

# Wrestling with Cinders: Reflections on Jay Winter's Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning

Scott Ashley

## I: 'TRADITIONS' AND 'MODERNISMS'

Like the speech of a nervous orator, the twentieth century began slowly. Rather than hitting its dark and melancholy note immediately as the calendar changed from 1899 to 1900, it coughed, cleared its throat and coughed again before the words began to come, before the century began to assert itself upon a bewildered audience. That it finally began to form its words in the mouths of soldiers choking on the last remnants of gas-soaked lungs in the Ypres salient, that it first expounded its dominant theme in the silence that met the reading of the muster rolls on the evening of July 1st 1916, is a tragedy so intense and a disaster so complete that it continues to sear the imagination. But as that silence settled, as if into a vacuum, the words flowed and have continued to do so ever since. The Great War has been always surrounded by words, by the war poets, by the phrases of remembrance, "They shall grow not old", "Their name liveth forevermore", by the imaginative responses of those born not only after the first war, but after the second. Our common doom as citizens of the twentieth century has its origins in the trenches of the Western and Eastern Fronts, where was first witnessed the gruesome icon of the modern world, "survivors perched on a mountain of corpses."

These are Jay Winter's words, and in his latest book, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) he sets out to explain to us anew the meaning of the Great War for European cultural history, leading a frontal assault on the now entrenched positions of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* and more recent works such as Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined* and Modris Ekstein's underrated *Rites of Spring*. Winter's basic thesis is simple. Concentrating on Britain, France and Germany, he argues that the shared experience of mass bereavement and mourning after the First World War revitalised 'traditional' forms of cultural expression, be they in literature, painting and film, memorials and popular religion, or, out on the margins, spiritualism and occultism. The 'Modernist' thesis, that the war killed off the world of Victorian Romanticism and ushered in an iconoclastic and experimental European and American culture, is simply wrong, ignoring the overarching need to mourn the dead in accepted and fitting forms. The nine-

teenth century received a debilitating wound on the battlefield certainly, but was evacuated to the clearing station, stitched-up and sent home, to be wheeled out, ailing but still alive, on the high and holy days of the nation. Only after the mountain of corpses was seen for a second time, at Auschwitz and Hiroshima, rather than Verdun and the Somme, did the old soldier finally fade away.

Readers of this journal will be both intrigued and bitterly disappointed by Winter's work in almost equal measure. Intrigued because he provides a useful service in reminding us again that the movement we all too easily call 'Modernism' did not achieve a cultural hegemony in the first half of this century, nor did it necessarily provide the best or most suitable language of expression in those years in which the shadows of the dead still loomed long over the world. Adroitly side-stepping the 'Modernists' by reminding us of "the continuing affinities between avant-garde artists and mainstream styles and modes of thought", Winter opens up the field for writers such as Graves to assert their right to be recognised, neither as marginal voices, nor as central voices, but as one vital thread in the twisted skeins of literary history. Jay Winter has done us all a service if he has provided a framework in which this already active re-evaluation can continue and flourish.

But it is the way in which this important, if hardy original, point is made that will disappoint. Given the fact that not only Graves's immediate post-war writings, but his entire *oeuvre*, would have helped illuminate the ideas Winter has shone into some of the murkier corners of the Great War, it seems a shame that there is only one passing reference to him, merely citing Fussell's reading of *Goodbye to All That* as an 'ironic' text. A thorough engagement with Graves's writing, up to and including *The White Goddess*, would have seriously questioned some of the notions Winter has brought to his study. Reflecting on that body of work, it seems to me that we need to go way beyond Winter's thinking and abandon this pointless game of categorisation altogether, of defining something as either 'Modernist', 'traditional', 'anti-Modernist', 'late romantic', 'expressionist' or whatever (the lush undergrowth of terminology points up the futility of it all) and actually start thinking about what texts say and how they actually relate to the often misleading cultural genealogies they themselves create.

In his lecture of 1911-12, 'Romanticism and Classicism', T.E. Hulme noted, with typical clarity, a point that is important to us. Arguing for the necessity of neo-classical poetry, a poetry that would "prove that beauty may be in small, dry things", he reminds his audience that this

new poetry will almost certainly not be the direct offspring of Pope:

When it does come we may not even recognise it as classical. Although it will be classical it will be different because it has passed through a romantic period.

