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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

It is not surprising that playgoers prefer the lightest kind of amusement just now, for no modern drama can compare in interest with that drama which is being enacted by our soldiers, sailors and airmen. Moreover, men returning from the front are not in a mental state to endure those fictitious 'horrors' and 'thrills' so dear to stalls and gallery alike in profound peace. I know strong soldier-men who frankly will not go to a play in which revolvers are fired, or even in which their emotions will be appealed to in any overwhelming manner.

Neither do they want pieces about the war and I strongly suspect that the public will not want any theatrical treatment of it when the peace is concluded. Yet there will be an undercurrent of 'war' sentiment, and of 'situations' arising out of the war, for many a long year to come. It has so profoundly changed our social life and smashed all our little social prejudices to bits that drama inevitably arises out of this new condition. An aviator who has done some signal service to his country, but who is of humble origin, would easily be the protagonist of a modern play

Ella Hepworth Dixon¹

Ella Hepworth Dixon's 1915 assessment of theatre's role in wartime, the difficulties in giving expression to the hopes and concerns of the battle-weary, the shell-shocked, the bereaved, the romantic and the bored, aptly sums up the tenor of hundreds of discussions in the years 1914–18 and, indeed, in the decade following. Not least, it conveys something of the restrictions under which playwrights and producers worked and the kind of dramatic work put on. A great deal of this work, developed within an atmosphere of patriotism – and often jingoism – exhibits strong desires to bolster public resilience, reviving British historical and imperial histories, and drawing on long-standing performance traditions by which to do so. At the same time, there was a widespread engagement with other popular theatrical styles (the revue, the pageant, the musical, the social-problem play, the comic sketch) to the extent that theatre historians have come to recognize the theatre of 1914–18 as remarkably diverse. Vibrant, lively and sometimes contentious, this varied and robust body of work, only small sections of which have remained in print, is only now beginning to attract greater acknowledgement from those interested in theatrical history and popular entertainment.

To put together any assortment of theatrical work under the descriptor 'World War I drama', as this anthology does, is to get involved in a debate, not only about which texts or authors should be dealt some kind of re-recognition (and on what basis), but also about the makeup of the literary and critical fields of which they are now a part. Although a relatively new topic of academic interest, World War I drama has extended its borders over recent years so that the term now describes, in Lewis J. Collins's words 'a myriad of overlapping and different types of theatre provision' with 'a multiplicity of inter-related functions'.² In a recent book, *The Theatre of War*, Heinz Kosok sets out ten different types of war play.³ And in 1914–18 the phrase 'war play' meant different things to different people: it suggested something topical which advocates resistance to the enemy; in other contexts, the term indicated a play about war but this could include a revival of an older production, including Shakespeare or Victorian farce; it could be a production which flagged up a particular historical legacy; it could be a play which signalled the country's transition into a new age; others used it to suggest concerns about the impact of the conflict on the individual, even if this was not the main driver of the plot.

Recent critics have been less anxious than their wartime counterparts in trying to reach a definition and the 1914–18 'war play' has become a convenient (and sometimes useful) term to describe any kind of play which engages with the conflict, whether that is in national, social, class, racial or gender terms. The plays included in the present volume have been chosen as texts which, whilst directed at different audiences, all have a historical and a discursive relationship to the war, whether the conflict is regarded positively, unsympathetically, ambivalently or acceptingly. In addition, the following plays, whilst deriving from different theatrical cultures (the West End, the suburban, the working class, the member's theatre society), respond collectively to wartime life on the Home Front. Their reactions – whether enthusiastic, regretful, angry, heartfelt, cynical, celebratory, ambivalent or even humorous – may be manifest in recurrent images, dramatic devices or character types, all of which might be said to be born out of the cultural and historical moment, and whilst also stemming from the particular resources (performers, venues, funds) available in a particular theatrical environment. That this was sometimes made more difficult thanks to the interventions of the government censor is a point which has been made by several critics.⁴

This anthology's attempt to position drama as an important component of the World War I literary canon has part of its origins in the interest which the nature of war drama provoked among contemporary commentators. As a writer for the *Era* observed in August 1914:

At the present juncture, the dramatist is in a difficulty ... It [the war] hangs over us like a cloud, and the general indignation that it should ever have been started generates a stern, determined resolution which will probably have good results but does not

make for easy acceptance of art or amusement. There used to be a good deal of sentiment and romance about War and these are the essence of drama. The Germans have shown us only its seamy side. Treaties considered as so much waste paper, thousands of men ... marched out in fear of death to be mown down like sheep. Civil populations maltreated and vast amounts of trade ruined, all at the will of one man – these combined effects have ‘knocked the stuffing’ out of war for amusement purposes. The war will not bear thinking of, yet most people, do what they will, can think of nothing else.⁵

