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“This is the world I create”: A Review Essay on Current First World War Scholarship

ELIZABETH TOWNSEND

My stories seek to create memories of war less conducive, I hope, to waging war. These narratives displace the soldier as the mouthpiece of war, reminding the reader that the makers of war are not its only victims. The stories assume that women, children, noncombatant, and the enemy have an experience of war as much worth telling and remembering as is the story of any soldier. And the stories insist on the links between men and women at war, men and women in books, men and women at work, play, home and in bed.

– Lynn Hanley, *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory*

SCHOLARS CREATE the worlds of their subjects through inclusion, emphasis, and deletion, inherently distorting and enlightening in the same sentence. In choosing a perspective, although it may illuminate the past, it inevitably conceals other aspects of the same events. Paul Fussell chose the literary world of the British upper class officer. Eric Leed analyzed the psychological phenomenology of the German veterans. Robert Wohl looked at the intellectuals that contributed to and formed the concept of the Generation of 1914. Samuel Hynes gave us a vision of a changing British culture and society, as they strove to understand the catastrophe of the Great War. These scholars are credited with “chartering the cultural origins and effects of the Great War”¹ The works of Fussell, Wohl, Leeds and Hynes provide an essential foundation on which to build. With recent works discussing the roles of women, further insights, additions, and improvements can be made. And like a beautiful but aging house, sometimes the living room may need to be remodeled, a couple of chairs added to the dining room table, a new picture hung in the hallway, or maybe after years of work, an additional room added on.

This essay will evaluate the worlds created about the First World War with

the belief that experience rather than gender should be the determining factor for inclusion or omission. I will look at the influential works on the cultural history of the Great War to reevaluate their arguments in respect to the inclusion of the experiences of women during the war, giving both an overview of the current historiography on the Great War and an insight into what still needs to be added.

Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*² is currently perhaps the most well-known and most widely read scholarly work on the First World War. A literary critic, it is his work, rather than the work of historians like A.J.P. Taylor or J.M. Winter that most often give undergraduates, graduates, and the general public their view of the First World War. Fussell defined his subject matter as a study of the cultural expression of the trench experiences of young educated British officers. Broken into nine chapters, Fussell traces the now familiar pattern of the soldiers' innocence, enthusiasm and excitement when the war began to their disillusionment and horror when they encountered the reality of a brutal war that would not end. His opening chapter explains the basic events of what came to be viewed as a disastrous war. Fussell structures his argument around the classic memoirists and novelists who fought and wrote about the war, using less well-known works to support his findings. It is a moving work that gives one the sense of the tragedy amongst a sensitive and literary youth. Although his focus is narrowly defined as a work about literary works produced by British officers, many of his main ideas and themes would have been strengthened had he included women within the realm of the experiences of the British officer.

For example, in his first chapter, "A Satire of Circumstance," Fussell explains the state of society before the war, the chronology of the war, and then ends the chapter with an ironic and gruesome example of what the war did. He begins with Sherriff's 1928 play *Journey's End*, but then turns to Joseph Heller's World War II novel *Catch 22* for a more potent example with the unforgettable ironic scene of soldier trying to comfort a friend with a horribly wounded leg. "You're going to be all right, kid. Everything's under control." But soon everything proves not to be under control at all: the wounded soldier kept shaking his head and pointed at last, with just the barest movements of his chin, down toward his armpit....Yassarlian ripped open the snaps of Snowden's flak suit and heard himself scream wildly as Snowden's insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out. Yassarlian "wondered how in the world to begin to save him." "I'm cold," the soldier whimpered, "I'm cold." "There, there," Yassarlian mumbled mechanically in a voice too low to be heard. "There, there. There. There." (p. 35) This is a profound, one-time experience for Yassarlian.

For Fussell, this is the ironic reality of war at its most gruesome.

But Fussell need not have searched out another war to have found a such graphic and memorable scene. All he had to do was to read the diaries, novels, or memoirs of the nurses, ambulance drivers or VADs responsible for the care of his wounded British officers. For them, these kinds of scenes happened over and over again in a twelve hour period day after day, month after month, year after year. Florence Farmborough and Helen Z. Smith are but two examples.

Florence Farmborough, a British nurse on the Russian Front, recorded the daily horrors she tried to fix.³ The wounded were separated into three groups: those too injured to survive, those who could walk to the next hospital for care, and those that had a chance with medical help. Florence wrote "With cheering words, we strove to comfort them, but pain is a hard master; and the wounds were such as to set one's heart beating with wonder that a man could be so mutilated in body and yet live, speak, and understand." A soldier in the "chance" pile was saturated with blood on his left side. "I began to rip the trouser-leg, clotted blood and filth flowing over my gloved hands. He turned his dull, uncomprehending eyes toward me and I went on ripping the cloth up to the waist. I pushed the clothes back and saw a pulp, a mere mass of smashed body from ribs downwards; the stomach and abdomen were completely crushed and his left leg was hanging to the pulped body by one of the few shreds of flesh. ...It's nothing, It's nothing my dear." (p. 42) She feels the constant struggle for her own sanity while at the same time remaining compassionate.

Helen Z. Smith's novel *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of the War*⁴ describes the world of the well bred, upper-middle class volunteer ambulance drivers. She writes:

Cleaning the ambulance is the foulest and most disgusting job it is possible to imagine. WE are unanimous on this point. ...We do not mind cleaning the engines, doing repairs and keeping the outside presentable it is dealing with the insides we hate.

