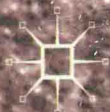


WAR TRAUMA

and English Modernism

T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence

CARL KROCKEL

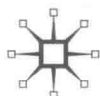


War Trauma and English Modernism

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Carl Krockel

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List of Abbreviations

T.S. Eliot

- ASG *After Strange Gods*. London: Faber & Faber, 1934.
- AWL *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- C *The Criterion* [1922–39] 18 vols., ed. T.S. Eliot. London: Faber & Faber 1967.
- CPP *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot*. London: Faber & Faber, 1969.
- EAM *Essays Ancient and Modern*. London: Faber & Faber, 1936.
- FLA *For Lancelot Andrewes*. London: Faber & Faber, 1928.
- ICS *The Idea of a Christian Society*. London: Faber & Faber, 1939.
- IMA *Inventions of a March Hare*. London: Faber & Faber, 1996.
- LE *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Volume I*. Ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton. London: Faber & Faber, 2009.
- NTDC *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. London: Faber & Faber, 1948.
- PP *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber & Faber, 1957.
- SE *Selected Essays*. London: Faber & Faber, 1959.
- SP *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*. Ed. Frank Kermode. London: Faber & Faber, 1975.
- SW *The Sacred Wood*. London: Faber & Faber, 1997.
- TCC *To Criticize the Critic*. London: Faber & Faber, 1965.
- UPUC *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. London: Faber & Faber, 1933.
- VMP *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*. Ed. Ronald Schuchard. London: Faber & Faber, 1993.
- WLFT *The Waste Land: a Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. Ed. Valerie Eliot. London: Faber & Faber, 1971.

D.H. Lawrence

Letters

- ii. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume II. Eds. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- iii. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume III. Eds. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- iv. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume IV. Eds. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- v. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume V. Eds. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- vi. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume VI. Eds. James T. Boulton, Margaret H. Boulton and Gerald M. Lacey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- vii. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume VII. Eds. Keith Sagar and James T. Boulton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- LBR *D.H. Lawrence's Letters to Bertrand Russell*. Ed. Harry T. Moore. New York: Gotham, 1948.

Works

- AR *Aaron's Rod*. Ed. Mara Kalnins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- EmyE *England, My England and Other Stories*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- FLC *The First and Second "Lady Chatterley's Lover"*. Eds. Dieter Mehl and Christa Jansohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- FWL *The First "Women in Love"*. Eds. John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- K *Kangaroo*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- LCL* *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Ed. Michael Squires. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- LEA* *Late Essays and Articles*. Ed. James T. Boulton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- LG* *The Lost Girl*. Ed. John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- MEH* *Movements in European History*. Ed. Philip Crumpton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- MM* *Memoir of Maurice Magnus*. Ed. Keith Cushman. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987.
- MinM* *Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays*. Ed. Virginia Crosswhite Hyde. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- MN* *Mr Noon*. Ed. Lindeth Vasey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- PUFU* *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- R* *The Rainbow*. Ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- RDP* *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*. Ed. Michael Herbert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- SS* *Sea and Sardinia*. Ed. Mara Kalnins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Studies* *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Eds. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Study* *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- VG* *The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories*. Ed. Michael Herbert, Bethan Jones and Lindeth Vasey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- WL* *Women in Love*. Eds. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

One of the legacies of our last, violent century is the split in our reading of its formative period, the First World War and the rise of Modernism, between history and aesthetics, the “Georgian” war writers on one side and the Modernists on the other.

This division was present during the war, in the terms over which it was fought. The international avant-garde was associated with the rising industrial power of Germany which threatened British imperial interests established in the previous century; this attitude was maintained at great cost in the early years of the war while Britain resisted matching Germany’s industrial-scaled onslaught. As the “Men of 1914” the Modernists both emerged and were obliterated on the first year of war. Wyndham Lewis recalled how “It was, after all, a new civilisation that I – and a few other people – was making the blueprints for . . . Then the war came, and that ended chapter i of my career as a writer and artist with an unceremonious abruptness.” Lewis went to war, T.E. Hulme was killed in 1916, T.S. Eliot struggled to financially support himself and his wife, and D.H. Lawrence kept writing while desperate to escape; Ezra Pound tried to continue to foster literary production despite conceding in 1916 that “the only person of interest left in the world of art, London”,¹ was himself. Meanwhile in the warzone Wilfred Owen looked back to Algernon Swinburne, disregarding Modernist trends in his record of experiences.