Reading these comments it is tempting to think that the theatre was set for a lean few years. But apart from a brief period of closure at beginning of the war it was, as the *Sketch* noted in December 1914, ‘Business as Usual’, at the theatres and music halls, including Vesta Tilley at the London Hippodrome singing the recruiting song ‘In Dear Old England’s Name’.⁶ Writing in the 1930s, the actress Gladys Cooper recalled that notwithstanding air raids and blackouts ‘the theatres had a boom time’.⁷ And far from having little choice, theatregoers could take their pick. Comedies, musicals, melodramas, pageants and revues were all on offer and most of them were well attended, ‘as if there were no such thing as some fifteen million men striving their best to mutilate and kill each other’ noted Derek Ross in 1915.⁸ Ross’s comments point to the doubts in some people’s minds – at least in the early part of the conflict – about going to theatres and music halls, ‘less’, as the *Bystander* reported in September 1914, ‘they should be likened to Nero who is said to have fiddled while Rome burned’.⁹ Yet most commentators viewed this kind of self-denial as unnecessary. When a new edition of the revue *The Passing Show of 1915* opened at the London’s Palace Theatre in June 1915 much was made of the fact that there was virtually no mention of the war in it. But as a writer for *Tatler* suggested no-one need feel guilty, for ‘[t]his is as it should be’. Nor did it imply a lack of patriotism:

After all, it does not mean that because we are not talking about the war we are not thinking about it. We are. But we don’t want to go where it is made ‘frightful’ or where it is laughed at. Both jar. We go where we can get away from it.¹⁰

Such comments were frequent ones in the daily and periodical press. Apart from suggesting one of the perspectives from which theatrical entertainment was viewed, they serve as a reminder that the most viable productions for the duration of the conflict – financially at any rate – were revues and musicals; ‘positively pouring on’, as the *Bystander* reported in March 1915, ‘and without even a particle of a pretence of seriousness of purpose about them’. As the writer noted, for good or ill nothing seemed to have changed:

The purifying effect of war we all talked so much about – where is it? The same sort of chorus girls – and men – are taking the middle of the stage again just as much as ever and just as lightly clothed as ever, and any night of the week the Britisher whose

country is fighting a very hard fight for its very existence, may be seen in his thousands absolutely absorbed in the very last touch in rag-time or the latest undressing act.¹¹

The 'undressing act' was a reference to the French music-hall actress Gaby Delys (1881–1920), whose willingness to dress down to her stockings and undergarments was written into several of the London revues in which she starred, most notably Leon Morton's *My Lady's Undress*, which ran at the Ambassadors Theatre for over two months in the autumn of 1914.¹² It was not all like this of course. There was a stark contrast between Delys's antics and the heavily clothed Shakespearean revivals and the flag-draped patriotic pageants offered by weightier theatrical managements where serious verse was spoken. Yet almost a century later, such contrasts are useful, not least because they serve as another warning against talking of World War I drama in terms of homogenization. As the columns of the daily and weekly press reveal, the field involves difference and separation even if the texts are deeply embedded within the same broad historical circumstances.

As will become obvious from the annotated bibliography in this volume (below, pp. xxiii–xcviii), the process of anthologizing a range of plays under the broad heading of 'World War I Drama' inevitably involves a good deal of narrowing down from a vast array of work. In this instance, the play texts have been chosen on the basis that individually they each shed their own distinctive light on the field and some of the issues with which dramatists tried to deal. It is hoped that focusing on plays rather than revues or musicals will offer some sense of coherence. But by focusing on plays – even those inflected by the same event – the intention is also to allow analysis of differences as well as similarities, convergences and variances, and lines of connection and divergence. For example, Ernest Temple Thurston's *The Cost* (1914) might be examined as a product of the West End drawing-room tradition. In a different direction, one might trace connections between this play, with its hero's agonizing over whether to enlist, and Edmund Goulding's less sophisticated discussion in *God Save the King* (1914) and Edward Knoblauch's discussion of the role of the artist in *The Way to Win* (1915). Alternatively it is possible to consider the play in the light of the Military Service Bill (January 1915) and the second conscription bill which followed in April, or the intellectualization of the war that took place via the government's Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations, which encouraged various prominent intellectuals to lecture and write on the war with the aim of justifying 'both historically and morally England's position in the struggle'.¹³ Pacifism and masculinity are also issues which cut across the class boundaries of several of the plays, as are concerns about the returning soldier and his post-war existence. In several of the plays, the legacy of melodrama enmeshed with contemporary paranoia about enemy spies suggests another area for comparison and

contrast, as well as questions about the roles played by women in the conflict, including the sacrifices that they are shown to be able to make for their country.

