

What's missing in this picture?

The 'middle parts of fortune' in Australian Great War literature

Clare Rhoden

In Will Dyson's drawing *Dead Beat*, an exhausted Australian soldier sits slumped, deeply asleep, in the tunnel of Hill 60, his rifle under his head.¹ He has a strong forehead and nose, a sharply angled cheekbone. His left hand rests on his knee, the long fingers angled tensely inward. His right hand is fisted loosely. It is the Western Front, 1917; Ypres. In the background, another Aussie leans against the wall with his back to the sleeper, and beyond him, the light ekes past another man, also looking away from us. The only face shown is that of the sleeping soldier. In his diary, Dyson explains that although the man looked young and 'emphatically lost, lost like a child ... I have not at all drawn him as childish as he looked'.² We see the dead-beat infantryman, not the lost child. The soldier's face, affecting as it is, is not the face of the man who was there.

This exemplifies the choices made in representing so large and complex an event as the Great War. Journalists, artists, historians, diarists, letter writers, poets, and official despatch writers all chose what to include, what to expunge, what to emphasise and what to minimise. Dyson's 'winter' drawings show only one of what he calls the 'many moods' of war.³ Of these many moods, Australian perspectives tend towards two polar notions: the heroic proving of the nation, or reprehensible, readily manipulated obedience to the British Empire's demands that led to shattering disenchantment with 'glorious war' notions. The heroic myth (*myth* as convenient cultural explanation) of Australian popular memory has been linked to militarism, while the disenchantment myth is privileged in literary criticism. Both these views overlook the complexity displayed by the best of both Australian and overseas narratives. The nature of much discussion of Great War texts is habitually adversarial; Pickthorn noted as long ago as 1924 that 'it may be that anyone's account of the [recent] war is bound to irritate everyone else'.⁴ Most prose accounts of the Great War continue to be divided (by readers and critics) into the two opposed perspectives. Consequently the middle ground, encompassing both poles and recognising both as extremes in a range of experiences, is unclaimed. Inhabited by some texts that are largely forgotten in Australian literary history, it is a no-man's-land of critical appreciation.

Australian works such as Leonard Mann's *Flesh in Armour* (1932), Frank Dalby Davison's *The Wells Of Beersheba* (1933), J.P. McKinney's *Crucible* (1935) and G.D.

Mitchell's *Backs to the Wall* (1937) show more balance and complexity than has been readily appreciated in the need to identify evidence of the heroic narration/disenchantment divide.⁵ A closer inspection of many of the works assigned to one extreme or the other shows that the simple binary opposition is a simplification of what is in fact a dense, multi-faceted textual remembrance of the Great War. Appreciation of the large middle ground, as well as acceptance of the validity of the extremes, accepts the irreducibly complicated nature of experiences in and responses to war.

The two camps: disenchantment and heroism

The two distinct and characteristic sets of responses to the events of 1914-1918 – European debunking and Australian big-noting – offer what are in effect two biased and contradictory versions of the same 'story'.

Gerster 1992, 13.

Disillusionment as a style of war fiction, with its characteristic debunking of old-fashioned glorious-war notions, owes its prominence more to the post-war, depression-oppressed mood of the 1930s than to the war's factual history.⁶ Soldier-authors such as Sassoon, Graves and Aldington followed Remarque's popular *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) with their own reminiscences, part auto-biography, part imagination, and wholly literary. With an emphasis on the terrible conditions and the devastating experiences of sensitive individual protagonists, the disenchanted novels of the Great War canon expose war's futility and horror. The disenchantment perspective is generally summarised as the culpable sacrifice of idealistic young men by war-mongering politicians and profiteers.⁷ Its tropes are the Western Front trench, mud, shellshock, summary executions and the ruin of a generation. Although recent historical and literary analyses have demonstrated errors, exaggerations and misunderstandings in these clichés, popular memory still prefers disillusion.⁸ So indeed does current literary fiction set in the period.⁹

However, the disillusioned impression of the war is not the only or even the dominant theme of most writing about it. The current critical privilege of disenchantment lends more authenticity than many veteran-authors would admit. In the 1930s, veterans and academics argued bitterly over how the war should be remembered in literature: as a morass of futile, depersonalising disillusionment, or as a tragic event drawing forth humanity's best qualities. The polarisation of the discussion continues to this day, with scant attention paid to the ambiguity and complexity in the best Great War prose.

