Writers at war

Bertrand Russell was just one man largely thinking and acting alone – and therein rests his reputation. But to what extent – whether in private or public – did similar anti-war concerns to those of Russell and the Bloomsbury circle express themselves among the intelligentsia? The bulk of the evidence derives from the letters that sped back and forth between contemporary writers, artists and thinkers, during a time of unexpected conflict – a conflict that provoked much doubt and debate.

In common with Bertrand Russell, E.M. Forster believed the war to be partly due to misdirected destructive energies; forces that could be channelled during times of peace into creative efforts. In a letter to Siegfried Sassoon written as the conflict neared its end, Forster confirmed that ‘all vigour these days is mis-directed’ and that the human race needed time and the opportunity to re-align itself.1 What of further evidence of similarities of response amongst the wider literary intelligentsia who, though they did not take part in the actual fighting (see Chapter 5), could, as with Bloomsbury and Russell, regard the conflict from a particular aesthetic or humanistic standpoint?

In his letter to Sassoon, E.M. Forster also explained that his other hope for the future, though ‘very faint’, was for a League of Nations. This was a hope Forster shared both with his frequent correspondent Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and with other intellectuals such as the writer and ruralist Edward Carpenter, who wrote publicly on the war throughout its duration. Carpenter’s standpoint was derived from his background of mysticism rather than the statistical analysis of Leonard Woolf, for example, who worked slowly on academic reports for the Fabians during 1915 and 1916.2 Carpenter rushed out books, articles, letters and pamphlets on the war and also found time to produce an autobiography. His 1916 pamphlet Never Again (subtitled ‘A Protest and a Warning Addressed to the Peoples of Europe’) echoed Clive Bell’s Peace at Once of the previous year in arguing that war was ‘abhorrent to our common humanity’: the longer the war continued, the greater would become the impulses of hate and revenge. Carpenter’s focus on destructive impulses mirrored that of Russell; Carpenter cited Russell’s Principles of Social Reconstruction in his own Towards Industrial Freedom (1917) and highlighted the creative
impulses of men set against those impulses which were of a ‘Possessive’ (i.e. destructive) nature.

In his *The Healing of Nations* (1915), as well as the material loss of war and the mental and physical suffering, Carpenter also recognised that war released ‘passions’ – resulting in cruelty and vindictiveness – the energy of which, during peacetime, could have been put to good use. Carpenter’s idea of a world at peace was one without the economic rivalries of nations bound by the dictates of commerce and, more importantly, without the dehumanisation brought about by scientific advances – advances which were now being used for the malign purposes of war, to take life with such a destructive force that the human spirit could ‘hardly hold up against’. Carpenter placed his faith in the simple peasant or agriculturalist, ‘the one honest man in the community’, a figure close to the land, a creator of food and therefore life who perceived, without illusion, the true ‘foolery of war’.

Carpenter’s appreciation of the life-force represented by the countryside as a contrast to the slaughter and destruction in France and Gallipoli was matched in a quiet way by Leonard Woolf, who later recalled in his autobiography walking to the Sussex coast from Asheham House with his wife on the day war broke out and wrote, ‘I see that part of the civilisation which the war destroyed was the environment, the country and the country life, through which Virginia and I walked that day.’ Woolf spent most of the war in the country, writing and caring for his mentally-ill wife. If one went for a walk on the downs above Asheham, he recalled, ‘one could hear the incessant pounding of the guns on the Flanders front. And even when one did not hear them it was as though the war itself was perpetually pounding dully on one’s brain’.

Both Woolf and Carpenter looked to the future for consolation. Woolf was glad that the weight of the ‘fog and fetters’ of the Victorian age had been lifted but was concerned that something constructive, creative and free should take its place – hence his work in drafting plans for a League of Nations in order to provide a calm setting wherein this transformation could be given an opportunity to conclude itself satisfactorily.

Edward Carpenter was impassioned about the possibilities of what he identified as the ‘life within’, a life of the spirit which even death could not conquer. In common with E.M. Forster, Duncan Grant, David Garnett and others, Carpenter believed that experience of war (even from a distance) was important in the formation of reaction to it, especially that of the ‘life within’; ‘All these shattering experiences, whether in a nation’s career or in the career of an individual, cause one – they force one – to look into the bones of life and to get nearer its realities.’ At a time when supposedly civilised nations were acting ‘so contrary to the natural laws and instincts of humanity’, Carpenter championed the individual. ‘Let us recognise’, he wrote in *Never Again*, ‘the right and the duty of each man to ponder these world problems for himself: to play his part and to make his own voice heard in the solution of them.’ He raged against the
injustices of conscription; this ‘gross folly’ would prove to be the war’s moral low point, he warned. For, ‘to compel a man to fight, whether he will or not – in violation, perhaps, of his conscience, of his instinct, of his temperament – is an inexcusable outrage on his rights as a human being’.6

The emotional response of Edward Carpenter and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson to the war was matched by that of Henry James, who had also experienced an assault upon rational sensibility as soon as hostilities had commenced, writing on 5 August 1914 that:

The taper went out last night, and I am afraid I now kindle it again to a very feeble ray – for it’s vain to try to talk as if one weren’t living in a nightmare of the deepest dye. How can what is going on not be to one as a huge horror of blackness?7

James was at Rye on the Sussex coast when war was declared but soon went to London, leaving his studio as a refuge for some of the first refugees from Belgium, displaced by the advancing German army. He threw himself into Belgian relief work in the capital, the atmosphere of which he described as ‘monotonously magnificent’, while highlighting the inconceivability of the general populace towards the horrors occurring just over the ‘blue channel’. He pointed out to his fellow writer Hugh Walpole that every former social convention and habit had broken down and that life in the city made his former life at Rye seem to fade into ‘grey mists of insignificance’, while London itself had become grey – in ‘moral tone’ due to the war’s blunting of life’s usual compass points.

This warping of the values of the outside world severely affected James’s inner creative life. ‘I myself find concentration an extreme difficulty’, he wrote to Edmund Gosse after only two months of war, ‘the proportions of things have so changed and one’s poor old values received such a shock’.8 He set himself the goal of clinging onto and upholding his values ‘in the very interest of civilisation’ but admitted in the current climate of ‘measureless rush’ that this would be no easy task. James found the ‘unprecedented combination of size and suddenness’ very hard to accommodate in his personal, everyday world. Where others rushed to enlist or cheered the men to France, to James the conflict was the ‘Great Interruption’ and the experience of it he likened to living under a permanent dark cloud (the ‘funeral pall of our murdered civilisation’) which obscured the future and threw back ‘so livid a light’ on the past – a period which had seemed full of effort and promise and now gone to waste.

The war to James could only be an ‘unspeakable giveaway of the whole fool’s paradise of our past’.9 He was not above being stirred by sights of human endeavour, however. Ever since, as a young man, he had visited his brothers on active service in the American Civil War (James had then been unfit for service), the exploits of soldiery had held a fascination for him and, though appalled by the war itself and feeling himself to be ‘infirm and helpless at home with the women’, he was impressed by the bustle of preparation, writing that, ‘I find the general community, the whole scene of energy, immensely sustaining and inspiring – so great a thing … to be present at, that it almost salves over the
haunting sense of all the horrors.” While visiting the wounded at St Bartholomew’s hospital in London, James found himself amazed by the courage and steadfastness, moral as well as physical, of the returned soldiers. In his essay ‘The Long Wards’, which was included in The Book of the Homeless (edited by the hugely popular American novelist Edith Wharton to raise money for refugees), James marvelled that ‘the murderous impulse at the highest pitch’, experienced by the wounded soldiers, had left ‘so little distortion of the moral nature [my italics]’. James naturally expected that the nearer one came to the horrors of war, the more one’s moral sensibilities would suffer damage of some kind.