This is central to the question of 'tradition', for certain texts may be called 'traditional' by either their authors or their critics, but this does not mean they are. Forms of artistic production that were called 'traditional' after 1918 may have had very little organic connection with the world of 1914, let alone of previous centuries. 'Tradition' went into the firing-line still proudly wearing the slightly tattered uniform of Victorian romanticism. In those sultry August evenings of 1914:

Never was such antiqueness of romance,

Such tasteless honey oozing from the heart.

But come 11th November 1918 'tradition' had swapped the gold braid for the puttees and sheepskins of a colder world. As Graves acknowledged in 'Recalling War', antique romance gave way under the recognition that:

War was return of earth to ugly earth,

War was foundering of sublimities,

Extinction of each happy art and faith

By which the world had still kept head in air

Winter realises this when he talks of the war-poets "recasting" traditional languages, but there is no systematic discussion of what this recasting meant in practice or how these old-new languages related to any willow-the-wisp 'tradition'. We need to examine carefully the body underneath to see if this amounted to an essential, or simply a surface, transformation.

Of the Craiglockhart triumvirate of Sassoon, Owen and Graves, Graves has always been cast in the role of Lepidus, more known about than known. That his war-poems exist is common knowledge, but how many of us can truly say that we have lived with them as we have lived with 'Strange Meeting', 'Dulce et Decorum est' or 'Counter Attack'? Yet I have always been drawn to one poem by Graves time and again since I first found it in Brian Gardner's anthology, *Up the Line to Death*. 'Dead Cow Farm' sticks in my mind not because it is especially powerful or because it contains any linguistic fireworks (that is what it quietly resists) but because it tells us something about what was thought to have died along with the millions of men:

An ancient saga tells us how  
 In the beginning the First Cow  
 (For nothing living yet had birth  
 But elemental Cow on Earth)  
 Began to lick cold stones and mud:  
 Under her warm tongue flesh and blood  
 Blossomed, a miracle to believe;  
 And so was Adam born and Eve.  
 Here now is chaos once again,  
 Primaeval mud, cold stones and rain.  
 Here flesh decays and blood drips red,  
 And the Cow's dead, the old Cow's dead.

Despite the tragic circularity of physical circumstance, the old mythic props, the literary life-belts that men could hold onto, as F.R. Leavis clutched his copy of *Paradise Lost* on the western front, or T.E. Lawrence his *Morte d'Arthur*, have gone down with the ship. "The Cow's dead, the old Cow's dead": the older forms of epic can no longer impose any kind of meaning on the world, or even console very much. Just think how Leavis came to view Milton after the war. Whether this is objectively 'true' or not is beside the point. This poem points us to something of the first importance, not only for understanding Graves, but for much of the ideology of twentieth-century literature.

Just as Hulme recognised that classicism would be different because it had gone through a period of romanticism, so 'tradition' survived the war only to re-emerge looking very different. *Goodbye to All That* contains at its heart one of the most primeval of all myths, especially to a generation attuned to the thought-world of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. On his twenty-first birthday, poised on the threshold into adulthood, a young infantry officer is seriously wounded by shrapnel and reported dead. But after reading his own obituaries, he returns to the living world, scarred but whole. A Christ-like figure? Frazer's ritually-murdered king? The phoenix? He could have been any of these, but in Graves's myth of his younger self his 'death' and 'resurrection' becomes a cue for irony, for the dry laughter reminiscent of the *Hollow Men*. By 1929 Graves reckoned the old Cow hadn't quite die on the Somme, but came back, hard, ironic and changed. If the "ancient sagas" no longer had much power, that didn't mean that myth or epic itself needed to be junked. Quite the contrary. This is just one of the points of contact between Graves and T.S. Eliot at this point,

and we can only bemoan the fact that their collaborative book on modernist poetry never came to fruition. The battlefields of the Great War had proved not to be epic in a Homeric sense, but they had still been sites of myth. Not just through the Angel of Mons, or the 'Trench of the Bayonets' at Verdun, not just 'Lawrence of Arabia' or footballs kicked over the top at Loos, but through the revelation of a more primeval, apocalyptic, mythical world. As in 'Dead Cow Farm', by some random Darwinian accident, the world seemed to have reverted back to the ancient chaos, perhaps never to recover. The living passed over into the world of the dead in waves, and just occasionally, the dead came back into the sunlight. Already in 1916, in a poem like 'Escape', Graves was mythologising his own experiences on the other side:

... But I *was* dead, an hour or more.  
I woke when I'd already passed the door  
That Cerberus guards, and half-way down the road  
To Lethe, as an old Greek signpost showed.

