

# **PERSPECTIVES ON THE “GREAT” WAR**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Anita R. Appelbaum</b>	1
<i>The Heart of Humanity. A Prime Example of Late First World War Cinema Propaganda</i>	
<b>Peter C Appelbaum</b>	6
Infectious Diseases During the First World War	
<b>Ian D. Armour</b>	13
Nailing ANIMAL: The Historiography of War Origins and the Durability of Public Stereotypes	
<b>Gerhard Genis</b>	37
Adamastorian Abjection: South African Poetic Embodiment of the Great War	
<b>Terence M. Holmes</b>	55
Not the Schlieffen Plan 1914	
<b>Deborah Maccoby</b>	63
‘A Fruitful Fusion Between Hebrew and English Culture?’: Isaac Rosenberg as a Jewish Poet in the Great War	
<b>Jane Mattisson Ekstam</b>	72
Pacifism in literature on World War One: the case of <i>A Crimson Dawn</i>	
<b>Donna Perry</b>	80
Making the First World War Relevant: Pat Barker’s <i>Regeneration</i>	
<b>Natalia Starostina</b>	89
The Representations of Trains in the Construction of Mythology of the Civil War in Russia	
<b>Claudiu-Lucian Topor</b>	96
Romanian Life as Reflected in Wartime Memoirs: Society and Mores during the German Military Occupation (1916-1918)	

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***The Heart of Humanity.***

**A Prime Example of Late First World War Cinema Propaganda**

At the beginning of the First World War, the transatlantic cable between the United States and Europe was severed, so that the American public was given a one-sided view, primarily through newspapers and newsreels, of the behaviour of German troops towards Belgian and French civilians. Although atrocities did indeed occur during the first weeks of the war, there were gross exaggerations of atrocities committed by the “Horrible Huns” against helpless women and children.

**1. Overview: the Rise of Film Propaganda in the United States**

The medium of film was in its infancy at the time of the First World War, but nonetheless became a powerful propaganda tool, used by both anti-war and pro-war American filmmakers. The pacifist drama *Civilization*, released in mid-1916, directed and produced by Thomas Ince and distributed by Triangle Film Corporation, tells the story of a mythical U-boat captain, Count Ferdinand, ordered to sink a civilian ship carrying munitions to an enemy country and is reminiscent of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915. But in this film, the Count refuses, his crew mutinies, the Count sinks his own ship, and everyone drowns. The Count arrives in Purgatory, where he meets Jesus Christ. In return for promising to advocate for world peace and brotherly love in the land of the living, Jesus restores the Count to life. He is promptly stoned, reviled and put on trial by his countrymen. Upon its release, the film proved controversial, eliciting both positive (*La Crosse Tribune*) and negative (*Los Angeles Times*) reviews. This film was credited by the Democratic National Committee with helping to re-elect Woodrow Wilson in the Fall of 1916, using the motto “he kept us out of war”. In contrast to this film, *Sylvia of the Secret Service* was released in mid-1917, directed by George Fitzmaurice and distributed by Pathé Exchange. Although it was the usual story of a plucky American girl out to foil German spies intent upon

sabotage on US soil, it starred dancing and style icon Irene Castle, who, with her husband Vernon Castle, was considered the premiere dance team of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The English-born Vernon Castle had returned to Great Britain at the start of the First World War, received his pilot's license in 1916 and then volunteered as a flyer for the British Royal Flying Corps. By 1917, the air ace, decorated by both the English and French military, having flown over 300 times across the Western Front, as the film's distributors were quick to tell their public.

## **2. America Goes to War: 1918 Anti-German Propaganda Films**

Once the United States formally declared war against Germany in early April of 1917, anti-German propaganda films began to appear with great regularity, culminating in a spate of movies released to the general public in 1918. Some were made to poke fun of the Germans in broadly comedic terms: Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* has the "Little Tramp" going "Over There" and fighting the Germans; Mack Sennett's romp *Yankee Doodle in Berlin* has a downed American flyer impersonating an exotic dancer pursued by the Kaiser and his staff, all played by the Keystone Kops! Others were very serious: *Hearts of the World*, D.W. Griffith's all-star war extravaganza filmed on location in parts of Great Britain and France; *America Goes Over*, a documentary of the United States Expeditionary Forces serving in France, produced by the United States Army Signal Corps with approval by General John J. Pershing; *My Four Years in Germany*, a fact-based anti-German film based on the experiences of American Ambassador James W. Gerard at the court of Kaiser Wilhelm II; *The False Faces*, starring silent horror film star Lon Chaney in an early role as a merciless German officer involved in espionage and mass-murder; and, lastly, the film that President Woodrow Wilson's Committee on Public Information (CPI) considered to be one of the most explicit, *The Heart of Humanity*.

## **3. *The Heart of Humanity*: Civilian Atrocities; Sexual Assault; Child Murder**

Completed in early November 1918, *The Heart of Humanity* was pre-screened and approved by CPI and released to the public by Universal Pictures in late December of

that year. Directed and written by Alan Holubar, the film was unique in that it was set in Canada and spotlighted the heroism of Canadian soldiers fighting in war-torn Belgium and France. Holubar was able to obtain actual newsreel footage of the Canadians fighting at the second battle of Ypres, and interpolated it into battle scenes within his film, earning kudos from the New York Times, who noted that ‘his battle panoramas were amongst the most vivid every produced on the screen’. Adding to the storyline was an original film score, featuring a song *World of Tears* dedicated to the Canadian mothers who lost sons on the Western Front. This song became an instant sheet music hit, selling 25,000 copies in less than three months from the time of its release. Audience reaction and box office receipts was very positive, helped in part by introductions before showings by CPI’s “Four Minute Men”, a cadre of 75,000 volunteers who spoke in favor of approved CPI films.

Holubar selected his leads carefully: for the heroine Nanette, a fragile-looking film and theatre actress Dorothy Phillips (Holubar’s real-life wife) was chosen; the hero, John Patricia, was played by the versatile screen actor William Stowell, known for his “everyman” portrayals of parts ranging from cowboys to playboys. As the villain, Eric von Eberhard, Holubar cast a young Erich von Stroheim, who, with his menacing manner and cold eyes, quickly earned the nickname “the man you love to hate” coined by the film’s publicity people. Both Stowell and von Stroheim were accomplished stuntmen, not only performing their own stunts, but doubling as Canadian and German soldiers in some of the battle scenes.

The story is set in Canada directly before the Great War: Nanette is courted by the five Patricia brothers, John, Paul, Jules, Maurice and Louis, choosing John as her husband. She also meets John’s German friend, Eric von Eberhard, who schemes to seduce her and fails. John and Nanette are married, but their honeymoon is interrupted by the start of the First World War. John and his brothers volunteer for service; but one by one they die on the fields of Belgium and France, until by 1916 only John is left, taken prisoner by the Germans, with his whereabouts unknown to his wife and widowed mother. Nanette, after giving birth to John’s son, decides to take action: leaving her baby boy with John’s mother, Nanette trains as a Red Cross worker and is sent to a war-ravaged Belgian village to care for homeless and sick war orphans. She also hopes to discover John’s fate. John is, in fact, in a POW camp not far from the village where Nanette is based. During a pitched battle for control of the village between heroic Canadian soldiers and “barbaric” enemy soldiers, the Germans

slaughter innocent civilians and use women and children as human shields against the Canadians. Nanette, in trying to evacuate wounded children, is caught in the carnage and takes refuge with a crying child in a bombed-out building. She is spotted by a German patrol, led by Lieutenant von Eberhard.

In the notorious and graphic climax of the film, von Eberhard follows Nanette up the stairs, sends his men downstairs to guard the building and attempts to rape her: he tears off her clothing and bites off her buttons; when the frightened child cries repeatedly, he throws it out the window. In parallel time, John is shown killing his German guard, putting on his uniform, and making it back to Canadian lines. He finds out that Nanette is trapped in the village, leads a counterattack, bursts into the apartment with his patrol, and kills von Eberhard as he is about to rape Nanette. When John tries to embrace her, a shocked and traumatized Nanette thinks that he also wants to rape her. She picks up a knife from the struggle, and tries to stab John. She is disarmed by a horrified John and is sent back to Canada by the Red Cross while John is sent back to the front. At the end of the war, John goes back to Canada and is reunited with Nanette. But do they really live happily ever after? The audience is left to wonder.

#### **4. Conclusion**

As the First World War progressed, and exaggerated stories of German atrocities reached the American public, the tone and content of American films towards Germany and its soldiers became increasingly negative. After the United States declared war on Germany in April of 1917, directors like Thomas Ince, who had written and directed 1916's *Civilization*, "jumped ship" and went on to direct anti-German films, most notably the above-mentioned *The False Faces*. The American public's perception of German soldiers as heartless "Huns" who slaughtered civilians, raped women and murdered children was intensified by the constant stream of 1918 anti-German propaganda movies, culminating with *The Heart of Humanity*. That perception was to linger in the mindset of the American public post First World War, and for decades thereafter.

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## **Infectious Diseases During the First World War**

Since the dawn of time, wound infections and diseases caused by water-borne, droplet, and insect-borne infections have played a leading role in war morbidity and mortality. During the Bismarckian wars, Dr Oscar Rothmann relates how he attempted to operate deeper and more thoroughly, but that he stopped doing so 'because it made him sad'. This is a reference to the incidence of post-operative wound infections followed by fatal general sepsis. Prince Anton von Hohenzollern died of general sepsis caused by a leg wound which became infected (Appelbaum, 2014b). Anaesthesia allowed surgeons to operate more thoroughly, but post-operative infections due to unsterile practices still caused enormous rates of post-operative sepsis. Despite the discovery by Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865) that unwashed hands transmitted the causative agents of puerperal sepsis, it took another forty years for the French chemist Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) to confirm the role of bacteria in all types of transmissible diseases. Robert Koch (1843-1910) placed routine culture and identification of bacteria on a firm footing and Joseph Lister (1827-1912) first successfully applied the concepts of transmissible disease, antisepsis, and asepsis to surgery (Osler, 1919; Bulloch, 1938; Metchnikoff, 1939).

### **1. Pathogenesis of Bacterial and Viral Infections**

By the time the First World War began, major bacterial pathogens causing disease in humans had been cultured and identified. Modern aseptic surgical techniques were routinely applied, and the principle food-, droplet-, and insect-borne bacteria had been delineated. A start had also been made in production of bacterial vaccines and antitoxins. A post-operative wound could therefore be kept clean and infection-free. By contrast, wounds caused by external trauma, including war wounds, routinely became infected. The nature of trench warfare produced ideal conditions for sepsis of every sort. Wounds by shells and other projectiles were routinely contaminated with earth, human



and animal excreta and the close proximity of decomposing corpses, which also contaminated the drainage system and water supply. The wounded often remained in no-man's land for extended periods of time before they were removed to dressing stations. Horse manure was an ideal source of tetanus spores, and gas gangrene often developed despite the physician's best efforts, necessitating amputation. Faecal-oral infections such as dysentery (bacterial and amoebic), typhoid fever and cholera were common, especially on the Eastern Front. Although mechanisms of disease transmission were known, provision of a safe sewage disposal system and water supply in the trenches was not always possible, especially in the rainy season. In Gallipoli, lack of fresh water, especially during the hot summer months, necessitated the drinking of water from contaminated wells and, despite methods such as chlorination, dysentery took a terrible toll. Viral gastroenteritis, not recognizable at the time, must have been very common and caused widespread morbidity. Insects of every kind proliferated in trenches and epidemic louse-borne typhus was a particular scourge. Additionally, the debilitated condition of patients in field-hospitals left them susceptible to post-operative bacterial pneumonia. Head-wound infections often spread to the meningeal cavity, and bacterial meningitis was uniformly fatal. As in every war, venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea were widespread. The close proximity of soldiers in trenches and hospitals also led to widespread dissemination of droplet-borne infections. In contrast to bacteria, culture and identification of viruses and non-bacterial organisms such as the *Rickettsia* causing louse-borne typhus, lay decades in the future.

## **2. The Treatment of Infections**

What could be done between 1914 and 1918 to treat and prevent these infections? The era of antibacterial agents had not yet arrived and the only substance which could be called antibacterial was salvarsan, an arsenical preparation discovered in 1909 in the laboratory of Paul Ehrlich (1854-1915). The treatment of infected wounds was symptomatic, with wide excision or amputation in an attempt to prevent dissemination. There are ample descriptions of saucers being placed under suppurating war wounds to collect pus. Once infections disseminated, causing general sepsis, mortality was uniform. This could occur even after bacterial streptococcal pharyngitis which went on to develop peritonsillar abscess and bacteraemia. Furunculosis was very common

especially in the cavalry (Appelbaum, 2014b), and the only treatment was incision and curettage. Once a patient developed bacterial or amoebic dysentery, typhoid fever, cholera, louse-borne typhus, or bacterial pneumonia (usually caused by the pneumococcus), treatment was symptomatic and mortality rates high. Once a patient developed tetanus, mortality was 100%. The introduction of salvarsan was a great improvement in treatment of syphilis, which up to that point had been treated with highly toxic and largely ineffective mercury. There was no specific cure for gonorrhoea, which was treated with intraurethral or intracervical installations of substances such as silver nitrate and potassium permanganate (Smallman-Raynor and Cliff, 2011).

### **3. Vaccines and Antitoxins**

Bacterial vaccines were in their infancy at the time of the First World War. Sir Almroth Wright (1861-1947) had developed a killed typhoid vaccine that had been successfully tested in India and during the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 (Colebrook, 1954). As a result, Britain was the sole combatant to enter the war with its troops vaccinated against typhoid fever. As can be seen from the diaries of Dr. Hugo Natt (Appelbaum, 2014b), German troops also soon received a typhoid vaccine, presumably similar to that developed by Wright. Although the vaccine was largely successful, mortality still occurred, side effects were sometimes severe, and the faecal-oral contamination that led to the disease in the first place was sometimes unavoidable in flooded trenches. Waldemar Haffkine (Vladimir Haffkin) (1860-1930) developed a live attenuated cholera vaccine in the early 1890s. Preliminary testing in India showed promise, but it was not developed as fully as the typhoid vaccine had been by 1914 (Lutzebrand and Jochnowitz, 1987). Protection by this vaccine was partial and short-lived, and boosters were necessary every few years. Treatment by massive amounts of intravenous fluid and electrolytes was available but not always possible. Interestingly, cholera-contaminated well-water, such as that encountered on the Eastern Front, was safe for horses which are immune from infection with human cholera (Appelbaum, 2014a).

Emil von Behring (1854-1917) and Shibasaburo Kitasato (1853-1931) first showed that injections of serum from an animal with tetanus could confer

immunity to the disease in other animals, and that the same was true for diphtheria. In collaboration with Paul Ehrlich a diphtheria antitoxin for humans was developed and was first used in 1891. The immediate emergence of a very high incidence of tetanus in wounded soldiers during the first months of the First World War was due to combat on richly manured fields in Belgium and Northern France, use of modern explosives that produced deep tissue wounds, and intimate contact between the soldier and the soil upon which he fought. In response, routine prophylactic injections with anti-tetanus serum were given to wounded soldiers. Subsequently, a steep fall in the incidence of tetanus was observed on both sides of the conflict. Because of fatal serum anaphylaxis associated with administration of serum at a time when purification methods still needed to be improved, it must be presumed that many men died as a result of the routine administration of anti-tetanus serum. Yet, anti-tetanus serum undoubtedly prevented life threatening tetanus among several hundreds of thousands of wounded men, making it one of the most successful preventive interventions in wartime medicine because once contracted, tetanus was uniformly fatal (Wever and von Bergen, 2012). Effective tetanus and diphtheria vaccines were developed only after the war (Haas, 2001).

#### **4. Epidemic Louse-borne Typhus**

Although the causative organism and mode of transmission of epidemic louse-borne typhus was well known by 1914, the organism could not be cultured with the methods available at the time, so no vaccine was possible. Conditions in the trenches, especially on the Eastern Front, were ideal for the spread of lice, which cannot fly and spread by jumping from person to person (Zinnser, 2007). Typhus proved to be a potent war weapon: Approximately one-quarter (200,000) of the entire Serbian army died of typhus during November 1914. Yet the combined German-Austrian army made no concerted effort to move into Serbia after the initial Serb victory against the Austro-Hungarians at Cer Mountain. Typhus was effective in holding battle lines; the Serbian Army could not achieve this. The Germans knew that marching an army through a typhus-ridden country could have disastrous consequences. As a result, the German forces held their position for six months until summer weather caused the typhus epidemic in Serbia to subside. The six-month hiatus in the fighting was to have dire

ramifications for the Central Powers' war effort, allowing the Entente to establish a stationary front in France while the Russians poured millions of men into a futile effort to stave off the Germans northern push. The Germans finally succeeded in forcing the Russians to sue for peace, but much later than had originally been hoped. To make matters worse for the Germans, the Russian forces with whom they were engaged suffered from scattered outbreaks of typhus. Withdrawal of German forces from the Eastern Front after Russian capitulation became a tedious process, with delousing procedures providing much of the delay. As a result, German reinforcements from the Eastern Front were unable to bolster the Western Front against rapidly growing American involvement in time to keep Europe in German hands, and the 1918 German Spring Offensive failed. No specific treatment of typhus was available, and mortality rates were high, both amongst soldiers and civilians, the latter particularly on the Eastern Front. Delousing was temporarily effective at the borders and when soldiers went on leave but reinfestation was immediate when they re-entered the trenches (Conlon, 2007).

## **5. The 1918-1920 Influenza Pandemic**

The 1918-1920 pandemic of influenza A probably originated at one or more military camps in the United States and spread with the troops to other parts of the USA as well as across the ocean to Europe. It disseminated rapidly, especially amongst the European population already debilitated by several years of war and its accompanying privations, and by the time it had run its course between 20 and 50 million people had died worldwide. Many succumbed to intermittent bacterial pneumonia (Barry, 2004). Apart from influenza, a whole array of other viral respiratory infections of varying severity remained undiagnosed. Viral culture and antiviral agents would not be developed for several decades, and treatment was symptomatic.

## **Conclusions**

The descriptions of infections presented above are by no means exhaustive. Static warfare gave rise to many other infectious diseases: scrub typhus, rat-borne infections,

and infectious complications of trench foot. Infectious diseases of all types played a major role in morbidity and mortality in the First World War. Apart from salvarsan, no antibacterial agents were available and the development of vaccines to prevent typhoid fever and cholera was in its infancy. Antitoxin therapy for diphtheria and tetanus was known. Faecal-oral infections were very common in trench warfare where safe drinking water and sewage disposal facilities were not always available, and typhus wrought havoc on the Eastern and Balkan Fronts. And then, when Europe was weakened and debilitated after four years of war, a pandemic of influenza A swept in and killed 20-50 million people worldwide. Modern antibiotic therapy, antiseptics, battlefield hygiene and insect control have greatly diminished war-related infectious diseases in the present day, but this situation may change in the future.

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**Nailing ANIMAL:**

**The Historiography of War Origins and the Durability of Public Stereotypes**

The essence of the Fischer thesis on the origins of the First World War is that primary responsibility rests with the German government and, to a lesser extent, the Austro-Hungarian government. In the context of 1961 this was controversial, because the prevailing orthodoxy had for some time assumed, with the American revisionist historian of the 1920s, Sidney B. Fay, that no single government could reasonably be held responsible, and that the War was rather the shared responsibility of all the great powers in 1914, as well as the product of certain “underlying causes” going back deep into late nineteenth-century European history (Fay 1966 [1930], 2: 548-49; Fischer 1967, 3-92). More in-depth examinations of German responsibility, by Bernadotte E. Schmitt and Luigi Albertini in the 1930s and 1940s, failed to make much impression on the general public (Schmitt 1966 [1930]; Albertini 1952). It was not until Fritz Fischer published his study of German war aims, with its sensational opening chapters on the War’s origins, that this more critical approach became a matter of renewed debate among historians (Fischer 1967, 3-92). It seems fair to claim that, since the 1980s at least, a modified version of the Fischer thesis has become something like the new orthodoxy (Joll 1984, 4-5; Langdon 1991; Joll & Martel 2007; Mombauer 2002; Hewitson 2004; Röhl 1995, 39-40, 51-53).

Despite fifty-plus years of “Fischer controversy”, however, it appears that certain public stereotypes regarding the origins of the First World War are as persistent as ever. The public perception remains that the War’s causes are rooted in what might be called “the usual suspects”, and are all too neatly summarised by the acronym ANIMAL: alliances, nationalism, imperialism, militarism, anarchy and leadership. ANIMAL is especially alive and well in the North American school system; but if one goes by the popular study centres proliferating on the Web, dedicated to helping students pass the American Advanced Placement examinations, or the GCSE revision

sites in the UK, it has become a trans-Atlantic phenomenon (Social Studies Help Centre 2015; Clare 2015).

### **ANIMAL Defined**

What, then, does ANIMAL consist of? This acronym is only one of several, intended as mnemonic devices for students desperate to pass crucial examinations. ANIMAL, the one peddled on the Social Studies Help Center, seems the most enduring (Clare 2015; Social Studies Help Centre 2015). It is on ANIMAL, therefore, that I intend to concentrate.

Some of the terms represented by this acronym need more explaining than others. *Alliances*: simply because there *were* alliances (usually described as ‘entangling’), and because Europe was divided into an “alliance system” of two “armed camps”, it is argued, the European powers were somehow more likely to be dragged into war. *Nationalism*: in view of Gavrilo Princip’s motivation for assassinating the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, this one is on the face of it unproblematical; but ANIMAL also assumes that the nationalism of the great powers themselves was a contributory cause of war. *Imperialism*: an explanation traditionally beloved of the Left, imperialism in the shape of competition for colonies, resources and investment opportunities is seen as a factor that made war next to inevitable; certainly it was Vladimir Lenin’s instinctive explanation for the outbreak of hostilities. *Militarism*: this embraces a variety of supposed causative factors, from arms races and constricting mobilisation plans, to the alleged undue influence of generals and admirals on government policy, to bellicose attitudes fostered in societies as a whole by the prestige of the aristocratic officer class, the military traditions of monarchs, and so on. *Anarchy*: this is shorthand for the “international anarchy” first identified in the 1926 study by G. Lowes Dickinson: because, it is argued, the European great powers existed in a Hobbesian universe of sovereign states, unrestrained by any international body such as the League of Nations, they had no “hot lines” or other mechanisms for resolving their differences in 1914, and were bound to make decisions dictated by their own perceived vital interests (Lowes Dickinson 1926, 46, 492; Lowes Dickinson 1916). And finally, *leadership*: this, too, is shorthand, in this case for *failure* of leadership; European statesmen of 1914 were too hidebound, too insulated from their peoples, too afraid of



being seen as weak to be capable of compromise, of backing down when faced with Armageddon.

### **ANIMAL Dissected**

The briefest knowledge of the historiography of war origins, especially the controversy over Fischer and the post-Fischer debate, shows that the simplistic reductionism of ANIMAL is utterly inadequate to explain the origins of the First World War. To demonstrate this, it is sufficient to dissect the acronym, letter by letter.

#### ***Alliances***

This is the hoariest chestnut in the barrel. Its premise is that the existence of alliances, divided into two rival “camps”, effectively forced governments to make decisions for war in 1914 (Schmitt 1966 [1930], 1: 8). This is rubbish, and has always been so. There were indeed two rival alliance groups; but this ‘system’ was mutable and constantly shifting. The alliances were in fact only a very imperfect reflection of the underlying vital interests of the great powers, as their governments perceived them. Like James Joll, F.R. Bridge, and more recent contributors like William Mulligan, I would argue that the alliance “system”, far from steering the powers towards confrontation, in reality was a source of stability, and that it was rather the *breakdown* of the alliance system that threatened war. As Bridge puts it, ‘To blame “secret diplomacy” or “the system of alliances” for the war is to mistake the symptom for the disease’ (Joll 1984, 34-57; Bridge 1983, 25; Mulligan 2010, 73).

