

## PART 3. WAR STORIES

### CHAPTER 13

#### WAR STORIES

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace —

Christopher Robin went down with Alice.

Alice is marrying one of the guard.

“A soldier's life is terrible hard,”

Says Alice.

A. A. Milne, *When We Were Very Young* (1924) 'Buckingham Palace.

‘Sometimes art tells us exactly what we need to know about difficult moral problems.’ David Pratt, in W. Smit (ed.) *Just War and Terrorism* (2005) 47.

The primary purpose of Part 2 of this book has been to question claims of continuity, coherence and superiority sometimes made on behalf of the just-war tradition and, more specifically, to expose the trajectory of its modern revival from the Romantic aftermath of the French Revolution through to recent decades. Revivals of religion, nationalism and orientalism since the 1980s in many parts of the world justify calling the current period as much neo-Romantic and post-modern. Contemporary enthusiasm for just-war discourse may reasonably be seen as part of this hyper-

Romantic enthusiasm. To chart its rise is to identify the revived tradition as emphatically modern at its inception, part of the project of restoration attempted in Europe after 1815 to stabilize rapid industrialization and urbanization through reinforcement of deference and tradition. To put in question reliance on custom and theology leaves the tradition dependent on reason alone, on equal terms with competing strands of modern culture that have been less concerned with justification than with the changing character of military experience and ways of war.

The purpose of Part 3 is to examine these alternative views through memoirs and fictions about war. If Part 2 has been an extension of the Shakespearean critique of Henry Plantagenet's pretensions to Christian pryncedom offered in chapter 3, Part 3 may be seen as an expansion of the range of ethical registers examined in chapter 4. This introductory chapter begins by noting that the study of ethical aspects of war has remained rather broader in scope in the military academies than in university departments of Political Science or International Relations. It goes on to consider the variety of ways of war before turning to modern anxiety about the changing nature of warfare and its implications for those caught up in hostilities, whether professionals, conscripts, or non-combatants. Though they reach beyond the characterisations of war and warriors in Shakespeare's plays, surveyed in Part 1, the chapters that follow draw their inspiration from his contrasting treatments of civil and inter-state war and of chivalric, professional, conscripted, sporting and looting soldiery.

### *Military Ethics*

By the 1980s the just war tradition had clarified into a version that was Thomistic in spirit, owing more to Vitoria than to any other individual thinker. The mutually

inconsistent strands of its fragmentary history had been set aside and its internal tensions largely forgotten; some of its provisions had been embodied in the law of armed conflict, though its main thrust had been negated by the criminalization of aggression and its attention had lately been turned sharply toward nice ethical issues posed by nuclear deterrence. This clarity could not last. Both the inextinguishable Augustinian and the dominant Thomist currents of the tradition were susceptible to distinct forms of corruption once they were distanced from the theologies of their originators: the first to too narrow a preoccupation with power and the present moment and the second to an excessive emphasis on polity and sovereign discretion. Stereotypically realist in their respective emphases on power and state, these corruptions are better classed as forms of idealism, since each carries the temptation of a deeply un-realistic conflation of its fetish with justice.

Turning to sins of omission, the casuistic tradition had marginalised a wide range of other moral considerations arising from armed conflict by focusing attention on discrete decisions and the associated processes of deliberation. These included the military virtues of courage, loyalty, mercy, fortitude and discipline, the locus of responsibility in the chain of command, questions of subjective experience, personal development and identity, and the function of sacrifice, pilgrimage, witness and their secular analogues as models for engagement in war

Worse, secular ethicists, like Warner Brothers' Wile E. Coyote, had sped heedlessly off the ample roof of the Angelic doctor's house in pursuit of their road-runner. They might not start to fall until a downward glance brought the drop to their attention, yet it could be only a matter of time before general reliance on the tradition faltered for

want of solid foundations in moral and political philosophy, and there have already been signs of this. As early as 1979, in a review of Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*, Hedley Bull had complained of the lack of explicit grounding of the discussion in any moral theory.<sup>1</sup> This was a deliberate move by Walzer, but could not wholly be achieved; communitarianism, while latent, underpinned the whole approach, aligning Walzer more closely than might at first appear with the official view of US moral superiority adopted by Cold War administrations. Bull was right to detect a reluctance to engage in a frontal attack on the theologians and a liberal faith in common morality. This could only defer resolution of these issues.

More recently, David Pratt was quick to detect shreds of just-war discourse in the 2002 United States National Security Strategy. Far from reassuring, he found them worrisome because they were merely 'a patina of justification' and he concluded from a reading of Paul J. Griffiths and George Weigel, both Catholic just-war specialists in the USA, that '... we are left with simulacra rather than theory and rationality. We have vestiges and vocabulary of a tradition but no tradition.'<sup>2</sup> At such moments the tensions afflicting the Christian underpinnings of the tradition are easily exposed and its unacceptability to the secular mind becomes apparent, the only bar to these developments being the all too apparent difficulty of developing any convincing alternative in an era ill-disposed towards foundationalism of any kind.

Maybe this is why it has been from the *practice* of warfare, rather than debate among ethicists – its rehearsal, enactment, recollection and representation – that challenges to the standard formula began to emerge as asymmetric and irregular forms of

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<sup>1</sup> . Hedley Bull, 'Recapturing the Just War for Political Theory' *World Politics*, (1979) 31:4, 599.

<sup>2</sup> . Pratt 'Realism and Just War Fictions' 51-5.

warfare replaced the Cold War nuclear stand-off. The discontinuity, incompleteness, and contradictions of the tradition began to create space for rival sources of military ethics to become visible once again, fostering disorderly and laggardly intellectual skirmishing analogous to and reflective of conduct on the new global battlefield.

Perhaps it is because they have felt live metal searing past that the some of the most resilient upholders of a broader view of military ethics have been former officers teaching in military establishments or philosophers close to them. The academies and staff colleges have their share of just-war theorists, but they are also home to a much broader tradition. Aine Donovan and his co-editors, in their anthology, *Ethics for Military Leaders*, cover the entire range of approaches to ethics, with excerpts from classical and modern authors, including practitioners, novelists and academics, organized into fourteen sections. The just war is only one of fourteen.<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Fotion and G. Elfstrom, in an earlier text book on military ethics, took a similarly comprehensive view.<sup>4</sup> C. A. J. Coady and Igor Primoratz, more timidly, organized a recent collection of reprints on military ethics into three sections, of which the first two corresponded to *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, but the third, under the title, 'The Soldier's Ethics' raised questions of military virtue and honour.<sup>5</sup> James H. Toner, who served in the US army between 1968 and 1974 and saw action, has taken a virtue ethics approach at the US Air War College in Alabama, while Timothy L.

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<sup>3</sup> . Aine Donovan, David E. Johnson, George R. Lucas, Paul E. Roush (eds.) *Ethics for Military Leaders* (Simon & Schuster 1998).

<sup>4</sup> . N. Fotion and G. Elfstrom, *Military Ethics: Guidelines for Peace and War* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: Boston MA, London and Henley, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> . C. A. J. Coady and Igor Primoratz (eds.) *Military Ethics* (Ashgate 2008)

Challans fears that ‘the ghost in the military machine is asleep at the wheel’.<sup>6</sup> Finding the just-war tradition inadequate he argues the need for moral progress. Finally Nancy Sherman, a philosopher who has spent time at the US Naval Academy, examines the points of contact between contemporary United States military ethics and classical stoicism.<sup>7</sup>

### *Ways of War*

One serious objection to modern just-war doctrine is that the nature of war is settled before argument begins. War is to be regarded as an instrument of justice, narrowly defined. Everything follows from this, including the holistic ontology of Augustine and the state-centrism of Aquinas. Modern moral sensibility as expressed in literature has by and large rejected this premise, even as modern reason has acquiesced in it, and the purpose of the remaining chapters is to explore that sensibility. War may be thought sport, a means of state-building, an instrument of social control, or sheer irrationality.<sup>8</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive; they are neither inconsistent with the judicial function of war nor does any of them entail amorality; yet each has distinctive ethical implications and, together, their incommensurability yields challenging moral predicaments.

This variety of views about the nature of war in general and of particular conflicts, both between and within polities, is so fundamental to what follows that it needs to

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<sup>6</sup> . James H. Toner, *Morals under the Gun: The Cardinal Virtues, Military Ethics, and American Society* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Timothy L. Challans, *Awakening Warrior: Revolution in the Ethics of Warfare* (Albany NY: State of New York University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> . Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> . In other times and places it has also been thought a source of labour, of breeding stock, of sacrificial victims, of cattle or of territory. For Kant, among others, it was justified by its function within a teleological scheme of history.

be spelt out in more detail, as the texts to be examined in Part 3 are contextualized in the remainder of this chapter. There is no need to go back to Shakespeare's French knights, gambling on the eve of Agincourt. The sobering notebook kept by an Anglo-Indian doctor in the West African Colonial service, early in the twentieth century, records hunting expeditions and punitive expeditions in virtually the same form: the bag – the dead.<sup>9</sup> Joseph Conrad's Assistant Commissioner of the London police, in *The Secret Agent*, 'chained to a desk in the thick of four millions of men' as he tried to detect and prevent anarchist outrages, 'did not like his work'. He looked back nostalgically to the kind of colonial police work for which he had trained, which 'had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open-air sport'.<sup>10</sup> For the young Winston Churchill war was, if not a game, then certainly an adventure, and military service in British India was constantly juxtaposed with polo.<sup>11</sup> The spiked helmet of a German soldier sits alongside the stuffed heads of a menagerie of the world's creatures in the London trophy room of Powell and Pressburger's Colonel Wynne-Candy. The bug game metaphor – if it is a metaphor – is pursued in the literature of espionage, where the eponymous memory game forms part of Kim's training in espionage as he plays his part in the Great Game and John Le Carré's George Smiley engages in *Our Game*.<sup>12</sup> The technological fusion between computer games and the control of weapons systems in recent times is well known.<sup>13</sup> Games need no justification beyond amusement. *Le roi s'amuse*.

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<sup>9</sup> . Private collection.

<sup>10</sup> . Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* ([1907] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 89.

<sup>11</sup> . Winston Spencer Churchill, *My Early Life: A Roving Commission* (London: Bloomsbury, 1930).

<sup>12</sup> . Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Macmillan, 1901); John Le Carré, *Our Game* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> . Matthew Thomson, 'Military Computer Games and the New American Militarism' (Unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Nottingham, 2008).

It is sometimes said that eighteenth-century sovereigns felt no need to justify their conduct. They waged war as they chose. This is not the case. What may be nearer the truth of a very complex matter is that they waged war in order to resolve emerging contradictions between two central institutions of international society: dynasticism and the secular state. The only state that came close to threatening the European balance of power in this period was France, but even France would not have constituted a credible threat of universal empire before 1789 had it not been for the principle of dynasticism, by which control of more than one state could fall to a single sovereign or family. Wars of succession were fought to prevent the lottery of heredity from producing composite polities capable of upsetting the balance of power. By the early twentieth century this conflict had been displaced by a new one, between nationalism and the secular state, resulting in the de-composition of empires as the glue of loyalty to their monarchs dissolved, and their replacement by more or less perfectly national states. Wars of aggrandisement, consolidation and secession were justified functionally rather than morally. Their purpose was to reconcile the bureaucratic state with principles of legitimacy that were accidental to it. The point is a simple one. War in such circumstances was not a matter of redressing wrongs; it need not stem from past offences by one sovereign against another. It was the tuning of an instrument notoriously prone to loss of pitch, and that was enough.

War as social control has two characteristic expressions. A state may use participation in a conventional inter-state war as pretext for suppression of the liberties of its citizens, or it may set out to reinforce its authority by a demonstration

of superiority over a dissident group or polity, within or beyond its frontiers: a secessionist province or a troublesome colonial revolt.

Within the just-war tradition, right conduct or *jus in bello* is an absolute. Reprisals, the taking of hostages, assassination, reprisals, terrorism: these and other issues are immediately classified as candidates for exceptional exculpation. But right conduct can be an absolute only because war is taken to be singular. Concede that war – the very same war in which they are together engaged – can be different things to different people, and it follows that right conduct may vary according to circumstances. Each game has different rules. Actions that are indefensible in one kind of conflict may be justifiable in another. International humanitarian law has struggled with this and developed a complex web of rules of engagement and variations in the status of combatants and non-combatants. Disagreements on this latter point have surrounded United States practice since 2001 and the detainees at Guantanamo.<sup>14</sup> The pusillanimity of the British high command in the Boer War in failing to acknowledge publicly that guerrilla operations required different rules lies at the heart of the Australian film, *Breaker Morant*, discussed in chapter 18. Both Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, some of whose works are discussed in chapter 14, are very much concerned with conflict between discrete styles and purposes in war, including regular and irregular combat and the very different objectives of imperial forces, militias, rebels and tribesmen. Historians of war have dealt with its variability of war by writing of ‘ways of war’. Only the moralists have lagged behind, fearful of relativism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> . George P. Fletcher, *Romantics at War: Glory and Guilty in the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton NJ; Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> . Needlessly, because the possibility of basic principles of morality is not undermined by the contention that varying circumstances are relevant to their application. This, surely, was the basis of scholastic casuistry.

A great many outstanding texts in the modern literature of war are concerned with the contradictions or dissonances that arise when people caught up in a single conflict conceive themselves to be fighting different wars, so that incomprehension or disagreement about the rules of the game is added to mortal threat, yielding disorientation and threatening more fundamental corrosions of sociability and rationality than can arise solely from mutual enmity and destruction. But the drift of modern war literature is the product of many currents and forces, so that representation of war becomes, from the early nineteenth century if not before, a way of playing out fears about society as a whole.

Among these currents, pervasiveness and incoherence stand out. At the empirical level, fear of the pervasiveness of war is evident in a literature of anxiety and anticipation that literally brings battle home to countries, most of all Britain and the United States, two countries with territories spared from high-intensity ground conflict for more than a century. The genre of imagined future wars that flourished in the half-century before 1914, was centrally concerned with the collapse of any real distinction between combatants and non-combatants, the infiltration of combat into familiar corners of the homeland and, often, a consequent collapse of social order. This imagining of future conventional wars, especially from the 1890s, was flanked by new genres of terrorism and espionage in which the privilege and decisiveness of battle were attacked more obliquely. Of the texts to be examined most closely in later chapters, it is Buchan's *Mr Standfast* that captures this anxiety most completely, and – within it – the crisis of the military as distinct and privileged caste.

Fear of incoherence is most eloquently expressed in Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*. Like Buchan's later novel, *The Red Badge* undermines the separation of war from ordinary life, but where Buchan achieves this by subordinating the battlefield to a secret war of intelligence, Crane does so by deflating the epic and heroic pretensions of battle. The mundane detail of military life, later to be so brilliantly captured by Tim O'Brien, is anticipated in the things Fleming and his companions carried, and threw away, as they became soldiers. The very first action of a soldier in Crane's novel is to wash a shirt.

But Crane's deflation of war is preface to a more ambitious critique of the possibility of representation. Battle evades perception and description; it twists and turns, now visible, not obscure; it constantly adopts new forms in which landscape and clouds may take on agency, joining the combat or merging with troops who, in their turn, metamorphose into all manner of beasts. Crane conveys radical doubts about the coherence of battle by subverting the coherence of its representation in narrative. At this point it is enough to note that he is not alone in this, and that the challenge of war to rationality writ large has become a major theme in recent war literature, vividly conveyed in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* by breaches in narrative convention suggesting disruption of the frame of time and space.

Tugging powerfully at these surges of anxiety, moon-like, is the theme of modernity, which informs *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, the only film among the close-read texts that follow. Most often, this is tied up with technological advance.

Innovation and its social application figure as both the supreme manifestation of reason and the means of its negation. H. G. Wells is master of this, and perhaps the

first novelist to start to think through seriously the implications of extreme asymmetries of military competence. But speculation about the consequences of new technology is present also in works by authors as different from one another as Mark Twain and G. K. Chesterton.

### *Anticipation and Anxiety*

So much Romantic literature looks back. Colonel Monro, eldest of the protagonists in *The Last of the Mohicans*, shares the distaste felt by his Indian foe, Magua, for bombardment as a method of attack. In spite of their superior numbers, he longs for the French to try to storm the fort he is defending so that there can be some real fighting. 'The beauty and manliness of warfare had been much deformed,' he complained to Heyward, 'by the arts of yon Monsieur Vauban'.<sup>16</sup> After the American Civil War (1861-5) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870) the backward glance continues, but in self-consciously modern fiction it is now stripped of nostalgia. Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895) is a historical novel; Crane had been born after the war ended. *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889) by Mark Twain (1835-1910) is also a historical novel, but one that plays fast and loose with the narrative conventions of the genre, not least by its use of the device of unexplained time-travel which sends a supervisor from Samuel Colt's Hartford works back into Arthurian England, there to create the skeleton of a modern industrial nation. But more and more, fictions of war move into a hidden present of conspiracy, espionage and terrorism or an imagined future that extrapolates present possibilities and anxieties. First making a real public impact in 1871, with George Chesney's

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<sup>16</sup> . James Fennimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (London: John Miller, 1826). Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707), to whom Monro refers, was a celebrated French military engineer.

unexpected best-seller, *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), in which a survivor narrated the history of a successful German invasion of England in the reader's near future from a point in the more distant future. The genre is still alive, but reached its imaginative and popular zenith in *War of the Worlds* (1898), by H. G. Wells (1866-1946), and its infamously plausible 1938 radio dramatisation by Orson Welles.<sup>17</sup>

A key feature of early British examples of the genre is that war takes place on home territory, long considered invulnerable. The same anxiety about the pervasiveness of war is evident in two other genres that develop in England at the turn of the twentieth century: the first of these deals with terrorism; the second, later, with espionage. Their common theme is that the decisive forces in modern warfare may be in Britain itself, hardly perceptible and immune to conventional means of defence. Together, the three genres, of imagined wars, terrorist fantasies and spy novels, range over the whole range of anxieties outlined earlier, starting with incommensurabilities of war-fighting, then running through the collapse of binary distinctions between war and peace, combatant and non-combatant, front and home, before spilling into fears about identity, meaning and coherence, often expressed through a discourse about modernity in which new technology figures centrally.

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<sup>17</sup> . Recent examples, aimed, like Chesney's tale, at boosting defence budgets, include Sir John Hackett, *The Third World War* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985) and Caspar Weinberger and Peter Schweizer, *The Next War* (Washington DC: Regnery, 1996). I. F. Clarke was responsible for recovering this genre and reprinting many examples in facsimile. He has also written extensively about it. I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (London &: Oxford University Press, 1966); I. F. Clarke, *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995); I. F. Clarke (ed.) *The Great War with Germany, 1890-1914: Fictions and Fantasies of the war-to-come* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press); I. F. Clarke (ed.) *British Future Fiction* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001). As is evident from the first of Clarke's books, Chesney did not originate the genre of future-wars, but Clarke accepts that none of the earlier attempts found anything approaching the public response accorded to *The Battle of Dorking*. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 2.

In Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, the final battle between Hank Morgan's modernising elite and the massed chivalry of England is mere slaughter. Despite their overwhelming numbers the ironclad knights have no chance at all against electric fences, swiftly flooded ditches and Gatling guns. It is much the same for the regular forces in *War of the Worlds*. A gunner, holed up on Wimbledon Common after conventional defences against the Martians have collapsed, contemplates a guerrilla campaign to win time, while humans develop adequate technology to face their enemy in the open. What he has observed over the past few days is not a war. '[I]t never was a war anymore than there's a war between men and ants'.<sup>18</sup> This is a sentiment that runs through much *fin de siècle* literature.

Most of all, this anxiety about the death of war takes the form of meditations on the collapse of the distinction between combatant and non-combatant. This is sometimes expressed spatially, as in the intrusion of Cora and Alice, daughters of James Fennimore Cooper's Colonel Munro into Fort William Henry, under siege unbeknown to them. But there is a notable inversion. *They* had ventured into the wilderness; now the war comes to those most secure of places, the middle-class suburbs and dormitory towns. To anyone unfamiliar with England it is not easy to convey the resonance of 'The Battle of Dorking'. For New Englanders, 'The Battle of Wellesley Hills' might just about do the job. Like Wells, in his much later *War of the Worlds*, Chesney works on the sense of outrage felt by the reader as familiar places in what English elites refer to as the 'home counties' are violated. At an early point in the war, before the public have quite grasped the situation, the narrator finds a kind of normality in Weybridge, a commuter town at the confluence of the Wey and the

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<sup>18</sup>. H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* ([1898] New York: Modern Library 2002) 153.

Thames, a few miles West of London.<sup>19</sup> ‘The respectable inhabitants of the place, men in golf and boating costumes and prettily-dressed wives were packing’. Moving incongruously among them were uniformed soldiers, urging flight or concealment.<sup>20</sup> In G. K. Chesterton’s *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, life in a future England is roused from bureaucratic torpor by the neo-medievalist fad of the king — a title no longer hereditary, but selected by lot. His decision to invest each London borough with a distinctive identity is taken seriously by Adam Wayne, who transforms himself into the Napoleon of the title, waging war from his base at the end of the Bayswater Road on other emergent micro-states of the metropolis. Benign suburbs take on a malignant air Wayne stares at the iron railings that mark the privacy of stuccoed suburban villas. ‘Shaped in imitation of spears [they] become spears for him’.<sup>21</sup>

The consequences of such infiltration are a collapse of social order and effective government. As the Martians advance in *War of the Worlds*, institutions collapse. ‘By ten o’clock the police organization, and by midday even the railway organizations, were losing coherency, losing shape and efficiency, softening, running at last in that swift liquefaction of the social body’.<sup>22</sup> As hunger spread, ‘the rights of property ceased to be regarded’.<sup>23</sup> The invulnerable Martians aimed less at physical destruction than at ‘complete demoralization’.<sup>24</sup> In this, the Martians have much in common with the anarchist professor in *The Secret Agent*. In nicely phrased anticipation of the tactics of Al Q’aida, Joseph Conrad’s Assistant Commissioner

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<sup>19</sup>. Like Dorking, Weybridge evokes security and wealth. Home for a time to two of the archetypal modern rock stars, John Lennon and Ringo Star, it was the location, as recently as 2008, of no less than six of the most expensive residential streets in the area surrounding Greater London.

<sup>20</sup>. Wells, *War of the Worlds*, 59.

<sup>21</sup>. G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* ([1904] London: Capuchin Classics, 2008) 88/9; emphasis in the original.

<sup>22</sup>. Wells, *War of the Worlds*, 91.

<sup>23</sup>. Wells, *War of the Worlds*, 105.

<sup>24</sup>. Wells, *War of the Worlds*, 104.

recognized the danger that the professional revolutionary is intent on demoralization more than mere destruction. In this way Conrad's anarchist professor, scorning the meticulous utopian plans of the revolutionists, aims instead to make 'a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life' by destroying public faith in the rule of law.<sup>25</sup>

The remainder of this longest and concluding part of the book consists in seven chapters, each of which offers a close reading of one, or a very small number of texts. Treatment of Scott and Cooper dwells largely on the bewildering multiplicity of ways of war in modernity, displaced into recent history by the characteristically romantic device of the historical novel. This is followed by four chapters dealing, successively, with the battlefield, guerrilla warfare, espionage and terrorism. The last two substantive chapters explore the lives of the professional soldier and the conscript respectively, and are followed by a brief conclusion juxtaposing a seeming crisis in the representation of war and the enduring coherence of military training and consciousness. These chapters step beyond the narrow questions of obedience to legal orders, discrimination, and temperance to regard the predicament and life of the combatant in more general terms, moving from morality to ethics or, more precisely, from a rule-governed approach to morality to one centring on lifelong pursuit of the good life through the cultivation of virtue, and with the growing fear that war may no longer offer space for this, if it ever did.

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<sup>25</sup>. Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 127, 67, 74.

## CHAPTER 14

### WAYS OF WAR: SCOTT AND COOPER

To claim that Sir Walter Scott addresses the entire agenda of the remainder of this study would be an exaggeration, but he is certainly alive to many of its themes: the multiplicity of ways of war and their challenge to social order; the pervasiveness of war, which he expresses through inversions of the binary distinctions of conventional warfare; the threat of incoherence, which he examines chiefly through the challenges posed to personal identity by rebellion; and, finally, the predicaments of those caught up in combat, and the tensions between professional, irregular and civilian. Though reacting against the cosmic disruptions of Revolution in France and the wars to which it gave rise, and firmly aligned with the forces of restoration, Scott eschews the grand canvas of recent European history partly because rebellion and irregular warfare in a more distant yet still remembered past provide the ideal surface on which to inscribe these features of war.