It is this mythic world-view, revisited at a distance between 1939 and 1945, that eventually coalesces in Graves's mind as the White Goddess, that bloody-handed reiver, stalking the centuries looking for women to possess, men to torment and inspire. She is in an identifiable line of descent from la belle dame sans merci, though the modern lover-poet no longer wanders "Alone and palely loitering", but forgets "cruelty and past betrayal, / Heedless of the where the next bright bolt may fall." Just as with the men in the trenches of the Western Front, who could find death and destruction falling from the heavens, impartial, without respect of class or position, without warning. Despite Graves's own professed contempt for Yeats, it is only one of the many basic similarities between the two men that they formulated new mythic visions of the world in the aftermath of extreme violence. Just think of the way Yeats moves away from, or ironises, the given stories of ancient Irish mythology in the 1920s and 1930s in an attempt to understand the revolutions in both Ireland and the world at large. That Graves's fixed on the Goddess, Yeats on Leda and the Swan and the mystic Neo-Platonic gyres of *A Vision* should not obscure the deeper structures of thought that bring them together. The "spilt religion" of nineteenth-century romanticism, Hegelian *geist*, progress, Beauty, Truth, Good, was not put back into the bottle, was not gathered up into Hulme's harder, dryer classical world, but neither was it recognis-

able as the romanticisms of Shelley or Byron, Tennyson or Arnold, Swinburne or Yeats's own earlier work.

What we see instead in Graves, just as we see it in the canonical authors of 'Modernism', are myths of the self. In telling of his death and rebirth, in the urge toward mythic autobiography in Graves generally, which he shares with many of his contemporaries, we see 'tradition' beginning to right itself again. If after 'Dead Cow Farm' the literary source epics become problematic for Graves, why then, you write a new epic but with yourself as the subject and sole basis of authority. Books and evidence become servants, not masters. It becomes acceptable to play fast and loose with Tacitus, Suetonius, Procopius, the Bible - after all, the past went west along with the old Cow and who knows what happened for sure anyway? Such an attitude reaches its climax with *The White Goddess* in which the books that "tumbled down into my hands from the shelves of a second-hand seaside bookshop" are wholly subordinate to the working out of a purely personal thesis. The self becomes the arbiter of ethics and aesthetics, while 'tradition' and evidence and Truth are constantly called upon. Graves constantly claimed that in writing *The White Goddess* he had held true to the historical facts. Yet it is also clear that his knowledge of these 'facts' partly came about through inspiration, coincidence and a seer-like certainty of the validity of these methods of gathering knowledge (of which Chapter 19, 'The Number of the Beast', is a tour de force). Graves and academic scholars could never talk to each other successfully because they had (and still have, though the distance is lessening) fundamentally different notions of the meaning of Truth and fact. To see that Graves was part of a wider culture in doing this, one need only look at the stink that is still kicked up about the truthfulness of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. In the immediate post-war years Lawrence came to feel that his entire existence in the Middle East had been based on a lie, the lie that Britain and France supported Arab national self-determination. In his art he made lying the basis of his whole aesthetic, the partial vision of the self, his guiding principle. He came to see himself as a blank sheet, filled with whatever myths he or others (including Graves in *Lawrence and the Arabs* and 'The Clipped Stater') chose to put there. Even the most basic information was as shifting as the Arabian sands: was his name Chapman, Lawrence, Shaw or Ross? He admitted in 1927 that the "only authentic part of my name is [sic] the initials T.E." and to John Buchan in the same year that "the fiction is less trouble than the truth." With this Joycean blurring of the boundaries between fictional persona and personal biography it is perfect that one of the

most famous photographs of Lawrence in his later years has him lying on his bed, reading *Ulysses*.

Winter's thesis then is both right and terribly wrong simultaneously. Yes, 'tradition' survived, 'Modernism' was not an iconoclastic juggernaut. But what serious critic ever really thought it was? When claims were made for the new art that it was against the past, the past was normally confined to the last fifty years or so, to the perceived stultifying grip of Victorianism. Even then much of 'Modernist' art would have been impossible without the social and aesthetic seriousness of the Victorians. For one recent case-study see Clive Wilmer, "Sculpture and Economics in Pound and Ruskin", in *P.N. Review* number 122 (1998). But the organising principles of the world, the "certain groups of ideas as huts for men to live in", as Hulme called them, were changed by the Great War in fundamental ways.