The obsession with the “alliance system” perhaps goes back to a misunderstanding of the pathbreaking diplomatic histories of William L. Langer (Langer 1950; Langer 1951). Langer was writing at a time when, despite the increasing documentation available, the largest single source was still the German one. But at the core of Langer’s work there was a perception that strikes me as innately sound: the alliance system constructed by Bismarck did make for stability. The extension of this system into two rival alliances, each keeping the other in check, arguably made for even greater stability. Germany and Austria-Hungary needed one another’s support against Russia; and France and Russia needed one another’s support against Germany. Yet this did not mean that either side was intent on war; on the contrary, these were

defensive, not offensive, alliances. The real problem lay not in the existence of alliances, but in the underlying, and conflicting, states' interests which those alliances reflected. And in 1914 the problem lay not in the fact that the alliances existed, but that they did not do their job; they no longer deterred.

The real determinant of relations between states, in any period, is how they pursue their perceived vital interests. On this score, we can identify certain verities about the international scene between 1871 and 1914. One was the Franco-German antagonism, rooted in France's defeat in 1871 and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany. Another was the Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans. A third, less enduring verity was the imperialist rivalry of Britain with both France and Russia, which seemed to be the dominant source of friction in the 1890s. And a fourth verity was the inherent strength of the new German Empire, a populous, industrialised, militarily strong power in the middle of Europe, whose potential for destabilising the balance of power was recognised by some observers from the moment it emerged (Langer 1950, 13-14). This potential German strength was a legitimate source of concern to Germany's neighbours. Was it, as some recent literature has suggested, perfectly natural for Germany to seek to attain *Weltmacht*, or "world power status", and was it dog-in-the-mangerish of the other great powers to regard this attempt with fear (Clark 2013, 141-52)? Perhaps. But the fact remains that it was a source of concern. Germany made its neighbours nervous.

A 'system' of rival alliances was in place by the mid-1890s, and it remained in place for the next twenty years, *without* producing a world war. Indeed, much of the history of the next twenty years positively disproves the notion that the alliance system somehow made conflict more likely. Instead, a series of *ad hoc* agreements showed the limited applicability of the alliances, and the capacity for pragmatism of governments in response to emerging circumstances not covered by the terms of whatever formal commitments they had. An excellent example of this sort of *ad hoc* pragmatism is the series of Austro-Russian ententes reached over the Balkans, one in 1897 and another in 1903, ententes preceded by the more famous Three Emperors' Leagues of the 1870s and '80s. Due to the inveterate suspicion which both Russia and Austria-Hungary had of each other these understandings were always rather fragile, but the point is they could be reached (Bridge 1972, 211-309).

The precise, limited nature of all alliances was noted long ago by Sir Harry Hinsley, who pointed out that the major alliances 'explicitly aimed at preserving

the status quo' (Hinsley 1963, 257). Such instruments had precise time limits, and needed periodically to be renewed. They envisaged precise contingencies as requiring action, which were the only circumstances in which these sovereign states accepted any obligation or limitation on their own freedom to act. As Bismarck pointed out, reason of state always took precedence over formal or informal treaty obligations. Some alliances, or parts of them, were not even regarded as valuable by their signatories, the most notorious example being Italy's membership in the Triple Alliance. As far as 1914 is concerned, in Bridge's words, 'no government...acted in fulfilment of its treaty obligations, and the British did not even have any' (Bridge 1983, 24).

The roots of this obsession with the alliance system go back to Victorian thinking about what today is called 'conflict resolution'. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a conviction that there should be some overarching, supranational authority in international affairs. Prior to 1914, there had been a proliferation of peace leagues, congresses and attempts to limit armaments, culminating in the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907. After 1914 the erroneous lesson was drawn that the War had its origins in the unfettered sovereignty of states; and the 'alliance system' was somehow equated with this dog-eat-dog universe. The fact that any alliance actually required the limited *abandonment* of sovereignty passed unremarked.

In reality the origins of the War must be sought elsewhere. Down to 1914, the great powers had recognised the restraints imposed on them by the alliance system, and had talked to one another. The difference, in 1914, is that they did *not* talk to one another, or rather, not enough. And the key to what we have to think of as the breakdown of the alliance system is to be found in the fact that, for whatever reason, certain parties, that is Austria-Hungary and Germany, had lost faith in their own alliances. The alliance system was already under strain, and there was not enough time, after the Balkan Wars, to shore it up again. The alliances, in short, had simply been the framework within which the great powers acted, and some of them resorted to adventurism in 1914 because, in their view, it was no longer working (Schroeder 2007, 27-40).

### ***Nationalism***

This is represented by the second letter of ANIMAL, and comprises a multitude of confused notions. Obviously, the nationalism of individual Serbs, in both Serbia and the Habsburg Monarchy, and of nationalist organisations on both sides of the border, was

very much at the root of the Sarajevo assassination. A significant number of Serbs regarded the Habsburg Monarchy as an oppressor and an obstacle to the formation of the Serbian nation-state. This nationalism, moreover, was clearly shared by the leaders and political elite of the Serbian state, even though we have known for a long time that the Serbian government was not behind the assassination, and took belated, if entirely inadequate, measures to prevent it. Whether this means we should blame the Serbian government for the assassination, is another matter (Clark 2013, 56-64; Macmillan 2013, 549). Equally important, although often overlooked as a cause of war, is what might be called the “anti-nationalism” of the dynastic, multinational Habsburg Monarchy. This was a crucial ingredient in turning a Balkan crisis into a general European war, because without Vienna’s determination to respond to Sarajevo there would have been no July Crisis. So nationalism, and the reaction to nationalism, lie at the heart of the problem.

Beyond the Austro-Serbian antagonism, however, should we be focusing on nationalism generally, among all the European peoples involved? One of the most challenging tasks in analysing nationalism is determining how general it is, what the “take-up” rate is among different sectors of a population; and this difficulty remains even in 1914, the age of mass education, a mass-circulation press, mass conscription and all the other conditions which made nationalism a mass phenomenon (Weber 1976). How much did nationalism shape the decisions of statesmen in 1914 and earlier? With some actors in 1914, it is relatively easy to conclude that their attitudes and actions reflected an ingrained, fierce nationalist pride. With other figures it seems harder to say. Dynastic considerations, dynastic loyalties, larger strategic goals were in these cases probably far more important than nationalism. Even in the case of obvious nationalists, I would suggest that these experienced politicians knew very well how to keep their own nationalist passions in check; in a crisis they too kept their eye on the really important strategic and state interests.

On the larger issue of whether nationalism in general was a cause of war in 1914, I think the answer has to be both “yes” and “no”. The subject is a quagmire of imponderables, and can hardly be quantified scientifically. Nationalism falls under the category of “unspoken assumptions” analysed by James Joll in 1968: ‘When political leaders are faced with the necessity of taking decisions the outcome of which they cannot foresee, in crises which they do not wholly understand, they fall back on their own instinctive reactions, traditions and modes of behaviour’ (Joll 1972b, 309). Yet

some reasoned, if tentative, inferences seem possible. It is not unreasonable to assume that, with the exception of dynasts and dynastic loyalists, some socialists and internationalists, and the unknown number of Europeans who might be coloured “nationally indifferent”, nationalism was everywhere in 1914, even in Russia (King 2001, 123-30). But how to demonstrate its effect on the decisions to go to war?

One measure of the strength of nationalism is the state. States acted as a powerful focus for nationalism, and “nation-building” was one of the vehicles for this. For many Europeans by 1914, the nation-state represented the highest good. By 1914 nationalism seemed nowhere stronger than among the Balkan peoples, of whom the Serbs were emblematic; but we should not forget that the peoples of Eastern Europe had learned the habit from exemplars in Western Europe. Nationalism was promoted through symbols such as flags, the collection of folklore, the writing of history, the erection of monuments to “national” heroes, the commemoration of “national” events like the battles of Leipzig or Sedan. The very apparatus of the state – the monarchy or presidency, the bureaucracy, the armed forces – was a reminder of national identity and one’s duty to the collectivity called the nation.

Nationalism was reinforced by other aspects of mass society, such as education and mass-circulation newspapers (Joll and Martel 2007, 281; Jelavich 1992, 75-76). The existence of a nationalist press by 1914 was a reflection, however distorted, of public opinion and, in so far as virtually all European governments had systems of political parties and representative institutions, it is clear that the press was listened to, even in Russia (Spring 1988, 58-59, 77, 79-82). How far did this awareness of nationalist opinion shape government policy? Impossible to tell. All we can say is that, in their constant reference to the “national interest”, leaders evidently felt they had to take note of public opinion, and to some extent felt they spoke for it. Did the nationalism of individual statesmen, reinforced by the nationalism of their publics, encourage them to take a harder stance than they might otherwise have done? It seems very likely, but more than that one cannot say.

The influence of nationalism, and the near-universality of the Social Darwinist mindset, do appear, in some instances, to have induced a fatalism, a resignation to the likelihood of war (Joll 1972b, 321, 322; Remak 1959, 320-22). This is not to say that all leaders actively sought war; but neither were they opposed to using it as an instrument of policy. What remains more difficult to determine is the extent to which decisions were made because of nationalist views; I would argue that most

decision-makers were governed far more by considerations of *raison d'état*, albeit interpreted in a 'national' sense.

### ***Imperialism***

To mix metaphors with a vengeance, this is the great red herring of ANIMAL. The enduring favourite of left-wing interpretations of war origins, imperialism, I would argue, is not one of the obvious causes of the First World War, except in a very narrow sense. A certain type of imperialism, Germany's informal imperialism in South East Europe and the Ottoman Empire, was arguably one of the root causes of the international instability contributing to war in 1914. Beyond that, however, I think imperialism broadly defined should be let off the hook. It is true that imperialist tensions had contributed to crises between the great powers in the past. But part of the misperception involved is that people tend to think of 'imperialism' as colonialism, or formal imperialism. The *informal* variant of imperialism, what M.S. Anderson calls 'unofficial empire', is usually overlooked (Anderson 2003, 274-76). And as far as colonial imperialism is concerned, much of the steam had gone out of colonial rivalry by 1914; it certainly did not play a role in the July Crisis. No: "imperialism" has been dragged across our path, like a rotten fish, by Marxists ever since Lenin, obsessed with attributing everything to the evils of capitalism; it is not a sufficient explanation for why war came in 1914.

Lenin cranked out his famous pamphlet *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* because, like all Marxist socialists, he had a problem: contrary to Marx's predictions, capitalism had not collapsed. The War, however, seemed to Lenin to present a golden opportunity to stir up socialist revolution. Lenin found much of his explanation for the War in the work of J.A. Hobson, whose attraction, for Lenin, was that he explained the burst of colonial imperialism of the late nineteenth century with reference to the needs of capital (Hobson 1902). Hobson saw the principal reason for the 'new imperialism' in the need of Western capitalists to secure fresh markets, sources of raw materials, and fields for investment.

The only trouble with this Hobsonian analysis, however, was that it was almost complete nonsense. Not only were European governments *not* the playthings of capitalists, seeking out colonies in obedience to the dictates of finance capital, but governments were perfectly capable of taking decisions, for purely strategic and 'national' interests, that capitalists were bound to deplore. Going to war in 1914 was

one of them. Even more important, Hobson got the *destination* of surplus European manufactured goods and capital wrong: throughout the nineteenth century these were flowing for the most part not to colonial possessions, where there was little market for them, but to already established, but comparatively under-developed economies in the world's temperate zones, which were rich in resources and foodstuffs, but also goods- and capital-hungry (Anderson 2003, 286; 288-90). As far as Lenin was concerned, however, Hobson's basic insight, that Western capital needed outlets, was a convincing explanation for the War.

Lenin's take on imperialism is no less flawed than Hobson's, because it overlooks one of capitalism's fundamental characteristics. As Joseph Schumpeter pointed out, capitalism by its very nature is a form of economic organisation which tends rather to promote cooperation (Schumpeter 1955, 234-40; Kruger 1955, 259). In other words, capitalism is internationalist, even if, unrestrained, it can also tend towards monopoly. Capital's predominant tendency, however, is to go wherever the market leads it, and if that means striking deals with foreign capitalists, so be it. In the period before 1914, it is striking how often business and banking interests, left to their own devices, cut deals and 'cohabited' with foreign markets. They sometimes did this, it is worth stressing, in defiance of their home governments. Above all, capitalism was not warlike; on the contrary, banks and manufacturers feared war, because they knew it would disrupt trade and the flow of finance (Lloyd George 1933, 1: 61, 68). In short, it is very hard to argue that imperialism in a general sense lay behind the War (Fieldhouse 1961, 195-99; Anderson 2003, 285-86).

The specific ambitions of German *Weltpolitik* in the Near East, however, *were* a source of increasing tension, because of the way in which Germany pursued them, and the focus of the pursuit. It did not have to be this way; rather, the German government chose to attach such a high priority to its interests in this region. The problem was that, in doing so, Germany was cutting across the vital interests of all three Entente powers, but above all Russia.

Let us review the basic facts of how Germany's imperialism actually worked. By "imperialism", here, I am referring not to colonial imperialism but informal imperialism, the penetration of other societies' economies through trade and investment. It is worth reiterating that, by 1914, this was becoming the most successful aspect of Germany's "bid for world power"; and although German businesses and

banks had interests around the globe, they were arguably most successful in Europe itself and its periphery (Joll and Martel 2007, 199-200; Porter and Armour 1991, 96).

Before the turn of the century, the focus of German informal imperialism was increasingly on South Eastern Europe. German manufactured goods were making steady inroads in the Balkan nation-states, underdeveloped economies hungry for goods and capital. By 1900 German and French banks were the biggest lenders there, and Germany was undercutting its own ally, Austria-Hungary, for trade in the Balkans (Lorscheider 1976, 132-33, 139-41). As early as 1898 the Emperor William visited Constantinople, expressing his government's lively interest in promoting Ottoman modernisation. The major infrastructure project embodying this interest was the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway, the perfect illustration of how international capitalism could be, in that both French and British banks, at various points, were enthusiastic collaborators. German economic interests in the Ottoman Empire generally were pervasive and growing, and in addition Berlin was anxious to strengthen political and even military ties, in the shape of the Liman von Sanders mission.

In response to Germany's Near Eastern imperialism, the attitudes of the French and British governments varied across the years, depending on the strategic interests of the day. As far as Britain was concerned, accommodation with Germany's presence in the Middle East was possible; the main reservations in London were over such cooperation's impact on Britain's Entente partners.

It was on France and Russia that the growing German involvement in the South East had the most unsettling effect. France, for whom the solidity of the Russian alliance was the highest priority, objected to German imperialism in the Near and Middle East on strategic, rather than economic, grounds. France's principal economic stake in Eastern Europe was rather in Russia, and the government here was a major player in securing Russia access to French loans.

The loudest alarm bells in response to Germany's involvement in the Near East, inevitably, rang in St. Petersburg. Both Dietrich Geyer and Dominic Lieven have demonstrated abundantly Russia's strategic interest, after 1890, in maintaining its alliance with France and keeping the Straits at Constantinople open (Geyer 1987, 134-35, 308, 310-11; Lieven 1983, 40, 45-46). By 1914 the Straits were more important than ever to Russia for the export of grain, and as a result German economic activity, and above all German political involvement in this area, was a source of rising alarm to the Russian government.



It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the decisions taken by the Entente powers, in 1914, were decisions taken by all three powers as a group, because all three of them saw Germany's Near Eastern policy as a threat. The threat seemed most real, indeed existential, to Russia; for France and Britain the threat had reality because it affected their partner Russia. Yet despite this obvious alarm at Germany's presence in the Near East the German government persisted with its agenda there, and appears to have regarded it as more than ever essential. We know that Bethmann Hollweg was an enthusiastic proponent of *Weltpolitik*, both colonial and informal, and it was his determination to prosecute it further that lay behind the July Crisis. For only by springing the Entente apart, reasoned Bethmann Hollweg, could Germany regain its freedom of movement on the European and world stage. In this sense, and in this sense alone, "imperialism" is one of the root causes of the First World War.

### ***Militarism***

The "M" of ANIMAL, for "militarism", subsumes multiple misperceptions about the origins of the First World War, and indeed about how wars come about generally. Military planning and influence, militaristic values and attitudes, and arms races: belief in the malevolent power of these phenomena has been a staple of pacifist opposition to war for generations. Yet we should be sceptical of the idea that armaments, by themselves, can cause wars, and the same goes for mobilisation plans. As Joll and Martel comment, the military 'prepare for war. That is what they are there for' (Joll and Martel 2007, 87). This does not mean that the military, or anyone else, necessarily intend to bring war about. With one obvious exception in 1914, I would suggest that war plans were not equivalent to a commitment to war, even though generals were by no means averse to the idea of war. More ticklish is the issue of the effect one's own arms build-up might have on the other side. Was this, in itself, a destabilising factor? Perhaps.

Let us take first the debate on the importance of mobilisation plans, a subject bedevilled for years by A.J.P. Taylor's *War by Timetable* (1969). The silly title alone of this book suggested that simply possessing a mobilisation timetable made war inevitable. In reality all governments, in 1914, had such plans; in highly industrialised societies, where speed of mobilisation would be essential, generals would have been criminal not to have them. All war plans are the geopolitical equivalent of house insurance: you have them just in case.

This complex planning was itself a potential danger-point, because so much depended on mobilising speedily, and on time. For the generals, but also for governments, it became a matter of extreme importance not to let one's potential opponent gain the advantage in time (Joll and Martel 2007, 123). So the decision to mobilise was a fateful one, even if it was not, in itself, a commitment to war; witness the agonies of the Tsar and his ministers over this question at the end of July. And the suspicion that the other side might be mobilising secretly was of course a real factor in destabilising the decision-making process at a crucial stage during the July Crisis: the German general staff, partly because of their spies in Russia, knew full well that certain preparatory measures were being taken by the Russians, even before the formal decision to mobilise had been taken in St. Petersburg (Trumpener 1976, 58-85). Whether the Russian government, as opposed to the Russian generals, was aware of this is open to question, but is in any case irrelevant, since the Germans assumed the worst. In any case, Russia's mobilisation, like almost every other state's mobilisation, still did not mean war (Joll and Martel 2007, 120).

The exception, of course, was Germany, which had the only war plan which posited, as an essential first step, violating the neutrality of Belgium and Luxembourg *en route* to France. So if military planning, and the political innocence of generals, is to be blamed for the First World War, then the Schlieffen Plan is the most obvious culprit. The conclusion has to be that war plans themselves committed governments to nothing, with the exception of Germany's. But the pressure to mobilise, or rather not to lose time before mobilisation started, perhaps became irresistible beyond a certain point, making the soldiers desperate simply to get on with it.

The Schlieffen Plan brings up the question of militarism in a general sense. This is impossible to quantify meaningfully, and yet the influence of military values and attitudes in European societies deserves to be recognised. The quasi-independence of the Prussian general staff in matters of planning, as we have seen, could be fateful. What is *not* true, however, even in Germany, was that the military somehow controlled government, like puppets; the ultimate mind behind foreign policy was the chancellor. And if this is true of Germany then it is even truer of the other great powers, even of Russia, where the Tsar was actually more independent of civilian or parliamentary control than the Kaiser. The reality was that civilian ministers and, in the case of Russia and Austria-Hungary, the monarch, made all the crucial decisions (Mulligan 2010, 125).

In these circumstances the extent to which military values affected the popular mood must be a matter of conjecture. It is clear that, a certain left-wing as well as liberal, anti-militarist body of opinion apart, the armed forces of most countries were popular and highly esteemed. The identification of monarchs and heads of state with the armed forces was mirrored all the way down the social scale. More measurably, organisations devoted to promoting and funding the armed forces had million-strong memberships and no shortage of funds for propaganda. Such pressure groups certainly played a role in stoking popular fears about “losing” the arms race, as well as indignation at the perfidious designs of the other side. Most difficult to decide of all, however, is how much ‘militarism’ contributed to a popular readiness for war, that willingness to see war as a release and an adventure, so evident in 1914. There were plenty of generals and admirals who were classic Social Darwinists, preaching the value of war as a means of making the nation racially or morally “fit”; but these, however much they reflected the popular consciousness, did not represent government policy (Bernhardi 1914 [1913], 18).

Arms races constitute perhaps the most difficult area in which to assert, flatly, that there is no connection with the origins of the War. The popular view of this subject, and of arms manufacturers as “merchants of death”, has ever since 1914 tended to muddy the waters, and was even adopted after the War by some actors in 1914, like Sir Edward Grey, who really ought to have known better (Grey of Fallodon 1925, 1: 91). Arms manufacturers, however, did not control governments. Nor did armaments firms act as an arm of government abroad; on the contrary, like all capitalists, they were admirably internationalist in terms of whom they sold to (Grant 2007, 10-11, 235). Nor do I think we should blame governments for wanting the most up to date military hardware, or for maintaining large standing armies. If governments are not positively pacifist, and none was in 1914, and take defence seriously, then they surely have a duty not to be caught napping. In the world of 1914, a Hobbesian universe where states were on their own, even with allies, one of the dominant elements shaping international relations was fear of being subjected to another state’s preponderant power. At any rate, I would argue that up to a certain point the possession of armies and navies was not, in itself, a cause for war. The existence of armaments, and the well-publicised readiness to use them, may even have acted as a deterrent. The real question is, past what point does the accumulation of arms, and in particular the size of military establishments, start seriously affecting the judgment of leaders?

This has two aspects. The most obvious is the effect of increasing the size of one's army, or laying down extra keels, on one's potential opponents. The second, less obvious but possibly more important in 1914, is the effect on one's own side: does the consciousness of being armed to the teeth encourage too bold a policy?

In the case of Germany's leaders, both military and civilian, I think this sense of temporary superiority was in fact decisive. The Prussian general staff genuinely believed they could take everyone on, and win, otherwise they would not have called on the civilian leadership, from about May 1914, to roll the dice; and by early summer it appears that Bethmann Hollweg, the key civilian figure, agreed with this calculation. The problem this created was that in other capitals, even in St. Petersburg, there was a comparable confidence that the country could handle the challenge, and despite many misgivings. In each case this determination was the result of massive recent expenditure and huge increases in military establishments, all in the previous few years. We can, therefore, conclude that arms races had created a different mood, a sort of gambler's fever, which made war, for all governments, an option (Stevenson 2007, 130, 145). Bethmann Hollweg's tactics in July 1914 have been called a "calculated risk", which might more aptly be called a miscalculated risk; but the German chancellor was not alone in concluding that war had to be accepted as an instrument of policy. In the minds of the military, and of monarchs like Francis Joseph, concerned with dynastic prestige, it was *always* an option. In the minds of civilian leaders like Berchtold and Bethmann Hollweg, because of what they saw as the circumscribed and threatened position of their states, it *became* an option. In the mind of Raymond Poincaré, and Sergei Sazonov, and Sir Edward Grey, it was an option that, in certain circumstances, might have to be *accepted*; and each of these men, confronted with what each considered a threat to his country's perceived vital interests, in the end accepted it.

"Militarism" is one aspect of war origins to which there may be no definitive answer. Certainly arms races contributed to international tensions, and a growing sense that, with all this hardware lined up, war was virtually inevitable. We need, however, to distinguish between impression and reality. Contrary to the celebrated defence of Madame Henriette Caillaux, on trial in July 1914 for pumping six revolver bullets into the editor of *Le Figaro*, arms did not 'go off by themselves'; it required governments to resolve on using them (Thomson 1964, 156). All we can say is that, although fear of being outgunned could act as a real deterrent, a plethora of arms

perhaps emboldened the decision-makers. This was definitely a factor in Berlin in July 1914, if not in Vienna; with regard to the governments of the Entente powers, by contrast, I think the jury may be out indefinitely.