In this milieu, Australian scholarship expends a great deal of energy refuting the heroic exaggerations of Australian narrative accounts, overlooking the multi-faceted nature of these accounts in the cause of rejecting any notion of truth in 'glorious war'. This particular pole of literary commemoration is conceived as outmoded epic hyperbole, in which military prowess is lauded and heroic tropes celebrate the soldier's courage and self-sacrifice. Many Australian literary representations of the war, for example Ion Idriess's *The Desert Column* (1932), employ this traditional perspective, proffering both heroic narration and absolute confidence in the Australian soldier's superiority. In such works, Anzacs laugh at danger, defend their mates, and regularly aid struggling allied troops. These exaggerated and parochial features constitute one reason why Australian works have been largely dismissed or undervalued.¹⁰

Klein remarks that the validity of measuring literature, or any art, against positivist historical 'truth', instead of against artistic measures, is also problematic.¹¹ Dyson's drawings, Bean's histories, and all other literary and artistic responses to war result from the choices artists make about representation. The Australian style in general adopts the traditional soldier's story, continuing a venerable Western cultural concept of masculine identity invested in military prowess and valuing courage, endurance, and aggression.¹² This tradition also includes largely unrecognised features of disillusionment with war. The oldest of Western war stories, *The Iliad*, incorporates intense elements of disillusion in its heroic narrative. Simone Weil describes the death and desecration of Hector in disillusioned terms: 'The hero becomes a *thing* dragged behind a chariot in the dust ... The bitterness of such a spectacle is offered absolutely undiluted.'¹³ Further, all the combatants share 'the shameful experience of fear. The heroes quake like everybody else', as do the protagonists in disenchantment literature.¹⁴

Tragedy is not confined to disillusioned accounts, and the victim is not the only protagonist who can help us understand catastrophe. Tragedy also appertains to the heroic: the hero, no matter how overblown, is never immune from tragedy. Nussbaum shows us heroic protagonists who fail despite their best attempts, because it is their *tyche* – fate – to fail.¹⁵ They fail because they are human, mutable and fallible, operating in a contingent world. They fail because they are fully, indeed 'beautifully', human: part of that beauty resides in the very possibility of failure. As Howard says, 'the tragic approach which underlies all the greatest military literature [is that] the hero cannot win', particularly in a contest with his own mortality.¹⁶ The heroic narration of Australian war fiction accords with this perspective, so that we see brave heroes in impossible situations: *c'est la guerre – la guerre*[,] which is also part of the human condition. This resigned heroic (sometimes epic) conception of tragedy

contrasts with the more utilitarian, Kantian philosophy underpinning disillusionment-tragedy, in which there is something, someone, to be blamed for unleashing the horrendous fate; that is, in which there is a reason for the disaster, and a human agency behind the reason. Disillusioned narratives often imply blame, while heroic accounts tend to resolve war as part of the greater contingency of human life.

The choice of disillusion or heroic narration

At the expense of commemorating the contemporaneous triumph and relief of victory, many of the Great War's most accomplished writers chose disenchantment as their underlying premise. These disillusioned responses had (and continue to have) their uses and benefits. To convey anger, disgust and despair, emotions which dominated many people's responses to the Great War, disenchantment's irony and realism are very effective. However, writing the war as unmitigated disillusion and disgust is only one of many ways that survivors chose to record their impressions. Todman explains that the war 'could mean survival, victory (personal and national), disappointment, comradeship, unity, sorrow, shared purpose, betrayal, sacrifice, redefined status, and enjoyment, sometimes all at the same time'.¹⁷ Klein claims that responses from joy to despair exist in the literatures of all nations.¹⁸ This range, not just in national literatures but also within individual texts, is rarely appreciated, and even less recognised in Australian Great War literature.

Acknowledging the prominence of disillusion as a literary fashion in no way diminishes the war's factual disillusion, tragedy and horror as experienced by millions of people. The message that war is wasteful and obscene is rightly compelling. Accordingly for many, the Great War effectively finished not only the literary but also the actual career of the hero.¹⁹ The mechanised slaughter made a mockery of traditional heroic values. Bravery was invalidated by indiscriminate technology which had the blind power to end, or save, lives.