To some extent, James reconciled the differing experiences of himself and others to a question of age and having lived through years of hope and achievement. As he wrote to his friend Rhoda Broughton at the start of the war:

‘Black and hideous to me is the tragedy that gathers, and I’m sick beyond cure to have lived on to see it. You and I, the ornaments of our generation, should have been spared this wreck of our belief that through the long years we had seen civilisation grow and the worst become impossible … It seems to me to undo everything, everything that was ours …’

He took a similar line with his old Rhode Island friend, Margaret La Farge, bewailing to her that, ‘These are monstrous miseries for us, of our generation and age, to live into; but we wouldn’t not have lived – and yet this is what we get by it. I try to think it will be interesting – but have only got so far as to feel it sickening.’

Although, in contrast with Henry James, the dry, precise tone of George Bernard Shaw provided perhaps the most prominent intellectual commentary of his time on the war’s ebb and flow, Shaw had his emotional side, too. His overriding sympathy for the suffering of the troops of all nations was his Achilles heel in terms of his many critics. As Shaw’s biographer puts it, ‘His reasoning was impeccable; his offence emotional.’ Shaw referred at one point to Germany and Great Britain as ‘quarrelsome dogs’ and advised the soldiers of both sides to shoot their officers and return home. It was for statements such as this that Shaw found himself blacklisted by many public organs of news and comment, such as the Manchester Guardian, whose editor, C.P. Scott, regarded Shaw’s stance as one that could only ‘exercise and divide’ a readership at a time when the duty of public comment was to ‘encourage and unite’.

Naturally, the outspoken Shaw, never one for reticence, saw things differently; his ‘job’ and that of other commentators and intellectuals was, as he wrote to Bertrand Russell, to ‘make people serious about the war’, and to expose the ‘monstrous triviality’ of jingoistic patriotism. Michael Holroyd has pointed out that Shaw believed that, ‘it was the duty of representatives of art and literature in all countries to keep moral considerations above the nationalistic level of the war’. As Shaw wrote to Russell, it was important that thinkers and commentators (people who could ‘keep their heads’) conferred with
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one another from time to time, if only to reassure themselves that it was they who were sane and the outer world given over to madness. Hence Shaw’s advice to Clive Bell concerning Bell’s tribunal adjudicating over his declared conscientious objection (recognising that Bell would suffer from Shaw’s public support due to the built-up prejudice against him and that the tribunal would not accept Bell’s art criticism as work of national importance) and his anger when H.G. Wells, J.M. Barrie, G.K. Chesterton, playwright Harley Granville Barker, Oxford professor Gilbert Murray and forty-eight others (all those who supposedly possessed ‘the power of seeing what is really going on’) signed the War Propaganda Bureau’s jingoistic Wellington House declaration of September 1914 condemning Prussia’s ‘iron’ military bureaucracy and contrasting it with the lawful ideals of the Allies. 16 Also, though Russell identified the emotions of primitive destructiveness inherent in war, Shaw, with his ‘sophisticated reason’ and lack of Russell’s occasional despairing pessimism, could not always bring himself to comprehend the ‘primitive and irrational’ character of the war, despite an emotional element to his reasoning.

One of George Bernard Shaw’s stated reasons for making an end to war was the abandonment of the morality of right or wrong in favour of kill or be killed. This ethical reasoning was intermeshed with an emotional response to the loss of life. In common with Carpenter and especially Lowes Dickinson, Shaw deplored a situation whereby the youth of all nations was deprived of its potential creativity representing as it did, ‘the loss of so many young men any of whom may be a Newton or an Einstein, a Beethoven, a Michelangelo, a Shakespeare or even a Shaw. Or he may be what is of much more immediate importance: a good baker or a good weaver or builder.’ Shaw found himself unable to take sides between nations – his ‘quarrelsome dogs’; ‘I was as sorry for the young Germans who lay slain or mutilated in no-man’s land as for the British lads who lay beside them’, he wrote, ‘so I got no emotional satisfaction out of the war. It was to me a sheer waste of life.’ 17

In What I Really Wrote About the War, Shaw lamented the death from trench fever of Cecil Chesterton, the editor of the New Witness who had enlisted as a private, though palpably unfit. Chesterton had asked Shaw to review his The Perils of Peace even though he suspected – correctly – that Shaw would not agree with the content and would review the book accordingly. Though Shaw found Chesterton too bellicose on a professional basis, his death was to be personally mourned as a waste of creative talent. ‘It was hard enough to see any young man thrown into the common heap of cannon fodder’, Shaw recalled, ‘but when the young man, possessing a rare and highly valuable talent, was not replaceable, one’s hatred of the war bit fiercely in.’ 18

For Shaw, the enemy was not Germany but blind jingoism and militarism wherever they existed and in all nations and although he often criticised the British Government for not taking the right steps towards peace, he commented to his translator, the Viennese Siegfried Trebitsch, that if he had been born a...
German he would have attacked the German Government with ‘equal fierceness’ and indeed, Shaw’s The German Case Against Germany appeared in April 1916 in the New York Times.

In early January 1917, Shaw was invited by General Sir Douglas Haig to visit the Western Front and, although he was sceptical about the selection of places he would be allowed to see, he eventually agreed with his wife’s insistence that he had to observe at first hand the events he was commenting on. Once in France, Shaw asked to visit the ruined Ypres and was taken to survey the shattered Medieval Cloth Hall and later (with the accredited journalist Philip Gibbs) he viewed Vimy Ridge from St. Eloi, south of Ypres. Shaw noted the contrast between the projected image of the warrior and the ‘soulless labour’ that occupied most of the soldiers’ time. ‘He [the soldier] has no sight or knowledge of what he is doing’, commented Shaw, ‘he only hands on a shell or pulls a string. And a Beethoven or a baby dies six miles off.’19 Unsurprisingly, this was not printed until long after the war’s end. On his return to England Shaw censored his own articles for the Daily Chronicle (for which he was paid £200) and was so effective in this that only two objections were raised by the authorities.

Though he did not mention the casualty lists, Shaw was critical of the war’s cost and its evident waste: it was all ‘a hopeless moral muddle’, and he attempted to understand the motivations of those who, though opposed to the war in principle, still felt they had to become involved in the fighting. He concluded that some found that they could not vindicate ‘outraged morality’ by surrendering once the sword had been drawn and, in common with Bertrand Russell, he recognised general impulses in human nature towards conflict which ‘must finally be satisfied in nobler ways or sternly repressed or discarded’. The soldier’s experience was unique and for some involved a separate morality: ‘The soldier says that war is hell; but he does not say that it is a crime.’ Shaw reasoned that when a man became a soldier and experienced the front, he ceased to blame Germany exclusively for the war and turned away from conventional notions of pacifist morality. The moral aspect to the waste, destruction, terror and suffering of the front as separate elements, although ‘codifying and human’ to observers and commentators, did not represent the ‘true nature’ of military experience.20

His articles for the Daily Chronicle marked a valuable turning point in the perception of Shaw and his stance on the war by the public at large. Hitherto, he had generally been judged as the author of ‘Common Sense About the War’ which had appeared as an eighty page supplement to the New Statesman in November 1914 (which Shaw had spent the preceding three months working on). He had refused to make the journey to London for the War Propaganda Bureau’s meeting of literati at Wellington House (despite his comment to Russell that intellectuals should not miss opportunities to pass the time of day, occasionally, during the war). His ‘Common Sense’ had found Shaw echoing publicly
what he had been expressing privately to friends such as Mrs Patrick Campbell and Siegfried Trebitsch: namely that the war was a ‘perpetual Waterloo’ and that a civilisation which was ‘tearing itself apart’ had failed utterly. Shaw’s criticisms and solutions (including a ‘League of Peace’) contained within his personal manifesto had seen him roundly condemned and he had been forced to step down from the two committees of the Society of Authors and resign both his membership of the Dramatists’ Club and his directorship of the *New Statesman* in 1916. Although he was also struck off a list of proposed names for a post-war Reconstruction Committee by Lloyd George, Shaw continued his chairmanship of the Fabian Research Department throughout the war.