After picking up wounded all night (a harrowing task in itself, where no lights could be used on windy roads that had no signposts or markings), it is time to clean up.

The stench that comes out as we open the doors each morning nearly knocks us down. Pools of stale vomit from the poor wretches we have carried the night before, corners the sitters have turned into temporary lavatories for all purposes, blood and mud and vermin and the stale stench of stinking trench feet and gangerous wounds. Poor souls, they cannot help it. No one blames them. (p. 59)

Both works, along with many others, show the courage, strength, and endurance women had to embrace during the war, under many of the same kind of squalid and depressing conditions the male soldiers were facing.

In his chapter "The Troglodyte World," Fussell describes the trench system. This included three parallel trenches, with tunnels linking them together. He describes at length the condition and life within these trenches: the tasks of the men as they worked during the night and tried to sleep during the day; the clothing and equipment in the trenches; the mud, filth and rats; the food and rotting flesh; how the sunrises and sunsets came to represent the changes in duties and dangers of war; and the differences between the well-built German trenches and the ill-conceived British trenches. While not assigned in the trenches, similar images are found in the war accounts written by women stationed on the Western Front.

In discussing this "Troglodyte World," Fussell literally goes right to the road that leads to the hospitals caring for the recently wounded, stopping there in his description of the Western Front. He *stops* before the stories end. Being wounded is a large part of the trench experience. Only the psychiatric hospital experiences of Sassoon and Graves is given much attention. If he had included this aspect of the soldier's experience, we might have seen a glimpse of women, as they comprised most of the common caretakers of the wounded and dying during the Great War.

In chapter four, "Myth, Ritual and Romance," Fussell focuses on the homoerotic relationships of these educated officers in the trenches. Although Fussell admits that some soldiers had wives, fiances, girlfriends, and even experience with prostitutes, he concentrates solely on the homosocial relationships between soldiers, implying by exclusion that these were the most prevalent and important relationships. Nicholas Boyack's *Behind the Lines: The Lives of New Zealand Soldiers in the First World War*,⁵ based on the private letters and diaries of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, shows a way to include women from the writings by men. The first three chapters tell the chronological story of the war for these soldiers, and the last three chapters focus on topics to better give the sense of what it was like to be New Zealand and in the Great War. Two of these last chapters focus on women. In the first thematic chapter, "Women: The Forgotten Victims," he too mentions the comradeship and relations among men in war. But he also discusses the differences in their relationships and writings to their mothers versus sweethearts, showing that for the most part, most were more open and honest about what was happening with their mothers. He also writes about their impressions of the women they see in England. "Because Britain sent so many of its men to war, jobs traditionally done only by men were

for the first time made available to women. It was a trend the New Zealanders commented on frequently." (p. 122-3) And he then goes on to cite examples from their letters about their views and experience with women in England. The second thematic chapter "Prostitution: Far from Home in Wazir," explores the relationship of the prostitutes with the soldiers what he calls "perhaps one of the ugliest aspects of the war," (p.131). Prostitution often became the means of familiar support for women struggling to survive with their traditional wage-earners off at war, and where disease amongst all involved ran rampant.

Like Fussell, Boyack's story is from the soldiers' perspective, using almost exclusively their writings. And yet, Boyack wrote, "In short, war is just as disruptive for women as it is for men, yet historians have concentrated almost exclusively on male perception of and participation in war.... Luckily the diaries and letters of World War One enable us to make some significant comments on the New Zealander's attitude towards women, both those left behind and those they encountered overseas." (p. 110) One wonders if the sources Fussell used also had these hidden treasures and were discarded or ignored, *or* that unlike the New Zealand soldiers, British soldiers had absolutely no interest in women: their mothers, sisters, prostitutes, those they encountered on the front, or those in new jobs at home. It is not that Fussell entirely ignores women. A few sources are penned by women, but only for their comments (i.e. Queen Mary's fear that the war would never end). He never gives you a feeling or understanding for that there are lives behind the comments (like he has with the men).

Lynn Hanley's "The War Zone" is an interesting critique of Fussell's work, which she found too narrowly focused on a small proportion of people involved in the First World War.⁶ "For the most part Fussell's premise that war literature is by and about men at the front remains the operative premise in our identification of what poems, memoirs, and fictions constitute our literature on war. And since soldiers write our story of war, theirs is the perspective that prevails." To her, what is so disheartening is how few have challenged this view. "[Great] War literature, correctly or not, can afford to ignore war in the Middle East, Africa, and Ireland. It can afford to ignore war as it is experienced by women and civilians... A platoon of soldiers who fought on the Western Front is licensed here to shape our culture's imagination of the war."

She looks at the sign posts in the text that point to the exclusiveness of Fussell's view. His dedication is particularly telling. A memorial to his comrade-in-arms, it reads "To the Memory of Technical Sergeant Edward Kenneth Hudson, ASN 36548772 Co. F 410th Infantry, Killed beside me in France March 15, 1945." Hanley writes, "Thus Fussell quietly sets his own claim to the authority to write about the literature of war. He is a soldier; he, too has been under

fire, has seen a close friend die in combat, and knows the code, he knows what all those military numbers, abbreviations and designations mean."

Her view and ideas of war are refreshing. In this slim volume she separates chapters on Virginia Woolf, El Salvador, and War and Post modern Memory with her own autobiographical short stories depicting war in what she thinks is the best ideal, a story inclusive and not limited to the immediate experience of the soldier. War lingers on, affects whole families and permeates the child's world and imagination.