Despite this, many writers rejected disenchantment as a way to commemorate their experiences, and proposed that heroism and initiative still counted and that human actions as well as the random destruction caused by technology affected the war's progress. They chose to record their experiences in more positive terms, emphasising adventure, comradeship, courage, achievement, experience, stoicism and triumph. They asserted that some purposeful actions could mediate the lethal and random effects of bombardment. Their protagonists, like the archetypal adventurer described by the poet Paul Zweig, chose to enter the contest with – or against – contingency, emphasising the intensity and meaningfulness of the war experience.²⁰ The psychological and moral armour this attitude provides to veterans and other contemporaries is self-evident, forming a stalwart bulwark against notions

of futility and realisations of meaninglessness. Even those whose accounts are, on the whole, read as disillusioned, such as Facey (*A Fortunate Life*, 1981) and Richards (*Old Soldiers Never Die*, 1933), place their war experiences centrally in their lives, and not as unmitigated disaster. Similarly, the heroic aspects of disillusioned works have been largely overlooked. Sassoon and Graves explicitly denied that their books were against war as an institution, their objections to *this* war notwithstanding.²¹

Much of the war experience for many combatants was boring and banal, and sometimes interesting and novel as they travelled the world for the first time. It is probably unfair to the writers of cheerful letters, prosaic diaries and heroic memoirs to dismiss their texts as wholly deluded or fabricated, or to see them solely as artefacts of a psychological process of denial. Selfless rescues, daring attacks, and stalwart defence are as much a part of the factual historical record as arbitrary carnage, shell shock and futile advances. Notwithstanding, valorous actions in fiction tend to be read not as authentic reflections of historical events, but rather as baseless blustering. In Great War texts, narration of heroic episodes has been regarded with more scepticism than the extremes of disillusion, though both have limitations and extravagances in aesthetic terms.

Winter describes the waste-and-pity style of writing as 'both untrue to the [factual] events of the war and a profoundly accurate account of the mentality of the trench soldiers'.²² The same could be said of Dyson's drawings, in which elements of both accuracy and creativity combine to form a unified representation, one that the artist chose deliberately as the best medium to convey his message. In fact, we can take this notion somewhat further. Winter's comment applies equally to heroic accounts, for 'the mentality of the trench soldiers' was not constant, simple or universal. For many, neither the sordid nor the courageous dominated their experiences. They had the middle parts of fortune, and operated in a confusing, ambiguous and testing world.

Appreciating complexity in the texts

Recent critical studies of Australian Great War literature are relatively sparse.²³ Most debates concentrate on the historical accuracy of accounts and the political motivations behind the over-inflation of the Anzac.²⁴ This is despite the fact that most texts navigate a continuum rather than aligning on either side of a division between disenchantment and heroic narration. It is not necessary to categorise them as belonging to one extreme or the other.²⁵

A brief comparison of Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-1928) and Mann's *Flesh in Armour* demonstrates overlapping ideologies, concepts and motifs from both disillusion and heroic narration. Both novels feature an unsoldierly protagonist who

struggles with the demeaning, absurd ugliness of war. These men have intellectual capabilities and educated tastes beyond the general run of infantrymen. Ford's Christopher Tietjens at least has recourse to the conversations of fellow officers; Mann's Frank Jeffreys acts as corporal to a set of largely uncongenial, irreverent privates. The fates of both are decided more by the actions of the women in their lives than by the war itself: Tietjens' wife Sylvia is a spiteful incarnation of everything rotten at the heart of the Empire; Jeffreys' fiancée Mary is weakly vulnerable to the vitality of the larrikin Charl Bentley. Tietjens survives, despite Sylvia's malice and his own breakdown, to be united with his beloved mistress Valentine. He rescues Lieutenant Aranjuez and then makes a heroic post-war stand for his own happiness. Jeffreys, on the other hand, has a crisis of courage in failing to support the doomed, heroic action which protected the rest of his troop. Disgusted by his own cowardly ineptness and convinced that Mary has been intimate with Charl, he commits suicide.

