their contribution to British national identity throughout the nineteenth century. In her analysis she has suggested that historians too often failed "to recognize the impact of more popular genres upon the contemporary vision of the past".[5] Moreover, the stories could be recast to present the country in a manner that would appeal to English sensibilities. The same could be said of other historical events. Recent academic work has focused on the British experience on the Home Front during the Second World War. In his examination of this subject, Mark Connelly noted that "Myths are important because they help people to make sense of their lives; they provide a popular memory of the past, which can shape expectations of the present and future".[6] Similar arguments could be made regarding presentation of the First World War in children's fiction.

Society changed greatly throughout the twentieth century, and its reactions to the First World War reflected this. In the decades that followed the war, the economic crisis encouraged people to question the benefits of taking part in the conflict, though as many historians have pointed out, this was just one of many competing interpretations of the conflict in this era. The war books controversy of the twenties and thirties encouraged an analysis of fiction and memoirs aimed at adults, from highbrow literature to Rosa Maria Bracco's study of middle-brow novels and bestsellers. Children's fiction of this era, however, also reflected some of these varying interpretations and reminiscences. Although the view of the war as a just and noble conflict lasted at least until the end of the Second World War, it should still be recognised that the tone of the stories written for children *had* changed in the immediate aftermath of the Armistice.

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[5] Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000), p. 1.
[6] Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p. 3.

Those writers who sought to follow the Henty formula and had been the leading purveyors of Great War stories and novels largely moved away from the war as a setting for their exciting tales. By and large they returned to the timeless subjects of pirates and cowboys and jungle adventures. They also embraced the potential of modern technology in countless air stories. These were directly influenced by the war, but this did not guarantee that the setting would be a theatre of conflict between 1914 and 1918. George E. Rochester's 'The Black Beetle' had honed his flying skills in the First World War, but tackled Britain's enemies in the interwar years, in a similar fashion to 'Sapper's' 'Bulldog' Drummond. Similarly, Johns' 'Biggles' stories began in the Great War, but only achieved longevity by moving into more contemporary settings.

This is not to say that no Great War stories were published in the inter war years. Boys' story papers were replete with images of the war, while many novels dealt with the conflict. It should also be remembered that the works of Westerman, Brereton and their fellow wartime writers were republished during the 1930s, and often given away as school prizes throughout this period. However, the tone of the publications did appear to change. The tales in the story papers were often true stories, recognising and celebrating the heroism the British and her allies. They emphasised the bravery of British troops, figures highly visible in post-war Britain, but their understanding of the war was frequently different from that presented a few years earlier. Those novels and stories written in the early years of the war often had little concept of the nature of the war on the Western Front. They were set in France and Belgium, but they may as well have been set in late nineteenth century Mafeking or Khartoum generations earlier. The reality of the fighting and the scale of the losses became more apparent as the war dragged on, but this rarely filtered into works aimed at children. They perpetuated the notion that Britain's cause was just, and that the blame for any horrors could solely be attributed to the tyrannical Kaiser and his militaristic nation. When death was depicted, it was clean and quick, and served to further solidify the British sense of righteousness and belief in the cause.

After the war, events could less often be portrayed in the context of more traditional imperialist adventure stories, in which plucky young Britons verified their moral and physical superiority on the field of battle. An emphasis on heroism, and true-life stories shifted the focus from the realms of fantasy in which British adolescents outwitted experienced enemy agents and soldiers. Instead, there was a subtle movement towards realism. To some extent, the introduction of conscription democratised the notion of

heroism. Although the old nineteenth century heroes retained their hold over young Britons, the ordinary soldier would become the focus for children eager to learn about the Great War.

The Second World War largely sounded the death knell for First World War adventure fiction. The works popular between 1914 and 1918 were still being republished two decades later, but they were surpassed by representations of the more modern conflict. Moreover, after the horrific actions of the Nazi regime became more widely known, it became very difficult to question the justness of Britain's decision to go to war. The Second World War provided a setting for adventure stories in which the moral probity of the heroes was as undeniable as the unremitting wickedness of their nemeses. Furthermore, looking back from a period after a second global conflict and two decades of economic upheaval meant that the reasons behind the outbreak of the First World War appeared to be less clear-cut. After 1945, war stories were almost universally set in the Second World War, while textbooks began to examine the complicated series of events that led to Britain declaring war on Germany in 1914. Before 1939, very few schoolbooks questioned the legitimacy of the war.

In this sense we can see a clear correlation between the direction of children's fiction about the Great War and the historiography of the subject. This was further emphasised by the revival of interest in the subject during the 1960s. Children's authors also began to return to the First World War soon afterwards in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Society had changed, however, and so too did the fiction. The clear definition between boys' and girls' fiction, no longer existed, at least in terms of Great War stories. Children who wanted to read adventurous tales about the Western Front would have needed to dig around in jumble sales for old Westerman novels. Many modern writers had been influenced by the works of the 1960s, so set their tales on the home front. Attention was paid to such issues as the inequality of the class system and its role in the appalling casualties. A portrait began to appear of soldiers, from all sides, as victims of the callous warmongers who encouraged conflict from the safety of a chateau miles behind the battle front, or more egregiously in the eyes of modern writers, Whitehall. A steady stream of novels appeared from the 1980s into the twenty first century, marking a clear divergence between literature and historiography.