### *Anarchy*

The second “A” of ANIMAL stands for “anarchy”, in other words the international anarchy of a world of sovereign states, untrammelled by any supranational body or rules. The idea that a supranational authority would be preferable to this state of nature went back a long way, but little progress was made in the nineteenth century (Hinsley 1963, 253-55; Holbraad 1970, 23-34).

The outbreak of the First World War was therefore taken as the cue for a new push to achieve a League of Nations. Failure to do so, in the eyes of these zealots, meant that war would continue to be part of the human condition; as Lowes Dickinson put it, ‘whenever and wherever the anarchy of armed States exists, war does become inevitable’ (Lowes Dickinson 1926, v). The fact that the European great powers had always been armed, but for over forty years had *not* gone to war with one another, seemed to count for nothing in this analysis.

Worse, the foreign policy of sovereign states, in this analysis, was habitually directed by unaccountable elites, who took no account of the wishes of the peoples on whose behalf they claimed to speak. As soon as the War broke out, therefore, the cry went up that a principal cause of war was “secret diplomacy”. Democratically accountable governments, ran the argument, would never have dared risk war without proper consultation with their electorates (Swartz 1971; Robbins 1976; Morris 1972, 409-10, 420).

The only problem with accepting that war came because of the lack of a supranational authority, or of democratic accountability, is that it remains a counter-factual argument, impossible to prove or disprove. It is true that the government in Britain, where foreign policy was dominated by the so-called Liberal imperialists, was at loggerheads with many of its own backbenchers (Morris 1972, 29-34). Similarly, the German government after 1912 had to live with the knowledge that the largest party in the Reichstag was the Social Democratic Party. In France, in Russia, in the Habsburg Monarchy, governments were uneasily aware that they did not necessarily command the allegiance of large parts of their electorates or peoples. Yet the fact remains that governments in 1914, as always, made the decisions they did make on the basis of what

they perceived to be their state's vital interests. Even democratically elected governments do not always listen to the "voice of the people".

In addition, as the response to the declarations of war in 1914 in country after country demonstrated, even the centre-left was capable of patriotism, largely because all governments successfully presented the war as primarily a defensive one. Europeans of all political stripes obeyed the call-up in their millions, and the pre-1914 socialist dream of a general strike which would stop war in its tracks proved to be just that: a dream (London 1908). Although enthusiasm for war was arguably less widespread than has sometimes been claimed, all leaders in 1914 were struck by the extent to which war seemed positively popular, indeed demanded (Riezler 1972, 189; Ascher 1961). Nor is it clear that the existence of a League of Nations would have served to defuse the situation in July 1914. We are dealing here with arguments against which there is no conclusive answer, but which constitute wishful thinking of a peculiarly stubborn variety.

### *Leadership*

The final letter of ANIMAL stands for "leadership", by which is meant its alleged absence in 1914. War came because the statesmen of 1914 were weak: afraid to speak cold truth to impetuous allies; afraid to stand up to warmongers; afraid to give the appearance of weakness by accepting compromise; too easily swayed by their own notions of national or dynastic honour; incapable of providing firm, responsible leadership. Precisely because it involves such a subjective subject as human judgment, this has always been the most difficult aspect of ANIMAL to pin down. None of Europe's leaders, in this view, was up to the job, and consequently war came almost by default, because no single statesman had the moral courage and breadth of vision to halt the juggernaut.

As with every other component of ANIMAL, the charge of poor leadership has a superficial plausibility. Almost any international crisis, it can be argued, benefits from leaders on both sides being able to take the long view, to weigh options dispassionately and from a fully informed position. Any detailed study of the July Crisis reveals that, because of the short duration and intensity of the crisis, decisions especially towards the end of July were being taken by men under extreme pressure, often deprived of sleep, and with perhaps inadequate time for consultation and reflection (Jannen 1983, 58, 60).

Yet do fatigue, and poor judgment resulting from fatigue, constitute poor leadership? The weak point in the ANIMAL model in this regard is that it could just as plausibly be argued that the statesmen of 1914 made the wrong decisions for what they, at least, regarded as impeccable reasons; that some of them made decisions which, from the perspective of their state's perceived vital interests, were not only unavoidable but morally *responsible*; and that responsible and even courageous (if not correct) decisions were made *despite* the participants' accelerating fatigue and stomach-churning sense of impending disaster. In short, we should respect these historical actors' decisions as understandable from the point of view of the decision-makers, and in light of what they considered to be their responsibilities. The decisions may have had disastrous consequences, but of the deadly seriousness with which those decisions were made we should have no doubt. It is high time we abandoned the idea that European statesmen in 1914 were "sleepwalkers" who, at some level, did not know what they were doing.

What has always struck me is the horrifying sense of *burden* that so many of the leaders in the July Crisis expressed. The leaders of the Habsburg Monarchy operated under a sense of compulsion because, as *they* saw it, the Monarchy's very existence as a great power was at stake (Bridge 1972, 366-73; Williamson 1990, 154-56, 162-63; Jannen 1983). They may have been wrong, but they believed sincerely that they had to act; this was no frivolous decision.

The German chancellor's brooding sense of responsibility is equally well known. A determined advocate of *Weltpolitik*, Bethmann Hollweg was conscious that Germany was hemmed in by the Entente powers. He was disturbed by the knowledge that Britain and Russia were contemplating talks on naval cooperation. He was oppressed, above all, by Russia, 'which grows and grows and weighs upon us like a heavier and heavier nightmare' (Porter and Armour 1991, 99). He accordingly deliberately took advantage of the Sarajevo crisis to unleash a confrontation with the Entente powers, convinced that Germany either had to win freedom to act on the world stage by diplomatic means or, failing that, accept war against its rivals before the opportunity to do so became militarily unfeasible. And yet the sense of what he was setting in motion also oppressed Bethmann Hollweg. War would 'lead to an overthrow of the entire existing order', regardless of whether Germany won it or not (Porter and Armour 1991, 99).

If we go all around the capitals of Europe in 1914, we find the same sombre seriousness and sense of responsibility. The French president was clearly

resolved to defend France's interests, and was not afraid of a fight. Recent literature has discussed the "Balkan inception scenario", the alleged eagerness of the French and the Russian governments to take advantage of instability in the Balkans to force a quarrel on the Dual Alliance (Clark 2013, 349-58; McMeekin 2011). Yet I think this is still, even after a century's study, a matter of interpretation. One could just as plausibly argue that the French and Russian leaders, convinced that Germany and Austria-Hungary were trying to steal a march on them in the Near East, were simply determined not to be taken advantage of again. Germany, far more than the Habsburg Monarchy, was regarded by Paris and St. Petersburg as a threat, militarily and economically. Should we therefore convict them of undue bellicosity for standing up to what, in their view, was German and Austrian bullying and expansionism?

The Russian case is most intriguing because, while the Tsar and his ministers took their responsibilities with extreme seriousness, further down the line we find Russian officials, especially military ones, who have been charged with recklessness, if not outright frivolity. Everyone probably knows the story of General Janushkevich, chief of the general staff, who threatened to smash his telephone to prevent any further countermanding of the fateful order for Russian general mobilisation; and of Sazonov, the foreign minister, who allegedly, when the final decision was made, told Janushkevich that 'Now you can smash your telephone' (Albertini 1952, 2: 572). Was this frivolity, or rather a desperate consciousness of the consequences, for millions of Russian subjects, of delaying mobilisation any further? Most poignant of all are the accounts of Nicholas II's agonising over the decision to mobilise (Albertini 1952, 2: 571-72). This was not a man who took his responsibilities lightly, even if there is general agreement that Nicholas was a disastrously weak and vacillating personality. This apprehension, like the fears motivating the Austrians and the Germans, may have been mistaken, but it was undoubtedly sincere. Does acting on one's apprehensions, once all other means of explaining someone else's actions appear to have been exhausted, constitute weakness?

Sir Edward Grey has had a bad press ever since July 1914, because he was in fact the principal decision-maker in London. Liberal imperialist that he was, Grey was happy to keep it that way, since he was well aware that a significant proportion of the government's own backbenchers did not agree with his priorities. In the postwar period, some claimed to have had reservations about Grey's decisions, particularly the commitment to Anglo-French military planning secretly made in 1912,



and which only came to light on 3 August 1914 (Lloyd George 1933, 1: 28). Yet the commitment to military planning with the French was just that, a commitment to planning in case war did come. It could be taken by the French as a commitment in a more general sense, but this was not how Grey interpreted it, as he was at pains to remind the French ambassador in 1914. Was Grey's foxiness irresponsibility, or simply a recognition of the fact that no Liberal government could commit itself unambiguously to the Franco-Russian Alliance, for both domestic political reasons, but also because such a commitment could dangerously embolden the French?

The other charge against Grey is that he did not make it clear to the German government where Britain stood (Albertini 1952, 2: 643-50; Macmillan 2013, 590-93). This is nonsense. The German government had no reason not to be aware that Britain's commitment to the Triple Entente was still firm. As late as 4 June, it was reported that the chancellor 'knows for certain that the British government has repeatedly declared to Paris that it would be associated with no provocative policy and no aggressive war against Germany. But that would not prevent us, if it came to war, from finding Britain not on our side' (Porter and Armour 1991, 98-99). During the July Crisis itself, Grey's sincere anxiety to mediate led him scrupulously to avoid giving any impression of taking sides. Grey had no need to drop heavy-handed hints of where Britain stood, because as far as he was concerned the German government knew this already. In addition, rightly or wrongly, Grey assumed that an Anglo-German mediation effort could be revived to deal with the Sarajevo crisis. This as we know was an illusion, because by the early summer of 1914 Bethmann Hollweg had come to the conclusion that forcing a showdown with the Entente powers over a Balkan issue was the only means of winning Germany the freedom of manoeuvre the chancellor coveted, and which he was willing to risk war to achieve. Grey could not possibly have known this.

Enough has been said, I hope, to dispel the notion, always something of an impertinence to those involved, that the men of 1914 were weak leaders. The impression culled from a detailed examination of the record suggests instead that decisions were made in some cases for the wrong reasons, but with complete seriousness and deliberation.

## Conclusion

The public stereotype nevertheless persists. ANIMAL continues to run wild through the North American and now the British educational system, a feral mutant fed by secondary school teachers, their students and even, it seems, university-level academics who should know better. Why this is so seems at first a mystery, yet it is perhaps not so surprising.

Anyone teaching twentieth-century European history, especially at university level, will be familiar with certain public stereotypes which stubbornly refuse to go away: interpretations of complex historical events which have long been exploded by historical scholarship, but whose simplified explanation by politicians, the media, and – regrettably – by some secondary school teachers remains firmly entrenched in the lay consciousness. Of these public stereotypes, none seems more enduringly anchored in the public mind, despite all the efforts of historians, than this traditional explanation for the origins of the First World War.

Some of the stereotype's beginnings, I suspect, are rooted in the conviction that blaming the other side was always too simple an explanation for such a cataclysm. Historians are rightly wary of monocausal explanations of anything; and at the level of the ordinary public an innate concern for balance perhaps made the idea that a single government could be at the root of the War improbable. The Treaty of Versailles, an imperfect instrument if ever there was one, and the notorious "war guilt clause", gave fresh credence to this natural scepticism. The revisionist school of the 1920s built on this bedrock of suspicion, and once the seductive formula of "immediate causes" and "underlying causes" was concocted by Sidney Fay, ANIMAL's component parts could be assembled, rather like Dr. Frankenstein's creature.

Like Frankenstein's monster, moreover, ANIMAL has long since taken on a life of its own. The more detailed forensic investigations of scholars like Bernadotte Schmitt and Luigi Albertini could not impede ANIMAL's progress. The bombshell of the Fischer thesis, unfortunately, burst too late and too far away from ANIMAL's natural habitat to make much of an impression. And so, despite several generations of post-Fischer research into the origins of the First World War, ANIMAL survives, to such an extent that, surveying some of the more recent literature, one gets the impression that things have almost, if not quite, come full circle. On the hundredth

anniversary of the outbreak of the War, that has a certain irony, and suggests that even historians do not always learn the lessons of history.

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### **Adamastorian Abjection:**

#### **South African Poetic Embodiment of the Great War**

South Africa's Great War poetic tropes resonate within the sea and *veld* – the physical links between the southern most point of Africa and the major theatres of war for South Africans: East Africa and the Western Front. The semiotic sea topos afforded the war poets with a space in which the abject experience of war could be embodied in a semblance of meaning. The *veld* provided the bowers, flowers and animal images which were employed by the war poets to hide, both metaphorically and metonymically, the abject presence of death from physical and psychological view. Both these spaces, therefore, created a psychological and literary environment in which metaphysical images could be employed to soften the sensory blight of the corpse of war, and all its related horrific leftovers: the walking-wounded and shell-shock ridden bodies. However, the loss engendered by the war remained as an abject presence that could not be completely veiled from view. In some verse it became a perpetual schizophrenic “waiting” for the inevitable physical demise and psychological breakdown.

#### **1. Sea and Veld**

In the South African war poetry, water represents a binary space which serves as both a sanitising agent and a bedlam milieu of psychological and physical unbecoming. The sea as abject referent in a South African context is encapsulated by the image of the dark and savage monster Adamastor that first rose from the sea off the Cape of storms in 1497 to challenge tempestuously Vasco De Gama's historical rounding of the southern tip of Africa, and literarily in 1572, when Luis Vaz de Camoens's poem on De Gama's epic voyage, *The Lusiads*, was published. Since then, the dark and mysterious Spirit of the Cape has permeated narratives and poetry written on southern Africa by Europeans and white settlers (Van Wyk Smith 1998).

The Cape was, in the typical neo-Hegelian *lingua* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British Empire, appropriated as a new Mediterranean hinterland, which shared not only North Africa's and southern Europe's climate, but also their cultural heritage as an extension of western civilisation (Merrington 2004: 57-89). Conversely, the area to the north, which lay between the newly established Union of South Africa's borders and Egypt, was the 'Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit' (Hegel quoted in Merrington, 65) – Adamastor by another name. The interior of Africa was perceived by white settlers as a primitive archetype of the human unconscious (75): a quintessential "Heart of Darkness". And its "dark" inhabitants were seen as the irrational and sometimes treacherous metonymic offshoots of this archetypal cultural and historical void that needed to be filled by the "progress" brought by western European colonisers (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 1-24; Merrington 2004). In contrast, Cape Town was set up as the birthplace of a new "rational, organic" state, founded on Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, in which Briton and Boer would be married as one political body after the Anglo-Boer War (Merrington 2004: 62-64). Essentially, the Cape provided a foothold from where European civilisation could be spread to the interior of Africa. Whereas Cairo wore the pharaoh's crown, Cape Town now represented the sun-god's regal beard. Merrington (2004) refers to this process of geographical implosion or inversion as 'staggered orientalism' which was characteristic of early 20<sup>th</sup> century British Imperialism that lavishly painted the world-map in red. When South Africa became a Union within the British Empire in 1910, the two former Boer Republics, the Transvaal and Orange Free State, as well as the Natal Colony were drawn within the ambit of the light of reason emanating from the Mother City, Cape Town – the black "spirits" roaming these parts were excluded from this colonial brotherhood: they were present, but not fully existing and mere chattels to be exploited economically and physically and then discarded as Darwinian evolutionary oddities. Ironically, this was very much the literary picture painted of the Boers (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 3-18) before their utility rose as political and economic cogs in the patriarchal-industrialised rich mineral-machine that became South Africa.

Both Johnny Boer and Tommy Atkins were now children of the sun and, therefore, blood brothers. It was part of the South African government's policy at the time to mould the two white sections of the population into a united Union of South Africa based on patriarchal-capitalist principles (Davenport 1988: 255). This drive to



reunite Johnny and Tommy is clearly reflected in the Great War poetry, which is characterised by a homoerotic and sacrificial blood-spill<sup>1</sup>:

Brood of the burghers of Ghent!  
Scions of spurners of Spain!  
(...)  
Up! prestige-proud, teach him that ye  
With liberty's lustre elate  
Have the faith to defy a detestable fate,  
And the will to be free.

Ye, too, whose sires spake  
With the spirit of Hampden and Pym;  
Who spoiled and sacked with Raleigh and Drake,  
(...)  
To arms! and strike until  
On bended knee, they discern  
Your hearts as your father's staunch and stern  
And untameable still.

The poisoned pits in the sand  
Of the desert, the deadly thirst,  
The famine, the fever, hand in hand,  
Have ye suffered, to sink immersed  
In baptismal brotherhood  
Of blood in Delville Wood.  
As one into the grave  
Have ye faded, as one defied  
The vaunt of the foeman to shackle, enslave,  
Dutch prowess and British pride.  
From sepulchred mountain and mere,  
From trench and tent and tide,  
To your brothers ye call, ye who dared and died!  
O, South Africa, hear!  
(‘Union Battle Hymn’, i-iii; John Lomax 1918: 5-6)<sup>2</sup>

In the poetry, these fearless Springboks (antelope gazelle) – the term used to describe white South African soldiers – were drawn from unsurpassed genetic stock: from the practical and rugged Dutch nation that frustrated the growth of the mighty Spanish empire during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and from the British nation, the inheritors of the British parliamentary tradition and progeny of the superior Anglo-Saxon racial

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<sup>1</sup> Also see *The Quatrains of War*, Boustany (1915: 16, 19); ‘Who will fill the Gap?’, i, iii, vi, October 1917, Thompson (1919: 27); Lieut. F.C. Cornell, ‘A Soldier’s Song’, i, iii, published in Uys (1983: 243); Creswell-Knützen, ‘The Battle of Delville Wood’, i, iii, published in Uys (1991: 150); Serowe (1919: 11), ‘The First Brigade’, i; ‘Semper Fidelis’ ca. 1915-1918 (9); C.F.C., ‘To the Memory of those who fell in France’, NMMH, *The Springbok Magazine*, I (8), November 1917: 54; Beattie, ‘The Passing of the “Scottish”’, published in Digby (1993: 389-390); ‘Mons’, iv; Lefebvre (1918: 10); F.E.U.S., Kokstad, ‘A SAMR Acrostic’, i, iv, 18-20, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IV(1), July 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Lomax was a South African civilian war poet.

prototype, which was guided by a sense of freedom, fair play and fearlessness. Essentially, both English and Dutch are sturdy seafaring stock who spread their “superior” cultures, which were conceived in the amniotic fluid of *über*-mothers, on the crests of the sea to the “dark” continents of Africa, North America, India and beyond. The Dutch link to the Cape was enshrined in 1652, with the arrival of the first white settlers, who then began their “civilising” mission of the dark children of Adamastor.

This archetypal Argonaut-Springbok that is bathed in a perpetual “baptismal brotherhood” on the field of battle is essentially a beautified heroic specimen, an African Apollo or sun-god. The white Springbok’s bronzed African sunbathed complexion is appropriated as a sign of martial prowess and physical incorruptibility within the hellish destruction of the battlefield. Both men from Dutch and British extraction are reserved these “manly” and “sunny” dispositions in the poetry (‘The African Brigade’, ii, ix;<sup>3</sup> W.A. Beattie, ‘Delville Wood’, ii, 9-10<sup>4</sup>; E.L. Wynne, ‘The Heroes of Delville Wood’, x, 37-40<sup>5</sup>; D.L. Tull, ‘To the South African Brigade – God Speed’, i, 1-2<sup>6</sup>; ‘To the Springboks’, Slater 1917: 24). They are essentially the archetypal colonial knights and sportsman warriors: ‘They fought, and died, with hero zeal, / And true Colonial vim’ (‘The First Brigade’, ii; Serowe 1919: 11).<sup>7</sup> Each one of the Springboks fought like a 20<sup>th</sup> century Leonidas, and it was especially the epic battle for Delville Wood that took place during the bloody Somme offensive of July 1916, which was juxtaposed as the Springbok’s Thermopylae (Nasson 2007: 205-218; Genis 1996). Honour, right, duty, “noble” deeds, “crusade”, bravery, self-sacrifice and glory are common themes in poems dealing with the battle.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.48, *Poetry*, no. 8.

<sup>4</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 1, no. 7: ‘The Battle of Delville Wood’ by W.A. Beattie (*Indaba* 8/61, August 1961: 7).

<sup>5</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A48, *Poetry, Battle of Delville Wood*, no. 11.

<sup>6</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II (11), February 1919: 32.

<sup>7</sup> Other poems in this crusading Springbok genre include ‘The African Brigade’, NMMH, Pamphlet A.48, *Poetry*, no. 8; ‘Follow the Spoor’, NLSA, *King Edward VII School Magazine* (3441), VII (2), June 1918: 21-22; ‘The Mother’s Call’, Thomas (n.d: 61); Slater 1917: 24; ‘To the Springboks’, 14; ‘Delville Wood’ by Kate Rawlins, NMMH, Pamphlet A.48 *Poetry*, no. 7; Emma Creswell-Knütens’s ‘The Battle of Delville Wood’, i, 1, Uys 1991: 150; D.L. Tull’s ‘To the South African Brigade – God Speed’, i, 1-2, NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(11), February 1919: 32; E.L. Wynne, ‘The Heroes of Delville Wood’, 1916, ii, 5-6, NMMH, Pamphlet A48, *Poetry, Battle of Delville Wood*, no. 11; W.A. Beattie, ‘Delville Wood’, ii, 10, NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 1, no. 7: ‘The Battle of Delville Wood’ by W.A. Beattie (*Indaba* 8/61, August 1961: 7).

<sup>8</sup> See John Lomax’s (1918: 4) poem ‘In Delville Wood’; ‘Delville Wood’ by Denys Lefebvre (1918: 11); B.M. Bromley’s ‘Delville Wood’, (Uys 2006: 91-92); ‘Delville Wood’ by H.F.S., NMMH, *The Springbok*

In contrast, the dark children of the barbaric Adamastor were excluded from this army of the sun:

It is very hard and difficult  
To face the Germans without arms.  
The government says we must go to France.  
No man is bold enough to face the Germans without arms.  
(Nimrod Makanya, Zulu song quoted in Morris 2004: 149)

African recruits who served in non-combatant labour units in German South West Africa, East Africa and Europe (Grundlingh 1987) were not issued with firearms, and this negatively affected recruitment. This exclusion perpetuated not only political ostracism, but also psychological castration. The white Union government introduced this measure as it feared possible black mutiny against white authority (Grundlingh 1981: 194-195). It was argued that an armed Adamastor would represent a real 'Black Peril', and would threaten white hegemony in South Africa. The black body was open to the physical and political assaults by the white other. Its only salvation lay in the ancient sacrificial rites of its ancestors.

In 'A Call to Arms' (1916),<sup>9</sup> S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875-1945), the famous early 20<sup>th</sup> century Xhosa *imbongi* or indigenous oral poet, calls on the bull-calves to defend the black man's honour:

Off with you then, my fellows, off to France!  
Remember the hunger you have left at home.  
Sent out to face the slaughter there today,  
You're sacrifices for the Black-skinned race.  
Go, you bull-calves of the cows with milk-filled udders,  
Away, sons of the lean and the long-starved,  
And you too, offspring of the death-defiers.  
Go, for we have long foreseen all that would come.  
Our people's God decided in advance.  
Away, your legs uncramped with stiffness,  
No quake or tremor in your hearts.  
Go with light bodies, limbs unfrightened,  
And stride on, stride, stride, stride!  
Stand, stand firm, stop, sto-o-o-p!  
(Cope & Krige 1968: 278, tr. Xhosa)

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*Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 11; 'Ou Kerel', 'His All' — In memory of Private Ronald Lock — Jagersfontein, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VII(6), June 1917: 330.

<sup>9</sup> Grundlingh (2011: 32-33) gives the date for 'A Call to Arms' as 1916. Similarly, Opland & Nyamende (2008: 408) indicate that 'The Black (or Dark) Army' (*Umkosi wemidaka*), of which 'A Call to Arms' forms the last stanza, was first published in the 31 October 1916 issue of *Imvo*.

