Introduction: The First World War, Then and Now

In his 2017 study of the impact of the Great War on British modernists (Woolf, Lawrence, Forster, and Eliot), Bill Goldstein focuses on the year 1922 and describes newspaper reports reminding readers that the war did not end with the Armistice because "the plight of wounded veterans, mentally and physically scarred, was visible all around" (Goldstein 2017, 272). Although this was clear then, it has become more obvious with the passage of time because one hundred years later, artists working in many disciplines, historians, and literary scholars are still exploring the significance of that war and uncovering things we have tried to forget. For this reason, my colleague Waldemar Zacharasiewicz and I wanted to organize a panel on the Great War for the London IAUPE conference in July 2016. The year and the venue seemed appropriate to us, and it is a great pleasure to thank the conference organizers for encouraging us to proceed. The result was not one, but three panels; the response to our call for papers was immediate and plentiful.

This special issue of Anglistik owes its beginning to that conference. Such was the enthusiasm after our final panel that the three editors of this issue, Professors Zacharasiewicz, Löschnigg, and myself, decided to prepare a proposal for a volume that would include revised papers from the conference supplemented by some new pieces. Apart from demanding excellence, our only other criterion was that our contributors attempt to reach beyond the traditional literary emphasis of both IAUPE and Anglistik to place literature in a broad historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary context. It is to the journal's credit that they accepted our proposal and have allowed us to include reproductions of several visual art forms in this volume with discussions that range across many decades, several national literatures and several disciplines. Our premise is simple enough: World War One did not belong to one nation or one side in a conflict; it did not leave a terrible legacy for just one country; it did not take the lives of only one group of young men or destroy the futures of just one group of women. The war graves that exist across northern France, in Belgium and elsewhere mark the deaths of soldiers on all sides of the war: a dead son is a dead son, or brother, or father. And the lasting trauma from that war has haunted the memory of each country that sent soldiers to the front or received wounded veterans home again. Artists were among the first to channel this haunting into meaningful statements about war and its costs. Only think of Käthe Kollwitz's Die Eltern, Otto Dix's Der Krieg, Walter Allward's Vimy Monument, or Frederick Varley's For What?

That was then. What of more recent years? What of now? As each of our contributors shows, interest in the war and its impact across generations, nations, and disciplines has not waned, but the emphasis on what is remembered and on how we remember has changed considerably, and several of our contributors isolate and discuss how those changes manifest themselves in literature, visual reproduction, and other art forms. In "Vera Brittain: a Pacifist's Progress," Patrick Deane invites us to reconsider the importance of Brittain, a writer too often ignored or altogether forgotten, by examining her diaries and her work as a feminist and a pacifist after the war, in con-

1 A selection of papers from the other panels in the conference has been published in Roberts and Darby (2017).
junction with her best-known book, Testament of Youth. The result is a fresh look at a
writer who was often dismissed in her own time as too personal and autobiographical,
but who can now be appreciated for her achievements and the influence she has had
on later writers. We start with this essay for many reasons, not least because Deane
opens up the discussion of both then and now, signals the strategic importance of
inclusivity – in this case of women’s perspectives on war and peace – and of archival
resources, which are invaluable for remembering and reconstructing the past, and
establishes the initial echoing of references that recur and link many of the essays.

Susan Fisher’s "A Bestselling War: The Novels of Jennifer Robson" introduces rea-
ders to a writer they might overlook: a bestselling contemporary Canadian novelist
writing historical romances about war. This is a very popular form for remembering
the war, one that may well exert more influence on the general reader than all our
scholarly endeavours taken together. In introducing us to Robson, Fisher confronts
some important questions: how do we value women’s perspectives on a war in which
most women played a minor, civilian, home fires, role or were, like Brittain, left to
mourn the loss of loved ones? Is the importance of the war diminished by "domesti-
cating" it in such fiction? And what sources does a contemporary writer draw on to
create popular novels? As it turns out, these writers do a lot of research, may even be
historians and, as in Robson’s case, they may read and appreciate Vera Brittain.

Martin Löschnigg shifts the focus from memoir and contemporary popular fiction
to poetry, but once more the discussion is inclusive and wide-ranging. In "Poetry
Remembers: Contemporary Poets and the First World War" he engages with a set of
our contemporaries in three countries: Canadian poets Ted Plantos and Marilyn Bow-
ering, Austrian poet Raoul Schrott, German poet Thomas Kling, and three recent
volumes of British war poetry. "Then and Now" could scarcely be more prominent
than in this essay by a respected scholar of the Great War, but there are two points in
Löschnigg’s discussion that stand out for me. One is the presence of grandfathers; the
other is the quality of haunting that the Great War has come to have for us now. In my
experience university students and veterans’ families learned what little they know
from their grandfathers, when they had the good fortune to spend time with that ge-
neration. It was to their grandchildren that these men spoke of what they refused to
discuss with their immediate family members. But it is also Löschnigg who summa-
rizes most succinctly what all the essays in our collection address when he writes that
"it is images of the Great War, rather than of later wars, which crop up in modern
writing about war and violence." In "David Jones and his Great War Epic," Thomas
Dilworth, an expert on Jones, urges readers who may have struggled with Jones’s
complex masterpiece to return to In Parenthesis by starting with the frontispiece
Jones created for his poem. Dilworth’s case for Jones as a leading modernist is com-
pelling, and by drawing our attention to the accomplishments of Jones as a visual
artist Dilworth provides the interdisciplinary focus that enriches our collection and
enhances his claims for this poet/artist’s role as a witness who achieves "immediacy"
and "authenticity" through visual and verbal memory.