Early 'Modernism', that is the cultural climate of Europe that flourished in the excitement of its own definition from around 1900 to the outbreak of war, set the tone, provided a linguistic and "visual grammar" for the war, as Winter says of Kandinsky and Meidner. But the actual mechanics of how this might have happened are left completely unexamined. There is only one side to high culture in the book, that of the producers, the artists. Reproducing their own anti-commercial rhetoric (often contradicted by the hard sell many of them indulged in with galleries, collectors and publishing houses), the consumers of the art, the public, disappear from view. The avenues by which cultural codes and languages pass into common, or at least a wider, currency are not mysterious, but inscribed for all to see in newspapers, exhibition catalogues, administrative documents (for public works), library registers. Winter does this very well for the loci of public and private grief, showing an otherwise quotidian culture energised by death. But it is one of the real missed opportunities of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* that a professional historian does not take a really hard look at just how important groupings like *Der Blaue Reiter* actually were in formalising the languages of war. We will have to come back to this later, but Winter provides us with no grounds for thinking that such cultural circles were anything other than a self-contained intellectual élite with no purchase whatsoever on a wider audience. 'Tradition' or 'Modernity' takes on a rather different colouring if it is largely confined to the critical polemics of a self-styled avant-garde.

But this may be something of a red herring anyway. The question is not whether this self-styled 'Modernism' finally became culturally hegemonic after the Great War, since there seems little disagreement

among critics that it was always an élite, minority culture, deliberately seeking to avoid absorption into the mainstream. The question is whether the war provided for the first time a real *referent* for the language of 'Modernism', whether the full-flowering of 'Modernism' after the war came about because between 1914 and 1918 theory actual began to run alongside and finally merge with social practice?

There is always a feeling reading, and reading about, the generation before 1914 that they are speaking into a void. The Futurists and Vorticists ranted through their manifestos about explosions, speed, violence, about hurtling toward the 'Future', but where were those explosions, that capitalised 'FUTURE' to come from? Even the Italian Futurists, those most determined children of mass communication, exhibited "a perplexing failure to face the challenge of current events", as noted in the excellent study of (48). I would simply note that it does not seem in the least perplexing, but part of the character of avant-garde movements generally. How was cubist art or atonal music ever going to revolutionise the world when even (especially?) its own proponents agreed that public taste ossified somewhere around 1850? The cry for a invigorated language, for words to brush the skeletal hand of the past from the shoulder, falter when the question is asked, 'how is this to be accomplished?' The theories were all there, whether they were based on Chinese characters, on analogy, on the Image, on etymology, but how were these theories going to take root in society when everyone outside the charmed circle was, supposedly, hopelessly intellectually corrupt? What did words ever really refer to, apart from other words, other theories? The turning inwards of much of the theory of the first decades of the twentieth century, the desire to create organic art that referenced only itself, was not just a hang-over from *l'art pour art*, but the making of a virtue out of necessity. The war changed all that. There were the explosions, killing countless men on the western front. There was the clearing away of buildings, of the physical remains of the past, there was the 'FUTURE'. As Modris Eksteins has suggested, there in Flanders and Picardy was the rite of spring played out, every year for four years. There did cubism and machine art achieve practical shape in the form of the tank, the gas-mask and barbed wire. There, in Russia, were the revolutionary cadres on the streets demanding an overthrow of the *ancien régime* in both politics and culture. And, finally, there was the demand among society at large for some truth-telling, for some straight talking about what happened to sons, brothers, husbands, friends. Those members of the avant-garde that survived (or avoided) the war may not have liked

this new found land, this place where their theories achieved concrete existence, but that is another story.

In 'Cinders' Hulme had wrote how London looked pretty at night because "for the general cindery chaos there is substituted a simple ordered arrangement of a finite number of lights." Compare this with the letter home of a young lieutenant in the 7th Leinsters from May 1916:

Before long you'd top a little rise, and then stand and catch your breath with the whole Front spread out before your feet. Imagine a vast semi-circle of lights: a cross between the lights of the Embankment and the lights of the Fleet far out to sea; only instead of fixed yellow lamps they are powerful white flares ... (quoted in Myles Dungan, *They Shall Not Grow Old: Irish Soldiers and the Great War*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).