One could argue that *Flesh in Armour* is disillusioned and *Parade's End* is heroic. In fact both are neither, wholly. *Parade's End* was not considered a disenchantment text when first published, but *Flesh in Armour* has always suffered from its awkward deference to the heroic record of the AIF in its final pages. There Mann resorts to listing statistics of Australian achievements, as if to counter-balance the miserable experiences of Jeffreys. This inability to integrate the historical record of military success convincingly with the horror of the individual's experiences speaks to the impossibility of resolving the war's vastness and complexity by either disillusioned or heroic narration alone. It is useful shorthand to categorise Australian works as naïve and heroic as opposed to the sophisticated and disillusioned canonical Great War narratives, but the duality is more convenient than accurate. It elides the complexity of most texts.

One subtle but major difference between Australian Great War narratives and the canonical disillusionment texts is the divergent ways in which they treat the extensive losses of the Great War. The contrast is more complicated than a simple disenchantment-or-heroic treatment. On the one hand, in disenchantment the sacrifice is seen as futile, an idea most effectively conveyed in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, where the disfigured Hallet protests "Shotvarfet!": *it's not worth it*.²⁶ On the other hand, most Australian prose accounts acknowledge and even decry the cost, but posit that the gains justify the sacrifice. This subtle variation, at times lost beneath layers of bombastic self-praise in the Australian case, or bitter recriminations in the canonical, speaks directly to the irreducible complexity of the war experience.

A handful of examples demonstrate this important difference. In the canonical *Good-bye to All That*, Graves writes of his grief at Armistice:

In November came the Armistice. I heard at the same time of the deaths of Frank Jones-Bateman, who had gone back again just before the end, and Wilfred Owen ... Armistice-night hysteria did not touch our camp much, though some of the Canadians stationed there went down to Rhyll to celebrate in true overseas style. The news sent me out walking alone ... cursing and sobbing and thinking of the dead.

Graves 1971 (1929), 228

The Canadians are depicted as celebrating the war's end 'in true overseas style', that is, in a way fitting for colonial troops. The implication is that the more sophisticated English or European response spoke more of grief than of rejoicing at the war's end, and spoke of grief alone: 'Armistice-night hysteria did not touch our camp much', and in this version did not touch Graves at all (unlike his letters of the time). Similarly, in Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, George Winterbourne does not survive until Armistice, but the narrator conveys the bitter futility of the losses in the novel's very first paragraph:

The casualty lists went on appearing for a long time after the Armistice – last spasms of Europe's severed arteries. Of course, nobody much bothered to read the lists. Why should they? The living must protect themselves from the dead, especially the intrusive dead. But the twentieth century had lost its Spring with a vengeance. So a good deal of forgetting had to be done.

Aldington 1984 (1929), 11

There is little here of the notion of sacrifice for a just cause, or the sacred memory of the dead, let alone any idea that the war had achieved an end worth its cost. Aldington conveys bitterness, anger, and resentment in this passage, feelings aroused by unrewarded sacrifice. In contrast, Australian works recognise the cost, but achievement repays the outlay. In *Backs to the Wall*, G.D. Mitchell touches on the losses but also identifies the gains, emphasising the idea that the sorrows had brought benefits, that the sacrifice had its reward:

The cubs of the Empire, Australian and Canadian, had smashed the unbreakable line. British, American, and French troops had taken up the chase. We knew at last that victory must crown our arms. Our fallen had paved the way for this. Our world was safe ... And so, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month came the silence. London and Paris went mad, but to us, it all seemed unreal. There was a little cheering ... Wonderful times we had, but underlying all was an indefinable sadness ... Against the grey mists of distance showed well-remembered faces in an endless gallery. Those who marched beside us for a while and died that our people might live. They died but did not fail.

Mitchell 2007 (1937), 314-8

Aldington's 'intrusive dead' who will need 'a good deal of forgetting' here become 'well-remembered faces' who 'died but did not fail'. Clearly a different style of bitterness is in operation. For Aldington, the sacrifice of young lives is worthless, worse than worthless: it is shameful, fit only to be forgotten. For Mitchell, loss is bitter but sweetened with purpose and with sanctified memory. Of these three extracts, it is Mitchell who admits to conflicted emotions at war's victorious end: the 'wonderful times' include 'indefinable sadness'.