How questions of chronology intersect with the content of World War I drama is also an important consideration. It is difficult to make large claims on the basis of the eight plays reprinted here, though the bibliography gives a better idea. The war broke out on 4 August 1914 but war plays had been produced before this date. This list includes Paul Potter's *The Conquerors* (1898), Arthur Collins's spy play *The Price of Peace* (1900), Cecil Raleigh's *The Best of Friends* (1902), W. P. Drury and Leo Trevor's *The Flag Lieutenant* (1908) and Guy Du Maurier's *An Englishman's Home* (1909). These are plays which treat the topic of militarism and masculinity in different ways, sometimes confidently, sometimes alarmingly, and in some ways set the scene for much of the work that followed.

In terms of August 1914 and after, plays written explicitly in response to the conflict emerged rapidly (the front-runner was Edmund Gouling's *God Save the King*). They were quicker to appear in the variety theatres, largely because these were spaces where one-act plays (which, after all, could be written more quickly than three-act ones) were most in demand. It was only in the late autumn, after the theatres had reopened, that West End theatre managements began get to grips with the task of wartime entertainment, offering provision calculated to amuse and distract rather than upset or offend. Here there was a very noticeable trend. 'Revivals Lead the Way', was the headline in the *Era* of 2 September 1914.¹⁴ Old (Victorian) warhorses were wheeled out: Hugh Stanislaus's *The Chocolate Soldier* (a musical adaptation of G. B. Shaw's *Arms and the Man*), Henry Arthur Jones's *The Silver King*, Augustus Harris and Cecil Raleigh's *Cheer, Boys! Cheer!*, H. J. Byron's *Our Boys*, Brandon Thomas's *Charley's Aunt*, to list but a few. According to the *Graphic*, one of the effects of such revivals was 'to remind us what the world was like before the war', that such plays served as a kind of dramatic comfort food.¹⁵ But there was also the sense, as the *Bystander* noted, that the move to revivals was owing to the fact that 'the public have now no stomach for the [modern] drama, doubtless because the theatre of war is for the moment producing sensational situations with which the legitimate drama cannot hope to compete'.¹⁶ A good example of this trend comes with the war-time efforts of actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. During the Boer War, Tree had famously taken it upon himself to produce a series of patriotic plays, including a celebrated production of Shakespeare's *King John* (a play with the rallying cry 'This England never did, nor never shall, / Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror').¹⁷ In autumn 1914, Sir Herbert launched his company on a similar mission, whilst Lady Maud Tree – whether through her own volition or her husband's – appeared in music halls reciting Kipling's poem 'The Absent Minded Beggar'. At His Majesty's Theatre, the spectacular *Drake*, written by pageant-master Louis Parker, opened on 19 August. This was followed on 14 November

by *1 Henry IV*, the choice of play being dictated, it was said, by Tree's being unable get any suitable young(ish) men to take the lead in *Henry V*.¹⁸ Instead Tree reprised his role as Falstaff looking, some said, for all intents and purposes like a giant Father Christmas of the kind seen on advertisement hoardings. The third part of the triumvirate of patriotic dramas came on Christmas Eve with a revival of Parker's adaptation of *David Copperfield*, replete with 'all-star' cast. *Oliver Twist* and *Henry VIII* were revived the following year, the latter attended by King George and Queen Mary in June 1915. Everyone said that there was something very creditable about all this though if truth be told some of the audience found the Shakespeare a little bit boring and the creaky mechanics of *Drake* were beginning to show. Such work was 'propagandist rather than dramatic', as the *Bystander* noted, and it was these sections of the plays which provoked most interest. Describing a performance of *Drake*, the *Bystander* observed that the audience did not seem to find it particularly enthralling but 'the one genuine sentiment was that of patriotic enthusiasm':

The vast audience watched the play in silence as if it were asleep, until some reference was made to England's mastery of the seas, or good ships of oak; then it woke up suddenly with a roar of approval, relapsing into grim silence a moment or so later. The people about me seemed to have only one ear for the play; the other ear was cocked in the direction of the streets outside where the noise of battle was occasionally echoed by the hoarse voices of the newsvendors ... On the posters announcing the revival of *Drake* Sir Herbert has adroitly managed to convey the impression that in the character of *Drake* he is watching our shores for us, and that we may leave our case with all confidence in his hands and sleep soundly in our beds. The present production is not, perhaps all that might be desired as a work of art; but it is useful as an advance guard of what we may hope for in the theatrical world when the main army as it were, begins the general attack.¹⁹