This poem encapsulates the psychological tensions inherent in a colonised people. It is precisely the promise of the reaffirmation of self-worth through what Frantz Fanon calls ‘muscular demonstrations’ (2001: 44) to release the tautly spun psychological frustrations that drove black intelligentsia in South Africa to volunteer for active service during the First World War. It provided a catharsis for colonial induced mental frustrations. This is why Mqhayi’s bull-calves march off to war to join the South African Native Labour Contingent (SANLC): the black non-combatant labour contingent who served in Europe; they believed that sacrifices on behalf of the British Empire would lead to more political rights within the Union of South Africa (Grundlingh 1981 & 1987). In the *izibongo*, or traditional oral poetry, heroic warriors — the ancestral ‘death-defiers’ (‘A Call to Arms’) — including Shaka Zulu, Hintsa, Bambatha, and the Great War hero Isaac William(s) Wauchope,<sup>10</sup> are depicted as horned bull calves, bulls, oxen, buffalo or beasts.<sup>11</sup> Cattle are central in the economic, religious, social, political and cultural cosmology of indigenous South Africans and the bull’s muscularity and phallic horn is symbolic of the male warrior’s martial and physical prowess: the ideal tool to let loose pent up psychological frustrations. Shaka Zulu employed the curved horned-bull’s head encircling strategy to devastating effect during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in creating the mighty Zulu nation.

It is this archetypal warrior that is sacrificed to placate the gods so that political and economic liberation from colonial oppression may follow in the wake of this blood-spill. This poetic prophesy by Mqhayi harks back to the catastrophic Xhosa Cattle-killing of the 1850s. During this event, the blood-sacrifice to the ancestors — represented by the slaughtering of thousands of cattle and the destruction of crops — which was conjured by prophetic voices, did not lead to emancipation from colonial rule, but only to the entrenchment of white dominance: the destruction of the Xhosa chieftaincies during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was accelerated by the famine and breakdown of family structures within the Xhosa body-polity in the wake of

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<sup>10</sup> Isaac William Wauchope (1852-1917), is credited with the only war poem, or rather death-dance / battle cry, by a black soldier during the war. He served as an interpreter in the SANLC and drowned when the *SS Mendi* sank in the English Channel. However, the Mendi death drill’s historical veracity is in doubt. The first written rendition of this oral battle cry only appeared in the middle 1930s (Willan 1978: 85; Grundlingh 2011; Opland 2007: 105; Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxvii).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapman (2002: 26-27); Opland (1992: 129,160, 185,188, 191,200, 214,216, 217,219, 220,222, 225,227, 230,231); Mqhayi, The late Rev. Isaac William Wauchope, *The Bantu World* 19 Jan. 1935: 4,6, quoted in Opland 2007: 106,107; tr. Xhosa.

the cattle-killings (Peires 1987 & 1989). Similarly, black sacrifice during the Great War did not lead to any political gains in the country of their birth.

The epitome of black South African sacrifice during the Great War is represented by the sinking of the *SS Mendi* in the cold English Channel. More than 600 members of the SANLC who were on board drowned when the Mendi collided with another ship on 21 February 1917 (Clothier 1987; Grundlingh 2011). In the poem ‘The Sinking of the Mendi’ (Cope & Krige 1968: 278-280) the archetypal bull-calf metamorphoses into a sacrificial calf:

And as our bride down her last flood  
The Mendi takes the service of our blood.  
(S.E.K. Mqhayi; i, 7-8, Cope & Krige 1968: 278)

In the poem, the blood of the warrior mixes with the symbolic life-giving fluid of the Mendi bride, as well as with Abel’s and Christ’s blood-spill. The reference to biblical figures suggests the influence of the Christian mission schools on literary men like Mqhayi in South Africa, and especially in the Eastern Cape (Opland 2004 & 2009; Butler & Opland 1989: 203). It also indicates a clever appropriation of European biblical themes: the black body in the poem is likened to Abel’s, whose life was snuffed out by his “white” brother Cain, who now bears the mark of fratricidal shame. The new infant that is born from the union between the warrior and the Mendi maiden is a respected black descendent. He will receive more political rights from a thankful white government because of his wartime sacrifice that has been favourably accepted by an omnipotent god – similar to Christ’s death on the cross. The irony in these poems is unmistakable: the abjected black body could only manage to stumble from loss to loss — no political emancipation followed after black wartime service and bloody sacrifice.

In contrast, the whites’ wartime offer was more favourably accepted by Britannia. This offering is not only a homoerotic blood-spill, but also one that is characterised by a strong Oedipal bond. The soldiers on the various fronts were greatly under the sway of the Mother ethos. This cult was widely proclaimed in the South African soldier magazines, *The Nongqai*, *The Springbok Blue*, and the *The Springbok Magazine* and these magazines published odes to women’s sacrifices.<sup>12</sup> In these poems,

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Songs to Shirkers V. True Pluck’, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, II(3), September 1914: 212; ‘Red Cross Way’, NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(6), October 1917: 139; ‘The Sister’, Serowe 1919: 16; ‘Woman’, NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(11), February 1919: 22; and ‘Mothers of Africa’, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, X(2), February 1919: 55.

birth and death are metonyms of the same womb; the mother after experiencing an orgasm of both sexual fluids and blood gives birth to a son who, after an ejaculation of blood, again returns to a protective womb or homoerotic grave ('Kiss me for Mother', 4 October 1917; Thompson 1919: 40). Denys Lefebvre's 'To His Mother' (1918: 24) emphasises the Oedipal bond between mother and son:

(...)  
 She lay till sorrow merged into a dream. (ii)  
 She felt the man-child clinging at her breast,  
     Whose coming made it seem too hard to die;  
 She felt him warm, close-snuggling down to rest,  
     And rocked him as she crooned a lullaby. (iii)

Bourke (1999: 144-170) indicates that the close bond between males was actually not as tight and lasting as that of the domestic connection during the war. The warrior ethos exacted a too severe strain on the civilian volunteers who longed to return to their women folk, both lovers and mothers.

The craving for the female form was also voiced in more satirical, naughty and humoristic "girlie" and "nursie" poems, which were especially popular among the ranks:<sup>13</sup> 'You could nurse me up for life, / And I'd marry you to-morrow –/ If it wasn't for my wife!' The randy, rough-and-ready Kiplingesque soldier is always "up for life", whether on the battlefield or in the *boudoir*. These poems, even the more randy ones, were all part of the Victorian "cult of the mother" expounded during the war, and in the poetry<sup>14</sup> that on a geographical level relates back to 'Mother England' and her protective role as the birthplace of the colonies (Genis 2000: 5-160; Hoffenberg 2001; Baetz 2005). A poem which epitomises this umbilical cord between the life-giving feminine placenta and her guardian colonial foetus-sons is 'Mother's Lads', published in *The Springbok Blue* of September 1917 (I (5): 106):

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<sup>13</sup> See: NMMH, Pamphlet A.483 NAI, *The Great War Parodies on the East, Central African and Flanders campaigns*; 'The Patient's Sweetheart', 1917, NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (1), April 1917: 8; 'The New Lass of Richmond Hill' (1917), NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (1), April 1917: 7; 'What we want to know', NMMH, *The Springbok Magazine*, I (8), November 1917: 45.

<sup>14</sup> See Slater (1917); Thomas (n.d.: 61, 63).

THE Mother called for aid, and from across the sea  
 Came men in all their youth and pride to set their Mother free –  
 (...)
 They who had ‘gone over the Parapet’ to help the Motherland  
 From Africa, with her skies of lovely blue;  
 From Australia, land of plenty, the home of the kangaroo;  
 From India, queen of mystery, of rubies and of pearls;  
 From Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, all noted for their Girls;  
 From Canada and the Yank Land, oh, how the Lads all came!  
 (...)
 (‘Auntie Ida’, 28 April 1917)

Especially the sons from South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are singled out for their bronzed Herculean features and “rugger” bravery. Anzac and Springbok are essentially “brothers in arms”<sup>15</sup> and the “Aussies” were lauded for their southern hemispheric sunny dispositions under battlefield stress (‘The Raiders’, Serowe 1919: 17).

The wives and mothers of these sun-bronzed heroes mainly wrote patriotic and moralistic homilies in keeping with the Victorian Mother cult to produce cannon-fodder sons. This verse is drenched in an erotic and natal-platonic semiotic feminine liquid in which the “boys” stay forever young and beautiful beyond the grave (Genis 2014: 83-86, 89-91, 216-217). The natal bond between Mother England that is surrounded by the British sea and her sons who gestate in her metonymic colonial mother’s amniotic fluid is unmistakeable. The sea, the English fleet’s baptismal font, baptises the British Isles’ inhabitants and colonial sons in the name of the trinity of Duty, Faith and Bravery within the historical context of a proud naval history (‘The Fleet’, viii; De Waal 1917: 18-20).

In stark contrast to this natal certainty stand the Mendi dead who are in a state of spiritual limbo as their ‘souls are not sitting well in the English Channel’.<sup>16</sup> The bodies cannot be returned for burial as they had been scattered by the cold and dark northern seas. This represents a grave dilemma within the African cosmology: the bodies of the ancestors need to be returned home so that they may be tended to by family members to maintain ancestral benevolence. The Xhosa assigned mystical qualities to the sea, the place from where the white oppressor emerged (Peires 1979: 54). The settlers were the

<sup>15</sup> See for instance ‘The New Zealanders’ Farewell to the South Africans’, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, February 1917, VII(2): 73.

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, M. 2007. Available at: [http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330](http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330). Accessed: 9 January 2013; originally published in the *Mail and Guardian*, 21 July 2007, ‘Ninety years on, South Africa salutes 600 men left to drown in channel’.

physical manifestation of this dark mystery (54). At the time of the Great War, Boers or Afrikaners, because of their paternalistic oppression of black people, were seen as ‘a demonic race’ by blacks (Nyamende 2011: 13). During recruitment of blacks for Europe it was observed that “superstition” about the lands across the seas – the *Mkiza* – abounded and that “illiterate” Africans believed that a black body could not return alive from beyond the great waters, which negatively affected recruitment (Willan 1978: 70).

Ironically, both black and white poets metaphorically burnt incensed plant material on the poetic altar that was dedicated to their respective ancestral spirits to hide the abjected corpse in a mist of images. The *izibongo* resorts to covering the slain with ‘the tall *seboku* grass’ (Oxen for the vultures, 1891)<sup>17</sup> and hiding the fallen deep ‘In the bush’ (‘The Spirit Song of Mehlokazulu’)<sup>18</sup> and inside indigenous forests.<sup>19</sup> In the former poem and in a number of others, scavengers like the vulture are commandeered to remove hurriedly the rotting flesh and to leave clean white bone, which is more agreeable to the senses.<sup>20</sup> The “dark” children of Adamastor could draw on its cave of natural wonders to survive.

In the white poetry, the grave in which the comrades lie represents a paradisiacal space within a hellish no-man’s-land of destruction and chaos. Nature metaphors are used to cover the blight of boredom, death and maiming: grass, flowers, leaves, bowers, animals, the moon, and abstract discursive diction are included in traditional Romantic nature lyrics to cover the sights, sounds and smell of death.<sup>21</sup> However, it was the African bush more than any other trope that provided culturally digestible images that were drawn together in a psychological locus of escape from the nightmarish battlefield. *The Nongqai*, *The Springbok Blue* and *The Springbok Magazine* are sprinkled with poems and references to the natural beauty of Africa and South Africa.

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<sup>17</sup> Originally published in the Sotho newspaper *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, 1 February 1891; republished in Opland (1992: 129-130).

<sup>18</sup> AEK, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 29 June 1906; republished in Couzens & Patel 1991: 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> See ‘After the Battle’ (ca. 1915), Butler & Opland 1989: 50-51; tr. Xhosa by Jeff Opland.

<sup>20</sup> ‘The Bones are White at Nkandhla’, ca. 1906, republished in Opland 1992: 130; ‘After the Battle’.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance ‘April’, by H.F.S., NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (2), May 1917: 38; ‘The Bandage’ (1918), SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX (2), February 1918: 63. *The Springbok Blue* published various nature lyrics, which have as its main themes flowers, the moon (‘Life is Red Wine’, NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (4), July 1917: 75), escapism in ‘luxuriant bowers’ (‘Lines on James Thomson: the Poet of Nature’, NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (5), August 1917: 91) and the exuberant-brave bird (‘Vibrations’, NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I (6), October 1917: 123; ‘The Swallow’s Haunt’, I (8), November 1917: 54; ‘The Thrush’, NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, I (12), March 1918: 50).



The poet Francis Carey Slater<sup>22</sup> hides the troubling images of war very deep inside the South African woods, which are bathed in the soft beams of a benevolent moon:

At the grey old farmhouse she is sitting on the stoep,  
Amid the hiving shadows that around her softly creep;  
While the cattle wander kraalward, a sleek and shining group,  
And from the gloaming valleys comes the plaintive bleat of sheep:  
A lonely ostrich loiters beyond the darkling stream,  
And from the orange orchard a wild-dove croons her lay;  
One by one the stars begin to gleam;  
But that brooding figure heeds them not, her thoughts are far away.

For o'er the wind-turn'd furrows, abloom with flowers and foam,  
Her eager thoughts are winging – while she sits as in a trance –  
Swift sea-birds! They are winging to her boys who, far from home,  
Fight for her and freedom on the battlefields of France....  
O restless winds, that roam night's wildernesses,  
Comfort her with whispers of a budding brighter day;  
Desolate moon! O, shower soft caresses –  
Each a bright dream of her loved ones far away.  
(‘The Mother’, 1917: 27-28)<sup>23</sup>

Adamastor was tamed sufficiently within the Union’s borders to appropriate its natural bounty for the settlers to utilise in their struggle for physical and psychological survival within a war milieu.

### **Adamastor: Beast of War**

Notwithstanding all efforts to soften the blow of war, death and its minions of battlefield trauma and shell-shock still remained a psychological presence. In Mqhayi’s indigenous *izibongo*, ‘After the Battle’ (ca. 1915), the monster *Gilikankqo*, which is also metonymically represented by the maddened hyena in an indigenous South African milieu, is conceived to serve as the portent of unnatural civil wars, wars with the wizard settlers, ‘people who traffic in lightning’ (51), and fratricidal wars between the colonisers:

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<sup>22</sup> The best known and most written about white South African war poet of the Great War era is Francis Carey Slater (1876-1958) (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 45), born in the Eastern Cape and a descendant of the 1820 British Settlers (Slater 1925: 229; Doyle 1971: 15). Slater is best known as the editor of *The Centenary Book of South African Verse, 1820 to 1925* (1925).

<sup>23</sup> Also see ‘Night on the Battlefield’, Slater (1917: 18).

Today the country's in labour;  
 Today the land's in pain;  
 Beware of something in the stomach,  
 Suspect this thing in the womb;  
 Today it's as if Gilikankqo'll be born,  
 As if a doe who spurns her own fawn will be born.  
 (...)

Someone said today the beast's enraged,  
 Something long expected had now come to pass,  
 For they<sup>24</sup> looked at his brows and saw he was furious;  
 Today those brows are like clouds on a thunderous day,  
 Today they're flashing like lightning, and the people tremble.  
 Someone said today the world's at war.  
 (...)

Haven't you heard of Bright Ears who are coming?  
 What say you, for we hear they're coming with scourges?  
 Haven't you heard of these flowing-hair nations!  
 We hear that they're people who traffic in lightning.  
 (...)

Go home but stay watchful, the country's in labour –  
 When it gives birth I say it will bear Gilikankqo:  
 It will bear a doe who spurns her own fawn. –  
 (...) there'll be pools of blood;  
 (...) mankind will come to an end;  
 (...) you will sell your fathers;  
 (...) your fathers will sell you;  
 (...) chieftainships will die;  
 (...)

(...) Darkness will descend;  
 (...)

(Butler & Opland 1989: 50-51)

The uncanny sorcery of the white wizards who oppress with the conjuring stick – gun or cannon – is a common theme in the poetry. In 'Amagunyana's Soliloquy' (1906), it is 'That assegai of his, which hurls so fast / The hurtling iron ball' (Couzens & Patel 1991: 37), and in an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu *izibongo*, the white settler Henry Francis Fynn is described thus: 'Throbbing like rumbling thunder (...) / He who points with a stick and thunder and lightning come forth, / Whatever he points at falls and dies. / Our egret that came from the sea; / Elder brother of Shaka whom he raised from the dead'<sup>25</sup> ('Henry Francis Fynn', 19<sup>th</sup> century, tr. Zulu; Opland 1992: 190-191). The roles are reversed: it is now the whites who have become the Adamastorian nightmare that has risen from the terrible deeps of *Cabo Tormentoso*.

The poetry by white South Africans is also haunted by the terrible beast of war:

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<sup>24</sup> The Xhosa ancestors.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Francis Fynn healed Shaka's wounds and subsequently became a court favourite (Opland 1992: 190).

But we – War’s wehr-wolves – we than wolves more fain  
 (Grace-hardened, deaf to Gospel, blind to Rood,)  
 Fain to seek night-long horrors of the wood  
 Where the blood-trail is red, the blood-scent high,  
 Shall we return in time?

God, were it not  
 Best for Thy world we should not come again?  
 (‘Lycanthropy’, Cripps 1917: 112)<sup>26</sup>

Soldiers are transformed into ‘savage wolves’ (‘War’, Lefebvre 1918: 7) in a bleak landscape of utter destruction.<sup>27</sup> These English-speaking South African poets all shared a collective memory of the werewolf that roamed the dank and dark forests of Europe (O’Donnell 1912). They could thus tap into this abject referent as a metaphor for their wartime experiences. Especially the alien landscape of East and Central Africa, with its malaria, swamps and heat, led to great uncertainty and mental anguish among the soldiers — it was where the African werewolf-hyena, Adamastor, ruled supreme:

L is the Loneliness not infrequently felt  
 When you are banished away mid the bush or the veld.  
 (...)
 N are the Noises disturbing the Night  
 From hyenas that laugh to mosquitoes that bite.  
 (Lieutenant Harold Turle, ‘A Central African “Alphabet”’, 1918)<sup>28</sup>

Many soldiers endeavoured to come to terms with this alien landscape of fevers and fears by resorting to satire, irony, humour and coquetry. This was also the case with soldiers writing about life in the trenches and on the Western Front (Genis 2014: 180-229). Barrack-room cockneyisms, light hearted music-hall songs, “girlie” and “nursie” poems, and more serious odes to women and to Mother England, as well as to men, were all marshalled as coping-mechanisms to lessen the psychological burden of soldiering (180-229).<sup>29</sup> However, the stressors inherent in battlefield trauma remained

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<sup>26</sup> The soldier poet Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869-1952) was English-born and an Anglican missionary in Mashonaland. He served as a chaplain in the German East Africa campaign, from 1915-1916.

<sup>27</sup> ‘To our Dead’ and ‘Kultur’, Lefebvre 1918: 9,23; *War Memories*, Serowe 1919: 7,14,15.

<sup>28</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai* IX (1), January 1918: 18.

Other poems reflecting the madness encountered in the strange wildernesses of east and central Africa include: ‘If’ (1918), SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(1), January 1918: 8; ‘The Slur’ (1918), SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX (8), August 1918: 357; ‘The Dusty Duke’, from *Rhodesia Defence Force Journal*.

<sup>29</sup> Women also wrote war poems. This verse was mainly patriotic and moralistic homilies (Genis 2014: 83-86; 218).

as 'The things we can't forget',<sup>30</sup> no matter how hard the soldier fought against the flashbacks: 'God knows I tried to forget' (Naishstad 1919).

The poet that encapsulates this sense of spiralling loss most succinctly is Denys Lefebvre. In 'Waiting', a soldier's imminent demise is delayed throughout this imagist poem, which ends in a perpetual 'Waiting' (1918: 26-27):

Sand dunes  
Stretch white and silent  
To the horizon

A speck overhead  
Averted, motionless,  
Like a stone drops –  
Down.

On his back  
A man lies gasping;  
A bright stream oozes from his tunic.  
His hands –  
Brown, strong hands  
Clutching ...  
The nails, well trimmed and shapely,  
Make crimson furrows  
In his palms.

Blinding sunlight  
Stabs –  
Sharp fangs of flame  
Shoot at him, scorching,  
From molten sky.

Thirst  
Claws at his throat;  
His tongue,  
Grown black and swollen,  
Protrudes a little.

See! the palm-trees!  
Clear, cool water!  
Listen!  
The sound of rivers  
Coming near –  
God!  
Coming nearer!

Listen again!  
Was that a laugh  
Inhuman, twisted?

Great, yellow eyes  
Glare obscenely;  
Lean talons quiver;  
A long, hooked beak opens,

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<sup>30</sup> 'Holly Park, Crouch Hill', Serowe (1919: 18).

Closes;  
A naked head  
Cranes slowly forward –  
Waiting.

In Levebvre's *Trees* (1918: 27-28) the poem's persona, a German hunter/soldier, is cast as both the hunter and hunted. This state of affairs leads to a schizophrenic state of existence in which he has to be constantly on the lookout. The poem ends in an uncertain and anxious 'Listening'. In both poems, all the senses are uncannily attuned to the inevitable moment of death: the epitome of loss and open-endedness.

South African war poetry shares English poetic forms and conventions: the Romantic nature lyric, barrack-room ballad, satire, trench humour, parody and coquetry. The bitter trench poetry of Owen and Co. is lacking except for Serowe's (1919) poetic revolt against the florally poetics of pre-war Georgian and new-Romantic verse, and Lefebvre's (1918) blank and open-ended free verse that "stabs" at the reader. Indigenous oral praise poetry may also be classified as more "modern" as it tries to hide death through its interchangeable praise-units or subjects whose structural position within a poem could be moved during performances to defer loss. The content of these poems is very specific to South African images of wholeness that are closely linked to the fauna and flora of the southern land. Boer or Afrikaner voices are almost completely absent since the majority did not participate in the Great War: the trauma of the Anglo-Boer war battlefields and concentration camps that led to widespread apathy is the main reason for these missing voices.

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### Not the Schlieffen Plan 1914

Among the extensive military writings of Count Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the Prussian general staff from 1891 to 1905, one particular strategic idea has come to be known as the Schlieffen Plan, and that is the concept of a very strong right-wing attack through the Low Countries to outflank the French border position and then surround and destroy the French army — as set out in Schlieffen's famous memorandum of December 1905 (Ritter 1958, 134-48). For many years now, legions of historians have taught that Schlieffen conceived this grand offensive as the first stage in a two-front war. It is said that he aimed thereby to knock out France in six weeks while holding off the expected Russian attack in the east. As soon as the French army was eliminated he would send reinforcements to the eastern front in time to defeat the Russian army too. This, we are told, was Schlieffen's patent solution to the problem of fighting a war on two fronts, and as such it provided the basic outline for German strategy in 1914 (see e.g. Gross 2014, 115-20; Herwig 2009, 35-43; Mombauer 2010, 48-59).

The curious thing is that everybody seems to know this story, but nobody seems to know where it comes from. Of all the scholars who have propagated this account of the Schlieffen Plan, not one has ever identified a source in which Schlieffen himself actually claimed an intention to launch a massive right-wing attack on France *in the case of a two-front war*. His memorandum of December 1905 did, of course, propose such an attack, but that document is entitled 'War against France'. The plan expounded there assumes a situation in which France 'cannot count on effective Russian support', and that is the only time Russia is mentioned anywhere in the memorandum. There is no eastern front in this scenario, so the entire German field army, together with eight new corps improvised from the *Ersatz* or replacement troops, is concentrated in the west for the great outflanking attack on France (Ritter 1958, 134-5, 138, 142-3).

Schlieffen had also planned or contemplated such an attack on five previous occasions — on the two general staff rides (*Generalstabsreisen*) of 1904, on the general staff ride of 1905, and in the deployment plan known as *Aufmarsch West I* for 1905/06 and 1906/07. In all of these records, as in the December 1905 memorandum, the whole

of the German field army is deployed in the west for a war in which there is no expectation of Russian involvement. Let us look at these materials in a bit more detail.