The responses of Mann in *Flesh in Armour* are even more complex. There is a tragic balance between the cost and the reward. "Shotvarfet" hovers close but not quite so close as *Thanatos*, the death instinct inherent in all life, the foe and partner of Freudian *Eros*: here, the idea is that blood sacrifice establishes the basis not only for life's continuance but also for civilised gains:

Perhaps they would be going home soon to mingle again with their own people in their own land. Some effect that return must have. They were a people. The war had shown that. The AIF – was it not the first sign that they were [a people], the first manifestation that a spirit had begun to work in the material mass? How long would it be before there was some other sign, some manifestations of a small creative ferment ... Only by science, letters, art, can a people become great ... It seemed, now [Johnny] was leaving the war and the old familiar landscape of death, that his life and the life of this generation was finished. They were the dung for the new flowering and fruit of the future.

Mann 2008 (1932), 347

The suffering and sacrifice, the blood and bone of the AIF, here promote the growth of the Australian nation; growth, Mann posits, as 'a small creative ferment' of 'science, letters, art', which is a decidedly more sophisticated view than the popular notion of national identity resting solely on military prowess. Thus, despite its recognition of loss, the rejection of futility is evident. The blood sacrifice is seen as foundational, an essential fertilisation fostering the establishment of civilisation. Australian writers, whether to assuage grief or to justify the efforts and actions of their soldiers (and to justify the choice of Australian society as a whole to embrace the war), chose to view the cost as 'worth it'.

These works show how the Australian story, in Melrose's words, 'proceeded through [classical] stages of test, ordeal and triumph', while disillusioned European versions circled ordeal endlessly, pointlessly, inescapably.²⁷ Australian authors dealt with the war's ugliness by closing it with a note of triumph, while disenchantment writers continued to protest its horrors.

Heroic narration and disenchantment: allies in representing war experience

Bracco's study of British ephemeral literature from between the wars identifies many works continuing to use traditional narratives, including pastoral and epic, to convey stories of the war. Fussell notes the classical, pastoral and mythic allusions that amplify David Jones' highly regarded *In Parenthesis* (1937), one of the most sustained elegiac works of the war.²⁸ These examples are not exceptions; rather, they demonstrate that there is a range among narratives rather than a barrier between them, as most Great War texts deal with conflicted notions of heroism and disillusionment. Ambiguity and confusion are profoundly valid responses to the chaos of war, war that exposes men to the full extent of both comradeship and despair. For example, the psychological dissonance between hatred of war and admiration of the soldier haunts many disenchantment texts: Sassoon and Graves provide excellent examples. Australian authors stretch this idea in the opposite direction from the disenchantment writers, allowing their extravagant admiration for the soldier to overshadow their disgust of war, rather than having their disillusion with war overwhelm the soldier's human achievements. This is a question of balance and selection, and a reflection upon the Australian writers' denial of disillusionment's futility as the sole 'truth', and rather than being evidence of inaccuracy or poor writing is a reflection of the denial by Australian writers that the sole truth about the war was that it was futile.

Neither disillusion nor heroic narration is inferior; nor (despite the protests of literary critics) is either more true, authentic, or historically accurate. In each case, the use of one or the other, or the balance of both within an individual work, must be judged according to its success or failure to achieve its own goals. Winter describes the value of ironic disillusion for expressing anger, despair, and grief.²⁹ Bracco explains that the manner in which modernist irony 'disassembl(es) meaning' suits the expression of a sense of futility.³⁰ However, for mediating grief or fashioning coherence, traditional forms continue to be relevant; Bracco contends that 'the consolation provided by the sense of continuity in experience is one of the refuges to which people seek most frequent psychological access'.³¹ As the war grew distant and the sharp edge of grief eased, disillusion prospered accordingly, meeting the need of a later era to express anger and rejection of modern war. Thus for specific literary and aesthetic purposes, both disillusion and heroic narration are equally appropriate.

Many Great War texts provide us with complex, arresting stories that encourage us to empathise with their characters while exposing the irrational destructiveness of war. The Great War novels of Boyd, Manning, Mann, McKinney and Davison, for example, all provide thoughtful responses which both engage and dismay us. In these works, we witness the war from the centre of the action, seeing the actuality of

the horror as well as the undeniable valour and humanity of many who were caught up in it; these features also exist in the canonical texts of Graves and Sassoon but have been largely ignored. Thus the middle ground of war writing has been overlooked in the critical enthusiasm for texts that predominantly express disillusionment, texts more consonant with a latter day ethos of global peace and harmony.