The theatre's duty to the community was a recurring topic amongst journalists and theatre professionals, especially given the tendency to see theatrical types as 'evasionists' or shirkers. 'If the playhouse cannot aid us to carry on the grim business of battle it has no right to keep open' was the *Graphic's* judgement in May 1915.²⁰ No matter how many charity matinees were organized or the number of times patriotic poems like Kipling's 'The English Flag' were read out as a curtain raisers – as it was by E. Ion Swinley on a tour of C. B. Fernald's pre-war hit *The Pursuit of Pamela* – theatre folk were always liable to get it in the neck for not doing 'their bit'. In August 1916, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien made a loud and very public complaint about the stage's 'indecent and suggestive unecessaries'²¹ and the demoralizing effects 'scantly dressed girls and songs of doubtful character' were having on 'our young officers and soldiers'.²² Theatre managements led by Charles Cochran protested strongly at the unfairness of it all.²³ Oswald Stoll sued for libel.²⁴ But in some quarters the mud stuck and there

was a redoubling of efforts. 'We are like every other trade', producer Edward Laurillard told a reporter for the *Sunday Pictorial*; 'we must do whatever we are responsibly told is necessary to win the war'.²⁵ But, as has been noted, there was disagreement about what the theatres should do exactly and this discussion continued throughout the war. What kinds of plays – or entertainments more generally – should be put on? Not everyone liked being reminded of their duty when they went out for the evening.²⁶ As the *Bystander* put it:

The sort of theatre stuff the public is getting is the sort of stuff the public wants. If we really longed badly to see something pure and Victorian by Gilbert and Sullivan, or something great by Shakespeare or innocuous by Barrie, or serious by Galsworthy, or even just beautiful by Granville Barker and Co., we shouldn't flock in our thousands, should we, to 'The Girl from Ciro's' and 'The Bing Boys', and 'High Jinks' and 'Chu Chin Chow' and the rest of the undress drama? ... With the world at war there's no place for the sensitive and the artistic and the intellectual ... [The public likes] the sort of musical comedy revue that's no strain whatever on the brain ... golden fires and silver smiles (at the stalls or khaki filled boxes), and plenty of lingerie, a comedian who's always getting on the verge, but never goes over it, and heaps of nice sloshy tunes, all about whether you've seen the ducks go passing by, and what an awful lot a little hour or two can do, and what'd happen – 'if I were the only girl in the world and you were the only boy'.²⁷

Thus theatregoers, critics, soldiers and higher-minded superiors did not necessarily share the same tastes. In November 1914, Phyllis Monkman's performance of the 'Pom-Pom Dance' in the revue *Everything New? Not Likely* at the Alhambra was as much talked about as Tree's rehashing of Falstaff. Likewise, when it opened at the Strand Theatre on 27 February 1915, Paul Kester's frothy piece of 'history' *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* proved much more popular – and more popular, too, than when it premiered in 1911. That same month audiences at Drury Lane sought their thrills in Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton's spectacular melodrama *The Whip* with its train crash and race scenes. Two months later, the *Sketch* noted 'an epidemic' not of serious plays, but of farces in the West End theatres.²⁸ 'Pantomime as Usual' was one of the headlines in the *Graphic* in January 1916, even if it was pantomime inflected with wartime jokes.²⁹ Later, in the spring of 1917, the *Tatler* reported on another trend: the 'Boom in Banned Plays', prompted by the revival of Ibsen's *Ghosts* at the Kingsway Theatre and Eugène Brieux's *Damaged Goods* at St Martin's, the public clearly attracted by the 'for adults only' tag and 'rushing to see them both'.³⁰ All these elements conspired to make the business of writing an out and out 'war play', that is to say a play which dealt directly and seriously with the business of warfare or its impact on those involved at the Front or at home, a challenging task. Would commercial managements take such a play on or would it be left to private members clubs like the Pioneer Players (see below, pp. 201–2). In the spring of 1915, Derek

Ross lamented how 'we are still without a war play of any merit' and how the plays given this label – a revival of W. P. Drury's *The Flag Lieutenant* (Haymarket, November 1914) and Lechmere Worrall and J. E. Harold Terry's spy drama *The Man Who Stayed at Home* (Royalty, December 1914) – fell a long way short.