After the war Siegfried Sassoon consistently rejected Modernist poetry as exclusively cerebral, singling out Eliot as his *bête noire*. In constructing a post-war culture, Modernists tended to pass over the memory of war. Pound emigrated to Paris, while Eliot and the members of Bloomsbury appealed to an exclusive cultural alliance with France, rooted in the late nineteenth century. Eliot valued James Joyce, Pound and Lewis for

being apparently unaffected by the war, and his attitude was crucial to his whole notion of Modernism which excluded the war poets. His essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" supplanted immediate historical conditions with the legacy of great writers from Homer onwards. Eliot appealed to Joyce's example in setting the challenge of art "to create a new world" (AWL, 186), while Lawrence's aim in writing *Women in Love* was to "build up a new world in one's soul" (ii. 555).

The "war boom" of memoirs at the end of the Twenties overshadowed the "Modernist experiment" at the beginning of the decade. Eliot dismissed this war writing as symptomatic of the rising tide of military aggression in Europe, and W.B. Yeats famously excluded Owen from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1935. Yeats's attitude was motivated by a sense of Owen and other war poets competing with him as a model for the politically committed poets of the Thirties. As an affront to him and Eliot, Louis MacNeice confirmed that "the nineteen-thirty school of English poets . . . derives largely from Owen". This opposition continued after the Second World War. Bernard Bergonzi and Jon Silkin privileged immediate eyewitness poetry in their canon of war literature, since their priority lay in access to the authentic experience of war. Tacitly, their approach refuted formalist assumptions about poetry, turning from New Critical principles which had established the pre-eminence of Modernist poetry.²

This perceived absence, or repression, of the memory of the First World War in English Modernism threatens to restrict the event to Flanders instead of the whole of our culture and history. Nonetheless the division between Modernism and war writing that we have inherited is not an arbitrary consequence of later cultural trends, but is rooted in the conditions of the war itself. We need to trace this division back to these origins, in order to revise it.

The authority of experience: the case of the bayonet

Despite the devastating impact of war upon Modernist writers, more poetry was composed between 1914 and 1915 than perhaps any other period in British history. However, in lauding the heroism of the troops for King and country the significance of this poetry lay most in how it inspired others to write in opposition to it. As serving soldiers, these writers took on the responsibility of communicating the conditions of the battlefield to civilians. Vivian de Sola Pinto, Sassoon's second-in-command, described how the civilian and military sides formed "Two Nations". Sassoon later explained that "the essence of my war poems

was fellow feeling for the troops, whose sufferings were so remote from the comprehension of many civilians"; likewise Owen returned to the front in 1918 "in order to help these boys . . . indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can".³ A classic example of the poetry which sought to respond to this split between soldier and civilian is Sassoon's "Remorse". A soldier in no-man's-land recalls bayoneting a German who clutched at his knees in terror:

"there's things in war one dare not tell
 Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads
 Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds."⁴

For Sassoon "the essential quality" of his poetry lay in it being "true to what I experienced. All the best ones are truly experienced and therefore authentic in expression";⁵ this principle runs counter to the Modernist aesthetic of impersonality. Yet instead of bringing the "two nations" together, his poetry presented an unbridgeable gulf between them.

The shocking effect of "Remorse" relies on the presentation of a personalised form of war recognisable to the civilian, the hand-to-hand combat of the bayonet. Similarly, in Owen's "Arms and the Boy" the bayonet alludes to Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy".

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
 How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
 Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;
 And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Let the fixed bayonet
 Gleam with sharp desire to wet
 Its bright point in English blood
 Looking keen as one for food.⁶

Shelley was describing the soldiers at the Peterloo massacre of 1817, and through the allusion Owen made the point of how the army, which was supposed to safeguard its inhabitants, had become perverted by a futile lust to kill indiscriminately.

