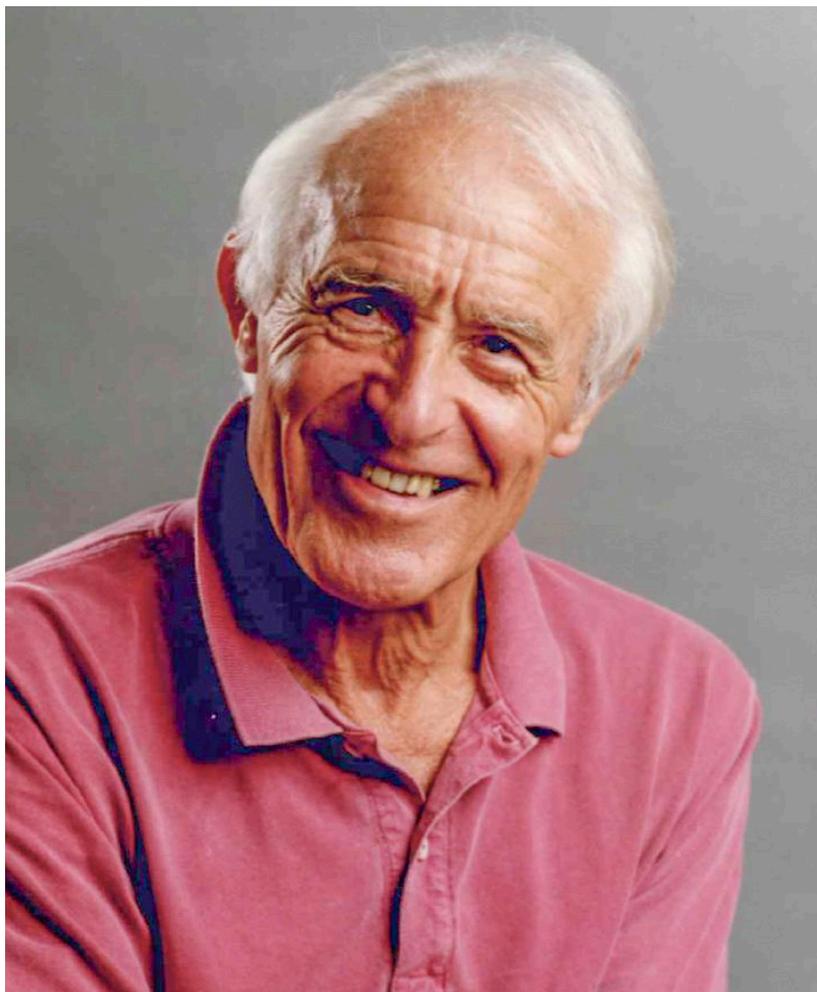


War Poetry Review

2014–15



Jon Stallworthy 1935–2014

War Poets Association

The War Poetry Review is the journal of the War Poets Association.
The editors for the present volume are Santanu Das and Kate McLoughlin.

Correspondence should be sent to the editor preferably by email:
editor@warpoets.org

Postal address: The Editor, War Poets Association,
c/o Veale Wasbrough Vizards (DBMW), Orchard Court, Orchard Lane,
Bristol, BS1 5WS, UK

Individual articles are the copyright of authors.

ISSN 1753-9463

Website: www.warpoets.org

Cover Photograph: Jon Stallworthy,
copyright © Wolfson College, Oxford.

Back Cover: Stanzas from 'War Poet' by Jon Stallworthy
and Design: Mireia O'Prey

THE WAR POETRY REVIEW
The Journal of the War Poets Association
2014–2015

Contents

Editorial	
<i>Santanu Das and Kate McLoughlin</i>	5
The War against the War Poets	
<i>Adrian Barlow</i>	7
Warwickshire’s Adlestrop: Rupert Brooke in the Forest of Arden	
<i>Guy Cuthbertson</i>	16
Reclaiming F.W. Harvey	
<i>James Grant Repshire</i>	23
‘A revolver to Charon’s Head’: Robert Graves and Survival	
<i>Charles Mundy</i>	31
Richard Aldington’s War Poetry: Images, Impressions and Impact	
<i>Michael Copp</i>	37
A Cell of One’s Own: Conscientious Objection and John Rodker’s Narratives of Resistance	
<i>Evelyn Heinz</i>	45
Poetics of Resistance: H.D.’s Sea Garden	
<i>Argha Banerjee</i>	52
War Poetry: A Conversation with Michael Longley, Andrew Motion and Jon Stallworthy	
<i>Edited by Santanu Das</i>	59
Jon Stallworthy: An Appreciation	
<i>Adrian Barlow</i>	71
Notes on Contributors.....	74

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Wolfson College, Oxford for allowing us to use the photograph of Professor Jon Stallworthy on the cover of this volume, and to Cambridge University Press for granting permission to reprint the essay on 'War Poetry: A Conversation' which first appeared in *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War* (2013). We would also like to thank David Worthington, the Chairman of War Poets Association, and Dr Elizabeth Robertson for their generous help with the volume in its final stages.

Editorial

‘War poet’ and ‘war poetry’, observed Robert Graves in 1942, were ‘terms first used in World War I and perhaps peculiar to it’. The current issue of the *War Poetry Review* is a centennial tribute to this foundational moment. More than any other genre – novel, drama or film – it is the poetry that has come to form the terrain of First World War memory. And more: it has provided the template for the poetry of all future wars. A hundred years after the outbreak of the First World War, its poetry has moved, beyond literary history and cultural memory, into a structure of feeling. We seldom read the poetry of the First World War: it is usually a matter of re-reading, remembering, returning – with pleasure, curiosity, sometimes even resistance.

In the opening essay, Adrian Barlow notes that ‘it seems strange that this year of all years the War Poets should need friends’. Yet, as he goes on to discuss, war poetry has been the site of skirmish, the target of snipers: many historians and politicians (Michael Gove is perhaps the most prominent example) fear that the poetry has hijacked the history of the war and they go on to denounce it for misrepresenting the ‘truth’ about the war. This is a gross misreading of the very nature of war poetry, and its relation to experience and memory. War poetry is not the transparent envelope of ‘history’ – in whatever way we may define the term – or just literary language speaking to itself about itself. Instead, it is one of the most powerful and moving encounters between literary form and historical experience, and delves into areas of imagination, sound and feeling usually closed to other disciplines and arts. Moreover, its richness lies in it providing differing interpretations to the same or different audiences, at different times. Hence it is essential that in the centennial re-assessment of the First World War, poetry should play a central role in helping us to understand the experience as well as the cultural heritage it has helped to create through the ‘mystery’ Owen wrote about in ‘Strange Meeting’.

At the same time First World War poetry is not limited to just a handful of well-known soldier-poets. Part of the aim of the current issue of *War Poetry Review* is to acknowledge the continuing power of these poets, as well as to expand the canon and showcase a more diverse range of war poetry by women, non-combatants, civilians, conscientious objectors and modernists. Thus, we have a range of offerings here, from fresh readings of familiar soldier-poets such as Rupert Brooke and Robert Graves alongside the lesser-known F.W. Harvey to fellow-Imagists and war-crossed and warring lovers

Richard Aldington and H.D to the pacifist John Rodker who carried on war 'on another front'. A century on, war poetry – like war experience – has to be more inclusive and look in different directions.

In his poem 'The War Graves', Michael Longley writes, 'There will be no end to clearing up after the war'. The war's various legacies will be examined over the next four years with remarkable intensity. The current issue of *WPR* pays close attention to what is arguably its most popular and powerful cultural legacy, and the variety and complexity with which it bears witness to history's 'blood-dimmed tide'.

Just as the current edition was about to go to press, we were greatly saddened to hear about the death of the distinguished poet, biographer and literary critic Jon Stallworthy. Very few scholars have championed, illuminated or edited First World War poetry – or mentored generations of scholars working on war literature – with the authority, sensitivity and humanism of Jon. His biography of Wilfred Owen, written in 1974, the edition of Owen's *Complete Poems and Fragments* (1983) and the *Oxford Book of War Poetry* (1984) – re-released last year by Oxford University Press (along with *War Poet*, a collection of his war poems) – remain magisterial and pioneering works in the field. For those who knew him, he was an exceptionally warm, generous and endearing presence. The poet Anne Stevenson remembers him as 'England's most charming man'. A few weeks before his death, when he had to withdraw from a poetry reading at the British Academy and heard that the poet-critic Angela Leighton had offered to read in his place, he sent an apology by email:

I so much enjoyed my last morning with you, Andrew, and Michael that I'm more than ever sorry to have to miss the BA reading. However, I cannot think of a replacement whose poems I like and whose criticism of poetry I admire as much as Angela's.

With gratitude and good wishes to you all from your devoted, Jon.

The 'last morning' refers to an extended discussion – 'War Poetry: A Conversation' – in which he took part with Andrew Motion and Michael Longley in the summer of 2012 and which is reprinted here. The above email is a small but characteristic example of his generosity, courteousness and beautifully cadenced prose. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

The War against the War Poets

ADRIAN BARLOW

It seems strange that this year of all years the War Poets should need friends. But in the skirmishing that has marked the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the attacks on them have become odder and more aggressive.

This oddness is evident in a recent *Guardian Review* feature¹ in which writers and historians were invited to present ‘untold stories’ of the First World War. While novelists such as Michael Morpurgo and Pat Barker set out patiently to explain the genesis of their novels *Warhorse* (1982) and *Toby’s Room* (2012), Max Hastings and Anthony Beevor began by summarizing the ‘Modern popular images’ of the War (Hastings) and the ‘popular impression of events’ (Beevor).

For Hastings, these images were of ‘trenches, mud, wire, tin hats and poets’. For Beevor, ‘this version of a totally futile and unnecessary war concentrates on the fate of the individual, with death and squalor in the trenches, the terrible moonscape of no man’s land, “going over the top”, the war poets, the execution of deserters and the incompetence of generals mounting doomed attacks.’² What is striking about both historians’ statements here is that the war poets are no longer simply being held to account for their part in creating the mythology of the First World War: they have themselves now become part of that mythology. This is new.

The war against the war poets during 2014 has largely been conducted in the Press. In March Jeremy Paxman was reported in the *Times* as saying that ‘Poetry is no way to teach the Great War’:

Jeremy Paxman said that the war was ‘only ever taught as poetry now’, adding: ‘It really won’t do.’

‘All that is taught is about the pointless sacrifice. It’s not helpful to see the whole thing through the eyes of poetry.’ This could lead to people ‘passing on half-baked prejudices,’ he said. ‘It’s too easy. The big question is why Owen, after writing his anti-war poetry, and Sassoon, after his letter of protest, decided to go back and fight.’

‘Luxuriating in the horror of the thing really won’t do and doesn’t set out to answer really interesting questions.’³

Certainly, it is interesting to ask why both Owen and Sassoon ‘decided’ to go back and fight. But if Paxman had remembered the answers Owen and Sassoon had already given to his ‘big question’, he might have been less keen to ask it in the first place. For Owen, as for Sassoon, it was a matter not of recovering a sense of patriotic duty, but of keeping faith with the soldiers alongside whom he had already fought. Writing to his mother a month before his own death, Owen explained:

‘My nerves are in perfect order ... I came out in order to help these boys – directly by leading them as well as an officer can, indirectly by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can. I have done the first.’⁴

And Sassoon offered an equally candid account of his own motives:

Going back was the only way out of an impossible situation. At the front I should at least find forgetfulness. And I would rather be killed than survive as one who had ‘wangled’ his way through by saying that the War ought to stop. Better to be in the trenches with those whose experience I had shared and understood than with this medley of civilians.⁵

Paxman’s remarks are of course essentially an attack on the way war poetry is used to teach the First World War. This year has seen the publication of a Report on an important interdisciplinary research project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council: ‘The First World War in the Classroom: Teaching and the Construction of Cultural Memory’.⁶ Writing in *The Use of English*, one of the Report’s co-authors, Dr. Ann-Marie Einhaus, Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Northumbria, has summarised the findings of the Report and assessed the considerable pressures (curriculum, timetabling, resources etc.) that English teachers encounter in teaching the literature of the Great War. She nevertheless argues that

Even given time constraints that prevent teaching a wider range of texts, teachers can still emphasize the fact that many millions of people who experienced the war did so in different ways – depending on class, gender, location, occupation, social and educational background, nationality and ethnicity – without necessarily having to teach literary examples of all these different perspectives.⁷

Prominent among historians troubled by the way the teaching of the literature of the Great War has, in their view, displaced an objective 'historical' assessment of 1914-1918 and replaced it with a dishonest misrepresentation is Professor Dan Todman of Queen Mary University of London. Writing for the BBC's World War 1 website, he has characterized the teaching and reception of war poetry and more recent literary fiction thus:

Sassoon and Wilfred Owen could be used to evoke an emotional reaction against war which engaged students and satisfied teachers, but which utterly misrepresented the feelings of most Britons who lived through the war years [...] Although works like Faulks' *Birdsong* are fiction, audiences often believed that they communicated 'deeper truths' about the war, because they reflected their own misconceptions.⁸

His strictures go further than Paxman's: he not only attacks teachers for being 'satisfied' with evoking an 'emotional' reaction from their students but criticizes readers in general for their naivety in misguidedly believing that novels such as *Birdsong* communicate 'deeper truths' – deeper, presumably than the truths of history. He is particularly irritated that novelists such as Faulks (and no doubt Barker and Morpurgo too) trade on what he calls readers' own misconceptions of the war. Here Todman surely under-rates the intelligence of readers, whom significantly he misrepresents as 'audiences' – as if reflective reading of a novel like *Birdsong* were a passive shared activity like watching a film.

Again, Ann-Marie Einhaus offers a different and more positive perspective, suggesting that 'What these modern writers can demonstrate is how popular memory of the war gradually takes shape and changes'. Her conclusion offers a genuine way forward towards a more integrated and interdisciplinary classroom approach:

English teachers can use their teaching of First World War literature, particularly modern literature, to raise awareness of how literary texts contribute to shaping our memory and understanding of the war [...] Encouraging pupils to question how the texts they have read influence the way they think about the war, and asking them why and how they think that is the case, allows them to question not only their own responses to literary texts, but the social function of literature in a wider sense.⁹

Dan Todman is of course by no means the first historian to be dismissive of the reading public's response to the literature of the First World War. Professor Jeremy Black, in his book *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (2011) puts it thus:

The standard images of the war, both literary and visual, have been ably criticized by military historians [...] who have pointed out the problems created by a very selective reading of a misleading literary legacy, notably of works published in 1928-30. Memoirs are often unreliable as history, but they are what the public and the media tend to rely on for their history because they offer triumph over adversity, as well as futility and pathos as themes, whereas straightforward scholarship is considered too dull.¹⁰

To characterize the work of historians as 'straightforward scholarship' and condemn the books produced by the survivors of the war for being 'unreliable as history' is to set up a false antithesis. Not only does it beg the question whether or not the fundamental disagreements among historians about the war, its causes and consequences are simply 'straightforward scholarship'; it fundamentally misunderstands what the writers of the First World War (both those who survived and those who did not) were trying to do. The war poets saw themselves and their poetry looking forwards, not back. They were witnesses but not historians. Isaac Rosenberg wrote to Laurence Binyon in 1916:

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the new and strange conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on.¹¹

And Sassoon, writing a Foreword to the *Complete Poems of Isaac Rosenberg* (1937), saw in poems such as 'Break of Day in the Trenches' and, 'Returning, We hear the Larks':

the poems that he might have written after the war, and the life he might have lived when life began again beyond and behind those trenches which were the limbo of all sane humanity and world-improving imagination. For the spirit of poetry looks beyond life's trench-lines.¹²

What is clearly called for is an acknowledgement that the poets of the Great War need to be re-read as individual voices, not as historians nor as a homogeneous group claiming to speak general truths about the First World War; but in the increasingly strident criticism of the war poets by journalists-turned-historians such as Jeremy Paxman and Max Hastings there is no evidence of such re-reading. In a recent *Sunday Times* feature, under the billboard headline, ‘OH, WHAT A LOVELY MYTH’,¹³ Max Hastings declares that ‘The popular image of 1914-18, nurtured by the war poets, is of needlessly awful slaughter. But Britain’s generals were far from donkeys, the bloodshed no worse than in other wars and the frontline soldier’s lot no more terrible.’ One would like to know which other wars before 1914-1918 had produced bloodshed (in terms of men killed, if in no other) on such a scale.