We cannot take *The Flag Lieutenant* seriously – West-End drawing-room stuff dished up with a naval sauce and some fuzzy wuzzy shooting ... *The Man who Stayed at Home* is the ordinary stage detective story cast in a war setting to fit the moment.

As Ross saw it, only Thomas Hardy and Harley Granville Barker's *The Dynasts* (Kingsway, November 1914) and J. M. Barrie's *Der Tag* (Coliseum, December 1914) came anywhere near what was needed.³¹ Others suggested that by and large the British were 'afraid of khaki on the stage – properly handled' and that this, linked with the censor's reluctance to pass wounded or dying soldiers on stage – or indeed any kind of soldier unless he was a stiff-lipped officer or cheerful cockney Tommy – was leaving a long shadow.³²

The challenges involved in choosing a small number of texts for a representative anthology thus become more evident when the *smorgasbord* of theatrical entertainment on offer in any given year of the war is considered. What should be excavated? There has been a sense, for example, that the genres of the revue and the musical do not fall under the realm of legitimate enquiry for the World War I theatre historian, while others accept this tagging but caution against simplistic interpretations of these forms of popular entertainment as driven by jingoistic impulses. Yet there is thus a case for examining the impact of such very long runners as Walter Ellis's *A Little Bit of Fluff* (1915–18; 1,239 performances), Edward Sheldon's *Romance* (1915–18; 1,047 performances), Oscar Asche and Frederick Morton's *Chu Chin Chow* (1916–21; 2,238 performances), and *The Maid of the Mountains* by Frederick Lonsdale and Harry Graham et al. (1917–20; 1,353 performances). The relationships between these works and the war deserve exploring in some detail despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that their success seems to have left many contemporary observers bemused or embarrassed. 'I leave it to the theatrical historian to tell us the psychological reason why these plays obtained the success they did in the midst of such times as these we live in' was pretty much all that the 1918 *Tatler* could say about them.³³ The appeal of these shows was clearly spectacular and escapist to various degrees and, like the comedies against which they vied for customers, they presumably benefited from the fact the audience had a good idea what they were getting and they also appreciated the optimism in them. This idea of dependency has also been used to account for the popularity of melodrama during the war. In September 1914, reviewing the revival of Henry Arthur Jones's *The Silver King* (1882), a writer for the *Tatler* noted how

when the world outside is like a Lyceum melodrama there is a certain consolation in watching a faint replica of it on the stage. For the sure and certain happy ending of the one makes one hope that there will be a sure and certain happy ending to the other, and the result is full of the heart throbs of hope³⁴

As with musicals and revues, the centrality of melodrama in the period 1914–18 is not difficult to understand, especially when one takes account of the mechanics of the form and the ways, for example, in which it is subject to historically available discourses including ideas of nation, empire and gender. In a succinct summary of melodrama's main features David Mayer has also noted its emphasis on suffering and pain and its depiction of 'a world which may be explained in comparatively simple terms of good and evil'.³⁵ Invariably the main emphasis is on an exciting plot, constructed around ordinary men or women coping with highly pressurized situations: dastardly criminal schemes, missing relatives, false imprisonment, forgery, murder. The characters are likely to include a virile hero forced to carry out a range of physical stunts, a beautiful 'swooning' heroine of unstained virtue who is contrasted with an aggressive and vindictive 'wicked' woman, and a predatory (upper-class) villain who must be resisted at all costs. Writers aimed to satisfy their readers' desires for escapism, showing thrills and physical danger, but they also offered psychological reassurance and a familiar narrative coda as the hero and his solid English values emerge triumphant. As Mayer points out, supporters of these thrilling dramas also saw them as serving to 'critique matters of daily concern ... otherwise disturbing to discuss'. Playwrights used them to address issues of urban poverty, class, alcoholism, illegitimacy, social ostracism and criminality.³⁶ These topics did not disappear in the years 1914–18, but rather were added to: betrayal, spying, profiteering, syphilis and cowardice were all depicted in melodramas of the war years.