It is very probably true, as Karl Kroeber has claimed, that 'no major novelist devotes so many pages to warfare as does Scott'.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Scott was immensely influential both within and beyond the English-speaking world.<sup>27</sup> A third reason for

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<sup>26</sup> . Karl Kroeber, 'Frictional Fiction: Walter Scott in the Light of von Clausewitz's *On War*' in James Pipkin (ed.) *English and German Romanticism: Cross-currents and Controversies* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> . James Fennimore Cooper, in *Last of the Mohicans*, and the Argentine writer and statesman Vicente Fidel López, in *La novia del hereje* and *La loca de la guardia* both betray the influence of Scott in their treatment of warfare and miscegenation. In France 'the historical novel was undisguisedly a model imported from abroad, inevitably associated with the immense European prestige of Sir Walter Scott'. Spanish Romantic writers of the period between 1835 and 1842 'almost all ... tried their hand at medievalizing historical novels à la Walter Scott'. In the Netherlands, 'Scott's historical novels were systematically imitated', while Roderick Beaton, somewhat more sweepingly, declares that 'Greek fiction during its first fifty years was dominated by the example of Sir Walter'. Finally, John Mersereau and David Lapeza submit numerous candidates for the title of the 'Russian Walter Scott', naming Zagodin, Kalashnikov, and Lazhechnikov, while also noting the less

examining the novels of Sir Walter Scott has to do with the method he adopts for the discussion of public themes. Scott relies, as the conventions of the genre demand, on analogy, juxtaposition, and implied comparison, rather than deductive argument. This contrasts with the argumentative method of much of Western philosophy so evident in the tradition of practical reason on which modern just-war discourse relies. This manner of argument makes claims to authority that find ready analogues in princely power and the rule of law. Not without reason is Kant's first critique, nominally an investigation of metaphysics, shot through with imagery based in instructively inconsistent analogies between reason itself and the chief magistrate, the constitution, or the people as unresolvedly rivalrous sites of sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> Such metaphors die easily and are at their most powerful posthumously, discreet zombies in the rhetorical universe. Arguments start to appear almost literally compelling. Rhetoric dressed as reason substitutes for coercion as one of the many sources of authority in a civil society.

But if philosophy's procedures of analysis and synthesis may be thought to mirror the administrative and judicial procedures of the state, international relations, far from being a curious and obdurate country, is no country at all. Reason-as-argument is accordingly much less effective in this anarchical setting than elsewhere. This need not entail the kind of nihilistic realism in which reason is abandoned in favour of naked power. Quite the contrary, it demands more exhaustive and pluralist attention to the multiple voices or registers in which reason speaks on its untidy fringe. For

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comprehensive influence of Scott on other novelists, including Gogol. The foregoing quotations are drawn, in sequence, from essays by Stephen Bann, Susan Kirkpatrick, Nichols A. Rupke, Roderick Beaton, and John Mersereau Jr., and David Lapeza, all in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 256, 265, 210, 93, and 290-5 respectively.

<sup>28</sup>. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781, 1787] (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp.7-9, 593, 601, 629. For a trenchant early warning against misapplication of deductive reason in the practical sphere, see Wilmot, Lord Rochester, *Satyr on Mankind* in John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *The Complete Works* (London: Penguin, 1994, 72-7).

argumentation is neither the only mode of philosophy nor philosophy the only mode of thought. Indeed for post-metaphysical or post-foundationalist philosophers it has ceased to be the senior service. That responsibility has passed to those who aspire to disclose or re-describe the world, more or less publicly, more or less ironically; and Scott is, above all, a discloser and describer of worlds.<sup>29</sup>

In sum, starting with Scott blazes the trail to be followed in the remainder of this part of the book, for Scott sets out to display an entire culture within which warfare in its manifold forms was endemic, nationalism incipient, and loyalty accordingly undecidable, while the spectre of a collapse of the conventions of war loomed large.

Scott's technique is often to display a multiplicity of types of combatant and ways of war – seldom conventional – in what may be taken as oblique commentary on the general crisis of ordered sociability prompted by the French Revolution and the prolonged, bitterly fought wars that followed. There is explicit reference to the medieval just war tradition in *Ivanhoe*, for example, but in an ironised form. Strictly applied to the tournament – a mere pretence of conflict – the rules provide no protection against force threatened in earnest when, later, the Jewess Rebecca is held captive by a Templar knight. Contrast the meticulous conventions constraining violence in the tournament with the Templar Knight's flatulent attempt to legitimise the principle that might is right. 'My language shall be that of a conqueror,' he tells

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<sup>29</sup>. Chantal Mouffe, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996), includes some relevant discussion of the political relevance (or lack of it) of philosophy by Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Simon Critchley. For an application to international relations of Rorty's utopian method of therapeutic redescription see Ronald J. Diebert, "'Exorcismus theoriae': pragmatism, metaphors and the return of the medieval in International Relations theory'. *European Journal of International Relations* 3:2 (June 1997), 167-192.

the non-combatant Rebecca. 'Thou art the captive of my bow and spear, subject to my will by the laws of all nations'.<sup>30</sup>

A latent nostalgia for older, more limited ways of war becomes more explicit in *Rob Roy*, a novel centrally concerned with the more general corrosive effects of emergent commercial capitalism upon traditional Highland life and values. Once conducted in a moderate fashion that limited its cost to both parties, border raiding is superseded during the course of the novel's action by total warfare, in which rape of civilians is flanked by double-tapping.<sup>31</sup>

The same concern with conflicting ways of war and the norms appropriate to each is apparent throughout *Old Mortality* (1816), which is set against the events of 1679, when an army of Covenanters, in revolt against the re-introduction of church government by bishops in Scotland, rose against Charles II only to be suppressed by James Graham of Claverhouse. Even more than in *Waverley*, the hero, Morton, is hopelessly strung out between the two sides, bound to each by family, friendship, love and his word. For Major Bellenden, an old soldier preparing to defend Tillietudlem against the Presbyterian rebels, the prospect of battle is rejuvenating, but it also revives the moral awkwardness he has felt in the past when applying rules of engagement appropriate to conventional warfare in a civil conflict. 'Although I had my share of the civil war,' he muses. 'I cannot say I ever had so much real pleasure in that sort of service as when I was employed on the Continent, and where we were hacking at fellows with foreign faces and outlandish dialect. It's a hard thing to hear a

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<sup>30</sup>. Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (Penguin Books, 1982), p.250.

<sup>31</sup>. Sir Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, I, 21 and II, 225. (All remaining references to Scott's novels are to the complete edition published between 1877 and 1879 in Edinburgh by Adam and Charles Black.) I take rape to be the implication of II, 219, referring to the incident described in the bland language of an official report at I, 93-4. To double-tap is to fire two rounds in quick succession without re-aiming. By extension, double-tapping became a euphemism for the practice of using a second shot to kill enemy wounded following a skirmish when taking prisoners might endanger security.

hamey Scotch tounge cry quarter, and be obliged to cut him down just the same as if he called out *misericorde*.<sup>32</sup>

Later, rebels face regulars and are observed (both metaphorically by the reader and literally by their dependants) as they strive with very limited success to re-invent notions of right conduct. At the siege of Tillietudlem, Burley, the most fanatical of the rebel leaders, threatens harsh treatment to the occupants of the tower.<sup>33</sup> Morton, accidentally recruited to the wrong side, remonstrates with his companion in arms and is supported by the divine, Pundtext.<sup>34</sup> Throughout, the abandon and arbitrariness with which the Presbyterian leadership trade biblical quotations is contrasted with the seemingly innate understanding of the war convention that Morton has brought from his settled world to the world of dissent.

Half-remembered fragments of the just war tradition are scattered through the Waverley novels, for the most part placed within cultural parentheses (as with the tournament) or presented as remnants of a past lying beyond the confines of the novels. They figure as foils to more modern or less orderly modes of combat, and Scott's second way of dealing with the leaching of war into civil society, brought about by rebellion, is to explore inversions of conventional binaries. Thus coercion and lawlessness are contrasted with commerce and civility; madness is measured

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<sup>32</sup> . Sir Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*, I, p.207. This echoes Defoe, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, 153/4: 'It grieved me to the heart, even in the rout of our enemies, to see the slaughter of them; and even in the fight, to hear a man cry for quarter in English, moved me to a compassion which I had never been used to; nay, sometimes it looked to me as if some of my own men had been beaten; and when I heard a soldier cry, "O God, I am shot," I looked behind me to see which of my own troops was fallen.' On Scott's admiration of Defoe, and of the Cavalier in particular, see George A. Drake, 'The Dialectics of Inside and Outside: Dominated and Appropriated Space in Defoe's Historical Fictions' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 14:2, Article 3, p.3.

<sup>33</sup> . Once again, there are echoes of Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, 183, where Latham House is defended, like Tillietudlem, by a woman.

<sup>34</sup> . Sir Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*, I, 99-100.

against sanity; youth is juxtaposed with age; present with past; Catholic with Protestant; highland with lowland; outsider with insider; sanctuary with jurisdiction; concealment with openness. Such inversions were already standard Enlightenment tropes: witness Tom Paine's memorable description of aristocrats as brigands.<sup>35</sup> But Scott's intention is never straightforward denigration of the less favoured element, but rather exploration of the possibilities of co-existence without fusion: the viability of union – and above all by the Union of England, Scotland and, after 1800, Ireland.

Loyalties are inverted as protagonists, like Morton or Waverley, the eponymous hero of Scott's first novel, come to side with rebels by chance, inviting readers to shift their own loyalties and sympathise with rebellion against authority.<sup>36</sup> Most famously, perhaps, Waverley only realises his Englishness as he stands alongside his Highland friends and companions at the battle of Preston Pans.

Waverley could plainly recognise the standard of the troop he had formerly commanded, and hear the trumpets and kettle-drums sound the signal of advance, which he had so often obeyed. He could hear, too, the well-known word given in the English dialect, by the equally well-distinguished voice of the commanding officer, for whom he had once felt such respect. It was at this instant, that, looking around him, he saw the wild dress and appearance of his highland associates, heard their whispers in an uncouth and unknown language, looked upon his own dress, so unlike that which he had worn since infancy, and wished to awake from what seemed at the moment a dream, strange, horrible, and unnatural. 'Good God!' he muttered, 'am I then a traitor to my own country, a renegade ...?'<sup>37</sup>

More inventive is Scott's repeated subversion of the customary association of masculinity with the warrior. In *Old Mortality* the military commander entrusted with

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<sup>35</sup> . 'It could have been no difficult thing in the early and solitary ages of the world ... for a banditti of ruffians to over-run a country, and lay it under contributions. Their power being thus established, the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings.' Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London: Penguin, 1969) 190.

<sup>36</sup> . Once again, Scott may have written with some memory of Defoe, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, where (126) a British officer strays into the Scottish camp and marvels at the 'oddness and barbarity of their garb and arms'.

<sup>37</sup> . Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley*, II, p.162. A further echo of Defoe: *Memoir of a Cavalier*, 126.

suppression of the Covenanters' rebellion, Grahame of Claverhouse, is described in a way that hints strongly at effeminacy.

Grahame of Claverhouse was in the prime of life, rather low of stature, and slightly, though elegantly, formed; his gesture, language, and manners, were those of one whose life had been spent among the noble and the gay. His features exhibited even feminine regularity. An oval face, a straight and well-formed nose, dark hazel eyes, a complexion just sufficiently tinged with brown to save it from the charge of effeminacy, a short lip, curved upward like that of a Grecian statue.<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, Di Vernon, beloved of Francis Osbaldistone, the narrator of *Rob Roy*, is described as masculine. When necessary she dresses as a man.<sup>39</sup> The wife of another reluctant rebel, Helen Campbell, receives similar treatment in *Rob Roy*:

She might be between the term of forty and fifty years, and had a countenance which must once have been of a masculine cast of beauty. ... She wore her plaid, not drawn around her head and shoulders, as is the fashion of the women of Scotland, but disposed around her body as the Highland soldiers wear theirs. She had a man's bonnet, with a feather in it, an unsheathed sword in her hand, and a pair of pistols at her girdle.<sup>40</sup>

### Cooper

A similar concern with multiple ways of war and ethical registers lies at the heart of one of the best known novels of Scott's North American disciple, James Fennimore Cooper. Echoing Scott's concern with the cultural differences between Highlander and Lowlander or between rebel and regular, Cooper places a forest-wise colonial, Natty Bumppo, more often known as Hawkeye, alongside British regulars and Indian auxiliaries, at times quite literally in the same boat.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> . Scott, *Old Mortality*, I, p.213.

<sup>39</sup> . Scott, *Rob Roy*, II, 277.

<sup>40</sup> . Scott, *Rob Roy*, II, p.218.

<sup>41</sup> . James Fennimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* ([1826] London: Penguin 1992).

*Britain and France are at war in North America, their regular forces assisted more or less willingly by colonial and Indian auxiliaries. Hawkeye and two Indian companions, Chingachgook and his son Uncas, the last of the Mohicans, first encounter Major Duncan Heyward escorting the two daughters of Colonel Monro to Fort William Henry, in the forests of what is now New York state, which he commands. The fort is one of a string of bastions against southward and eastward expansion by the French. Led into an ambush by Magua, a scout whom they suppose loyal to the British, but who is in reality the bitter personal enemy of Monro, Heyward and his charges are rescued by Hawkeye and his companions and delivered to their father's side in Fort William Henry. But the fort cannot withstand a French siege and Monro is soon obliged to surrender to General Montcalm.*

*According to the prevailing custom of European warfare, Monro is judged to have done all that was reasonable in defence of the fort and Montcalm, the French commander, consequently allows him to withdraw his troops with honour, bearing their arms and colours. The French will have achieved their purpose by destroying the fortifications. But as the British march out of the fort, their straggling train of civilians is attacked by Indians. The French fail to intervene, and it is only through the intervention of Magua that Alice and Cora, the half-sisters, survive the massacre. Magua heads north with his captives. Marriage to Cora will be Magua's revenge on Monro. But he is pursued by Hawkeye, Chingachgook, Uncas, Heyward and Monro.*

*Rescuing Alice from the Huron camp where she is held, the pursuers go next to the nearby Delaware village, seeking Cora. But Magua is allowed to make off with her. In the chase and fight that follow, Cora, Uncas and Magua all die.*

Hawkeye, who repeatedly protests his pure blood, is close enough to both whites and Indians to understand their different customs, and provides the main commentary on variant ways of war. As Heyward leads his group through the French lines to enter the besieged fort, he gets past a French sentry by deception, his French good enough to pass. When the British march out of the surrendered fort, the crucial decision of Heyward and Monro to ride at the head of the column, with their troops, that will leave Alice and Cora, at the rear, at the mercy of Magua, is dictated by 'military usage – pride'.<sup>42</sup> Later, as the little band follow Magua's trail to the north, they are themselves pursued by hostile Indians. As the pursuers come within range of their canoe, Hawkeye urges Heyward and Monro to lie flat while the others paddle. Heyward demurs. "It would be but an ill example for the highest in rank to dodge, while the warriors were under fire!" But Hawkeye's reaction is of exasperation. "Lord! Lord! That is now a white man's courage!" exclaimed the scout; "and like too many of his notions, not to be maintained by reason." Hawkeye thinks it obvious that the British should take cover, but Heyward persists: "All that you say is very true, my friend ... Still, our customs must prevent us from doing as you wish."<sup>43</sup>

Explicit resort to the terms 'courage,' 'reason' and 'custom' carries the novel close to the precipice of didacticism. This somehow does not feel like an accurate record of conversation under fire. But the rhetorical deviation is surely a token of Cooper's concern with a crisis of ways of war by no means resolved in his own day. The effect of imperial strife in North America had been, in Hawkeye's nostalgic phrasing,

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<sup>42</sup> Cooper, *Mohicans*, 202/3.

<sup>43</sup> . Cooper, *Mohicans*, 245/6. **TRY TO FIND REFERENCE IN ANTONY BEEVOR, SPANISH CIVIL WAR, TO REPUBLICAN OFFICERS THINKING IT DISHONOURABLE TO TAKE COVER.**

‘throwing everything into disorder and destroying all the harmony of warfare.’<sup>44</sup> In such circumstances, training and habit cut in as the sole remaining ground of right action.

This concern achieves its most vivid expression in the massacre that follows the surrender of Fort William Henry. What is in dispute is honour, which – like courage in the canoe – is differently understood by imperial and indigenous warriors. Montcalm allows the British to retreat with their arms, their colours and their baggage ‘and consequently, according to military opinion, their honour.’<sup>45</sup> Notice the order. Baggage comes last in the list until honour is added, almost as an afterthought.

Magua registers his objection with Montcalm. “Not a warrior has a scalp, and the palefaces make peace ... Magua took the hatchet to color it with blood. It is now bright; when it is red, it shall be buried.”<sup>46</sup> Put this way, it seems that Indian honour is at stake. Siege warfare is judged unsatisfactory by those for whom prowess is measured in scalps taken, not men killed, fortifications destroyed or territory secured. Hawkeye’s understanding of this and his relativistic acceptance of cultural difference have already been emphasised. Commenting on Chingchgook’s earlier scalping of a young French sentry, which had seemed a needless and even risky excess to the British military mind, the woodsman had offered an explanation that might serve as excuse for the massacre heralded by Magua’s exchange with Montcalm: ‘ ‘Twould have been a cruel and unhuman act for a whiteskin, but ‘tis the gift and natur’ of an Indian, and I suppose should not be denied’.

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<sup>44</sup> . Cooper, *Mohicans*, 233.

<sup>45</sup> . Cooper, *Mohicans*, 196.

<sup>46</sup> . Cooper, *Mohicans*, 200.

In the end it is a squalid tussle over the baggage – a mother’s shawl – that triggers the massacre of the column retreating from Fort William Henry. Denied the shawl, the brave takes the baby instead, and dashes its brains against a tree. Perhaps baggage trumps honour in a world upon which, as into Rob Roy’s Scotland, capitalist values are steadily encroaching?<sup>47</sup> And for the French, knowing of Magua’s dissatisfaction and able to see the massacre when it starts (as the British troops cannot), it has once again been property first and honour second. Destruction of the fort was their prime objective and they are careless of the aftermath. All are touched as property erodes honour, but each in a different way.

2,796 / 3,632

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<sup>47</sup> . Cooper, *Mohicans*, 206/7.

## CHAPTER 15

### THE BATTLEFIELD: *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

*A young man harbouring Romantic images of war volunteers against the wishes of his mother to fight for the Union. More often referred to as 'the youth', his name is Henry Fleming. Rumours of battle abound but seem never to materialise. When his unit is finally caught up in combat the youth stands firm against the first impact of an attack but is thrown when a second wave of Confederate troops advances. He runs from the battlefield.*

*Among the wounded to the rear of the Union lines the youth views the dead and is ashamed of his own cowardice and lack of wounds. He is drawn back towards the battle by curiosity and in the hope of redemption. Approaching the front line he finds Union troops running from the battlefield. One, whom Fleming accosts, clubs his head with a rifle butt in his anxiety to escape. That night the youth succeeds in rejoining his regiment, passing off his head-wound as a graze from an enemy bullet.*

*The next day Fleming finds himself once again in battle. Ordered to charge, only Henry and one other comrade, of all the 304th Regiment, have learned by chance that the general thinks poorly of their unit and expects it to be annihilated. Still they go forward, together seizing the regimental flag when their colour sergeant is killed. The charge falls short of its objective by a hundred yards. In spite of their bravery the men are berated by the general. Later in the day the regiment is trapped and has little option but to charge a second time toward the enemy unit that has them pinned*

*down. Once again Fleming leads, bearing the colours. Most of the Confederates flee; the remainder are killed or imprisoned and their colours captured. Soon after, it turns out that the battle is over, though it is not clear who won.*

It is hard to overstate the influence of this novel on subsequent representations of battle. Tim O'Brien, considered at length in chapter 20, shares Crane's preoccupations with vision and posturing and deploys the device of repetition, paying homage to the conclusion of the earlier novel when Lieutenant Cross, after confronting death for the first time, sets aside imagination and concludes that there is 'no great mystery... He was a soldier after all,' much as Crane's Henry Fleming, having 'been to touch the great death' concluded 'that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man'.<sup>48</sup> Vonnegut's homage is more obvious and sceptical. Billy Pilgrim breaks down in the PoW camp, is taken to the camp hospital, given a shot of morphine and left in the care of Edgar Derby, drafted high school teacher, who is given a copy of *The Red Badge of Courage* to read; but war will not make Derby, who had read the book before, either soldier or man. It will not even kill him. He will die, shot by firing squad, for looting a teapot.<sup>49</sup>

Four groups of images and three distinctive stylistic devices merit particular attention in this remarkable novel and together constitute a modernist argument against the possibility of realist representation of combat. The first group deals with perception and landscape. A second juxtaposes organism and machine, raising questions about individuality and rationality. Overlapping the second group, a third raises questions

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<sup>48</sup> . O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 19; all references to *The Red Badge* are to the Norton critical edition: Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 4<sup>th</sup> edition) this is 124 in Everyman, but need right (final) page from Norton edition.

<sup>49</sup> . Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5* ([1969] London: Vintage, 1991) 71.

about agency and identity through metamorphoses of group and individual. The fourth and most important set continues to play with identity through metaphors of theatre and spectacle. Nowhere does Crane resort to so hackneyed a phrase as the theatre of war, but Fleming is nothing if not an actor, constantly rehearsing and performing.

Battle has traditionally appeared the most visible aspect of war, represented with aspirations to accuracy in innumerable paintings and drawings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of which are little more than battle-plans with perspective thrown in. This visibility began to falter during the Napoleonic Wars, only to be restored, in highly mediated forms, in recent decades. Part of the reason for this was the sheer scale of the forces employed and the ever greater width and depth of battle fronts, which made visibility from a single standpoint impossible and undermined the plausibility of the battle-painting convention of the commander, mounted, surveying the scene from the foreground, attended by a small entourage of staff officers, among whom the viewer is implicitly included. Other, more mundane, reasons were more rapid rates of fire, before the development of smokeless powder, and the advent of high explosives, literally obscuring the action.

Already, in the early nineteenth century, two of the best-known British painters had avoided the battle entirely. Asked to paint Waterloo, Turner depicted the battlefield after the battle, showing a British patrol scaring off looters. Wilkie, resisted the site of conflict entirely, preferring to show veterans receiving the news of Wellington's

victory in London.<sup>50</sup> Such were the scale, pace and nature of newly industrialised warfare that it was becoming much less easy to provide plausible representations of engagements on canvas. The response was to move toward impression, as in Turner's marine paintings, to details representative of the whole, as in the swirling North African images of Delacroix or Fortuny, to the partial abstraction of Picasso's *Guernica* or Piper's *Battle of Britain*, or finally to displacement, as in John Byam Shaw's *The Boer War*, which shows a young women standing by a stream in lush countryside, letter in hand, the distant war now being represented by what is invisible yet almost palpable: her grief, her absent companion, the title itself, figuring as 'another colour on the artist's palette'.<sup>51</sup>

Crane understood this well. Rapid alternations between visual clarity and obscurity provide a powerful analogue for the bewildering movement between intelligibility and chaos experienced by participants. Short, staccato chapters, abrupt cutting from scene to scene, and the repeated counterposing of foreground and distance, visibility and occlusion, make *The Red Badge of Courage* one of the most cinematic of nineteenth-century novels, all the more extraordinary because it antedates cinema. Much of this purports to be plainly descriptive. Dozens of references to smoke, fog, haze, cloud, darkness, and mist are scattered throughout the book.<sup>52</sup> But at times there is a malign agency about these obstructions to sight. 'Smoke clouds went

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<sup>50</sup> J. M. M. Turner, 'The Field of Waterloo' (1818); David Wilkie, 'Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Waterloo Despatch' (1822).

<sup>51</sup> . The phrase was attributed to Marcel Duchamp by the anonymous author of a perceptive essay on Shaw's 'Boer War,' in *The Independent*, 5 March 2008.

<sup>52</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*: smoke (23, 25, 29, 33, 34, 50, 55, 77, 78, 82, 83); fog (36); haze, cloud, mist (52, 56/7, 64, 71). Though writing of events before his birth, to the irritation of some veterans, Crane is accurate in his choice of imagery. Gervase Phillips cites a number of mid-nineteenth-century sources, some from the American Civil War, to establish the literal fog of war created by black powder, concealing the effects of their firing from infantrymen. Gervase Phillips, 'Military Morality Transformed: Weapons and Soldiers on the Nineteenth-Century Battlefield' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41:4 (2011) 566.

slowly and insolently across the fields like observant phantoms' during an early skirmish.<sup>53</sup>

During the battle, moments of greater clarity come when the protagonist steps aside and, later, at the climax of the action. Fleming and a companion leave their unit to fetch water. 'They could, of course comprehend a greater amount of the battle than when their visions had been blurred by the hurling smoke of the line,' but not only do they see more, they also perceive more by overhearing a conversation between staff officers that makes clear to them, for the first time, the place of their regiment in the battle as a whole.<sup>54</sup>

It steadily becomes apparent (as though the smoke were to 'lift and disclose'<sup>55</sup>) that all of this is a metaphor for the 'fog of war' in two senses. Firstly there is the way in which intentions fail to translate into desired outcomes as they pass through this cruellest of social structures; secondly, the manner in which the participant caught up in events seems never able to understand them in a more than fragmentary and imperfect way and yet is transfixed or captivated by a desire to understand — the 'great desire to see' that draws Fleming back to the front after his early flight.<sup>56</sup>

Recovering or finding bravery after flight also confers on Fleming a fresh vision. During the water-fetching episode, he overhears the order for the 304th to charge and is stung by the General's low estimate of the regiment's capabilities. They fight like mule-drivers. They are to be used to plug the line for want of any better troops.

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<sup>53</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 78.

<sup>55</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 88.

<sup>56</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 52.