Like Paul Fussell, Eric Leed's work concentrates solely on the soldier's experience of the war. Whereas Fussell focused on British officers, with a few examples from French and German works, Leed's looks at the German experience. Leed's *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* takes an interesting and probing look into the psychological effect of the war. He discusses the various levels of the rites of separation in war: 1) as a society of whole from former, 2) citizen-soldier from civilian self, and 3) those who go to war from those who remain at home. He writes about the common symbols of the Great War: invisibility, death and living in the midst of death, burial and pollution (i.e. dirt, mud, disease, the grotesque). He also discusses a great deal about the memories of comradeship and the common endeavor, the good memories of war. In Germany, veterans were divided between those who viewed the war as a liberal experience emphasizing the loss of youth, death, horror, technology and the pollution of war; and those who viewed the war as a conservative experience, centering their memories on comradeship and community.

Women experienced these same kinds of rites of separation, and they have participated in and wrote about the same kinds of symbols and images Leed found persistent in men's writings. The emphasis on comradeship, though, is something yet to be explored in regards to women's writing. From my own readings, I have not seem the same emphasis on comradeship. One hypothesis for this difference could be due to the different nature of the majority of men's and women's activities. Men became friends because of the long hours of waiting bored in trenches. Women's writings about their war work emphasize the never ending duties, long hours, and short-handedness, leaving little time for friend-building. Most accounts I have read mention one or two close friends and discuss more the soldiers they come to know and then who go away.

A clear exception seems to be among the women munitions workers.⁸ One recent study that has found strong feelings of comradeship among women is Angela Wollacott's *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*,⁹ where she discovered that these vast numbers of women workers (over one million) were more similar to the army, then to other areas of women's

work. In her study, she examines not only the class makeup and duties of the workers, but tries to help the women munitions workers be “recuperated and retained as part of Britain’s cultural memory of the Great War.” (p. 11). Nicknamed “Tommy’s Sister”, these women felt themselves to be the “first stage of the production line of war.” (p. 7). They lived and worked in a “barracks atmosphere,” worked very long hours, wore uniforms, and “were continually urged to work hard, to increase production, and thus to help to win the war.” (p. 8). Woollacott discusses the danger associated with their work, including being “maimed, poisoned, or injured in the processes of making explosives, filling shells, and working with fast, heavy machinery.” (p. 12). Woollacott’s work seems to support the idea that comradeship in Leed’s terms may have occurred under certain types of working conditions.

Robert Wohl’s work *The Generation of 1914*^o is important in understanding the intellectual/cultural history of the Great War for a number of reasons. First, he is the only scholar to coherently discuss the common feelings that cross national borders, with the particular response to the feelings about the war from each country. Too often, scholars state that they will focus on one country, and then include without distinction literature from other countries to help prove their points. Examples of this can be seen in Leed’s *No Man’s Land*, Bonadeo’s *Mark of the Beast*, and Ekstein’s *Rites of Spring*. They give the impression that there is no national differences, that everything they are discussing transcends national borders.

Second, Wohl looks at the important concept of how the idea of generation developed country by country. He wrote that he wanted “to find out what people living in early 20th Century Europe had meant by the “generation of 1914.” “The idea of generation of 1914 came to imply a unity of experience, feeling and fate that transcended national borders.”(p. 3) But he found that “different nationalities had a tendency to express themselves in different forms.” (p. 3). Each chapter looks at how the idea of the generation of 1914 developed in a specific European country, and is organized chronologically, as the generational theory developed differently and at different times country by country: France before the war, Germany during and after the war, and England after the war with the development of the legend of the “lost generation.” He also explores in Spain the generational theories of José Ortega y Gasset and in Italy, Antonio Gramsci insights into the generational phenomena.

Writers should not be condemned because they do not find female examples to include in their arguments, just for the sake of being politically correct. Wohl’s work, for example, focuses on the intellectuals who helped to form the concept of the generation of 1914. He includes Vera Brittain into the discussion. The

question arises: what other women may have contributed at the time, but have been lost to history? That is the danger. The republishing of women's works in the last ten years may help to rectify this by bringing to attention to works that have become lost.

By looking at the theories developed at the time about the idea of the generation of 1914, Wohl wanted to find the "realities behind the myths..." created about this "lost" generation, an essential concept to understand for anyone studying the First World War. His work establishes the theory on which to look at specific examples of how different generations viewed and participated in the war. This is a particularly interesting and neglected area of research in regards to the experiences of women that would add great insight and dispel the notions of homefront women and frontline men as the two main categories. For example, Sonia Keppel, a girl too young to participate in the war like her older sister felt great hostility and jealousy towards the war, who got all the attention. She contrasts starkly with those who participated more actively, but also with older women, like Mrs. Peel, who worried about food shortages and happily observed the growing opportunities for women in work.

Like Fussell, Wohl's work provided a groundwork that many scholars continue to build from, often argument for argument. *Variations on Catastrophe: Some French Responses to the Great War*¹¹ by John Cruickshank mimics Wohl's France chapter by opening with a discussion of the young intellectuals coming of age at the outbreak of the war. This book falls short of brilliance. He only discusses men's written responses, despite the fact that he is discussing the response of the society made up of men and women, where the homefront and the frontline were often one. Where are the women's voices? They were there. What happened to them in the record? Françoise Thebaud in *La Femme au temps de la guerre de 14* (1986) discusses both the men and women's roles during the war in France. She found that a role reversal took place. Where women before felt dependent, constricted, with little opportunity, they now felt liberated with many responsibilities and choices. Men, on the other hand, stuck in the trenches and forced to gain permission to leave, felt the restriction women had felt.¹²

While a number of books try to rediscover the lost voices of women, *Women and World War I: The Written Response*¹³ edited by Dorothy Goldman is the first book I have found to view women's experiences of the war in a comparative national structure. This work would make a good accompanying text to Wohl's book. But it in no way does full justice to its subjects. This small book of essays left me wishing each chapter was its own full-length book.