The inclusion of examples of melodrama in the present volume is thus based on a belief that the engagement of these kinds of plays with the war, however simplistic or clichéd it might sometimes appear, is immensely valuable to an understanding of theatre's engagement with the conflict. It is also hoped that the melodramas included here may prompt readers to consider how the stylistic devices of some genres seem more suited than others to conveying the stresses and strains of wartime experience. Are non-naturalistic modes more effective? In addition, the thinking is that to exclude these kinds of plays would be to skew the picture, to ignore a genre which was not only a staple of the West End but the majority of East End, suburban and provincial theatres as well. John. G. Brandon's violent portrayal of spying, invasion and shooting in *For Those in Peril* and Berte Thomas's account of maternal self-sacrifice in *For My Country* are striking examples of how the genre was used in and out of London. In a different way Frederick Lonsdale's ironically titled *The Patriot*, performed at the Grand Thea-

tre, Clapham, and a drawing-room play of sorts, adds to a sense of the social and cultural vision of the suburban variety theatre in 1915.

Whilst the aim of the present volume is to bring together a selection of representative dramatic texts from the period, there are clearly many other powerful wartime plays, sketches, revues and pageants that could have been included. Well-known names such as Arthur Wing Pinero, Hall Caine, A. A. Milne, Arthur Quiller Couch, J. K. Jerome and Flora Annie Steel all produced topical plays that might be studied alongside the plays in this volume. Henry Arthur Jones's parable-cum-farce *The Pacifists*, dedicated to 'the tribe of Wordsters, Pedants, Fanatics, and Impossibilists, who ignobly and rabidly pursued peace that they helped provoke a disastrous war',³⁷ was a flop when it opened at the Kingsway in June 1917 but would repay anyone interested in seeing how a controversial topic was approached. Other works worth some attention include Frederick Melville's *One Way of War* (1914), the anonymous *Home to Tipperary* (1914), Harold Brighouse's *Followers* (1915), Stephen Philips's *Armageddon* (1915), J. D. Beresford and Kenneth Richmond's *Howard. A Son* (1916) and George Lee's *Gossips* (1916). Sewell Collins's *The Quitter* (1917), P. H. Sheenan and R. H. Davies's *Efficiency* (1917), Lieutenant W. P. Drury's *Royal Marines* (1918) or Kingston Stack's *Kitty Breaks Loose* (1918) would also enrich a study of the field. Other writers prominent within their specific fields but not featured here include Albert de Courville and Wal Pink, one of the most prolific teams of revue writers; Louis Parker, whose influential work as a writer and director of pageants has long been overlooked but who was key to the way in which theatrical spectacle was used as propaganda; Eva Elwes, Tyneside actress-turned-dramatist whose far-fetched melodramas were bought by producers up and down the country; and Odette Tchernine, the Anglo-Russian dramatist who later found world renown as an expert on the Yeti.

The intention of the final selection is not therefore attempt to offer a complete survey of the field or claim to represent the 'best' plays or dramatists from the period. These are difficult tasks for any collection. Instead the aim is to suggest the kinds of works that can and should be considered under the label of 'World War I drama'. Taken with the annotated bibliography they demonstrate something of the breadth of playwriting in the early part of the twentieth century. The works of Edward Knoblauch (United States) and John G. Brandon (Australia) were part of a conscious effort to forge sustainable theatrical careers in Britain while also attempting to get the patriotic ears of a Western audience. Hoping to get his work taken up by the syndicated variety theatres, Brandon, later a crime writer, deliberately wrote one-act dramas, using the violent twists and turns of melodrama to showcase his message. Knoblauch, on the other hand, initially produced his *The Way to Win* for the West End and for a particular 'star' actor; writing involving a different kind of 'play-making' challenge. A slightly

different situation pertains to Gwen John, whose choice of the Pioneer Players under the direction of Edith Craig reflects her position as a determinedly socially conscious dramatist, but also as one who seems to have been a step removed from the more obviously commercial projects of her male counterparts.

If the use of recognizable generic models – melodrama, the ‘well-made’ play, the Manchester School – was one strategic choice for playwrights, so too was the extent to which they tried to show the impact of the war on their characters, in psychological or social terms, for example. The experience of trench warfare leaves John Woodhouse in Ernest Temple Thurston’s *The Cost* with a nervous breakdown, his once brilliant intellect destroyed forever. In contrast, Berte Thomas’s *For My Country* stops short of examining Mrs Hartymann’s state of mind and the play ends before she is shown trying to come to terms with sanctioning her son’s execution. Christianity is viewed as the main source of strength in *For Those in Peril*, at least for Mother Mary Theresa, and there is a sense both for her and the audience that her killing of the German U-boat commander is God’s work. In contrast in *Handmaidens of Death* every character is traumatized – or at least severely unhappy – even if they do not quite realize it yet.