Schlieffen first mooted the idea of an all-out attack on France via the Low Countries on the occasion of his *Generalstabsreise West* in summer 1904. This exercise did not envisage an eastern theatre of war. The Germans deployed all of their 26 ‘active’ or first-line corps in the west, together with 16 reserve corps. That complement of reserve units far exceeded the officially available numbers, but Schlieffen argued that an attack through Belgium would require a mass of extra troops on top of the entire strength of the existing field army (Zuber 2002, 194; Zuber 2004, 155, 157). The same object of attacking France through Belgium was again discussed in connection with the autumn 1904 general staff ride west. Here, too, all of the German forces were employed in the west, though their strength this time approximated to the official total, apparently because some general staff officers had questioned the feasibility of raising a large number of additional reserve units (Zuber 2002, 200). The June 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* once again posited a German attack through Belgium, and one report of this exercise noted that the situation was ‘particularly favourable for the Germans due to the assumption that all forces could be employed against France and that it was unnecessary to leave forces in the east’. Schlieffen used the 26 active corps and 19 reserve divisions actually available at the time, but he also allowed the Germans to have 20 *Landwehr* divisions instead of the 26 *Landwehr* brigades in the official deployment plans. He was notionally expanding the army by about seven divisions, which foreshadowed the much larger expansion he insisted upon in his December 1905 memorandum (Zuber 2011, 32). We thus see that right from the inception of his new strategic idea Schlieffen was convinced that it would need at least the entire German field army — and probably a great number of extra troops as well — to be deployed in the west if there were to be a decisive attack on France. That would leave no troops at all for deployment to the east, so there was clearly no question of this scheme being adopted in a two-front war.

The great strategic attack through Belgium is also indicated in the official deployment plan known as *Aufmarsch West I* for 1905/06. The bulk of the German army is assembled north of Diedenhofen opposite the Luxembourg, Belgian and Dutch frontiers, and three cavalry divisions are instructed to race ahead of the main army and capture the Meuse bridges at Venlo, Roermond and Maaseyck ‘in the event of an advance into Holland and Belgium’ (Ehlert et al. 2014, 419-21). The same strategic

intention is stated quite definitely in *Aufmarsch West I* for the following year, 1906/07, which specifies that six of the eight armies deployed in the west ‘will pivot to the left through Belgium’ (ibid., 430). But *Aufmarsch West I* in both of these years was expressly designed for a one-front war: the entire German field army is concentrated in the west for a war ‘against France only’ (ibid., 416, 424).

We have, then, from Schlieffen’s fourteen years as chief of the general staff, an inventory of just half a dozen sources for the concept of a massive right-wing attack through the Low Countries — three general staff exercises, two deployment plans and the December 1905 memorandum — none of which relates to the prospect of a two-front war. What we know as the Schlieffen Plan arose from deliberations concerning a war against France alone. There is simply no evidence for the standard view that Schlieffen regarded such an offensive as the key to victory in a two-front war. For Schlieffen a two-front war was a quite different matter calling for a quite different plan. In another document of December 1905, his very last exercise critique, he argued that the Germans would be hugely outnumbered in a war with France and Russia, and therefore could not mount an attack in either direction. Under these circumstances they must adopt a counter-offensive strategy on both fronts. They must wait for their enemies to attack first, and then try to beat them with counter-attacks delivered in quick succession. It was in respect of this defensive-offensive concept that he said: ‘we need to eliminate one enemy in the shortest possible time in order to be free to turn on the other’ (Zuber 2004, 167-8).

Faced with a two-front war in 1914, the younger Helmuth von Moltke rejected his predecessor’s advice and decided to attack France through Belgium — with just 34 corps at his disposal in the west, not the 48.5 required in the Schlieffen Plan (Ehlert et al. 2014, 519). His advance was halted and reversed at the battle of the Marne because he lacked the overall strength to extend his right wing around the western side of Paris, as envisaged in the Schlieffen Plan (Holmes 2014, 210-11). Six weeks into the war, when France was supposed to have been defeated, the Germans were fortifying their positions on the river Aisne and the long years of trench warfare had begun (Strachan 2001, 261).

But it was not Schlieffen who prescribed a six-week timetable for an offensive victory in the west. That expectation was created by Moltke, who told the Austrian chief of staff in May 1914 that he hoped to deal with the French ‘in six weeks from the start of operations’ (Conrad 1922, 673). There is no six-week deadline in Schlieffen’s

memorandum ‘War against France’ — and anyway Schlieffen would have thought that six weeks was far too long to wait for the first victory in a war against France *and Russia*. In that event, he aimed for a much quicker defeat of the French army by counter-offensive means. That was clearly illustrated in the general staff ride west of 1901, which Schlieffen regarded as an exemplary model for the opening phase of a two-front war. In this exercise the Germans concentrated the great bulk of their army in the west, but allowed the enemy to take the initiative. The main part of the French army advanced through Belgium into Germany, and only then did the Germans respond with a crushing counter-attack on the left bank of the Rhine near to the Belgian border. Schlieffen underlined the importance of this counter-offensive approach: the Germans, he said, ‘must wait for the enemy to emerge from behind his defensive ramparts ( ... ) That was the method adopted here, and the Germans won a decisive victory over the French’. Their victory was accomplished by the 23rd day of mobilization, whereupon nine active corps were immediately despatched along ‘every available railway line’ to the eastern front, arriving there by day 33 to provide the necessary reinforcements for a counter-attack against the oncoming Russian armies (Schlieffen 1938, 222-225).

This was a very tight schedule, governed by the calculation that even with their ‘ponderous deployment’ the Russians would invade East Prussia from the river Niemen on day 24 of hostilities and from the Narew on day 29 (*ibid.*, 177). Schlieffen did not believe that Russia ‘would take at least forty days to mobilize’, as Holger Herwig maintains (Herwig 2009, 37). Even in 1905, in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, Schlieffen still thought that Russian forces could be ready to invade East Prussia within 28 days. In the two-front *Kriegsspiel* of November-December 1905 the Russians crossed the border four weeks into the war, but Schlieffen considered this a rather optimistic assumption from the German point of view. He said that the Germans needed to enlarge the fortress of Königsberg at the outbreak of war by constructing extensive fieldworks, which could be accomplished ‘if, as was the case here, we are given four weeks’ time’ (Zuber 2004, 170). The implication of this remark is that in a real war the Germans might have even less than 28 days’ grace before the Russians began their advance. Schlieffen would have been much relieved to learn that they needed ‘at least forty days to mobilize’ — until he found out that it was just an historian’s hypothesis. Given his actual estimate of Russian capability, he reckoned that the German army would need to win a decisive battle in the west in about three weeks, not six — and that could be achieved only by a quick counter-attack, not by a far-reaching offensive.

If Moltke had followed Schlieffen's real intentions for the *counter-offensive* conduct of a two-front war, the first great battle of 1914 would have been fought in Lorraine in the third week of hostilities, on terms much more favourable to Germany than they were at the battle of the Marne. We can reconstruct this alternative scenario because we know exactly what the French chief of staff Joseph Joffre intended to do if the Germans did not invade Belgium.

French war planning was constrained by two political imperatives. In the first place, France was committed by agreement with her Russian ally to launch an 'all-out and immediate' attack against Germany as soon as possible after the outbreak of war. Moreover, the French government had resolved not to encroach on Belgian territory unless the Germans did so first. Joffre was therefore obliged to incorporate in his war plans a variant which allowed for a full-scale offensive avoiding Belgian territory altogether, and that would have come into effect in 1914 if the Germans had stayed on the defensive and not entered Belgium. For this eventuality Joffre decided that three of his five armies, comprising some 60 percent of his first-line troops, should invade Lorraine on 14 August, aiming initially to reach the line of the river Saar between Sarrebourg and Saarbrücken (Doughty 2010, 146-8, 155-8, 168). Ominously, that position was flanked at both ends by the German fortresses of Metz and Strasbourg.

Schlieffen had long before outlined how the Germans should exploit a massive French incursion through 'the relatively narrow space between Metz and Strasbourg'. The aim must not be to push the enemy back to his fortified border. Rather, he had to be engaged on three sides, 'from Metz, from the Saar and from Strasbourg', and brought to a standstill there, which would give the Germans an excellent chance of decisive victory by means of envelopment attacks out of Metz and Strasbourg. The ultimate aim of this 'attack on the enemy's flank and rear' would be to surround the French invasion forces and 'not just defeat them, but lay them low and as far as possible annihilate them' (Boetticher 1933, 260).

Joffre himself was acutely aware of the perils attending a French offensive in Lorraine. He said that the object would be to rupture the German front, but he conceded that:

in the course of this operation our forces would be liable to be taken in flank by attacks coming in all probability from both Metz and the region of Molsheim-Strasbourg. By penetrating like a wedge into the midst of the enemy's lines we would be more or less inviting envelopment (Joffre 1932, 74-5).

But a German defensive posture in 1914 would have *compelled* Joffre to embark on that hazardous course of action — that was precisely what he was committed to if the Germans refrained from attacking through Belgium and waited instead for the opportunity to counter-attack. In that event, the war would have started with a great battle of encirclement as soon as the French First, Second and Fourth Armies had completed their short advance into the danger zone between Metz and Strasbourg. Speaking in 1904 of the strategic importance of these fortresses, Schlieffen once again emphasized their role in counter-offensive operations: ‘I do not mean a Metz and Strasbourg that are to be besieged and defended, but rather a Metz and Strasbourg in which armies are assembled and through which they march in order to attack the enemy by surprise’ (Zuber 2004, 160).

But in 1914 it was the French who assembled a new army in Fortress Paris for a surprise attack against the advancing German right wing, which was by then severely weakened because of the rigours and losses of the advance itself (Strachan 2001, 241). Without straying too far into the realm of virtual history, we may reasonably suppose that the chances of a German victory on the Saar would have been much better than they were on the Marne. And a victory in Lorraine, close to the German railheads, would have ensured the prompt despatch of reinforcements to the Russian front. Drawing on his personal recollections of Schlieffen’s two-front exercises, Hermann von Kuhl said that the chief of staff ‘attached particular importance’ to defeating the French with a counter-attack ‘on or near to German territory’ so that ‘strong German forces’ would remain close to their points of rail embarkation for the eastern theatre (von Kuhl 1920, 176).

That was another example of Schlieffen’s insistence on compressing the western operation in time and space to meet the stern exigencies of a war on two fronts. He never proposed an expansive right-wing attack on France in a situation where there was also a serious threat from Russia. His plan for a great outflanking attack in the west was specifically designed for a war limited to the west.

If we want to visualize Schlieffen’s stated principles for the conduct of a two-front war coming to fruition under the circumstances of 1914, what we get in the first place is the image of a gigantic *Kesselschlacht* to pulverize the French army on German soil — the very antithesis of Moltke’s disastrous lunge deep into France. That radical

break with Schlieffen's strategic thinking ruined the chance of an early victory in the west on which the Germans had pinned all their hopes of prevailing in a two-front war.

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**‘A Fruitful Fusion Between Hebrew and English Culture?’:**

**Isaac Rosenberg as a Jewish Poet in the Great War**

The title of this paper, ‘A Fruitful Fusion between Hebrew and English Culture?’, is a quotation from Siegfried Sassoon's introduction to the 1937 edition of Rosenberg's poems (reprinted in Parsons 1979, IX). But — to take “Hebrew” in the narrow sense of language, which can be one part of culture — Rosenberg grew up knowing very little Hebrew; we are told that he regularly played truant from after-school Hebrew classes (Cohen 1975, 18). And though his parents were Yiddish speakers and he is said to have spoken mostly Yiddish till the age of seven (Wilson 2007, 16), he was not involved in the flourishing Yiddish working-class culture of the London East End in which he grew up (though it inevitably influenced him, particularly in his Socialist outlook). His sister said that as a child he was ‘fervently religious’ (Liddiard 1975, 36); but he grew up to abandon conventional religion and to be fervent instead about English poetry. So in what way is he a Jewish poet? One of the most interesting but also most problematic comments about Rosenberg’s Jewishness was made by T.S Eliot, who wrote in the *Criterion* in July 1935: ‘For a Jewish poet to be able to write like a Jew, in Western Europe and in a Western European language, is almost a miracle’. Eliot greatly admired Rosenberg, and these comments bring out how strongly Jewish Rosenberg is, but the implication is that the Jewish tradition is so much outside that of Western Europe that it is almost miraculous for a Jewish poet to be able to resist assimilation (this implication seems to reflect something of the anti-Semitism that was in Eliot’s poetry before the Second World War). But after all, English poetry is infused with the Hebrew Bible. The King James Version is a masterpiece of English literature; and poets who influenced Rosenberg, such as John Donne, William Blake and Francis Thompson, were deeply influenced in their turn by the Jewish tradition. My main argument in this paper is that Rosenberg regarded the Jewish tradition as at the heart of European civilization. Jon Silkin has pointed out the importance of the ‘root’ image in Rosenberg’s poetry (Silkin 1978, 260-265); and Rosenberg seems to have seen the Jews as a root people, and the Jewish God as at the root of the Judaeo-Christian God of European civilization. So

Rosenberg felt that, as a Jewish poet, he had a particular responsibility to try to understand why the Judaeo-Christian civilization of Europe had ended in the slaughter of the First World War. In his short 1916 war poem 'The Jew' (which reflects the crude antisemitism he claimed to have encountered among his fellow-soldiers (Noakes 2008, 279)) he is asking: 'Why do they despise me, when my religion is at the heart of their civilisation, as their universal moral guide?':

Moses, from whose loins I sprung  
Lit by a lamp in his blood  
Ten immutable rules, a moon  
For mutable lampless men.  
The blond, the bronze, the ruddy,  
With the same heaving blood,  
Keep tide to the moon of Moses,  
Then why do they sneer at me? (Noakes 2008, 119)

## **1. Contrast between Rosenberg and other English War Poets**

Rosenberg's preoccupation with what has happened to Western civilisation differentiates him from most of the other English war poets, who are chiefly concerned with what has happened to England. Wilfred Owen's poems are essentially poems of mourning for the loss of the old England – and because Owen did not have an upper class education, he is much closer to the ordinary English people than are Sassoon or Graves. Owen has a popularity with the English people that Rosenberg can never attain. In terms of style, too, Owen is very accessible; his poems have an achieved perfection. In contrast, Rosenberg's style is groping, struggling, dynamic – again this seems to me to be a very Jewish quality. There is also far more continuity between Rosenberg's pre-war and war poetry than in the case of Owen and Sassoon — there is not the radical break between the pre-war poetry and the war poetry that we find in the latter two poets.

## **2. Rosenberg's Own Definition of Jewishness in Relation to his Pre-War Poetry**

Here is Rosenberg's own definition of essential Jewishness (from a review, published in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1912, of an exhibition of paintings by Jewish artists): 'The travail and sorrow of centuries have given life a more poignant and intense

interpretation; and the strength of the desire of ages has fashioned an ideal that colours all our expressions of existence' (Noakes 2008, 209). This characterises both his pre-war and his war poetry.

'The travail and sorrow of centuries' are reflected in Rosenberg's role as a victim who always identified with the downtrodden and oppressed. The son of an immigrant Jewish peddler from Lithuania, he grew up in dire poverty in the East End of London and only joined the army because he was unable to get work. He wrote to his upper-class and intensely patriotic patron Edward Marsh: 'I never joined the army for patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war .... I thought if I'd join there would be the separation allowance for my mother' (Noakes 2008, 288).

The Jews have traditionally adopted an attitude of resignation to their miseries, seeing them as a just punishment by God for their sins. In contrast, Rosenberg always struggled and protested. He was, in a sense, always in the trenches. This is an exaggeration, since of course the trenches were so much worse than anything he had ever known before; but the War was not to him the great shock it was to poets such as Owen or Sassoon, because his own pre-war life as a poor man in the East End had been so filled with hardship. But Rosenberg was not only an indignant sufferer – he also fulfils the second part of his definition: 'the strength of the desire of ages has fashioned an ideal which colours all our expressions of existence'. His outrage comes precisely from his idealism, his sense of the potential of human beings – and he has a vision of human perfectibility that is profoundly Jewish.

In his pre-war poetry, Rosenberg's idealism and his protest are apparent in his dual conception of God. God is seen from not from a conventional religious but a humanistic viewpoint, as the perfection of humanity, representing the ideal of beauty, truth, freedom, justice, love and civilization. Rosenberg writes in the 'Argument' to his long early poem 'Night and Day': 'Striving after the perfect — God, we attain nearer to perfection than before' (Noakes 2008, 39). There are some beautiful early poems about this concept of God — for instance, one beginning: 'I saw the face of God today/I heard the music of His smile....' (Noakes 2008, 25). But this very early vision of a loving and beneficent God gives way to a preoccupation with God as a tyrant, decreeing a cruel fate for human beings and especially for Rosenberg himself. Again God is seen from a humanistic point of view, as representing the negative aspects of human beings – hate, stupidity, cruelty, barbarism. The main reason that Rosenberg has never been accepted

by the Anglo-Jewish Establishment is his rebellious attitude towards God. For instance, he writes in the pre-war poem 'God':

In his malodorous brain what slugs and mire,  
Lanterned in his oblique eyes, guttering burned!  
His body lodged a rat where men nursed souls.....

God is seen as tyrannical not because He is strong, but because He is weak:

On fragments of an old, shrunk power,  
On shy and maimed, on women gone awry  
He lay, a bullying hulk, to crush them more....

And the poem ends: 'Ah, this miasma of a rotting God!' (Noakes 2008, 97-8).

Another very interesting figure in Rosenberg's pre-war poetry is the Female God (who has roots in the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition and is also influenced by English Romantic poets such as Keats and Swinburne). She too is seen in Rosenberg's very early poetry as representing the Ideal, but soon becomes a highly ambivalent figure, desired as an escape from the tyrannical Jehovah, but also feared as dominating and destructive:

You have dethroned the ancient God;  
You have usurped his Sabbaths, his common days;  
Yea, every moment is delivered to you,  
Our Temple, our Eternal, our One God. (Noakes 2008, 72)

These themes are further developed in Rosenberg's remarkable verse-play 'Moses', which he wrote in barracks in England between October 1915 and May 1916.

Rosenberg wrote about 'Moses in a letter:

G(ordon) B(ottomley) has urged me to write Jewish Plays. I am quite sure if I do I will be boycotted and excommunicated, that is, assuming my work is understood. My "Moses" is a hard pill to swallow; and should I get the chance of working on it and amplifying it as I wish – it will be harder still. (Noakes 2008, 329)

Moses denounces the rigidity, weakness and decay of the Egyptian civilization, repeating the line from 'God': 'this miasma of a rotting god':

I am sick of priests and forms,  
This rigid dry-boned refinement.  
As ladies' perfumes are  
Obnoxious to stern natures,

This miasma of a rotting god  
Is to me.  
Who has made of the forest a park?  
Who has changed the wolf to a dog?  
And put the horse in harness?  
And man's mind in a groove? (Noakes 2008, 159)

The Egyptian civilization evidently symbolizes the modern Judaeo-Christian civilisation, ruled by a God whose power has become weak and decadent. Moses has a great optimistic vision of a new expression of the God-ideal, a revival of the One God who represents the spirit of human freedom.

### **3. Rosenberg's 'Trench Poems', with particular reference to 'Break of Day in the Trenches'**

In the trenches, Rosenberg's experiences were so appalling that the optimistic vision of a new civilization towards which he is groping in 'Moses' disappears. The beneficent God is defined only by His absence; and Rosenberg struggles to master the evil God of war instead of being mastered by him, by articulating the war, turning it into poetry. To quote his famous statement of defiance against the war:

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poetry – that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will not keep a corner of my consciousness covered up, but will saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life and it will all refine itself into poetry later on. (Noakes 2008, 320)

In fact, he didn't get a chance to write poetry 'later on' – he wrote his poems while actually in the trenches; again in contrast to Owen and Sassoon, who wrote their poems during long periods of home leave in Britain (Owen had a nervous breakdown ("shell-shock") and Sassoon was wounded twice). Rosenberg only had ten days of home leave during his entire 21 months in France. He was killed in action at the age of 27, during the big German spring offensive of 1918. His lonely struggle to master the war by turning it into poetry was thus truly heroic.

Also in contrast to Owen and Sassoon, who were officers, Rosenberg writes about the experiences of private soldiers, who struggled with lice and with rats. Rosenberg wrote two war-poems about lice (Noakes 2008, 109-110) – but as well as reflecting the

reality of life in the trenches, they are also linked to his pre-war poetry; the lice are associated with the weak, decaying God. The weak God has turned into the angry God, but is still weak. The God of War is seen as violent and raging, in terms of iron and flame; but he is also seen in terms of weak, rotten things like lice and rats, who have become all-powerful in the War. Rosenberg's most famous poem, 'Break of Day in the Trenches', prominently features a rat, which seems to me to be linked to the rat symbol in his pre-war poem, 'God': 'His body lodged a rat where men nursed souls'. Jon Silkin also argues for this connection (Silkin 1978, 278). The poet is engaged in the dawn stand to, waiting for an attack (which actually happens in the course of the poem) and plucks a poppy from the parapet; as he does so a rat leaps over his hand. The poet addresses the rat:

Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.  
Now you have touched this English hand  
You will do the same to a German  
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
To cross the sleeping green between.  
It seems, odd thing, you grin as you pass  
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,  
Less chanced than you for life,  
Bonds to the whims of murder,  
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,  
The torn fields of France.... (Noakes 2008, 106)

It is often suggested that Rosenberg, as a marginal Jewish outsider, identifies with the marginal rat (Fussell 1977, 252; Featherstone 1995, 78; Wilson 2007, 9). The implication is that this is not his war – as a Jew he is neither English nor German, so he detaches himself, like the rat and smiles ironically. Rosenberg is often referred to as 'detached' (for instance in Parsons 1979, XXV1); and it is true that we don't find in his poems the overt pity and indignation that we find in the poetry of Owen or Sassoon. But this is because he enlisted without any illusions, so did not experience the shock encountered by Owen or Sassoon, and also because he is so close to the events he describes, so adopts an apparently deadpan manner as a coping mechanism: he therefore goes deeper than pity and anger into exploration of the root causes of the War.

I find it very hard to think that a soldier in the trenches would identify with a rat – the rats of the trenches were horrible creatures. Also, as I have been arguing, I don't think Rosenberg saw Jews as marginal. He is writing this poem not as an Englishman nor as a German nor as a Jew in the national sense – he is writing it as a human being,

about a terrible human tragedy in which he is totally involved. Nonetheless, in terms of Jewish universalism, he *is* writing as a Jew, in that he is asking: ‘how has the God behind Judaeo-Christian civilization, who derives from the Jewish God, turned into the nasty little rat-god, who can move around like a king or a god, at his pleasure, while the beautiful human beings are stuck in the rat-holes, and who mocks and jeers at the hopes and aspirations of European civilization?’ I think the reference to the rat as ‘cosmopolitan’ refers to the fact that the nastiness and squalor are common to both sides.

The Female God also reappears in Rosenberg’s war poetry, particularly in the long and complex poem ‘Daughters of War’, which features beautiful, sinister Death-maidens. (Noakes 2008, 116-119) A theme emerging especially from Rosenberg’s fragmentary verse-play ‘The Unicorn’ (written in the trenches) is that the power of the God and Goddess of War is the result of the inability of men and women to achieve love. (Noakes 2008, 182-190) If Rosenberg has a “message” it is perhaps this: that unless we can regain a strong, universalist God-ideal, we are doomed to war and destruction.