Not many of them will survive. Made aware of both the insignificance and the modest purpose of his unit in the larger scheme of the battle, he suddenly feels older. 'New eyes were given to him'.<sup>57</sup> The new eyes are those of a man newly part of a purposive society; now named; no longer the autistic figure of the first half of the book.<sup>58</sup>

In the first charge Fleming experiences an enhanced reality. 'They had passed into a clearer atmosphere. There was an effect like a revelation in the new appearance of the landscape'.<sup>59</sup> Later, between the two charges that provide the climax of the novel, he has a view of the great sweep of the battlefield and is able to identify three distinct engagements. At the climactic moment before the final successful charge, the regiment wait impatiently for their situation to be revealed by 'lazy and ignorant smoke'.<sup>60</sup> Advancing, they pass 'into a clearer atmosphere. There was an effect, 'this passage continues, 'like a revelation in the new appearance of the landscape... It seemed to the youth that he saw everything'.<sup>61</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Fleming discovers a more secure identity that enables him to review his own actions like a General reviewing troops. 'At last they marched before him clearly.' At its conclusion Fleming finds 'his eyes seemed to open to some new ways'.<sup>62</sup>

A second bundle of images in *The Red Badge* is already partly familiar from earlier discussion of the implications of technological change for warfare. Some are entirely

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<sup>57</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> . Eric Solomon offers interesting thoughts about the contrast between and individualistic first half and a more social second half of the novel. Eric Solomon, "The Structure of "The Red Badge of Courage"" *Modern Fiction Studies* 5:3 (Autumn 1959) 224 and 227. See also Solomon, *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) 76-77, which follows the earlier essay closely, but with many thoughtful revisions.

<sup>59</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 82.

<sup>60</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 103.

conventional; some almost literal. The litter of battle consists in 'the bodies of horses and splintered parts of war machines'.<sup>63</sup> At the climax, Fleming tries to encourage his comrades to one last effort, for 'the regiment was a machine run down'. Torn bodies express 'the awful machinery in which the men had been entangled,' for the battle itself is 'like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine' extruding corpses.<sup>64</sup> Some are more enigmatic, as when the sound of battle is likened to 'the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery, complications among the smaller stars'.<sup>65</sup> Less hackneyed is the melding of this war-machine with considerations of rationality and of organic metamorphoses, flanking the mechanical. Images of the individual as part of an organism or a machine abound, with what appears a complete disregard for consistency. As battle approaches, Fleming realises that he is 'about to be measured...and seizes time to look about him calculatingly'. Being measured is, ostensibly, being evaluated or judged. He is as yet 'an unknown quantity'. But is it also to be measured for his coffin, or worse, a mass grave, as the regiment becomes 'a moving box' from which he finds himself unable to contemplate escape, bound in by 'iron laws of tradition and law on four sides'?<sup>66</sup>

Fleming's response to mechanical constraint is calculation, much as his response to social constraint is the imagining of alternative roles for himself. At the outset he tries 'to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle'.<sup>67</sup> Before the final charge, he 'began to study the distance between him and the enemy [and]

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<sup>63</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 57. On the pervasive machine image, see Daniel Pick's brilliant study, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993) which, oddly, neglects Crane, though covering a tremendous range of authors, many left out of this book.

<sup>64</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 94/5.

<sup>66</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 19. Robert Graves, writing of the value of drill, echoes Crane. ' "Arms drill as it should be done," someone said, 'is beautiful, especially when the company feels itself as a single being and each movement is not a synchronized movement of every man together, but the single movement of one large creature.' Graves, *Goodbye*, 194-5.

<sup>67</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 8.

made vague calculations'.<sup>68</sup> There is no point aiming for precision (or with precision?) because he already knows that war has opened up awkward gaps between objective and subjective rationalities. Looking back on the regiment's penultimate charge he discovers 'that the distances, as compared with the brilliant measurings of his mind, were trivial and ridiculous ... The time, too, now that he reflected, he saw to have been short'. Reason is suspended. 'Elfin thoughts must have exaggerated and enlarged everything, he said'.<sup>69</sup>

In such a spellbound world, where the frame of time and space is beginning to dissolve, it is small wonder that men and groups should transform, not always into a machine, a box, or 'machines of steel' but into dragons, bees, crawling reptiles, serpents, or inanimate 'moving monsters wending with many feet', or else into the more abstract, enigmatic and repeated 'blue demonstration'.<sup>70</sup>

More elaborate, and more probing of agency and responsibility in battle, are the frequent metamorphoses of men into a single body. In the very first paragraph of the book, the whole army awoke, 'began to tremble with eagerness ... and cast its eyes upon the roads'.<sup>71</sup> Opposing groups exchanged blows 'in the manner of a pair of boxers'.<sup>72</sup> A regiment faltered under fire, 'but its riddled body still fought'.<sup>73</sup> The wounded, tramping back to the rear, were 'a flow of blood from the torn body of the

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<sup>68</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 97.

<sup>69</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 90.

<sup>70</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 8, 11, 13-14, 19, 21, 33.

<sup>71</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 99.

brigade'.<sup>74</sup> Fleming's regiment braced themselves to repel a second charge, and 'the sore joints ... creaked as it floundered into position to repulse'.<sup>75</sup>

Fleming's behaviour is not his own. Under fire he is 'not a man but a member,' and this is not simply because of the constraints of law and tradition represented by the moving box, but because he has been 'welded into a common personality ... dominated by a single desire'.<sup>76</sup> All this reinforces Jim's more prosaic speculation that if others ran then so might he.<sup>77</sup> At the same time it casts doubt on both the early cowardice and the later redemption of Fleming, whose agency is radically questioned.

This ambivalence is brilliantly captured in the fourth and final set of images running through Crane's tale, in which the consciousness of the soldier as an individual within a disciplined unit is mapped through the predicament of the actor, playing a rôle in his company. Even before he joins his unit, the young recruit is disappointed by his mother's refusal to engage in the domestic scene of his imagining. When he reveals that he has enlisted, she goes on milking the cow. 'He had primed himself for a beautiful scene. He had prepared certain sentences which he thought could be used with touching effect' – all to no avail!<sup>78</sup> Fleming had been dreaming of battles, but also, it would appear, doing a fair amount of reading for a farm boy. Finding it hard to conceive of a civil war – a war in his own country – he decides that '[I]t must be some sort of play affair' and gives up hoping for 'a Greeklake struggle'. 'Greeklake

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<sup>74</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 30.

<sup>75</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 32.

<sup>76</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 27; see also Malcolm Bradbury's introduction to the Everyman edition of *Red Badge* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), xxxi, for whom Fleming is 'the victim and not the maker of tactics, the individual in the managed mass'.

<sup>77</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 10-11.

<sup>78</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 6.

struggles would be no more.<sup>79</sup> Even so, his mother 'had disappointed him by saying nothing whatever about returning with his shield or on it'.<sup>80</sup> His comrades in arms are little better than his mother, in what seems to be a mere puppet show. '[They] seem ever to play intolerable parts ... ever upraising the ghost of shame on the stick of their curiosity'.<sup>81</sup>

There are moments of hope, when a suitably elevated drama seems imminent. Early on he hears others talk 'excitedly of the prospective battle as of a drama they were about to witness'. He scrambles to the brow of a hill, expecting to see some field of glory but is rewarded with nothing more than a landscape and distant men firing at it.<sup>82</sup> Another time he hears a great cacophony that must surely be the sound of 'a celestial battle ... tumbling hordes a-struggle in the air;' but no such luck.<sup>83</sup>

There is much talk of posture, but what posturing there is turns out to be merely banal. A soldier relaying fifth-hand gossip about troop movements adopts 'the important air of a herald in red and gold'.<sup>84</sup> The men debate the matter. Should they fight like duelists, erect and exposed, as Cooper's Colonel Munro and those doomed Spanish republican regulars would have insisted? This idea appeals to some as honourable, but others point to the veterans nearby, 'digging ... like terriers'.<sup>85</sup> In battle, 'there was a singular absence of heroic poses' and even the officers 'neglected to stand in picturesque attitudes'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 5, 8.

<sup>80</sup> . The reference is to Plutarch, *Moralia, Sayings of the Spartan Women*.

<sup>81</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 49,

<sup>82</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 39.

<sup>84</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 21. Once again, one is reminded of those Spanish republican regulars, scoring to take cover. See above, chapter 16, n.17.

<sup>86</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 29.

On the rare occasions when theatricals do interrupt the action, they are distressingly banal. A soldier tries to steal a horse; a girl comes out of the farmhouse and struggles with him. 'The observant regiment ... became so engrossed in this affair that they entirely ceased to remember their own larger war' and their proper roles.<sup>87</sup> At the end of the day this larger war is unprofessionally concluded. The dead cannot get up to take their bow. 'It would have been an empty stage if it were not for a few corpses ... At the sight of this tableau, many of the men in blue sprang from behind their covers and made an ungainly dance of joy'.<sup>88</sup> War seems a rather poor rehearsal for itself, a blue demonstration gone horribly awry. It is hard to know who is actor, who audience, who neither.

The problem for Fleming is that he has been taught 'that a man becomes another thing in a battle'. A thing! – But this might be a professional soldier, a wiser or a better man, or a performer, and Fleming is slow to abandon this third possibility while simultaneously slow to abandon himself to it. This latter reluctance stems from his self-regarding casting of himself as spectator. He has read about war, but longs 'to see it all': not to take part, to fight, to experience, but to see it.<sup>89</sup> He is constantly watching himself and rehearsing for some role he might assign himself, only to be frustrated by events. Returning to his regiment, with his head-wound – the ironic red badge of the title – he imagines the welcome he'll get.<sup>90</sup> After his flight, he recovers a little courage and decides to return to the front. He sees pictures of himself in his mind's eye, making up for that lack of suitably heroic attitudes observed earlier: 'a

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<sup>87</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 14.

<sup>88</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 89.

<sup>89</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 59.

blue, lurid figure leading desperate charges with one knee forward and a broken blade high – a blue, determined figure standing before a crimson and steel assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all.’ Toning it down a little ‘he saw a picture of himself, dust-stained, haggard, panting, flying to the front at the proper moment [on cue!] to throttle the dark leering witch of calamity.’ But then he started to think of practicalities. He is lost; he has no rifle. Before long the debate between imagination and practicality has exhausted him.<sup>91</sup>

Fleming starts out believing that a man becomes another thing in battle and anticipates salvation in such a change. Training, preparation and combat itself effect a transformation of personality. But the uncertainties surrounding the nature of this ‘other thing’ and the reluctance of Fleming to discard his incessant imaginings and throw away his ‘mental pamphlets’ leave a real doubt, at the end, about the extent to which he ever did, in the heat of battle, succeed in fusing his roles as soldier, spectator, and performer.<sup>92</sup> He looks back ‘upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and sees them truly’ and is gleeful to find that he can now despise them; but is this because he has come up with a more subtle and understated personal screenplay, newly able to marshal his own past actions and ‘look upon them in spectator fashion,’ or because he has ceased to be a fantasist and come to live in the moment and in the world? We know that Fleming has already had a shot at composing a notice of the battle. After the penultimate charge, ‘as he reviewed the battle pictures he had seen, he felt quite competent to return home and make the hearts of the people glow with stories of the war.’<sup>93</sup> Is this one of those abandoned ‘earlier gospels’? Does anyone really believe that Fleming has gleaned from his

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<sup>91</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 51.

<sup>92</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 55.

<sup>93</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 69.

fragmented part in the battle 'a store of assurance ... a quiet manhood, nonassertive but of sturdy and strong blood'. It just might be yet another audition; there is considerable room for doubt. Crane leaves little option but to read the much-debated final page ironically. 'He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.'<sup>94</sup>

The striking images deployed by Crane finally yield an anti-heroic account of battle. This interpretation is reinforced by three stylistic devices. Constant repetition, the use of bathos, and the upsetting of narrative conventions all point to the absurdity of warfare and challenge its moral pretensions.

How do these stylistic devices operate? – There is repetition both of phrase and of incident. There are repeated rumours early in the book that amount to nothing. When the action starts, it is from the second, not the first Confederate charge that Fleming runs. At the end, his own regiment mounts two charges against the Confederates in one day. It is from the second of these that most of the enemy run. In short, there is both repetition and inversion, which together mimic the symmetry and the repetitive

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<sup>94</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 102-104. There is very considerable disagreement on this central point in the voluminous secondary literature that has developed since John Berryman restored Crane to the canon through his 1950 biography. While textual variants amplify doubts, and there is a case for regarding the version prepared by Henry Binder as recently as 1982 as authoritative, the general drift over time has been away from ready acceptance of a heroic or redemptive interpretation of the second half of the book. James Trammell Cox, in the 1950s, was content to take Fleming's 'new manhood' as maturation and enlightenment: 'a new quiet, a new dignity' conferred by 'the ability to perceive truthfully the nature of this symbolically revealed, hostile universe'. But later readings incline to the view that Fleming understood *The Red Badge* less well than Cox. Howard Horsford, in another important collection of essays on *The Red Badge*, twenty-five years later, still conceded that the majority of readers accepted Fleming's maturation at face value, but placed himself with the minority who had 'found apparent contradictions and discrepancies between these concluding assertions in Fleming's thought regarding his gained maturity and the pervasive irony that hitherto has undercut his mind's working', while noting that recent awareness of the longer (Binder) text has encouraged the view that the novel is, to the very end, a 'consistently ironic treatment of Fleming's illusions, rationalizations, and self-justifications'. John Berryman, *Stephen Crane* (London: Methuen, 1950); Henry Binder, 'The *Red Badge of Courage* Nobody Knows' *Studies in the Novel* 10 (1978) 9-47; James Trammell Cox, 'The Imagery of "The Red Badge of Courage"' *Modern Fiction Studies* 5:3 (1959) 209-234; Lee Clark Mitchell 'Introduction' to Lee Clark Mitchell (ed.) *New Essays on The Red Badge of Courage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-23, and Howard C. Horsford, "He Was a Man" in the same volume, 109-127.

formality of modern war and modern industry, anticipating their representation through dance and ritual in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* or Joan Littlewood's later *Oh! What a Lovely War*.<sup>95</sup>

Repetition of small phrases conveys the tedium of war, the disorientation of the wounded and dying, and the inarticulate and uncomprehending condition of the common soldiery. As the newly formed regiment marches from pillar to post, the loud soldier complains of 'sore feet and damned short rations'. Things are no better by the next chapter: 'Sore feet an' damned short rations, that's all,' he once again complains.<sup>96</sup> (Fleming, thanks to his mother, is better armed, with his eight pairs of socks and his cup of blackberry jam.<sup>97</sup>) As the regiment marches a man falls down. He reaches to pick up his rifle and his hand is trodden on. The next day, woken to march at the double, Fleming runs alongside his comrades and all he knows is that if he falls 'those coming behind would tread upon him'.<sup>98</sup> Later, as they finally face action for the first time, the captain's talk is 'an endless repetition. "Reserve your fire, boys – don't shoot till I tell you – save your fire..."<sup>99</sup> As death approaches, Jim Conkin's conversation with Fleming lapses into repeated phrases as comprehension lapses. 'I tell yeh what I'm afraid of...' (twice) and Henry's futile reply: 'I'll take care of yeh!' Then comes Conkin's soliloquy: 'Don't touch me – Leave me be': that second phrase ten times. Stuck for an epithet, the tattered man – soon to be deserted by Fleming, concludes of Jim, no less than four times over, that he was 'a reg'lar jim-

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<sup>95</sup> . For Blimp, see chapter 19, below. Joan Littlewood's 1963 Theatre Workshop production was, along with the Cambridge Footlights' 'Beyond the Fringe' and the rise of the Beatles, were part of the sharp rejection of wartime deference that swept Britain in the early 1960s. In the 1969 film, a carousel represents cavalry and the jostling for position of staff officers is presented as a game of leapfrog.

<sup>96</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 16, 17.

<sup>97</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 13, 18.

<sup>99</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 27.

dandy'. For his own part, though wounded, he was determined not to repeat Jim's death. 'All I want is some pea soup an' a good bed. Some pea soup,' he repeated dreamily.<sup>100</sup>

Common soldiers, unable to achieve emphasis by other means, jabber phrases as epithet or plaudit. Ruminating on the first phase of the battle, the tattered man can think of nothing better to say to Fleming than 'Was a pretty good fight, wasn't it?': this twice, perhaps seeking reassurance. After the penultimate charge, one of the regiment has heard the colonel, in conversation with their lieutenant, commending the bravery of Fleming and Wilson, who took up the flag when the colour-sergeant fell. Excitedly silencing more eloquent comrades, he runs with the story.

"Mr Hasbrouck!" he ses, "by th' way, who was that lad what carried th' flag? He ses. There, Flemin' what d' yeh think 'a that? "Who was th' lad what carried th' flag?" he ses, an' the' lieutenant, he speaks up right away: "That's Flemin', an he's a jimhickey," he ses, right away. What? I say he did. "A jimhickey," he ses – those 'r his words. He did, too, I say he did. If you kin tell this story better than I kin, go ahead an' tell it. Well, then, keep yer mouth shet. The' lieutenant, he ses: "He's a jimhickey," an the' colonel, he ses: "Ahem! Ahem! He is, indeed..."<sup>101</sup>

And it's not clear that the story *could* be told any better, as it has been a story precisely of the routines, repetitive incident and confusion that are so characteristic of battle. To tell it better would be to disfigure it.

The banality of these passages, falling so short of the grand Greeklike narratives of which Fleming had once dreamed, is driven home by moments of bathos scattered throughout. The lieutenant is shot in the hand. He swears profusely but his next thought is for his uniform. He holds the wounded hand away from his side so the

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<sup>100</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 47.

<sup>101</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 92-3.

blood won't drip on his trousers. 'It was as if he had hit his fingers with a tack hammer at home.'<sup>102</sup> A general in the midst of battle 'has the appearance of a business man whose market is swinging up and down'.<sup>103</sup>

Many of these moments of bathos are at the expense of Fleming. Crane just won't give over teasing him. Battle seems imminent. Fleming expects heroics. He turns toward the colonel and sees him 'lift his gigantic arm and [...] calmly stroke his mustache'.<sup>104</sup> A horseman gallops up. He must be delivering orders. But no; the colonel's out of cigars, and Fleming wonders 'what a box of cigars had to do with war'.<sup>105</sup> Finally mobilized after months of training, Fleming had expected active service to be unrelentingly intense; instead, 'he had done little but sit still and try to keep warm'.<sup>106</sup> It is a pattern repeated almost a century later in Tim O'Brien's *The Things they Carried*. In Vietnam, the expectations raised by war stories are repeatedly dashed. When Ted Lavender is killed his performance disappoints. 'There was no twitching or flopping. Kiowa, who saw it happen, said it was like watching a rock fall, or a big sandbag ... not like the movies where the dead guy rolls around and does fancy spins and goes ass over teakettle.'<sup>107</sup>

Often, it is the utter failure of performance following one of Fleming's mental rehearsals that achieves the effect. At one point he wants 'to make a rallying speech, to sing a battle hymn, but ... [can] only get his tongue to call into the air: "Why – why

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<sup>102</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 35.

<sup>104</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 13. ('Everything,' Churchill muses; 'I couldn't agree more,' adds Cabrera Infante.)

<sup>106</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> . Tim O'Brien, *The Things they Carried* ([1990] London: Flamingo 1991) 6/7.

– what – what’s th’ matter?”<sup>108</sup> About to return a package of letters to Wilson ‘he had been trying to invent a remarkable comment upon the affair [but] could conjure nothing of sufficient point’.<sup>109</sup>

Fleming has all along wanted war to be something more than it is, and seems not quite to have shrugged this off at the novel’s end. What drove him to an appearance of heroism, after all, was not some recovery of abstract courage but a combination of shame at being compared to a mule-driver, of scorn for his officers, coupled with a vain desire to be esteemed by them, of pride in his regiment, and of a longing to overcome the shame, less of flight than of his abandonment of the dying tattered man. Shame, scorn, vanity and pride between them drain out much of the nobility lent to that concluding phrase ‘he was a man’ by the carefully balanced sentence that precedes it.

Denied grandeur and heroics, wandering in a Becket-like world of repetition, caught in a pincer movement between vain imaginings and events, Fleming and Crane’s reader are finally denied historical context and narrative coherence. That the battle may be identified using external evidence is quite beside the point; it is any and every battle. No towns are mentioned in the entire text except Washington, and that only once. There is no telling the date or even the time of year. The reader does not know what the war is about and is neither invited to sympathise with the South on constitutional grounds nor with the North on humanitarian grounds. The only negro in the book is left behind on page one before we learn whether he is slave or free man.

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<sup>108</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 69.

Fleming 'had had the idea that real war was a series of death struggles with small time in between for sleep and meals': a well-made play with intervals between the acts. But here are no unities: the very frame of time and space is eroded by stuttering repetition and by the troops' wanderings over unmapped terrain. If there is a story, it is hardly more coherent than those little parcels of half-routed troops that the officers, Fleming mused, could perhaps fit together to make a battle front.<sup>110</sup> Later he complains that 'nobody knows where we go or why we go ... [or] what it's done for,' and that, Crane seems to suggest, is how it is. Fleming would like to know, and it is while trying to get information from a soldier in his own army, coming from the front, that he gets his spurious wound – his red badge. Battle is incoherent and trying to make too much sense of it a dangerous business; perhaps it is the same with stories.

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<sup>110</sup> . Crane, *Red Badge*, 36.

## CHAPTER 16

### IRREGULAR WARFARE: SCAPEGOATS OF EMPIRE

‘The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like.’ St. Augustine, *Against Faustus*.

‘One who owes a duty of obedience to the giver of the command does not himself kill – he is an instrument, a sword in the user’s hand.’ St. Augustine, *City of God*.

[Both these quoted by Gray, the latter on p.87, in case page references required]

*Soon after war broke out in 1899 between Britain and the Afrikaner republics in Southern Africa, humiliating initial reverses led the British to mobilize forces from across the empire of settlement, India excepted. This was no small colonial struggle. By the end, in May 1902 combined civilian and military deaths on both sides totalled 75,000, many from disease, and the British had fielded an army approaching a quarter of a million men. George Ramsdale Witton (1874-1942), a gunner with the Victorian Regiment of the Royal Australian Artillery, was one of many young Australians who volunteered for service in South Africa. Notwithstanding his training in the artillery, Witton was soon selected for the Australian Imperial Regiment because he was an accomplished shot and an experienced horseman. Rapidly promoted to sergeant, he embarked for South Africa, receiving further training en route, including an introductory course in military regulations and law. Disembarked at Beira, a railhead in the Portuguese territory of Mozambique, Witton and his comrades found themselves waiting in vain for transport and far from the action during the closing phase of the conventional war, as imperial troops under Lord*

*Frederick Roberts relieved the siege of Mafeking and took the Boer capitals of Pretoria and Johannesburg in May 1900.*

*A recurrent problem with one of his knees had kept Witton from serving with his unit once they reached their base in Rhodesia. Instead, he found himself before long acting as quartermaster-sergeant at the Australian depot in Maitland, in Cape Town, the main base for cavalry and artillery in the district, including the irregular mounted forces and all colonial troops. So it was not until the war had entered its second and more prolonged phase, of Boer insurgency and imperial counter-insurgency, that Witton finally saw action. Offered a commission at a very handsome salary in a light mounted unit of roughly 350 men, the Bushveldt Carbineers, Witton travelled deep into the northern Transvaal to Pietersburg (present-day Polokwane), where the Carbineers shared quarters with two British infantry regiments and an artillery detachment under the general command of Colonel F. Hall.<sup>111</sup>*

*Following their defeat in conventional engagements, the Afrikaners had fallen back on guerrilla tactics, sabotaging the railways and launching small-scale raids against British positions by highly commandos. The response was to follow recent Spanish practice in Cuba by concentrating rural civilian populations in camps in order to isolate the insurgents. Areas like the northern Transvaal became, in effect, killing fields patrolled by irregular imperial units, even lighter and more mobile than the Boer commandos, in which Canadian and Australian contingents were prominent. Accordingly, detachments of the Bushveldt Carbineers operated from outposts some distance from Pietersburg, effectively under the command of quite junior officers.*

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<sup>111</sup> . ABWM.

*Witton's account of the events that so nearly led to his death centres on the operational and disciplinary problems that arose out of this form of warfare. There had been trouble at Spelonken, about ninety miles north of Pietersburg, where a detachment of Bushveldt Carbineers had established their headquarters in June 1901 at the rather grandiosely named Fort Edward, hardly more than a farmhouse. A group of Boers, wishing to surrender, had been shot dead by order of Captain Robertson, one of the officers in command. An Afrikaaner serving with the imperial forces, but suspected of treachery, had also been summarily executed, and his death misreported to headquarters by another of the officers, Major Robert Lenehan.<sup>112</sup> Colonel Hall, Commanding Officer in Pietersburg, withdrew the detachment and sent out replacements under Captain Percy Hunt, assisted by his close friend, Lieutenant Morant, the unit's horse-breaker. Together, they set about restoring discipline. This was not popular with the troops; pilfering and disobedience continued and those responsible were replaced by a fresh draft under the command of Witton, who reached Spelonken on 4 August 1901.<sup>113</sup>*

*When Witton and his men arrived at Fort Edward, Hunt was out on patrol. The following night he died in action. Shot in the chest at close quarters, he was subsequently stripped naked and mutilated. Falsely informed that the farmhouse headquarters of a Boer Commandant, some eighty miles to the east, was only lightly defended, Hunt had attacked with a small force only to find the house defended by a vastly superior force. When news reached Fort Edward, the troops were paraded. In Witton's version of events they were then told by Captain Alfred Taylor, an*

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<sup>112</sup> . Witton, *Scapegoats*, 47-8.

<sup>113</sup> . Witton, *Scapegoats*, 51.