It is, of course, difficult to recreate what the performances of these plays were like. No pictorial evidence has been uncovered. Nonetheless, today’s readers of these plays may find it useful to consider performance styles; the way, for example, that melodramatic theatre presumes a very particular kind of relationship with its audience, one that makes use of a shared gestural language and vocal tone. In a similar way, those plays written for or identified with specific ‘star’ performers who bring their own trademark acting styles to the part: Owen Nares’s nervous sensitivity in *The Cost*, Gabrielle Dorziat’s exuberance in *The Way to Win*, France’s Ivor’s stiff dignity in *For My Country* and Wish Wynn’s ‘woman of the people’ persona in *Luck of War*. However we try to revision these plays, what is true, of course, is that all of them show awareness of their audience, whether by inviting the audience to engage with topical material, bringing them face to face with uncomfortable truths, even allowing them perhaps to participate in the action, for example, hissing Heinrich Schultz in *God Save the King* or Captain Von Höeler in *For Those in Peril* and cheering as the two villains are dispatched. There are several precedents for this last kind of communal response. In an incident widely reported in the theatrical columns in March 1915, a performance of Leo Lelievre and Henri Varna’s *Agathe à Petrograd* (London Coliseum) became even more exciting when the dummy revolver failed to go off and the actress, Mademoiselle Polaire, leapt on the spy and strangled him. Cue wild applause from the audience.³⁸ What this also points to is the need to study not just the plays but also their production histories (if these are recoverable) and their cultural contexts.

This short introduction can suggest only some of the different issues and questions raised by the plays included here and how these relate to the wider context of World War I theatre. It is hoped that readers will develop their own ideas about the different texts' engagement with a range of wartime anxieties (patriotism, death, gender, race, identity, class, sexuality and remembrance) and be able to make links to some of the better-known expressions of these in the literature of the time. Thus this project has proceeded on the assumption that playwrights of 1914–18 were wide-ranging writers of more complexity than they have been given credit for; writers who were responsive to the social concerns of the day and to the theatrical conditions, and whose work and careers can be approached through many frameworks. In bringing together texts which generally lie outside the sight lines of War World I literary canons, the intention has also been to assemble a resource that will be flexible enough to serve different readers' needs even though the selection is obviously a partial one. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the following plays and the accompanying bibliography confirm that World War I drama, though differently configured in different places, can be a most important force, helping us rethink ways in which we can consider World War I literature.

Notes

1. E. H. Dixon, 'Woman's Ways', *Sketch* (29 December 1915), p. ii.
2. L. J. Collins, *Theatre at War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 219.
3. See H. Kosok, *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
4. See D. Shellard and S. Nicholson, with M. Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets: A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: British Library, 2004).
5. Unsigned article, 'War Plays and the Public', *Era* (26 August 1914), p. 9.
6. Unsigned review 'Business as Usual at the Hippodrome', *Sketch* (2 December 1914), p. 4.
7. G. Cooper, *Gladys Cooper: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1931), p. 164.
8. D. Ross, 'The Theatre', *Herald* (22 May 1915), p. 11.
9. Jingle, 'The Theatres', *Bystander* (2 September 1914), p. 496.
10. Unsigned article, 'Passing Shows', *Tatler*, 731 (30 June 1915), p. 388. See also unsigned article, 'London in Search of Frivolity', *Bystander* (14 October 1914), p. 57: 'At the Music Halls', 'Frivolity as Usual – and, after all, why not? Those of us who stay behind would do a sorry service to our country by moping all day and all night ... The love of fun is eternal and it will take a bigger beast than the Prussian to bully us out of it.'
11. Unsigned article, 'In England Now', *Bystander* (10 March 1915), p. 327.
12. See H. M. Walbrook, *J. M. Barrie and the Theatre* (London: F. V. White, 1922), pp. 128–30. See also unsigned article, 'In England Now: A Letter from Blanche to a Cousin in the Colonies', *Bystander* (30 December 1914), p. 450: 'They patronize the theatres, too, do these men who're home on the week-end leave from the front, which so astonishes the Germans. It supplies the touch of contrast, I suppose, after the horrors of the trenches! But I can't say I've seen much khaki at the homes of serious drama, not even at *The Dynasts* which is military and patriotic. At places like the Ambassadors, though,

where there's a big international mix-up revue and a short (but sweet) undressing act, our gallant defenders simply crowd the front seats.'