It is a curious article, an abridged version of his preface to a new edition of a C. S. Forester novel, *The General*, which originally appeared in 1936. Hastings begins with a striking assertion:

No warrior caste in history has received such mockery and contempt from posterity as Britain’s commanders of the First World War. They are deemed to have presided over unparalleled carnage with a callousness matched only by their incompetence. They are perceived as the high priests who dispatched a generation to its death, their dreadful achievement memorialized for eternity by such bards as Siegfried Sassoon.

Hastings’ lexis here is revealing: ‘warrior caste’, ‘high priests’, ‘bards’ – such language conjures ideas of a remote, ancient fighting elite: the hosts of Midian perhaps, but hardly the British Expeditionary Force. The use of these words is peculiar to the author: who else has ever called Sassoon a bard? Which poet(s) ever depicted the generals as high priests?

What really offends Hastings is the fact that the full-time soldiers like French, Haig and Rawlinson should have been so impugned by ‘cultured citizen soldiers, disdaining the stoicism displayed since time immemorial by professional warriors’. Actually, this sounds more like the disdain displayed by the warrior caste for those who – for the duration of the war, but for no longer than absolutely necessary – had to be allowed into the Officers’ Mess.

Hastings is eager to defend the privileges of the Mess. Though he suggests accounts of ‘the sybaritic lifestyle of commanders in the Kaiser’s conflict’

were exaggerated, he himself cheerfully accepts that ‘When champagne was available, most British, American and German senior officers drank it as enthusiastically between 1939 and 1945 as they did between 1914 and 1918.’

Hastings’ disdain for the feebleness of the ‘citizen soldiers’ is worth considering alongside an entry in the (carefully re-written after the war) diaries of Field Marshal Earl Haig:

Monday, 4 September [1916]:

I visited Toutencourt and saw Gen. Gough. The failure to hold the position gained on the Ancre is due, he reported, to the 49th Division. The units of that Division did not really attack and some men did not follow their officers. The total losses of this Division are under a thousand! It is a territorial division from the West Riding of Yorkshire. I had occasion a fortnight ago to call the attention of the Army and Corps Commanders (Gough and Jacobs) to the lack of smartness, and slackness of one of its Battalions in the matter of saluting when I was motoring through the village where it was billeted. I expressed my opinion that such men were too sleepy to fight well, etc.

Hastings enjoins his readers to see the generals as men who ‘possessed virtues and vices bred into the British military caste over centuries’. However, after reading, nearly a century later, that Haig condemned the 49th Division – part-timers, Territorials – for ‘slackness ... in the matter of saluting’ and judged it not to have fought hard enough because it only suffered 1000 casualties,¹⁴ Hastings’ plea in mitigation – that they were simply ‘men of their time, and it is thus that they should be judged’ – sounds unconvincing. Men of their time ... men of their caste: *tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner* – is that historically, never mind morally, sufficient?

It is, as ever, Sassoon’s poem ‘The General’ that is produced in evidence against the war poets. Perhaps, however, before anyone else cites this poem as the *fons et origo* of the myth that the staff officers were callous, cosseted incompetents, they should read what Field Marshal Viscount Wavell had to say about staff officers in his still much-admired anthology of English verse, *Other Men’s Flowers* (1944):

The feeling between the regimental officer and the staff officer is as old as the history of fighting. I have been a regimental officer in two minor wars and realized what a poor hand the staff made of things and

what a luxurious life they led; I was a staff officer in the First World War and realized that the staff were worked to the bone to keep the regimental officers on the rails. I have been a Higher Commander in one minor and one major war and have sympathized with the views of both staff and regimental officers.¹⁵

To prove the point, he includes Sassoon's 'The General'.

Hastings claims that 'the public mood began to shift about the time the Depression began' and he cites Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* (1928) and Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (also 1928, though Hastings incorrectly dates its publication as 1930) among key books that 'depicted a protracted agony in pursuit of rival national purposes that allegedly meant little to those who perished in their names, compounded by the brutalism of those who directed the armies'. He cites a 1975 letter by Charles Carrington to an unnamed friend in the wake of Paul Fussell's book *The Great War and Modern Memory*:

Does anybody care any longer about the silent millions who did not want the war, did not cause the war, did not shirk the war, and did not lose the war [...] who had never heard of these lugubrious poets [...] with their self-pitying introversion?

This unidentified (unpublished?) letter is strikingly at odds with the views expressed by Carrington in his excellent memoir, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965). Carrington is rightly admired for having insisted that not all soldiers returned from the trenches traumatised by their experiences and convinced of the war's futility. What is less often noted, however, is his willingness to understand viewpoints other than his own. He is particularly sympathetic towards Siegfried Sassoon. 'For ten readers who know of Siegfried Sassoon's protest,' he asks, 'are there two who know that he returned to duty, performed more feats of valour, and ended the war a wounded hero, like so many others?' And he goes on to describe Sassoon's poem, 'Everyone Sang', as 'the supreme revelation of the soldier's life [...] If this is not pure poetry, I know none.'¹⁶

Thus Carrington on Sassoon. More surprising still, in the light of the letter Hastings quotes, is Carrington's admiration for Edmund Blunden. He calls *Undertones of War* (1928) 'a book that would be remembered and read, whatever the circumstances in which it had been written [...] So firmly

constructed, so deeply wrought out of genuine experience, so exquisitely finished is this book that it transcends experience.’ He ends by saying that, ‘as one of Edmund Blunden’s admirers, I should be proud to think that my crude rendering of the soldiers’ chorus would help some of my readers to detect his undertones.’¹⁷

No doubt Max Hastings will go on accusing the war poets, or at least those he names in ‘OH, WHAT A LOVELY MYTH’, of having ‘nurtured’ a false myth of the Great War. However, the more pernicious myth being peddled in this centenary year is the myth that no one apart from the military historians understands what the Great War was about, what it was like and what the ‘warrior caste’ had to put up with; and that it’s all the fault of the war poets.

The best corrective to this new myth is Vivien Whelpton’s article, ‘Poetry Matters’, in the centenary edition of the Western Front Association’s journal, *Stand To!*. Whelpton points out that ‘the combatant poets of the First World War had to search both for the *means* through which to render the nature of this ‘new’ type of war and for a *vision* that encompassed that war in all its complexity’.¹⁸ She argues for both a deeper and a wider reading of the poetry of the war, and concludes:

It is a diverse and challenging body of work, but its range, vividness and imaginative power have contributed hugely to the place of the Great War in our cultural heritage. That this writing, rather than historical texts, should be the primary mode of access for the non-specialist is not a situation to be deplored. Rather, we should be insisting that the reading of the poetry should be more perceptive and wide-ranging.¹⁹

Notes

¹ 26 July 2014.

² ‘The Front Lines’, *The Guardian*, Review section (26 July 2014), 4.

³ *The Times* (14 March 2014), 3.

⁴ Wilfred Owen, Letter to Susan Owen (4 or 5 October 1918), Jennifer Breen, ed., *Wilfred Owen: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Routledge, 1988), 165.

⁵ Siegfried Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 549.

⁶ For full information about the project and to access the final Report, see <http://ww1intheclassroom.exeter.ac.uk> (accessed 3 July 2014).

⁷ Ann-Marie Einhaus, ‘Learning, Literature and Remembrance’, *The Use of English*, 65.3 (Summer 2014), 19-20.

⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/perceptions_01.shtml (accessed 3 July 2014).

⁹ Einhaus, 'Learning, Literature and Remembrance'.

¹⁰ Jeremy Black, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Continuum, 2011), 220.

¹¹ Isaac Rosenberg, Letter to Laurence Binyon [1916], Gordon Bottomley and D. W. Harding, eds., *The Complete Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), 373.

¹² Siegfried Sassoon, 'Preface', *The Complete Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. Bottomley and Harding, ix-x.

¹³ Max Hastings, 'OH, WHAT A LOVELY MYTH', *Sunday Times*, News Review section (11 May 2014), 1-3.

¹⁴ Actually the losses of the 49th Division in this action were 1728 men (428 killed), a casualty rate of 30%; the high casualty rate among officers (70%), is now considered to be one of the reasons for the Division's failure at Thiepval. Figures and analysis in 'From Disaster to Triumph – the 49th (West Yorkshire Division) in the Great War': Western Front Association website:

<http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-on-land/britain-allies/1761-from-disaster-to-triumph-the-49th-west-riding-division-in-the-great-war.html> (accessed 3 July 2014).

¹⁵ A. P. Wavell (ed.), *Other Men's Flowers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 131.

¹⁶ Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* [1965] (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military Classics, 2006), 266.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁸ Vivien Whelpton, 'Poetry Matters', *Stand To!* 100 (June 2014), 135-139.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

Warwickshire's Adlestrop: Rupert Brooke in the Forest of Arden

GUY CUTHBERTSON

In the summer of 1914, with war breaking out in Europe and Britain's entry only days away, Rupert Brooke took a car journey to 'lovely' Hampden-in-Arden:

I remembered once passing through a station of that name. And I've always wanted to see the forest of Arden. ... Hampden-in-Arden. What a name to dream about! [...] It's the sort of country I adore. I'm a Warwickshire man. Don't talk to me of Dartmoor or Snowdon or the Thames or the Lakes. I know the *heart* of England. It has a hedgy, warm bountiful dimpled air. Baby fields run up & down the little hills, & all the roads wriggle with pleasure. There's a spirit of rare homeliness about the houses & the countryside, earthy, uneccentric yet elusive, fresh, meadowy, gaily gentle. [...] Shakespeare & I are Warwickshire yokels. What a county!¹

This letter about Hampden is arguably the first decent piece of war writing to come from the pen of one of our war poets – or, if you like, the first example of how literary this war would be. Just before Britain entered this war, a war in which letter-writing played such a part, Hampden-in-Arden produced a fine letter and one that says a good deal about both Brooke and England. The war is there in the letter in so far as Brooke complains that he couldn't find Shakespeare's holly or horns or shepherds or dukes at Hampden, and neither Rosalind nor Audrey – 'And Orlando's in an O.T.C. on Salisbury Plain'. The possibility of war is an undercurrent in everything he says in the letter, as he expresses his affection for home as well as a sense of the vulnerability of what he loves. The letter gives us, though, a different Brooke from the Brooke of 'The Soldier'; possibly even a writer who might appeal to modern readers more than the war sonneteer does.

We could easily compare this letter with 'The Soldier': certain words and images reappear in the sonnet written a few months later and both consider what England is and what is most lovable about it. The heart, the earth, the ways to roam, gentleness, the flowers, the sun, dreams, home, can all be

found in both the letter and the poem. Perhaps 'The Soldier' is a poem for Shakespeare's Orlando to recite at his O.T.C.; but the differences between the two pieces of writing are probably more important than the similarities. If Brooke had written poetry in the spirit of this letter, his reputation would be different. For a start, the letter shows us his sense of humour. Describing the visit to Hampden, he said 'It is perpetually June in Warwickshire, and always six o'clock of a warm afternoon' and 'the flowers smell of heaven; there are no such larks as ours, & no such nightingales; the men pay more than they owe; & the women have very great virtue & wonderful virtue, & that, mind you, by no means through the mere absence of trial'. With an eye for comic contrast, however, Brooke saw the less beautiful reality:

Hampden was just too full of the plutocracy of Birmingham, short, crafty, proudly vulgar men, for all the world like heroes of Arnold Bennett's novels. They were extraordinarily dressed, for the most part in very expensive clothes, but without collars. I think they'd *started* in collars, but removed them by the way. They rolled out of their cars, and along the street, none so much as five foot high, all hot, & canny to the point of unintelligibility, emitting the words 'Eh ...' or 'Ah, lad ...' at intervals. They were profound, terrifying, and of the essence of Life: but unlovely.

It is a relief to know that real, twentieth-century human beings live in Hampden. It is a real place (although with a touch of comic stereotype). Brooke offers us a pre-war England of motor-cars, cities and suburbanization, an obsession with 'home', new money, detachable collars and Birmingham. If only there were some Brummies in 'The Soldier' and some hints of Arnold Bennett in the war poet. There is no business in 'The Soldier': we have a 'rich earth' not the filthy rich, a 'richer dust' rather than the nouveau riche; we have giving rather than buying and selling. From Rugby four years earlier, he had written that

What happens is that I suddenly feel the extraordinary value and importance of everybody I meet, and almost everything I see. In *things* I am moved in this way especially by some things; but in people by almost all people. That is, when the mood is on me. I roam about places – yesterday I did it even in Birmingham! – and sit in trains and see the essential glory and beauty of all the people I meet. I can watch a dirty middle-aged tradesman in a railway-carriage for hours, and love every dirty greasy sulky wrinkle in his weak chin and every

button on his spotted unclean waistcoat. I know their states of mind are bad. But I'm so much occupied with their being there at all, that I don't have time to think of that. I tell you that a Birmingham goaty tariff-reform fifth-rate business-man is splendid and immortal and desirable. It's the same about the things of ordinary life. Half an hour's roaming about a street or village or railway station shows so much beauty that it is impossible to be anything but wild with suppressed exhilaration.²

Perhaps this was the occasion, while sharing a carriage with a Brummie businessman, travelling along the line between Rugby and Birmingham that ran through the Forest of Arden, when he had passed 'through a station of that name' and seen the intriguing 'Hampden-in-Arden' on the platform sign. In the South Seas in 1913, he had complained that the Pacific islands were going to become indistinguishable from Birmingham and when he wrote about Hampden he seems to have retained some of this fear of the modern life of trade and possessions that invades and destroys a 'primitive' Eden, but he could find beauty and life in modernity.

The Hampden letter is, though, a letter that causes some bafflement. Where is this Hampden- in-Arden? There is no such place. Critics and biographers have tended to avoid this matter by referring to Hampden as if it does exist or by simply skirting over its exact location. Christopher Hassall says that 'On August 2, the last Sunday of the old world at peace, the brothers thought they would go for a spree in Mrs. Brooke's motor car'.³ Nigel Jones simply mentions 'a long car trip with the Rane and Alfred through the English heartland of Warwickshire, redolent with images and memories of Shakespeare, whose death-day he would so soon come to share'.⁴ Hampden-in-Arden is most likely to be Hampton-in-Arden, a village of medieval and Victorian faux-medieval houses that could indeed convince the visitor that he has stepped back into Shakespeare's time. Thatched and half-timbered, the village could evoke *As You Like It*, as it has for many tourists. The Victorian buildings in their Tudor fancy-dress were no doubt built with Shakespeare in mind and, alongside six other poets, Shakespeare is depicted in saintly pose in the church's Edwardian east window.⁵ Some of Shakespeare's relations, Ardens, lived in the village, at a house that still exists. It is true though that Brooke's description of the place in his letter makes it sound more like the slightly better-known, busier Henley-in-Arden (the Henley of 'warmest welcome' of William Shenstone's 'Written at an Inn at Henley').⁶ Brooke describes 'Arden' as ten miles north of Stratford

and near ‘the Stratford-Birmingham canal’ – Henley is near this canal and roughly ten miles north of Stratford, whereas the canal turns towards Birmingham some miles before Hampton, which is nearer to the Grand Union Canal and some fifteen miles as the crow flies (twenty miles by today’s roads) north of Stratford. Brooke says he saw the Stratford- Birmingham canal but there’s no reason why he would have done if he had been visiting Hampton, but perhaps he got his canals mixed up or saw the River Blythe. And if ‘Arden’ refers to the forest not a village then it is correct to say that the forest traditionally begins just north of Stratford. Both Henley and Hampton had inns that served plenty of visitors from Birmingham – Hampton had three inns and two tearooms in 1914 and Henley was known for its inns lining the High Street. Brooke ‘wanted to go thirty miles away’ and both Hampton and Henley would fit that description, although Hampton is a little nearer than that (Hampton to Rugby is about 20 miles as the crow flies, but 28 miles by car). Both Hampton and Henley have a train station where he could have seen the name once before, although Hampton was on a main line used by express trains, with trains running to Rugby from Birmingham, and it is far more likely that it was Hampton-in-Arden station, hidden away from the village by steep green banks, that he saw once before. Throw a stick in either Hampton or Henley these days and you might not hit a tree but you are more than likely to hit a Brummie millionaire. No doubt it was the same a century ago. Hampton or Henley? Does it really matter? Not especially, and clearly it didn’t matter to Brooke, who got the name wrong and might have merged two places together.