The political point was well made by Owen – however, accuracy regarding the conditions of modern war is sacrificed for it. Combat by bayonet had all but disappeared in the conditions of large-scale war. In *Blasting and Bombardiering* Lewis reported that "Sixty per cent of the casualties on the Western Front were caused by shell-fire, forty per cent by bullets. (Bayonet wounds were so rare that they do not enter into

the statistics.)" In *Disenchantment* C.F. Montague commented that "the bayonet's thrust is more of a gesture: a cogent appeal, like the urgent 'How's that?' from the whole of the field when a batsman is almost certainly out". In *Death of a Hero* Richard Aldington noted that "it was a war of missiles, murderous and soul-shaking explosives, not a war of hand-weapons". The historian Denis Winter confirms these observations: "'No man in the Great War was ever killed by a bayonet,' claimed one soldier, 'unless he had his hands up first'. . . . Then as now the bayonet's function was symbolic and ornamental: without them the sculptures' internal dynamic is thrown irremediably out of kilter."⁷

Remarkably, Lawrence managed to register this fact in the revision of his short story "England, My England". In the 1915 version Evelyn's death is described in terms of how an uninformed civilian could imagine the reality of war:

For one moment he felt the searing of steel, another final agony of suffocating darkness.

The German cut and mutilated the face of the dead man as if he must obliterate it. He slashed it across, as if it must not be a face any more; it must be removed. (*EmyE*, 232)

Evelyn's death is the culmination of his nullified existence which drove him to war; the whole story is presented through his consciousness at the point of death. Hence the concluding scene focuses on how the German kills him, personally with a bayonet, while trying to obliterate his impersonal expression, a product of his immersion in mechanised warfare. Where Sassoon and Owen expressed the horror of warfare, Lawrence conveyed the horror of what one becomes through participating in it. Then in the 1919 version of the story Lawrence excluded the protagonist's death by bayonet because he was not concerned with the significance of his protagonist's death, but in his civilian existence which impelled him to war. Battlefield experience is dismissed, perhaps with self-conscious irony on Lawrence's part, as "small, unimportant action", in comparison to the action at home which determined it (*EmyE*, 30, 32). In effecting this change Lawrence turned out to be more faithful to the actual conditions of war than Sassoon and Owen were.

The crucial point indicated by this comparison is how soldiers' writing of the war tends to be suffused by rhetoric which sacrifices the accuracy of its description. War poetry is in dialogue with its civilian readers, presenting the battlefield as an alien environment. It inverts the images of propaganda, replacing heroism with horror – but still in a personalised

form. This quality most often occurs in the description of death, which is both the defining cost of war, and which absolutely resists representation. Dennis Welland notes in his critical study of Owen that "a reliable guide to war poetry could be written in terms of changes in poetic attitudes to death". Bergonzi lists the range from the uninformed acceptance of Rupert Brooke to Sassoon's angry rejection and Owen's burning pity. When Owen and Sassoon described the death of a soldier it became suffused in rhetoric, for instance in the concluding part of "Counter-attack": "Bleeding to death. The counter-attack had failed". Criticising the commanding officers' ineptitude, this part was tagged onto the preceding description of the battle scene composed while Sassoon was at the front. Owen also inserted rhetoric into the shocking description of the gassed soldier's "froth-corrupted lungs" to force home the irony of "Dulce et decorum est".⁸ By contrast, in describing his own situation of being declared dead, Graves could only mention the laconic anecdote that a letter of condolence was prematurely written to his mother.

These war poets, then, cannot be read uncritically for the veracity of their depictions of war, and neither is their writing a simple product of the horror of war. Most of Owen's war poems are based on his experiences of the first five months of 1917; he endured very little of the monotony of trench duty which is considered by historians to be the most typical Western Front experience. Sassoon began writing poetry after only a month on the front line in November 1915 and February 1916, without being directly involved in the fighting. Also the divide between combatant and non-combatant follows the outdated lines between the genre of realism as an unmediated reflection of experience, in contrast to the stylistic experimentation of Modernism. It is most problematic in the sense that the extreme conditions of the reality of war demanded new techniques to represent them. Despite being angered by the indifference of Londoners to war in 1915, then the "war-madness" of the following years, Robert Graves conceded the difficulty of comprehending and describing encounters on the field: "All we heard back there in the sidings was a distant cheer, confused crackle of rifle-fire, yells, heavy shelling on our front line, more shouts and yells and a continuous rattle of machine-guns." Even Sassoon himself conceded in his fictional *Memoirs* that his outlook on the war was limited to his battalion, and that despite his arrogance about the ignorance of people at home, the war was too large for him to understand. Perhaps the most comprehensive expression of war experience that he witnessed was in the screams of a delirious man in hospital: "All the horror of the Somme attacks was in that raving."⁹