It begins with Dorothy Goldman's informative introduction. She wrote that

resurgence of scholarship about women and reprinting of lost works was a result of the popularity of three events in the 1970s: the Imperial War Museum's exhibit of women's war in 1977, the TV series "Upstairs Downstairs" in 1974, and the BBC serialized TV version of Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) in 1978. She gives a concise historiography of works focused on women in the war.

Jane Howlett's essay "'We'll end in Hell, my passionate sisters': Russian Women Poets and World War I" seeks to rescue the women intellectuals overlooked by their male counterparts in their experiences of war and revolution. Nicola Beauman's "It is not the place of women to talk of mud': Some Responses by British Women Novelists to World War I" is particularly moving and enlightening. Some of the writers focus on the home front, others focus on those closer to the war.

Agnès Cardinal's chapter, "Women on the Other Side," looks at the hardships of the home front in Germany. She discusses the near starvation of the people left on the home front, and the belief that the soldier comparatively stood in comfort. She found many women becoming actively involved politically, intellectually, and through popular writings in wartime Germany.

Cardinal's second essay "Women and Language of War in France" shows the increasing independence of French women. Yet, she discovered that the radical reorientation of patriotism did not incite women to write. Instead, she found little fiction about "women's destinies in war-torn France." What she felt strange was that it was a time in France of a great proliferation of female novelists, and yet, about the war, they remained relatively silent.

One strange chapter is Jan Bassett's "Untravelled Minds": The War Novels of Mabel Brookes," whose experiences of the war came by travelling with her husband, a Red Cross Commissioner. She seems far away from the horrors compared to many women, but became the voice of the realities of war for the Australian reading public. These essays show the common experiences of women and the differences due to physical geography. Dorothy Goldman hopes that this slender volume will help to build a literary canon of women writing on the war, by exposing many writers still hidden.

Goldman is only one of many who in the last fifteen years have begun to explore and bring attention to the varied feelings of women during the war. Most of the literature, however, concentrates on the enormous contribution women made to the war effort. *Women at War 1914-1918*, *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I*, and *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War* all show that women served in the First World War in vast numbers and in a variety of jobs.

Arthur Marwick, an established British war historian, was commissioned by

the Imperial War Museum to write *Women at War 1914-1918*⁴ to coincide with an exhibition featuring women's war work in 1977. His goal was to "bring out something of what it was like to be an ordinary woman living through the First World War." (p. 8) This book gives the best overall understanding of the scope and numbers of British women's activities during the war. His appendix shows that there were 1,080 women policemen, 7,123 women in the Royal Army Medical Corps, 40,850 women in the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, 70,000 nurses by 1918, 82,857 women VADs, 947,000 women in private munitions, and 700,000 in government munitions.⁵

Diana Condell and Jean Liddiard's *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War*⁶ was published ten years later. It serves the same purpose as *Women at War*, providing a glimpse into the many jobs women had during the war. Like Marwick's work, Condell/Liddiard's work is based sources from the Imperial War Museum but also from the National Portrait Gallery and the Royal Photographic Society. Using photographs to tell their story, they set out to show how women of all classes were "mobilized" and participated in the war effort, making women's war lives a dramatic departure from their roles in pre-war society. Just by flipping through the book, ones sees the amazing variety of jobs and outfits of women during the war. They appear active, athletic, heroic, sometimes in dangerous places, all in necessary jobs.

Here is an example of the text that accompanies the photos. Plate 106 is a photo of a funeral procession of a munitions worker killed on duty, Swansea, August Bank Holiday, Monday 1917. They write,

[The funeral] was a curious, and rather touching mixture of the civilian and military funeral. The coffin is covered in the Union flag (a privilege normally only extended to service men and women or retired members of HM forces) and escorted by eight pall bears dressed in munitions workers' uniforms... They clearly considered that this woman had died in the service of her country and was as much a casualty of the war as the soldier dying at the front." (p. 113.)

Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider in *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I*⁶ sought to show the depth of involvement and participation of (25,000 volunteering) upper-middle class American women, beginning in August 1914. Most went on their own and "not became of a relationship with a male combatant." (p.12). They went because, like the women and men in Europe and England, they felt it was their duty to serve. The Schneiders write that they performed more jobs and more different kinds of jobs than women had in previous wars.

They were physicians, dentists, dieticians, pathologists/cardiologists, occupational and physical therapists, administrators, secretaries, "chauffeuse," telephone operators, entertainers, canteen workers, interpreters and translators, searchers (for soldiers missing), statisticians, decoders, librarians, supervisors of rest homes for women munition makers, directors of recreation, accountants, publicity directors, social workers, distributors of supplies, journalists, peace activists, small factory and warehouse protectors, refugee workers, interior decorators, lab technicians, and architects. (p 12)

Women often found themselves posted far closer to the front than officials let on to, being assigned to Casualty Clearing Stations and makeshift camps, both on the Eastern and Western Fronts. "The profound inadequacies of medical services called out for women to take charge, to solve problems, to find supplies where they could, to launch their own projects to feed, clothe, and comfort their patients." (p. 10) They stressed that "Amid all these stresses and tension of war hovered always the ultimate risks of ruined health and death, from bombardments, from air raids, most of all from tuberculosis, pneumonia, blood poisoning, meningitis, typhus and the flu epidemic." (p. 273) They devote particular attention to the horrific conditions women worked under in Russia.