*intelligence officer serving in Spelonken as second-in-command to the Area Commander, that they must ‘avenge the death of their captain, and “give no quarter”’.<sup>114</sup> Morant, who claimed to have ignored direct orders to kill prisoners in the past, was now convinced that his friend and comrade had been murdered, and that revenge was justified. ‘He vowed there and then – Witton assures his readers –that he would give no quarter and take no prisoners’.*

*A punitive expedition led by Morant caught up with the Boers, inflicting casualties and dispersing them. Returning to Fort Edward, Morant found that a wounded prisoner, Visser, taken the previous day, was wearing parts of Hunt’s uniform. Morant immediately arranged for Visser to be executed by a firing squad. He justified this in three ways. First of all, he took Visser’s possession of the uniform as evidence of complicity in Hunt’s death. Second, he claimed that Hunt himself, not long before, had ‘paraded his officers and sergeants and told them that he had direct orders from headquarters at Pretoria not to take prisoners’.<sup>115</sup> Finally, he cited a recent proclamation from Lord Kitchener, commander-in-chief in South Africa, that all Boers captured wearing khaki were to be summarily shot. Soon afterwards, Morant ordered more Boer prisoners to be shot; Witton personally killed one who attacked him while attempting to escape. These events were witnessed by a German missionary, Daniel Heese, who made off in his buggy, only to be found shot dead a few miles away, some days later, by Handcock.*

*Not long after these events, while Morant was on leave in Pretoria, the Fort Edward detachment was recalled to Pietersburg and all its officers placed in solitary*

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<sup>114</sup> . Witton, *Scapegoats*, 54.

<sup>115</sup> . Witton, *Scapegoats*, 55.

*confinement. A fortnight later, Witton, Morant, Handcock, Lenehan and Picton were charged with the murder of Boers, including prisoners, and of Heese, a witness to their earlier crimes. A court martial was convened at which the accused were defended by an inexperienced country solicitor, Major James Thomas. When Pietersburg was attacked by the Boers, emboldened by the withdrawal from Spelonken, the prisoners were temporarily released to join in its defence and acquitted themselves well. Later, the court martial reconvened in Pretoria where Morant, Handcock and Witton were convicted and sentenced to death. The court recommended mercy, perhaps because of the convicted men's service in the defence of Pietersburg, but only Witton was subsequently reprieved. Morant and Handcock were shot on 27 February 1902. Witton served only a short term of imprisonment before being pardoned.*

### *The Horses*

‘Concerning the war I say nothing. The only thing that wrings my heart and soul is the thought of the horses. Oh, my beloved animals! The men and women can go to hell, but my horses; I walk round and round this room cursing God for allowing dumb brutes to be tortured... Oh, my horses!’ Edward Elgar, letter 25 August 1914 to Frank Schuster.<sup>116</sup>

*Breaker Morant*, an Australian film based on the ghost-written memoir that supplies the title of this chapter places Harry Morant at the heart of the story, the horse-breaker of the title. It is a courtroom drama, in which the patent manipulation of legal process and the operational difficulties of holding prisoners in the South African veldt are balanced against Morant's impurity of motive and the functionally necessary indiscipline of his counter-commando, operating deep inside hostile country. But

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<sup>116</sup> . The phrase provided Lewis Foreman with the somewhat enigmatic title of the second volume of his series on Elgar: Lewis Foreman (ed.) *Oh, My Horses! — Elgar and the Great War* (The Music of Elgar, vol.2. (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001).

there is a second aspect to the breaker's story, and that is its changing character, as one text was imposed upon another over close to a century.

Modern literary representations of warfare, both factual and fictional, have extended the moral vocabulary of combat in ways that foster serious deliberation of the dilemmas of military service and command. At the same time, legalistic, formulaic, and narrowly secular approaches to the ethics of war have been gaining ground over the past century in ways that threaten this ethical deepening. Scrutiny of Shakespeare's *Henry V* introduced this contradiction by juxtaposing the multiplicity of Shakespeare's moral registers of war and the narrowing tendencies in the play's performance history. The story of the just-war revival saw a rich tradition rendered formulaic. In their modest way, changing narratives of the Boer War paralleled both these trends. Accounts written at the time and some later academic histories light upon the disregard with which the British and their allies denuded farmland and squandered horses; by the end of the 1970s these aspects of the Boer War had been forgotten, as the episode precipitated a stripped-down just-war narrative

In George Witton's 1907 *Scapegoats of the Empire*, one of the earliest and most substantial tellings of the Morant story lassitude, ill-health, the horses and the sheer wastefulness of war figure prominently.<sup>117</sup> Yet the 1978 Australian film *Breaker*

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<sup>117</sup> . This part of the chapter is a revised version of part of my 'Three Parables about War' in Timothy Blewett, Adrian Hyde-Price and Wyn Rees (eds.) *British Foreign Policy and the Anglican Church: Christian Engagement with the Contemporary World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 55-71. George R. Witton, *Scapegoats of the Empire: the Story of the Bushveldt Carbineers* (Melbourne: D. W. Paterson Co., 1907). The history and development of this text is problematic in the extreme. Very few copies of a first edition have survived. The memoir and the incidents to which it refers were little regarded by historians until a novel was published in 1973, by broadcaster, film and television director and producer, Kit Denton. *The Breaker* ran to seven editions. This led in turn to a play (Kenneth Ross, *'Breaker' Morant* (1978)), a film under the same title directed by Bruce Beresford in 1980 and starring Edward Woodward, and a new edition of Witton's memoir in 1982. In later life Denton changed his mind about Morant, and tried unsuccessfully, through a further book, *Closed File*, to knock him off the pedestal on which he had been placed after the release of Beresford's film. See Vivienne

*Morant* reduces a broader account of the experience of one Australian combatant to courtroom drama, editing out one of the most striking features of the book from which from which it derived. The full extent of the tension between the moral autonomy of Harry Morant under patently illegal orders and his desire for revenge is sidelined. The development of this Australian story over time helps show the price of the move from tradition, through doctrine, to formula. To return to Witton's original text is to recover a wider moral imaginary of war; its evolution, from memoir to novel to play to film, nicely illustrates late twentieth-century convergence on the Victorian formula.

Who, aside from those personally involved in hunting, racing, or eventing, gives a fig for horses these days? Part of the political force of the Countryside Alliance in Britain and most of the surprise it evoked in Whitehall during the first decade of the new millennium stemmed from sharply contrasting answers to this question in Blair's Britain. Horses are no longer involved in mundane transportation or warfare. They remain numerous, but are an important part of daily life for only a small minority. Kept mainly for pleasure, the 1.3 million horses, ponies and donkeys in Britain are looked after by 720,000 owners and carers, but this amounts to scarcely more than 1% of the population.<sup>118</sup> Little place remains for the horse in warfare, which has been

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Kelly, 'The Persistence of Myth: Kit Denton and Breaker Morant' *Journal of Australian Studies*, 91 (2007) 123-134. There is still no agreement on the facts of the case, and British official records are lost. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breaker\\_Morant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breaker_Morant). The 1907 copy from which I worked, in the Cambridge University Library, claims to be a second edition. I am informed by staff at the National Library of Australia, in a communication from Gwyn Wilding, that the library of Deakin University has a copy of the first edition. Deakin confirm this (<http://www.deakin.edu.au/library/spc/exhibitions/wittonscapegoats.php>), repeating the rumour that the first edition was seized by the Australian government and destroyed for fear of offending Lord Kitchener. I have been unable to confirm this or see the Deakin copy, but believe the Melbourne publication to be a second impression, rather than a new edition. The book was reissued in 1982, and reviews at the time suggested that only seven copies of the first edition had survived, thought to be advance copies belonging to the author. The Australian National Library holds a clippings file of reviews of the 1982 reissue, and copies of these can be obtained using the 'Copies Direct' system (<http://www.nla.gov.au/copiesdirect>).

<sup>118</sup> . <http://www.equinehealthandwelfarestrategy.co.uk> (2000) accessed 27 August 2011.

mechanised to the point where mechanical and biological adaptation or enhancement even of the human body is now routine.<sup>119</sup> Think only of night vision. As to landscape, it remains far from inconsequential. Deserts and mountains still challenge human endurance and mechanical reliability. Yet technological ingenuity in the form of novel means of surveillance, protection of personnel, and precision-guided munitions have done much to minimize the significance of the ground over which wars are fought. In short, there has been a dissolving of what once seemed to be natural limits to warfare and a corresponding growth in the risk of permanent harm to the environment from combat. All this must seem to Christians in stark contrast with God's injunction to Adam in the Garden of Eden, 'to dress it and to keep it'.<sup>120</sup>

Even seventy years ago it was otherwise. Kurt Vonnegut tells of a time, two days after the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, when six abandoned American prisoners of war were riding through Germany in a wagon drawn by two horses, found abandoned in a suburb of Dresden, the city where, not long before, many thousands had died in a single night of Allied bombing. Vonnegut's protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is roused by:

a middle-aged man and wife ... crooning to the horses. They were noticing what the Americans had not noticed — that the horses' hooves were broken, so that every step meant agony, that the horses were insane with thirst. The Americans had treated their form of transportation as though it were no more sensitive than a six-cylinder Chevrolet.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> . Christopher Coker, *The Future of War* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>120</sup> . *Genesis* 2.15.

<sup>121</sup> . Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5* ([1969] Vintage 2000) 143.

Even in 1945, the German couple needed to be middle-aged or country folk to notice these things, and place concern for the horses ahead of resentment of the Americans. Industrialisation had severed millions from the land, and the internal combustion engine was speedily ousting horses from the city. For decades, streams of refugees had been passing each other at the city limits: people in; horses out. Go back another half-century and the Second Boer War (1899-1902) was almost certainly the last in which the British suffered far greater casualties among their horses than among the troops. When Lord Roberts invaded the Orange Free State in 1900, 500 mounts of the 8,000 strong cavalry division commanded by Lieutenant-General John French were dead or useless after the first two days, long before the enemy had been engaged. By the time French reached the capital, Bloemfontein, two-thirds of the horses at his disposal were dead.<sup>122</sup> In his authoritative history of the war, Thomas Pakenham has estimated that 21,942 out of a combined force of 448,435 imperial and colonial troops died in the war: 5,774 in combat and a further 16,168 from their wounds or from disease. Compare this with an estimated loss of between 400,346 and 513,320 horses, mules, and donkeys, 'turning South Africa into [an] ... imperial knacker's yard'.<sup>123</sup>

Fatalities among the horses were a serious military issue. In the absence of mechanised road transport, and with the few railways that existed increasingly targeted by Boer irregulars, they were crucial to British logistics. Moreover the innumerable corpses, not easily gathered and burnt, posed a serious health risk, polluting watercourses.<sup>124</sup> To make matters worse, the logistical and combat aspects

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<sup>122</sup> . Byron Farwell, *The Great Boer War* (London, 1979) 240/1.

<sup>123</sup> . Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979) 572; Farrell, *The Great Boer War*, 240/1. Pakenham's is the lower estimate.

<sup>124</sup> . Ibid.

of the horse shortage worsened as the war progressed. The Afrikaaner victories of the first two months were soon reversed, as British and Dominion forces reached South Africa in strength. No longer able to match the British in conventional warfare, the Afrikaaners fell back on irregular means. Raids on British communications and outposts increased in frequency toward the end of 1900. In October 1899 the British had 'barely 14,000 mounted men'.<sup>125</sup> Over the next two years hundreds of thousands of mounts were imported from as far afield as Argentina and Hungary to provide the mobility needed for effective counterinsurgency operations.

Lord Kitchener's response to lightly armed and mobile Boer commandos was twofold. The first step was to drain the water in which they swam by moving civilians into concentration camps, a policy reversed only in the closing months of the war, partly in response to public revulsion at the death rates among civilians in the camps and partly to lay responsibility for feeding them on the Boers themselves, by then poorly supplied. But it was also in this late phase of the war that special mounted units were formed, designed to beat the Dutch at their own game by operating deep in hostile territory. The war thus became a highly mobile irregular struggle in which horses and their care were vital to success. Light mounted troops had great tactical advantage over Boer commandoes hampered by the wagons that carried their supplies and in which they laagered overnight. The Bushveldt Carbineers, in which Witton, Morant and Handcock were to serve, was one such force. Nominally commanded by British officers, it was in essence an Australian force, relying on the much more widespread familiarity of colonials than of urbanised British recruits with life in the saddle and on the range.

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<sup>125</sup> . Bill Nasson, *The South African War, 1899-1902* (London: Arnold, 1999) 150.

While it may be true that ‘the British, a horse-loving people, were horrified by the dreadful treatment of horses in South Africa’, they were also largely responsible for them.<sup>126</sup> Those from Indian and colonial units were appalled. A recent official history quotes Captain Laurence Maxwell, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bengal Lancers, writing in March 1900 to his sister, about the conditions under which the remounts he had brought from Indian were being moved up to the front. ‘The horses are shoved into trucks just like cattle – he wrote—and with room enough to turn around and get mixed up higgledy-piggledy and kick and do all sorts of mischief.’<sup>127</sup> Horses, for Maxwell, were morally distant from cattle.

The Australians, as is evident from *Scapegoats*, did not neglect their horses. They cared about them and cared for them. Not for them the heavy iron-framed English cavalry saddle. Indeed, like Witton, the men of the Bushveldt Carbineers had been selected for their skill and familiarity with horses. All volunteers for service in South Africa had been subjected to a riding test before departure. Those who failed had been rejected. Witton’s memoir shows a consistent interest in and regard for horses. He describes the embarkation and rather precarious disembarkation of his unit’s 700 horses. He comments on the Hungarian re-mounts at Beira and notes the admiration expressed by the Portuguese governor for the condition of the Australian horses. He criticises the quality of the saddlery issued at East London by the British as ‘just the

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<sup>126</sup> . Farwell, *The Great Boer War*, 240/1. H. S. Gaskell, who interrupted his medical studies at Edinburgh University to serve in South Africa in the Imperial Yeomanry, pays close attention to the horses (41, 42, 44, 51, 61, 66-67, 79, 81, and passim) and provides a horrifying description of the burden carried by the small American horses on which his unit was mounted and the incompetence of many of his fellow-soldiers. Loading the horse was two hours’ work. H. S. Gaskell, *With Lord Methuen in South Africa* (London, 1906) 31-33.

<sup>127</sup> . Field Marshall Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson in association with the National Army Museum, 1999) 140.

kind of equipment to cripple the rider and ruin the horse at the same time'. On arrival at Pietersberg, his principal duty was to oversee the care of the horses.<sup>128</sup>

Not only did Witton evidently care about the horses; so also did those who stood trial with him. Handcock had been a farrier, responsible not only for shoeing horses but also for attending to their minor ailments. In the Carbineers he served as a Veterinary Lieutenant.<sup>129</sup> Morant, famously, was a breaker, who took wild horses and brought them to the point where they were fit to ride.

### *Natural Warriors*

The reason why so much attention has been devoted to the prominence of the horse in the Boer war and the contrast between British and colonial attitudes to the horse is because this theme, so common in scholarly historical accounts of the war and in contemporary memoirs, is virtually absent from the later film. *Breaker Morant*, like the antecedent novel and play, is as much a gloss on Australian participation in the two World Wars and Vietnam as the literal treatment of events in the Boer War that it purports to be. Australian resentments bubble under the surface: not just Gallipoli, but also the loss of the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* in December 1941 and the yet more ignominious fall of Singapore in February 1942, which resulted in the captivity thousands of Australians and left the country almost defenceless. When the condemned Australians in *Breaker Morant* are temporarily released to help the British regulars to repel a Boer raid on Fort Edward their valour earns no mitigation.

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<sup>128</sup> . Witton, *Scapegoats*, 5, 9, 10, 19, 40, 43; see also 16, 71, and passim.

<sup>129</sup> . The word 'farrier' is little known these days, as much because of the rise of professional vets as because of the marginalisation of the horse, but denotes a common horse doctor. In a statement to the court, Handcock declared: 'I am a Veterinary Lieutenant. I have had a very poor education. I never cared much about being an officer; all I know about is horses, though I like to fight'. Witton, *Scapegoats*, 114.

High politics, it is suggested, trumps humanity and moral obligation among the British commanders. Rules prevail over natural impulses.

The contemporaneity of its implicit political target surely guided the transformation of *Scapegoats* into *Breaker* and the relative neglect of opposition between natural Australian and artificial Briton in the later text. The horses fade into the background. Emphasis moves from the natural Australian of Witton's almost certainly ghosted narrative to the passion of the film's eponymous anti-hero. The dubious character and ambivalent identity of Morant, evident in earlier texts, are leached out of the story.<sup>130</sup>

The mythic Morant might at first seem almost ideal as the hero of a nationalistic drama, 'the very epitome of the contemporary Australian national self-image' of the 1980s, as bushman, horseman, drinker, gambler, flash, a mate, a boxer and a racist.<sup>131</sup> This is very much how he appears in the earliest published account, by Frank Renar, which preceded Witton's memoir by five years.<sup>132</sup> The air of popular romance in Renar's account survived in the much later account provided by F. M. Cutlack, who had met Morant as a boy of twelve in 1899. He is inclined to accept Morant's own account of his lineage and indulgent of his persistent womanising.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> . Mythic accounts.

<sup>131</sup> . Russel Ward, "'Breaker Morant' and Australian Nationalism' (Public Lecture delivered in Darwin, 6 May 1981, University of the Northern Territory Planning Authority).

<sup>132</sup> . Frank Renar, *Bushman and Buccaneer: Harry Morant: His 'Ventures and Verses* (Sydney: H. T. Dunn & Co. 1902). Cutlack claims that Renar was a pseudonym for Frank Fox of the *Sydney Bulletin*. Cutlack, *Breaker Morant*, 18.

<sup>133</sup> . Cutlack, *Breaker Morant*, 35: 'There were women who met him on fleeting acquaintance, yet their memory of him lasted their lives.'

More critical than Renar or Cutlack, Russel Ward explains why Edward Woodward's Morant, in the Beresford film, needed to be de-mythologized and cleaned up. At a time when most people in Australia were starting to think of themselves as Australians, Morant was English born, not native Australian. As Australian nationalism welled up from below, Morant was an officer and a versifier with middle-class pretensions. Though born humbly enough in 1864, son of the master and matron of a workhouse, he had changed his name and identity by the end of the century, passing himself off as a remittance man, the natural son of a British Admiral, Sir George Digby Morant. He was, Russel would have us believe, 'a sadistic racist,... inordinately fond of using his great powers as a confidence man to persuade Aborigines to "put on the gloves" with him'.

It is quite otherwise in the film, where Morant becomes something close to a father figure for his peers: a stoical figure at the cusp between discipline and instinct: the older than usual junior officer who reminds readers of the extreme youth of the rest.<sup>134</sup> Conflict within the Breaker has been de-nationalized. Passion and reason contend in Morant until the former triumphs, but nature precedes both and receives less attention in the industrial cultural product of a largely urban 1970s Australia than it did in Witton's simpler (though hardly simple) testimony of seventy years before. In formal terms, the courtroom entirely frames the film, having been no more than the last, albeit culminating episode of the memoir.

*Breaker Morant* offers an account of a harsh guerrilla war in which it was impossible to take prisoners, presided over by a high command insensitive to the predicament

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<sup>134</sup> . Cf. Guy Crouchback in Evelyn Waugh's trilogy or Osborne in Sherrif's 1928 play, 'Journey's End,' about the trenches on the Western Front, each referred to by his juniors as 'uncle'.

of their forces and coldly instrumental in their manipulation of events. Fearing German intervention and anxious for a negotiated settlement of an expensive and costly conflict, the British take steps to ensure conviction and subsequently decline to pardon Morant and Handcock. Witnesses who might have exonerated the accused are posted elsewhere; others with personal grudges against them are brought forward. A British officer perjures himself by denying under oath that orders to kill prisoners have been issued.

The film takes the conventional form of a courtroom drama, exercising numerous tensions in the Witton memoir between law, morality, and expediency. In this it is entirely faithful to the earlier narrative, though selective exclusively of those elements that reflect contemporary concerns. First among these was law, which finds a central place in Witton's account because of the rise of positive international law in general and specific contemporary interest in the codification of the law of armed conflict in the two Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907.<sup>135</sup> The argument of this element of the film is that the British, having chosen to pursue the war by irregular means, were duplicitous in holding those who were the instruments of their policy to standards appropriate only to conventional warfare.

A secondary theme of the film is faithful to Witton's narrative. This is the conflict between passion and morality. Morant, Handcock and Witton are unjustly condemned, yet may be thought guilty men.<sup>136</sup> Though Morant may indeed have

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<sup>135</sup> . Though the second convention postdates the writing of Witton's memoir, it was being negotiated and discussed as he wrote.

<sup>136</sup> . Opinions on this point still differ. Pakenham gives short shrift to the Bushveldt Carbineers. There is no suggestion in his brief account of any miscarriage of justice or British kow-towing to German diplomatic pressure. The episode is seen as simply the worst case of a process of reciprocal brutalization that characterised the later stages of the war (Pakenham, *Boer War*, 538/9.) Wallace quotes a letter of 21<sup>st</sup> October 1929 from

been obeying orders, there is a strong suggestion that he was also motivated by revenge and spurred by anger. The legal justification of his action fails in the court martial because the dice have been loaded against him; its moral justification fails because wrongful passion vitiates mere legality. What sparked off the whole episode was the death, on 5 August 1901, of Captain Percy Hunt, Morant's senior officer and friend. Acting on false intelligence, Hunt had attacked what he believed to be a lightly defended farmhouse eighty miles from base. Encountering a force more than four times more numerous than his own patrol of seventeen men, he nevertheless persisted until he fell wounded on the veranda of the farmhouse. When his body was subsequently recovered for burial, it was found to have been stripped and mutilated. 'This convinced Morant' – so Witton tells his readers – 'that his brother officer and best friend had not simply died in action but been brutally murdered; he vowed there and then that he would give no quarter and take no prisoners. He had ignored his orders [to this effect] in the past [knowing them to be wrong], but he would carry them out in the future'.<sup>137</sup>

This second theme, as much in 1980 as in 1907, addresses Australian concerns about an emerging national identity, substantially shaped by war. The latent argument is that Australians – more and more urbanised in fact – remain natural and intuitive while Britons are instrumental and expedient. A hybrid figure, the Breaker ineffectually guards the passes between nature, discipline and passion. In manipulating the trial, the High Command bring the passions of those involved to

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Witton to his erstwhile defence lawyer, from which it appears that Witton believed that Handcock murdered the German missionary and that Morant knew of his intention. It may be, then, that Handcock and Morant were condemned and executed for a crime (killing prisoners) of which they were technically innocent, but acquitted of a capital crime of which they were guilty, and that a kind of justice was done, though Wallace himself is unconvinced: R. L. Wallace, *The Australians at the Boer War* (Canberra, 1976) 370.

<sup>137</sup>. Witton, *Scapegoats*, p.55. Robert Graves claims that killing of prisoners and refusal to accept surrender were commonplace in forward positions during the First World War.

bear like so many pieces of artillery. They rely on the resentment felt towards Hunt and Morant by those whom they alienated while restoring discipline among the Carbineers. They move key witnesses for the defence into administrative dead ground. More broadly, British vulnerability and failure in the war, just as much as the cynicism of military justice, arise from the distance of the British from their rural antecedents. The poor state of health of British recruits, their ignorant mistreatment of horses, the removal of the Boer non-combatants from their natural surroundings and the consequent desolation of the countryside all bespeak a gulf between the British and their natural environment, the consequence of more than a century of sustained urbanisation and industrialization.

Australians, on this reading, are not so much undisciplined as natural and passionate by turns. It is perfectly true that Harry Morant was a man who tamed or 'broke' horses. It is also emblematic of a certain vision of Australia and perhaps accounts for the perennial appeal of this episode – the merest detail in most general histories of the war – that his calling gives Morant a Janus-like character, looking both ways. As we have seen, Morant was English, supposedly set to marry an Englishwoman, sister to Hunt's bride-to-be, yet thoroughly at home in the Australian bush after fourteen years working there. He was a poet and a reader, yet also a man of action. He stands literally at the point where the wild horse is brought into subjection – 'the only Englishman capable of riding a buck-jumper like a native-born Australian' – while, metaphorically, he 'breaks' the men under his command as one of those responsible for restoring discipline among the Bushveltd Carbineers shortly before the death of Captain Hunt. Yet Morant fails wholly to break *himself*, allowing revenge to supplant discipline when push comes to shove. And with Morant gone, in later

mythic readings of the story, the bridge between natural Australia and artificial Britain is broken. By a further irony, the success of the film occludes Witton's narrative, substituting courtroom for Veldt, passion for nature, and purported factuality for evident romance. The British, Witton or his ghost-writer tell us, were no longer fit to watch over the Garden of Eden. The Australians, it now seems, may have been more Cain than Adam, more Jacob than Esau. The horses vanish altogether; the clash of passion and discipline, though still present, is marginalised; it is the courtroom that comes to dominate the whole narrative in the film, all else being rendered in flashbacks.

Neither Shakespeare's *Henry V* nor the story of Harry Morant is ever wholly drained of moral complexity and nuance in subsequent productions or re-tellings, but it is evident from the histories of their respective performances and adaptations that both these texts and their receptions work together over time to achieve substantial shifts of emphasis. It is a reminder that the just war tradition, too, as traced in Part 2, has been a sequence of texts: read and re-read, interpreted and elaborated over time, following a pattern not dissimilar to the fall and rise of Shakespeare's reputation, and for common reasons. Each exhibits a forgetting of moral complexities, a rationalisation in the worst sense of the word.