#### **4. The Nationalistic Jewish Aspect of Rosenberg’s Poetry**

I do not believe that in most of Rosenberg’s war poems he is writing as a Jew in the nationalistic sense. There are three war poems in which he uses national Jewish imagery – poems about King Solomon, the Temple and the Holy Land. Judaism is both a universalist and a national religion. The universalist side centres around the Prophets, of whom Moses was the first and greatest. The national side centres around the Land, the Temple and the King. Rosenberg’s central work was universalistic, its main figure being Moses; but the national Jewish side of him does come out in these three poems. The nationalistic Jewish aspect had also come out in Rosenberg’s very earliest extant poems, ‘Ode to David’s Harp’ and ‘Zion’, which he wrote at the ages of 14 and 15 (Noakes 2008, 1-3) – poems in which the East End ghetto boy recalled the ancient national power and splendour of his people. But these two earliest poems and the three war poems already mentioned (two of them at the very end of his life) represent the only expression of this strain in Rosenberg’s work. The dominant note of his poetry is one of Jewish universalism.

Rosenberg wrote two poems about Solomon and the destruction of the Temple – one during the terrible winter of 1916 (Noakes 2008, 112) and one at the end of his life, in the first months of 1918, when we learn from his letters that his hitherto indomitable spirit had been finally broken (Noakes 2008, 356-7). It is as though, lost and helpless amid the trenches, he consoled himself with the thought of the ancient splendour and glory of King Solomon and the Temple. But of course the destruction of the Temple symbolizes the destruction of European civilization, so even this national side of Rosenberg's poetry has a universalist significance.

Though the main argument of this paper has been to emphasise Rosenberg's Jewish universalism, I will end with his last poem, which is a Zionist poem. In January or February 1918, in a final desperate attempt to escape from the Western Front, Rosenberg applied to join the Jewish Battalion that had been set up in Palestine and Mesopotamia by the nationalistic Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky. Previously Rosenberg had never shown any interest in Zionism. Typically, he received no response to his application (Noakes 2008, 361); but he wrote what he called 'a battle-song for the Judaens' (Noakes 2008, 364). In fact, this last poem, 'Through These Pale Cold Days', sent to his patron, Edward Marsh, two days before his death in action on April 1, 1918, is not a ringing battle-song at all but is full of the pathos of a broken man who looks towards the Holy Land in a final hope to escape from a Europe in ruins. This poem has an added poignancy and irony nowadays, when we have seen so much slaughter across the Middle East, particularly in Gaza, Syria and Iraq; a turmoil which is many ways the legacy of the First World War:

Through these pale cold days  
What dark faces burn  
Out of three thousand years,  
And their wild eyes yearn,  
While underneath their brows  
Like waifs their spirits grope  
For the pools of Hebron again --  
For Lebanon's summer slope.  
They leave these blond still days  
In dust behind their tread  
They see with living eyes  
How long they have been dead. (Noakes 2008, 123)



## Conclusion

Rosenberg was a deeply Jewish poet but only marginally in a nationalistic Jewish way. The nationalist aspect of his work only appeared in his very earliest poetry, written at the ages of 14 and 15, and in the despair of his last poems. The majority of his pre-war and war poems reflect a Jewish universalist approach. He wrote not as the Great Outsider but as the Great Insider, viewing the Jewish tradition as at the root of European civilisation and feeling a particular responsibility as a Jew to explore the failure in the First World War of the Western civilisation that has the Jewish God at its root.

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**Pacifism in literature on World War One:**

**The case of *A Crimson Dawn***

Literature has a special power to describe the complexity of the position of the individual in time of war. My paper focuses on the situation of conscientious objectors in World War One and how it is portrayed in modern literature. When patriotic fervour was at its height in 1914, pacifism was regarded by many as both disloyal and cowardly. Two important questions are addressed in my paper: What can novels tell us about conscientious objectors? And why do we continue to be fascinated by their stories? One novel is singled out for special attention, Janet MacLeod Trotter's *A Crimson Dawn*. Trotter's novel shows clearly how opposing attitudes to whether it was one's duty to enlist or to refuse to help the war effort could split families and communities. By bringing the tragedy down to the level of the individual, and the individual's relations to his or her community, and by stimulating the reader's imagination, *A Crimson Dawn* tells the tragic story of conscientious objection in one community and two families who are united by marriage but tragically separated in their attitudes to war. It is a story that encompasses the most important features of pacifism, its ideals and its consequences. It is also a story that resonates particularly powerfully in the modern world, where war is omnipresent.

There were approximately, 16 000 conscientious objectors at the beginning of World War One. They were largely ignored because they were numerically insignificant and because the hostilities were expected to be over by Christmas. By 1915, the growing resentment towards conscientious objectors due to heavy battle losses combined with the realisation that the War would last longer than expected rendered pacifism increasingly problematical and controversial. With the introduction of conscription in 1916 and the enlistment of many conscientious objectors in the Non-Combatant Corps (where they served as stretcher bearers, ambulance drivers, canteen workers and road makers), pacifism became increasingly identified with cowardice, as exemplified in the nickname "No-Courage Corps".

One hundred years later, at the centenary of the outbreak of the war, there has been a concern among pacifist sympathisers that the events of 1914-1918 will be glorified as a part of the British national heritage and that they will be presented as inevitable. Indeed, historians such as Hew Strachan have warned that there is a real danger that the centenary celebrations will merely become “Remembrance Sunday Writ Large”. A number of prominent British actors have taken a stand for pacifism. Roger Lloyd Pack, for example, known for his roles in *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Only Fools and Horses*, was a signatory to the “No Glory” campaign, an organisation that has campaigned to provide an alternative view of the war. Pack was worried that the official celebrations will be a continuation of the glorification of war. Britain’s oldest pacifist group, the Peace Pledge Union, has been granted £95,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to increase awareness of pacifist views and actions during the war. And Bradford Peace Museum has designed an alternative commemorative World War One education project called ‘Choices’, which presents the decisions people made between 1914 and 1919 and compares these with modern-day choices for children and young people in response to such events as 9/11 and 7/7. Special conferences have also been held, and are indeed still being held, on the role of pacifism during the war. These include Dr Jo Vellacot’s talk at Senate House, London on ‘The War Work of an Anti-War Activist: Catherine Marshall, 1914-1918’ on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014, and the conference ‘Objections to War: pacifism, anti-interventionism and conscientious objection in literature, theatre and art, 1830-1918’ at Hull University, 7-9<sup>th</sup> September, 2014. The Hull conference considered the content, form and cultural significance of protest against war and military intervention in the years leading up to 1918.

Art in general, and literature in particular, has a special ability to demonstrate different views of war and to highlight the complexities of pacifism in World War One. Recent studies such as R.S. White’s *Pacifism and English Literature: Minstrels of Peace* (2008) bear witness to the power of literature to critique the principle that armed combat is the best way to resolve conflicts. Tracing pacifist writing back to the Middle Ages, White demonstrates that literature stimulates the imagination, enabling the reader to empathise with characters and thereby gain a more nuanced view of pacifism. The increased mechanisation of warfare has resulted in adversaries no longer perceiving at close range the effects of their weapons on individual human bodies, making it all the more important, argues White, to record and explore the effects on the individual in time of war.

## 1. History and Literature

As historian and literary critic Hayden White has shown, both historical and literary writing rely heavily on narrative to create meaning. There is no such thing as objective history. Narrative, argues White, translates *knowing* into *telling* (White 1980, 5). Writing about history is a narrative, a metacode, ‘a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted’ (ibid., 6). ‘Real’ events, according to White, need to be ‘narrativised’; they do not, however, offer themselves as stories with a beginning, middle and end. Facts do not make a story; they must be interpreted and arranged in a comprehensible and effective manner. White argues that the function of storytelling in historiography is to explain historical events. Narrative accounts, he suggests, explain real events ‘by representing them as possessing the coherence of generic plot-types – epic, comic, tragic, farcical and so on’ (White 2010, 280). The story of conflict between individual groups, be they social or ideological (as in the case of pacifism), is linked to the more general or even global story of whether it is right to take up arms or to be a pacifist.

While real events and phenomena may terminate, White points out, they do not have “closure”, i.e. a proper conclusion that may or may not make clear the ultimate fate of the protagonists but provides a satisfactory solution. For the reader to perceive a story as “true” or “real”, it must have closure; it cannot simply terminate. The reader desires ‘coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary (White 1980, 27). The real world is only understandable when it is presented as a story that carries moral authority. The question of pacifism is deeply moral in nature. With respect to World War One, one of the critical moral questions was ‘is it one’s moral duty to take arms or, as a pacifist, should one obey one’s conscience and resist the pressure to enlist?’

Well-known novels such as Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1991), Sebastian Faulks’s *Birdsong* (1993), Mackenzie Ford’s *Gifts of War* (2008), Anne Perry’s *At Some Disputed Barricade* (2006) and *We Shall Not Sleep* (2007), and Chris Ryan’s *One Good Turn* (2008) illustrate the attitudes of different social groups towards pacifism. Janet MacLeod Trotter’s *A Crimson Dawn* (2006) has been singled out for special attention here because it shows particularly clearly what happens when members of a family and a community are separated by different views on war and peace. These views are embodied in the protagonists: Rab MacCrae, who is arrested as a conscientious objector

and barely survives his harsh treatment in prison, and Emmie Kelso, who is married to a patriot who volunteers in 1914 but who is both a pacifist and ardent defender of women's rights.

Two important questions are addressed in the following discussion: What can novels tell us about conscientious objectors? And why do we continue to be fascinated by their stories? First, however, a few words about *A Crimson Dawn*.

## 2. *A Crimson Dawn*

*A Crimson Dawn* was inspired by the author's work as a peace activist who had protested against America's involvement in Iraq. On her website, MacLeod Trotter writes:

At the time when I was going on peace protests to try and stop our country invading Iraq, I was researching the First World War. I wondered what had happened to the widespread women's movement for emancipation that was stopped abruptly by the outbreak of the Great War.

What I discovered was that many of the groups did not disband, despite their leadership telling them it was their patriotic duty to get behind the war effort. Many brave women, against the jingoism whipped up by the government, stood out against war and kept in touch with their fellow campaigners in the "enemy" countries. They saw it as an imperialist war that was all about grabbing colonies and resources. Ordinary people on both sides were being asked to do the fighting to support a system in which they were the victims.

Amazingly, some of these women held a peace conference in 1915 to try and bring a negotiated peace to Europe. If they had been listened to, millions of lives would have been saved.

The more I delved into this fascinating, over-looked piece of history, the more my admiration grew for these long ago peace campaigners — socialists, pacifists, Non-Conformists, Quakers and suffragists — whose ideals are still so relevant today.

Each month, I help organise a peace vigil in my home town of Morpeth, to remind people that peace is something for which we have to strive and work towards every day, not just on the eve of invasion. Big governments put huge effort and resources into planning and carrying out war. We look for the day when they'll put as much effort into planning for peace.

However daunting and impossible the task may seem, I take courage from our forebears who thought nothing of being vilified or imprisoned during the First World War for their determination to put a stop to the carnage.

<http://www.janetmacleodtrotter.com/a-crimson-dawn.htm>

On her blog (<http://janetmacleodtrotter.wordpress.com/>) Trotter describes the extensive archival work that forms the basis of all her historical novels, including *A Crimson*

*Dawn*. Her favourite setting is north east England, and Tyneside in particular. This is the setting of *A Crimson Dawn*.

*A Crimson Dawn* shows the attitudes of different social groups to combat on the one hand, and pacifism on the other. Emmie's family is divided: while her husband enlists in 1914, the family by whom she is brought up (her father and mother died when she was very young) are ardent pacifists and socialists. The eldest son, Rab McCrae, follows in the family tradition. He and Emmie are also deeply in love — a significant complication in the development of the story. Emmie learns early on from her adopted father, Jonas MacCrae that 'all war waged by governments is imperialist' (27). Pacifism in the MacCrae family is about politics (the MacCraes are ardent socialists) rather than religion. The MacCraes do not attend church. Despite heated debates among the members of the MacCrae family, the atmosphere in the home is both loving and warm. In Emmie's future husband's home, on the other hand, the situation is very different: Tom Curran lives in fear of being beaten by his father — and a harsh piousness (the Currans are regular chapel goers) prevails in the home.

Religion and pacifism have a complicated relationship in *A Crimson Dawn*. Emmie mourns what she calls the 'narrow-minded religion' of the chapel goers who damn and even punish pacifists (271). Quakerism, on the other hand, is held up as a good example of how religion and pacifism may work hand-in-hand to produce a better, more tolerant world. Indeed, pacifism is first mentioned in the novel in relation to Quakerism. Rab MacCrae, who wishes to start a pacifist newsletter, is inspired by the Quakers' opposition to the Boer War. He uses his trial which follows his refusal to enlist after the introduction of conscription to elaborate on his pacifist philosophy in detail:

I will have no part in a war that kills and maims my fellow comrades – men who are working for a better world for all humanity, no matter what their nationality. I belong to an international brotherhood and do not accept the boundaries that the imperialist rulers of Europe impose on us. (230-231)

When war is declared, Rab speaks at a peace rally in his home town, Crawdene; he is accompanied by his Quaker friend, Charles Oliphant. Emmie surreptitiously contributes to Rab's newsletter, urging women to attend the peace rally. She risks her marriage because she knows that if she is identified as the anonymous writer of the pacifist articles in the newsletter, she can expect no mercy from her in-laws, the Currans. Both

Rab and Emmie know that the press is carefully watched and when the newsletter runs a feature on the Government concealing the true casualty figures at the front, they are not surprised that the police make a raid. They are not, however, prepared for the brutality of the raid.

As more and more men enlist, the pacifists become increasingly isolated in Crawdene. As they preach that 'words can be more effective in bringing peace and restoring sanity' (173), it becomes patently clear that the MacCraes are not only isolated but have also become targets, their windows even being smashed on one occasion. As the narrator comments:

The consensus in Crawdene opposing war evaporated like the morning dew. Within days the patriotic frenzy of London was being reported in the newspapers and spreading around the country. Recruiting offices were swiftly set up to cope with the numbers volunteering to fight. Posters went up and the national press was filled with vitriol about the terrible Hun. (177)

The War divides even the closest and most harmonious families: Charles Oliphant, for example, is disowned by his father for his pacifist activities and is not invited to his sister's wedding. Even children of pacifists are attacked by other children; Emmie's son, Barny, for example, is harshly beaten by the children of so-called 'patriotic families' (300).

Emmie struggles to remain strong, drawing on her belief in women's rights to give her extra strength. The very foundations of Emmie's pacifist beliefs are summarised in a letter she receives from a missionary and ardent feminist:

(...) women get no benefit from the war. Whatever is of glory, it is for men. The fascination of war, its pomp and pride of uniforms, gold lace, medals and pensions are for men . . . The Church colludes in war, yet two-thirds of its members are women. We must appeal to the church to work hand in hand with the mothers of mankind in this crusade against the war. Christianity demands of women this crusade of peace. Mothers, wives, daughters, sisters! Go forward – God wills it. (184)

Emmie becomes even more determined when she learns that familial pressure from the Curran side of the family has resulted in Sam MacCrae, Rab's younger brother, enlisting (Sam, like his brother, is a pacifist). When she hears what Sam tells his wife, Louise Curran, namely 'I'm doing this 'cos I want you to be proud of me, Lou. I don't want to be second best to your da anymore' (191) it is not only Louise who is

distraught. As both Louise and Emmie fear, Sam is killed. His death is depicted as pointless, tragic and a betrayal of ideals.

Emmie has little peace as she is constantly bullied by her husband Tom. She is not permitted to air her pacifist views at home, which Tom describes as treasonous, shameful and disloyal to the principles of his family. By this stage, Emmie knows that she loves Rab and is forced to recognise that she married the wrong man. Her misery is compounded when the police confiscate Rab's pacifist newsletter, thereby removing her only means of expressing her pacifist and feminist convictions. When Rab is badly beaten up for distributing anti-war leaflets she is determined to be strong not just for herself but also for Rab. She sees that his bravery and sacrifices for his beliefs far excel anything that her husband has achieved and or is indeed likely to achieve at the front. Tom does not, the narrator makes clear, enlist for patriotic reasons but out of shame: when he catches his wife handing out anti-war leaflets at the mine where he works he tells Emmie that '(i)t's the only way I can hold me head up round here anymore, after what you've done' (219). Tom is depicted as a coward. Rab and Emmie, on the other hand, are prepared to pay the ultimate price for their pacifist views and both serve harsh prison sentences without complaint or retraction.

The narrator of *A Crimson Dawn* notes that even after the War, pacifists continue to pay a high price for their views. He describes, for example, how Laurie, Crawdene's postman before the War, cannot return to his job and cannot find any other employment. No one wishes to employ him. The narrator also reminds the reader that pacifists were denied the vote for a period of five years after the end of the War.

The stories of Emmie and Rab reveal the full force of the position of the pacifist on the outbreak of World War One, throughout the war years and into the post-war period. The struggles and conflicts are particularly poignant because the reader identifies with the characters, understands the reasons for their different views on combat and peace, and realises that reconciliation is impossible. Pacifists and combatants alike are victims of a situation that could neither be anticipated nor understood. Both sides of the story are tragic. By bringing the tragedy down to the level of the individual, and the individual's relations to his or her community, and by stimulating the reader's imagination, *A Crimson Dawn* tells the complex story of pacifism in a way that the reader can understand. It is a story that encompasses the most significant features of the movement, its ideals and its consequences. It touches some of the most important qualities of a human-being: compassion, love and conviction and



places these in a context of crisis which tests the individual to the limits of his or her endurance. It is also a story that resonates particularly powerfully in our modern world, where war is omnipresent and where the voice of peace continues to struggle to be heard.

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### **Making the First World War Relevant: Pat Barker's *Regeneration***

In a team-taught course on The Great War, my history colleague and I have used Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991) to show students the complexities and human costs of war. The story of a sympathetic physician diagnosing and treating his officer patients suffering from war neuroses, *Regeneration* goes beyond that to raise questions about British culture, class, ethics, and morality that resonate powerfully today. Specifically, the novel examines "shell shock" as a form of war resistance, exposes the pervasiveness of class prejudice, reveals the dangers inherent in concepts of masculinity, and, most importantly, explores the tensions between duty, ethics and medical practice, especially during wartime. We teach it in conjunction with *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), the standard narrative of disillusionment and the tragic inevitability of war.

#### **1. The Background to *Regeneration***

A historical novel blending fact and fiction, *Regeneration* takes us away from the western front to another battlefield: Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. There Dr. William Rivers, anthropologist, neurologist, and Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps, is one of a team of physicians charged with "curing" British officers of their war neuroses to return them to the front. Central in this treatment is the "talking cure," introduced by Freud, by which patients' speech and dreams offer the key to their trauma and recovery. Although there are many interesting subplots, the novel focuses on three main characters: the real life Rivers and two of his officer patients, the well-known poet Siegfried Sassoon and the fictitious Billy Prior. The novel is compressed in time: it takes place over a four month period — from July to November 1917— from the time Sassoon protested against the war and was admitted to Craiglockhart the day he is "discharged to duty".

Rivers's voice and thoughts predominate, and he is clearly the book's moral centre. But we also enter the minds of Sassoon, Prior, and others, who provide us with

alternative — sometimes inconsistent and contradictory — readings of war and its consequences. The novel's greatest strength actually lies in the sessions Barker recreates based on Rivers's own extensive case histories. In these sessions, the doctor, acting as detective, tries to read the verbal and nonverbal clues his patients present to cure them. Ironically, the novel's most compelling character is not the ethical Rivers or charismatic Sassoon, but Second Lieutenant Billy Prior. Working class, intelligent, ambitious, antagonistic, and not cut from the same aristocratic or middle class cloth as his fellow officers, Prior serves as foil to Rivers throughout.

Since her four previous novels dealt with trauma and recovery among poor and working class women and children, Barker's decision to focus on shell shock is not surprising. She has claimed that the urge to write about the war was always there, but she wanted a new angle, 'a sufficiently original way of doing it'. Shell shock had been dealt with before; she referenced Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) in an interview during the *Regeneration* book launch. But Barker's treatment of the subject is more extensive. As she explains: 'I think the analysis of men's dependency and their lack of autonomy in that war, a study of why they suffered from hysterical symptoms rather than paranoia is a feminist analysis' (Perry 1993, 52).

Barker's timing for a novel on The Great War was appropriate: *Regeneration* appeared during the First Gulf War (1991), to which Britain deployed 53, 462 troops. Readers were viewing war on the nightly news, where images of soldiers in trenches wearing gas masks, tanks, bombings and military artillery brought the war home. And war's effects — particularly what we now call post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — were on the national radar screen in Britain, as well as the United States. The ending of the twentieth century also prompted a reviewing of the Great War in general, with other novels achieving popularity in Britain — such as Sebastian Faulk's *Birdsong* (1993).

## **2. Shell Shock as Resistance to War**

World War I narratives by men rarely deal with shell shock. Eric Leed argues in *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (1979), a book acknowledged by Barker as a source, that this silence may be because veterans, in particular, were trying to suppress their most painful war experiences. Ironically, the avoidance persisted despite the fact that tens of thousands of shell-shock cases passed through army medical

facilities. If they deal with resistance at all, most novels about the Great War see it manifested through the portrayal of “conchie” or deserters. *Regeneration*, however, deals with the resistance of soldiers themselves, officers in particular, to the horrors they encountered at the front. Their resistance may be conscious or unconscious, verbal or nonverbal. They resist by protesting or talking back, becoming mute or stuttering, suffering hallucinations or nightmares, trembling or becoming paralyzed. These soldiers don’t resist by running away. Most of their protests present as war neuroses.

Barker opens the novel by quoting overt contemporary act of protest: Sassoon’s ‘A Soldier’s Declaration’, in which the heavily decorated officer charges that the war ‘is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it’ (Barker, 3). Sassoon’s words, read in Parliament and subsequently published, would have resulted in a court martial, but instead a medical board declared him mentally unstable and sent him to Craiglockhart to silence him. Sassoon does not, however, suffer from a war neurosis, and his declaration is rational and overt. As Rivers says when they first meet, ‘You seem to have a very powerful *anti-war* neurosis’ (Barker, 15). Sassoon eventually stops his resistance, for various reasons, most notably out of a sense of responsibility to his men back at the front and a desire to please Rivers, who has become a father figure. His resistance continues in his poetry, however. As Paul Fussell points out, Sassoon’s vivid descriptions of the war’s horrors and satirical indictments of the military and civilians, along with his rejection of the stylized, euphemistic language of previous war poetry, are a form of protest in themselves (Fussell 1975). Perhaps not surprisingly, these poems were his least successful commercially with the British public.

The other patients in the novel show their resistance through psychological or physical breakdown – tremors, sweats, paralysis, nightmares, or hallucinations – all of which Rivers connects to the horrors of their war experiences. As Elaine Showalter explains in *The Female Malady* (1985), another source for Barker, by this period in the war most military psychologists and medical personnel agreed that shell shock was caused not by physical injury to the brain or heredity but by warfare itself: ‘by chronic conditions of fear, tension, horror, disgust, and grief’ (Showalter 1985, 170). War neurosis was the psyche’s compromise between self-preservation and deception or flight, which was rendered impossible by ideals of patriotism and duty. Rivers is clearly in this camp.

Unlike the aristocratic Sassoon, who protests with speech, Second Lieutenant Billy Prior — a working-class “honorary gentleman” for the duration of the war —

protests against battlefield horror by becoming mute. When Rivers tells him that mutism is one of the commonest symptoms among enlisted men, Prior asks why. Rivers responds: ‘Mutism seems to spring from a conflict between *wanting* to say something and knowing that if you *do* say it, the consequences will be disastrous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for you to speak’ (Barker, 96). Thus, by forcing Prior to speak, Rivers removes his defense against articulating a horror truly beyond words. Not surprisingly, once his speech returns, Prior still suffers from nightmares. He has hardly been cured. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, there are just two incidents in which soldiers at the front demonstrate what looks like shell shock. Both times, their fellow soldiers are told to restrain them until they “get over it.” Such behaviour is considered weak and unmanly, even by the narrator.