In January 1915, Leonard Woolf had been engaged as secretary of a subcommittee of this research department to formulate Fabian policy on peace and the future prevention of war. His report, published as ‘International Government’ with the *New Statesman* in July 1915, had been studied two months earlier by Shaw, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and others at a meeting in the imposing yet calm setting of the Lake District. This led to the formation of a ‘definite scheme’ for a League of Nations which was announced within the annual report of the Fabian Research Department for the year ending March 1917. In addition to his work for the department, Shaw had also continued to give lectures throughout the conflict, most notably his participation in the series of autumn Fabian lectures, beginning in 1914 around the time of the appearance of ‘Common Sense About the War’. The lecture series of 1915 had been entitled ‘The World after the War’ and although three hundred people were turned away from the first lecture on 26 October, ‘The Illusions of War’, press reports of the lectures had been suppressed, with the exception of the *Manchester Guardian*. Shaw had also given the fifth lecture of the series in which he declared that the first action of a war should be the formation of a Peace Council to identify the motivations of the conflict in order to more swiftly bring it to a close. The 1916 lecture series was given the title ‘The World in Chains’, with Shaw giving the initial and concluding lectures on ‘Life’ and ‘Religion’ respectively.

By the time of the 1917 series of Fabian lectures, collectively titled ‘The Britannic Alliance and World Politics’, and following the publication of his reports from the Western Front, Shaw’s public position was more respected, due partly to a growing acceptance of his forthright opinions. By this point, Shaw had also spent a year campaigning publicly against the treatment of conscientious objectors such as Clifford Allen of the N.C.O. (later Lord Allen of Hurtwood), Rutland Boughton (the Director of the Glastonbury Music Festival) and Eric Chappelow, whom Shaw was persuaded by Bertrand Russell and W.B. Yeats to support in the pages of the *Nation*.

Russell had been in the chair to introduce Shaw’s initial lecture of the 1915 Fabian autumn series, and Shaw later advised Russell to plead his own case after Russell’s arrest in 1918 as well as offering a draft defence via Dorothy Mackenzie to whom he wrote:
If Russell ... is to be savagely punished for writing about the war as a Pacifist and as
a philosopher, the intimidation of the Press will be carried thereby to a point in
England which it has not yet attained in Germany or Austria and if it really be an
advantage to be a free country, that advantage will go to Germany.21

This was symptomatic of Shaw's reasoning that it was better for intellectuals
and writers to work together against the strictures of war. In July 1917 Shaw
dined at J.M. Barrie's in the company of Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and Thomas
Hardy; three months earlier, he had joined with Wells, Bennett and John
Galsworthy in protesting at the ban on the export and foreign sales of the
Nation, imposed due to a perceived editorial policy of preaching peace by ne-
gotiation.

In 1915, Shaw had begun work on 'More Common Sense About the War'
and though this was never published, parts of it appeared in other articles and
writings. One section was later used to form Shaw's appeal for a 'Coalition of
the Intelligentsia' which appeared largely in response to the introduction of
conscription in January 1916 and which Shaw, like Edward Carpenter, later
viewed as the 'profoundest change' brought about by wartime conditions – the
'lesson' of the war. In his appeal, Shaw attempted to rally the forces of the mind
and of creation against the 'stale' and 'soul-destroying' work of the Govern-
ment. 'Perhaps the grimmest feature of this war, as all wars, is the helplessness
of the intelligentsia', he wrote, adding that:

We loathe war as an abomination forced upon us by crude and corrupt people long
after we have morally outgrown it. Being unable to suppress it, we would like to
obtain control of it sufficiently to dictate its aims and define its limits. But, though
we write the most intelligent and interesting and suggestive articles, we might as well
discharge popguns. If it were not for the attacks we make on one another, our utter-
ances would pass without notice. They remain in any case without effect. Intelli-
gence is not organised: everything else is, more or less. The War Office has not so
much brains as the brim of Mr. [G.K.] Chesterton's hat; the Cabinet has not as much
knowledge of political science or even of the everyday facts of four-fifths of English
society as Mr. Arnold Bennett's umbrella: Maxim Gorky and Romain Rolland and
H.G. Wells know more of the real needs of civilisation than all the Governments of
Europe. Yet these clever people count for nothing in war.22

By 1918, Shaw and his opinions were becoming respectable, and he was the
featured speaker at the annual meeting of the Society of Authors at Central
Hall, Westminster, in May of that year. He used the occasion to point out that
those that ran the war were blind to the importance of the threatened cultural
life that struggled to exist under the weight of the conflict. The following month
he favourably reviewed a performance of Wagner's Die Walküre for the Nation,
commenting specifically on the enthusiastic reaction of the audience and chal-
lenging the authorities, in this new climate, to, 'bring along your Dora [the
Defense of the Realm Act] and hale me to the Tower'.23 Shaw spent the final
months of the war working on his play Back to Methuselah.
When Shaw had called for a ‘Coalition of the Intelligentsia’, Arnold Bennett had remarked to a friend that the idea was ‘idiotic’. Bennett, the popular author of The Old Wives’ Tale (1908), had also remarked to his literary agent on the appearance of Shaw’s earlier ‘Common Sense About the War’ that some of the detail was ‘absurd’. However, he had admitted that about two-thirds of it was ‘strictly first class’ and overall it was ‘quite unequalled’. Although Bennett did not agree with his fellow writer on the causes of war, the fallacy of the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and the position of Belgium, he stated in the New York Times on 18 November 1914 that the greatest quality of ‘Common Sense’ was its courage in saying things ‘that no one else has been able to say’, in terms of ‘magnificent, brilliant and convincing commonsense’. This was praise indeed from Bennett as he and Shaw rarely saw eye to eye on anything.

Bennett attended the Propaganda Bureau’s Wellington House meeting in September 1914. However, during the same month, he described war as ‘grotesque, a monstrous absurdity’ in his article ‘Let us Realise’ for Harper’s Weekly. A month earlier, he had confided to his journal that he regarded the war as a ‘mistake on our part’. However, he had concluded sadly, it had also been inevitable and hence resistance was useless. Bennett then developed what he described publicly as a ‘stolid attitude’ towards the conflict, regarding it as a last battle between the old concept of a noble war for territorial power and modern ideals of democratic and social change. Bennett’s biographer has remarked that he, ‘saw the true issue of war not as the struggle for territory but as the struggle for ideals – the ideas of democracy, social justice and peace’. He had no love for the German military caste or European diplomats in general (except Sir Edward Grey), and he declared them all to be infantile, ignoble and ‘altogether rascally’ in articles for the Daily News and Saturday Evening Post during the second month of the war.