4,728 / 5,772

## CHAPTER 17

### ESPIONAGE: *MR STANDFAST*

‘The impulse to secrecy and to learn the secret is the first tendency of any power.’

Carl Schmitt – *The Nomos of the Earth*, 336.

#### *Secrecy, Conspiracy, and Espionage*

St. Augustine had maintained that right conduct in war was primarily a matter of keeping faith, which is to say, of not lying.<sup>138</sup> By 1942, the anti-hero of Powell and Pressburger’s film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, representative of the last generation of Victorian regular officers in the British army, had reluctantly conceded the need for deception in modern warfare.<sup>139</sup> John Buchan had reached this conclusion more than twenty years earlier, perhaps moved by stories he had heard in South Africa of Boer tactics against the British, which had included fraudulent surrender and impersonation. It was already evident in his first spy novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, that Buchan had begun to regard espionage as more decisive than open battle, suggesting that wars might be won and lost by intelligence even before conventional hostilities commenced. In a post-script, recounting what happened immediately after the conclusion of the novel’s action, Buchan’s accidental spy-hero

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<sup>138</sup> . Gray, *Being*, 107.

<sup>139</sup> . The action of the film is triggered by the disclosure of privileged information by an army driver and the gross insubordination of a junior officer, but at its end Blimp–Wynne-Candy concedes the necessity for breaches of this rules in a war unlike those of his remembered youth.

reminisced. 'Three weeks later ... we went to war. I joined the New Army the first week... But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki.'<sup>140</sup>

Buchan's development of the modern spy novel and his elevation of intelligence over combat also resolved, at least for a while, an ambiguity in late-Victorian and Edwardian literature about the prevalence of conspiracy and the seriousness with which it should be regarded. Conspiracy occupies a central place not only in the terrorist novels reviewed in chapter 18, but also in novels of assassination, specifically excluded from that discussion, and in the emerging genre of detective stories.<sup>141</sup>

Recognition of a rising tide of public sensitivity to secrecy, conspiracy, and espionage may explain why so many works by John Buchan remain in print more than sixty years after his death and a biography has recently been reissued.<sup>142</sup> Yet casual investigation suggests that public memory of Buchan is dim. Many — even in Britain — need the cue of his thrice-filmed *The Thirty-Nine Steps* to call Buchan to mind, and Buchan the author is too easily confused with the easily parodied heroes and villains of his adventure stories.<sup>143</sup> So it seems best to begin by outlining

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<sup>140</sup> . John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (Wordsworth Classics, 1996) 108.

<sup>141</sup> . Think of *The Assassination Bureau* (1963), which Jack London started in 1910 but left unfinished at his death six years later, also some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories: not just those featuring Moriarty, but also *A Study in Scarlet*, the very first of the series, which bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the Stevensons' *Dynamiter* in its depiction of malign Mormon conspiracy.

<sup>142</sup> . A casual tour of British bookshops in December 2007 found an average of half a dozen titles on the shelves, including the Penguin compendium of Hannay novels. The availability of Buchan's novels has been in part a function of their copyright status, not simply of readers' demand. See:

<http://www.johnbuchansociety.co.uk/theman.html>. The reissued biography is Andrew Lownie, *John Buchan: the Presbyterian Cavalier* (London: Constable, 1995; London, Pimlico, 2002). Other biographies include Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: a Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965).

<sup>143</sup> . John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1915). There have been many subsequent editions and three films. The first of these, directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1935, with Robert Donat as Hannay, was not at all close to the book. A 1959 re-make in colour directed by Ralph Thomas and starring Kenneth More was closer to Hitchcock than Buchan. Don Sharp's 1978 version, starring Robert Powell, was somewhat more accurate. The 2006 London stage adaptation (Tricycle; Criterion) is a spoof of the Hitchcock

Buchan's career and situating him politically. Only then can his experience and recording of the First World War be dealt with through close reading of the third and most remarkable of Buchan's Richard Hannay novels, *Mr. Standfast*.

## **Buchan's Life**

Born in Perth in 1875, the son of a Presbyterian minister, Buchan grew up in Fife and the Border country before studying at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford.

Already a published author before leaving Glasgow, he would continue to write almost obsessively throughout his life, publishing more than thirty novels and perhaps as many as fifty non-fiction titles. This is almost certainly to under-estimate his output; there was much occasional writing and, of the books, one title alone—*Nelson's History of the War*—ran to more than a million words.<sup>144</sup>

Buchan combined law, writing and politics. Though called to the bar in 1901 he never practised, and all that remains of his legal career is a long-redundant treatise on the law of taxation.<sup>145</sup> All the indications are that the young Scot's foremost ambitions were political rather than literary or legal. He seized openings in the public service as they arose and the importance he attached to this element of his career was evident

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version, played for laughs. This is easy enough, for Buchan's characters have more than a little of Bertie Wooster about them and speak in a now risible argot of Edwardian men-about-town. Buchan himself sometimes has this flavour. Writing from G.H.Q on the Western front in 1915, for example, he finds the staff of the Brigade 'the jolliest fellows you ever met' (quoted by Smith, *Buchan*, 196). But Buchan is not Hannay. David Daniell, possibly Buchan's fiercest advocate comments: 'Modern remarks implying that "Buchan" means crude jingoism also imply that very little has been read of him...' *The Interpreter's House: A Critical Assessment of John Buchan* (London: Nelson, 1975) 141.

<sup>144</sup> . John Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1914-1919. 24 vols).

<sup>145</sup> . John Buchan, *The Law Relating to the Taxation of Foreign Income* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1905).

in the disappointment he felt at not receiving higher recognition for his work in the Great War.<sup>146</sup>

Two years in South Africa (1901-3) as private secretary to the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, provided a golden opportunity. Milner's task was reconstruction, reconciliation and federation of the gaggle of settler communities, English and Dutch in origin, that were only just emerging from a bitter war — Britain's Vietnam — a glimpse of which has been offered in chapter 16. Though the circumstances of Milner's service were extraordinary, his position as representative of the Crown forshadowed the last and most senior public office to which Buchan himself would be appointed in 1935, that of Governor-General of Canada. In addition, membership of Milner's kindergarten confirmed Buchan's place as both a Scottish nationalist and a fervent Unionist within a circle, dedicated to imperial federation and loosely institutionalised in *The Round Table* and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, that included Lionel Curtis, George Geoffrey Robinson (later Geoffrey Dawson), editor of *The Times*, and Philip Kerr, 11<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian, who would later serve as British ambassador in Washington from 1939 to 1940, while Buchan was High Commissioner in Ottawa.<sup>147</sup> But if Buchan served a valuable political apprenticeship in Milner's kindergarten and made useful friends, he also found time to explore the country and learn the importance of intelligence and deception during the guerrilla

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<sup>146</sup> . Smith, *Buchan*, 215.

<sup>147</sup> . For Robinson's change of name, see Smith, *Buchan*, 194. The Royal Institute of International Affairs, generally known by the name of its premises in London's St. James's Square, Chatham House, is the British counterpart of the US Council on Foreign Relations with which it was originally intended to have been formally partnered. It was a source of modest delight, while checking their shared origin, to discover that the supposed continuing link has become a source of fascination for deluded conspiracy theorists who regard the twin institutions, really united, as an effective world government. It could have been written by Chesterton, being perhaps a touch too zany for Buchan. Visit [www.atlanticconspiracy.com](http://www.atlanticconspiracy.com), [www.whale.to](http://www.whale.to), [www.bilderberg.org](http://www.bilderberg.org).

phase of the Boer War, finding in the British spy, Edmund Ironside, a model for his own fictional hero, Richard Hannay.<sup>148</sup>

Returning to London, Buchan became a partner in the London publishing house of Thomas Nelson & Sons. Some volumes of short stories and a biography of Sir Walter Raleigh made no great impression on the reading public, though *Prester John* (1910) and *The Power House* (1913) — first experiments in more sensational forms of fiction — were encouragingly received.<sup>149</sup> It may have been this that led Buchan, while convalescing in Broadstairs, to dash off his first spy novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.<sup>150</sup> The plot, in which a South African in London, Richard Hannay, foils a German espionage conspiracy, was perfectly timed; the writing, racy. Success was assured. Serialization began in *Blackwood's* in July 1914, just weeks before the outbreak of war, making possible the closing real-time reference to the outbreak of hostilities quoted earlier. When it appeared in one volume the following year, the book sold more than 25,000 copies in the first ten weeks; by 1975 it had sold more than a million copies in English alone; it remains in print.<sup>151</sup>

From the earliest weeks of the war, Buchan was hard at work. Nelson's had lost many of its staff to the armed forces and trade was dull. Buchan met this challenge

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<sup>148</sup> . W. Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: the 'kindergarten' in Imperial Affairs* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970); <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2Wwironside.htm>, accessed December 2007. Like Hannay, Edmund William Ironside, later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Ironside, also served in the First World War, rising from Captain in 1914 to Colonel, in charge of the Machine Gun Corps, by 1918. Buchan also emerged from the war with the rank of Colonel. Hannay did rather better. A brigadier by 1917, he ended the war in command of an army division (1, 258). A charming parody of Buchan's own 'shocker' style, entertains the possibility that Buchan himself might have been the model for Hannay. On Ironside see also Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier*, 121.

<sup>149</sup> . In a letter written on 7 December 1914 Buchan described *The Thirty-Nine Steps* as 'a shocker in the style of *The Power-House*, only more so'. Buchan to George Blackwood, quoted in Smith, *Buchan*, 194. *The Power House* had been published in *Blackwood's* in December 1913; it appeared in book form in 1916.

<sup>150</sup> . John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1915).

<sup>151</sup> . Daniell, *Interpreter's House*, 120, 133.

by more or less taking charge of the firm. He kept it in business by writing a blow-by-blow account of the war, of which the first volume (of an eventual twenty-four) was published as early as February 1915. This epic undertaking led to speaking engagements and, in May 1915, to Buchan's appointment by another of the Milner kindergarten, George Geoffrey Robinson (later Dawson), as special correspondent for *The Times* at the second battle of Ypres.<sup>152</sup> Subsequent engagements as journalist, and on behalf of the Intelligence Corps, the War Ministry and the Foreign Office, gave Buchan unparalleled access to the raw information needed for the *Nelson's History*.<sup>153</sup>

In December 1916 Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister and brought Lord Milner, Buchan's old boss, into the war cabinet. Buchan was asked to put forward a proposal for a more integrated approach to propaganda. This received cabinet approval in February 1917 and, at Milner's instigation, Buchan was appointed as director of the new Department of Information, a position from which he pioneered the employment of official war artists, including unconventional painters such as C. R. W. Nevinson and Paul Nash, and the filming of the Western Front.<sup>154</sup> Early the next year, partly because of the difficulty of operating without direct representation in the War Cabinet, the department was reconstituted as a Ministry, with Lord Beaverbrook as Minister and Buchan as Director of Intelligence.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> . Smith, *Buchan*, 194.

<sup>153</sup> . The substantial task of assessing the extent of the undoubted overlap between the texts of the various accounts Buchan wrote specifically for use as propaganda in neutral countries, the journalistic reports, the *Nelson's History*, the wartime novels, private letters and memoranda, and the post-war abridgment of the *Nelson's History* has not yet been undertaken.

<sup>154</sup> . Smith, *Buchan*, 201-2; Sonia Roe (ed.) *Oil paintings in Public Ownership in the Imperial war Museum* (The Public Catalogue Foundation: London 2006).

<sup>155</sup> . Smith, *Buchan*, 211.

Following the war, Buchan devoted himself to writing until he was elected to Westminster as Unionist MP for the Scottish Universities in 1927. He resigned his seat only on his ennoblement as 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Tweedsmuir in 1935, a prerequisite for his appointment as High Commissioner in Canada in the view of George V. There, Buchan is credited with having worked skilfully and tirelessly to overcome the damage done by the abdication crisis, travelling widely and master-minding the 1939 visit of George VI, thereby helping to ensure Canadian participation in the coming war. He died in office in 1940.

### **Mr. Standfast**

It must be apparent from this brief account of his career that Buchan was a man of astounding energy. He had just one research assistant to help with maps and check facts on the multi-volume *Nelson's History*; he himself was sole author.<sup>156</sup> This work sat alongside his other wartime commitments as journalist and civil servant. Yet Buchan still found time to write two sequels to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in which the same cast of characters, led by Richard Hannay, were deployed. The first of these, *Greenmantle*, centred upon a German plot to mobilize Islamic opinion against the British and culminated in the February 1916 Russian capture of Erzerum, in Eastern Anatolia, and was published within months of the event.<sup>157</sup> The tone of *Greenmantle*, as of the Nelson's history and much else that Buchan wrote during the war, is resolutely optimistic. Taken in conjunction with some of the mannerisms of his Edwardian prose style, this has led many, armed with hindsight, to criticise Buchan. Peter Buitenhuis, for example, attacks Buchan's *The Battle of the Somme*. 'The

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<sup>156</sup> . Daniell, *Interpreter's House*, 119.

<sup>157</sup> . John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (1916). The book is said to have been passed around the Romanov family as they languished in captivity following the 1917 Revolution, relished, one supposes, as a record of the only major Russian victory of the war, but I have not found confirmation of this.

account contains all the ringing clichés and exaggerations of the genre, and by representing that almost unmitigated hell in such glowing colours, Buchan falsifies the whole military situation on the Western Front. By his omissions and exaggerated claims he makes not only the common soldier but also the commanding generals look superb.<sup>158</sup> This line of argument tends to assume that Buchan adopted a false and unrealistic optimism in order to propagandise, when it may be closer to the truth to say that the reason he was an effective propagandist was because he was by nature an optimist. Moreover, he is never crass. His attempts to empathise with the enemy, his rejection of conventional anti-Semitism, and above all his defence of conscientious objectors all tell in Buchan's favour. Jonathan Calder puts it nicely. 'You come to scoff and leave impressed'.<sup>159</sup>

This said, Buchan's tone in published wartime work is indeed optimistic beyond the point where optimism could easily be sustained, and somewhat at variance with his private correspondence, and this is what makes his final war novel so striking. For the third of the Hannay novels, though firmly placed in Buchan's *oeuvre* as a 'shocker,' is also a *roman de clef*, the attempt of a man keyed up and at the end of his resources, to say something important about the changing character of war that could not be said out loud so long as the conflict continued. The message is that war is no longer decided on the battlefield, but by espionage. The implication is that the outcome of war is now determined primarily by superior intelligence, which includes, of course, not solely espionage but also the propaganda war in which Buchan himself served with such distinction. It is, in short, an almost narcissistic confession, and a heartfelt homage to lost friends, couched in the form of a pilgrimage narrative

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<sup>158</sup> . Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-18 and after* (London: Batsford, 1989).

<sup>159</sup> . Jonathan Calder: <http://liberalengland.blogspot.com/2005/08/greenmantle-by-john-buchan.html>

— the form that both Evelyn Waugh and Kurt Vonnegut were to adopt in such markedly different registers to represent the Second World War.<sup>160</sup>

*Mr. Standfast is easily summarised. The novel falls into two distinct parts, the first of which takes the hero on a tour of Britain in wartime, providing an implicit social analysis of the resolve and loyalty of differing sections of the population and an informal inventory of British war aims. The second part never strays far from the front lines and attempts a portrayal of the battlefield. The novel's hero, Richard Hannay, who appears to be the model of the successful secret agent in the first part of the novel, turns out to have had his cover blown almost from the start. His German antagonist, seemingly victorious at the midpoint of the book, is finally destroyed by his inability to confront real war—the battlefield—which remains Hannay's true element. At crucial points in the novel, the real war of battle and violence and the unreal war of espionage and deception intersect. Alongside the whole novel runs the parallel narrative of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, an allegorical tale in which the moral and religious resolve of symbolic characters is tested as they journey through dangers and temptations toward salvation.*

*Hannay, already known to Buchan's readership from The Thirty-Nine Steps, is called home from service with the British army on the Western front to join a team set up to break a German spy ring. He is sent first to receive orders from Mary Lamington, to whom he is immediately drawn. She sends him to the Garden City of Biggleswick where he establishes his credentials with the disengaged petit bourgeois intelligentsia as an Afrikaner pacifist and meets Moxon Ivery, really a German spy-*

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<sup>160</sup> . Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1952); *Officers and Gentlemen* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1955); *Unconditional Surrender* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1961).

*master, and his own old comrade from the United States, John Blenkiron. The latter, hoping to use Ivery's network to feed false information to the German High Command, suspects that an important link in the chain is provided by the American labour agitator, Abel Gresson, currently living in Glasgow. Thither Hannay is sent, still in the character of the Afrikaner, Cornelius Brand. A British agent, Andrew Amos, helps him get on board the Tobermoray with Gresson, bound for the Western Isles.*

*On Skye, Hannay finds signs of a planned meeting between Gresson and agents landed from a German submarine. While watching for the meeting he is surprised to see Launcelot Wake, a Biggleswick pacifist and friend of Mary, who has by chance been hiking on the island. Together they overhear a night meeting that confirms Hannay's suspicions that this where information and documents are picked up for carriage to Germany.*

*Attempting to return to London to report his discoveries in greater detail, Hannay is obstructed by the Scottish police, to whom he has been falsely denounced as a deserter by Ivery's cronies. He suffers a number of mishaps as he attempts to avoid arrest. Flown out of Scotland by a former comrade now in the Flying Corps, he narrowly misses capture in the northern industrial city of Bradfield after a forced landing, continuing to London by rail disguised as a private soldier. Encountering Ivery by chance in a state of panic during an air raid on London, Hannay recognises him as the Graf von Schwabing, a German spy he had encountered some years before. It dawns on him that his own cover must have been blown from the moment he set foot in Biggleswick. Moreover, Hannay realises that Ivery now realizes he has*

*been recognised and will try to flee the country. But before he can raise the alarm, Hannay is arrested in the character of Tomkins, the deserter whose identity he has assumed. The consequent delay allows Ivery to cross safely to France.*

*In the second part of the book, all the principals are drawn like moths to the glow of the Western Front. Hannay is given command of a Division. Mary is nursing the wounded nearby. Wake, still a pacifist, has joined the pioneer corps. Ivery and his gang are located in the chateau of Eaucourt Sainte-Anne, not far behind British lines, at a central point in the allied supply and communications system, from which they intend to spread anthrax throughout the Allied armies. Hannay pursues Ivery—von Schwabing to Switzerland, where the German agent hopes to use a secret escape route, the 'underground railway', to bundle Mary, with whom he is infatuated, into Germany. He teams up with his old comrade Peter Pienaar. Pienaar, a distinguished pilot, had been lamed and taken prisoner before being allowed to cross into Switzerland by his captors, there to await repatriation. Helped across a hard and dangerous pass by the convenient hiker, Wake, Hannay is in time to join with Blenkiron and Amos in finally capturing the Graf. Together they take him, by means of his own 'underground railway', to France, where he is placed under guard in the front line.*

*The remainder of the novel traces the final German attack on the Western Front, of which the Allies are forewarned by Hannay and his friends. Hannay himself is in command of a division at the weakest point in the line. The pacifist Wake, acting as his courier, is killed in battle. Pienaar, in a final flight, dies preventing a German reconnaissance aircraft from returning to base with intelligence of the weakness of*

*Hannay's force. Von Schwabing dies running towards the German lines, his protestations of nationality inaudible amid the noise of battle.*

Three of the main arguments in the novel are established within the first few pages and are almost archetypically Romantic. These are its concern with landscape, the analogy between journey and narrative, and a nexus of concerns centring on identity and deception. As Hannay journeys from London to Fosse Manor in the Gloucester countryside, his mood gradually lightens, soothed by the beauties of the English landscape in summer. To move from city to countryside is to move steadily upward and to come ever closer to the landscape, travelling first by train, then road, and finally on foot.<sup>161</sup> Landscape is almost personified — becoming an actor in the drama. 'Often, tramping home in the dusk', Hannay muses, 'I was so much in love with the land that I could have sung with the pure joy of it'.<sup>162</sup>

People can be judged by their relationship with the landscape. The Weekeses, Biggleswick intellectuals, 'didn't give a rap for it and had never been a mile beyond the village', though they talked often of the countryside in abstract terms.<sup>163</sup> Later Hannay finds it incongruous but endearing that Gresson, the American labour agitator, should speak lovingly of the Scottish countryside.<sup>164</sup> For Hannay, the Cotswolds become the token or symbol of a future with Mary.<sup>165</sup> The land, in which the Tory Hannay/Buchan believes that all should have a share is one facet, along with male comradeship, folk music, and the literature of the England that the South

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<sup>161</sup> . David Daniell offers some insights on the links between elevation and truth/illusion. Daniell, *Interpreter's House*, 139-41.

<sup>162</sup> . John Buchan, *Mr. Standfast* ([1919] Ware: Wordsworth, 1994) 18. Page references are all to the Wordsworth edition.

<sup>163</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 20.

<sup>164</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 55.

<sup>165</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 62.

African, Hannay, feels worth fighting for and which replaces the veldt in his affections during the course of the book.<sup>166</sup> When he first approaches Fosse Manor, Hannay has 'a kind of revelation' of the war as a struggle for England and its land. 'I had a prospect as if from a hilltop' — he continues — 'which made all the present troubles of the road seem of no account'.<sup>167</sup>

The analogy between journey and narrative, like the value of landscape, is established in the first sentences of the novel, as Hannay recounts his journey from the Somme to the Cotswolds by way of London.<sup>168</sup> This is also, like the novel as a whole, a journey from the real war of the Western Front, through the frustrations of secret war to the ideal of England. The same analogy is pursued through abundant references to another narrative of a progress, or journey, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Originally offered as devotional allegory by its author and now employed as a code by the fictitious British agents, *Pilgrim's Progress* provides a private language between Mary and Hannay through which they can filter their shared experience of the covert struggle.<sup>169</sup>

But it is the theme of secrecy, deception, identity, and inversion that runs most strongly throughout the book. The book is full of reversals of sanity and madness, youth and age, male and female, clothed and naked, vision and obscurity, mask and exposure, reality and pretence, innocence and guilt, reminiscent of Sir Walter Scott, whom Buchan so much admired.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 71, 4 and 7, 46, 18.

<sup>167</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 7-8.

<sup>168</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 1.

<sup>169</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 14, 75, 81, 130, 135, 160, 168, 184, 185, 190, 196/7.

<sup>170</sup> . These inversions may be taken as a more or less deliberate homage. Buchan later wrote a biography of Scott: John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (Toronto and London: Cassell & Co. Ltd: 1932).

Hannay, though under cover himself, despises pretence. He hates having to speak out against the war. 'I detested my new part and looked forward to naked shame'.<sup>171</sup> He is repelled by the inappropriately young dress style of the over-intellectual Miss Weekeses and the heavy make up of Claire Weekes.<sup>172</sup> 'It was their fashion — Hannay notes — never to admire anything that was obviously beautiful, like a sunset or a pretty woman, but to find surprising loveliness in things which I thought hideous'.<sup>173</sup> 'The mass of faked china fruit' at Fosse Manor comes under his disapproving scrutiny as, much later, does von Schwabing's desk. 'It's a bad piece of fake Empire' – he declares – 'and deserves smashing.'<sup>174</sup>

Arriving in the 'Garden City' of Biggleswick, Hannay finds a whole sub-culture that is incomplete or unreal because of its lack of contact with the reality of war.<sup>175</sup> Its people have 'shut out the war from their lives'.<sup>176</sup> His hosts, the Jimsons, dress inappropriately and contrive to appear younger than their age.<sup>177</sup> The city is in one sense a wholly public place 'where people lived brazenly in the open and wore their hearts on their sleeves'. But finding that his room has been searched Hannay realises that this pretence of transparency conceals a mystery.<sup>178</sup>

Ivery—von Schwabing is a pretence in several ways. He is identified by Blenkiron as 'the superbest actor that ever walked the earth [with a face that] isn't a face, it's a

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<sup>171</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 3.

<sup>172</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 8/9.

<sup>173</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 19.

<sup>174</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 162.

<sup>175</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 13.

<sup>176</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 21.

<sup>177</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 16.

<sup>178</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 18.

mask'.<sup>179</sup> He is more specifically false in allowing Hannay and his companions to believe themselves to be manipulating him and his channels of information when in point of fact the reverse obtained, as Hannay was suddenly to discover during the London air raid.<sup>180</sup>

Pretence is associated with unreality, and the unreal cannot be fought by 'real' or honest methods of combat, but only on its own terms. Thus Fosse Manor is at heart unreal, even though placed in the most 'real' of landscapes. Mary is obliged to change out of her VAD uniform the moment she arrives. 'She may masquerade as she likes out-of-doors, but this house is for civilized people'. But it is the masquerade — the role of military nurse — that is real and the house unreal.<sup>181</sup> The place is a pretence because the war has been shut out. Launcelot is reminded that even conversation about the war is banned, it would seem on grounds of taste.<sup>182</sup>

Elsewhere, Buchan plays with the inversion of innocence and guilt; guileless pacifists unintentionally become drawn into enemy espionage networks and are therefore guilty. Unaware of what they are really doing, they remain innocent.<sup>183</sup>

Real and covert war are constantly juxtaposed. In a moment of sheer inventive brilliance, fleeing from the police on the outskirts of Bradfield, Hannay suddenly stumbles out of the covert war of the first half of the novel into a real battlefield, only to perceive, moments later, that it is a re-enactment of combat for the cine-camera,

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<sup>179</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 34.