Or note when Hulme writes how, "All heroes, great men, go to the outside, away from the Room, and wrestle with cinders." Or how he thanks God "for the long note of the bugle, which moves all the world bodily out of the cinders and the mud." It is fanciful, while also tragic, that it was precisely those heroes who left the Room, who left their funk-holes, and went over the top to wrestle with the cinders at Verdun or at Passchendaele whom, Binyon-like, the bugle called away. One longs to have talked with Hulme, not the wonderfully bullying and dogmatic Hulme of the later years, swatting both middle-brow art critics and Bertrand Russell alike with sentences that make one laugh out loud and cringe all at the same time, but the quieter, less boisterous Hulme of 'Cinders' and of the poetry. To ask him, "what was it like seeing your ash-pit of cinders materialise in front of you? How did it feel knowing that many are called to bring forth a new *weltanschauung*, but few are chosen to prophesy the future of the world?"

## II: MOURNING AND MEMORY

[The] man who deliberately sets himself the task of thinking continuously of a lover or dead friend has an impossible task. He is inevitably drawn to some form of ritual for the expression and the outflow of the sentiment. Some act which requires less concentration, and which at an easy level fulfils his obligation to sentiment, which changes a morbid feeling into a grateful task and employment. Such as pilgrimages to graves, standing bareheaded and similar freaks of a lover's fancy.- T.E. Hulme, 'Cinders'

Hulme called it "a relief from concentrated thinking", Winter "a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind." In both cases the importance of ritual in the expression and assimilation of otherwise dangerous emotions is recognised. With four million dead in the three major combatant countries, France, Germany and Britain, on the western front alone, the need for mourning was immediate and almost universal. It is one of the strength of Winter's work that he concentrates on the ritualistic aspects of Great War commemoration, the need to remember the dead and overcome often debilitating grief, complementing the more usual historiographical line which reads conservative political messages into such artefacts. Working with his 'traditional' approach to the expression of the war, he insists upon the necessity for art to retain its time-honoured features during and after the war, for only such work could truly minister to the bereaved.

Like so much in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* I find the idea worthy of genuine consideration, but the actual working out of the thesis disappointing. Let me concentrate here just on Winter's examination of 'War poetry, romanticism and the return of the sacred' as exemplifying some of the problems in his approach, an examination concerned with material of especial interest to readers of this journal.

Winter is quite clear in his mind that his 'traditional' art worked, that it helped the bereaved to live with their loss. As I have tried to stress, his analysis of actual bricks and mortar memorials such as the Cenotaph in London or the so-called "Trench of the Bayonets" at Verdun is alert, sophisticated and, in general, convincing. His discussion of the desire for information and the (rather cold) comfort found in spiritualism also genuinely adds to our knowledge of the war. But how far is poetry produced by combatants, and especially post-war literature usually produced at least a decade after the end of the war, really comparable with these more immediate acts of memory? How far are these writings part of the *direct* mourning process in the way that the creation of Remembrance Day or veterans' associations were?

These doubts are not resolved in the chapter Winter devotes to war poetry, concentrating specifically on themes of the return of the dead and the role of Biblical imagery in English and French combatant verse. First of all, Winter defines war poetry as essentially elegiac, as a series of attempts "to keep the voices of the fallen alive, by speaking for them, to them, about them." Well, perhaps, but as Winter himself admits this is to privilege only one facet, to take the sentimental 'English Elegies' side of Owen at face value, and allow it to colonise

all the other approaches. A counter-narrative needs to be woven into the texture of the discussion, one that might define war poetry from other angles, such as irony, alienation, polemic, or at least to problematise and relativise the notion of elegy itself. Again, one wants to avoid the critical line of "if only you'd chosen this writer, then you would have seen!" But to cite Isaac Rosenberg, in my opinion the most interesting of all the English combatant war-poets by some margin, only in terms of his interesting, but nevertheless minor 'On Receiving News of the War' at the expense of 'Break of Day in the Trenches', 'Dead Man's Dump' or 'Returning, We Hear the Larks' seems avoidance of the canonical work taken to an unprofitable extreme. Some more thorough engagement with his work would have cleared up several points that remain unsatisfactory.