13. Report of the Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations (1914), p. 3, quoted in A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965), p. 45.
14. Unsigned article, 'Revivals Lead the Way', *Era* (2 September 1914), p. 11.
15. Unsigned review, 'The Round of Christmas Plays', *Graphic* (2 January 1916), p. 25.
16. Jingle, 'The Theatres', *Bystander* (11 November 1914), p. 202.
17. *King John*, V.vii.116–17, in *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. J. Bate and E. Rasmussen (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 828.
18. Unsigned review, 'Shakespeare – The Recruiter. *Henry IV* at His Majesty's', *Sketch* (25 November 1914), p. 8: 'With his usual fine sense of the fitness of things, Sir Herbert Tree has seized the psychological moment to revive at his Majesty's Theatre the stirring, spectacular war-like and wholly fascinating play, "*Henry IV*". It is magnificently put upon the stage and excellently acted, with an effect that is both inspiring and absolutely in the key of the time. The blare of the trumpet, the pageant of colour, the impassioned speeches, the soldierly figures, should stir the blood, stimulate the martial spirit, and so help on the patriotic work of recruiting in these days when every hour is making history in the Great War, and every man is wanted to write his name upon his pages. Thus Shakespeare becomes recruiting-sergeant for the British Army, although Germany has claimed him for her own!'
19. Jingle, 'Diverting the Popular Mind: *Drake* does its Duty at His Majesty's', *Bystander* (26 August 1914), pp. 464–5.
20. Unsigned review, '*The Day Before the Day*', *Graphic* (29 May 1915), p. 704.
21. Unsigned article, 'Sir H. Smith-Dorrien on War and Morals: The Tone of the Stage', *The Times*, 9 October 1916, p. 5.
22. Unsigned article, 'In England Now', *Bystander* (13 September 1916), p. 454.
23. Unsigned article, 'A Reply to General Smith-Dorrien', *The Times*, 8 November 1916, p. 5.
24. Unsigned article, 'King's Bench Division: The Libel against General Smith Dorrien', *The Times*, 5 April 1917, p. 2.
25. Unsigned article, 'In the Limelight', *Sunday Pictorial* (11 March 1917), p. 11.
26. See Unsigned article, 'Bystander War Comments', *Bystander* (9 September 1914), p. 306: 'At one of the music halls I witnessed a significant incident. A gentleman appeared upon the stage to indulge in a patriotic scene, recitation, or something, and quite a number of people immediately left their seats to go and have a drink. I cannot pretend to be surprised. These "patriotic" turns are always horrible, usually bombastic, and always inadequate. Music halls are for amusement, not for exploitation of our deepest emotions.'
27. Unsigned article, 'In England Now', *Bystander* (20 September 1916), p. 505.
28. Unsigned review, 'Things New at the Theatre', *Sketch* (28 April 1915), p. 82.
29. 'Unsigned review, 'Pantomime as Usual', *Graphic* (2 January 1916), p. 26.
30. Unsigned article, 'A Boom in Banned Plays', *Tatler*, 833 (13 June 1917), p. 332.
31. D. Ross, 'The Theatre', *Herald* (22 May 1915), p. 11. See also unsigned article, 'The Letters of Eve', *Tatler*, 703 (16 December 1914), p. 233: 'All the "high brows", of course, are going to Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts* ... It's a fine play, a real work of art, and as it's all about war you don't get that dreadful feeling one mostly does at the theatre in war-time – that you're wasting your time on stupid unrealities. And there's the real kind of patriotism in it too – not the kind you get in some places of alleged amusement where

large nosed ladies shriek frantically, tearfully hoarsely all sorts of ghastly doggerel about "the dear old flag".

32. Unsigned article, 'Dramatic Gossip: The Call for Khaki', *Referee* (24 June 1917), p. 2.
33. Unsigned review, 'The Passing Shows', *Tatler*, 905 (30 October 1918), p. 136.
34. Unsigned review, 'The World of Melodrama', *Tatler*, 690 (16 September 1914), p. 314.
35. D. Mayer, 'Encountering Melodrama', in K. Powell (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 145–63, on p. 148.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 146–7.
37. H. A. Jones, 'Dedication' to *The Pacifists*, Lord Chamberlain's Office Stage Plays, 1917, vol. 12, no. 989.
38. See also unsigned review, 'The Passing Shows: *Alsace*', *Tatler*, 721 (21 April 1915), p. 74: 'You may judge the type of play it is by the incidents which call forth the greatest applause. We clap when a French uniform is discovered beneath a man's overcoat. We clap whenever the words Alsace or Lorraine are mentioned. We hiss at the terrible German family who, even when alone, struggle desperately with an awful kind of broken French; while we cheer and cheer again when at the end the mother embraces her son who has married a German girl and upon declaration of war with Germany fights for his real country and cries "He shall live for France". It is immensely stirring, especially in these times, but it is not great "art".'