As academic historians were moving towards a more nuanced understanding of the First World War, children's authors were straying further from this version of events. As research emphasised the uncommon nature of military executions, or the successes of

the allied forces on the Western Front, writers of children's fiction moved in the opposite direction. It could be argued that the revisionist historians had not been vehement enough in disseminating their ideas, that the public at large were unaware of this revised way of thinking. In his book *Remembering War*, Jay Winter has noted the separation between 'history' and 'memory' and the necessity of "the negotiation of the space between the two".[7] Winter saw the need for academics to embrace 'public history', to bring "professional scholarship more centrally into contemporary discussions about our common past".[8] The polarity between academic and popular understandings of the war made this unlikely, especially as the competing camps were not blissfully unaware of each other. The republication of Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun's *Charley's War* in the first decade of the twenty-first century demonstrated that the writer was fully aware of, and actively engaging in the historiographical debates that had been raging for several decades. Furthermore, the author clearly saw one role of his work as being the protection of what revisionist historians would term 'myths' of the Great War. This ranged from big 'myths', such as the callousness and ineptitude of British military commanders, to the smaller 'myths', such as soldiers using machine guns to make tea. To Mills, there was little difference between the two. They were both examples of self-aggrandising, scurrilous historians, scrabbling around to challenge the accepted vision of the war either in a shameless attempt to climb up the career ladder, or because they were right-wing defenders of an "odious class system".

In a similar vein, Michael Morpurgo clearly felt that the subject of military executions during the First World War was woefully absent from the modern British classroom, and that his novel *Private Peaceful* was doing something to redress the balance. In one sense this represents a remarkable consistency in the propaganda value of children's books representing the First World War. As British society became more liberal, representations of the Great War in children's fiction changed accordingly. Indeed, it could be argued that First World War novels revealed more about British society and its values than the actual experience of combat. In the period incorporating the two world wars, children's fiction presented a largely traditional view of society. Boys' stories inculcated ideas of empire and British superiority, pluck and bravery, gentlemanliness and honour. Similarly, tales aimed at girls suggested that the role of women was largely a domestic one. Female characters did have adventures, but these were clearly precursors to a retreat to domesticity. Late twentieth century writers also used the war to

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[7] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (Yale, 2006), p. 202.
[8] Ibid., p. 202.

comment upon and disseminate ideas about their own eras. The gradual erosion of the class system and the connotations that went with this process were reflected in literature produced at the end of the twentieth century. The Great War became a useful tool with which to teach children about the horrors of war, the injustices of a class-ridden society, the injustice of capital punishment and various other foundations of a modern liberal society. In this sense the Great War became a parable for modern Britain, an example of the follies of the past.

Throughout the twentieth century children's authors presented the First World War in a manner that reflected their own views on society. Between 1914 and 1918, writers produced works that could be seen as continuations of the imperialist adventure fiction of the late nineteenth century. Writers of boys' fiction often modelled themselves as the inheritors of the mantle of G.A. Henty, and their work frequently reflected this. Stories set in the sideshows of the Great War were little more than old-fashioned stories that could have been set in any era. Such tales reflected little about the nature of the war, but a great deal about British society and its values. In many ways this set the precedent for many of the late-twentieth century works of fiction. Authors looked back on the war with modern eyes, and this naturally shaped their understanding of the conflict, and the image they wanted to present. There has been a clear disparity between the academic and popular views of the war, but both sides clearly have different agendas. Many academic and in particular, military historians have attempted to present a less emotional understanding, rescuing the reputations of some figures that have perhaps been unfairly maligned in the past.

Yet the cultural impact of some of the apparent 'myths' that have been perpetuated is often dismissed. If myths are a representation of how people want to see themselves, then these works about the Great War are hugely important. By pointing out the inequalities of the class system between 1914 and 1918, writers are showing audiences just how much life has changed since then. Images of injustices being meted out to soldiers again paint modern society in a more favourable light. The limitations placed upon female characters are indicative of the developments in gender equality later in the century. Modern authors do not look on the conflict through Edwardian eyes, but then again, why should they? These ideas may not be entirely representative of life during the Great War, but they are useful for modern audiences, helping them to recognise the changes in society throughout the twentieth century, and the role of the two world wars in paving the way for such developments.

So, by the end of the twentieth century, the understanding of the Great War in popular culture had largely been reversed. The perspective of children's writers was largely a left-wing one, as opposed to the patriotic imperialism of the war years. These changes had been gradually gathering momentum since the interwar years, and after the Second World War it became increasingly difficult to depict the conflict in the same manner as Westerman, Brereton, Lynn and Strang. Air stories had helped to shift the focus away from the Western Front between the wars, and the setting did not really return until the last decades of the twentieth century. By then, despite the best efforts of academic historians, the Great War had been reinterpreted to warn of the dangers of militarism and blind patriotism. The message is a potent one, and will require great effort to break down.

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