One of the interesting things about the letter is that it plays with the real and the unreal and the slightly misremembered name only adds to that effect. What we get is a sense of how England was understood by many, probably most, people during the war – a mixture of the places they knew, both ugly and beautiful, and then the dream-like, literary idealized England. Brooke wrote about imaginary Englands that are written in the ‘little nowhere of the brain’:

and in that nowhere move
The trees and lands and waters that we love.

And she for whom we die, she the undying
Mother of men
England!

In Avons of the heart her rivers run.⁷

But in his letter in 1914 we get what he once referred to as ‘England (as I know it)’⁸ as well as England as we like it. It is a more representative attitude to England than the one in ‘The Soldier’ and in its particularity it is a more realistic interpretation of patriotism. It is often felt that Brooke’s ‘The Soldier’ is bad because it is unrealistic, offering a dream England rather than a specific, unofficial England of, say, hurrying trains passing through Adlestrop or Hampton-in-Arden.

Edward Thomas, the poet of ‘Adlestrop’, was friends with Brooke for several years and had stayed with him at Grantchester, but he was no great admirer of Brooke’s war sonnets (in 1916, two of Thomas’s poems seem to have been written in reaction against Brooke’s ‘The Soldier’ – ‘No one cares less than I’ on 25-6 May, and ‘As the team’s head-brass’ on 27 May). In the Hampden letter we see why they got along, despite a difference in age and lifestyle: Thomas would note Brooke’s realism and his ‘humour and good humour’ when he wrote his obituary for *The English Review* in 1915,⁹ and we see in the Hampden letter a Brooke who is closer to Thomas’s own writing. ‘Adlestrop’ was written during the war, around the time when ‘The Soldier’ was first published, but it recalls a train journey in June 1914. Like Thomas at Adlestrop, which was just over the border from Warwickshire (hearing all the birds of ‘Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire’, Thomas would have heard the birds of Warwickshire too), it was the name that attracted Brooke more than the place, and he had first seen the name when passing through on a train – it was a name to dream about but Brooke felt that ‘Perhaps one shouldn’t have *gone* there’ (Thomas never saw or visited Adlestrop, seeing ‘only the name’). Adlestrop and Hampden exist as real places, occasionally unlovely (someone ‘cleared his throat’ at Adlestrop, and at Hampden men go about without collars), wrapped up in unreality – the magical possibility of hearing *all* the birds of two counties, or the possibility of returning to Shakespeare’s England. Like Brooke, Thomas was always alert to the literary associations of names and places, and always aware of the difference between the actual place and the images its name evokes. Thomas went to Shakespeare country on 22 March 1912, writing that ‘Chance has brought me to Stratford upon Avon where it is evident Shakespeare once lived & is not alive now’;¹⁰ while Brooke complained that he couldn’t find much of *As You Like It* in the Forest of Arden – he only glimpses ‘a hart weeping large-eyed on the brink of the Stratford-Birmingham canal’. And in 1914 Thomas wrote a series of essays about England’s response to the war, journeying through the Forest of Arden when visiting Birmingham and Coventry. Like Brooke, he

saw the lovely and the unlovely in the heart of England, as he shows in his notebooks and in the essay ‘Tipperary’:

For the women the sun was too hot, but not for the corn, the clover-hay, the apples, of this great summer, nor for the recruits sleeping out. The sun gilded and regilded the gingerbread. Everybody that could, made an effort to rise to the occasion of the weather. The parks and the public gardens were thronged. The public-houses overflowed, often with but a single soldier as an excuse. Bands played in the streets – at Newcastle bagpipes – to quicken recruiting. A crowd listened to a band at Birmingham outside the theatre before going in to hear Mr. Lewis Waller recite ‘Kipling and Shakespeare,’ and the first remark to break the ensuing silence was, ‘It’s by far the best band in Birmingham, by far.’ Street meetings having no connection with the war were held. Men in the Bull Ring at Birmingham one afternoon argued furiously on faith and works, quoting Scripture amid eager onlookers.¹¹

Brooke’s sense that the unlovely city-dwellers were nonetheless ‘profound, terrifying, and of the essence of Life’ was echoed by Thomas in his wartime essays. Thomas knew that, although he loved the countryside, in order to understand England he needed to understand Birmingham, which was then the most modern of Britain’s cities, and towns and cities play a bigger part in Thomas’s poetry than one might be led to think (even in ‘Adlestrop’, the city is latent in the fact that it is an ‘express’ train).

We are still told today that, a century ago, it was ‘still Shakespeare’s England, recognisably’, and Brooke might give that impression in ‘The Soldier’ but his Hampden letter suggests otherwise.¹² All the world’s a stage, but collarless Brummie businessmen drive onto the stage in their cars like Mr Toad and remind him that this England is not a Shakespearean play. His letter complements and contradicts ‘The Soldier’. It is also a watershed moment, the final record of the world before the war and, at the same time, the beginning of Great War writing.

Notes

¹ Rupert Brooke, ‘July 1914’ in *The Letters*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 599.

² Timothy Rogers, *Rupert Brooke: A Reappraisal and Selection* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 43.

³ Christopher Hassall, *Rupert Brooke: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 456.

⁴ Nigel Jones, *Rupert Brooke: Life, Death and Myth* (London: BBC, 2003), 373.

⁵ The poets depicted as saints, behind the altar, are Langland, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Cowper, and Shelley.

⁶ This poem has been associated incorrectly with Henley-upon-Thames and it probably was not about Henley- in-Arden either, but the latter is the Henley of the poem's famous title.

⁷ 'Fragment of an Ode-Threnody on England' in Rogers, *Rupert Brooke*, 226.

⁸ Rogers, *Rupert Brooke*, 46.

⁹ Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to be Betrayed: Selected Prose*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 109.

¹⁰ Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (London: OUP, 1968), 220.

¹¹ Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to be Betrayed: Selected Prose*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 234.

¹² Paul Johnson, 'The Age of the Warrior Poet', *Standpoint* (June 2014).
<http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/5579>

Reclaiming F.W. Harvey

JAMES GRANT REPSHIRE

F. W. Harvey was one of the most popular soldier-poets during the First World War, yet until recently his works were in danger of fading into obscurity. He is unique for his insight into the prisoner of war (henceforth POW) experience, and also for his pioneering work in the first of the British trench journals, the *5th Gloucester Gazette*. Yet scholarly work on his life has been lacking, largely due to a previous insufficiency of primary source material. Fortunately, in 2010 Harvey's descendants discovered his personal papers in his derelict home in Yorkley, Gloucestershire. By late 2013 the F. W. Harvey Collection had become available for researchers at the Gloucestershire Archives, catalogued and preserved through a collaborative project that also involved the University of Exeter and the F. W. Harvey Society. The documents in the collection number well into the thousands, and include poetry and prose manuscripts, notebooks, personal records, BBC radio scripts, and a lifetime of correspondence – including many letters to and from his best friend Ivor Gurney – and even the full typescript of a novel, which was published for the first time this summer.¹

The availability of Harvey's papers gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate his place within the canon of First World War literature. In *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive*, Lisa Stead asserts that literary archives 'allow us to interrogate, dialogue with, and re-evaluate conventional conceptions of a writer, or to reclaim an author from critical or cultural obscurity'.² New research into Harvey's papers grants all of these things, facilitating a greater understanding of a significant First World War poet whose voice was in danger of being lost. Harvey experienced the war first as a private soldier, then as a non-commissioned officer, a commissioned officer, and finally as a POW. Enlisting in the 1/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment on 8 August 1914, he chose to serve as a private despite his public-school education and professional qualifications as a lawyer. The 1/5th Gloucesters arrived in France in March 1915, and on 15 April the first issue of the first British trench journal of the war, the *5th Gloucester Gazette*, appeared from their trenches in Ploegsteert, Belgium. Harvey's poetry featured heavily in every issue until his capture; he would publish seventy-seven poems there, along with some satirical prose. He provided so much quality material that its editor and founder, Chaplain (Captain) G. F. Helm, credited Harvey's

work as the primary reason for the periodical's survival through its early days.³ The *Gazette* and Harvey's work in it would inspire other trench journals, as evidenced by the popular *The Listening Post* of the 7th Canadian Infantry later reprinting – or more accurately, plagiarising, as they gave no credit for the original author or source – Harvey's poems 'Our Portrait Gallery – To P. H.' and 'To the Patriots of Poplar'.⁴

Harvey repeatedly volunteered for night patrols, resulting in promotion to lance-corporal, and in August 1915 he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and commissioned as a second lieutenant. He then returned to England to receive officer training. His trench-journal poetry had gained notice, even being reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁵ Sidgwick & Jackson soon contracted him, and August 1916 saw the publication of his first collection, *A Gloucestershire Lad at Home and Abroad*. It sold well, going into six editions by 1918.

Harvey had no opportunity to enjoy his newfound fame, as he returned to the front with 2/5th Gloucesters in July 1916, and was captured on 17 August. He was taken alone, having gone on what he later claimed was a solo-reconnaissance of a German trench – though new evidence indicates he may have gone out seeking vengeance-kills for the recent death of his comrade, Lieutenant R. E. Knight. Having entered a deep German trench during this action, he found himself unable to get back out before being cornered by enemy soldiers. He spent the rest of the war in captivity. Still, he had the distinction of being the only poet to publish a collection while a POW, when the commandant at Crefeld⁶ *Offiziersgefangenenlager* allowed him to mail home his manuscript of what was published in September 1917 as *Gloucestershire Friends: Poems from a German Prison Camp*. Harvey would publish further POW poems after the war in *Ducks, and Other Verses*, including the highly-popular title poem which was written after a serving period of solitary confinement as punishment for an escape attempt. In October 1918 he was moved to the Netherlands on a prisoner-exchange programme; however, his joy at release was diminished by news that his brother, Eric, had been killed in action that same month. He returned to Gloucestershire in February 1919 and was demobilised. His final publication that directly resulted from the war was memoirs of his life as a POW, *Comrades in Captivity* (1920). Still, the war would continue to influence his work until his death in 1957.

The greatest value of Harvey's wartime poetry comes from the insight it gives into the experience of British POWs. The POW experience of the

First World War has largely been ignored until recently, though studies are expanding thanks to a growing interest in POW experiences as a whole, evidenced by an entire conference dedicated to POW studies held by the newly-formed POW Network at Warwick University in November 2013. It must be noted that Harvey's status as an officer meant he was held in an all-officer POW camp, or *Offiziersgefangenenlager*, exempting him from the forced-labour endured by POWs from the ranks. Officer POW's primary distress was not physical hardship; rather it was an abundance of boredom that allowed the mind to dwell on negative thoughts and the hopelessness of confinement.

One of the few psychological studies of POWs was written by Major Walter A. Lunden, an American sociology professor who served as a prison officer during the Second World War. He noted that immediately after capture, POWs tend towards a state of shock and stupor, partially caused by the fact that capture, unlike death or wounding, is an outcome of combat that they had never envisioned. As they adjust to their new circumstances they begin to experience feelings of disgrace at having been captured.⁷ Harvey wrote that once his initial interrogations were over and he was placed in solitary confinement, he felt guilt that his family would worry over him, and that his comrades might get killed looking for him: 'Again and again, I asked myself if I could in any way have avoided being taken [...] why did I risk getting into that trench at all?'⁸

The feelings of guilt that Harvey, like most POWs, felt shortly after capture never left, but grew. His guilt was primarily associated with knowing that his comrades – including his two brothers – were still fighting in the front lines, while he was relatively safe in prison camps. In his memoirs he wrote that 'the whole sting of [the POW's] position, that which makes it so intolerable, is [...] his friends and brothers are "out there" killing and being killed. *He* cannot help them. He is futile [...] There is no more terrible reflection for a man.'⁹ He further explains that, though many might say that he was a decorated hero who had 'done his bit', he felt that a soldier's 'bit' was never done while his country was still at war.¹⁰ This inability to join comrades in fighting was what he called 'the true agony of the prisoner-state'.¹¹ This guilt was seen in many of his poems from *Gloucestershire Friends*.

One of these poems is 'Prisoners', written at Gütersloh and Crefeld *Offiziersgefangenenlagers* in late 1916 or 1917. As published in *Gloucestershire Friends*, it reads:

Comrades of risk and rigour long ago
Who have done battle under honour's name,
Hoped (living or shot down) some meed of fame,
And wooed bright Danger for a thrilling kiss, —
Laugh, oh laugh well, that we have come to this!

Laugh, oh laugh loud, all ye who long ago
Adventure found in gallant company!
Safe in Stagnation, laugh, laugh bitterly.
While on this filthiest backwater of Time's flow
Drift we and rot, till something set us free!

Laugh like old men with senses atrophied,
Heeding no Present, to the Future dead,
Nodding quite foolish by the warm fireside
And seeing no flame, but only in the red
And flickering embers, pictures of the past: —
Life like a cinder fading black at last.¹²

The poem addresses Harvey's fellow POWs, who were once fighters – 'Comrades of risk and rigour' – but are now neutralized. This poem is consistent with Lunden's observation that most soldiers envisioned death or wounding rather than capture removing them from the battlefield, as Harvey states they hope to find fame either 'living or shot down'.

The new availability of Harvey's manuscript of *Gloucestershire Friends* allows us to use early drafts of this poem to gain further insight into the POW's emotions. Harvey does not directly state in the published version of this poem that he feels guilt that others are fighting while he is not; however, in his earliest draft, the fourth and fifth lines of the second stanza read 'Here we must wait till others set us free. / Safe in stagnation! Laugh, laugh bitterly!'¹³ The manuscript shows that Harvey recognised that his freedom was now conditional upon his comrades fighting to defeat the enemy. Not only could he no longer fight alongside his comrades, but his comrades now had to fight on his behalf. This idea of waiting to be set free by others continued in the second draft of his poem, but was eventually edited out completely in his third draft.

Another poem from *Gloucestershire Friends*, 'At Afternoon Tea', indicates the same guilt felt by POWs, which is again exposed by a close reading of its

manuscript version. Harvey used the triolet to highlight the emotional and experiential distance between those fighting in the trenches, and those who merely hear about the fighting secondhand. The published version reads:

We have taken a trench
 Near Combles, I see,
 Along with the French.
 We have taken a trench.
 (Oh, the bodies, the stench!)
 Won't you have some more tea?
 We have taken a trench
 Near Combles, I see.¹⁴

The shifting meaning of the repeated lines highlights that the mere statement 'We have taken a trench' does little justice to the violent reality of such an event. The initial observation of having taken the trench is made somewhat lightly, as indicated by the slightly flippant 'I see'. However, the parenthetical statement acknowledging the macabre aftermath of such an event gives the final two lines a gravity not felt in their appearance as the first two lines. In the final line, 'I see' now implies insight.