Placing his trust in himself, early in the war Bennett became a representative on the Thorpe Division Emergency Committee for his local area, Essex, established in order to assist the evacuation of civilians in the event of a German invasion. This was only the beginning of his practical involvement in the running of the war. He became the permanent chairman of the Wounded Allies Relief Committee and in March 1915 was asked to tour the Western Front only a few weeks after the first newspaper correspondents. The practical result of this visit was seven propagandist articles, six in Over There, published in 1915 and one for the Daily News in September of that year.

In Over There his disgust at the destruction he witnessed in France and Belgium was clear; he prophesied that the shattered Ypres would become a tourist attraction full of visitors ‘like staring sheep’ and hotels, touts and tours. ‘Nevertheless’, he concluded, ‘the thing must come to pass, and it is well that it should come to pass. The greater the number of people who see Ypres for themselves, the greater the hope of progress for mankind.’ The destruction of Rheims moved him to write that:
It is monstrous that one population should overrun another with murder and destruction from political covetousness as that two populations should go to war concerning a religious creed. Indeed, it is more monstrous. It is an obscene survival, a phenomenon that has strayed, through some negligence of fate, into the wrong century.

For Bennett, this was all symbolic of his belief, shared by other writers and intellectuals such as Lowes Dickinson, that the progress of civilisation had been stalled. He had expressed his view early on in his article ‘The Ant Hill’ for the *Daily News* of 24th October 1914 when he stated that the war had come about because civilisation had failed in its duty to ignore the tenets of anarchy and competition born of jealousy.

In his controversial novel of 1918, *The Pretty Lady*, Bennett has his main character realise that ‘the sense of its [the war’s] measureless scope was growing’ and that the conflict (which ‘transcended judgements’ and ‘defied conclusions’) had sprung not from specific crimes, but ‘out of secret, invisible roots of humanity’. The novel concerned the love of a deported French courtesan for a middle-aged English bachelor, and was set in a London under attack. The supreme lesson of the war was ‘its revelation of what human nature actually was’. In this recognition that the war had evolved from the latent darker side of humanity, Bennett was here echoing Bertrand Russell’s similar conception of a human race that had to be constantly on its guard against malign impulses and hence diverted into creative pursuits.

Bennett’s novel was attacked repeatedly in print: H.M. Richardson’s review in the *Sunday Chronicle* of 14 April 1918 appeared under the title ‘An Ignoble New Novel’. Bennett’s book would, according to Richardson, ‘destroy the moral [sic] of the people’. The novel’s supposedly immoral and irreligious character also incited the ire of the Catholic Federation and the Catholic Truth Society.

Some reviews were more positive: W.L. Courtney in the *Daily Telegraph* of 5 April described the novel as ‘tremendously up-to-date’. Perhaps the most interesting comment came from James Douglas in the *Star* of 5 April, in which he wrote that had the novel appeared before the war it could have been appreciated as a study of decadent London life:

But the war forces the critic to set up a severe standard of aim and intention for art as well as for other forms of national energy. No artist had any right to fall below that standard of aim and intention. If he does so deliberately, he is not a good citizen. It is his duty to enoble his readers and to inspire them with ideals which will make them better fit to do their part in the national struggle.

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Bennett had done the country an ‘ill turn’ by writing this book during the war when ‘every English pen ought to be a clean, shining weapon’ in order to fight for citizens who, as Douglas was forced to admit, ‘are in sore need of mental and moral sustenance’. This was no time to ‘regale our hurt minds with glimpses of the nether world’.

Bennett spent the latter half of the war in increasing detachment, severing his links with the Thorpe committee and turning his attention to the issue of
social stress generated by the war and criticism of the handling of the introduction and after-effects of conscription. He sided with the forces of liberalism on all issues of legislation affecting social issues and attacked the tribunals and medical boards for their ignorance and incompetence. However, despite describing the Northcliffe press as ‘the stunt press’ in the *New Statesman*, in May 1918 he accepted Lord Beaverbrook’s offer to become director of British propaganda in France; by September 1918 Bennett controlled all international British propaganda except that in enemy countries.

Arnold Bennett’s final immersion in the practicalities of the war was mirrored in opposite terms by Thomas Hardy, who had also attended C.F.G. Masterman’s 1914 call to literary arms – the meeting at Wellington House. By the end of the war, Hardy was working steadily on his autobiography and his next collection of new (and old) poems. His previous and largest collection, *Moments of Vision*, which had appeared in November 1917, had exhibited a ‘new human tone’, compared to his earlier *Poems of War and Patriotism*. The poems of the 1917 collection were, according to Hardy’s biographer, ‘wholly on a human scale … their concern for human failing celebrates true humanity’.30

Hardy had been deeply affected by the deaths in 1915 of both his beloved sister and Frank George, the ‘heir’ to his home, Max Gate, in Dorset. George, a 2nd Lieutenant in the 5th Dorsets had been killed at Gallipoli. It was from this year that Hardy became more thoughtful and reclusive while still receiving a constant stream of visitors including Virginia Woolf and Siegfried Sassoon. Although he felt that Great Britain was impelled to fight, had strongly disagreed with the Christmas Truce of 1914 and allowed producer and playwright Harley Granville-Barker to mount a popular patriotic adaptation of scenes from his epic poem set one hundred years earlier, *The Dynasts*, in the month preceding the ‘truce’,31 in truth, Hardy had always been cautious about the war and its effects as well as his own public attitude to it. He responded to an invitation to comment on the war from the *Daily News* in August 1914 with, ‘I do not feel impelled to say anything at present.’ This he sensibly ascribed to the insufficiency of available data; later in the war he would publicly support the *Cambridge Magazine’s* inclusion within its pages of translated extracts from the foreign press.

In reality, he and his wife were horrified with the uncertainty of the first weeks of the war, and Hardy felt his creativity to be adversely affected, writing to Sydney Cockerell (the Curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge):

> The recognition that we are living in a more brutal age than that, say, of Elizabeth ... does not inspire one to write hopeful poetry, or even conjectural prose, but simply make one sit still in apathy, and watch the clock spinning backwards, with a mild wonder if, when it gets back to the Dark Ages, and the sack of Rome, it will ever move forward again to a new Renaissance and a new literature.32

He recognised that the regularity of his correspondence was becoming ‘fitful’ and blamed the mental pressure of ‘this hideous European tragedy’, while being
guarded in his reaction to reports of German atrocities in Belgium, commenting that, ‘the whole thing is a mystery to thoughtful Englishmen’.

‘Nothing effectual will be done in the cause of peace’, Hardy wrote, ‘till the sentiment of Patriotism be freed from the narrow meaning attaching to it in the past (and still upheld by Junkers and Jingoists) – and be extended to the whole globe.’ This comment was made to Percy Ames, the Secretary of the Royal Society of Literature, to whom Hardy wrote supporting the idea of an Entente Committee to promote an ‘intellectual entente’ among friendly countries and also a Memorandum (from the report of the Society’s Educational Subcommittee) proposing principles of international education to uphold ethical ideals of peace. This, though on a wider scale, was not far removed from Shaw’s concept of intellectuals coming together to promote peace. Hardy apologised to Ames that he could not attend the Entente Committee which was to be composed of distinguished Fellows of the Society. By this stage in the war Hardy and his wife had retreated to Max Gate: ‘living uneventful lives … feeling no enterprise for going about and seeing people while the issue of the great conflict is in the balance’. The only physical reminder of the existence of the war was some young German prisoners of war who had been set to work in the Hardy’s garden. ‘They are admirable fellows, and it does fill one with indignation that thousands of such are led to slaughter by the ambitions of Courts and Dynasties.’