They write extensively in one chapter about the canteening experience, "a mixture of cook, waitress, and shop girl," a place for comfort for soldiers. Another chapter tells the story of "Trooping for the Troops." Five hundred seventy one American women performed songs, told jokes and stories, did imitations, cartwheeled, and danced for the troops. Elise Janis, an entertainer wrote, "It's really splendid playing under shellfire...not knowing which song may be your last. It makes you do your best, spurred on by the ambition that fills every performer's heart to make a good exit."¹⁸ The Schneiders also examine the "paper pushers," the clerks in the war. "Unseen and often unthanked, clerical workers did a myriad of jobs. Some took records from patients. Some interpreted for the medical staff. Others labored in the soul-destroying capacity of "searchers", going from ward to ward, trying to locate soldiers missing in action by questioning men from the same outfit." (p. 101)

The Schneiders wrote that they found it easier to understand what the women did, through their letters and diaries of the time, than to discover the quality of their lives. Sometimes the answers were found in memoirs and diaries. What they did reveal was the difficulty of returning home. They felt out of place, returning to an ungrateful nation. "Not until 1977 did the Signal Corps telephone operators finally win their prolonged battle for recognition as veterans and entitlement for veteran benefits." (p. 278)

In recent years, there has also been a number of bibliographies and antholo-

gies chronicling the poetry and literature of women. Sigrid Markman and Dagmar Lange compiled *Frauen und Erster Weltkrieg in England: Auswahlbibliographie*⁸ after they found “the lack of a general guide to sources of information to women in England and the Great War.” (p. i) They hoped that it “might serve as an expanded reading list for enriching the awareness of women authors and women’s experience in the First World War. The texts demonstrate what women thought and felt about the war both at the time and in retrospect.” (p. iii) They included a number of popular novels that would not traditionally be considered war literature. But these provide insight into how much the war permeated the culture. For example, Dorothy Sayers wrote a series of mysteries where the hero Lord Peter Wimsey is a war veteran who has recurrent flashes of the trenches. His manservant was his sergeant in the war. His sister served as a VAD, who then gets involved with a Bolshevik. Sayers is not writing about the war, but her characters are a result of the war. Popular fiction can help to understand how much the war penetrated the lives of people. The world was never the same again. This is one of the few bibliographies that include this popular fiction.

Markman and Lange purposely did not include poetry, because of the work of Catherine Reilly. She has compiled both a bibliography that includes men and women writing World War I poetry, and an anthology of samples of the work of 79 of the 532 women poets she found.¹⁹ She saw that most bibliographies included only a handful of women, if that, and most poetry anthologies ignored women completely. The 125 poems in *Scars upon my Heart* express the same range of emotions and images that are found in the men’s poetry: “...a strong sense of war’s realities is expressed.” (p. xxxvi)²⁰

One interesting aspect Reilly discovered was the persistent images of mourning. This anthology of poetry shows the impact of the war, the reality of what the deaths meant to those left behind, those that loved them. It is an important aspect of any war, but particularly one where casualties were so high and so random. The historian Trevor Wilson trivialized this aspect of the war in *The Myriad Faces of War*²¹ when he wrote that even though a woman lost every one dear to her, “she was lucky to have been born a woman.” (p. 710) He shows little sympathy to the difficulty of losing loved ones; he only sees that they got out of fighting in the trenches because of their gender, as if they used being female to duck their duties. Compare Wilson’s attitude toward women, the homefront and non-combatants with Freud’s article, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death 1915.”²² This is not about the soldier in war, but the difficulty of being a civilian, of not having the whole story of what is happening, and about the mental distresses of being a non-combatant. Not only was there a disillusion-

ment "to which war this has brought [to society]" (p. 246), but non-combatants also had to deal with the difficult task of coming to terms with "an altered attitude towards death." (p. 246) Much of the important psychological work on mourning came as a result of experiences in the First World War.

Trevor Wilson's work is problematic on a number of other accounts. He seems preoccupied that women volunteered, that it was their choice. Somehow this discredits and degrades their involvement for him. He seems to forget that when the war began and until Conscription in 1916 men also joined voluntarily, and it was only because of the high casualty rates that Conscription was enacted. Marwick and Condell/Liddiard both show that when this occurred, women's participation in all aspects of the war also increased, especially in munitions.

Wilson's three chapters on women (out of more than 70) are curious. Chapter 63 is filled with a hostile and bitter tone towards women. They could never really understand the war. They could only live vicariously through men, who made the "supreme sacrifice" (p. 705), because they "suffered under gunfire, saw comrades mangled, inflicted death in close combat or at remote distance, possibly sustained atrocious injuries, and sometimes died abruptly or lingeringly." (p. 708) He gives no credence to women caring for these dying and mangled soldiers. Women merely sent men to their deaths by encouraging enlistment. Note, Wilson makes no mention of the propaganda encouraging women to encourage men to enlist, propaganda written by men. In all fairness to Wilson (and what is ironic about his portrayal of women), his second two chapters discuss the many roles women took, similar to Marwick, the Schneiders and Condell/Liddiard.