Notes show that he originally wrote the triolet like a script, with the speakers of the lines indicated in the margin. The location of the trench was also different. His handwritten copy reads:

Host Speaking:- We've taken a trench
 Near Oviliers, I see,
 Along with the French.
 We've taken a trench
 myself thinking:- (Oh, the bodies! The stench!) <-- Italics
 H. Speaking:- Would you have some more tea?
 We've taken a trench
 Near Oviliers I see.¹⁵

Harvey later crossed out these cues. By reading the poem with the cues still in place, we see the poet as a participant in the scene, possibly imagining himself home from the front, as he was from August 1915-July 1916 when he receiving officer training. In this situation, his non-combatant host's casual remarks about the capture of the trench are opposed by Harvey's knowledge – which parentheses indicate that he thinks but does not speak – of the truth

of what happens when a trench is taken. This is further reinforced as the 1/5th Gloucesters did attack near Oviliers in July 1916 while Harvey was away from the front, resulting in the death of his friend Lieutenant R.E. Knight.¹⁶

Changes in the poem's final draft further suggest POW guilt. Prior to publication, 'Oviliers' was replaced by 'Combles'. 1/5th Gloucesters made gains near Combles during the battle of the Somme, just after Harvey's capture.¹⁷ While news from the front was officially restricted by the Germans, POWs followed the war by questioning new arrivals. J. A. L. Caunter, a 1st Gloucester who was with Harvey at Crefeld *Offiziersgefangenenlager*, claimed that officers on parole in the local villages could covertly obtain copies of *The Times* from villagers.¹⁸ Caunter added that POWs knew most news even before new arrivals told it to them.¹⁹ The attack near Combles on 27 August 1916 was a large effort that resulted in the 1/5th Gloucesters capturing a trench along with 30 Germans and inflicting an estimated 200 casualties, while suffering 17 killed, 86 wounded, and 11 missing – casualty figures not likely to escape notice even by POWs in Germany.²⁰ Harvey's changing of 'Oviliers' to 'Combles', reflected that while the fighting continued for his comrades in the trenches, he and other prisoners were at the liberty to do such things as relax with afternoon tea. Harvey reported that afternoon tea was a daily occurrence held after sporting events at Gütersloh *Offiziersgefangenenlager*, the camp he was at when the attack near Combles occurred.²¹

Reading the poem with this in mind, one can imagine an officer hosting tea in a POW camp reporting the news of these gains, initially glad of the victory. Yet, mention of trench warfare causes the host and his companions to internally reflect on the true horror of the event, from which they are now spared. He breaks the silence by offering more tea, speaking again of the trench's capture with the somberness brought by personal experience, and the guilt of not having participated. The parentheses show that dreadful facts need not be stated aloud; the tea-drinkers all know it, and so they continue their tea, trying not to think too deeply on it. The parenthesis may even indicate an attempt by the speaker to suppress traumatic memories of trench combat, or perhaps that focusing on the simple task at hand – offering more tea to his guests – is allowing him to repress thoughts that sit below the surface. The poem certainly shows that Harvey saw some ignominy in being a non-participant in the fighting. As a POW and now *hors de combat*, he couldn't help but feel that ignominy reflected back on himself, a feeling that fellow POWs could relate to.

Were it not for the rescue of Harvey's papers, these in-depth readings of his POW poems showing hints of the guilt felt by First World War officer POWs would not be possible. Though Harvey's poems as published give a unique insight into the lives of First World War POWs, only through his manuscript drafts can we explore ideas and emotions that he chose not to publish, either because he did not want to fully disclose these feelings publicly, or simply for reasons of poetic form and readability. Harvey's papers are helping us to give the First World War POW experience the same treatment through literary scholarship that the trench experience has been given. Not only can his literary archive expand our understanding of this heretofore understudied aspect of the war, it is also allows us to seek a greater appreciation of one of the war's unique poets.

Notes

¹ The typescript, originally titled 'Will Harvey – A Romance' has been published as *The Lost Novel of F. W. Harvey – A War Romance* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014).

² Lisa Stead, 'Introduction', *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive - Reclamation and Representation*, ed. Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 3.

³ George Frances Helm, 'Introduction', *5th Gloucester Gazette*, ed. George Frances Helm, post-war bound reprint (Gloucester: John Jennings, [undated]), iv.

⁴ W. G. Gibson, ed., *The Listening Post* 2 (30 August 1915), *The Listening Post* 6 (20 October 1915), <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-collections/collection/the-first-world-war-visual-perspectives-and-narratives/> (accessed 30 July 2013).

⁵ E. B. Osborn, 'Trench Journals', *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, 12 October 1916), 769 (accessed 5 April 2013).

⁶ Contemporary spelling, it is now known as Krefeld.

⁷ Walter A. Lunden, 'Captivity Psychosis among Prisoners of War', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 39 (1949), 721–33: 725.

⁸ F. W. Harvey, *Comrades in Captivity - A Record of Life in Seven German Prison Camps [1920]* (Coleford: Douglas McLean Publishing, 2010), 40.

⁹ Harvey, *Comrades in Captivity*, 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹² F. W. Harvey, *Gloucestershire Friends: Poems from a German Prison Camp* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1917), 17.

¹³ F. W. Harvey, 'Gloucestershire Friends – Poems from a German Prison Camp' (manuscript), Gloucestershire Archives (henceforth GA), F.W. Harvey Collection (henceforth FWH), D12912/21/3/Notebook 2.

¹⁴ Harvey, *Gloucestershire Friends*, 44.

¹⁵ Harvey, 'Gloucestershire Friends' (manuscript), GA, FWH, D12912/21/3/Notebook 2.

¹⁶ '1/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment War Diary, 1914-1918' (typed copy), 1920, Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum Archives (henceforth SoGM).

¹⁷ '1/5th Battalion War Diary', SoGM.

¹⁸ J.A.L. Caunter, *13 Days - The Chronicle of an Escape from a German Prison* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1918), 31.

¹⁹ Caunter, 41.

²⁰ '1/5th Battalion War Diary', SoGM.

²¹ Harvey, *Comrades in Captivity*, 91.

‘A revolver to Charon’s Head’: Robert Graves and Survival

CHARLES MUNDY

Just four days before his twenty-first birthday, on 20 July 1916, Captain Robert Graves was preparing to support an assault on High Wood during the Battle of the Somme. Whilst running for cover through a cemetery, he was hit by shell shrapnel in the leg and chest. He moved by stretcher-bearers to an old German dressing station at the recently-captured Mametz Wood, where he was left for dead. His Colonel wrote immediately to Graves’s parents to say that their son was very gallant, and had died of wounds.

The next day Graves was found, despite the night’s neglect, to be not dead after all, though it took until 5 August and the Court Circular in the *Times* newspaper for the story to be put officially straight: ‘Captain Robert Graves, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, officially reported died of wounds, wishes to inform his friends that he is recovering from his wounds at Queen Alexandra’s Hospital, Highgate.’¹

It is likely that this early brush with death saved Robert Graves’s life. He was so seriously wounded that, despite a brief return to the Somme in February 1917, he didn’t find himself in a place of extreme front-line danger again for the rest of the war, although he was not finally demobilised until early 1919. In the immediate aftermath of this near-death experience Graves seemed at least to be in remarkably good spirits in his poetry and in his letters, writing to Edward Marsh with a whimsical account of his near-death experience. On the way to Hades and crossing Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, he writes:

Then I strode away, held a revolver to Charon’s head, climbed into the boat and so home. I gave him a Rouen note for 50cm which I didn’t want particularly. Remained Cerberus whose three heads were, I noticed, mastiff, dalmatian and dachshund. He growled furiously and my revolver was empty, and I’d no ammunition. Happy thought: honeyed cakes and poppy seed. But none was handy; however, I had an excellent substitute – Army biscuit smeared with Tickler’s ‘plum and apple’ and my little morphia tablets carefully concealed in the appetizing conserve.²

Later in his life Robert Graves was to become famous amongst other things for his accounts of the Greek myths. Here, his scenario layers contemporary warfare with the classically mythological. The same scenario also provides Graves with the substance of a poem, titled ‘Escape’, in which one notable addition to the prose reverie is the intercession on his behalf of the Queen of the Underworld, who presides over death, but who here grants life-from-death:

Oh, may Heaven bless
 Dear Lady Proserpine, who saw me wake
 And, stooping over me, for Henna’s sake
 Cleared my poor buzzing head and sent me back
 Breathless, with leaping heart along the track.³

With this addition he plants a seed of an idea about the significance of the goddess figure, which thirty years later bloomed into one of the most extraordinary books of the twentieth century: Graves’s *The White Goddess*, subtitled ‘A historical grammar of poetic myth’, and published in the aftermath of the Second World War in 1948. Proserpine in this poem is an early manifestation of one aspect of his triple goddess theory: the goddess as mother, bride, and layer-out in death. Fran Brearton is surely right in seeing this much later book as engaging ‘if obliquely, with the politics of the 1940s, and thus, over its shoulder, with the politics of the Great War and inter-war period.’⁴

Graves signed up as a young volunteer in August 1914, just a matter of days after his nineteenth birthday, and straight from school. His first collection, *Over the Brazier* (1916) is in two parts: firstly ‘Poems Written at Charterhouse 1910–1914’, consisting of schoolboy poems which demonstrate an extraordinary precocity of talent, and then part 2, ‘Poems Written Before La Bassée – 1915’, in which the schoolboy attempts the transition to soldier, and negotiates the related movement from a kind of innocence to experience, and from home life to life at the Front.

Graves’s next collection, *Goliath and David*, contains one of his most anthologised poems, ‘A Dead Boche’, in which a transformation from death into a kind of macabre life makes the paradox of war all the more immediately vivid:

To-day I found in Mametz Wood
 A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.⁵

The metamorphosis of the dead corpse into grotesque material life comes through his seemingly active presence – he sits, he scowls, he stinks, he dribbles. This is poetry that embodies paradox and metamorphosis. Death comes unexpectedly out of life, and life out of death in ways that are characteristic of a naturally mythological imagination at work.

Graves encountered the corpses that inspired this poem whilst employed in recovering the dead from Mametz Wood. The preceding battle was one of the bloodiest on the Somme, and the 38th (Welsh) Infantry Division, tasked with taking the wood, lost 4,000 men in the process. Two other notable poets were involved at Mametz: David Jones, and Siegfried Sassoon. Graves and Sassoon, both Officers in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, had first met and become close friends in November 1915 at Béthune. By July 1916 they were in different Battalions, but stationed on the Somme near enough to each other for them to meet on 14 July. The companion poem to ‘A Dead Boche’, written at the same time, provides an instance of the two opposite impulses in Graves’s war poetry. ‘Letter to S.S. from Mametz Wood’, later titled ‘Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon’, is a sort of generic hybrid between poem and letter, imagining a world beyond war where friendship and poetry alike might flourish:

In Gweithdy Bach we’ll rest a while,
We’ll dress our wounds and learn to smile
With easier lips; we’ll stretch our legs,
And live on bilberry tart and eggs⁶

A later poem, however, written in about 1924 to Sassoon, or, rather, Sassoon’s double with the soubriquet Captain Abel Wright, gives a much more complex account of their post-war relationship. Graves creates his own double named ‘Richard Rolls’, and Rolls suggests that he did in fact die in 1916 on the date of Graves’s birthday (24 July), and was replaced by a double who looked exactly the same but was not him. Similarly, Rolls speculates that Sassoon’s double Wright may not actually have survived his earlier heroic actions:

And I don't know for sure, but I suspect
That you were dead too, killed at the Rectangle
One bloody morning of the same July,
The time that something snapped and sent you Berserk:
You ran across alone, with covering fire
Of a single rifle, routing the Saxons out
With bombs and yells and your wild eye; and stayed there
In careless occupation of the trench
For a full hour, reading, by all that's mad,
A book of pastoral poems! Then, they say,
Then you walked slowly back and went to sleep
Without reporting; that was the occasion,
No doubt, they killed you: it was your substitute
Strolled back and laid him down and woke as you⁷

Wright is the literary double of Sassoon, whose actions encapsulate the absurd paradoxes of war, reading pastoral poetry in the midst of a single-handed attack on the enemy, a double who then didn't, as he thought he did, survive, but was replaced by his own double. These are perhaps not so much questions of identity as expressions of the uncertainty of knowing anything for sure again, about oneself, about others; expressions of fracture, of division, of discontinuity even where things might appear to be normal.

In *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Graves's autobiographical account of his younger self, he claims that in one of their earliest meetings in 1915 Sassoon took him to task for the realism of Graves's war poetry:

In return he showed me some of his own poems. One of them began:
Return to greet me, colours that were my joy,
Not in the woeful crimson of men slain....
This was before Siegfried had been in the trenches.
I told him, in my old-soldier manner, that he would soon change
his style.⁸

Graves was the younger of the two, but at this stage more experienced in war, and therefore, he maintains, more advanced in finding an appropriate poetic register to describe war. Such an exchange may or may not have happened in quite this way, and the unreliability of memory and autobiography is part of the shaping motivation for Graves's memoir. Throughout, uncertainty is the only thing that is certain.

By 1918 Sassoon had indeed changed his style, and was turning the tables by taking Graves to task for being short on anger and feeling in certain poems that were addressing subjects other than war, and the pity of it. Indeed, writing to Wilfred Owen in December 1917, Graves had exclaimed: 'For God's sake cheer up and write more optimistically – the war's not ended yet but a poet should have a spirit above wars.'⁹ Countering Sassoon's criticisms in a letter of August 1918, Graves reinforces the sentiment expressed in the letter to Owen:

I can't write otherwise than I am now except with hypocrisy for I am bloody happy and bloody young (with only very occasional lapses) and passionate anger is most ungrateful. And I can't afford to stop in these penurious days and anyhow my 'antique silk and flower brocade' continue to please the seventeen-year-old girls and other romantics for whom they are intended: and why not? Worrying about the war is no longer a sacred duty with me: on the contrary, neither my position as a cadet instructor nor my family duties permit it.¹⁰

Yet, there is as much, if not more, significance in the parenthesis here as there is in the rest of the letter, which protests too much, has too much the air of a studied public persona interested in audiences and bank balances and duty, which is shoring up the interior horror contained in the brackets.

Graves deliberately did for his own reputation as a war poet. Even by the second edition of *Over the Brazier* he was already starting the process of editing his war poetry out, and by the time of the later editions of his *Collected Poems* he cut out virtually all of his early war poems. By 1941, in the early stages of the next war, Graves was making it clear that he wanted to leave his own 'war poems' behind as 'too obviously written during the war poetry boom'.¹¹ The older Graves was fundamentally sceptical about war poetry, seeing it as a specific genre made possible by the circumstances of one war alone, and indeed one poetic style alone – the Georgian style. Poets are rarely the best judges, or editors, of their own work, and we should forgive the old soldier his prejudices against poems about a subject that remained deeply painful to him, a pain intensified by the loss of his son David during World War Two on active duty for the Royal Welch Fusiliers in Burma in March 1943. These next few anniversary years, however, afford us a good opportunity to re-evaluate the importance and significance of Graves's early war poems, to bring back to life once again the young poet who was nearly killed on the Somme in 1916, with all due

respect to the old poet who had such a long and flourishing career until his death in Mallorca in 1985.

Notes

¹ Anon, 'Court Circular.' *The Times* [London, England] 5 Aug. 1916: 9. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 26 Mar. 2014.

² Robert Graves, letter to Edward Marsh, 7 August 1916, in *Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1914–1946*, ed. by Paul O'Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 59.

³ Robert Graves, 'Escape', from *Goliath and David* (1916) in *Robert Graves: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (London: Penguin, 2003), 28.

⁴ Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.

⁵ Robert Graves, 'A Dead Boche', *The Complete Poems*, 27.

⁶ Robert Graves, 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon', from *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917) in *The Complete Poems*, 38–39.

⁷ Robert Graves, 'A Letter from Wales', from *Welchman's Hose* (1925) in *The Complete Poems*, 232–37.

⁸ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), 224.

⁹ Robert Graves, letter to Wilfred Owen, December 1917, in Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 596.

¹⁰ Robert Graves, letter to Siegfried Sassoon, 26 August 1918, in *Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1914–1946*, 101.

¹¹ Robert Graves, 'War Poetry in this War', *Listener*, 667 (23 October 1941), 566–67 (566).

Richard Aldington's War Poetry: Images, Impressions and Impact

MICHAEL COPP

Aldington's best war poetry offers objective treatment of the front's realities ... [and] a much wider range of immediate sensation and a more realistic perception of the war than do the verses of most of the trench poets.
(Fred D. Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War*, 1988)¹

Aldington's war poetry is strikingly varied. In a series of thematic polarities he juxtaposes the brutal and the fragile, the military and the civilian, order and chaos, a serene Hellenism and a stark curative realism, isolation and togetherness, love-making and death. Throughout Aldington's war poetry we keep encountering four major themes. Three of them, an idealised Hellenic past, a sensitive response to the natural world, and love of woman, often sensual, enable Aldington to escape from the fourth, the brutal reality of war, by means of memory, imagination or wish-fulfilment.

His war poetry begins with a handful of poems written in London when still a civilian. He explores his active war experience for the most part, but not exclusively, in two major collections, *Images of War* (1919) and *Images of Desire* (1919). Post-war, his poetry is not wholly purged of war memories, as the longer poems he wrote in the 1920s and 1930s testify. Nor do his novel, *Death of a Hero* (1929), and his collection of war stories, *Paths of Glory* (1930) mark an end to haunting recollections of the war.

Four short poems, written in 1915 and 1916, show Aldington in true imagist mode, characterised by their concision, concreteness and clarity. They provide impressionistic glimpses of contemporary London with ominous hints of fear and destruction hanging over normal civilian life. 'Sunsets' ends with the lines:

And the wind
Blowing over London from Flanders
Has a bitter taste.