Although Hardy spent most of the war at Max Gate, the steady stream of visitors, letters and newspapers and journals such as the *Cambridge Magazine* kept him informed of the progress of both the war itself and those affected by it, especially when it interfered with the creativity of his fellow writers. ‘I am sorry to hear that [John] Masefield has been aged by his war experiences’, he wrote to Sydney Cockerell in January 1917, ‘Yet a man of deep feeling like him could not avoid it after coming in contact with the tragic scenes in France. It is grievous to think too that his writing of verse will probably be hindered for a time.’

The poet (and later Poet Laureate) John Masefield was thirty-six in 1914. He had volunteered at the outbreak of hostilities but had been rejected on medical grounds. However, by February 1915 he had gone out to France as a Red Cross orderly. After being shocked by the ‘horror, terror and anxiety mixed’ of the wounded he planned to create a mobile field hospital which would operate nearer to the front and spent the summer of 1915 inspecting French military hospitals, which only served to increase his horror of the situation. Although the start of the war had found him in a mood of ‘simple patriotism’, and many of his letters express strong anti-German sentiment, his experience of conditions in France led him to admit that, ‘Probably nine tenths of each country involved would be glad to end it now. I would, God knows, if there were any chance of its not springing up again.’ The military hospitals he had encountered were ‘fearful places’ and possessed, according to him, a ‘disregard … for life which shocks continually; not that we can blame them now, in this upheaval. I could weep all day for pity of these brave fellows here.’

"A war of individuals"
By August 1915, Masefield was at Gallipoli with a nautical ambulance service using funds raised by himself. It was this experience, he wrote, that ‘made me very old’. Despite his emotional reaction, Masefield felt a need for constant war-related activity, perhaps to divert him from his inner disquiet concerning the conflict. He returned to France in August 1916, following an exhausting lecture tour of America, to gather information concerning voluntary aid from America to the Allies in the form of medical units and supplies. The year 1916 saw the publication of his *Gallipoli* (based on his observance of military operations in the Near East), and the writing of *The Old Front Line* (covering the Somme offensive) which appeared the following year. He remained in France until June 1917 and saw as much of life at the front as he was permitted. On a sunny day in March he visited the ruined town of Peronne and wrote to his regular correspondent Margaret Bridges that, ‘the sight of all this order and niceness and beauty, all lit up in its defilement, made the heart ache’.37

Like Hardy, Masefield was wary of the English press, at one point referring to it collectively as the ‘last enemy’. He condemned as ‘ghastly’ the state of affairs whereby foreign sales of the *Nation* were suppressed while the ‘howling and foaming’ of the ‘patriotic’ press continued without abeyance. The final year of Masefield’s war was spent on a further lecture tour of America, followed by talks to army camps and work on his book describing the Somme offensive which would appear after the war’s end. Although his books on the war meant that he was hardly idle in a literary sense, Hardy’s concern had been for Masefield’s ‘writing of verse’ and the future Laureate concentrated mainly on rural subjects for his poetry of the war years, such as *The Cold Cotswolds* and *Lollingdon Downs* (both 1917). The realities of the conflict prevented Masefield from expressing his true thoughts on the war in verse form like, for example, Siegfried Sassoon (discussed in Chapter 5).

Masefield’s public opinions on the war and its conduct were limited to his American lectures, at which he was heckled over his presentation of the Near-Eastern campaign, and also to his books; the chivalric, semi-mystical tone of *Gallipoli* was an attempt to refute the criticism of what Masefield would later and privately refer to the whole Gallipoli campaign as ‘that insane move’. His private thoughts on the war are his most revealing. After visiting a wallpapered and electrically-supplied German dugout at Beaumont Hamel in 1917, he was moved to comment, ‘To the devil with all this talk of Boche efficiency. War is a degradation of life and these dugouts are fit only for the degraded beings who like war. Paupers would refuse them in times of peace.’38

Another literary figure who had met at Wellington House in September 1914 with Masefield, Hardy and Bennett was the novelist and playwright John Galsworthy, the author of moralistic dramas such as *Strife* and *Justice*. In common with Masefield and Hardy, Galsworthy distrusted what he called ‘our press’, referring to reporters and editors, with a few exceptions, as ‘a mischievous lot of irresponsibles’, though he differed from Masefield’s overt distrust of
German militarism in that he ultimately viewed each side as equally to blame and was not above being critical of his own side; as he wrote to a friend in 1915, ‘I don’t very much admire the British character … we have no philosophy. The man who has no philosophy, who does not know what he wants, but only that he means to have it, does not know when to stop.’ This could be seen as siding with Bertrand Russell’s view of the destructive element in the human character being given free reign due to a lack of conception or understanding of the philosophical and creative side to life. Galsworthy continued:

We are told that we are fighting for Belgium, fighting for France, fighting against Autocracy, fighting for our existence. Some of us may be fighting for all or any of these reasons but my instinct tells me that, once it began, we have been and shall go on fighting because the other fellows said they were better men than we; and we shall simply be unable to stop till we have proved to them that they are not.39

Galsworthy also differed from Masefield in that his public utterances tended to mirror his private thoughts from the start. On the outbreak of war, Galsworthy’s reaction was similar to that of Henry James. He was appalled at the suddenness of the conflict and entered ‘Blacker and blacker!’ in his diary for 1 August. The following day he recorded how he had gone riding ‘to distract the thought’ and complained of an inability to work properly; ‘I try not to think of all the poor creatures who are suffering and will suffer so terribly’, he wrote, ‘but how not to? Wrote some words of Peace, but shan’t send them anywhere. What’s the use of whispering in a hurricane?’ On 4 August 1914, with Great Britain now fully involved, he described his feelings thus:

We are in … The horror of the thing keeps coming over one in waves; and all the happiness has gone out of life. I can’t keep still, and I can’t work … If this war is not the death of Christianity, it will be odd. We need a creed that really applies to life instead of taking it.40

With his lack of faith in whispering, Galsworthy wasted no time in attempting to shout above the noise of ‘the hurricane’. He penned ‘First Thoughts on the War’ that autumn for the American *Scribner’s Magazine*, referring to the conflict as, ‘the grand defeat of all Utopians, dreamers, poets, philosophers, idealists, humanitarians, lovers of peace and the arts; bag and baggage they are thrown out of a world that has for a time no use for them’.41 As in his diary, he referred to the war as representing the failure of hypocritical religion. Like Masefield, he would try, via articles in various American monthly periodicals, to explain to the American citizens England’s position on the war. In doing this, Galsworthy could calmly distance himself from the emotional turbulence of his personal thoughts and those of the British press. Also like Masefield, he made use of money for humanitarian ends, dedicating his American earnings to the various relief funds that he wrote appeals for in the national press and, in common with Henry James, he concerned himself with the plight of Belgian refugees, arranging for a number of them to be given placements in Devon.
Galsworthy was of a naturally sensitive nature; his niece later commented that the war had ‘damaged him terribly because he felt it so’ and that it ‘ate into his capital as a writer – he gave too much’. Although he believed that the causes of democracy, justice and ‘all that is sacred to true civilisation’ was the responsibility of the Allies, unlike many others he could not see how the state of the world was going to be improved by the war. ‘The reaction from so prolonged a bout of self-sacrifice and heroism is likely to be tremendous’, he wrote and warned that, ‘we may look for less brotherhood even than existed before, and that was little enough’, before adding crucially, ‘The whole edge of sensibility is likely to be blunted for a long while’.

