

morale. Airs, show tunes, and commissioned works contributed to each nation's sense of mission that they were fighting for something more than a local battle or another village. Music also brought enemies together. In one hauntingly moving episode during the so-called "Christmas Truce" in 1914, enemy units began singing "Silent Night" in all the languages of the battlefield in a quiet testimony that they had more in common than most were willing to admit.

What the two sides had in common was in fact a theme of many dissenters, who argued that this war was between imperialist governments, not between citizens whose struggle for decent wages and working conditions across national boundaries gave them the real common cause and common voice. Other dissenters objected to war itself, a sentiment that for understandable reasons grew during the course of WWI. Finally, there were those like Eugene Debs in America, four-time candidate for president, who personified many strands of dissent current at the time. Debs objected to America getting involved in WWI—this was a European war, a colonial war, he argued, one that would for the foreseeable future only pull the United States into the problems of another continent. He also believed that the fundamental causes of the war were not the interests of the working man, that those laborers would be cannon fodder for the escapades of the wealthy elite. Debs was jailed for his dissent, a reaction which highlights a perennial issue: when does free speech threaten national security? What are the limits of dissent during a time of war? Nations today find it no easier to answer these questions than those pulled into the maelstrom of World War I.

HUMAN RESPONSES TO WWI

Perhaps the most profound legacy of the war is the human record, something that concerns us most as we survey global cultures. We have a rich cache of artifacts from World War I.

The War Memoir

Besides the story of Vera Brittain, we have memoirs, diaries, poems, and battlefield accounts. We have the diaries of Robert Lindsay Mackay, Thomas Frederick Littler, Edwin Evan Jones, William Whirmore, and scores of other accounts from many perspectives and nationalities. We have first-hand accounts of being torpedoed in the Aegean Sea, of a labor company at Ypres, of a young boy's experience at the Battle of Gallipoli, of being held captive in the Ardennes Forest, and of narrow escapes and brave counterattacks. And we have poetry, the monuments of which include Rupert Brooks' "The Soldier," John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," and Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori." ("It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one's country."). But not all of this material is serious and sober. People find humor in the unlikeliest of places, and I think you would agree that humor is another way for us to tell our stories and, by doing so, cope with the unthinkable. In addition to the works noted above, students of WWI have a collection of some 500 cockney war stories with titles like "The Chef Drops a Brick" and "Chuck Us Yer Name Plate."

All of these works offer us a record, and this entire record was an attempt to make sense of war, to find dignity in the trenches. This goes to the heart of the study of world cultures: all cultures attempt to find meaning even in the most desperate of circumstances, and most often, this comes down to us in writing. Writing became

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a means of coping, even of healing. Writing was a way to exercise memory so as to purge memory, to remove the toxins of war with the catharsis of language. As we remember, we often edit, and so later generations must appreciate that the memoirs we read are works of art in themselves, not simply "accounts" of precisely what happened. That doesn't discount them. It actually enhances their value for us.

Deconstructing Art and Music

In many cultures of the past, post-war culture is a time of renaissance. It can represent a rebirth as people struggle to understand what just happened and to synthesize the past for the benefit of the future. We can point to a few examples. The birth of Western philosophy, art, and architecture came after the horrendous Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta. In East Asian history, Confucius gave up his life as a provincial bureaucrat to become a teacher of virtue after the collapse of the celebrated Zhou dynasty in China. Culture after WWI is another good example of this pattern. What occurred in the 1920s was one of the most exciting, most fruitful periods of cultural creativity in history. It was as if after being buried in trenches or being locked away in hospitals or war shelters, people came out into the sunshine and were viscerally determined to unleash all of the pent-up creativity that had lain dormant for years. They were also viscerally determined to have a good time, and the nightlife of the 1920s is legendary for excess and experimentation. All told, however, the result was something remarkable.

Since it reflected the experience of war, postwar culture also possessed a fractured perspective and dark overtones. Fractured lives were reflected in the fractured lines of culture after WWI. Karhe Kollwitz, having lost a son herself to the war, led the way in sketching out what remained of human dignity after the war. Often done in charcoal or sepia, her sketches inspired sculpture and other monuments to WWI. The Fauvists and Cubists were more convinced than ever that their conceptual perspective reflected the human condition. The Dada movement, an offshoot of the prewar avant-garde, collected everyday mundane material objects and displayed them, often with very little additional artistic rendering. The Bauhaus architectural movement also stressed everyday practicality termed *functionalism* as homes and buildings were rebuilt after war. Total war also produced tonal dissonance as composers took their cues to structure symphonies without recognizable themes or harmonies. Arnold Schönberg relished atonal works. Other composers in this same vein, like Igor Stravinsky, took as their vocation the reeducation of European music lovers. Many, though, decided to hold on to traditional genres of music and decided that atonality was one class in their education they preferred to flunk. Beyond this, the novels of E. Scott Fitzgerald, the growth of the automobile and airline industries, and the universal fascination with cinema signaled a new age of flight beyond the traditional bounds into a realm of genuine existence: existentialism.

For many, the past age was a confusing as well as tragic one. Hadn't European progress ensured a better future? Hadn't industrialized technology relieved us of many of the burdens of the past? Hadn't sophistication in literature and the arts created the potential for splendidly civilized world cultures? For many after WWI, the answer was no, or at least that something was deeply amiss. Indeed, those colonized by Western empires confessed that if this was what it was to be civilized—if this was what "civilization" meant—they wanted no part of it. In the coming decades, this disillusionment with the prewar order would transform world cultures in the 20th century.

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