In 'Hampstead Heath' the night sky above the clamour of the pleasure-seeking crowd is pierced:

By a swift searchlight, a long white dagger.

And in 'Sloane Street' the moon has to compete with:

On the left a searchlight
A silver stream among the stars.

The final stanza points to the paradoxical effect of London's dimmed street lamps: wartime conditions allow Londoners to once more appreciate the true beauty of the night sky:

London was a rich young man
Burdened with great possessions –
Now, poor in light,
Menaced, and a little frightened,
At length he sees the stars.

'London' begins with three short, two or three-line, haiku-like, stanzas, impressionistically listing either natural phenomena (leaves, a squall, clouds, wheat fields) or man-made things (a church spire, chimneys, roofs). The fourth and fifth stanzas continue this theme and introduce a note of anxiety before the final stanza expresses the premonition that all this beauty could be wiped out by war:

A pear-tree, a broken white pyramid
In a dingy garden, troubles me
With ecstasy.

At night, the moon, a pregnant woman,
Walks cautiously over the slippery heavens.

And I am tormented,
Obsessed,
Among all this beauty,
With a vision of ruins,
Of walls crumbling into clay.

Aldington enlisted in June 1916, and began his military service with the 11th Devonshires. In December he was drafted for the Leicestershire Regiment, and in January 1917 was sent to the 11th Battalion of the Leicestershire

regiment, a Pioneer battalion. After periods of training in England he was commissioned in November 1917 as a second lieutenant in the Royal Sussex Regiment. While serving in France, Aldington wrote to his great friend F. S. Flint, confident that he had written an important and original body of war poems:

I have spoken of the war more frankly than almost any other Englishman [...] & when you read *Images of War*² [...] I think you will admit that I have by implication written a denunciation of the war. You must not expect a book of *faits divers* from me; but anyone who reads attentively the book [...] will see the indignation, the pity, the anguish underneath. [...] [T]hough I may seem absurdly vain in claiming it, I believe them to be the most sincere war poems yet written in English.³

After demobilisation in February 1919 he was lodging in London, with no secure base, was finding it hard to make living and was suffering from severe depression and self-doubt, as the following letter of 17 May to Flint reveals:

I am going through a really desperate crisis. I have serious doubts about my talent. [...] I've lost any confidence. [...] My *Images of Desire* poems I rate as vulgar. [...] My war poems – pooh! What rubbish!⁴

Images of War was eventually published in April 1919. It is a carefully planned and clearly structured volume. This concern for purposeful arrangement informs the trajectory of the sequence. Two framing poems, 'Proem' and 'Epilogue' bracket three chronologically ordered groups that can be summarised as training, trenches and trauma. In 'Proem' Aldington voices the problem facing him as a poet struggling to come to grips with the war:

Each day I grow more restless,
See the austere shape elude me,
Gaze impotently upon a thousand miseries
And am still dumb.

The first two impressionistic stanzas of 'Machine Guns' depict the visual effect of ricocheting bullets, and snapshots of men in and near a trench. In the third stanza Aldington comments wryly on the necessity for officers to put on a bold face for the sake of their men's morale:

Only we two stand upright;
All differences of life and character smoothed out
And nothing left
Save that one foolish tie of caste
That will not let us shrink.

In 'In the Trenches', after rejecting exhaustion, fear, loneliness as the destructive components of war, Aldington introduces a strikingly complex image:

Not that we are weary,
Not that we fear,
Not that we are lonely
Though never alone –
Not these, not these destroy us.

But that each rush and crash
Of mortar shell,
Each cruel bitter shriek of bullet
That tears the wind like a blade,
Each wound on the breast of earth,
Of Demeter, our Mother,
Wound us also,
Sever and rend the fine fabric
Of the wings of our frail souls,
Scatter into dust the bright wings
Of Psyche!

The ordnance of war threatens and destroys not only the soldier's material existence, but his spiritual life as well. Psyche works well as a multi-layered image. In Greek, 'psyche' signifies both 'soul' and 'butterfly'. In painting Psyche is represented as a maiden with the wings of a butterfly. This is much more than Aldington just playing an esoteric game with classical allusions. Many soldiers would have seen the fragile beauty of a butterfly 'scattered into dust' by a bullet. Thus Aldington concludes with an authentic piece of war observation.

This stanza is a typical example of Aldington as the sensitive Hellenist, horrified at war's destruction of the natural world. The titles of some of the later poems in this collection testify to Aldington's state of mind immediately after the war: 'Doubt', 'Resentment', 'Disdain' and 'Apathy'.

In *Images of Desire* (1919) we find erotic images of sensual love-making side by side with memories of the losses and horrors of war, as in the short poem 'Reserve':

Though you desire me I will still feign sleep
 And check my eyes from opening to the day,
 For as I lie, thrilled by your gold-dark flesh,
 I think of how the dead, my dead, once lay.

This theme is also present in other poems such as 'Before Parting', 'Daybreak' and 'Meditation'.

Aldington's experiments with the free verse form of the prose poem are usually omitted from most anthologies of war poetry. This absence is hard to justify. Seventeen of them are included in *The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington*.⁵ They are included at the end of *The Love of Myrrhine and Konallis, and Other Prose Poems* (1926), and were recycled in the short story 'Farewell to Memories' in the collection *Roads to Glory* (1930), where they alternate with the prose narrative sections of the story. As Vivien Whelpton says: 'the battlefield pieces, particularly when they confine themselves to the concrete circumstances of a moment's experience, have a compelling beauty and pathos'.⁶ 'Fatigues', 'The Road', 'Stand-To', 'Landscape' and 'Song' are particularly effective in this respect. 'Landscape' ends with the lines:

Heavy scented the air tonight –
 New-mown hay – a pungent exotic
 Odour – phosgene...
 And to-morrow there will be huddled
 Corpses with blue horrible faces
 And foam on their writhed mouths.

In Aldington's longer post-war poems the war continues to emerge, often unexpectedly and abruptly, as in the erotic poem *A Dream in the Luxembourg* (1930). Aldington recalls aspects of his war experience by means of a series of rhetorical questions:

How many yellow dead men have I seen?
 Carried how many stretchers?
 Stood by how many graves – of young men too?
 Reported how many casualties?

The long ambitious poem *A Fool i' the Forest* (1924) contains a war section in which one character, the Conjuror, as Sergeant-Major, brainlessly gives away the position of the narrator, 'I', and another character, Mezzetin. Mezzetin is killed by an enemy shell and the narrator says:

My heart went icy; I felt sick, sick,
And something vital left me forever.

Then I knew Mezzetin
Was as much to me as life itself;

In this poem Aldington explores his sense of personal disintegration and loss of his creative powers brought about by the war.

Life Quest (1935) is the last poem of Aldington's to contain war material. In one section the poet, strolling by a river in France, suddenly sees the body of a dead snake lying in the water. This triggers off a sequence of juxtaposed hallucinatory images, growing in intensity. Aldington abandons all punctuation as each image rapidly succeeds the previous one: dead snake – dead English soldier – dead German officer – dead soldiers – dead self – dead snake:

I saw the white belly of the dead snake
And I saw the body of a dead English soldier
Laid like a coloured statue on the fire-step
I saw and the same sickly smell came choking
The body of a young German officer
His face blue-grey like his uniform
I saw the rag-clothed skeletons of Loos
I saw my own body lying white and helpless
Belly turned to the sun
Gently swaying in the water
Under the sunlight where the snake lay
With all the queer taut snake-life gone limp and lost.

Aldington's most modernist poem, 'By the King's Most Excellent Majesty: A Proclamation', is inserted into his 1934 novel *All Men are Enemies*, at the beginning of Part II. It is notable for its modernist procedures: the language is fragmentary, discontinuous and elliptical; it lacks rhyme and punctuation; the word-spacing and lineation are erratic. Each year of the war is characterised by the choice of a well-known popular song of the period.

These familiar ditties chart how attitudes develop and are modified by the war. The mood darkens from one of enthusiastic jingoism from civilians at the start of the war to one of bleakly cynical resignation and black humour from the survivors of the war. The satirical impact of the poem gains from Aldington omitting any personal comments in this collage of excerpts:

1914

don't want to lose you
 you ought to go your
King and your Country
 kiss you when you come back

1915

 a long way
it's a long way to go
 a long way
goodbye farewell
it's a long long way

1916

I want to go home
 home
take me over the sea
don't want to die
 home

1917

take the cylinders out of my kidneys
the connecting rod out of my brain
 from under my backbone
assemble again

1918

I know where they are,
 where they are

on the old barbed wire
I've seen them I've seen them
hanging on the old barbed wire
I've seen

1919

and when I die don't
bury me at all just
pickle my bones
in alcohol
in al-co-hol

GOD SAVE THE KING

In the opening poem of *Images of War* Aldington was concerned that on starting to tackle the war as a subject for his poetry the 'austere shape' that he sought would be difficult to achieve. It does indeed 'elude' him here, to be replaced by this quintessential example of *discontinuity*, the true 'shape' of the war.

Notes

¹ Fred D. Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses), 90-91.

² Richard Aldington, *Images of War* (London: Allen & Unwin 1919).

³ Michael Copp, ed., *Imagist Dialogues: Letters between Aldington, Flint and Others* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press 2009), 228.

⁴ Copp, ed., *Imagist Dialogues*, 253-4.

⁵ Michael Copp, ed., *An Imagist at War: The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002).

⁶ Vivien Whelpton, *Richard Aldington: Poet, Soldier and Lover 1911-1929* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press 2014), 211.

A Cell of One's Own: Conscientious Objection and John Rodker's Narratives of Resistance

EVELYN HEINZ

In the foreword to his 1935 essay collection *We Did Not Fight: 1914-18 Experiences of War Resisters*, Julian Bell summarises the position of the C. O. in World War I as follows:

The position of the conscientious objector was one of simple resistance; a conviction that it was impossible for anyone of intellectual and moral integrity to surrender to the discretion of fools and scoundrels engaged in the enterprise of destroying civilisation.¹

With his collection of first-hand accounts, Bell's aim is to shed light on the unwritten history of Britain's conscientious objectors and to pay tribute to their acts of resistance: 'That pacifists and conscientious objectors were not cowards I think these narratives will make clear.'² One of the narratives included in Bell's book is the essay 'Twenty Years After' by John Rodker, a writer, publisher and translator associated with Modernism. A conscientious objector in World War I, Rodker spent the period between 1916 and 1918 either in prison or on the run from the authorities. In his essay he reconsiders the implications of pacifist resistance some twenty years after the war, arguing that '[w]hatever the function of the pacifist, we may rest sure it was a valuable one, if only as a brake on the sadistic juggernaut of war.'³ Although the historical and political significance of Britain's conscientious objectors is acknowledged today, the literature produced by war resisters has so far received much less attention than the work of Britain's celebrated War Poets. With reference to John Rodker's little known narratives of conscientious objection, particularly the poem 'A CO's Biography' and the novel *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, this essay begins to explore a hitherto under-appreciated body of pacifist war writing.

During the war, John Rodker attempted to evade conscription, was arrested and imprisoned and later wrote about his experiences as a conscientious objector.⁴ He wrote and rewrote the narrative of his resistance over almost fifteen years. The first version, possibly started as early as 1917 but certainly completed by January 1918, was a long poem entitled 'A CO's Biography'.

The poem remained unpublished, apart from two stanzas which appeared with slight alterations under the title 'From A Biography' in the volume *Hymns* (1920) and as 'Two Prison Poems' in Rodker's *Collected Poems 1912-1925* (1930).⁵ *Dartmoor*, a fictionalised prose account of the period during which Rodker carried out 'Work of National Importance', building roads on the moor, first appeared in a French translation by Ludmilla Savitzky, serialised in *La Revue Européenne* between October and December 1923.⁶ The original English text was later incorporated into the novel *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, published anonymously in 1932. Rodker's friendship with Isaac Rosenberg, with whom he communicated intermittently throughout the war, further entices us to look upon Rodker's prison cell memoirs as a complementary discourse to Rosenberg's trench poetry. Yet, if what we are looking for is a tale, in Bell's words, of 'simple resistance' and 'intellectual and moral integrity' we will be disappointed. What makes Rodker's narratives of his resistance unique is that they are uniquely unheroic. His strongly autobiographical and introspective approach rather focusses on the conflicting drives and desires which constantly undermine the individual's attempts at acting with integrity, while his complex psychological portraits of the conscientious objector challenge the notion of pacifism as a stance of 'simple resistance'.

When the Conscription Act was passed in early 1916, Rodker initially 'refused to believe in [it]' and made little effort to stay hidden from the authorities.⁷ The novelist Dorothy Richardson remembers Rodker's behaviour during that time as positively reckless:

I have a vivid memory of R. at the beginning of conscription when he was sleeping every night in a different house to evade registration. A part of us were strolling about in Brunswick Square gardens, when someone said to R. 'Look out, there's a military policeman prowling around.' 'Where?' asked R. all alert & very debonair. Having identified the hawk, he strolled up to him with a slight limp & a dangling cigarette & asked for a light. Soon afterwards we all silently stole away.⁸

Richardson's anecdote corroborates Rodker's depiction of the period in his fictionalised autobiography *Memoirs of Other Fronts*. The novel consists of three parts. The first and third parts recount events in the narrator's life which take place after the war. These two narratives are based on Rodker's relationship with his lover Nancy Cunard and the aftermath of his failed marriage to Mary Butts. Couched between these two narratives is the

section 'A C.O.'s War 1914-1925' which contains an account of Rodker's experiences as a conscientious objector. Here, Rodker describes how, during the first months of conscription, London's conscientious objectors had somehow become invisible in plain sight. The 'conchies', he writes, were able to go on with business as usual for a while because they blended in with other marginalised social groups, the 'boys, stray Russians, Japanese, Colonials, Americans, Central Europeans, rejects', who were excluded from the business of war because they were foreign or deemed physically unfit.⁹ The link between conscientious objection and foreignness is of some significance to the *Memoirs*. Rodker presents the C.O. as a type of 'stranger' and his resistance as a version of his narrator's experiences of foreignness in the other parts of the novel. While, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator articulates his feeling of foreignness in terms of a national identity, stating '[i]n Paris I feel English, in London a foreigner,' the second part portrays the C.O. as intellectually restless, perpetually at odds with his environment and yearning for a place where he can feel at home.¹⁰

The alienation of the conscientious objector from his social environment is described in great detail in Rodker's first war resister narrative, the poem 'A CO's Biography', which chronicles the events from Rodker's second arrest in April 1917 to his release from Wandsworth Prison six months later. With frequent references to recognisable London locations, Rodker constructs a psychological geography of his hometown from which the subject of the 'Biography' becomes increasingly removed as his arrest and imprisonment relegate him to a position of social isolation. '[T]hrough a chink' in the tumbril transporting him to prison the C.O. spies an already intangible Holborn, sees Bow Street and Oxford Street revealed 'strip by strip', fragments of his former life gleaned through a peephole.¹¹ Thrust into a crowded guard room alongside criminals whose mere sight terrifies him, he 'hides behind the thought of last Tuesday and Piccadilly,' clutching onto the memory of a life from which he has been so suddenly and brutally wrested. Only 'last Tuesday' he was among the revellers in Piccadilly, now the women on Oxford Street 'look with hostility upon him, avoid him, refuse him cover.' Already isolated within his social environment, the open spaces of the city no longer hold any attraction for him and the prospect of prison becomes a relief: 'Nothing mattered now, come quickly prison.'¹²

Drawing on his own experience of solitary confinement at Wandsworth, Rodker's poem fluctuates between the two poles of the prison cell as a cage and as a place of refuge. At the beginning of his imprisonment, the C.O.

is described as ‘a spider inside a tumbler, a miserable gannet caught by wire’.¹³ The feeling of entrapment inside the cell is amplified by the location of Wandsworth Prison just south of Battersea and Chelsea and therefore in taunting proximity to the neighbourhoods that formed the centre of Rodker’s social life at the time. In ‘Biography’ he describes the painful experience of being so close and yet so far from his familiar environment, still able to see the well-known landmarks of South London through the window of his cell but no longer able to participate in the life that takes place around them. He sees the railway station at Clapham Junction, where the trains ‘slyly’ slide in and out of his field of vision, mocking his own immobility.¹⁴ The towers of the Lots Road Power Station in the distance make him think of his lover ‘Eveline, who lived under them’ but his envy of her freedom consumes his romantic feelings for her.¹⁵ Inspired with erotic longing by the ‘smell of his armpits’ he searches his memory for a moment of tenderness with his lover but is unable to call up the desired image:

He had forgotten moon and stars and remembered her only to
hate her.