<sup>180</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 120/1.

<sup>181</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 9.

<sup>182</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 10.

<sup>183</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 117.

though like enough to real battle for the experienced officer that he is to be able to take over direction and reduce the carefully planned mock-battle to sheer chaos.<sup>184</sup>

Soon afterwards, finally reaching London, Hannay heralds the conclusion of Part 1 and the move to the 'real' battlefields of Flanders. 'The day of disguises is past,' he declares.<sup>185</sup> And the first chapter of Part 2 is headed 'I become a combatant once more', as though the first part had not related a story of combat, albeit clandestine. Yet in *Pilgrim's Progress*, part 1 tells the story of Christian, a man, and the trials and tribulations he encounters on the road to salvation, while part 2 is the story of Christian's wife and children. Now, in Buchan's novel, part 1 charts the progress of a war fought by stereotypically feminine means of deception and espionage at home, while part 2 returns to Flanders and the stereotypically masculine world of armies in confrontation. Buchan uses formal inversion to mount his central argument. Espionage is now mistress.

The old division between home and battlefield can no longer be maintained. Traditionally it has been the battlefield that has presented the mortal threat and the ultimate test. Indeed, the climax of *Mr. Standfast* is the more or less historically accurate account of a military assault. But Hannay accepts that now Ivery is 'the big enemy, compared to whom the ordinary Boche in the trenches was innocent and friendly'.<sup>186</sup> It is they, in the end, who kill von Schabing. The burden of the tale of espionage is that in modern warfare 'the whole world was one battlefield and every

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<sup>184</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 112.

<sup>185</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 125.

<sup>186</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 167.

man and woman among the combatant nations was in the battle-line'.<sup>187</sup> So indeed Buchan engineers it in part 2; the pacifist Weekes, Blenkiron the engineer and the nurse–spy Mary are all in at the kill.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 168. The echo of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is unmistakable: 'All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players'.

<sup>188</sup> . Buchan, *Standfast*, 4.

## CHAPTER 18

# TERRORISM; *THE DYNAMITER AND THE SECRET AGENT*

### *The Rise of Terrorism*

After open battle, insurgency and espionage comes terrorism. It is the end of the line, just about as far from the archetype of conventional high-intensity conflict as it is possible to go and still claim to be talking about war. There is a case for putting espionage last, because it is less spectacularly violent and, like terrorism, is a tactic just as useful in domestic as in international conflict. But espionage has long occupied a central place in conflict between states, carrying mortal risk for its practitioners. Terrorism, by contrast, has only come to figure prominently in war between or against states in relatively recent times, since industrialization enhanced the destructive power and availability of suitable weapons and new forms of communication made possible effective amplification of 'propaganda by the deed', a mode of political action by no means identical with terrorism, yet which terrorists would readily claim as their own.<sup>189</sup>

Those fears on which the contemporaneous invasion and terrorist literatures played so effectively during the later nineteenth century had arisen from a particular set of circumstances. The long peace that followed the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815

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<sup>189</sup> . With roots in the writings of Carlo Pisane and Mikhail Bakunin, the phrase was popularised by Paul Brousse (1844-1912) in an 1877 essay, and could as readily be applied to experimentation with new social forms, such as Ghandi's ashrams, as to violent attacks on symbolic targets. But it soon became closely associated with the 1880s wave of attacks on European royalty and thence with ill-defined terrorism, and with some justification, because members of royal families were as much symbolic as political targets.

had been associated with widespread material progress. Though distant, the Crimean War and the American Civil War offered Western Europe auguries of what was to come, but social revolution long remained the more imminent threat to states and their growing middle classes. Brief wars of German and Italian unification in 1848, 1859 and 1866 could be shrugged off; not so the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, in which the collapse of France and the final emergence of a united Germany first raised in British minds the possibilities of violent dislocation and the reversal of progress in a country that had not fallen to a hostile invasion for centuries. Yet its origins in Tory campaigning for increased defence expenditure set the invasion literature on a path largely dominated by conventional warfare, with clear fronts and regular tactics. Only this form of warfare would justify the reinforcement of conventional equipment and military establishment that the Conservatives sought.

Little more than a decade was to pass before a new form of combat spread across Europe. Generally the instrument of shadowy non-state organizations, often rumoured to be transnational in scope, opposed to statehood and monarchy in general as much as to any particular state or monarch: terrorism exploited rising mass literacy and newspaper circulation, together with the recent inventions of dynamite in 1863 and the fulminate-of-mercury detonator four years later. This produced a second panic, hard on the heels of the British invasion panic but now more widespread, extending throughout Europe and North America.<sup>190</sup>

Terror is nothing new, nor is it deployed and experienced solely in warfare. But the deliberate use of indiscriminate violence to spread fear among a public capable in

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<sup>190</sup> . Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (Croom Helm: London etc., 1985), 2 and passim.

their turn of sapping the resolve or redirecting the policy of a belligerent authority is, by contrast, a novelty. It first emerged in Europe in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Up to that time a force that was out-gunned yet retained the support of those around it would generally resort to irregular warfare, as had the Spanish against Napoleon's armies. This was the strategy of Afrikaners against the British in the later stage of the Second South African War, with consequences explored in chapter 16. It had already been employed by the Cubans against Spain during the 1890s to hold an army of occupation numbering close to a quarter of a million at bay, and was to be the method of the Irish in their first successful war of independence against Britain. But when the populace in a war zone are indifferent or hostile, or when the decisive publics are separate yet tantalisingly close – as in the Irish case or the Algerian war of independence – terrorism and assassination may be the only remaining effective tactics.

There has long been a tendency to conflate terrorism, assassination and irregular combat. In a useful survey of international responses to the rise in terrorist incidents, Richard Jensen suggests that Irish Fenians, Italian nationalists and Russian nihilists 'all made their contributions to the creation of modern terrorism' before 1880, though incidents only became frequent and widespread after that date.<sup>191</sup> But this is to confuse terrorism with assassination and other irregular tactics. The Fenians raided Canada from the USA in 1866, hoping to seize and paralyse the railway system, and attempted a rising in Ireland itself the next year. They were an irregular and – as it turned out – inadequate force, employing conventional means to pursue conventional tactical and strategic objectives. Their shooting of a Manchester

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<sup>191</sup> . Richard Bach Jensen, 'The International Campaign against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880-1930s,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21:1 (Jan. 2009). P.??

policeman in 1867 and bombing of a prison in the London district of Clerkenwell were both linked to failed attempts to free members of their own organization.

Like that of the Fenians, most other asymmetric uses of force in this period were directed against military or political targets or strategic objectives. The 1858 attempted assassination of Napoleon III by Felice Orsini had once again a very clear and direct political motive; Orsini and his Carbonari associates thought the French Emperor a crucial impediment to Italian unification. That eight bystanders died and more than a hundred were injured gave this incident some of the appearance of a terrorist act, but these innocents were not the target. Terrorism, in the strict sense, is defined by its indiscriminate targeting of civilians and its reliance on mass media to spread news of its actions, with the aim of undermining public support for state policy. The death of innocents is not incidental; randomness is essential. True terrorism depends on a combination of civilian targeting, free mass media, and democracy for its effects. But the confusion that lumps in other forms of asymmetric force extends even to the critical literature on late-nineteenth-century fiction. Jeffery Clymer, for example, refers to Jack London's assassination bureau as 'a corporate terrorist enterprise,' in spite of the fact that its killings were carried out in such a way as to be misidentified as accidental or natural, provoking no public alarm whatsoever.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> . Jeffery A. Clymer, *America's Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 154. Interestingly, Clymer finds, in London's *The Iron Heel*, a conflict between rational terrorism and 'disorganized or merely vengeful violence' and concludes that '[f]or violence to be validated in the novel as a legitimate revolutionary force, it has to be a conscious part of a strategic plan that combines calculated acts of violence with attempts to win the public's hearts and minds'. This goes half way to identifying the essence of terrorism, but omits the possibility that its aim may be to cultivate general fear rather than public approval, using indiscriminate violence and the mass media to sap electoral support for state resistance to the demands of the terrorists.

## *The Dynamiter*

Fictional responses followed hard on the heels of these events; a new literary genre sprang up to cope with a new way of war. This chapter concentrates on two disparate British contributions to this genre, the Stevensons' 1884 *Dynamiter* and Joseph Conrad's later *Secret Agent* (1907).<sup>193</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson had already published *New Arabian Nights* in 1882. This title brought together eleven stories, some linked, others quite discrete, all of which had been first published in magazines during the five preceding years. The second collection, *More New Arabian Nights*, with its connective title, *The Dynamiter*, had a quite different origin.<sup>194</sup> The stories had not at first been written at all. They had been told by Stevenson's American wife, Fanny Van de Grift, to entertain her husband during a spell of temporary blindness during the winter of 1883. Fanny had, in effect, cast herself as Scheherezade to Stevenson's sultan. Only when the Stevensons ran short of money the next year did they recall the stories, set them down, embellish them and seek publication. If Gosse is to be trusted, all bar one of the stories in *More New Arabian Nights* were Fanny's inventions; the device to link them had also been hers. 'There had been several dynamite outrages in London about this time, most of them turning out fiascos. It occurred to me to take on an impotent dynamite intrigue as the thread to string my stories on.'<sup>195</sup>

The distinctive characteristics of terrorism have seldom been set out more clearly than by the Stevensons in their strangely episodic novel. Lack of discrimination and

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<sup>193</sup> . Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson, *The Dynamiter: More New Arabian Nights* (Longmans, Green & Co: London 1885).

<sup>194</sup> . It is clear from the point and relative boldness of their respective fonts that *The Dynamiter* is the principal and *More New Arabian Nights* the subordinate title.

<sup>195</sup> . Melchiori, *Terrorism*, 59. Melchiori quotes the introduction written by Edmund Gosse to the 1907 edition of Stevenson's works, in which Gosse attributes these words to Fanny Van de Grift. Gosse had known Stevenson well and published a memoir of his life in 1895.

maximum publicity are held to be the keys to successful terrorism in a democracy, where demoralisation of the public may undermine the resolve of government. Paul Somerset, a naive young man about town, has sublet rooms in the London house where he himself is a tenant. Before long he discovers that his lodger has set up a bomb factory on the premises. The lodger reveals himself to be Zero, proud to be identified as the notorious perpetrator of the Red Lion Court explosion. Somerset is puzzled. What reason is there for pride? — The incident had been an abject failure, causing little damage and, worse, killing a passing child; the effects of the explosion had been quite indiscriminate.

Zero patiently explains; lack of discrimination is the whole point. 'War, my dear sir, is indiscriminate. War spares not the child.' Rather than attack obvious targets such as royalty or statesmen, he seeks to touch public sentiment. 'Our appeal,' he tells the young man, 'is to the body of the people; it is these we should touch and interest'. It is an objective most easily attained by killing housemaids and nursemaids because they stand precisely between the class from which they are drawn and the class they serve, and are therefore of interest to both. He then relates the story of the attempted bombing of Leicester Square, in the heart of London's theatre district. He and his associates had planned to place their bomb very near a statue of Shakespeare. This was in part for symbolic effect but also because the nearby benches were favoured by poor women and elderly men, while children played nearby. All these belonged to 'classes making a direct appeal to public pity, and therefore suitable with our designs'.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> . Stevenson and Stevenson, *Dynamiter*, 118-120.

Stringing the beads of their earlier stories on the thread of a Fenian conspiracy gave a barely plausible unity to *The Dynamiter* that had scarcely been attempted in the earlier collection of *New Arabian Nights*. Not only is there a meta-story to link the sequence of apparently unconnected stories; it also gradually becomes apparent that there is at least one fresh Scheherezade here, the terrorist Clara Luxmore, whose entirely fantastical and implausible tales stave off detection by the amateur sleuths who are the nominal protagonists of the quasi-novel. Zero, too, staves off denunciation and arrest by story-telling, duping the gullible Somerset into aiding his escape, a plan that founders when Zero, having blown up his own laboratory, knocks his bag against a news-stand at Euston station, setting off the last remaining stick of dynamite and obliterating himself.

The practical politics of the Stevensons' pioneering terrorist fiction are clear. They do not regard terrorism as a serious threat. They dismiss fine causes and ideology and detect banality beneath. In the combination of banality and pretention they find comedy while remaining aware of darker tones of passion, commitment and persistence in the conspiracies underlying the sequence of frustrated outrages. In the preface to *The Dynamiter* they betray an anxious sensitivity to the change in public sentiment that had occurred even while their new collection was at press, and might easily have triggered a hostile reception. On 24 January 1885, Fenians had succeeded in placing bombs in Westminster Hall, the chamber of the House of Commons, and the Tower of London. In the Westminster Hall explosion two police constables and one bystander had been seriously injured, and two women 'bereft of their upper garments'. This had created a mood of anger and apprehension, with possible adverse implications for sales of their imminent publication, which the

Stevensons tried to head off by dedicating their tales to the heroes of the hour, constables Cole and Cox.<sup>197</sup> Yet the ultimate aim of the Stevensons had never been to belittle terrorism, but rather to ridicule the gullibility without which terrorism cannot succeed. At the heart of terrorism is the manipulation of narrative to achieve panic and a collapse of public morale.

By their recognition and exploitation of this central fact the Stevensons provide not just the prototype but in many ways the model of the terrorist novel: a tangled nest of stories, oscillating between melodrama and incoherence. The aesthetic politics of the novel consists in an attack on realist equation of the novel as a genre with some kind of social truth. It would be tedious to summarise the tales of Arsenath Fonblanque and her pursuit by Mormons, the miraculous escape of Teresa Valdivia from voodoo-ridden Cuba, or the foiled assassination attempt on Prince Florizel of Bohemia. They are so much froth, invented by the terrorist, Clara Luxmore, and her mother, to enlist the help and sympathies of the three impecunious young men-about-town – Challoner, Darbyshire and Somerset – who have resolved at the outset of the novel to rebuild their fortunes by turning detective. The point is that narrative is as much part of the arsenal of the terrorist as the bomb and that, like the bomb, its lack of discrimination embraces even the authors. It is beyond detection, and goes off at the slightest jolt. If the bomb as often as not kills the bomber, so too Scheherezade the story-teller dies when stories finally end, and sometimes bomb and story, bomber and story-teller, are effectively inseparable.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> . *Hansard*: HC Deb 20 March 1885 cc 52-3 puts a favourable gloss on the fate of the two constables, both rewarded financially and promoted, and expected to return to duty following three months' fully-paid convalescence. Other sources suggest that things did not turn out quite so well for Cox, though Cole was awarded the Albert Medal. See <http://www.alphadeltaplus.20m.com/contact.html> (visited 14 February 2011).

<sup>198</sup> . There is a good deal of dross written about Stevenson. Frank McLynn's biography entirely misses the point of *The Dynamiter*. However a strong case is made for him, and for *The Dynamiter*, as heralds of modernism in

Consider the death of Zero. As he waits to board the Liverpool train, there to take ship for America, a story catches Zero's attention. It is the tale of the destruction by a massive explosion of the very house from which he so recently fled. Not only has he finally succeeded in making a *bomb* that works; he has also made the headlines by generating a *story* that works. Too late; it is precisely the shock of this crowning headline that knocks him off balance, literally as well as metaphorically, so that his bag strikes the news-stand. That Zero should be obliterated by a combination of the newspaper distribution system and the bomb, the two great instruments of nineteenth-century terrorism, might seem enough. But the Stevensons cannot resist the cherry on this cake; there are no other casualties.

### *Fantastic Plots*

It is fitting that Stevenson, admired by contemporaries for his formal innovation of the short story, should have chosen to deal with terrorism as he did. Anticipating Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, he and Fanny offer no coherent account of the political objectives of his terrorists, touching lightly on their nationality and leaving numerous holes in the meta-narrative. If exposure of the banality of terrorism was their first contribution to the literature, a second was recognition of the essentially episodic nature of their subject. To a point, terrorism depends on the facility with which police and media can lodge its actions in narratives of conspiracy and threat. But terrorism succeeds supremely when it is not merely indiscriminate but also without context,

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Alan Sandison, 'A World Made for Liars: Stevenson's *Dynamiter* and the Death of the Real' in William B. Jones, Jr. (ed.) *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives* (Jefferson NC and London: Ms Farland & Co. Inc, 2003). Peter Lancelot Mallios, 'Reading *The Secret Agent* Now: the Press, the Police, the Premonition of Simulation,' in Carola M. Kaplan, Peter Mallios and Andrea White (eds.) *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century: Contemporary Approaches and Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 157, may be stretching a point when he compares the exploded body of Conrad's child-like bomber, Stevie, to the jumbled page of a newspaper, but the image lingers none the less.

unable to be explained, still less explained away. These features are often conflated and misnamed as irrationality. But they are elements of a strategy that, when successful, is hyper-rational, achieving very large effects from scant resources.

The authorities emplot and narrate because to do so makes sense of things and motivates the responses they desire. This is one of the ways in which the end of terrorism is achieved. Terrorists rely not simply on the amplification achievable by mass media, but on the dramatic skills of those who seek to suppress them. The intelligence services of wealthy democracies have proven second to none in making bricks without straw before graciously handing them over to their enemies. G. K. Chesterton recognised this danger in Edwardian England and chose, as the Seversons had done twenty-four years before, to combat public hysteria with ridicule. Appalled by the aftermath of an explosion in London, Gabriel Syme, the central character in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is recruited to an undercover unit in the London police targeting anarchists. The police have concluded that Europe is threatened by a pan-European conspiracy. This is not to be confused ‘with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland,’ warns the Harrow-educated constable who recruits Syme. ‘This is a vast philosophical movement,’ the constable continues, to which the police have responded by creating a force of philosopher policemen.<sup>199</sup> So Syme is drawn into the movement under cover and elected to the secret seven-man European anarchist council under the code name of Thursday. As the story unfolds Syme discovers that other members of the council are also secret policemen. It appears that the plan of their president, Sunday, has been to set the security forces of Europe at one another’s throats. But in the end it

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<sup>199</sup> . G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* ([1908] London: Headline Review, 2007) 48.

turns out that Sunday, too, is a force for good. The police have conjured up a massive misdirection of resources and inflated the anarchist threat by their imaginative response to public alarm.

Besides conspiracy and absurdity, the feature that most obviously links Chesterton and the Stevensons to Joseph Conrad is the central place accorded to newspapers, the most effective mass medium of the day. Chesterton's Gabriel Syme, the obsessive enemy and mirror-image of anarchism, has been writing incessantly for the press, warning of the scale of the anarchist threat. Early in *Thursday* he observes of himself that 'there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he'.<sup>200</sup> The newspapers had become the primary battlefield; dictation of common sense and the coining of prejudice great prizes. Even before his recruitment to the spurious anarchist council, Syme had been feeding the collective hysteria of which it was symptomatic through his journalism.

### *The Secret Agent*

For Conrad, even more than for the Stevensons or Chesterton, the newspapers were a latent protagonist. 'Newspapers fill *The Secret Agent*,' Peter Lancelot Mallios observed, responding to the post-9/11 celebrity of Conrad's novel.<sup>201</sup> Though written

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<sup>200</sup> . Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 42.

<sup>201</sup> . Mallios, 'Reading *The Secret Agent* Now' 155-172. Mallios notes that *The Secret Agent* attracted so much attention in the months following the 9/11 attacks in the United States that it was in danger, in the manner of Jean Baudrillard's Gulf-War-that-never-was, of disappearing beneath a surfeit of representations of itself. Another text that enjoyed similarly spectacular notoriety at the same time was Gillo Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers*. Neglected in this book because of a self-imposed restriction to literature in English, the film has been treated elsewhere: Charles A. Jones 'Dialectic and Passion in Pontecorvo's "The Battle of Algiers"' *Millennium* 35:2 (2007) 445-452.

in 1906, the story reaches back into the nineteenth century, taking its inspiration from the Greenwich Observatory bombing of 1896.<sup>202</sup>

*Verloc, the lynchpin of the novel, ran a small shop but had also infiltrated an anarchist group on behalf of the London embassy of a European power. The anarchists, Ossipon, Michaelis and the Professor, had been ineffectual: all talk. But Vladimir, First Secretary at the embassy, required action. “What we want is to administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan,” he said airily. “Its deliberations upon international action for the suppression of political crime don’t seem to get anywhere. England lags”.*<sup>203</sup>

*Verloc’s livelihood is threatened. To preserve it and maintain the adoptive family he will now inadvertently destroy, he sets about designing and appropriate act of terrorism that will breathe plausibility into an entirely fictitious narrative of conspiracy against reason itself. Vladimir muses on targeting, dismissing Verloc’s suggestions out of hand. To achieve its political objective the tonic must be precisely formulated in such a way as to frustrate the ability of journalists to pigeon-hole and diminish it. It must be an event that reaches the public without first being ‘shot through with explanation’.*<sup>204</sup> *It appears that neither the assassination of royalty nor an attack on the church any longer has the impact it once had. Wholly indiscriminate slaughter can too easily be passed off as the action of a deranged individual or a manifestation of intelligible and manageable class hatred. Vladimir finally settles on a target that will shock because it represents science, the ‘sacro-sanct fetish’ (sic) of the Victorian middle classes, and synchronicity, without which their global commercial and*

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<sup>202</sup> . On the 1894 bombing see <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/explore/astronomy-and-time/astronomy-facts/history/>.

<sup>203</sup> . Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* ([1907] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 27/8.

<sup>204</sup> . Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968) 89, quoted by Mallios, ‘Reading’ 168.

bureaucratic culture cannot thrive.<sup>205</sup> The Greenwich observatory, which had officially set standard time throughout England, Scotland and Wales since 1880, also stood on the Greenwich meridian, from which degrees of longitude were measured, and which was recognised internationally for this purpose at the 1884 International Meridian Conference. Time, space, the hegemony of Britain, and international cooperation are all to be attacked in a single symbolic gesture. It is arguable, of course, that this is to be an act of propaganda by the deed, and not of terrorism at all, for lack of civilian casualties. But this is a fine point, for Vladimir's reasoning (and Conrad's conceit) is that opinion of the British middle and upper classes, which is the real objective, will be more readily touched by an attack on science than by the deaths of civilians.

Verloc recruits his young brother-in-law, the emotional, 'weak-minded,' possibly autistic Stevie; but the job is botched.<sup>206</sup> Stevie blows himself to pieces in Greenwich Park without damaging the target. Learning the truth, his sister Winnie fatally stabs her husband, Verloc, and later drowns herself. The circumstances are such that, for the highest authorities, the incident stands out from the general run of terrorist narratives. The Assistant Commissioner of Police recognises as much even before he has quite reached the bottom of it. Reporting to the Home Secretary he concedes that the police had thought they had the anarchist underworld comfortably under surveillance, 'and yet this episode happens,' he admits. 'I call it an episode, because this affair, I make bold to say, is episodic; it is no part of any general scheme, however wild.'<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> . Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 30.

<sup>206</sup> . The description as 'weak-minded' is that of the Assistant Commissioner: Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 165.

<sup>207</sup> . Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 109.

The perceptions of every major character in *The Secret Agent* are shaped by the press.<sup>208</sup> Stevie, the willing though inadequate accomplice of Vorloc, is a compulsive and emotional reader of newspapers, epitome of the naïve and passionate reader who makes mass manipulation by the press possible in modern democracies, whether for the provocation of moral panic or in jingoistic pursuit of imperialism, under the banner of civilization or humanitarian intervention. ‘The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage’.<sup>209</sup>

But it is not simply a shared preoccupation with the press that links Conrad to the Stevensons, to Chesterton, and to so many other novels of terrorism and espionage; it is a wider concern with fantasy, invention, and the political power of narrative. The Assistant Commissioner of Police, reporting the Home Secretary on the Greenwich affair, is asked how he would deal with the antics of the conspirators, advances his preferred policy only to withdraw it in almost the same breath. ‘[T]he existence of secret agents should not be tolerated,’ he declares, ‘as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used. That the spy will fabricate his information is a mere commonplace. But in the sphere of political and revolutionary action, relying partly on violence, the professional spy has every facility to fabricate the very facts themselves, and will spread the double evil of emulation in one direction, and of panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate, on the other. However, this is an imperfect world — ‘.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> . Mallios ‘Reading’ 163 and 156-8.

<sup>209</sup> . Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 154/5.

<sup>210</sup> . Conrad, *Secret Agent*, 108.

So the secret agent became indispensable. At first this could be passed off as a supplement to conventional forms of warfare. Buchan argued that intelligence was decisive because of the advantage it conferred in battle. But following the two world wars, espionage became more fully indispensable to the great powers, constituting the primary theatre of a war endlessly deferred. The Assistant Commissioner's dystopic vision was realised in fictions of the rightly named Cold War and beyond, and in the realities they echoed. Commonplace fabrication lay at the heart of Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958). Working in MI6, the British overseas intelligence service, during the second World War, Greene had been aware of the case of the Spanish agent, Garbo, who had fed worthless information from imaginary British agents to the Germans.<sup>211</sup> Later, setting his novel in Batista's Cuba, Greene substituted James Wormold, a vacuum-cleaner salesman, for Garbo. Recruited by MI6, Wormold supplemented his income by creating faked reports drawing on fabricated information from real people, claimed as agents. But when Wormold, the divorced father of a beautiful daughter with expensive tastes, raises the stakes by passing off drawings of vacuum-cleaner parts as components of new military installations in the Cuban mountains, MI6 send out reinforcements, and the fantasy lurches into reality. People get killed. Wormold himself is marked for assassination but outwits and eliminates his would-be killer, Carter.