For Galsworthy, there existed two types of modern man: those who possessed an ‘extra sensitiveness’ and those who did not. In other words, those who appreciated beauty and those who could not. ‘Would there still be war in a world the most of whose dwellers had the sense of beauty?’ he asked in ‘Second Thoughts on the War’, again mirroring Russell’s championship of creative values as an antidote to conflict. As in his ‘First Thoughts’, he bemoaned the fact that those individuals who appreciated beauty, ‘are tragically compelled to live and bear their part in this hell, created by a world of which they are not’, and warned that:

the war .. will not bring them one jot nearer one to the other … there is certainly no chance that the sense of beauty can increase within measurable time, so as to give its possessors a majority. No chance that wars will cease for that reason. The little world of beauty lovers will for many ages yet, perhaps always, be pitifully in tow, half drowned by the following surge of the big insensitive world when it loses for a time what little feeling for harmony it has, and goes full speed ahead.

Galsworthy saw his writer’s role as a clear one; given an underlying feeling among all men that ‘we have grown out of … savagery’, the only ‘true realities’ lay in a future of peace: ‘the great epic of our time is the expression of man’s slow emergence from the blood-loving animal he was. To that great epic the modern pen has long been consecrate, and is not likely to betray its trust.’ ‘Second Thoughts on the War’, although like its predecessor first written for Scribner’s Magazine, was included with ‘First Thoughts’ in A Sheaf which was published in Great Britain in 1916. The volume concluded with a repeated warning that the war was ‘a terrible calamity’ and as such, ‘it will not leave an improved world’.

As in the cases of some of his fellow writers, Galsworthy lent his public support to the campaign against the treatment of conscientious objectors. In the case of one particular individual, his brother-in-law George Sauter, who was imprisoned as an enemy alien in Wakefield Prison, Galsworthy attempted to alert Asquith (Prime Minister until 1916), Winston Churchill and Herbert Samuel (the Home Secretary) to his plight and was Sauter’s only visitor in the thirteen months of his confinement. Galsworthy also offered to testify in support of the defendant’s character at the tribunal of David Garnett and wrote a letter to The Times in defence of H.W. Massingham and the Nation when the
journal’s overseas circulation was prohibited. In spring 1918, Galsworthy assumed the editorship of *Reveille*, a magazine which featured contributions from distinguished authors and artists as well as articles of a more practical nature on rehabilitation for the benefit of the disabled soldier. The August issue sold more than 30,000 copies, and Galsworthy spent the remainder of the war working on his anti-patriotic xenophobic novel *The Burning Spear* which would appear under the pseudonym of ‘A.R.P. – M.’ in April 1919. The same year saw the publication of *Another Sheaf* which was composed of articles written in the latter half of the conflict, one of which, ‘The Sacred Work’, was written at the end of the war in support of the disabled and wounded.

To Galsworthy, the ‘folding back’ of the darkness of war in the immediate post-war period revealed ‘an earth of cripples’ with the ‘field of the world … strewn with half-living men’. He observed that, ‘loveliness which is the creation of the human spirit; that flowering of directed energy which we know as civilisation, that manifold and mutual service which we call progress – all stand mutilated and faltering’. As he had warned Massingham of the *Nation* during the dark days of 1917, ‘We cannot, as reasonable human beings, let our warped and stunted stocks deteriorate further, and the little remains of our dignity and sense of beauty ooze away utterly underneath pressure of machinery and of the herd of life.’

H.G. Wells had joined John Galsworthy around C.F.G. Masterman’s table on 2 September 1914 and both Wells and Galsworthy believed that the cause of the Allies was just, representing, in Galsworthy’s phrase, ‘true civilisation’ pitted against the autocracy of the German system. Wells wrote in his pamphlet *The War and Socialism*, that the war was, ‘a conflict of cultures, and nothing else in the world’. To Wells, Germany represented a ‘nest of evil ideas’ and the war was a material consequence of German ‘false philosophy and foolish thinking’. The purpose of the war was to ‘clear the heads’ of the Germans and their allies and to ‘keep the heads of our own people clear’.

However, Wells possessed a more robust moral nature than Galsworthy and was initially less willing to distinguish the potential negative effects of the conflict upon the civilisation being fought over. While Galsworthy swiftly perceived that potentially less brotherhood would exist after the war and that sensibilities were under threat, Wells famously convinced himself that the war was worth fighting ‘to end all wars’ and spent the first months of the war penning numerous articles, many of which were of a propagandist nature. Wells’s targets included conscientious objectors and the pacifist movement, as in his *War and the Future* – an attack he later regretted. For Wells, the personal solution of the pacifists was too simple – a ‘merely negative attitude’ was not facing the reality of a world wherein, as he stated in his autobiography, ‘life is conflict’ and peace must sometimes be kept by force.

As the war progressed, however, Wells – in common with some of the other Wellington House writers – began to harbour doubts over the continuation of a
conflict that revealed only the worst in human nature and looked set to wreck civilisation. While not losing his belief that the Germans were responsible for the outbreak of the conflict, Wells communicated his doubts in his novel *Mr Britling Sees It Through*, which first appeared in October 1916 and which became a bestseller in America. Wells later wrote that although Mr Britling was not a self-portrait (unlike Mr Britling, Wells had no son killed in action, for example), the fictional character was deliberately representative of a man of Wells's 'type and class' and the novel was intended to convey the 'sense of tragic disillusionment in a civilised mind as the cruel facts of war rose steadily to dominate everything else in life', a process which had obviously affected Wells himself, who had admitted in *The War That Will End War* that life under the war was at times a 'waking nightmare'. Mr Britling represented the 'intelligent brain', shared by Wells and other individuals, that Wells later described in his autobiography as being unable to be anything other than 'profoundly changed' by the experience of the Great War; 'our vision of life was revised in outline and detail alike'.

The conflict brought Mr Britling – and, by implication, Wells – to a realisation of what modern war represented. The 'essence of modern war' was:

the killing off of the young. It is the destruction of the human inheritance, it is the spending of all the life and material of the future upon present-day hate and greed … until the whole fabric of our civilisation, that has been so slowly and laboriously built up, is altogether destroyed.

Britling/Wells here echoed the fears of Bloomsbury and also, in the realisation of the 'spending' of the material of the future on present-day hatred, the concerns of Bertrand Russell contained within his *Principles of Social Reconstruction*.

The war swept the old order away and Wells had at first, like Edmund Gosse, welcomed this scouring away of Edwardian indolence and had looked forward to a new world order. However, he found that the conflict, in a wave of destruction that was both physical and mental, overtook his thoughts and rushed ahead. 'We couldn’t get out of it for a time and think it out’, he remembered, ‘and the young men in particular were given no time to think. They thought it out in the trenches – and in No Man’s Land.’

An overview of celebrated writers and their reactions to the Great War would not be complete without an examination of D.H. Lawrence, one of the most extreme examples of individuality in his response to the conflict. Lawrence operated within neither the group of Wellington House propagandists nor the circle of Bloomsbury artists and yet, though an outsider like him, did not affect Shaw’s dry aloofness. Lawrence felt the war to a greater depth than most other writers and was at the same time able to articulate this feeling with passion and clarity – this alone makes him worthy of attention, in addition to the fact that the themes of his response were mirrored by other well-known writers, and echoed later by less-celebrated individuals.
D.H. Lawrence felt no desire to enlist; soldiers seen drilling at Worthing were to him ‘teeming insects’ while the job of soldiering to him was ‘the annul-
ing of all one stands for ... the nipping of the very germ of one’s being’.
He felt keenly the humiliation of undergoing the call-up procedure following the introduction of conscription in 1916, describing the experience as, ‘a degrada-
tion, a losing of individual form and distinction’. In addition, there existed the threat that the war posed to Lawrence’s creative powers – a threat recognised by his friend Lady Ottoline Morrell, who had read and appreciated Lawrence’s The Prussian Officer and had first invited the Lawrences to dine in January 1915 (they were her first guests at Garsington Manor and shared a mutual friend in the critic Gilbert Cannan who accompanied them to the Morrell’s new house on a later visit the same year).