Life had ebbed from him, his past was forgotten – it was a story read
in a book.¹⁶

Rodker’s poem presents the isolation of the C.O. in solitary confinement as a break with the narratives that connect him to the world outside the cell, a loss of his ‘biography’. No longer able to satisfy his social and sexual needs by reminiscing about his past, the C.O.’s desires become projected onto the interior of the prison cell instead. His erotic longing finds an unlikely object in ‘[a] plaited skein of hemp that hung on the wall’, which he addresses as ‘Gretchen’ and ‘Margaret beloved’ in a bizarre love poem.¹⁷ Casting himself in the role of a love-stricken Faust, the C.O. exclaims: ‘I stroke you, lay you against my face – / Your hair is fine gold, and you hid my face in corn.’¹⁸ The metaphorical re-imagining of confinement in prison as being held in the binding embrace of a lover adds an interesting new aspect to Rodker’s psychology of imprisonment but the weird object-focussed eroticism that suddenly supplants the theme of pacifist resistance strikes us as odd and out of place.

The mingling of the problem of conscientious objection with themes of sexual longing and frustration is a characteristic of all of Rodker’s texts about resistance. The critical press picked up on this particular feature in their reaction to Rodker’s *Memoirs*, with one reviewer describing the novel

as '[dealing] mainly with the reactions of a sex-maniac'.¹⁹ Another deplored its 'pitiful frankness' and added: '[T]he reader would like to be spared these intimate confessions, he feels like a deity to whom the author makes a continual sacrifice of his proper pride.'²⁰ The space devoted to the C.O.'s erotic fantasies in the 'Biography' or to the narrator's bowel movements in the third part of the *Memoirs* indeed makes for some whimsical and sometimes uncomfortable reading. Rodker continually goes against our expectations of what is the 'proper' story to tell of conscientious objection by depicting the resister as obsessed with his physical needs and unable to make up his own mind. The pitiful climax of Rodker's pathetic narratives of resistance is reached when he presents us with the image of the imprisoned C.O. who does not want to leave his cell:

If I but opened the door I could walk out.
I do not want to open the door.
I am safer in this cell than in the spidery galleries, the aery dome,
I hate the exercise rings – black cinders – that circling make me giddy.
Bed is good though and the coarse sheets – and my pied coverlet,
hand woven – brick reds, yellows and greens:
I like the sewing and the Bible's interesting:
And if I opened the door I could walk out.²¹

The prison cell is transformed from the site of the C.O.'s suffering to a place of homeliness and quiet domesticity. In the *Memoirs*, this theme is carried even further as the prison cell becomes a place of retrospective longing. Upon his release from prison the narrator desires to be once more 'shut tight in the small cell, in warm gas light, with my book, all of me aware that soon it would be time for the eight o'clock bed-time bell'.²² Rodker's depiction of the imprisoned C.O. who gladly accepts, even desires his confinement is problematic since it does not square with the narrative of 'simple resistance' and heroic suffering that most supporters of conscientious objection wanted to tell. This was conceivably one of the reasons why the more whimsical sections of 'A CO's Biography' were never published and why Rodker had such difficulties placing the *Memoirs* with a publisher. Indeed, Bernard Noël Langdon-Davies who rejected Rodker's manuscript of the *Memoirs* despite his pacifist leanings did so on the grounds that 'it would put up the backs of those who dislike and those who sympathise with Conscientious Objectors alike'.²³

Despite scenes of exemplary cruelty against conscientious objectors, such as the gruelling depiction of a prisoner being force-fed in the second part

of the *Memoirs*, there is undoubtedly a degree to which Rodker refuses to engage with certain moral and political questions that arise from his narratives. His focus on the C.O.'s struggle with his divided self tends to overshadow the implications of the war resister's experience for the wider social and political sphere. Certainly by the time Rodker was writing the *Memoirs* his approach was coloured by his interest in psychoanalysis and the models psychoanalytic theory provided for understanding war and pacifist resistance in terms of drives and desires anchored in the psyche rather than on a political plane. Via the work of psychoanalyst Edward Glover, Rodker arrived at the conviction that 'wars are not a matter of rulers, diplomats, markets, but the projection on to others of urges in the self so dynamic that failing such an issue, they must end in the disintegration of their host'.²⁴ Rodker's narratives of resistance allow us to witness the 'disintegration' of such a self in the figure of the conscientious objector at war with himself. In this Rodker's literary angle on conscientious objection is unique: he approaches the topic of pacifist resistance from a vantage-point outside the dominant discourse which sought to redeem conscientious objectors on the same terms that constituted the overblown rhetoric of warfare, that is to say, a discourse evolving around the abstract concepts of courage, honour and integrity. 'A CO's Biography' and *Memoirs of Other Fronts* are no tales of 'simple resistance' but present the C.O.'s struggle in all its psychologically complexity. Bearing testimony to the fact that, in Julian Bell's words, '[t]he pacifist is fighting too, but on another front',²⁵ Rodker's narratives of resistance merit our attention not only as documents of the war years as experienced by a conscientious objector but also as works of great literary appeal and originality.

Notes

¹ Julian Bell, ed., *We Did Not Fight: 1914-18 Experiences of War Resisters*, (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), xvi.

² *Ibid.*, xii.

³ *Ibid.*, 284f.

⁴ For a detailed outline of Rodker's cat-and-mouse game with the authorities during the war, see Andrew Crozier's introduction to his edition of Rodker's *Poems & Adolphe 1920* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), vii-xxiii.

⁵ 'A CO's Biography' is included in full in Rodker's *Poems & Adolphe 1920*, ed. Crozier, 115-122.

⁶ In 1926 Savitzky's translation of *Dartmoor* also appeared in book form under the imprint of the Parisian publishing house Sagittaire.

⁷ John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (London: Putnam, 1932), 111.

⁸ Letter from Dorothy Richardson to Peggy Kirkaldy, 1st November 1943, *Windows*

on *Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, ed. Gloria G. Fromm (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 484.

⁹ Rodker, *Memoirs*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹ Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe*, 116.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁹ Review by 'G.M.H.' in *G. K.'s Weekly* (21 May 1932).

²⁰ Review by L. P. Hartley in *The Week-End Review* (11 June 1932).

²¹ Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe*, 120.

²² Rodker, *Memoirs*, 150f.

²³ Typescript of rejection letter from Langdon-Davies, 20th March 1931, located in the John Rodker Papers at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin, Box 36, Folder 4.

²⁴ John Rodker, 'War and Peace', *New English Weekly* (3 August 1933), 379.

²⁵ Bell, *We Did Not Fight*, p. 285.

Poetics of Resistance: H.D.'s *Sea Garden*

ARGHA BANERJEE

In her poem 'The Tribute', the American poet Hilda Doolittle – better known as H.D. – dons 'only the thinnest of Hellenistic masks'¹ while alluding to the ongoing war. First published in the *Egoist* (November 1916), the lyric underlines the profound degenerative impact of the war on both the female artist and her aesthetic creed. Art itself is a casualty of the war, as the prophetic voice warns in the poem: 'squalor has entered and taken our songs/ and we haggle and cheat...'² Poetry, as H.D. had noted in a letter to William Carlos Williams during that time, is 'a very sacred thing',³ and she saw the war as a direct threat to her aesthetic philosophy. Her anxiety during those war years, as Gary Burnett notes, is embodied in Hermione's reflection in *Asphodel*, expressing horror at, and distance from, the intellectual bankruptcy of contemporary womankind:

How horrid to hate them, all the women who went on talking as if they were enjoying it, and the worst of it was one felt they were enjoying it. It was horrible of her not to but how could she help it? How could she help her vivid mind not seeing? Her mind had been trained to see. Cultivated. For just the horror? Women talking, picking cotton, making bandages. O God, don't they see what they're making them for?⁴

Anxious to preserve her 'cultivated' sensibility in times of flux and change, the poetic voice in 'The Tribute' finds herself in the company of a select minority of artists, consecrated to the true worship of the 'sacred' and undermined by dominant militant ideology. The 'squalor'-drenched city – ridden by war hysteria – is portrayed by H.D. as a desecrated one, more so, as 'the boys have gone out of the city'⁵ to offer their pilgrimage to the 'god of war', and there is 'no voice to rebuke'⁶ the patriarchal ideology that claims innocent young lives at the Front.

In most of her poems and translations composed during the war years, H.D. protests against a conflict that has not only consumed the lives of artists, but also has endangered the aesthetic ideals of an entire generation. As an avant-garde aesthete, she is inevitably drawn into the vortex, and several of her poems testify to her position of being an 'artistic incarnation of that destructiveness'.⁷ For H.D., the war is a clash between ideologies

and principles. It is a struggle of the destructive militant force with the enduring principles of love, beauty, survival and preservation. Akin to Virginia Woolf's critique of the war in *Three Guineas*, H.D. through her poetry 'affirms the need for a female response to the destructiveness of a militarist ideology which does not accept the language or assumptions of that ideology'.⁸

In spite of her enduring poetic message, it is interesting to note that H.D. is normally not regarded as a war poet. With the solitary exception of *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (1995), she is absent from most poetry anthologies of the First World War. Perhaps the grounds for her exclusion lie in the fact that her verse does not directly deal with the 'war'. Yet war serves as an omnipresent backdrop and inspiration. Along with independent efforts of women poets like Edith Sitwell, Iris Tree, Phyllis M'egroz and others, H.D. strived to fashion her own unique reaction to the war in verse. All these poets used allegorical or mythical narratives – occasionally or predominantly in their war poems – to force an extraordinary critique of the ongoing hostilities.

H.D.'s poetry affirms that not all women poets were ideologically trapped, seeking refuge in conventional themes of jingoism or writing sentimental elegies, as is widely believed. Bearing an unmistakable imprint of the ongoing hostilities, these poems also call for a different critical approach. 'To fight (war) in the open', as H.D. had reflected in *Tribute to Freud*, is the unique war of a female artist, striving to preserve her sensibility in chaotic times of unprecedented change. Rooted in Imagist experimentations, her poetic exercises in *Sea Garden* carry traces of emotional devastation and personal responses to the horrors of the Great War: the sinking of the *Lusitania* which she was utterly convinced resulted in the miscarriage of her first child; the break-up of her marriage with poet Richard Aldington following his enlistment; the sad demise of her brother Gilbert in France in 1918; the subsequent death of her father; the coincidence of D.H. Lawrence's persecution just at the start of her new relationship and finally, the incident of her flat being bombed towards the end of the war. Immediately following the war, in 1919, her own life (along with that of her illegitimate child) was endangered due to an attack of double pneumonia. It was only under the able care of her friend Annie Winifred Ellerman, following her subsequent trip to Greece in 1920, that she managed to recuperate from the long 'series of shocks'. She was also profoundly unsettled by the deaths of artists such as Rupert Brooke and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in 1915. However, her aesthetics

of grief and horror both subsumes and transcends the private context of her sorrow in her literary output of this period; while translating Euripides's *Rhesus* during the early years of the war, the artist related her personal grief to the larger suffering of the soldiers. The grief of a mother who had lost her child during the war blends into a general maternal bereavement for the loss of young lives at the Front.

The war years were a period of broken and strained relationships that intensified an arduous process of self-discovery for H.D. However, amidst all these tragic personal circumstances of grief, mourning, self-discovery and personal trauma, her literary activities during the war were brisk and intense. *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology*, published in 1915, carried seven of her poems: 'The Pool', 'Sea Lily', 'Sea Iris', 'Oread', 'Sea Rose', 'The Garden' and 'Orion Dead'. In 1916, besides publishing the *Sea Garden*, a compilation of twenty seven poems, and *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis*, a translation, H.D. also took over the editorship of *The Egoist*, as Richard Aldington had to enlist for the military service. *Collected Poems* (1925), compiling both her poems and translations, testify to the prolific nature of her literary work during these years. Some of her later published works too were inspired and initiated during the period of the First World War.⁹

In place of an avant-garde that thrusts itself on the readers, defying any continuity with the past, H.D. offers a historical basis for her aesthetic creed. H.D. was not the only artist to turn to the Greek spirit in search of a suitable metaphor for the ongoing war. War reports on Gallipoli in various newspapers often referred to the Homeric and the Turkish names of the sites.¹⁰ To H.D., the 'sacred' pursuit of the female artist during the time of the war called for aesthetic endurance and spiritual resilience. Her poetic acknowledgments of sturdy aquatic flowers in poems like 'Sea Rose', 'Sea Lily', 'Sea Poppies', 'Sea Violet' and 'Sea Iris' symbolise such female resistance against the dominant masculine ideologies of wartime. Rachel DuPlessis describes these flowers as possessing 'harsh surprising beauty, slashed, torn, dashed yet still triumphant and powerful, despite being wounded, hardened, tested by exposure,' suggestive of 'an almost contemptuous defiance of ease, of simple fashions of ripening.'¹¹ The poet adores these flowers in comparison with the conventional garden variety, as they withstand the heavy odds of wave, wind and sand. In spite of being 'scarred and broken', these flowers are treasured for having outlived the adversities of life, an indirect symbolic and Imagist celebration of the enduring female principles of life.¹²

The flowers, as depicted in *Sea Garden*, are sea-borne and emerge superior in grace, beauty and endurance when compared with their terrestrial counterparts. Most poppy poems composed during the years of the war glorify and symbolise sanctity of human blood and sacrifice, but H.D.'s 'Sea Poppies' has its roots in a different world altogether. These aquatic flowers serve as symbols of a rare kind of beauty, suggestive of a different artistic creed, far beyond the conventional aesthetics of the dominant militant ideology in vogue: 'Amber husk/fluted with gold, /fruted on the sand/ marked with a rich grain, /...Beautiful, wide-spread, /fire upon leaf, /what meadow yields/ so fragrant a leaf/ as your bright leaf?'¹³

The 'Sea Rose', as portrayed by H.D. in *Sea Garden*, emerges superior to the conventional garden rose. The garden rose, a symbol of nationalism during the Great War, was widely employed in Victorian arts as an 'ideal image of feminine delicacy and vulnerability'.¹⁴ However, it is a 'meagre flower' in comparison with H.D.'s sea rose: 'more precious/than a wet rose/single on a stem'.¹⁵ In a distinctive Imagist vision, the female voice is empowered in the poem through a rare use of floral imagery:

The sea rose is a sign in terms of which a poetic voice presumes power and opens a circuit with the reader, who is thus implicated in a transtemporal project – making the rose out of language, interiorising the rose in an allegory of desire, within this fiction invoking the rose in a lineage of invocations – Yeats's Rosicrucian rose, Browning's rose tree, Blake's sick rose, Waller's lovely rose, Meleager's anthology/garland with Sappho's roses.¹⁶

The interiorisation of the rose as an 'allegory for desire' implies an aesthetic search for an independent female world, beyond the conventional one envisaged, endorsed and controlled by men. H.D.'s description of the rose in verse imparts a distinctive cinematic quality to her poetic narrative as well. Representing a 'mutilated' 'unloved body', according to Susan McCabe, the 'sequenced' imagery of the poem 'operates as though by the shot by shot layering of film': 'Rose, harsh rose/ marred and with stint of petals'.¹⁷ Floral imagery not only symbolises female resistance but also features in H.D.'s veiled attack on remembrance rituals carried out during the war. The catalogue of flowers in 'The Tribute' mocks at the futility of such an exercise: 'For the lads who drew apart/the scholar and poet we place/wind-flower or lily or wreath/of ivy and crocus shaft,/ and the lads who went to slay/with passion and thirst/ we give roses and

flowers of bay.¹⁸ Closely allied with the floral symbolism is the central metaphor of the garden in *Sea Garden*. Both ‘Sheltered Garden’ and ‘Garden’, written during the war period, explore the sense of female entrapment in the cultivated space of life: ‘I have had enough/I gasp for breath.’¹⁹ The conventional female resources of sustenance are discarded by the poet – ‘I have had enough!/ border-pinks, clove pinks, wax-lilies, / herbs, sweet-ress’²⁰ – in preference for a more active role. The ‘Sheltered Garden’ almost persuasively and symbolically communicates the ‘dialectic between actively carving out and masochistically identifying with torn bodies’.²¹ Both these poems provide images of protest, deeply resentful of the claustrophobic existence of the female intelligentsia during wartime. Both celebrate ‘alternate landscapes of psychic and erotic power’ in times of ‘disruption and displacement.’²²

Several poems in *Sea Garden* address the vulnerability of youth and the brutal damage incurred on young male bodies in a modern technological warfare. The desecration of male bodies is boldly, yet metaphorically, portrayed in ‘The Shrine’: ‘Flame passes under us /and sparks that unknott the flesh, /... / sparks and scattered light’.²³ ‘The Shrine’, the safe haven for shelter and support, is also a deceptive beacon in the poem, metaphorical of the ongoing war and propagandists who have ‘tempted men’ and lured them with false promises, eventually leading to the path of destruction: ‘Nay, you are great, fierce, evil!/ you are the land-blight!/ you have tempted men/ but they perished on your cliffs.’²⁴ The element of deception and treachery associated with the militarist ideology is intensified by the evocative use of sea imagery: ‘Your lights are but dank shoals, / slate and pebble and wet shells/ and seaweed fastened to the rocks.’²⁵ The doomed youth are vulnerable, ‘unsheltered’ from the brute elemental forces of nature in the trench warfare: ‘But you! you are unsheltered, cut with the weight of wind!! you shudder’.²⁶ These lines also underline the fragility of human valour and strength against the heavy odds of the modern war (‘You are useless!/ When the tides swirl/ Your boulders cut and wreck/ the staggering ships’),²⁷ or what H.D. describes in a wartime review as ‘mechanical demon, the devil of machinery, of which we can hardly repeat too often, the war is the hideous offspring.’²⁸ The poet mocks at the personified grave too: ‘you are useless, /O grave, O beautiful, / the landsmen tell it! I have heard! you are useless.’²⁹ ‘Grave’ promises no sustenance or hope for the poetic voice, as young lives perish anonymously, deprived of the dignity of proper burial or remembrance. Through her deeply personalised reaction in *Sea Garden*, H.D. fashions a poetics of resistance that is in sharp contrast to other forms

of war poetry. Her veiled criticism of the ongoing war is a political language as well, as it portrays the exclusive ideological resistance of a female artist. Yet, it is interesting to note that her aestheticism departs from the male poetic canon or other forms of war verse written during the war years.