*Regeneration*’s reading of war neuroses as resistance remains relevant today. Post traumatic stress disorder is often in the news in the United States — with stories about veterans who need but may not receive treatment and those describing veterans who commit suicide or succumb to mental illness. According to the National Institutes of Health, between 11% and 20% of veterans of America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffered from PTSD, along with 30% of Vietnam veterans. Whatever the numbers, PTSD is endemic — and an understanding of the way it provides a tragic commentary on war resonates with our students.

### 3. Class Prejudice

*Regeneration* offers a sharp insight into the reality of social division at and away from the front. Barker contrasts the way the middle-class Rivers interacts with Sassoon and Prior. He invites Sassoon to join his club, calls him Siegfried, and lets down his professional objectivity to allow a friendship to develop. With Prior, however, Rivers keeps his distance, calling him “Mr. Prior”. Prior challenges Rivers’s position of authority, accusing him of acting like ‘empathic wallpaper’ (Barker, 51). He comments on Rivers’s own stammering, asking what he is trying to hide. Rivers explains that his stammer is congenital, but neither doctor nor patient is convinced.

Showing disparities between officers and enlisted men is easy. As Prior describes it, enlisted men get two minutes with a prostitute, while officers get longer. He is not sure how much longer this will last, however, because, as he says, ‘*I don’t pay*’

(Barker, 67). More interestingly, Prior also exposes class prejudice among officers. When Rivers asks him how well he fitted in while in France, he says, 'Not more than I have here.' He explains you need to have been to the right school, to hunt, to have shirts a deep shade of khaki. He summarizes his contempt for middle-class values in a diatribe against the war: 'I realized that somewhere at the back of their tiny, tiny minds they really do believe the whole thing's to end in one big, glorious cavalry charge. 'Stormed at with shot and shell/Boldly they rode and well/Into the jaws of death/Into the mouth of hell... And all. That. Rubbish' (Barker, 66). Ironically, Prior wants to be acknowledged for having those very qualities he claims to despise. Like Sassoon, he wants to go back to the front, not to return to his men, however, or from a sense of duty, but to prove himself. Ironically, Prior wants to be acknowledged for having those very qualities he claims to despise. Like Sassoon, he wants to go back to the front, not to return to his men, however, or from a sense of duty, but to prove himself. Significantly, much of the literature on the Great War (such as *All Quiet* and much poetry) celebrates solidarity and fellowship among soldiers, downplaying tensions between officers and enlisted men. By suggesting that the class prejudices that operated in civilian life also existed in the military, Barker complicates the notion of fighting men as a classless band of brothers.

#### **4. War and Masculinity**

The nature of masculinity is another of Barker's concerns. Through Rivers, she also explains the ways in which life in the trenches, with its enforced passivity, feminizes soldiers. The virtual certainty of getting shot if they even poke their heads above ground strips away their power to act like warriors; they are forced into submissiveness. Caring, supportive, and encouraging his patients to connect with their emotions, Rivers in some ways acts like what one patient calls: 'a male mother'. He rejects the term: as Barker puts it: 'He distrusted the implication that nurturing, even when done by a man, remains female, as if the ability were in some way borrowed, or even stolen, from women ... If that were true, then there was really very little hope' (Barker, 107).

To Rivers, 'fathering, like mothering, takes many forms beyond the biological.' He concludes that the worried expression he has often seen on officers' faces and their frequently voiced concern for their men 'is the same look he had seen on the faces of

poor women bringing up large families on very low incomes. It was the look of people who were totally responsible for lives they have no power to save' (Barker, 107). All this stands in sharp contrast to the description of an ideal officer offered in a 1917 British brochure of instruction for officers. The brochure describes the platoon commander as 'well turned out, punctual and cheery, even in diverse circumstances.' While he looks after his men's comfort before his own and never spares himself, he is also 'blood thirsty and forever thinking how to kill the enemy' (Showalter 1985, 174). So as the army sees it, to become a good officer you have to be schizophrenic: caring, selfless and blood-thirsty, but also desensitized, unemotional and controlled. There is no place for the kinds of emotion that the patients at Craiglockhart experience.

## **5. War, Ethics, and Moral Responsibility**

For me, the most compelling reason for teaching *Regeneration* is because it raises profound questions about ethics and the role of psychotherapy, particularly during wartime. Rivers embodies a paradox: a psychiatrist and healer who is a complicit part of the war machine at a time when he recognizes its horror. Because Rivers is so humane, principled and self-critical, we might forget that his treatment is ultimately coercive. He admits as much early on, telling Sassoon that it is his job to get him to want to go back to the front (15). Duty matters to him. He is, after all, a Royal Army Medical Corps captain.

There is a traditional argument for the role of duty trumping conscience, and Pat Barker gives its voice to the poet and novelist Robert Graves. He was Sassoon's friend and fellow officer, and he had rigged the medical board to get Sassoon committed to the hospital:

'The way I see it,' Graves says, 'when you put the uniform on, in effect you sign a contract. And you don't back out of a contract merely because you've changed your mind. You can still speak up for your principles, you can argue against the ones you're being made to fight for, but in the end you do the job.' (Barker, 23)

To which Rivers says, 'I couldn't agree with you more (ibid.).

Throughout the novel, Rivers acknowledges the conflicts between duty, morality and good medical practice. He questions the ethics of treating officers for the purpose of enabling them to be sent once more into what may well be certain death at the front.

He justifies this throughout most of the book, arguing to himself that his therapy is ultimately beneficial to them as individuals. They are restored to mental health.

A close reading of a scene at the end of the novel shows that Rivers is far from innocent. Visiting London, he stops by the Royal Hospital to see the work of a colleague, Dr. Lewis Yealland, a real historical figure who used electrodes and intimidation to treat enlisted men suffering what are mostly physical manifestations of war neurosis. Yealland invites Rivers to observe his treatment of a soldier named Callan, who is mute. Rivers watches as Yealland badgers Callan, locks him in a room, straps him down and tells him he cannot leave until he talks. Yealland says, 'You must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be' (Barker, 230). He applies electrodes to Callan's neck and shocks him with increasing severity. Callan twice tries to escape, only to face the locked door and Yealland's directive: '*You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say*' (Barker, 231). After an hour, Callan finally whispers 'Ah'. Eventually, with an increase in the current being applied, he finally begins repeating the days of the week, the alphabet and the months of the year. Although he is speaking normally, Callan develops a tremor in his left arm, to which Yealland applies another electrode. The tremor appears in various places, and Yealland moves the electrode. Finally Yealland pronounces the cure complete. In the end, Callan hesitates before saying the expected, 'Thank you, sir', and offering a salute (Barker, 233).

Disturbed by the brutality he has witnessed, Rivers has a dream that night. He is walking down a corridor at Yealland's hospital. Clinging to a rail, a deformed man watches him approach. The man says, '*I am making this protest on behalf of my fellow soldiers because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.*' The dream changes and Rivers is in the electrical room, applying an electrode to a man's open mouth. When it does not fit, he tries to force it in. The man struggles and Rivers sees that the object he is holding was a horse's bit — an instrument of control. He had been trying to force it into the man's bloody mouth. The patient's cry wakes him. (Barker, 235-36) When he analyzes the dream, Rivers concludes that the man in the corridor represents Sassoon, since he had quoted the anti-war protest. As for the man with the bit, the obvious candidate was Callan, but he had noticed a slight facial resemblance between Callan and Prior, who had been mute when he arrived at Craiglockhart. In fact, Rivers remembers an incident in which he had dragged a teaspoon across the back of Prior's throat to see if he could trigger the return of speech — perhaps too harshly. At first he thinks there was no comparison in the



amount of pain inflicted by Yealland on Callan and by himself on Prior. Yet Rivers knows that ‘in the dream, he stood in Yealland’s place’ (Barker, 238). He then concludes that he and Yealland are both in the same business of controlling and silencing people, even though he does so in what he calls ‘an infinitely gentler way’ and that the symptoms of his patients are ‘just as much protest as the grosser maladies of the enlisted men’ (Barker, 238). But he ultimately rejects this too general reading of the dream. Ultimately, Rivers realizes that the man in the chair represents Sassoon: ‘he was the only man being silenced in the way that the dream indicated’ (Barker, 238). Although he tries to convince himself that he hadn’t forced Sassoon to abandon his protest, ultimately, ‘He knew the extent of his own influence’. In the last chapter, as Rivers discharges Sassoon back to duty, he thinks about what he has himself learned at Craiglockhart. He acknowledges how Siegfried and all of his patients have forced him to become less introverted and self-conscious. He wonders whether his previously held, deeply conservative values are valid. Finally, he thinks, ‘A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance’ (Barker, 249).

The enigmatic Rivers offers the final test for our students, precisely because he understands the implications of doing his duty. But questions persist: As a captain in the army, can he reconcile duty with conscience when he agrees with Sassoon about the conduct of the war? As a physician, how can he justify curing patients so they can return to what will quite likely be their deaths? Rivers finally knows that he has been complicit in the war machine, but he cannot find a way to honorably extricate himself.

*Regeneration* is the first novel in a trilogy. In *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995). Barker continues her imaginative exploration of the moral and ethical dilemmas facing Rivers and Prior, in particular, after they leave Craiglockhart. All three of the novels bring The Great War home to our students and force them to think about the causes and consequences of all wars.

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**The Representations of Trains  
in the Construction of Mythology of the Civil War in Russia**

The Bolshevik Revolution and ensuing Civil War were one of the most significant outcomes of the Great War. The collapse of the Russian Empire took place in the context of hundreds of thousands of soldiers who returned from the battlefields of the war only to find themselves involved in the massacre of the Civil War. Historians argue that the Soviet project was shaped to a greater extent by the realities of the Civil War rather than pre-revolutionary debates about the nature of socialism. The story of the Civil War became one of the cornerstones of Soviet history. The Soviet elite sought to forge a Soviet “imagined community” by creating narratives and its own mythology. As Roland Barthes argued, myths and mythologies play an increasing role in creating the common identity in the contemporary world (Barthes 1972). One such important narrative was the Soviet emphasis on the essential modernity of Bolshevik rule. In Soviet ideology, technology played a key role in explaining why the Bolsheviks won the Civil War. This paper will provide insights on the relationship between technology, memory, and the emotional appeal of mass culture by looking at the imagery of trains in Soviet movies. I shall suggest that representing the Bolsheviks as “technologically advanced” versus the Whites as “technologically backward” contributed to the creation of certain a Soviet mythology which simplified the complexity of the failure of the Whites to win the war. Moreover, the imagery of trains in such movies emphasized the modernity and vitality of the Soviet project and helped to engage the audience emotionally. Fast trains on screen brought more appeal to visual narratives about the distant war and made possible the emotional engagement of the audience with the Bolshevik discourse on the Revolution. The representations of trains played an important role in the construction of the memory of the Civil War. At the same time, I will show that the experience of train rides during the Civil War was nothing like that demonstrated in Soviet films.

J.N. Westwood and Anthony Heywood examine the story of Russian railways during the twentieth century (Westwood 1964; Heywood 1999). Westwood

demonstrates the profound crisis of the Russian railways by the end of the Great War. When demobilized soldiers stormed trains to return from the battlefields and the urban folk fled Russia to go abroad, travel by train became a dangerous experience. Especially for the intelligentsia, train travel could become a shocking experience of being exposed to the hostility of peasants and soldiers, who openly expressed their rage against the bourgeoisie. Many Russian authors have written the dramatic accounts of train travel. In her memoir, Nadezhda Teffi (1872-1952) describes a train voyage of herself and her acquaintances through Russia in the midst of the Civil War (Teffi, 2005). The clothing of her companions, who were actors and actresses, reveals that they belong to the middle class and causes fury among the third-class travellers. Teffi wrote:

Our train ride was nice and comfortable, but after we rode for three hours, the train had stopped and everyone was ordered to disembark. We got out, dragged out the luggage, stood on platform for two hours and got into another train, consisting of only third-class cars, packed to full capacity. Very angry white-eyed peasant women were seating across us. They did not like us (...). They were most annoyed by a Chinese Pekingese dog, a tiny ball of silk, whom the oldest actresses among us carried on her hands. [The peasant women discuss this dog and the woman with a great deal of hostility – N.S.]

— Look, she is taking a dog! She is wearing a hat and carrying a dog.

— She should have left it at home. People have nowhere to sit down, and yet she is carrying the large dog! (...) [The actress responds – N.S.]

—It cannot be left alone at home. She is a delicate creature. She needs more care than a child. (...)

— Oh, what is it? — The speckled peasant woman suddenly has become completely enraged and even jumped from her seat. — Hey! Listen, what it is said here. This woman, with a hat, says that our children are worse than dogs! Do we really need to endure it?

— Who-o? We-e? We are dogs, but she is not? — angry voices murmured.

No one would know how this matter would end, if not a wild shriek had interrupted this interesting conversation. (Teffi 2005, 28)

Teffi also describes how she and her companions were taken from the train and ordered to give a concert in a village (Teffi 2005, 30-44). Teffi portrays the gloomy and horrifying atmosphere in the village that people pass through on board trains, are arrested, robbed, and executed. Executions and searches happen every day there, yet, people do not ask questions and pretend not to hear shots. Teffi assumes that the band who are in the charge of the village are Reds. (However, this definition is open to interpretation because the lines of authority were blurred during the early Civil War,

and bandits could pretend to be Bolsheviks). One such terrifying character, whom Teffi calls 'Robespierre', wears a fur coat with a hole soiled in blood, and it had become clear that he took the coat from one of the executed passengers. Yet the Reds, especially, Robespierre, demonstrate a remarkable knowledge of contemporary theatre and theoretical debates, which presents a surreal contrast with the atmosphere of terror in the village.

Train travel in this epoch was dangerous and terrifying: people stormed trains, entered them by windows, travelled on their roofs, and burnt the wooden panels of wagons to warm themselves. In his memoir, published in the late 1950s, a Russian writer Konstantin Paustovsky (1892-1968), describes his own journey through the country torn by the Civil War. Interestingly, Paustovsky was well known and celebrated in Soviet Russia, yet his memoir about the Civil War reveal its horrors. He writes:

The train took eighteen days to go from Kiev to Odessa. I have never counted up how many hours this was, but I know that every hour of that exhausting trip seemed twice as long as normal to us who were passengers on it. The reason must have been that every hour hid within itself a threat of death. It's true that only three men were killed and a few more wounded by stray bullets in our heated boxcars; none of us, of course, believed that a single one of them would ever get to Poland alive. (Paustovsky 1964, 627)

In his novel *A Bare Year* (1922), the Soviet writer Boris Pilniak (1894-1938),<sup>1</sup> describes the appearance of mixed train No. 58 at the epoch of the Civil War:

People. Human legs, arms, heads, bellies, backs. People infesting the box car like lice. People crowded in this place and maintaining their right to travel with their fists, because here in a famine areas at each station crowds of starving people threw themselves at the car and struggle to get inside over their heads and necks... They tear off and throw down those already on the train... (cit. in Westwood, 180-181)

The railways also became the sites of intense social conflict. The American scholars Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg emphasize the importance of the strikes by railway workers that took place across Russia in 1917 to bring down the Provisional Government (Koenker and Rosenberg, 1989). Konstantin Paustovsky also described

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<sup>1</sup> Pilniak was executed in 1938 as an "enemy of the people".

how he witnessed a conflict between a train-driver and a woman, a wealthy peasant, during his trip across Ukraine. The woman's luggage consists of a variety of things, including a heavy chest filled with a dowry for her daughter. In exchange for bread and lard, the peasant woman asks for help in handling this heavy chest; however, after railway workers safely unload it at her final destination, she fails to give a promised amount of bread and lard to the railway crew. After unloading the chest, the crew puts it on the tracks 'then the engineer started the locomotive and ploughed straight into the chest, which broke to pieces with a great crash. With a triumphant whistle, belching out steam, the locomotive moved over the dowry up to the water tower, crushing the samovar into a pancake' (Paustovsky 1964, 634-635). This symbolic scene may represent more than the conflict between a railway worker and a wealthy peasant, 'greedy, wicked, brazen in her knowledge of her own worth and her own wealth in the midst of general ruin and poverty' (Paustovsky 1964, 633). The train driver as well as the train's passengers not only wanted the train to destroy the chest; they saw the train destroying the material remains of "old Russia" in such a dramatic way as a celebration of the end of the old greedy Russian Empire.

Other Soviet movies portrayed trains in the epoch of the Civil War in a variety of ways. A train appears in an USSR top box office *The Elusive Avengers* (*Neulovimye mstiteli*) created in 1966. This film tells the story of four teenagers who joined the Reds and took revenge on the mob of Ataman Burnash (the "Greens").<sup>2</sup> The Whites had killed the father of two of the teenagers, Danka and Ksanka. Together with Yashka, a Gypsy, and Valerka, the four avengers launch a guerilla war against the band and, thus, support the Reds. There is an obvious ideological message in this film: one character is a Gypsy, another, Valerka, represents the intelligentsia, making the four characters a symbol of alliance between the intelligentsia, ethnic minorities, and the Russian people for the cause of the Russian Revolution. The film portrays the Whites and the Greens as those who only pretended to use modern technology. In one of the opening scenes of *The Elusive Avengers*, a viewer sees the arrival of the Ataman Burnash.<sup>3</sup> He appears to arrive by a car in the village, but then one sees that it is pulled by two horses, and that he is therefore an impostor from the point of view of technology and modernity. This scene has a profound symbolic meaning, for it shows that the use modern technology

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<sup>2</sup> During the Civil War, these semi-bandit units played an important role by offering a support the Whites; they also robbed and killed civilians without any regard to law.

<sup>3</sup> Ataman means "chieftan" and refers to both the head of a Cossack unit and the head of a band.

by the anti-Bolshevik forces was a deception. One may compare such an image with the scene of the arrival of Nestor Makhno in the memoir by Konstantin Paustovsky:

The first train went by and the second followed close after it. [A whole forest of shafts of machine-gun carts pointed upwards, jouncing and bouncing with the movement of the trains. Shaggy little horses stood sideways in the freight cars, shaking their heads. Instead of blankets, the horses were covered with Jewish prayer shawls.] The train kept on moving slowly and steadily through the station and we saw another flat car. There was nothing on it except a luxuriously lacquered carriage with a prince's golden coat of arms on its doors. One of its shafts stuck straight up in the air, with a black flag tied to it announcing: 'Anarchism – Mother of Law and Order'. Bandits in brown English overcoats sat at all four corners of the flat car with machine guns next to them. On the red Morocco leather of the back seat in the carriage a little man with a green, sallow face, wearing a black hat, was lying. (Paustovsky 1964, 641)

In *The Crown of the Russian Empire, or Once Again the Elusive Avengers* (1971), a sequel to *The Elusive Avengers*, two avengers, Danko and Ksanka, manage to catch the train by using a section car. In purely physical terms, it would be impossible to do so. Yet, in the film, this scene symbolizes how enthusiasm, faith into socialism, and youthful energy could defy the laws of physics. These movies enjoyed a wide popularity among the Soviet population and became blockbusters.

Trains appear in many films about the Russian Civil War during the 1970s and 1980s: *Adjutant of His Excellency* [*Ad'yutant ego prevoskhoditel'stva*] (1969), *And on the Pacific ocean* [*I na Tikhom Okeane*] (1973), *At home with strangers* [*Svoy sredi chuzhikh, chuzhoy sredi svoikh*] (1974), *Fiery childhood* [*Ognennoye detstvo*] (1976), *Duel in Taiga* [*Poyedinok v tayge*] (1977), *The Extraordinary Mission Train* [*Poyezd chrezvychaynogo naznacheniya*] (1980), *Bread, gold, and a revolver* [*Khleb, zoloto, nagan*] (1980), *Lyudmila* [*Lyudmila*] (1982), *Every tenth* [*Kazhdyy desyatyy*] (1984), *Our Armored train* [*Nash bronepoyezd*] (1988). The presence of trains in such movies introduced a very peculiar material culture connected with the Civil War. Along with the Bolshevik uniform and other symbols of the bygone epoch, trains became the artifacts of material culture that immediately brought associations with the Civil War. They helped viewers to become emotionally engaged with the Civil War as the time of romantic struggle of good versus evil, as the birth of the Soviet project itself. In the representations of such films, the Civil War became a thrilling adventure, a horrifying but ultimately safe voyage that shook the imagination.

For the Soviet youth, viewing such movies seemed to offer an experience of being involved in the Civil War. Vladimir Dragunskiy (1913-1972), a well-known Russian children's writer, had captured the profound impact of such movies on the Soviet youth (Dragunsky 2010, 35-40). One of his short stories tells how during a movie screening about the Civil War, a group of school kids are so captivated by a fictional portrayal of the war that, with cries 'Let's help our side', they pull out catapults and toy guns and begin to shoot at the movie screen. This story, which was later made into a movie, shows how the Civil War became a romantic legend for the younger generation. The memory of the Civil War as a heroic, romanticized struggle of the Bolsheviks was significant for forging the Soviet community.

The time when these later movies have appeared helps to understand their appeal and their role in shaping the imagined community of the Russians. The Soviet moviemakers created a nostalgic and romanticized image of the Civil War to highlight continuity between the identity of the Soviet people in the 1920s and that of the post-war Soviet Union. In reality, enthusiasm for the Soviet project was fading in the epoch of late socialism, i.e., 1970s-1980s. To boost patriotism, especially among children, Soviet moviemakers sought to create several easily recognizable symbols of this period — symbols which especially appealed to the Soviet youth and could trigger emotional engagement with the Soviet project. The Soviet cinema utilized a nostalgic sentiment for the heroic and romantic epoch of the 1920s to forge the sense of an “imagined community.” The trains of the epoch of Civil War became cherished artifacts of material culture that helped people visualize such an imagined community. It is ironic that such a mythologization of the past had become necessary to build the future and that it was in the past, in this fictionalized portrayal of the Civil War, where such a romanticized imagined community could be achieved.



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**Romanian Life as Reflected in Wartime Memoirs:  
Society and Mores during the German Military Occupation (1916-1918)**

In autumn 1916, when Romania had been at war for a month, the Count of Saint Aulaire writes emphatically in his diary that in Romania it is the hearts, rather than the arms, that are better prepared for war (Saint Aulaire 1953, 73). And this truth has a certain cold allure for the French minister plenipotentiary stationed in Bucharest. Begun in Transylvania, with great hopes, the Romanians' military saga soon turned into disappointment and bitterness. After only a few months of fighting, defeats started coming one after the other, and three-quarters of the country, including the capital, Bucharest, ended up under foreign military occupation. In the course of the war on the Eastern fronts, a new chapter was opening in the history book, maybe a lesser-known one, a picture full of contrasts, to which memoirs kept adding something new every day and every year. For the first time ever, Romanian society was the subject of comprehensive descriptions, against the background of a coalition war. People's feelings and thoughts were not informed by nationality alone (Bucharest, for instance, was occupied by German, Austrian, Turkish and Bulgarian soldiers); the historical background, the level of education and the frustrations of the past also came to complete the picture. Aside from discovering foreigners, Romanians re-discovered their own society, their own mores, as they had not experienced military occupation for the past half-century.<sup>1</sup>

**1. From Enthusiasm to Fear: The First Days of War and After**

The start of the occupation saw a transition from enthusiasm and hope to fear and disappointment. 'In the street, one was confused by contradictory scenes'

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<sup>1</sup> During the Crimean War, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian Principalities, a neutral territory, entered for a while a brief period of Austrian military administration, but this was too short a time for reflecting on one's own vices and frailties of the heart.