Breaching the critical divide

Reflecting an awareness of these issues, since the Seventies the debate on war literature and Modernism has become more complex, questioning the apparent divide between participants and non-participants. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* Paul Fussell directly contradicted Bergonzi that the best literature of the war was demythologising: "No: almost the opposite. In one sense the movement was towards myth, towards a revival of the cultic, the mystical, the sacrificial, the prophetic, the sacramental, and the universally significant. In short, towards fiction."¹⁰ The rhetoric which I have described can be subsumed in this notion of "fiction". Having distinguished truth value from factuality, Fussell took the debate in two new directions by relating the war to modern culture, and by opening up the theme of sexuality. Criticism has since followed these directions, extending the theme of sexuality to women's experience of the war, and revising the relationship between soldiers and civilians, especially those producing Modernist culture. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, identify the shared resentment of Sassoon, Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Lawrence towards women's empowerment during wartime; also they detail the shared passive suffering of Lawrence, Eliot and civilian women in relation to events beyond control and comprehension.¹¹

These developments notwithstanding, Fussell maintained the divide between front line experience and civilian ignorance, excluding the Modernists; Vincent Sherry accuses him of "a kind of 'combat gnosticism'", a term borrowed from James Campbell. Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* represents the most significant attempt to redress this. It argues that the language of Anglo-American Modernism in the Twenties formed a critique of the rhetoric of liberalism during the war: the politically dominant Liberals had tried to square their values of enlightened democracy which was pacifist with the imperialist defence of Britain's economic resources. According to Sherry, Modernists such as Eliot and Pound deconstructed the platitudes of liberalism by exposing the contradictions of its logic, and developing a language which located a reality in the objective expression of feeling.¹²

One of the most striking aspects of his book, though, is how Sherry excludes Lawrence from what is otherwise a comprehensive survey of Modernists. After all, Lawrence was most directly affected by the war in having his work banned, and suffering persecution by the authorities as a suspected spy. Given the direct effect of war on Lawrence, the exclusion of him reflects how Sherry is maintaining the divide between

war writers and civilian Modernists who reacted to the war's ideological consequences, not directly to its violence. Sherry's attitude also points to the much larger issue of how a "subjective" Lawrence is often considered a peripheral figure in an impersonal and detached Modernism. With Lawrence, the issue of the relation between Modernists and war writers becomes much larger, an issue about how we characterise Modernism itself.

To relate Sherry's otherwise powerful theory to Lawrence, one needs to change its points of emphasis. Lawrence's case foregrounds how a crisis in language could become expressive of one's psychological crisis in being unable to comprehend the war, and one's place in history. Sherry appeals to the Modernists' attempt to "recover the memory, and the shock"¹³ of the ideological crisis of liberalism; however the shock and memory are much deeper and broader than this for Lawrence, reaching to the actual question of personal survival. Consequently, where Sherry's focal points are linguistic and political, in the case of Lawrence one should add the biographical and psychological. Also, one can apply these points to the writers whom Sherry discusses, especially Eliot.

A book that at least goes in this direction is *Modernism, History and the First World War* by Trudi Tate. One of her prime examples of civilian war neurosis is how the poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) believed that the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 caused the stillbirth of her first child – and the child can be considered a casualty of war.¹⁴ However, Tate's book leaves further questions to be asked. One of its most formidable critics is Sherry, who criticises the terms of her study. Ostensibly about "Modernism", it restricts itself to prose since Tate argues that the writers only registered the presence of how propaganda distorted the actual conditions of war. According to Sherry, through this choice Tate avoids considering how "modernists might distinguish themselves by becoming animated by these fresh incentives and fashioning an answering language". So, where Sherry omits Lawrence from his range of Modernists, Tate does not include Eliot, since his response to the war cannot be separated from his development of a Modernist literary style.