Lady Ottoline described the war hitting her ‘ultra-sensitive’ friend Lawrence like an avalanche and dislodging all his hopes for mankind. The outer turmoil of the war was balanced by a mental upheaval within Lawrence which, ‘drew him away from his natural course of creativeness’. Cynthia Asquith – the Prime Minister’s daughter-in-law and possibly Lawrence’s closest confidante – observed and later recalled his quest for a new set of values and ‘moral equiva-
 lent’ of an alternative life from that which existed under the war. To her it was clear that Lawrence saw the seeming fulfilment found in conflict as the confession of failure of mankind, though her husband Herbert saw that Lawrence was alternately full of hatred and fascination when confronted by the full colours of war, though he concluded that Lawrence’s ‘passionate individualism had no place in an embattled world, whose urgent commands were in obvious conflict with his whole theory of living’. Lawrence’s friend John Middleton Murry (the husband of Katherine Mansfield) went further and stated in his autobiog-
raphy, Between Two Worlds, that Lawrence repudiated the war because of a feeling of ‘kinship’ with it – an inherent ‘blood-lust’. This was ironic, in that Lawrence famously accused Bertrand Russell of being ‘the super-war-spirit’ when they quarrelled over plans for a joint lecture series and Russell’s desire to re-
main a ‘free agent’.

One of Lawrence’s reactions to the growing unease with Russell (and the rest of Bloomsbury) was to found The Signature with Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield and including within it contributions from the likes of Gilbert Cannan and, it was hoped, Russell himself. The magazine was to be financed from Lawrence’s advance for The Rainbow, which had been rejected by the publisher Methuen in the first week of the war. Lawrence wrote to Russell commenting on the venture and stating that he himself intended to be ‘the preacher’, Mansfield the originator of satirical sketches and Murry ‘the revealer of the individual soul’ in terms of its ‘real freedom’. Cannan was left, in Lawrence’s barbed comment, to ‘flounder prehistorically’. The article that Russell sent to Lawrence in response, ‘The Danger to Civilization’, revealed Russell’s fear of the war’s effect upon, ‘that common heritage of thought and art and ...
humane way of life into which we were born’, and upon Europe’s ‘mental advancement’, that Lawrence conversely thought had led civilisation astray from the more vital aspects of life.

Russell’s article was the start of the rapidly widening breach between the two thinkers and their worlds. The first issue of *The Signature* appeared on 4 October 1915 but soon afterwards Murry’s brother was killed on active service by a grenade and he and Mansfield withdrew from the publication, leaving only Lawrence and his growing hostility towards Russell and his friends. In August, in a letter to Cynthia Asquith, Lawrence had accused Russell and those who supported ‘all international peace-for-ever and democratic control talks’ of striving merely towards ‘an outward system of nullity’ which would allow them, within their own souls to be ‘independent little gods, referred nowhere and to nothing’, or ‘little mortal Absolutes, secure from question’.56

This bitter and independent stance represented the summation of Lawrence’s experience of the war so far. As we have seen, both Murry and Herbert Asquith recognised in Lawrence a fascination with the energies of war; Lawrence confessed to Lady Ottoline that, ‘if there was a restoring, creating influence equivalent to the destructive, one would not be so bled’. Paul Delany has written that Lawrence, ‘longed to take part in some collective enterprise that might be equally engrossing, equally purgative of selfish concerns, yet constructive rather than destructive’. This desire – on an individual level – reflected Russell’s concepts of social reconstruction and yet, with regard to the attitude of Bloomsbury and the anti-war lobby:

Lawrence’s indignant temperament did not permit him to dissociate himself from the war, nor to judge it by the old standards of civility as the pacifists did ... If men were to give themselves over completely to hate, he saw no reason why he should not hate the haters – though at the same time refusing all literal participation in the massacres.57

On the outbreak of war, Lawrence had described his situation to Edward Marsh (‘patron’ of the Georgian poets) as suddenly existing in ‘a sort of coma’, a dream-world – ‘like one of those nightmares when you can’t move’. This was in stark contrast to the way in which he remembered the world before the war; ‘there was something in those still days’, he recalled to Mary Cannan, ‘before the war had gone into us, which was beautiful and generous – a sense of flowers rich in the garden ... now the whole world of it is lost’.58

Despite this loss, Lawrence soon came to believe (by November 1914) that it was the very business of the artist to try and define the war, ‘to follow it home to the heart of the individual fighters – not to talk in armies and nations and numbers – but to track it home – home – their war’.59 In common with other individuals with an anti-war disposition, Lawrence felt himself drawn to the activity at the front and admitted as much to Lady Ottoline in spring 1915, though in his case ‘not to shoot’ but rather as a bus conductor or some other non-combatant occupation that might afford him the chance to observe ‘their
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war’. However, Lawrence was always wary of what he later described in Aaron’s Rod (when commenting on the link between former soldiers) as the ‘hot seared burn of unbearable experience’, especially to one who intensely disliked the military machine; as he commented to the American poet Amy Lowell after his compulsory medical at Bodmin barracks:

There is something in military life that would kill me off, as if I were in an asphyxiating chamber ... the pure spirit of militarism is sheer death to a nature that is all constructive or social-creative ... is essentially destructive, destroying the individual ... it is bad. 60

Lawrence found an alternative method by which to ‘track’ the war home; a process which, he realised, existed within himself and his own reactions to the conflict. By the middle of the war, he commented to Lady Ottoline that he felt as if he had been fighting in spirit ‘every minute’ and, while describing himself as ‘too raw’ for the experience of combat to his friend Catherine Carswell, he justified himself by saying, ‘one fights too hard already, for the real integrity of one’s soul’. 61 This attitude remained with him for the remainder of the war; when his friend Richard Aldington (see Chapter 5) returned to France in April 1918, Lawrence commented that he felt it was harder to bear ‘the pressure of the vacuum’ of the domestic front that ‘the stress of congestion’ of its military equivalent. He was becoming more concerned with the condition of his inner being and, in the process, attempting to cut himself off from the attitudes of others, as evidenced by his split with Bertrand Russell. It was as if he needed to experience the war on his own terms alone, whatever state this might bring him to. As early as January 1915 Lawrence was describing himself as made ‘feeble and half alive’ by the war with a heart ‘as cold as a lump of dead earth’. He made many allusions to being brought metaphorically to a state of near death – the coma/nightmare state of the first weeks of war had become deeper and Lawrence now felt ‘corpse-cold’.

By the end of 1915, following his argument and subsequent split with Russell and the failure of The Signature, Lawrence began to talk of leaving Great Britain; if his soul was to be rendered ‘sightless’ by the war, then, he wrote, ‘let it ... be blind, rather than commit the vast wickedness of acquiescence’. Despite his criticism of Russell of championing the values of civilisation, Lawrence could not help but reflect to Cynthia Asquith that the golden autumn of 1915 had made him deeply sad, as he saw it representing the passing of the old civilisation and the fading of beauty, although his ultimate sadness was that there were ‘no new things coming’ to replace the old order. He had previously written to her that while war might be a ‘great and necessary disintegrating autumnal process’, love represented the creative thrust and unifying solidity of mankind, mirrored by the season of spring within nature. Lawrence’s fear, as he expressed it, was that the disintegrating processes of war had become overpowering and:
if it goes on any further, we shall so thoroughly have destroyed the unifying force from among us that we shall become each one of us so completely a separate entity, that the whole will be an amorphous heap, like sand, sterile, hopeless, useless, like a dead tree ... it is so great a danger that one almost goes mad facing it.62

His frustration and fear sprung from his belief that it was his duty to 'speak for life and growth' amid a 'mass of destruction and disintegration' that was increasing in emotional density as the months passed.