Notes

- ¹ Gary Burnett, 'A Poetics out of War: H.D.'s Response to the First World War', *Agenda*, 25, 1987, 61.
- ² Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), *Collected Poems 1912-1944*, edited by Louis L. Martz (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), 59. Henceforth referred to as *H.D.: Collected Poems*.
- ³ William Carlos William, 'Kora in Hell' in *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 13. Also cited in Burnett, 56.
- ⁴ H.D., *Asphodel*, edited with an Introduction and biographical notes by Robert Spoo (Duke University Press: North Carolina, 1992), Part II, 116.
- ⁵ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 60.
- ⁶ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 60.
- ⁷ Burnett, 'A Poetics Out of War', 57.
- ⁸ Simon Featherstone, *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 102.
- ⁹ Especially in later works like *Helen In Egypt*, *Asphodel*, *Hermione* and several others.
- ¹⁰ The report on Gallipoli (On 30 April 1915) was titled 'Battle on Trojan Plain' by London *Times* and described on similar lines. For more details see *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 260. Hereafter cited as Eileen Gregory.
- ¹¹ Rachel DuPlessis, *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 1986), 12.
- ¹² Vincent Quinn, *Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc, 1967), 36.
- ¹³ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 21.
- ¹⁴ Megan Lloyd Davies, 'H.D. Imagiste? Bisexuality: Identity: Imagism' in *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Vicki Bertram (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) 41.
- ¹⁵ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 5.
- ¹⁶ Eileen Gregory, 136.
- ¹⁷ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 142.
- ¹⁸ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 66.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* 19.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 143.
- ²² Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siecle: Gender, Modernism and Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47.
- ²³ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 9.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 8.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ H.D., 'Responsibilities', *Agenda* 25 (3-4), 52 (1987-88) Also cited by Featherstone, 101.

²⁹ *H.D.: Collected Poems*, 8.

War Poetry: A Conversation with Michael Longley, Andrew Motion and Jon Stallworthy

EDITED BY SANTANU DAS

SD: ‘We must go over the ground again’ (Blunden). What has been drawing you to that ‘ground’ for so many years?

ML: My father’s central, really, to my preoccupation with the First World War. He joined the London-Scottish Regiment in September 1914 and miraculously survived the war. He was wounded at High Wood. He died before I was twenty. So I’ve always regretted not talking to him more, and in a sense, my own urge to write about the Great War is ... I simply want to go on talking to my father. In my late teens and early twenties, a number of things came together: a growing admiration for the poems of Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg which I’d first encountered at school; then my father’s distinguished service in the Great War (he was awarded a Military Cross for gallantry and became a Captain by the time he was twenty); then discovering the glorious songs from the trenches (Seamus Heaney loaned me a recording of Joan Littlewood’s *Oh, What A Lovely War!*). At Trinity College Dublin, at the beginning of my relationship with Edna [the literary critic Edna Longley], we treasured the little blue Faber hardback of Edward Thomas’s poems. For decades, Edna has been profoundly engaged with Thomas. He now haunts our lives, an illuminating ghost. We have travelled to his grave in Agny twice and we have visited his three Hampshire homes. Over the years, I have written seven or eight poems about Thomas, footnotes to Edna’s monumental annotated edition of his *Collected Poems* (2008). I also remember as a student a handsome Chatto and Windus *Collected Poems* of Wilfred Owen (1963) edited by Cecil Day Lewis. For me the work produced by the war poets is an inexhaustible well. And that’s why I keep returning to it, not only as a reader, but also as a pilgrim to the battlefields and cemeteries of northern France. We last visited the war graves in 2010, along with Isaac Rosenberg’s nephew and Edmund Blunden’s daughter. At Rosenberg’s grave I read to a group of fellow pilgrims ‘Dead Man’s Dump’ and found myself saying that it was one of the greatest poems I knew – like a chorus from Aeschylus or Sophocles. I now believe that’s true. I feel the same about Owen’s ‘Insensibility’ and ‘Exposure’. My reading of the poem was followed by this epiphany: out of

the bus window I watched Rosenberg's nephew kneeling by his uncle's grave and placing a pebble on the headstone. The Great War keeps generating epiphanies like that.

JS: I had an uncle who was killed at Gallipoli, and a cousin of his who was wounded there. So my first visit to that ground was for personal reasons. At school – in the 1940s – our lives were soaked in the First World War. Of the masters who taught me, one had lost half his face in the trenches and was a terrible sight. Another had a steel plate in his head. Every Armistice Day, sun or rain, we had the Armistice Service in front of a tall stone school cross engraved with eighty-three names of boys and masters killed in the First World War. But of course, that was when another war was on, so I grew up with the radio. The airwaves were clogged with news of war. And at school, almost every week, someone's mother would come wearing black clothes. So for me, there was the entirely subjective First World War from my schooldays, and then as I began to grow up, the first poem I remember writing was a bad ballad about a British pilot shooting down a Japanese Zero fighter plane.

AM: I came to this through my grandfather's involvement – my grandfather fought in Palestine from 1915 until 1917 and then went to France and ended the war fighting in France, with never a scratch on his body. And also through my father's involvement: he enlisted in 1944, landed on Gold Beach in Normandy on D-Day, fought through France and Germany until the end of the war, then stayed in the Territorials until the mid-1960s. But while a lot of my early memories of him are memories in which he's wearing a uniform, he very rarely spoke about his experiences as a soldier. In fact, his silence on the subject was a powerful kind of presence – until the end of his life, when he began speaking a little more freely. His memories were all there, intact. Like the little plastic folder he'd been given on D-Day, with a phrasebook and a map in it, that he kept in his desk until the last ... So yes, that was one way into my thinking about the war. The other was reading the war poets at school, in my teenage years. I came from a very un-bookish background, and these poems were crucial for me. I suspect the same is true for a lot of people – maybe boys especially. For good and for ill, they shaped my idea of what all war poetry could and should be like. My ideas have modified a good deal since then, of course.

SD: What then is 'war poetry'? When does a poem become a 'war poem'? Are there particular pressures in writing war poetry?

ML: First of all, it has to be a *good* poem. Tens, hundreds, thousands of poems were written in 1914–18, and most of them are ghastly. So that’s the first thing, really.

JS: Yes, more than 2,000 poets – most of them were hopeless. I think we make too much of some of the minor poets of the First World War because they were fine courageous people. But not all their poems are as good. Many are less good than those of the underrated poets of the Second World War.

AM: Sure, I agree, although for a lot of people, war poetry remains, essentially, First World War poetry. It’s about trench fighting, it’s the reversal of the pastoral tradition in which the old comforts of beautiful landscape, birdsong, poppies, flowers are found to have lost their consoling powers. Second World War poetry, by contrast, tends to be broader in its types and varieties – and is often not about fighting itself, but about being frightened, or displaced, or bored. It’s perhaps too neat a way of putting it, but for me, these differences are well-summarised by the difference between ‘I parried; but my hands were loath and cold’ in Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting’, and ‘Now in my dial of glass appears/ the soldier who is going to die’ in Douglas’s ‘How to Kill’. One is hand-to-hand – and the other is detached. Like Michael, Edward Thomas has been very important to me, as a way of understanding what these differences might be (I wrote my graduate thesis on his work in the 1970s, and subsequently published it as a book). Even though Thomas wrote all his poems wearing a uniform, he wrote next-to-nothing in France – and has consequently loosened up my idea of what war poetry can be. I imagine that, as life goes on, other kinds of loosening will occur too, because our experience of war changes as time passes – as combatants and non-combatants (as non-combatants because we read about it all the time, see it on telly, and so on). There are dangers associated with this I think, from a writer’s point of view. I mean, there’s a temptation to aggrandise yourself by associating with an extreme subject; a danger that you’ll end up parading your sensitivity.

JS: Well, remember the most unpopular poem in American poetry written during the Vietnam War – by Anthony Hecht:

Here lies fierce Strephon, whose poetic rage
Lashed out on Vietnam from page and stage;
Whereby from basements of Bohemia he
Rose to the lofts of sweet celebrity,

Being, by Fortune, (our Eternal Whore)
One of the few to profit by that war
A fate he shared – it bears much thinking on –
With certain persons at the Pentagon.¹

An awful lot of those poets stayed comfortably at home and made a great deal of money. Poems about bullets whacking through the thatch, written in flats in Harvard and Princeton, seem to me obscene, in a way.

I think the term ‘war poetry’ may have outrun its use. War poetry, as you extend it, generation by generation, now includes the Home Front, and women, and very rightly, but it used to mean a poem about combat. It can no longer do only that. It’s become so elastic now that I think one has to use it in sort of quotation marks.

ML: Well, the example of Edward Thomas means one uses the term without quotation marks, because he wrote all his poems in England. If the cosmos of a poem is the Great War, then that’s it. And it doesn’t matter if it’s a woman writing, or Edward Thomas writing in England. War turns everything upside down, and redefines poetry. The quality of the best poems continued through from 1914–18 to Keith Douglas in the Second World War.

JS: Absolutely. And I think Edward Thomas is a particularly interesting case because his are intensely, beautifully made, very moving poems by someone who hasn’t even seen a trench. But he’s aware of what the war is doing to England, and the pastoral world that he so loves. And I think you can translate that experience into the American experience in Vietnam, where there are some poets who wrote very movingly about what the war was doing to *America*, which they knew about, rather than the bullet whacking through the thatch, which they didn’t know about.

AM: That’s absolutely it. There are two things to add perhaps – to be specific. One is that time needs to pass, and things need to mulch down. And the other is that poems often benefit from approaching their subject through the side door or the back door or the roof, and not through the front door.

JS: Not full-frontal, yes, I agree. It seems to me that to write well about a war that you’ve only seen on the television, or read about in the newspapers, there has to be a sort of subjective way in. When you’re thinking about

the great war poems, by people who never saw a battle – for example, ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ – it’s because Tennyson had spent his life thinking about chivalry, men on horseback, charging, that the story of the charge of the Light Brigade was an extension of an Arthurian story. What flows into it is all he’s been reading and imagining for years. And similarly, Hardy’s ‘Drummer Hodge’:

Young Hodge the drummer never knew –
 Fresh from his Wessex home –
 The meaning of the broad Karoo,
 The Bush, the dusty loam,
 And why uprose to nightly view
 Strange stars amid the gloam.²

Hardy cycled down to Southampton to see the troops leaving for South Africa, and he’d spent his life thinking about Wessex, and countrymen like young Hodge, and home and so he was able to identify with Hodge as Tennyson with the soldiers of the Light Brigade. It’s very hard to do that, and to write a poem as good as these, unless you have that sort of personal connection.

AM: There’s got to be that engine, hasn’t there? For you, Michael, it’s your Dad; for you, Jon, it’s your relatives – and for me, it’s my Dad. That’s how it works. In my own poems about war, I’ve tried to use this personal element as a way of preventing myself from grandstanding. And by doing something else as well. By writing poems that collaborate with soldiers and others; by writing ‘found’ poems. ‘The Five Acts of Harry Patch’ (2008) is a good example. I used some of Harry’s own words, wrote my own, and listened to my father’s heartbeat.

ML: A bad poem is a big enough offence, but a bad poem about the suffering of one’s fellow citizens really is a sin against the light. Like other Irish poets I have approached the Troubles obliquely – and still do. I dislike the notion that the Troubles might be subject matter for art, or that art might provide solace for those damaged by the violence. Having said that, I would like to add that I have received from people bereaved in the Troubles some warm letters in response to my elegies. When my elegy ‘The Ice-cream Man’ was first published, I received a letter of thanks signed ‘Loretta Larmour, the Ice-cream Man’s Mother’. That alone makes the poetic enterprise seem worthwhile.

SD: War poetry, it is often alleged, is perhaps too weighted towards the war and politics. How important is the role of aesthetic form to war poetry?

JS: There are those who know that war's a confusing experience and think that if you're going to write about it, you have to have a confusing form – and that I think is nonsense. Someone like Owen or Blunden used form which is what people of that time expected if they read a poem, and then they gave it a violent twist. They set up a sort of lyric pastoral expectation, but then delivered a shocking sting in the poem's tail.

AM: Completely right. First World War poetry is literary, however visceral it might also be. Literary because the people writing it had the sort of the education that was beginning to diminish by the time the Second World War started. Metaphorically and sometimes actually, soldiers of the First World War had all kinds of book-culture in the knapsacks: stuff they took for granted. The Classical tradition. The English inheritance. And the Bible, of course.

ML: And they test the English lyric. The whole war experience tests it, and shows how sturdy it remains. The Keatsian, the Wordsworthian tradition (and all the way back to Homer and Virgil). 'Insensibility' is Sophoclean: it's war poetry reaching way beyond what we normally think of as war poetry: it seems to touch on everything. I remember asking you, Andrew, why you didn't include in your war anthology Sassoon's 'The Dug-Out':

Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,
And one arm bent across your sullen, cold,
Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you,
Deep-shadow'd from the candle's guttering gold;
And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;
Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and turn your head...
*You are too young to fall asleep for ever;
And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.*³

If Sappho had written those last two italicised lines, they would automatically be considered immortal. But here they are, the work of a poet who has been dismissed as lacking transcendence. But that seems to me an extraordinary moment in English poetry, not just in Sassoon's work. The whole poem's marvellous. And I love 'Everyone Sang'. It moves me to tears every time I read it. It has the transcendental note.

JS: I wonder whether you know Sassoon's poem, never published in his lifetime, called 'Christ and the Soldier'. It was written one month after he had seen the first day of the battle of the Somme. It's interesting in that, at the end of his life, Sassoon entered the Roman Catholic Church, and I suspect he didn't publish it because he had doubts about whether it would be seen as blasphemous. You have the soldier kneeling before a crucifix, so religion is right there from the start.

The straggled soldier halted – stared at Him –
 Then clumsily dumped down upon his knees,
 Gasping, 'O blessed crucifix, I'm beat!
 And Christ, still sentried by the seraphim,

And here's the natural world:

Near the front-line, between two splintered trees,
 Spoke him: 'My son, behold these hands and feet'.