Silvia Mergenthal puts the Great War on stage with her analysis of one of the most
influential of British plays about the war. "'The War is a Sitting Target': The Theatre
Workshop’s Oh What a Lovely War," is a beautifully contextualized discussion of Joan
Littlewood’s group performance of what has proven to be one of the most memorable
English-language theatre presentations of the war’s history and impact. This play, with
its performative methodologies inspired by Brecht and Piscator, is still very much
An essay like this one prompts me to reconsider an early Great War play like *Journey's End* and compare that with a contemporary piece like *War Horse*. But I shall get to horses and the Great War in due course. In "From the Erasure Art of World War I Canadian Postcards to Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Canadian scholar and poet Frank Davey reminds readers about the persistence of forgetting that always accompanies memory on both the individual and socio-cultural levels, but he does this in an unusual way. Davey has studied actual postcards sent home by soldiers during the war, and what he has found is what we knew but ignored: the censorship of such texts and their visual counterparts. The evidence Davey places before us of strategic erasure in a time of war, with the reduction of a soldier's identity to a few formulaic phrases, is a moving testament to a wider form of loss and haunting that Davey locates in important paintings of the war and in the context of modernist art. Charles Caramello's essay, "'They had No Choice: Images of Equines in the Great War,'" is also a moving reminder of casualties in war that we too often ignore or choose to forget. The statistics on the deaths and mutilations of horses and mules in the last war to be fought before mechanization fully took over the battlefield are appalling. Moreover, the visual and verbal rhetoric deployed to camouflage the reality of "wastage" or the uses to which these animals were put by human beings is deeply troubling. Caramello examines representations from recruitment posters to photographs, fine art, and literature in his highly interdisciplinary consideration of the reality behind the metaphors associated with sacrifice, nobility, courage, and companionship so often called upon to encourage, and excuse, war. Horses became iconic images of the Great War, and it would be easy to wax sentimental about their fate, but Caramello avoids this trap and forces us to consider the larger ethical issues raised not only in wars but also in our species' relationship with the rest of the world's creatures. Once more that popular play *War Horse* comes to mind, as does Timothy Findley's heartbreaking portrayal of horses in his iconic novel *The Wars*.

What we prefer to forget or ignore always comes back to haunt us, and the theme of forgetting is central to Kathleen Harrington's "Representations of Return: Preset War Narrative Arcs from Woolf to Robinson." Harrington brings together American and British representations of the returned soldier – what she calls the "returning-soldier-human-being spectacle" – in fiction and documentary photography to explore how the wounded, traumatized veteran has been depicted in several novels and in Lalage Snow's stunning photographs "We Are the Not Dead." Perhaps not surprisingly, we at home are often so uncomfortable with the person returned to us – blind, mutilated, disfigured – that we look away, ignore, forget. But Harrington argues that certain novels – Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is one – and an exhibition like Snow's open up a different space for receiving and accepting the soldier as a human being instead of a distressing spectacle. The challenge confronted by Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż in "The Affective and Ideological 'Faces' of the Great War: Facial Disfigurement and Cultural Memory" is possibly the most unsettling contribution to this collection. It is also the most interdisciplinary and inclusive study, one, moreover, that reverberates back through the other essays recalling Harrington, Davey, Caramello, and Dilworth. The questions posed in the novels, photographs, and films that Sokołowska-Paryż discusses are powerful and urgent: how does an artist represent disfigured soldiers without repelling the viewer/reader when the desired goal is to elicit empathy and understanding? How can an artist encourage us to remember and accept the Other
when, as Eliot said, "human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (Eliot 1944, 8)? This is a hard-hitting essay, but it is also uplifting because it reminds us of what the arts can do to bring the wisdom of memory and hope to those terrifying silences and absences we prefer to ignore.

It only remains for me to thank the contributors to this volume on behalf of the editorial team. Despite great distances and busy schedules we have worked as a group to present these essays, which bring a wealth of knowledge, research, and passion to a very difficult subject. Surely this collegiality is proof that the whole is greater than its parts and that by working together people can advance the mutual understanding that resists war. Of course we have not covered all the ground we might have, and the scholars and artists represented here are but a selection of what exists and will continue to be produced. It seems to me, therefore, that the research and art must continue in an ongoing dialogue about then and now and why remembering matters.

Works Cited