The pattern of intelligence-officer-turned-fantasist established by John Buchan, continued by W. Somerset Maugham, Graham Greene and Ian Fleming, was maintained through and beyond the Cold War in the novels of John Le Carré, where the Assistant Commissioner's fear that 'the very facts themselves' will be fabricated

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<sup>211</sup> . Some German agents in Brazil relied on published shipping data for their income during the Second World War. See Stanley E. Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War in South America: German Military Espionage and Allied Counter-Espionage in Brazil* (Baton Rouge LA and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

is realised in *Absolute Friends* (2003) as the spectacularly irrational War on Terror subsumes the calculating symmetry of Cold War espionage.<sup>212</sup> The climactic episode of the novel consists in a post 9/11 raid on a purported Islamic cultural centre in Heidelberg, exposed in the media as a terrorist base. The published version, carefully fabricated by Western intelligence agencies to elicit a German policy more supportive of attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, gains credibility from the deaths, during the raid, of the eponymous absolute friends. Castigated by reviewers in the United States, the novel is clearly an instrument in the struggle it relates. The absolute friends, relics of a past era, fail to recognize the story forming around them, concocted for the mass media, in which their own deaths are essential to ensure plausibility. More generally, their passing signals a transformation of intelligence from the pursuit of truth to the fabrication of appearances: a generational shift through which espionage becomes, in effect, a rhetorical form of state-terrorism.

The Stevensons take the extreme view of terrorism. There is no straw. At the core lies banality. But it is a banality, based in conspiracy, that may yield horrific loss of life and destruction of property at any moment. In their suggestions about how to deal with this, Victorian and Edwardian authors split, some – like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or John Buchan – making much of the malignant and brilliant mind at the heart of conspiracy and its potential for evil, while others – like the Stevensons or Jack London – incline to belittle the danger. Conrad's treatment is unusual. Placing the action in the past softens the immediate political argument of the novel and allows

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<sup>212</sup> . Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) worked briefly for MI6 in Russia in 1917 and later wrote several short stories about a British agent, Ashenden. Fleming (1908-64) played a more substantial and sustained role as a naval intelligence officer during the Second World War and went on to write several novels featuring a British naval commander, James Bond. Le Carré (1931—) is thought to have been working for MI5 while studying at Lincoln College, Oxford, in the mid-1950s. He worked for the British Foreign Service in West Germany from 1959, devoting himself to writing full time after the success of his second spy novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

attention to focus more closely on a banality far more finely drawn and pathetic than the Stevensons aspired to. Yet this cannot conceal the fact that terrorism is the instrument of high politics for Conrad. For all – the Stevensons, Conrad and Le Carré – privileged intelligence, newly positioned centre-stage by Buchan, is displaced by public narrative and its amplification by the media of mass communication.

Terrorists, who were the inadequate protagonists of national liberation or social revolution for the Stevensons, have by 1906 been subsumed into the Great Game of power politics, where they remain in Le Carré's bitter attack on the subordination of British and United States intelligence to neoconservative belligerence.

4,394/ 5,323

## CHAPTER 19

### THE PROFESSIONAL: COLONEL BLIMP

*It was a routine speech we got during our first day of basic training, delivered by a wiry little lieutenant: "Men, up to now you've been good clean American boys, with an American's love for sportsmanship and fair play. We're here to change that. Our job is to make you the meanest, dirtiest bunch of scrappers in the history of the World. From now on you can forget the Marquess of Queensberry Rules and every other set of rules. Anything and everything goes. Never hit a man above the belt when you can kick him below it. Make the bastard cream. Kill him any way you can. Kill, kill, kill, do you understand?"*

Kurt Vonnegut 'Wailing Shall Be in All Streets' in *Armageddon in Retrospect* (Vintage 2009) 33.

It is now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed aim is world domination by whatever means and at whatever cost. There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto accepted norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United States is to survive, longstanding American concepts of "fair play" must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us.

'Panel of Experts on Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency' (The Doolittle Committee) 19 October 1954, quoted in William M. Leary (ed.) *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents* (Tusaloosa AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984) 144.<sup>213</sup>

*A column of motor-cyclists speeds through the countryside, its members peeling off one by one to deliver orders to units of the regular British army preparing to invade London. It is only an exercise, but a false note is struck straight away as one of the bikers is brought crashing to the ground as he approaches the unit commanded by 'Spud' Wilson, a young Lieutenant, not long promoted from the ranks. Spud is taking*

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<sup>213</sup> . My particular thanks go to Lezlee Halper, who drew my attention to this quotation at a Cambridge CIS doctoral candidates' conference, 1 March 2008 (check).

*no chances. This is total war, and he has orders to make it like the real thing. 'The war starts at midnight,' he's been told. But there was no formal declaration before Pearl Harbour, and Spud has decided to start early, capturing the officer commanding the Home Guard force defending the city even before the exercise has officially begun.*

*There is one flaw in his strategy, fully apparent only toward the end of the film. Spud stops off to steal a few moments with his girlfriend, Angela Cannon, generally known as Johnny. He discloses his plan. Johnny, official driver of Major-General Clive Wynne-Candy, commander of the Home Guard, is suddenly made aware of the consequences of her loose talk about the General's whereabouts. Spurred by guilt Spud's Mata Hari gives him the slip and makes a dash for London to try to warn Wynne-Candy, but she is too late to prevent Spud and his regulars from capturing the London Club where Candy is relaxing in the Turkish baths in preparation for the night ahead.*

*A blustering Wynne-Candy fails to convince Spud that the rules are not to be broken. Wynne-Candy pushes him into the hot pool. As they struggle they go under together, providing the pretext for a flash-back. The scene is unchanged, the time forty years earlier, and the remainder of the film fills the gap between Wynne-Candy as youthful junior officer and as elderly General, restored to the active list only because of the exigencies of war.*

*Back from the Boer War with a Victoria Cross pinned to his chest, the young Clive Candy is set on discrediting Kaunitz, a German n'er-do-well he ran across in South*

*Africa, now spreading malicious stories of British war-crimes around Berlin. Ignoring War Office advice, he travels to Germany and makes contact with the Edith Hunter, the English governess whose appeal has brought him there. She is played by Deborah Kerr, who has already appeared as Johnny, the Mata Hari driver. Together they confront Kaunitz in the Kafe Hohenzollern, only for Clive to be provoked into publicly insulting the entire German officer corps.*

*German officers and British diplomats alike agree that a duel must take place, and the Germans draw lots for the honour of tackling Candy with sabres in the gymnasium of the 2<sup>nd</sup> regiment of Uhlans.*

*The scene shifts to a well-appointed convalescent home. Both men have come away with honourable wounds, Clive's to the upper lip that he will thenceforth conceal with a full moustache. Edith and Clive, are introduced to Clive's erstwhile duelling partner, Theo Kretchmar-Schuldorff and his companion, Frau von Kalteneck. They decide to play cards and cut for partners. Theo and Edith are to play against Clive and Frau von Kalteneck. The weeks pass. Edith teaches Theo English while Clive and the English-speaking Frau von Kalteneck ride and hunt. On the eve of Clive's departure for England, Theo confesses that he and Edith are to marry, anticipating a further duel. Clive is delighted for his new friend, only slowly realising as he journeys back to London what Edith and Theo had already recognised: that he, too, loves Edith.*

*Germany and Britain are at war. It is November 1918 and Candy, now a Brigadier, is en route from Flanders to London. The guest of a South African officer, Major van Zijl in a company HQ near the front line, Candy learns that German prisoners have been*

*taken, attempting sabotage. They are from Theo's regiment. He asks to be allowed to interrogate them, his only concern to find out whether his friend is still alive, but his questioning is entirely ineffectual. He does not realise, as is evident to all others present and to the audience, that van Zijl will use torture to gain more serious intelligence the moment Candy's back is turned. 'I'm not a simple English gentleman; I'm a simple South African.'*

*Driving on in search of rail transport, Candy is stranded and has to put up for the night at a convent serving as the billet for a group of nurses from the West Riding of Yorkshire. His attention is caught by one exhausted woman in the refectory, once again played by Deborah Kerr, but she is gone before he can put a name to her. Travelling on the next day Candy's car breaks down. While his driver, Murdoch, tinkers, Candy remarks on the uncanny resemblance between the nurse of the night before and Edith. Murdoch undermines the resemblance by remarking that Edith must have been 'a very common type of girl' for Candy to have glimpsed her repeatedly on their travels. Candy receives a message. The Germans have accepted the terms of an armistice. The war is over, and the British have won — so the Candy assures Murdoch — by fair means. 'Clean fighting and honest soldiering have won the day.'*

*Murdoch is free to go home. Candy is free to seek, identify and court Barbara Wynne, the nurse he no more than glimpsed at the convent: the very image of Edith. They marry and settle to a life of comfortable but pointless domesticity in the London house bequeathed him by his aunt, with Murdoch as factotum. In July 1919, almost a year after the armistice, Candy locates Theo in a prisoner-of-war camp in*

*Derbyshire. They visit, but Clive is snubbed. Theo relents. Soon afterwards, in London on the eve of his repatriation, he calls Clive and is persuaded to join a bachelor party already gathered at the London house. The British — a representative bunch of the great and the good — are entirely at ease. They want to be friends; they want to trade with Germany; they want to see Germany on its feet again; they want things to be as they were.*

*Clive and Barbara wander the world. It is a world of finely printed invitations, honorific postings, horses, polo and sailing. When Barbara dies in 1926 Clive resumes his pre-war pursuit of big game. In 1933 Edith also dies, and Theo, estranged from his two Nazi sons, is free to leave Germany, arriving in England in June 1935, a refugee. Late 1939, with war already declared, finds him facing an official tribunal and threatened with repatriation. Moved yet un-persuaded by his eloquence, the presiding Home Office official points out to Theo that his story could easily be false and he himself a spy. 'This time we mean business,' and that, he implies, may preclude justice. Just in time Candy arrives in full military rig. Asked if he will back Theo, Clive replies '...with everything I have, sir.'*

*A ménage à quatre forms in Candy's town house. The truth about Candy's feelings for Edith dawns on Theo when he sees Barbara's portrait and meets Angela — 'Johnny'— the LTC driver: 'He chose me out of 700 girls!' Murdoch presides as he, Theo and Johnny gather around the radio set like fond parents in one of those parodies of a family composition so common in British neo-romantic official war art, waiting to hear Candy speak on the BBC Home Service about the inefficiency at*

Dunkirk.<sup>214</sup> *But this is mid-1940; on June 16 Reneaux had given way to Petain and France was to fall within days. This is no time to be telling the truth about military inefficiency at Dunkirk.*

*Further blows fall, as Clive is once again retired from the active list and Murdoch when the London house is bombed dies in October 1940. But at Johnny's suggestion, and egged on by Murdoch and Theo, Clive has already found new meaning in life as a leading spirit in the Home Guard. He is area commander for the London region, lionized in a September 1942 edition of Picture Post.*

*Finally, the early scenes replay, with new camera angles and cuts. Only now the audience discovers Johnny's betrayal of Clive. Spud, it turns out, has both won and lost. He did indeed capture the enemy commanders, but was to be had up on charges for breaking the rules and making a farce of the exercise. In a final scene in the garden of the London square where his house once stood, Clive makes clear to Theo and Johnny that he will not see Spud punished. As the band of the regulars' victory parade passes nearby, unseen, Candy stares into the flooded basement where his home once stood. A first pool prompted the flashback; a second closes the film: the first, a Turkish bath in an exclusive London club; the second, an emergency reservoir in a bombed-out house. Candy recalls the promise he made Barbara when they first came to the London house, that he would never change and that this would be the den to which they would always return 'till the second Flood'. Now they have*

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<sup>214</sup> . Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain, 1939-45* (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2007). Foss deals at length and with copious illustration with the 'trope of family as nation in miniature' and its iconographic reconstruction from unrelated groups of fellow workers, *War Paint* 82-107. See *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in the Imperial War Museum* (London: The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2006) for additional examples of wartime quasi-domesticity, notably by Leslie Cole, Evelyn Dunbar, Ethel Gabain, Elsie Gledstones, Arthur Harrison and Elsie Hewland.

*their flood – a lake in the basement – though it is public not private and Clive has finally had to change.*

How does the individual soldier weather the multiplicity of ways of war, their progressive transformation in modernity, and the displacement of combat by intelligence and media representation? It is after all false press reports inspired by Kaunitz that take Candy to Germany. The answer is that many responses are possible, including childlike attachment to old ways and relapse into insanity, with many less spectacular alternatives in between.

The charge against Clive Candy is not just that he and the officer class to which he belongs are hidebound and conservative, though this is true enough; it is that they are children, spirited away in their youth to J. M. Barrie's never-never land, condemned to wander, homeless and playful, never quite growing up. They marry, and expect to spend less time in the club, but the porters know better: 'They all say that!' The most trenchant arraignment is placed in the mouth of Theo ... at the lowest point in his life, embittered by defeat, about to return home 'if there's such a thing left in Germany', 'a beggar... like all the professional soldiers'. The condescension and liberality of Clive Candy's well-meaning black-tie dinner guests has been too much for him. 'They are children!' he exclaims, as he recounts the evening's conversation to his German fellow-officers on their home-bound boat train.

Perhaps it was because he or his subordinates had detected the keen edge of the script, perhaps it was simply because the words were penned by a foreigner, Emrich — formerly Imre — Pressburger, that the British Minister for War, Sir James Grigg,

balked at Michael Powell's request for the loan of army equipment and uniforms, coming as it did at the lowest point in British fortunes, early in 1942. Against all expectation, cinema had flourished in the war, leaving the few who had remained in Britain and maintained their investment with considerable opportunities. J. Arthur Rank, with control of several British studios and two distribution chains, gave Powell extraordinary directorial freedom when he signed up. The result was *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, the first Powell and Pressburger film for Rank.

This very popularity of the medium may have heightened official suspicion, and even though the Ministry of Information gave initial clearance to the script, Grigg went beyond mere non-cooperation by writing to both Brendan Bracken, Minister for Information, and Prime Minister Churchill himself, to warn against *Blimp*.<sup>215</sup> When Powell asked Grigg point blank if he was being forbidden to make the film, the reply was stereotypically British, as Powell later recollected it. 'Oh my dear fellow, after all we are a democracy, aren't we? You know we can't forbid you to do anything, but don't make it, because everyone will be really cross, and the Old Man will be very cross and you'll never get a knighthood.'<sup>216</sup> It might have been Clive Candy himself, being gagged before his visit to Berlin, the difference being that Powell and Pressburger's decision to ignore the gag was deliberate, and Candy's inadvertent.

The film was made because the film-makers were grown-ups – Pressburger himself one of several members of the team exiled from Continental Europe. They wanted to make clear that Germany had derived lessons from the past and was applying them, and that Britain must adapt rapidly to avert defeat. Breaking the rules, a repeated

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<sup>215</sup> . Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000) 65-6.

<sup>216</sup> . Powell, 1986, 402-3, quoted in Murphy, *British Cinema*, 67.

motif, is a stand-in for flexibility, learning, maturation. Rules are for children; discretion and responsibility for adults. It is an injunction, in John Dewey's terms, to develop new habits appropriate to changed circumstances. In more Aristotelean mode, it is a reminder that principles guide the processes of deliberation and judgment, but do not determine it.

If the Old Man was *very* upset (and he was) it may have been because he was himself so much of a Blimp.<sup>217</sup> Not yet the adored war-leader he later became, Churchill had a problematic past and reputation: opportunist, ambitious, well-born and not slow to use his connections and put himself forward, he had risen fast only to endure 'years in the wilderness' and might in 1942 have regretted the glib judgment on modern warfare he had published twelve years earlier: lines that could have been written by (or for) Candy.<sup>218</sup> As pendant to a rhapsody on the beauty of cavalry drill in the 1890s, Churchill mused:

It is a shame that War should have flung all this aside in its greedy, base, opportunist march, and should turn instead to chemists in spectacles, and chauffeurs pulling the levers of aeroplanes or machine guns... War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now become cruel and squalid. In fact it has been completely spoilt. It is all the fault of democracy and science.<sup>219</sup>

*Life and Death* recognizes, like Churchill, that war has changed. It goes further, and in so doing avoids mere nostalgia. War has not simply changed over time in a unilinear manner; it is changeable by nature, mercurial, and in this lies a great deal

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<sup>217</sup> . Stephen Fry ventured the same opinion in an interview, circa 2000. 'In a sense ... Churchill was Blimp'.

**Cite the DVD. Additional material.**

<sup>218</sup> . Churchill had served successive Prime Ministers, Liberal, Labour and Conservative, in ministerial posts between 1910 and 1929, but was out of office for the next ten years, at odds with his Conservative colleagues over India, foreign policy, and the abdication crisis. He returned to office on the first day of Britain's war in September 1939 as First Lord of the Admiralty, a post to which had first been appointed eighteen years earlier.

<sup>219</sup> . Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life* ([1930] London: Eland, 2002) 64/5. Clive Coultass, *Images for Battle*, 113 is puzzled by Churchill's personal sensitivity.

of its moral relevance. Neither the mundane customs of civilian life nor the disciplines of military training will quite suffice. War is a supreme test of moral responsibility, and the career of a long-service soldier correspondingly challenging.

Change over time is there, of course. In *Blimp*, trench warfare on the Western Front, city bombing, women in khaki are its ostensible markers. Clive, once seated in the rear of his staff car, driven by Murdoch, finds himself successively in the flooded sidecar of a motor-bike ridden by an African-American and, finally, seated beside Johnny in the front passenger seat of his staff car in the 1940s, something Murdoch would never have countenanced. Times change. Theo offers Angela a smoke: 'Cigarette, soldier?'

This is the least of it. Already, in 1918, Candy finds nothing as it should be. Imagine 'a rail transport officer without a train'! — This sort of inefficiency would not have been tolerated in South Africa or Somalia, he blusters. Many of his audience know better, and he himself, one day soon, will try and fail to speak the truth about Dunkirk; but the Americans in 1918 hardly know that much. One of them asks 'what were those other wars? — I never heard of them?' The other replies: 'Those weren't wars; those were just summer manoeuvres'. When Candy boasts that 'clean fighting and honest soldiering have won', his audience suspect that he has simply failed to register clear hints that the prisoners he so recently interrogated were to be tortured once his back was turned.

If Candy's static personal account of warfare is upset by these exposures of differing perceptions and misperceptions, the social seclusion of armed conflict as a matter to

be settled on the battlefield is rendered equally problematic by constant juxtapositions of real and mock war. The military exercise that frames the entire action is, in an important sense, more real than Candy's notion of war itself, veteran though he is. The duel he fights in Berlin, itself a mock war, is followed by a shadow war as he plays cards against his erstwhile opponent in the convalescent home; but this open contest conceals the clandestine one of Theo's courtship of Edith, the pivotal struggle of the film, in which Candy's personal future is at stake. Later, in 1939, he will offer to wager all he possesses on Theo's loyalty. Further mock wars fill what has become a playing at life, the whole of the London house their den — their playroom — at Barbara's insistence. The peripatetic big-game hunting of the interwar years and a final recall to active duty to head the shadow of an army, a Home Guard comprising adolescents and veterans, with even less chance should they ever encounter German regulars in earnest than they turn out to have when faced with British regulars in jest.

The point is rammed home through repeated resort to visual set pieces that mimic the neat formations and rituals of early-modern warfare. Recall that it was the memory of cavalry drill that sparked Churchill's vituperative comments on modern warfare. The world of *Blimp* is one of fine uniforms and drills. Whether it is the opening sequence of balletic motor-cycles, the dance-like careering of the Berlin embassy officials down their broad corridor, the preposterous march of the Uhlans and the Guards, as they visit the duelists, heralded by their proud moustaches, or the ritualistic form of the duel itself, the ideal of clean fighting is constantly associated with the ideal of military life as an orderly affair, sapped at the last by the black and

water-filled hole in a neat London terrace that is all that is left in the end of the house that never really became Candy's home.

In the opening Turkish bath scene, Candy demands the respect due to him as a senior officer with long service. Spud refuses. Is he wrong to do so? — No; because Candy — to repeat — has never quite grown up, for all his forty years in the army. Those around him have grown up, grown old, grown wise, and died. Not Clive. Edith was already wiser than Candy back in South Africa at the turn of the century. Clive was in Berlin to stop Kaunitz from spreading lies. Edith shared his desire to curb anti-British propaganda, but not his commitment to the fair fight. Edith, after all, was a New Woman. When Candy explains that his friend Fitzroy at the embassy had effectively gagged him because of British desire to mollify German opinion in advance of the forthcoming visit of the Prince of Wales, she is quick to condemn his impulse to comply. Her brothers have told her what good manners cost the British in the disastrous early phase of the South African War. When the Uhlans present their code governing duels with due ceremony Candy accepts it in all seriousness; Edith think it 'a joke worthy of *Punch*'. War by the rules is not for her. On his last day in Berlin, already sensing the feelings that Candy will discover too late in himself, and which she reciprocates, she suggests a play for him to go to with her sister. It is about Ulysses. Perhaps he will finally reach home, but Calypso will detain him for a while.

Theo grows up quickly. A young officer selected by lot to defend German honour, he spends his convalescence learning English and courting his teacher. His throwing back Clive's jibe that he must be 'cuckoo,' when first hearing of his betrothal to Edith

suggests that Theo has learned his English well enough to attempt, or perhaps stumble upon, a play on words that Clive entirely misses, and that he may understand Candy's feelings better than he does himself. 'You cuckoo, because she loves me!' Theo declares. It is Clive, not Theo, who is not so much crazed as cuckolded.

Theo marries. He experiences defeat and imprisonment. He returns to a ruined country and lives through the economic disasters of the peace. He builds a new career as military chemist. He fathers two children only to lose them to the Nazi Party. He sees through Hitler and finds the courage to abandon a homeland where he is no longer at home in order to seek a new home in England. It is almost a parable of Dewey's distinction between custom and habit: Theo, a creature of habit in the best and fullest sense: shaped by repeated and intelligent adaptation to a changing environment; Candy, too long bound by custom, constant, unchanging, a moral *ingénue*.

The contrast between the two marriages makes the point nicely. Lunching at the Wynne family's Yorkshire mansion, Candy explains how he first saw Barbara in the Flanders convent and failed even to discover even her name, only searching her out by ingenious investigations after the war. All present are visibly disturbed by this confession of mere appearance as basis for a marriage; they do not understand. (It echoes, remotely, the Uhlans' assurance that a duel between people who had never met was not uncommon, 'like marriage'.) But Barbara breaks in to say that she understands very well. When Clive asked her, earlier that day, to repeat her reasons she had reassured him. 'I'm marrying you because I want to join the army and see

the world. I'm marrying you because I want to watch you play polo. I'm marrying you for fifty different reasons. You are how I imagine my future husband.' He had replied: 'Same here! That's how I imagine my future wife.' There is no mention of love, but only a reciprocal imagining of ends — a dream in Dewey's terms — with no sense of the steps needed to attain them.

To Murdoch, the end of the war meant that everyone could go home. Candy's London house became Murdoch's home, and there he would die. Candy's reply, back in November 1918, is that, for him 'it means more than that'. It is to be more but also less. There will never quite be a home. Murdoch has everything ready with fresh flowers in the hall, only to learn that they are not staying. The marriage is to be a picaresque novel, and that suits them both. Barbara, as much as Candy, seeks security in unending fantasy.

When they first drive up to the London house, two spaniels in the back of the car, a ready-made family, Clive points out his den, and Barbara says 'Let this whole house be our den.' In words worthy of a Forsyte, she declares it 'a fine solid-looking property, just like you,' before appealing to Clive, in a rare moment of passion, never to change. It was to be, Candy would later assure Theo, a loving marriage, but it was also a brief one with no issue. Alone in the London house together one evening, Barbara asks Clive not to hum. He thinks for some little time before asking 'but if I don't hum what else am I to do?' And when later asked by Clive to endorse the resemblance between Edith and Barbara's portrait Theo evades the now suspected truth, that the resemblance is at least partly in Candy's imagination. 'I saw Edith thirty-one years later,' he reminds Clive. 'We grew old together.' Then he looks

around the room, Clive's den since 1902, his trophy room, remarking how strange a place it is to hang such a lovely picture, side by side with the stuffed heads of so many animals. Each was the other's trophy.

Why, in spite of it all, does Clive Candy — 'innocent to the point of stupidity' — remain a sympathetic character?<sup>220</sup> He is bull-headedly determined to tell the truth when it is least convenient; he entirely misses important truths that stare him in the face. Had Candy been played by a lesser actor; had Roger Livesey's performance not been set off by and equally impressive rendering of Theo by Anton Walbrook, himself — like scriptwriter and co-director Pressburger — a refugee from Naziism, the question might never have arisen. The answer that Clive and Theo together have the makings of a perfect soldier and complete man, yet separately are unable to reproduce their virtues. In much the same way Europe in 1914 shared a culture and an integrated economy that could not be passed on to the next generation. It is one thing to survive war and another to learn from it. Some can survive only by resisting its lessons; others by learning them. As the price for using his universally known cartoon figure in the title of the film, David Low stipulated only that Blimp be proved a fool in the end.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> . A. L. Kennedy, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (London: British Film Institute, 1997) 29.