Now the poem has these two voices: the soldier, and Christ. And Christ is completely out of touch. He says, 'I made for you the mysteries,/ Beyond all battles moves the Paraclete.' The soldier would think, what the hell's a paraclete? A parachute? He would have no idea. Sassoon does this deliberately, to show you how out of touch Christ is. And the soldier answers him:

'I was born full of lust,
 With hunger, thirst, and wishfulness to wed.
 Who cares today if I done wrong or right?'
 Christ asked all pitying, 'Can you put no trust
 In my known word, that shrives each faithful head?
 Am I not resurrection, life and light?'

In part three of the poem, at the third time of asking, the soldier says:

'But be you for both sides? I'm paid to kill
 And if I shoot a man his mother grieves.
 Does that come into what your teaching tells?'

Not surprisingly, the figure on the Cross is silent and the soldier has the last word:

‘Lord Jesus, ain’t you got no more to say?’
Bowed hung that head below the crown of thorns.
The soldier shifted, and picked up his pack,
And slung his gun, and stumbled on his way.
‘O God,’ he groaned, ‘Why ever was I born?’
The battle boomed, and no reply came back.⁴

ML: That’s very formal. By and large the Anglophone poetry of the Great War is at its best when it’s formal. In fact, war poems would not be as interesting as they are, if they were formally less complex.

AM: This is an extremely interesting poem. It’s a lyric debate – similar to the kind of thing Larkin does. And about the question of form: taking images in nature which have traditionally been used to help us enjoy and endure our experience as humans, and showing that either they don’t work anymore, or have been forced into some ironical relationship with new brutal material, seems to me the default strategy in an awful lot of First World War poetry. And nobody does it better than Owen, as in ‘Spring Offensive’:

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field
And the far valley behind, where buttercups
Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up ...⁵

JS: I think that’s so moving because it calls into mind a time when buttercups did cover the feet of children, and happy picnics with parents. And I think the same goes for form. If you ask whether there’s a tension between the subject form and the lyric mode, I would say not necessarily.

ML: Owen keeps changing, doesn’t he? There are so many Owens. ‘The Send-Off’ is about all the send-offs, isn’t it? It is a symbolic poem.

JS: And it would do for any war. It would do for Afghanistan.

AM: It’s my favourite of all his poems, as a whole poem, even though it’s in some ways un-typical of him. While most of his greatest poems are set in the trenches, this is not: it’s behind the lines somewhere or other. So the angle of entry to the subject is surprising and different. And as a result, this business we’re talking about – about the pastoral tradition and what’s being done to it, about how it’s being brutalised and discredited or undermined – becomes very fascinating:

Down the close darkening lanes they sang their way
To the siding-shed
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.
Their breasts were stuck all white with wreath and spray
As men's are, dead.

Here nature (the dust, the 'wreath and spray') has become memorialising the soldiers, rather than being something that fortifies them. And this point of view is strengthened by the non-combatant observers:

Dull porters watched them, and a casual tramp
Stood staring hard,
Sorry to miss them from the upland camp.

Then, unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp
Winked to the guard.⁶

Though it's only a little poem, the world suddenly opens and shows us the hinterland of things: the emotionlessness of natural objects, and of man-made objects (the 'unmoved' signal). Or the way they conspire with death, rather than bringing comfort (the lamp 'winking').

JS: Not 'moved', as a watcher might be moved.

AM: Precisely. 'So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went'. This idea of their being *wrong* ... Well, of course, we know it's *wrong* because war is *wrong* in some fundamental way, but that's -

JS: And hushed up, too -

AM: Exactly, the idea that this is all being swept under the carpet – the whole thing is done guiltily. Everybody really knows this is all a terribly bad idea. But they're not saying so.

JS: It does have a political thrust there, actually.

ML: For all its documentary propulsion, it's a very mysterious poem. And the drift of the different line lengths, the short and the long, emphasises that. It comes in by the sidedoor. It's a poem about mortality.

AM: Absolutely. And then there's that business of the 'wells':

Shall they return to beating of great bells
In wild train-loads?
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,

May creep back, silent, to village wells,
Up half-known roads.⁷

It always reminds me of Hardy – of that moment in *Jude the Obscure* when he identifies the well as the *omphalos* of the village. It's the essence of the place, and so it is here. But what we're being told in this poem is that not many people are going to come back, and even for those who do, the well may not (so to speak) know them. Because the place will have changed – and so will the people. Horribly changed by the war.

JS: The poem also comes around in circles: they *sang* their way down the darkening lane, now they *creep* back, maybe on two legs, maybe not on two legs, *silent*, no singing. To village wells -

AM: Wells, wells up, tearfulness – all these things come into it. And speaking about this reminds me very much of what Thomas says about watching the clods crumble and topple over *for the last time* in 'As the team's head-brass':

The horses started and for the last time
I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.⁸

He's telling us here that the landscape has changed for reasons which are not only to do with the war, but with agricultural changes. You go to fight the war to defend the country that you love, but when you come back, oh! It's not quite the same.

JS: There's a brilliant ambiguity in that, because the plough is going up and down, and it goes up for the last time – so, just the last time today, but there is another last time which we hear behind that.

ML: *Multum in parvo*. The 140 poems he wrote in the last two years of his life are a miracle – one of poetry's great mysteries. Nowadays Thomas's presence seems to be everywhere: 'the past hovering as it revisits the light'.

SD: Auden famously wrote that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’. Is this true of war poetry?

JS: One of the things that makes Auden’s claim so vitally interesting and significant is its context, his great elegy ‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’. The Irish Archpoet died in January 1939, the month in which Barcelona, the last Republican stronghold, fell to Fascist Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, and the banners of Hitler’s Third Reich were preparing to advance across Europe. Auden, believing that poetry could help democracy to happen, had been one of many British and European poets to have gone to Spain and written in support of the Republican cause. So, profoundly disillusioned in 1939, he ventured to take issue with Yeats who, by contrast, had long believed that the arts in general, and poetry in particular, *made* history happen. In his great late poem, ‘The Statues’ (written in 1938), he had argued that it was the ancient Greek artists – sculptors, in particular – who created the culture, the society that shaped and inspired the citizen sailors who defeated the Persian navy at the battle of Salamis. In the same way, he claimed it was the artists of the Irish Renaissance – poets (like himself) in particular – who reintroduced the mythology that inspired the Irish Republican Brotherhood gunmen, whose Easter Rising against the British had led to Ireland’s Home Rule.

It’s an argument that artists – and poets, in particular – find attractive. Myself, I think Auden and Yeats are *both* right: poetry makes nothing happen in the short term, but has in the past had long-term results. Poetry from Homer to Brooke presented a view of war that led young men to take up arms. And, by contrast, I would argue that it was the anti-war poetry of Owen, Sassoon and others – in which British schoolchildren have for half a century been steeped – that helped make the protest marches in London against the Iraq War so much larger than those in America (where war poetry is seldom on a school syllabus).

ML: Poetry gives things a second chance. It helps to make sure that victims are not forgotten. Good war poems escape the category ‘war poetry’.

JS: Yes, war poems should be *good* poems. I think bad ones are sometimes not so much harmless as *harmful* in that, like bad journalism, they numb nerves which the best poems (only the best) of Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg and Thomas reach and still retain the voltage to shock.

Notes

¹ Quoted in *Anthony Hecht in Conversation with Philip Hoy* ed. Philip Hoy (London: Between the Lines, 2001).

² Thomas Hardy, 'Drummer Hodge' in James Gibson ed. *Complete Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 91.

³ Siegfried Sassoon, 'The Dug-Out' in Rupert Hart-Davis ed. *The War Poems* (London: Faber, 1983), 129.

⁴ Sassoon, 'Christ and the Soldier' in *The War Poems*, 45-46.

⁵ 'Spring Offensive', in Jon Stallworthy ed. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (London: Chatto, 1983), 169.

⁶ Owen, 'The Send-Off', *Poems*, 149.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Edward Thomas, 'As the team's head-brass', in Edna Longley ed. *The Annotated Collected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2008), 124.

Jon Stallworthy: an appreciation

ADRIAN BARLOW

Poetry and Oxford shaped Jon Stallworthy's life and career. War poetry will define his reputation. He grew up in Oxford, and as a young boy entered the Dragon School, where already at the age of eight he had decided he wanted to be a poet. After Rugby School and National Service, he went up to Magdalen College and won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry. Encouraged by Helen Gardner and Maurice Bowra, he embarked on research into Yeats's manuscripts, which led to a lifelong fascination with the process and sequence of poetic creation. He published the first of eleven volumes of his own poems in 1961 (aged 26) and worked for a decade as an influential and successful Poetry Editor at Oxford University Press. Poetry always came first; his work as a scholar and critic flowed from the way he thought as a poet. He says as much in his memoir, *Singing School: the Making of a Poet* (1998).

Stallworthy's biography, *Wilfred Owen* (1974), and his two-volume edition of Owen's poems and fragments, led to ten years' teaching in the United States, before he returned to Oxford to become Reader in English Literature and a Governing-Body Fellow at Wolfson College. A Professorship soon followed. Wolfson was to be his teaching, research and writing base for the rest of his life – the affection he felt for the College was only matched by the esteem in which he was held by its members. His writing was always lucid and accessible, but never condescending. His criticism, his biographies of Owen and of Louis MacNeice, his work as an anthologist – not forgetting his advocacy of poets in danger of being buried in the footnotes of literary history – ensured he had many friends, even among those who had never met him. Last September, in a warm tribute at the English Association's Oxford Conference on 'British Poetry of the First World War', Tim Kendall spoke for everyone present: 'I just wanted to say how important Jon's work has been actually for all of us, even when we don't always know it. He has shaped the field of war literature for all of us.'

Shaping the field of war literature has indeed been both Jon Stallworthy's work and his achievement. Part of that work has been to insist that the very term 'war poet' needs to be used with care: 'It remains an unsatisfactory label', he declares in the Introduction to *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, the

book written to accompany the 2002 Imperial War Museum exhibition about the lives and legacy of ‘Twelve Soldier Poets of the First World War’. However, he uses the label himself (not without a certain irony) as the title for his final volume of poems, *War Poet* (2014). He is clear that war poetry – poetry that bears witness to war – can be written both by those who actually experienced fighting at first hand and by those who did not, provided that their poetry is ‘true’ in the sense Wilfred Owen had applied to that word. In one of his final essays on the responsibility of war poets and war poetry, ‘The Fury and the Mire’, (collected in *Survivors’ Songs*, 2008) he says of poems such as ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ and ‘Drummer Hodge’ that

These poems of second-hand witness have an immediacy and power equal to any of first-hand witness, being the work of great poets, each with a lifelong imaginative investment in his subject. But such poems are rare. The second-hand testimony of lesser poets, lacking such investment, is seldom impressive and sometimes embarrassing.

Here, his willingness to discriminate between great and lesser poets - defining the strengths of one and the weaknesses of the other - is characteristic of Stallworthy’s critical rigour. He is always clear that the experience of those who fought and wrote gives them the right of rebuke against those who only pretend to bear witness. In ‘Owen’s Afterlife’, another of the essays in *Survivors’ Songs*, he explains how he came to Owen via a disagreement with his own poetic mentor, Yeats:

The power of his pleading challenges the validity of Yeats’s pontifical dictum that ‘passive suffering is not a theme for poetry’ Owen’s poems tend to make an active response to the suffering of which they speak. He is a classic example of what would become a quintessentially twentieth-century figure: the poet as witness – and not a passive witness.

In all his writing, Stallworthy reminds us that what the war poets wrote was poetry, not propaganda; and not the least part of his legacy will be to have made us listen to the voices of writers such as Owen with greater pleasure as well as greater understanding. At the end of ‘The Mire and the Fury’, he asks what war poems actually achieve, before answering thus:

In that their subject is tragedy, they can – when made with passion and precision – move us (as Aristotle said) to pity and terror; also, I

suggest, to a measure of fury. And just as we go to a performance of Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Britten's *War Requiem* for pleasure, we return (or at least I return) to 'Dulce et Decorum Est' or 'The Heroes' for the wonder and pleasurable satisfaction a masterpiece affords.

'Passion and precision' describe exactly the kind of conviction and scholarship Jon Stallworthy's life and work have brought to the discussion of literature and its value in our time. To which I should add, finally, one other quality: generosity. It's a quality he admired in others and exemplified in his own willingness to teach, share and encourage. What he wrote of Edmund Blunden, in a 1989 Introduction to *Undertones of War*, we may properly apply to Jon himself:

Wherever he went he was loved for his learning, his wisdom, his modesty, his humour and his generosity. The last was legendary and extended not only to the living but to the dead, such as Wilfred Owen, whose poems he edited with rare devotion.

Notes on Contributors

Adrian Barlow is President of the English Association. Before retiring, he was Director of Public and Professional Programmes at the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education. He is series editor of Cambridge Contexts in Literature and his recent publications include *World and Time: Teaching Literature in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *Extramural: Literature and Lifelong Learning* (Lutterworth Press, 2012). His website is www.adrianbarlow.co.uk.

Argha Kumar Banerjee, DPhil (Sussex), is currently the Dean of Arts and Assistant Professor, English Department, St. Xavier's College, Calcutta University, India. A Commonwealth Research Scholar (2004-7) at Sussex University, he was also awarded the Charles Wallace Research Grant (2012) for his post-doctoral research in the UK on war poetry. His publications include *Poetry of the First World War: A Critical Evaluation* (2011) and *Women's Poetry and the First World War* (2013).

Michael Copp is an independent scholar, with an MSt in Modernist Studies (Cambridge). He has presented conference papers on Richard Aldington, Imagism, Pound, Sassoon and F. S. Flint. Among his edited books are *An Imagist at War: The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington*, *Richard Aldington: The Selected War Poems* and *Cambridge Poets of the Great War*. He has also contributed three short monographs to Cecil Woolf's 'War Poets' series: Edgell Rickword, Frederic Manning and Ford Madox Ford.

Guy Cuthbertson is a Senior Lecturer at Liverpool Hope University, and has held posts at St. Andrews, Oxford, Swansea, Queen Mary and Brighton. He has written a biography of Wilfred Owen for Yale University Press (2014), and he is a General Editor of the OUP edition of Edward Thomas's prose, having also edited the first two volumes, *Autobiographies*, and, with Lucy Newlyn, *England and Wales*. In 2007 he co-edited *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*.

Santanu Das is Reader in English at King's College London. He is the author of *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2006) and *1914-1918: Indian Troops in Europe* (2014) and the editor of *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (2011) and *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War* (2013).

Evelyn Heinz is an AHRC-funded doctoral student at Birkbeck, University of London. She holds a BA in English from the University of Cambridge and an MSt in Modern Languages from the University of Oxford. She has recently been awarded a Fellowship to research John Rodker's manuscripts at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas.

Kate McLoughlin is an associate professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and Fellow and Tutor at Harris Manchester College. She is the author of *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (2011) and *Martha Gellhorn: The War Writer in the Field and in the Text* (2007) and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing* (2009).

Charles Mundy is Head of Academic Development for the Department of Humanities at Sheffield Hallam University, and is the editor of *The Van Pool: The Collected Poems of Keidrych Rhys* for Seren, and co-editor of Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* for Carcanet. He is President of the Robert Graves Society and co-editor of the Society's journal *Gravesiana*.

James Grant Repshire received a BGS in history at the University of Kansas in 2005. He was then commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. A cavalry officer and paratrooper, he served in Iraq and Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne Division. Leaving the army in late 2010 at the rank of Captain, he has since received an MA in History at Exeter, and currently reads there for a PhD in English, studying war poet F. W. Harvey.

Back to South Leigh for evensong
and, in the sermon, watched the long
arm of the sun restore the Doom
above the chancel arch. *Thy kingdom
come*, with a vengeance! The entrenched dead,
rising as Reveille sounded,
parted company. Sinners condemned
to join the chain-gang of the damned
recovered 'objects of desire'
and fell in for eternal fire.

I knew them, even naked - Smith,
Haynes, Adrian, Hill, Roberts (with
his hand restored) - my own lot, plus
the General. *He* had earned his place!
But then, herded with them downhill,
I was reprieved. Detailed for hell,
I heard beyond the traverse
an archangelic sentry's voice:
'Wiring party coming in.'
They came in without Adrian.