One can only speculate as to the reason for this dichotomy in Wilson's work. First, this is a work (like Wohl's, Fussell's, and Leed's) written before the republishing and new interest in women's writings and roles in the First World War. Second, for over 700 pages (and even in the chapters on women), he used primarily sources written by men. Possibly this reflected his sources' hostility, rather than the reality of the world in which they lived. If so, Wilson needed then to qualify their remarks. Finally, Wilson's work is indicative of the way writing about war has always been done, what Lyn Hanley complained about with Fussell. Women were not considered part of chapters. They were part of the war. Instead, they are separated out and discussed as an afternote (which is more than either Fussell or Leed did, neither of which ever really acknowledge women's existence as active participants in the war at all. Arthur Marwick in *Women in War* wanted his readers to understand that it is impossible to write about women, without writing also about men. To really have an understanding of the full

experience of a soldier, it is also impossible to write it without women. They were part of their lives, in a variety of capacities. They were part of the war.

Two very different attempts have been made to integrate or include the experiences and writings of both men and women. In *Women's Poetry of the First World War*²³, Nosheen Khan, while focusing on British women, incorporated and compared relevant men's works along the way. She found that the male writers (i.e. Sassoon, Owen and Aldington), "distorted images of the role played by women in war, images not a little touched by their misogyny and homosexuality, [which], have, being the only ones widely known, become embedded in the modern consciousness, and are accepted as the norms of female behavior at that moment in time." (p. 2). Throughout her study, she points to not only common themes found in men's writings, but also misconceptions, misportrayals, and many times, when ideas associated with male writers were actually thought of first by female writers. She gives a much needed balance to the subject of the literary history of the First World War.

*A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*²⁴ is another interesting and exciting work. Samuel Hynes broadens the scope to look how a whole society, rather than just how the soldiers or intellectuals, were affected by the Great War. He sets out to understand it chronologically in terms of the whole of English society: "...how English culture was transformed, and English imagination was altered by what happened between 1914 and 1918, and how that process of change determined what England after the war was like and what Modern came to mean" (p. xi).

A War Imagined is a masterpiece. Hynes tells the complex historical story of those trying to understand their changing reality: Old Men, soldiers, non-combatants, modernists, pacifists, generals. He explores the reactions and changes in the major movements (political and cultural) of the time: labor, suffragette, Bloomsbury, Imagists, pacifists, Vorticists. He looks at painting, poetry, film, novels, memoirs, journalism, legislation, and diaries. He creates a seamless construction, weaving together hundreds of individuals and their changing impressions of their society into a picture of the collective cultural experience of the war that came to be viewed as the Myth of the War. With all of these different groups and individuals, his text never becomes messy or disorganized. He creates a web of stories, ideas and personalities much like a novelist with many story lines that converge at the end to give the feeling of a time or event. And also like a novelist, he writes about Sassoon, Wells, Masterson, and the others in a way that keeps their identities from blurring together but at the same time guides the reader along the way to see the developing patterns.

This could have been written as a text only accessible to academics. Instead,

Hynes lets the reader into the world he writes about. He shares the complexity and uniqueness of individual experience in a way that not only is clear, but leaves lasting impressions. Part one looks at the prewar images of war used to describe activities hostile to official government. Labor, Suffragettes, the Irish and Modernists all contributed to the feeling that things were out of control. He describes a "War before the War, The Home Front Wars." (his chapter titles). He discusses the belief that England had become soft, decadent and a ruined civilization. War was thought by many of varying ages and ideas as a possible "cure" for the troubles.

Then war came. Part two, after discussing the beginning of the war, focuses on the turning point of the war in 1916. He shows how and why disillusionment occurred, and how people were trying to understand these changes through cultural expression. Hynes traces the reaction from all sides of society. And as the disillusionment of war became pervasive, Hynes explores again on many levels, why and how this came to be. He uses the example of the letters of Roland Leighton to his fiance Vera Brittain.³⁵ No longer did Leighton believe in the high ideals of "Glory" and "Honour." The horrors of the war had changed him. Yet, she could not understand. Brittain was still in England, still safe from the horror. (Hynes neglects to point out that Vera Brittain herself came to the same conclusions after she too had seen the horrors of war as a nurse on the Western Front.) It was the firsthand knowledge of horror of the war that seem to change reality for people. For many, the Somme in July of 1916 became that turning point because of the length of the continuing brutality and senseless killing.

It would also be a turning point for the home front with the film *The Battle of the Somme* (1916). Hynes explains the government censored all gruesome photos from the battlefield so that the home front had little opportunity to see the reality of the war as those on the Western Front were experiencing.³⁶ The documentary *The Battle of the Somme* helped to bridge that gap. This film, shot in the first few days of the battle, "made the war imaginable for the people at home," (p. 121) even though most soldiers felt the film only showed the tip of the iceberg and the one battle scene had to be staged due to technical problems. Part III looks at the end of the war. Parts IV and V look at the aftermath, the world after the war. He looks at the memorializing of the dead, of the changing nature of society through legislation, and the solidification of the Myth of the War. The whole work is a fascinating look at how society came to terms with the changes brought by this catastrophic war. The feeling of anti-war disillusionment brought about by the change in reality was felt throughout the post-war period.