Winter keeps insisting that the war-poets used 'traditional' forms for their work. But if the use of 'traditional' forms (by which I think he means those characteristic of Victorian romanticism) is to mean anything it has to be shown to be a deliberate choice, a deliberate avoidance of other forms as inappropriate. Now let us ask the question, what was a non-traditional form in London (I just talk of England here) in 1914? Did any of these soldiers know anything of *vers libre*, of Imagism, of Apollinaire? From the evidence of our legion biographies of Owen, Graves, Sassoon, Rosenberg et al, the answer must be that they knew very little. The poetic taste, and hence poetic language, of the educated young man who volunteered or was conscripted into the British Army was defined by Georgianism, by Tennyson, by Swinburne, by Browning, by the books they could buy in the shops, by the books they could borrow from the libraries. It seems to me that they did not avoid innovative forms because they were unsuitable to the functions their verse fulfilled, but because they had little conception that verse form could be anything other than that of the nineteenth century. This is part of my earlier point about that lack of social reference which early 'Modernism' inscribed within its own self-definition. The avant-garde had deliberately withdrawn from 'market-place culture', with the result that the extant culture they so much derided was left in possession of the field. It is all very well for scholars to talk about the importance of the Imagist anthologies, of the growth of knowledge of French and Belgian Symbolism and what not, but if the young Robert Graves or Wilfred Owen could not buy such works in their local bookshop, if they did not see them advertised because they could not afford a subscription to *The New Age*, then it remains so much high-falutin' rhetoric. We still need a *history* of that

cultural movement we call 'Modernism' in the full sense of the word history, not just more analyses of its philosophy.

To get back to Rosenberg. As a friend of those arch-'Modernists' David Bomberg and John Rodker, student at the avant-garde Slade School, but writer of poems that take as their starting-point some of the less interesting pathways indicated by Edward's Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, Rosenberg's work could have added real subtlety to Winter's analysis. There we see how difficult it is to determine in what direction an art will develop. For Rosenberg *had* been introduced to the work of continental, Francophone, Symbolism, singling out Maurice Maeterlinck and Emile Verhaeren for especial praise. He had read the Imagist work of F.S. Flint by 1912 and was introduced to Hulme at the Café Royal a year later. While visiting South Africa for health reasons in 1914 he lectured on modern painters, including Augustus John, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Stanley Spencer and Picasso. In 1916 he had two poems published in that supposedly 'Modernist' journal, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* (Chicago), encouraged by Rodker and Ezra Pound. Yet the presiding genii of Rosenberg's poetic taste, returned to again and again in his letters, were Gordon Bottomley and Lascelles Abercrombie, the former called by Rosenberg "my great god of poetry", the latter "a mighty poet and brother to Browning." Neither has survived the poetic earthquakes of the twenties and thirties, their disappearance from the poetic landscape confirmed after both failed to make it into James Reeves's *Georgian Poetry* retrospective of 1962.

Yet as soon as we come to look at this surprising poetic genealogy, easy distinctions between 'Modernist'/'Imagist' and 'traditional'/'Georgian' poetry come crashing down. Although Rosenberg did not take to Flint's current work with great enthusiasm, finding them unambitious and mostly "just experiments in versification", he praised two poems for their greater naturalness and claimed to be confident that Flint would "do something yet." This is not in any way to be wondered at when we piece together Rosenberg's own statements about his poetic aesthetic, seeking for "definite thought and clear expression", for "a word that would flash my idea plain", his favouring of a rhythm based on stress and accent rather than regular patterns. Compare this with the manifestos of Flint and Pound on 'Imagisme', or Hulme's 'A Lecture on Modern Poetry', to see how there was a *common* language of poetic ambition in Edwardian and Georgian Britain, in which the distaste the self-defined factions held for each other arose from a recognition that many aims were shared.

When programmatic statements are made we really need to ask critically whether these statements are polemic or informed and serious aesthetic positions. It seems to me indisputable that Rosenberg was independently running on poetic lines parallel to what Hulme was trying to do c.1908-12 (that is, before Pound 'discovered' China and the Japanese haiku). Even in the field of polemic the similarities are striking. He could opine in 1916 that the "French poets I think have given a nasty turn to English thought. It is all Café Royal poetry now." Compare this with Hulme's sardonic letter to *The New Age* in 1909 attacking Flint's francophilia: "When, oh, when, shall we finish sentimentalising about French poets in cafés!" (It is, perhaps, worth noting that Hulme's irony is partly directed towards himself, giving his own address as the 'Café Tour d'Eiffel'). Yet would Hulme ever have written in such hushed tones of the work of Bottomley and Abercrombie?