Also Sherry is critical of Tate's lack of research into contemporary notions of trauma, by which she could have shown the compensatory function of its symptoms such as the "fugue", a flight from reality: "Delusional as the 'fugue' may be, its protagonist is engaging nonetheless in some sort of compensatory enterprise, regarded by Rivers himself as a regrettable but potentially necessary way of actually dealing with what has happened – a sort of transitional, ultimately beneficial fantasy."¹⁵ Tate points out Lawrence's delusional treatment of his

characters' injuries, such as Maurice in "The Blind Man" "whose war injury is a source of deep insight, vitality, and joy".¹⁶ On the question of the truth of war, Tate is on the side of Bergonzi's demythologising, not Fussell's mythmaking of war. In this context, she regards Lawrence as merely a pathological case of erotic fantasising; she does not recognise how he created a myth as a way of coping with, and ultimately surviving the pressures of war. To understand this larger question one need not only investigate in more depth the nature of trauma, as Sherry advises, but also the psychological and biographical context of the writing. By this means we can show how, and to what ends, the writer is personally reacting to history.

None of the major books on the literature of the war that I cite above have done this, for the main reason that it threatens to restrict the consideration of the subject of literature and World War I to an intensive study of a couple of writers, not the period as a whole. I have attempted to counter this problem in my choice of writers, Lawrence and Eliot, who are in so many respects diametrically opposed figures of Modernism, as indicated by Sherry's exclusion of Lawrence and Tate's of Eliot. By bringing the two writers together we can break down the boundaries within Modernism, between personality and impersonality, a literature which registers or transcends history, and one constructed from experience or the play of language.

Finally, perhaps the most satisfying exploration of the issue of the relative experience of soldier and civilian in the First World War is offered by Samuel Hynes since he has written two books on the subject – which directly contradict each other. His study of 1990, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture*, makes the most convincing link between war writers and Modernists in a shared aesthetic that communicates direct experience – where Sassoon and Owen forged a kind of "objective correlative" from enduring trench warfare. Hynes dismisses their division between combatant and non-combatant experience as a "myth" and as "a curious kind of elitism, not unlike the avant-garde artist towards bourgeois society, but set in terms of war". Six years later, however, in *The Soldier's Tale* Hynes reverses his position, arguing that war writing does not follow a literary tradition because it is confined to experience, to "make war actual". He describes it as a form of ultra-realism which comes "as close as language can to rendering the things of the material world as they are".¹⁷

I do not draw attention to Hynes' radical contradictions to undermine his interpretation of the relationship between war and literature, but rather to present it as a model that I wish to emulate. We can only

acknowledge the contradictions that beset our understanding of the formative period of literature in the last century, between soldier and civilian, direct and indirect experience, entrapment inside and outside historical events, realism and experimentation, physical and psychological trauma. In Lawrence and Eliot I will explore these contradictions. These writers were not threatened by shellfire, but by a society fixated upon war. They were helpless to participate in events which were remote from them, but so was the soldier helpless while caught up in these events. They could not represent war realistically because they had not witnessed it, but realism is an inadequate technique for representing what is too extreme and immense to be grasped by an individual subject. Their lack of physical injury was a consequence of their distance from the violence, but this condition mirrors that of the traumatised soldier, who could not locate his wounds externally and was victim to an injury inside his mind.

Modernism and war poetry: a shared culture

Throughout this study I will compare Eliot and Lawrence to a broad range of war writers, including Edmund Blunden, Wyndham Lewis, Frederick Manning, Ford Madox Ford, Herbert Read, Richard Aldington, and ordinary soldiers who gave testimony. I will maintain my focus upon Owen and Sassoon, since they were decisive in constructing the “divide” which my study addresses. They are traditionally regarded in opposition to civilian Modernists not just because of their war experience, but also the “Georgian” techniques they used to articulate it. I will demonstrate that the force of war experience gravitated both civilian and soldier, Modernist and Georgian, towards comparable modes of expression.

While establishing links with Modernists, Hynes notes that writers on the front “arrived at the aesthetic of direct experience *through* experience”,¹⁸ not through adherence to Modernist aesthetics. However both groups developed their aesthetics in response to the advent of Modernity, in the industrial conditions of the city and battlefield. In the rest of this Introduction I will draw attention to their shared Romantic inheritance of decadence, which they both modernised by bringing it to bear upon these historical circumstances. I will introduce into my discussion Isaac Rosenberg, who was patronised and misunderstood by Pound and Edward Marsh alike; for my purposes he serves as a bridge between Modernist and Georgian, civilian and soldier.

In 1916 Harold Wiltshire’s article for the *Lancet* discredited the notion that shell shock was caused by the physical effect of shells, since its