The story of Philip Gibbs is particularly poignant. He had been an official correspondent for the *Daily Chronicle* on the Western Front. "Gibbs was probably the most widely read, and the most influential, of English journalists. His dispatches were vivid, but they were also consistently positive, even in the most disastrous circumstances." (p. 283) He brought the vision of the war to the home front, gave them "their" impressions of the conditions. Yet, after the war, Gibbs wrote about a different type of war, the war he could not write about as a journalist during the war in the best-selling book *Realities of War*. "Gibbs' realities, the things that could now be told, were first of all the grotesque details of death and detestation that the censors would not have tolerated while the war was going on." (p. 284) Written in more of the soldier's style, it also put names to the regiments and places he could not during the war. Hynes feels this is an important step in the imagining of war. It was important to the soldiers; it served as a monument to their deaths and suffering. The names became symbols.

Hynes should be applauded for including a number of women's cultural works as important in understanding the transformation of society, namely Rose Macaulay, Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf. Women's works are discussed side by side with men for the merit of the work and for what it adds to the cultural expression of the time. But, to be included, these women must be extraordinary. For example, Hynes writes of the English novelist and film critic Bryher: "She was an unusually knowledgeable film critic for her time...and she wrote well about what she saw; her *Film Problems in Soviet Russia* (1929) is the first book in English to treat Russian films critically and seriously." (p. 446) Although Hynes includes many male critics' impressions of the films about the war, one wonders if Bryher would have been included if she simply wrote reviews without being exceptional.

When discussing ideas and experiences where one could use either men or women for subjects, only men are chosen. Hynes uses sources written by male ambulance drivers, male orderlies, and discusses Philip Gibbs' horror at the conditions of a hospital on the Western Front, the worst of the war in Gibbs' mind. Women drove ambulances in harsh wartime conditions, worked as orderlies more often than men, and most women serving in the war spent four and a half years inside the hell Gibbs wished to flee quickly after an afternoon. Like men, these women expressed themselves in a variety of cultural forms. Hynes missed an opportunity to show that in some cases, men and women did the same sorts of tasks and saw the same horror, rather than the stereotypical portrait of women at home, and men in the trenches.²⁷ Hynes throughout the work is continually trying to extend the world view of the war, to show how many more people were affected than is generally acknowledged. He needed to

take a small step further in the case of women's roles in the war.

Women's stories are not included in this work the same way as men's are. Hynes includes women in the main body of the text again only if they are extraordinary; if they are merely ordinary, they are on the margins of the story or completely ignored. Their stories come as a postscript to the suffragette movement in the pre-war chapter "The Home-Front Wars," or in his discussion of legislation affecting women after the war. (The majority of women who participated in the war effort were not suffragettes.) By his placement of women in his structure, Hynes geographically dismisses women's roles in the war because they are not part of the main story. This is not done because he states that women are on the periphery of the war (which they were not), but because war, despite his efforts, continues to a "man's story," instead of portraying the actual reality.

He also writes some disturbing sentences reminiscent of Trevor Wilson's treatment of women in *The Myriad Faces of War*. Hynes writes that he believes "...women's stories added their own perception [to the Myth of the War]: that in the arguments of armies women are useless, and their stories marginal." (p. 439) And he moves on, without any evidence or discussion about this very charged sentence. It is very un-Hynes-like and would not be so disheartening if he had not set such high standards. Throughout this work, he has taken care to avoid stereotypes and show the complexity of the culture of the time. He shows a special sensitivity to the home front, the Old Men, and the officials involved in the war, parts of the story often missing from many cultural accounts. But he does not do the same in his depiction of women.

Adding insult to injury, he continues "But the Myth that took shape at the end of the Twenties was more than simply a story of what the war WAS; it was also a story of what it DID—to history, to society, to art, to politics, to women, to hopes and expectations, to the idea of progress, the idea of civilization, the idea of England." (p. 439) To society, to women? Does this mean women do not fit into the other categories? Should it not be to men, to women? This is problematic throughout the text where words like society, home front and men seem to be interchangeable, leaving the reader wondering when and where women fit in? Are best-selling novels only read by men (society on the home front) or also by the marginalized women (in society on the home front)? Through his use of language he subtly seems to indicate that women are not necessarily included in his definition of society. And yet, he will use an extraordinary woman to show an important development in the Myth of the War.

In discussing the war memoirs, he chooses to look at five examples, including Vera Brittain. Like Wohl in *The Generation of 1914* he includes her because of her importance in the war literature canon, discussing her war diary and her

1933 memoir, *Testament of Youth*. He concludes his discussion of the war memoirists, "All of these memoirs—Grave's, Brittain's, and Sassoon's—share that central point..." (p. 436) and continues to go over the characteristics they all share in common, as writers of their experience in the war. Then, all of a sudden, he writes

That complex myth was fixed by the narratives that were written at the end of the Twenties and the beginning of the Thirties, including the narratives that I have been considering by writers like Graves, Sassoon, Blunden and Ford. (p. 441)

What happened to Vera Brittain? *Her* name is the only one not included. It would not be so alarming if Hynes had not written on the previous page the words "other men's war books." (p. 440) Why "men's"? Why couldn't he just write "war books"?

Hynes himself makes the best argument for including ordinary women into the mainstream discussion of the Great War with what he says as the conclusion of making of the Myth of the war. He ends with a discussion of the painter Stanley Spencer. Hynes writes that "Spencer had served as a private soldier, in two humble roles; he had first been an orderly...and had then transferred...and had served in Macedonia on the Salonka front, part of the time as an ambulance man. He had known the suffering of war, though he had not taken part in many major battles, or been distinguished in a military way." (p. 461) From this we can surmise that for Hynes, being a soldier does always not mean fighting and dying in the trenches. Soldiers served in non-combatant roles, just as women served in non-combatant roles. While a soldier, Spencer served as an orderly and an ambulance driver—again roles that women served in often. Spencer's contribution was knowing the suffering he saw in the wounded, not his contribution to the killing. Again, Hynes shows a particular appreciation to these attributes. So why didn't he discuss the suffering and horror seen by nurses, WAACs, WRENs, WRAF's, VADs, munitions workers, ambulance drivers, and other women working in the war effort? This is amplified with the discovery of Spencer's first subject for his paintings for the Sandham Memorial Chapel.