What distinguishes those so-called 'Georgians' who finally transcended Marsh's normative 'Georgian' ethos, Rosenberg, Graves, Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney, from Hulme, Pound et al, is not what they actually want to do, but the sophistication they bring to bear in their exposition of it. Several years ago now Donald Davie made this crucial point in relation to Thomas. The abstractions that pass muster for all of them in their early work are far from the philosophical preciseness of the 'Modernists'. Even when criticising Rupert Brooke for his use of second-hand phrases Rosenberg can talk of "distinguished emotion" in poetry. Thomas's prose is bedevilled with nouns like 'Beauty', 'Earth' and 'Nature' (Rosenberg also favours the latter). Yet this is not the kind of writing that survives into any of their mature poetry. In one of his finest, and last poems, 'As They Draw to a Close', speaking in the voice of Walt Whitman, Gurney can legitimately claim:

But I have roughed the soul American or Yankee at least  
to truth and instinct,  
And compacted the loose-drifting faiths and questions of  
men in a few words.

These lovely lines, speaking so modestly of achieved ambition, can stand as representative of what all those dissatisfied 'Georgians' attempted. If Rosenberg and Thomas had lived, if Gurney had not broken down and been incarcerated, might they too not, eventually, have been driven, like Graves, to attempt their own grammars of poetry, their own anti-philosophies to contest the increasingly extreme philosophies of those gradually defining themselves as 'Modernists'?

Through his biography and his work, Rosenberg (we could substitute Graves, Thomas or Gurney) allows us to see how form and content were determined not so much by the functions of war poetry as vehicles for commemoration but through the more everyday, but no less exciting, processes of books read, people talked to, books left unread, people ignored in the street. Through a proper look at a *body* of work by Jay Winter, rather than through disconnected snippets, we might have got something worth thinking about.

But even if war poetry was not consciously written as a form of 'traditional' mourning could it still have fulfilled that role in practice? Again, the idea is one worthy of some sustained consideration, but the really hard questions go unasked by Winter. To investigate in what ways the First World War poets acted as interlocutors between the communities of the living and the dead, we ideally need discussion of their publishing history and reception. We need to look not so much at what they said, but at how they were read. Yeats's infamous remark that passive suffering was no subject for poetry never fails to stick in the craw of those who admire the war-poets. But what was really important about Yeats's idiosyncracies, was that they meant the exclusion of the main body of First World War poetry from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, a popular anthology series that, in its various incarnations, serves as an important conduit of new(ish) poetry to the general reading public. Was then the transmission of the war-poets work more problematic than we might appreciate? Or was 1936 already too late to be of much use to those grieving the 'lost generation'? It might have been thought so, except Dr. Winter adduces as examples of healing art Stanley Spencer's *Resurrection of the Soldiers* at Burghclere, not completed until 1932, and Georges Rouault's *Miserere*, completed in 1928, but not published or exhibited until 1948! One can only conclude that if such work was supposed to heal, then it took a long time to take effect. More seriously however, it is worth noting the important point made by Bob Bushaway that there was almost a full continuum of Great War commemoration *entre deux guerres*, with many of the large sites on the western front only being completed in the mid to late thirties (136-67). But again this can only make us question to what extent the controlling and overcoming of grief was the primary purpose of these large-scale projects.

The problem with trying to demonstrate any social role for the classic canon of disillusioned or antagonistic war poetry of course, is that it is not at all certain that it has ever had a publicly recognised social role. Whenever poetry has managed to claim a place in commemora-

tion surely it has been the voices of Lawrence Binyon and Rupert Brooke that have occupied the stage, drowning out those of the 'Lost Generation'? No Remembrance Day goes by without someone intoning 'For the Fallen'. The lines beginning "If I should die think only this of me" have continued to saturate the consciousness of the non-poetry reading public like "Oh to be in England" or "I wandered lonely as a cloud". They have become 'classic' in the way that Owen or Rosenberg or Sassoon have never quite managed. It is those sentiments that define public commemoration of the both wars in Britain even up to the present day. To read 'Dulce et Decorum est' on Remembrance Sunday would be the height of bad taste.

So then, certain kinds of memory, certain kinds of mourning are allowed and others are not. Or when they are accepted, they should be confined to a private sphere. But what happens when mourning for the dead of the Great War was officially discouraged *en masse*? Winter works with societies in which displays of mourning for those killed were deemed wholly necessary. The importance of Myles Dungan's *They Shall Grow Not Old: Irish Soldiers and the Great War* lies in reminding us that in nationalist Ireland the psychic necessity of ritualised mourning was ignored, the reality of the Irish contribution to Britain's 'imperialist' war systematically denied.