(Cămărășescu, 2011, 379) says the diary of Zoe Cămărășescu, an aristocrat from the Court, taken by surprise by the approach of the German troops and by the sound of cannon fire close to Bucharest. 'One no longer knew what to believe – today Russian troops crossing the city', heading for Moldova, well-equipped, well-fed and heavily armed, tomorrow 'a convoy of German prisoners', tired, dirty and bearing the look of the defeated (ibid., 379). However, these were not the vanquished. No, not the Germans. This deceptive picture came from a recent past, when common people walked into the streets singing victory anthems. That was what happened in ill-fated Bucharest. Another scene, with other protagonists: 'There is terrible agitation in the city' writes Arabella Yarca, a general's daughter. 'Everyone says this is a mere formality, as the fighting has already begun at the borders' (Yarca, 2010, 87). It was no formality; it was a disaster, a catastrophe documented sporadically, also in the pages of diaries. A people 'that had grown accustomed to be waited upon hand and foot' had suddenly gone to war; this was a nation that had become used to luxury, extravagance, to horseracing, theatre plays and battles of flowers', while millions of other people bled to death on real battlefields. Romania had been living in drunkenness and stupor, and it was only the presence of the enemy that had managed to shake the unconcerned statesmen awake.

Romanians had suddenly realised that war was a horrifying reality and, having opened their eyes, they held very little hope for their poor country (Cancicov 1921, 121-122). This explains the drama of a nation outlined in the "impressions" jotted down by a lawyer, left behind in Bucharest during the occupation. He was one of the few who had reflective concerns at the time, albeit not the only one. A similar perspective is revealed by the memoirs of a journalist, Constantin Bacalbașa. His notes show that the spirit of the Bucharest populace had been softened by the times of peace. The material shortages and the moral jolts caused by war were unfamiliar to a people that had been raised in an era of good living, of peace, of prosperity. The need to give up comfort, the high cost of living, the disgust for imposed order and rigour destroyed the hope of the population and strained to the extreme the mores of a society subjected for almost two years to foreign military occupation (Bacalbașa 2007, 261).

When the Germans and their allies entered the Romanian towns and villages, they saw, to their surprise, that these places did not feel like enemy territory. The population received them without hostility, tried to ingratiate itself with them, begged for their mercy. Fear as well as foolish curiosity pushed many Romanians onto the streets, some

of them acclaiming the new occupants, others offering them their comradeship and cooperation. An undignified attitude, which apparently displeases the Germans. Field Marshal August von Mackensen, the future commander of the occupation troops, finds that Bucharest would not look like a city at war were it not for the armies of four countries marching in its streets. 'Everything is business as usual, the cafes are full, the shops are open, the trams are dashing about' (Mackensen 1938, 321). This was Mackensen, the proud commander, who had ridden first into the city, without being accompanied by his troops! And on the very day he had turned 67! The ease of the surrender of Bucharest, the cowardice of the government and the unnatural enthusiasm of the population are simply outrageous to him. The reason for his aversion does not stay secret for long; he reveals it to Bishop Netzhhammer, during a private conversation: 'In the end, those who are cheering us on are the same bunch of ne'er-do-wells that until recently were shouting they wanted to fight us' (Netzhhammer 2005, 692). Netzhhammer is very amused; he writes in his diary that 'it is a treat' to listen to Mackensen talking about what had happened to him the previous day. What had happened then? The marshal had gone into a tack shop to buy a suitcase, when he saw behind him 'a herd of people' shouting 'Hurray! Hurray!'. When he left the shop, the cheering resumed. And the feeling it gave the general was as far from respect as possible: 'You know, Archbishop, such things could be enjoyable in a country that is an ally, but in an enemy country it just fills one with nausea!' (ibid., 693) A great feeling, to be completely disappointed by the weakness of the vanquished! And a contagious feeling at that! One also finds the same reaction in the notes left by Major Alfred von Olberg, an attaché to the German Press Bureau (*Kriegspresseamt*), the leader of a group of journalists accompanying General Falkenhayn's army to the Romanian front. The indignation of the latter is even greater, as he is familiar with the state of mind of the Belgian population in Brussels, in late August 1914. He had seen there embittered men secretly tightening their fists, whispering in conspiratorial meetings, bowing their heads in a gesture of convulsive violence. None of this is present among the Romanians, who seem to have come to terms too quickly with their fate, losing any trace of their Latin forefathers' pride. They are 'effete lackeys', 'not at all likeable', and 'sycophants' (Olberg 1918, 195). Like Mackensen, major von Olberg has a story to tell – the revelation before the verdict. From the very first night after his arrival in Bucharest, in an audience hall filled to the brim, a Romanian orchestra plays first the German anthem "Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles", then the Bulgarian one, "Shumi Maritza",

without any imposition, even with a certain delight (*ibid.*, 194)! Servility is also evident in cities other than Bucharest. In Craiova, for instance, Romanians always have their hats in their hands, bowing their heads instinctively before the Germans and tripping over themselves to offer a light for the occupiers' cigarettes. The onlooker's feeling is the same – physical nausea (Köstner 1917, 101). In many respects, this is how the start of the German military occupation in Romania appeared.

## **2. The German Military Occupation: Moral Traits and Mores in the Romanian Society**

The frequency of negative stereotypes concerning moral traits or mores in Romanian society has stimulated the development of historical knowledge in the past decade, and the research has included a wider field of investigation. It has been found that the sentiment of belonging to the same community of civilisation (“the same world”) was much more pronounced in western and northern Europe in the years before the war, despite the differences and the resentment among the various nations. Meanwhile, Eastern Europe and especially the South-East of the continent did not have a symmetrical mindset. The peoples in this geographical area were assimilated in an undifferentiated and diffuse manner. The state of constant degradation and backwardness gave rise to clichés – some of them echoing pre-war racist, anti-Slavic trends, prejudices that remained entrenched in the collective mind until the Second World War. This contributed to the German belligerents' construction of their enemy's image (Angelow 2007, 135). Among these, of course, the clichés concerning Romanians. German authors from before the war would present Romania as a westernised society forsaking its Oriental past in order to embrace the culture of Europe and German capitalism. The war, however, ended this imagological construction. There was no longer a complete synchronization between German values and the interests of the Romanian elites. Criticism becomes extensive. The Romanian scene is now viewed as narrow-sighted, decadent, corrupt, and influenced by the maleficent French spirit. Disgraceful representations become even more common once the Romanian provinces are conquered by the German armies. Class differences are even more noticeable (the differences between the helpless peasantry and the tyrannical aristocracy) and an old

debate topic is resurrected: the civilising role of the German occupant (Hamlin 2010, 424-452).

The German soldier's knowledge about Romanian society and way of life were scarce and basic before the war. A substantial monograph authored by C.G. Rommenhöller in the first years after the war (1926), mentioned by Klaus Heittman in a study concerning the image of Romanians in the German-speaking space, states that all that was taught in German schools about Romania at the time was its geographical location in the Balkans (which is a geographical inaccuracy), the name of its capital (Bucureşti) and Queen Elisabeta's penchant for poetry writing (she wrote under the penname Carmen Sylva). Thus, some didactic work had to be carried out once the war started. Propaganda tried to instil into the soldiers an image of the enemy that was as accurate as possible, so that any doubt concerning the perception of the Romanian campaign as a secondary military experience would be erased from their minds. The press spread the image of Romanians as a treacherous, deceitful people, which had strayed from King Carol I's wise policy and attacked the multicultural Transylvania, a geographical region inhabited by Saxons, a minority towards which the German soldier has a patriotic duty to fulfil: to free it from under Romanian subjugation (Gahlen 2009, 145). It is with this baggage of ideas that the German soldiers came to meet the Romanian world. Their written testimonies stand out due to their capacity of observation and degree of indoctrination. The feeling of culture shock is also present. The Romanian way of life is either a colourful oddity, for those who try to be objective in their exploration of this world (as objective as they can be in the circumstances of a war!), or an unhealthy experience for those observers who are dominated by prejudice.

The critique of Romanian society reveals a world dominated by consumerism, immorality and effeminacy. A surprising aspect for the onlooker is the contrast between the rich and the poor, seen from the point of view of the opposition between exuberance and destitution. The criticism concerns the whole, not just the parts: it is not just the city elites or the opulent countryside aristocrats that are answerable for the mistakes of the past, their guilt is shared by the powerless peasants, who wallow in their misery and accept their fate<sup>2</sup>. Memoir-writer Willy Frerk believes that a life of revelry had reigned

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<sup>2</sup> The most significant book printed during the German military occupation was written by reserve officer Wilhelm Iänecke, with the title *Das rumänische Bauern- und Bojarenhaus*. This book, with its 109 illustrations and photographs, is clear proof of the interest shown to the peasantry.

over Bucharest before the course of the war changed the face of the city, bringing in panic and sorrow. He makes a parallel between the elegance, the coteries, the parties thrown for no reason, the sparkling diamonds and the glossy shoes, the rustling underskirts on the one hand, and the despair of the common man in times of evacuation and during the throes of the refuge in Moldavia on the other. From a city of lights and joy, Bucharest turned into a perimeter of order, under German rule (Frerk 1917, 133-138; 149).

From the effete elites, corrupted by the influence of Parisian models, the observer quickly shifts the focus onto the feckless, lethargic peasant, distrusting everything that may change his life for the better. The latter is described with severity by the pastor I. Weiss, who travelled throughout Walachia, accompanying a Bavarian infantry division:

If he has the necessary amount of flour, wine, brandy and a piglet, this is enough to allow him to slumber through the winter on a wooden cot. Despite the unusual fertility of the land, there is no wealth, there are only a few rich people in the entire Wallachia, and around them a profound drought. (Weiss 1917, 85)

Ignorance and the perpetuation of a corrupt social system cause destitution and degradation among the peasants. Even the gentlest description of peasant huts depict a disagreeable habitat. It is beyond Ernst Kabisch's understanding the way Romanians pay so little attention to hygiene:

They do nothing in order to destroy insects, lice and bedbugs, which fill the place in most situations. It is likely that their skin is less sensitive than ours, because you rarely see them scratching, while we are horribly tormented by the bugs. (Kabisch, 170-171)

In the streets of Bucharest, elegant Romanian women present Germans with a different picture of Romanian life. Gerhard Velburg, a reserve infantry corporal, remembers the waves of perfume rippling around these ladies, their faces glowing 'like in a wartime painting', their tall boots and lace stockings (Velburg 1930, 33). It is not surprising that the German authorities sought to prevent any fraternising between the German soldiers and the local population. Any close relationship that was likely to compromise authority over the occupied population had to be avoided (Mayerhofer, 2010, 290). It is hard to tell, though, whether the authorities' efforts were successful. The German

soldiers, as well as the officers, found it hard to resist the charms of Romanian women. This is where their war was lost. Lieutenant colonel Stolzenberg von Stolzenfest of the Bucharest military administration vents his anger by making disparaging remarks about the city, calling it ‘a genuine Sodom’, which should be entered mercilessly, with fire and brimstone, as about 7,000 women had been found here carrying dangerous diseases! (Netzhammer 2005, 687) Was this only a disturbing and defaming exaggeration, or was there a modicum of truth in his statements? What we know for sure is that a representative of the government in exile in Iași, Constantin Argetoianu, travelled to Buftea, near Bucharest, on his assignment as a peace negotiator. From the train window he spotted the yard of the army barracks in Mizil, filled with women of all sorts. Later on he would learn that it was in this location that the authorities had interned the party girls gathered from Bucharest and the other occupied cities who suffered from contagious diseases (Argetoianu 1993, 160).

Apart from quarantine, other measures were taken: moralising appeals and military orders. Before the return of the troops to the Western front, young lieutenant Hugo Jung (who in the end died on Romanian land) had to give a speech about integrity and honour in front of his comrades. His conclusion was that real men respect all women, but they avoid the loose ones (Schittelheim, 100). Gerhard Velburg reproduces from memory the contents of a secret order issued by the Headquarters of the City of Bucharest (*Kaiserliche Kommandantur der Festung Bukarest*), as a warning to officers. Commander Heinrich, a General-Lieutenant, expresses his concern that some of the officers show themselves in public, in restaurants and playhouses, with ladies whose company is best avoided. It is dishonourable to enjoy the graces of the fallen daughters of a defeated country (Velburg 1930, 275). Dishonourable it might have been, but everywhere in the big cities the nightlife provided the occupation troops with a variety of options, from cabaret shows to brothels (Bucur, 1999, 256).

In the countryside, on the other hand, the options for entertainment were considerably limited. Here, the soldiers live their own romances. The relationship with the local population becomes profoundly human. In Velburg’s memoir we read that in Făcăieni, near Fetești, in the county of Ialomița, in a quiet village in the heart of the Bărăgan Plain, corporal Drackhuhn, with a wife back home in Germany, is accompanied in public by two ladies. One is Mărioara, his 20-year-old sweetheart, a “lovable rogue”, the wife of a hotel owner from Constanța, currently on the Moldovan front. The other is Paulina, a 58-year-old Viennese socialite. Mărioara is, however, tearful about the



romance: soon she will lose her lover, who has been recalled to the front. This is why she takes him to another room and caresses him and kisses him goodbye. In Hagieni, a neighbouring village, we find Anicuța, a girl of only 16, from a fisherman's family, who claims to be the wife of German Unteroffizier Hans Achenbach. He, too, had been recalled to the front. But Anicuța does not lose hope; she believes that, when the war is over, the German officer will return to Hagieni, to a farmer's life. He will even sell his properties in Berlin in order to settle in the Romanian Plains! Anicuța cried for two days when she parted with her lover. She no longer wants to be addressed as "Miss" in the village, but instead as "Madam". Although not formally married, the entire village views her as the officer's wife (Velburg, 140-143).

### **3. Order, Respect and Prosperity: German Aims in War Propaganda**

Beyond appearances however, Germany has a duty to fulfil; the military occupation aims to be a government of order, respect and prosperity. Not only does it need to ensure the economic recovery of the country, but it must also contribute to its moral healing. A propaganda pamphlet states that 'first came the sword, then the plough', in a text signed by an academic (*Dozent*) at the Humboldt University in Berlin. The conquering troops roam the country without destroying property or oppressing the population. Germans do not kill innocent people. Instead, they bring the German culture to a people on the brink of the abyss, riddled with indolence, dishonesty, deceit and corruption (Schultze-Bahlke 1918, 7-8). It is quite enjoyable to watch the German soldiers help Romanian peasants with their farming, repair the roads and the railways (von Morgen, 1920, 118). To better highlight their efforts, the occupation authorities publish, apart from the daily papers in Romanian and German, a weekly illustrated magazine, *Rumänien im Wort und Bild* (*Romania in Words and Pictures*). The publication was printed at the State Press in Bucharest (*Staatsdruckerei*), and the editorial work was done by Captain R. Volkmar, an expert with a renowned publishing house in Leipzig (Al. Tzigara-Samurcas 1999, 202). From the first issue of the magazine, German soldiers could learn what Bucharest had looked like 50 years previously, when Prince Carol I Hohenzollern was beginning his reign. A new Romania, a new Bucharest was being born at the time, with an elegant life in peaceful times that had left indelible memories. Had it not been for the hand of fate – the

sorrowful death of the sovereign – this construction would have weathered the storm of the World War as well. This Romania, however, had turned into a corrupt country, with people and mores that require long-term therapy. Systemic corruption was reflected consistently in the common man's behaviour. After a year of unique experiences in the Romanian Plains, Gerhard Velburg comes to the conclusion that bribery is so common here and it is offered so openly, that nobody is embarrassed by it (Velburg, 92). However, he knows that this custom had begun to appeal to his German comrades as well. He had noticed that, day by day, the supplies in the house where he was quartered were growing apparently without reason, coming from the peasants whose households had not been visited by the requisitioning committee. With foresight, the villagers had thought it would be useful to bring the committee all sorts of nutritious food. Pies alone had been sent by around five families! The Germans do not feel like turning down the gifts – such delicacies are always a boon in times of war. A justification is quickly found: infantrymen (*Landstürmer*) are unsupported in times of war, and food is never enough for them. Day in, day out they receive mutton, bones and lard, half-boiled beans and peas; in the evening they get coffee that has been prepared in the same pot as the midday meal, and bits of fat are always floating in it (ibid., 69-70).

In the cities, things of a different nature are taking place, but the embarrassing accounts are present only in Romanian memoirs. These are thoughts jotted down by angry people, who see themselves as the victims of the German occupants. The German soldier, a man of duty, hyper-scrupulous about the orders he receives, had changed, fitting into the Romanian mould. Cancicov, the lawyer, having to spend several months in a Bucharest hospital under German observation, notices that tips open doors everywhere. After the Turks had taught the Romanians about bribery (in Romanian, the word *baksheesh* is used to signify 'tips', 'gratuity'), the Romanians, in their turn, had taught the Germans about it. In the beginning there was no money offered, only cigarettes, and those with much apprehension. Things changed fast, however. The German officers working in offices and headquarters started full-scale businesses, helped by their interpreters, many of them Jewish (Cancicov 1921, 352-353).

Corruption went hand in hand with debauchery. Still in Bucharest, Sabina Cantacuzino, the elder sister of the Prime-Minister (Ion I. C. Bratianu), talks about how Christmas had been celebrated by the Germans with a series of orgies:

The next day at dawn many of them were still lying on the pavement and in gardens, and in such a state! In pools of filth resulting from too much eating and drinking. There was almost no room to walk. (Cantacuzino 1937, 53-54)

It can be seen that each party interprets the theme of society and mores in a pejorative key. For one party, it is an explanation, for the other, a condemnation. In German war memoirs, the characterisation of Romanians takes up ample space and reflects the civilising mission of the conqueror. Instinctively, the Romanian eyewitnesses use the rhetoric of debauchery and greed as an antidote to the credibility of German reformism. Defeated in the war, Romanians discover their frailties, but in their hearts they cannot admit the Germans' success in a moralising sense. The Germans and their allies are exploiting the country, they take away people's freedoms. The present is the only time they own, they are not fit to judge, to guide, to decide for the future.

When they overcome the temptation to exorcise the evils of Romanian society, the foreign occupants discover profoundly human traits at its core. Humanity does not depend on ethnicity and sometimes in its manifestations it even prevails over the brutalities of war. Dimitar Paskalev is a Bulgarian officer; he arrives one evening in a Dobrudjan village (Nazarcea), where he looks for shelter for the night. He ends up in the yard of a Romanian peasant, who feels obliged to put him up. The Romanian has a son, a boy of about four. Seeing that the boy hesitates to enter the room, Paskalev smiles at him and motions him to come closer. With his father's approval, the boy shyly approaches the officer. For a moment, war is forgotten. Paskalev holds the child in his lap, strokes his soft blond hair and kisses his cheeks. Finally, he takes from his purse two silver leva and offers them to the child. But looking into the child's face, the officer's heart fills with compassion. This poor child! How many troubles he must have endured, how many horrible things he must have seen to allow fear to paralyse him like a mummy (Димитъръ Пасклевъ 1938, p. 58-59)! A superb sequence of images, a brief fresco depicting the reality away from the life on the front line, an illustration of the intense portraits drawn in war memoirs.

Often the boundaries between life and death are fragile, and consequently such writings contain many transitions from the delicate to the grotesque. Alfred von Olberg sees filthy villages, slothful men soaked in alcohol, dead horses lying close to water wells, emanating pestilential smells, stray dogs of all sizes holding ragged pieces of carrion in their mouths (Olberg, 218). Disgusting, indeed. But the choice of description

always belongs to the memoir's author. Hans Carossa, a writer whose reputation had been made before the war (Crohmaliceanu 1986, 124), is enrolled as a military doctor and he accompanies the German troops in the battles for the mountain passes towards Moldavia. He writes about misery and suffering, with an unparalleled compassion for the Romanians:

A wounded Romanian soldier, deserted by his peers, was coming towards us. When he drew closer, I noticed the bandages soaked in blood; on his neck, half uncovered, was an open wound. His right eye was swollen and blackened; the left eye, unharmed, had a beautiful brown colour. Recognising our medical insignia, he stopped before me and Rehm and silently pointed to his wound. We refrained from probing it; we didn't take off the old bandage, either, and instead we tied over it a thicker and tighter bandage, and the unfortunate soldier went trudging along his way, followed by the dreadful laughter of our infantrymen who, maybe without realising, were laughing at their own fate, embodied by the image of the enemy comrade: it's you today and us tomorrow. (Hans Carossa, 80)

What sensitivity among death and destruction! The beautiful brown eye, the gaping wound that they refrain from probing!

In contrast, we encounter another portrait, so different that one might think that such encounters were not taking place on the same front: in Târgu Jiu, Adolf Köstner comes across T., a young lawyer. We do not know whether he actually meets him face to face or whether he listens to him talk. What we see is a reconstruction of his portrait based on the books and other items found in his house. T., the lawyer, was very young. He wore his hair in elaborated waves, used scent and played the violin. We also know he had studied Law in Paris, that his parents were wealthy and that he was regularly sending articles to a newspaper in Bucharest. He was curious about everything and bought many things. An intellectual on whose shelves one could find German publications sitting side by side with English ones, illustrations of life on the front in both France and Germany. The young lawyer had read them all before the call to arms reached him. He went to a war that was taking him away, maybe for good, from the books of Ranke, Byron, Flaubert. Some of these books he had read, in some of them he had folded corners of the pages and written exclamation marks (Köstner 1917, 98). Compassion gives way to curiosity – the last sensible motivation in acquiring knowledge about the Romanian way of life, but possibly the most intrusive. The traces of curiosity are ever more present in the pages of memoirs. It is the bridge that unites

and divides at the same time: customs, feasts, traditions, crafts, clothing, etc. All recorded in detail, showing a concern that transcends culture shock. This is how Gerhard Velburg describes a ‘uniquely beautiful’ funeral, held for a young girl from Fetești:

Four young lads, adorned with colourful sashes, carry the open casket, decorated with roses all over. Ahead of the coffin walk the priest and the deacon, chanting litanies, and behind the coffin marches a Gypsy brass band, playing funeral marches (...) The paid wailers howl on both sides of the coffin, tearing their hair out. All the villagers take part in the funeral, some of them screaming around the casket. (Velburg, 148).

An extremely telling depiction. Although Velburg writes about other funerals as well, he never uses the phrase ‘uniquely beautiful’ for any of them.

## **Conclusion**

The German military occupation in Romania ended in late autumn 1918. The memoirs were published, however, without taking into account the significance of this event. The collection of memoirs grew constantly after 1916. In the years between the two World Wars, a new impetus was present, an impetus generated most likely by the need to rationalise the causes of war. Two groups of authors, of image creators, stand out: the first includes those who wrote as the events unfolded. Their memoirs are notes, impressions, diary entries. The second category includes those writers who had the time to allow their thoughts to settle down. This latter group favours a reflexive, analytical writing. It is hard to tell in which of the cases subjectivity is more burdensome. Society and mores are not an easy topic. Who can write without bias about the weaknesses of their mortal enemies? In reality, nothing outside the usual specificity of war-reporting is taking place. The written memoirs of the war in Romania do not hesitate to pass judgement and hand out verdicts. The hope of every author is that the posterity will take heed of the experiences they recount.

Paradoxically, both the accounts of Romanian eyewitnesses and those of foreigners reveal the presence of the same vices and sins in society. The discoveries made by the German authors when it comes to traits such as immorality, wastefulness and servility

among Romanians are ultimately acknowledged by many of the Romanian elite. The conclusion is that it is necessary to change the society, to change the politicians. The country must mend its ways; we must not waste the lessons taught by the war. In the writings of foreign authors, the image of Romanians is not for long one of resentment. It is driven by propaganda and it does not build on past frustrations or emit brusque judgements; it becomes humanised as the country and its wealth are discovered in earnest. For Germans, taking part in the Romanian campaign is not the worse thing in the world; the Romanians are not the fiercest enemies. After a few months of living in towns and villages, the country appears more hospitable and its inhabitants more benevolent. Hence the regret that the encounter between the two peoples did not take place in times of peace, that the war had made enemies of populations that are not so different from each another.

*All translations of quoted text from Romanian into English are the author's own*

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