After a final visit to Lady Ottoline's Garsington Manor in November 1915, Lawrence and his wife left intellectual society for the 'crow's nest' sanctuary of Cornwall. His hopes of travelling abroad were fading and men of military age could not emigrate. In addition, the degrading experience of attesting at Battersea Town Hall in December 1915 (to be repeated at Bodmin the following year and again in June 1917 and September 1918) had left Lawrence extremely unwilling to face the necessary officialdom of the emigration process. As he became more immersed in his writing once more and worked on Women in Love, his attitude built on the separations of the year before and became increasingly individualistic; though he still regarded the war as 'stupid, monstrous and contemptible', in the natural solitude of Cornwall, his fellow humans came to mean less to him and he could admit that, 'I am only myself. At last I submit that I have no right to speak for anybody else, but only for my single self. War is for the rest of men ...'63

For Lawrence to accomplish 'anything real' he felt he had to eschew all connections with other collective attitudes, and he singled out Fabianism, Socialism and 'Cambridgeian' as specific examples. As he had decided not to 'go down with the ship' (as he himself described that option), he was left to 'leave the ship and like a castaway live a life apart'. He also described it necessary for himself to become an outlaw, 'not a teacher or a preacher' as he had hoped at the time of The Signature; 'One must retire out of the herd', he concluded. In July 1916 he told the editor T.D. Dunlop that he esteemed individual liberty 'above everything' and this admission had been preceded by another to Lady Ottoline that it was only in 'my individual self ... that I live at all'. Hence his separation from the world at war and the ignominy of his experience with the military at Bodmin in June of that year ('I won't be pawed and bullied by them', Lawrence resolved after being eventually classed as Grade 3 in September 1918). The Lawrences only returned to London after their house at Higher Tregerthen was searched by the authorities in October 1917, and they were ordered to leave Cornwall.

To Lawrence, the inhabitants of London, obsessed with air-raids, had become 'factors' and not people while, as he and Frieda moved from place to place for the remainder of the war, Lawrence felt himself to be 'slowly suffocated in mud', an appropriate metaphor for one who believed he was fighting his own personal battle. Lawrence also described himself, 'at best only a torn fragment'; the war had forced him to abandon notions of place, identity and
alter his vision of a new beginning, and postpone plans of an escape to Utopia. As others observed and he admitted, the conflict had become one he had felt within himself and his war was of an intensely personal nature. To Cynthia Asquith, Lawrence wrote, ‘In war, in my being, I am a detached entity, and every one of my actions is an act of further detaching my own single entity from all the rest.’ He continued and explained how the war had led to his position of isolation:

You say that war does not prevent personal life from going on, that the individual can still love and be complete. It isn’t true. The one quality of love is that it universalises the individual. If I love then I am extended over all people, but particularly over my own nation. It is extending in concentric waves over all people. This is the process of love … and how can this be, in war, when the spirit is against love?

When Ottoline Morrell spoke of the war diverting Lawrence and his ‘passionate individualism’ away from his ‘natural course of creativeness’, she was echoing the fears of other writers; Thomas Hardy supported the concept of an ‘intellectual entente’ between nations, and Bernard Shaw had called for a ‘Coalition of the Intelligentsia’. Just as Bloomsbury believed it to be a dutiful good for an individual to appreciate and uphold the values of art and life, so Shaw believed that it was the duty of representatives of art and literature to uphold moral constants in a world changed rapidly by war. Both the Bloomsbury circle and Shaw attempted to ‘keep their heads’ and persuade others to keep theirs. The appreciation of the importance of keeping heads clear was shared by H.G. Wells who, in common with Russell and others, and using the fictional device of Mr Britling, pointed out that all ‘material for the future’ was being squandered on ‘present-day hate’. Mr Britling represents the disillusionment of a civilised individual in response to the now tattered fabric of a previously familiar world and value system.

John Galsworthy recognised that civilisation was the ‘flowing of directed energy’ and that this flow was faltering, as Lawrence had also noted, though Lawrence felt that civilisation had become perhaps too refined and removed from its more ‘vital’ aspects: some kind of purgative was called for – though not armed conflict, which could only result in a literal and metaphorical deadening or snuffing-out of sensation. The war caused creative energies (Galsworthy’s ‘flowing of directed energy’) to be misdirected – E.M. Forster had observed that ‘vigour’ had been misplaced and mankind needed to re-align itself if civilisation was to be saved. Galsworthy also declared the war to be the defeat of Utopians, dreamers and humanitarians and this view was reflected in others. But Galsworthy and some of his contemporaries wrote from a somewhat distant (though no less valid) perspective. What of writers and artists who found themselves in the arena of battle itself? What were the thoughts of those forced to grapple with death – that great nullifier of creation – on a daily basis?
Writers at war

Notes

2. Leonard Woolf's two reports – the first published as a supplement to the New Statesman in 1915 and the second a draft treaty – were published together as International Government in 1916.
15. Ibid., p. 368.
16. The former literary editor of the Daily Chronicle and MP, C.F.G. Masterman was appointed head of the War Propaganda Bureau in August 1914 and his confidential work was based in his existing office at Wellington House in London (until the department later became the Ministry of Information). On 2nd September 1914, many of Britain's leading literary figures responded to Masterman's call for help with the government's war propaganda and met in the conference room at Wellington House. See M.L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–1918 (London, 1982) and Buitenhuis, The Great War of Words.
25. Ibid., p. 50.
27. Cited in Roby, A Writer at War, p. 50.
29. Ibid., pp. 375–6.
31. The Dynasts was Hardy's epic verse-drama set a century earlier at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. It was widely admired, particularly by other writers, such as Siegfried Sassoon, who
read it while at the front.

41 J. Galsworthy, ‘First Thoughts on the War’, in *A Sheaf* (London, 1916), pp. 166–7. According to his biographer, though Galsworthy’s unofficial role as English spokesperson on the war in serious monthly American magazines was not one he sought, requests for comment from the United States fitted Galsworthy’s self-imposed need to support relief funds and permitted him to retain a kind of calm distance from the emotions and horrors he felt. Encouraged by editors and correspondents, Galsworthy himself suggested to Scribner’s his latest volume of collected war articles (*A Sheaf*), writing that, ‘this is more or less the moment, seeing that the past is so past, and the future so blind’. Cited in Gindin, *Alien’s Fortress*, p. 354. Galsworthy described his articles and essays as ‘humanist writings’ and his desire to publish them in order to secure funds for hospitals etc. was evidence of Galsworthy’s ‘wide, deep and sincere humanism’. Cited in Marrott, *Life and Letters of Galsworthy*, p. 460.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 666. Though the author of many propagandist bodies and articles (such as *When Blood is Their Argument: An Analysis of Prussian Culture*; London, 1915), Wells’s Wellington House contemporary Ford Maddox Hueffer also expressed his (eventual) disillusionment with the war in his fiction – though in Hueffer’s case, not until after the war. See his *Parade’s End* tetralogy, the first volume of which *Some Do Not …*, appeared in 1924.
Writers at war