The lowest range of panels represents scenes from the military hospital: men scrubbing floors, sorting laundry, filling tea urns and serving tea, making beds, treating patients—the sorts of duties that Spencer performed as an orderly. (p. 461)

Strange that Spencer painted traditionally women's roles with men performing them. Strange still, that the astute Hynes says nothing about this. Hynes writes

of the meaning of his paintings:

The story that these pictures tell is of army life, but not of war; there are no military formations, no enemy forces, no battle lines, no guns, and only one officer. Men work, eat, and play together, and serve their comrades in simple ways; they do not try to kill each other. The spirit of the paintings is of comradeship, kindness, caring, and love..." (p. 461)

These words echo the sentiment of Lynn Hanley in the introductory quotation of this essay: war is much more than the act of killing. This spirit of working, eating and playing must be explored both within the machine of war inhabited by both men and women, as well as outside it. The whole society cannot escape the re-imagining of a new world.

The works of Fussell, Leed, Wohl, Hynes, and others have focused the dialogue of the Great War away from the generals and battles to the cultural experience and meaning of the Great War for men—well-known and obscure. Now with the new awareness brought about by the republication of women's texts from the Great War, and an increased sensitivity in the realization that women actually actively participate in society, wars, and history-making, it seems important to continue the process of understanding the Great War by integrating thousands of its forgotten and historically-silenced participants—the women. What is needed now are scholarly works that recreate the world of 1914 as primarily experience-specific while at the same time taking into account not only gender differences, but also generational, ethnic, and geographical differences as well.

NOTES

1. Robert Weldon Whalen, "Fallen Solders: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars, by George L. Mosse," Book Review, *Journal of Modern History*.
2. Paul Fussell. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).
3. Florence Farmborough. *Nurse at the Russian Front: 1914-1918*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1975). See also her photographic memoir *Russian Album: 1908-1918* (London: Michael Russell, 1979).
4. Helen Z. Smith's *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of the War* (London: 1930, reprint New York: Feminist Press of New York, 1989)
5. Nicholas Boyack. *Behind the Lines: The Lives of New Zealand Soldiers in the First World War*. (Australia: Allen & Unwin Port Nicholson Press, 1989)
6. Lynn Hanley. "The War Zone," in *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991)
7. Eric Leed. *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

8. *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of the War* by Helen Z. Smith also portrays a comradery among Ambulance drivers.
9. Angela Woollacott. *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
10. Robert Wohl. *The Generation of 1914*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).
11. John Cruickshank. *Variations on Catastrophe: Some French Responses to the Great War* (Oxford: Caredon Press, 1982).
12. Most of the works about women also include the stories about men. Because of this, these works often present a more balanced portrait. This is true in many areas of history. One of the future goals must be to present a better balance in works that focus primarily on men, as the women have done in their works about women.
13. Dorothy Goldman, ed. *Women and World War I: The Written Response*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
14. Arthur Marwick. *Women at War: 1914-1918* (London: Fontana Paperbacks in association with The Imperial War Museum, 1977).
15. Louise Dalby's *The Great War and Women's Liberation* (Skidmore College: Skidmore College Faculty Research Lecture, 1970) is also a good source for information on the duties, restrictions, development, uniforms and life of the VADs and WAACs.
16. Diana Condell and Jean Liddiard. *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).
17. Dorothy Schneider. *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I*. (New York: Viking, 1981)
18. IBID, 157. Elise Janis, one-woman show for British and French troops in France.
19. Sigrid Markman and Dagmar Lange compiled *Frauen und Erster Weltkrieg in England: Auswahlbibliographie* (Osnabrück: H.Th. Wenner., 1988).
20. Catherine Reilly. *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography*. (George Prior 1978), and Catherine Reilly. *Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War*. (Virago, 1981).
21. I also found an impressive number of works written by women on the First World War. Targeting prose, I found 476 titles on a nine library on-line catalog search conducted in 1992. To get the most representative results, I searched large libraries networks (University of California and Cambridge), good size university libraries (Stanford, UCLA, and Harvard), smaller university libraries (Dartmouth, Delaware, and New Mexico), and local libraries (Santa Monica and Los Angeles).
22. Trevor Wilson. *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).
23. Sigmund Freud. "Thoughts for the Times on War 1915," *On War, Sex and Neurosis*. (New York: Arts and Science Press, 1947).
24. Nosheen Khan. *Women's Poetry of the First World War*. (New York: Harvester Wheatshear, 1988).
25. Samuel Hynes. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. (London: The Bodley Head, 1990).
26. This is a problematic section. For most of the section, he discusses the disillusionment resulting from the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Leighton died in December, 1915, long before the Somme began. He does not make this distinction. Nevertheless, Leighton does give a good example of what he is discussing.
27. He also discusses throughout the war and after the impact and growing tyranny of DORA.
28. In a conversation, Anne Mellor wondered if the same experiences might have been viewed differently by men and women. Men might comfort because it could be them next time; women might comfort because of a mother-instinct. This is an important area of inquiry, but before it can be accomplished, the women must be visible in order to know they did the same sorts of things at all.

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