Along with his previous book, *Irish Voices from the Great War*, Dungan has a modest polemical position which he takes up in the most tentative of language: but it is important and timely. He seeks to "keep before the public eye a neglected area of historical research and evaluation" and to encourage the production of "an analytical work which assesses the Great War and modern Irish memory." He points up the necessity of this in a sharply observed moment in his chapter on the Irish and Irish-Australians at Gallipoli, where he notes how the iconic names of Lone Pine and Shrapnel Gully occupy a site of "significance in Australian lore, history and popular culture which V Beach and Suvla Bay do not have in Irish memory." His title, taken of course from Binyon's 'For the Fallen', is therefore deeply ironic. For the last eighty years the last thing the collective memory of the Irish State has done is to remember them. Despite the growth in both scholarly and popular interest in the Great War south of the border (there has never been any reticence about the war in Loyalist memory of course) officialdom still moves slowly. Dungan notes how the President now attends the Remembrance Day service in that Anglo-Irish bastion, St. Patrick's cathedral, though perhaps his book went to press before Mary Robinson's successor, Mary McAleese expressed some, perhaps

justifiable, doubts about the value of poppy wearing. He also points out the more concrete cross-border acts of commemoration both in France and Belgium and in the Republic, the need to achieve some kind of identity with the north surely being one of the driving forces behind the renewal of interest in the Great War. But he also notes how the Fine Gael TD behind such initiatives promptly lost his seat and how the government of John Bruton proved "reluctant to intervene" in the requests by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to erect headstones in Glasnevin cemetery.

It is this issue of memory that provides the spark in Dungan's book. Apart from the nagging undercurrent of political and religious sectarianism and the absence of conscription, the only truly distinctive characteristic of the war for Ireland lay in the way its meaning was debated and remembered. Dungan stresses not so much the Easter Rising of 1916 itself, as the executions of the rebel leaders, that turned the tide of Irish opinion against the war. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, with a Home Rule bill for Ireland already accepted (though suspended for the duration) by the Westminster Parliament, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, had called on the nationalist Irish Volunteers and all patriotic Irishmen to join the fight against Germany, to demonstrate the maturity and commitment of Ireland to take its place in the company of nations. But with the harsh suppression of the rising, and its bloody aftermath, attitudes toward the war began to polarise and it became harder to support both the abstract idea of 'Ireland' and to be in the khaki of the British Army. In post-independence Ireland the idea took root that only 'anti-Irish' traitors and die-hard Unionists had fought in the southern Irish regiments. Lutyen's Islandbridge war-memorial was left unfinished and allowed to fall into ruin by successive governments.

The question then forces itself upon our attention, how did those who should have been in mourning for Ireland's war dead, in fact, grieve? Given the fact that some form of ritual mourning does seem to be a psychological necessity, how was this expressed and the process of healing embarked upon? It seems to me that what happened in the war-years and after was a systematic displacement of the symbols and reality of grief onto the 'martyrs' of 1916, onto Pearse, Connolly, McDonagh and the rest. These men, so jeered, so despised, so ridiculed, by the mass of Dublin's population when they were besieged in the Post Office, became the 'sons' of Ireland once they were dead. Their cult was, and to some extent still is, so powerful because their death coincided with, and came to stand in for, that of so

many others, remembrance of whom was publicly suppressed. There are commemorative statues, gardens, plaques and poems, sites of memory and sites of mourning, for these men, as there are not for the Irish soldiers. One of these poems, Francis Ledwidge's famous 'Thomas McDonagh', amply demonstrates the way commemoration of 1916 slides into other fields of significance. Beginning, "He shall not hear the bittern cry / In the wild sky where he is lain", these lines also serve as an epitaph for the plaque to their author in his home village of Slane, Co. Meath. But Ledwidge lies elsewhere, killed by a shell while drinking tea near Hell-Fire Corner at Passchendaele, serving with the 29th Division of the British Army.

When the firing-squads ensured that the rebels would 'die for Ireland', the bitterness turned into sorrow and anger as the people began to identify them with their 'own' men, who might already, or soon would, 'die for Ireland'. As the dead of Easter became, as they had hoped, the legitimisation of a nationalist revolutionary ideology so it became 'unpatriotic' to mourn those killed in Britain's war. But how many parents, wives, friends, throughout the twenties and thirties saw the stony features of Patrick Pearse dissolve into those of their own menfolk or comrades, still 'somewhere in France'?

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