<sup>221</sup> . Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society, 1930-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 61.

## CHAPTER 20

### CONSCRIPTS: BILLY PILGRIM AND PAUL BERLIN

One major premise of this book has been that action has meaning only within narrative contexts. Among its corollaries are that personality forms over time through repeated action. We constantly tell stories about one another and about ourselves, and while these concern every aspect of life there are some passages in life that have generally been thought formative or revealing of character and therefore worth the telling. War has been among these from earliest times, offering at best a test of fortitude and the opportunity to display valour and right wrongs. But the forging of narratives, whether true or fictional, relies from top to bottom on a basic reliability of narrative, which has been progressively subverted in the fictions about ways of war that have been examined in Part 3. The supposition is that this reliability, in turn, is achieved by interpretation in good faith, whether it be the rendering of primitive sense data into named objects, the piecing together of discrete events into stories, or the evaluation of those stories and of the actions of their protagonists. And not only is every act of interpretation a form of judgement but so too is the very decision to exercise judgement.

The use of public force to redress grievances and set things to rights has been one powerful plot around which to organise war stories. Helen, daughter of the Spartan king, Tyndareus, had many suitors. They swore to defend whichever of them was finally successful against his enemies. The choice settled on Menalaus, and together they ruled Sparta following the abdication of Tyndareus, until Helen was abducted by a visiting prince, Paris, and taken to his home in Troy. A ten-year war between

Greeks and Trojans ensued, leading finally to the destruction of Troy. There are innumerable conflicting myths and legends surrounding Helen, and the account offered here is ludicrously simple. But what it does is to offer plot and, thereby, coherence to a long struggle in the ancient world that would otherwise have lacked meaning and make it one of Henry Fleming's Greeklike struggles, foundation of Homer's *Illiad*. It is not difficult to imagine Candy slipping into this world of clear meaning, much as he slips into the pool of remembrance as he struggles with Spud Wilson, the modern soldier. There is no reason to doubt that Witton would have shared many of these assumptions about plot and narrative, though he is shielded by a ghost writer and his text twists and turns, slipping from his control, before finally debouching into a cinematic medium for its most subversive character, the breaker. However a persistent current in modern thought about war has challenged its efficacy as a means of achieving its declared objectives and resisted any straightforward imposition of plot and narrative upon it.

This challenge to the significance and coherence of war was already there in Erasmus, who regarded war as unnatural and insisted that 'if there is in the affairs of mortal men any one thing which it is proper uniformly to explode... that one thing is doubtless war'.<sup>222</sup> It is there in Swift, who used physical miniaturization to ridicule the conflicts of his day. It is there in Sterne, as Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby replicates old battles in the gardens of an English mansion. It is there in Scott, whose moral inversions lodged honor among rebels and feminized regular officers. It is there in

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<sup>222</sup> . Desiderius Erasmus, 'Antipolemus, or, the Plea of Reason, Religion, and Humanity against War,' reprinted in *The Book of Peace: A Collection of Essays on War and Peace* (Boston: George C. Beckwith, 1845).

Fennimore Cooper, calling into question regular combat by juxtaposing it with competing ways of war. It is there in Joseph Heller, pitting economic logic against military logic to the point where his US airmen are obliged to bomb their own base.<sup>223</sup> But the challenge has become steadily more acute and anguished in more recent times, finally passing beyond irony or ridicule to subvert the project of any kind of representation, with war as the least able to be represented of all human activities.

Since representation remains the principal means of exposing the irreducibility of war, several authors have tried to pull off the trick of conveying unrepresentability by offering stories that don't work. Laurence Sterne (1713-1768) and Denis Diderot (1713-84), the latter quite the juiciest worm in the bud of the Enlightenment, were at it early on; but the frequency has lately increased.<sup>224</sup> Sometimes there is doubt about the reliability of the narrator. Sometimes the representations offered are flatly inadequate. Sometimes multiple narrators tell mutually inconsistent tales. Sometimes a single narrator offers stories open to multiple but incompatible interpretations. Sometimes conventions of chronology, sequence and position are subverted. Sometimes real and fictional events and characters are problematically juxtaposed.

In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien sews seeds of suspicion about his own reliability from the outset. There is doubt about genre. Is this a collection of stories or

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<sup>223</sup> . Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*.

<sup>224</sup> . And war was there from the start, serving as a metaphor for narrative incoherence. Consider Uncle Toby's reconstruction of the siege of Namur in *Tristram Shandy*, which leads, indirectly, to the castration of Tristram, rendering him a fruitless narrator. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and opinions of Tristram Shandy* (9 vols. York (later London) 1759-67). Diderot owed much to Sterne, notably in *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master* (written 1773; published 1792), but it is his central position in the Enlightenment as editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopédie* that adds zest, subverting by anticipation late-twentieth-century post-modernist attempts to paint the Enlightenment as narrowly rational.

a novel? (Is his *If I die in a Combat Zone* a memoir or a fiction?) The conventional assurance to the reader that what follows is a work of fiction is qualified. 'Except for a few details regarding the author's own life, all the incidents, names and characters are imaginary.' But the reader has already seen the dedication, 'to the men of Alpha Company,' several of whom are named, and appear under those names in the stories that follow. Either the convention of dedication to real people or the equally conventional assurance of fiction is wrong. And the one story in which the author names himself (and which might easily be thought the one with 'a few details of the author's life') relates the most important decision in a young man's life, whether or not to go to war, and is in any case flatly contradicted by his ostensibly true memoir of Vietnam, reclassified by the publisher as fiction when issued as a paperback.<sup>225</sup> From the outset, O'Brien wants his readers to accept that 'story-truth is truer sometimes than happening truth' and it steadily becomes apparent that, if this is so, it is because stories can convey fragmentation and unreliability better than life itself, of which we have less exalted expectations.<sup>226</sup>

Attempts to enoble or even make sense of conflict by the injection of plot, narrative, even gesture, are constantly attempted, but fail to convince. Lieutenant Cross, a young West Pointer, feels responsible through inattention for the death of one of his men. His response is not to act more conscientiously but to try to be a better actor.

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<sup>225</sup> . Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (London: Flamingo, 1991) 55. See also Tim O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* ([1975] New York: Broadway Books, 1999) 18-21. In a more lighthearted but not dissimilar gesture, Arthur Ransome, no stranger to revolution and war, used maps as the endpapers of his first venture into children's literature, a tale of mock warfare still in print more than fifty years later, in order to suggest the reality of its location, and also acknowledged the assistance of one the novel's character's, who had helped with the illustrations. Just to add a little additional –re-post-modern sauce, he then placed a fictitious author, somewhat resembling himself, in the midst of the action, making the recovery of his stolen manuscript by the child protagonists the dramatic climax of the story. Arthur Ransome, *Swallows and Amazons* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930).

<sup>226</sup> . O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 179.

He will restore morale by calling the men together. ‘He would look them in the eyes, keeping his chin level, and he would issue the new SOPs [Standard Operating Procedures] in a calm, impersonal tone of voice, a lieutenant’s voice...’<sup>227</sup> Later, as he starts a mock combat, the first-person narrator experiences ‘giddiness and doubt and awe... It’s like you’re in a movie. There’s a camera on you, so you begin acting....On ambush, curled in the dark, you fight for control... You rearrange your posture; you try for a grin; you measure out your breathing. Eyes open, be alert, — old imperatives, old movies.’<sup>228</sup> In another story the same first-person narrator (or is it another?), working in the Armour meatpacking plant in his native Minnesota, a butcher already, tries to imagine what war will be like, ‘thinking about the war and the pig factory and how [his] life seemed to be collapsing toward slaughter’.<sup>229</sup> In Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse 5*, Roland Weary, a companion of Pilgrim as they wander in the Ardennes, detached from a unit they had scarcely had time to join by the German counter-attack, takes refuge in a prolonged rehearsal of his homecoming, ‘having survived the war, ... telling his parents and his sister a true war story — whereas the true war story was still going on’.<sup>230</sup> But he is never to return. Pilgrim, the passive protagonist, at that moment is becoming ‘unstuck in time’. From this point on ‘[h]e is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next’.<sup>231</sup> In these actorly worlds where imaginative anticipation strives to defer and disarm the reality of combat, repetition, which might in other circumstances be a realist device, becomes a further subversion of narrative, as death after death, whether of midge or multitude, takes on moral equivalence through Vonnegut’s tolling phrase, ‘so it goes,’ — *sic*

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<sup>227</sup> . O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 20/1.

<sup>228</sup> . O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 204.

<sup>229</sup> . O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 42.

<sup>230</sup> . Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5* ([1969] London: Vintage 1991) 30.

<sup>231</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse*, 17.

*transit* — while O'Brien's anticipations, tellings and re-tellings of the deaths of Ted Lavender, Kiowa and the slim Vietnamese confer mythic status, removing them beyond time and place.<sup>232</sup>

In the work of Kurt Vonnegut the unreliability of narrative is of a higher order than O'Brien aspires to. Best known for *Slaughterhouse 5*, which centers on the February 1945 fire-bombing of Dresden in which at least 25,000 and possibly more than 100,000 died, Vonnegut may already have been seriously traumatized by the suicide of his mother in 1944, while he was home on leave.<sup>233</sup> Joining the 106<sup>th</sup> US infantry division, he had been captured in December 1944 and imprisoned in Dresden. There he witnessed the Allied attack of February 1945 and its aftermath. The novel tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, assistant to an army chaplain he never gets to meet. Captured almost as soon as he reaches the Ardennes, at the height of the Battle of the Bulge, Pilgrim is the narrator of events based on Vonnegut's own experience. But the assurances offered for his reliability are anything but reassuring. He is by profession an optometrist, skilled in helping Earthling souls to see better. He is all the better able to appreciate their plight because he knows how much clearer is the sight of the aliens who abducted him, his 'little green friends on Tralfamadore'. It is because of

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<sup>232</sup> . The full phrase is '*sic transit gloria mundi*' – 'So the glory of the world passes away' or more loosely 'Nothing in this world is for ever.'

<sup>233</sup> . The figure of 135,000 in *Slaughterhouse 5* is sourced to David Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964). Though Rumfoord was a fictional character, Irving is not. He was later accused of exaggerating the number of deaths at Dresden and minimizing the number of Jews murdered in German concentration camps in an attempt to establish moral equivalence between the Allies and Germany. Bankrupt in 2000 following his defeat in a libel trial against US historian Deborah Lipstadt, who had accused him of holocaust denial, Irving was sentenced to three years in prison in 2006 after a trial in Austria relating to charges dating from 1989, to the dismay of his erstwhile opponent, Lipstadt. See Deborah Lipstadt, *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving* (New York: Ecco, 2005) and Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). On Dresden and the ethics of Allied bombing, A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) provides a careful and relatively recent account of this rancorous and contemptible episode, with a good bibliography.

his spell in Tralfamadore that Billy is able to tell the truth about time and, one is led to suppose, about war.<sup>234</sup> Who can wonder that Bertram Rumfoord, Harvard historian and official Air Force historian, obliged to share a hospital room with Pilgrim, disregards the eye witness account of his chance companion. Being there may convey no more than the illusion of knowledge because one can see only fragments; history written in tranquility may be no better because the coherence imparted to the fragments is a denial of raw experience.

Multiplicity of narrators creates further doubt. O'Brien's alternation between first and third person as he tells and re-tells the killing of a slim Vietnamese soldier tosses responsibility from hand to hand like a grenade that may at any moment prove anything but discriminate.<sup>235</sup> Vonnegut achieves a similar effect by placing his novel within a supposed preface and conclusion written in the first person. Yet after the preface gives way to the novel in chapter 2, the business of writing is not left behind. Billy has become a writer of letters about his time in Tralfamadore, where he had lived with the Earthling movie star, Montana Wildhack, though seemingly absent from Earth for only second, on the night of his daughter's wedding in 1967. It is at times unclear just who is speaking. Is the birdsong 'poo-tee-weet' Vonnegut's or Pilgrim's? Is the elegiac and more than seventy times repeated phrase, 'so it goes' (*sic transit*), that studs the narrative like cloves in a ham, the invention of Vonnegut or Pilgrim or, as Pilgrim insists, a customary phrase of the Tralfamadoreans?<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 20.

<sup>235</sup> . 'The Man I Killed,' 'Good Form' and 'On the Rainy River,' all in *The Things They Carried*.

<sup>236</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 20.

Both O'Brien and Vonnegut play fast and loose with time and place. The young narrator of 'On the Raining River,' within reach of the northern bank, becomes the spectator of his own decision, whether to flee to Canada or report for duty. He sees a bewildering cavalcade of past and future. Canada becomes most fantastic when it is closest. He has finally to make his decision, in a small boat twenty yards from Canadian soil, as though on stage. 'It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river...' and the audience must not be disappointed; the show must go on.<sup>237</sup> Vonnegut rehearses the raid on Dresden, but in reverse. 'American planes, full of holes and wounded men and corpses took off backwards from an airfield in England...' So it goes.<sup>238</sup> Throughout, he offers fragments that can be assembled almost as the reader wishes. Pilgrim is unhinged. He has become unstuck in time. But did this happen in December 1944 in the Ardennes (31) or during his breakdown in the prison camp hospital, or after the Dresden bombing, or in the US military hospital where he experienced a second breakdown in 1948, or when he broke his skull in a 1967 plane crash and experienced 'a mild nervous collapse'.<sup>239</sup> To settle on any one of these affects judgments of the relative reliability of different moments in a narrative that jumps frenetically back and forth in time, lending further support to the thesis that it is a Tralfamadorian that is telling the story, and not an earthling at all.<sup>240</sup> One of them explains how their books are organized. '[E]ach clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message—describing a situation, a scene. We ... read them all at once, not one after the other... There is no beginning, no

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<sup>237</sup> . O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 54.

<sup>238</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 53-4.

<sup>239</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 18, 30, 70-72, 113.

<sup>240</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*,

middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effect. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time.<sup>241</sup>

Reality and fiction jostle one another. Both books deal with real wars, real events. But where O'Brien is free of context, in a phenomenological limbo reminiscent of Crane's *Red Badge*, Vonnegut is ever teasing, with references to books — some real some imagined — and to events that seem to fix the writing of the narrative, such as the shooting of Robert Kennedy. Toward the end, he inserts himself into the fictional narrative. In the prison camp latrines, '[an] American near Billy wailed that he had excreted everything but his brains. Moments later he said, "There they go, there they go." He meant his brains. That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book.'<sup>242</sup> Above this text there is a facsimile of the message that hung on the wall: 'Please leave this latrine as tidy as you found it!' Before ever he speaks, the 'I' has been removed from the latrine.

Finally, there is the display of plain inadequacy: representations that just don't comprehend war, and by their failure illustrate the scale of its incoherence. Eliot Rosewater, the millionaire collector of Kilgore Trout science-fiction novels who has the bed next to Billy Pilgrim in the psychiatric hospital, thought *The Brothers Karamazov* had everything. But it was no longer enough. The German army, keen to maximize the propaganda value of surrendered American troops, have a cine camera trained on Billy as he crosses the frontier into Germany, but they have long

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<sup>241</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 64.

<sup>242</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*, 91.

since run out of film-stock.<sup>243</sup> The British officers in the German PoW camp, captured early in the war, have had to imagine it, and then admit they got it wrong as the childlike Americans trickle in. The Germans had loved the British because ‘they made war look stylish and reasonable’. But war is neither stylish nor reasonable, Vonnegut suggests.<sup>244</sup> In his preface he recounts, in a first-person that may or may not be reliable, the difficulties he faced in trying to tell his story, and how the best outline he ever produced was done with his child’s crayons on the back of a sheet of lining paper.<sup>245</sup> O’Brien, too, returns repeatedly to banal representations that provide the measure of war’s irrationality by their neatness. Two soldiers play checkers obsessively. ‘There were red checkers and black checkers. The playing field was laid out in a strict grid, no tunnels or mountains or jungles. You knew where you stood.’<sup>246</sup> ‘Rat’ Kiley crafts an elaborate story about the death of his comrade to send to the dead man’s sister, hoping to trade on it after the war. She never replies; the story is barren; it fails to yield the hoped-for real-life story of romance. ‘Listen to Rat: “Jesus Christ, man. I write this beautiful fuckin’ letter, I slave over it, and what happens? The dumb cooze never writes back.”’<sup>247</sup>

2,696 / 3,336

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<sup>243</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse*, 47.

<sup>244</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse*, 68, 76.

<sup>245</sup> . Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse*, 4.

<sup>246</sup> . O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 31.

<sup>247</sup> . O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 68 and 75/6.

## CHAPTER 21

### CONCLUSION

The principal aim of this book has been to restore a proper balance between rule-governed and phenomenological approaches to the moral dilemmas characteristic of war. Following a Shakespearean prelude, adumbrating the argument, this was attempted in two steps. First came a de-naturalization of the dominant just-war tradition of recent years. This was identified as part of a modern neo-romantic movement: the selective restoration in very specific political circumstances of a tradition calculated to reassure policy-makers, combatants, and publics in the face of a profusion of highly destructive security threats by offering a public procedure of rational deliberation framed by flexible criteria and rules. The second step was to place a second, more imaginative mode of deliberation alongside practical reason. In this, both the interiority of those caught up in war and the problem of representing that experience in ways that allow effective public debate are in play. Rule-governed behavior without imagination and unbounded initiative are both sure paths to disaster. War emerged as a sphere which, because of its mercurial character and systematical resistance to representation, can only be grasped by an oblique combination of discipline and imagination – the shield–mirror that enabled Perseus to fight the Gorgon.

The thinking behind this undertaking owes much to the American pragmatist tradition, nicely captured by David Hildebrand in his study of John Dewey.

Moral inquiry, Hildebrand writes, is a reflective response – intervening with analysis and imaginative deliberation – when action is frustrated. Deliberation in ethics has traditionally meant a mechanical calculation of future pains or

pleasures, advantages and disadvantages. Dewey expands the meaning of deliberation; it includes traditional forecasting, but also much more. Deliberation may also proceed by dialogue, visualization, imagining of motor responses, and imagining how others might react to a deed done. Some deliberation uses 'dramatic rehearsal' to illuminate the emotional color and weight of various possibilities.<sup>248</sup>

Once thought a step toward madness, imagination may instead be an essential defence against it; Billy Pilgrim stands guard at the perimeter of the just-war tradition, keeping it straight at the cost of his own convolution.

Chapter 13 began the process of setting imagination alongside practical reason by drawing attention to the variety of moral response demanded by differing ways of war, the resistance of war to representation, and the association of that resistance with modern anxieties about the fragility of social order and the dehumanizing effects of new technologies. It was claimed that the challenges to personal and political identity posed by the disorientation and enchantment offered by Crane, Buchan, Scott and Vonnegut – each in his own way – were every bit as much ethical issues as the dilemmas treated within the just-war tradition. Indeed, a possible sociology of recent just-war enthusiasm might argue that the struggle to fix war, responses to war, and representations of war through military training, humanitarian law, and the exculpatory doctrines of the just war have been symptomatic of the very same anxieties about possible loss of social and personal cohesion that spurred the modern literary tradition. This in no way denies their functionality for those faced with the challenges of modern warfare.

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<sup>248</sup> . David L. Hildebrand, *Dewey: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007) 77.

As well as charting a variety of ways of war, from battlefield through irregular operations and espionage to terrorism, the later chapters in the book contrasted the worlds of the professional soldier and the conscript. Yet a second strand of argument ran through this taxonomy. Already in Scott and Cooper, there was strong awareness of the multiplicity of ways of war and incompatibilities between them, together with a consciousness of the challenges posed by war to social order and personal identity. This last threat became imminent in Crane's *Red Badge*, and it would be hard to find a better anticipation of Dewey's vision of character formation than Henry Fleming, for whom 'deliberation is a process of active, suppressed, rehearsal; of imaginative dramatic performance of various deeds ... dramatic and active, not mathematical and impersonal.'<sup>249</sup>

If the major contrast in *Red Badge* is between the drama of rehearsal and the banality of the event, it becomes, in *Scapegoats of Empire* an opposition of artifice and spontaneity. Were it to have dealt only with the 1978 film, this chapter might have been closest to the just-war tradition of any in Part 3, with an emphasis on the immunity of non-combatants and issues of command responsibility, but its principal contribution is an implicit, albeit problematic justification of a less rule-governed way of war in the South African veldt, far from base in a war with no discernable lines. The political purpose of this argument came, in the course of the twentieth century, to be the vindication of an Australian national identity distinguished from that of the British by informality, spontaneity and honesty. But the second subject of the chapter was the attenuation of the early twentieth-century narrative of George Witton, with its

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<sup>249</sup> . John Dewey, *The Middle Works*, vol.5, 292-3, quoted by Hildebrand, *Dewey*, 78.

concern for nature, into a just-war courtroom script – a process that mirrored the emergence of a contemporary just-war formula, traced in chapter 11.

By this point, it must have become clear that in the modern tradition, as in Shakespeare, narrative cannot be thought innocent. It, too, is a combatant, as once was *Richard II* on the eve of the Essex rebellion. If this was true of the succession of Australians who handled the Morant myth, how much more so for John Buchan, whose daily task during the Great War was that of propagandist. His novels, not least *Mr Standfast*, plainly advocated the Allied cause, even as they raised profound questions about the efficacy of force. As a statement of war aims, the emphasis of *Mr Standfast* on landscape and its denigration of urban society anticipate the neo-Romanticism of Kenneth Clark's 1940s patronage of war artists or the recent work of Roy Strong.<sup>250</sup> At the same time, there is profound unease about the ability of narrative to represent the new style of warfare, in which intelligence has become the supreme weapon. Once narrative is implicated in the struggle, an infinite regress commences by which its reliability recedes to vanishing point. Buchan conveys this through intertextuality, *Pilgrim's Progress* figuring both as diegetic and non-diegetic text: the shared code book of Hannay and his companions and inverted structure of the whole novel, falsely embracing it. In earlier decades, the Stevensons and Conrad had already grappled with the implication of narrative in a new form of asymmetric warfare, terrorism. The approach adopted by the Stevensons was to smother terrorism in fantastic stories of Mormon conspiracy, Voodoo, and Ruritanian politics before exposing its grim banality and reliance on the daily press and public gullibility.

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<sup>250</sup> . For Clark's neoromanticism see Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain, 1939-45* (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2007); for the continuation of this oddly detached view of England (not Britain), hardly intelligible to those born north of Watford, see Roy Strong, *Visions of England* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011).

Both *The Dynamiter* and *The Secret Agent* continue Buchan's theme of the corruption of urbanism. The city, once the locus of security, is newly put in question as source and site of terrorism. Finally, chapters 19 and 20, dealing respectively with the professional and the combatant, complement the emerging theme of narrative incoherence, further elaborated in the works of Vonnegut and O'Brien, with a linked theme, of infantilisation. War has ceased to be the making or unmaking of men and become a business for children. Vonnegut's full title is *Slaughterhouse-Five or the Children's Crusade: a duty-dance with death*. Billy Pilgrim enters the war as a child and, though living on, is unable to mature, surviving only to tell the tale in a world bereft of coherent time and space. Conrad's bomber is a child, with a child's passionate and immoderate desire for justice. Where Buchan feminized Hannay, Powell and Pressburger infantilized his contemporary, Clive Candy, childless and believing, almost to the end, in rules long abandoned by those around him.

The moral agent who deliberates about just cause and examines conscience to determine right intention and the combatant who weighs lives against one another while trying to find ways of fighting that will best allow a just peace to be established at the conclusion of hostilities are not pristine rational individuals. He is newly-crowned Prince Hal, haunted by his own dissolute past and the sin of his usurper father. He is Paul Berlin, at one and the same time on guard in Vietnam and half way across the world, going after Cacciato. Those who embark on decision-making under stress in time of war do not do so as complete persons, but as men and women in an unending process of development. They exercise a reason that does not consist solely in measurement against criteria, gauging against principle and adhesion to

rules, but in the weighing of different imagined alternatives and of the moral status of themselves and others within those rehearsed futures.

Dewey's rejection of 'immutably fixed and universally applicable ... principles' did not entail the wholesale ditching of earlier thought. He believed that the study of past moral philosophy was worthwhile because it helped to 'reveal the complexity of moral situations'.<sup>251</sup> It was the substitution of deliberation-between-alternatives for assessment-against-criteria or consistency-with-principles that led Richard Rorty to 'see imagination as the cutting edge of cultural evolution'.<sup>252</sup> Hugh LaFollette is more explicit, suggesting that the capacity to deliberate and the quality of moral imagination an understanding are refined and improved 'by engaging in sustained and careful discussion of practical ethical quandaries, by talking to people (or reading about people) who have faced significant moral choices, by reading great literature, and by reading philosophical treatises'.<sup>253</sup> Rorty goes a step further, preferring history and fiction to moral philosophy.<sup>254</sup> There is pressing need for both and for more conversation between them.

1,575 / 1,730

Part 3: 33,670 / 40,436

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<sup>251</sup> . Hildebrand, 77, quoting Dewey, *Later Works*, vol.7, 180; or, as Rorty put it in 'Kant v. Dewey' 'Principles are handy for summing up a range of reactions, but they do not have independent force that can correct such reactions'.

<sup>252</sup> . Richard Rorty, 'Ethics Without Principles', 87.

<sup>253</sup> . LaFollette, 410.

<sup>254</sup> . Rorty, 'Kant v. Dewey: the current situation of moral philosophy' in Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers*, vol.4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).