The middle ground: between disillusion and heroic narration

Klein commented that war writers are always vulnerable to the critics: if they are plain soldiers, clearly they are not good writers; if they are writers, they are just as clearly not representative of plain soldiers.³² Such writers are also vulnerable to the war attitude of their readers, so that adherents of either the disillusion or the heroic polarity read the same texts in different ways. The texts are also subject to the influence of contemporary philosophy at the time of reading.

Most Great War fiction claims authenticity; it is the emotional and intellectual impossibility of assimilating two extremes that generates debate.³³ We have difficulty reconciling the statements of veterans who remember the war as the worst experience they ever encountered, with the statements of those who claim it was the best time of their lives. We are not convinced that it could be both – or neither – for anyone. We doubt evidence that indicates most Anzacs spent more time on troopships, in camps, in hospital, in reserve, in training, and on leave than they did in the foremost trenches. We have more faith in the *Blackadder Goes Forth* impression of years spent unrelieved on the front line.³⁴ Notwithstanding these preconceptions on the reader's part, many texts, as we have seen, can in fact be read as encompassing both disillusioned *and* heroic elements, i.e. as middle ground texts. This reading, however, is rendered remarkable by its rarity.

To classify Australian and overseas literature of the Great War as either disillusioned or heroic is reductionist if we consider the continuities and complexities of many of the texts. Instead, each can be read for its contribution to the portrayal of war as a human experience. Accepting the complexity of the texts, that is, recognising the middle ground rather than assigning each to the disillusioned or heroic, will afford us a deeper understanding. By discarding works that do not accord with our current attitude to war, for example as too 'unrealistically' heroic or too 'obscenely' disillusioned, we deny ourselves the full range of responses, indulging in what Todman calls 'psychological anachronism', and patronising the texts from a pacifist or nationalist platform.³⁵ Of course, some texts will have greater literary merit than others, just as some will better match our contemporary attitude to war; that does not mean other works will not provide useful insights. The literature of the Great War

shows us a wide range of experiences and attitudes. Like the blind men describing an elephant by touch, we of later generations can be too focussed on only one aspect of the whole, and too harried by our fears of militarism to resist the temptation to recruit disillusioned war narratives for pacifist didactic purposes. Just as Dyson's dead-beat soldier was both a child *and* a soldier, a powerful armed man *and* an exhausted boy, the Great War was not *either* disillusioned or heroic; it was both, and more.

It is worth considering another drawing from Dyson's 'winter record'. In *Looking for the Battalion*, Dyson shows us two Australians returning to their unit.³⁶ His diary tells us they were moving 'over duckboards and shell holes with that grouching league-devouring indifference ... which is bred by a life two-thirds of ... which is moving from a place you don't want to be in, to a place you don't want to go to.'³⁷ The drawing, however, shows us a well-trodden road that is neither muddy nor dusty; though the trees alongside it are shattered, there are no discernible shell holes or duckboards. The two Anzacs in full kit, one with tin hat and the other wearing his distinctive slouch hat, are walking with their heads up, as if eager to speak to the men at a distance down the road ahead of them. They may be coming from somewhere they didn't want to be, and going somewhere they don't want to go, yet they impress us with their purposeful stride and evident readiness to catch up with their comrades. *Looking for the Battalion* conveys the complexity of wartime actions, emotions, and motivations, a complexity extant but too often overlooked in Australian accounts of the Great War.

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¹ The drawing, AWM ART02210, can be seen at the Australian War Memorial website: search for 'Dyson, Dead Beat' at <http://cas.awm.gov.au>. The description reads: "Depicts an exhausted Australian soldier wearing full kit and greatcoat, sleeping in a tunnel during the Third Battle of Ypres. Indistinct figures of two other soldiers seen in the background. Dyson, appointed the first Australian official war artist in 1917, had no illusions about war. He declared: 'I never drew a single line except to show war as the filthy business that it was'. In this drawing his empathy with the weary soldier is keenly communicated. Will Dyson was the first Australian artist to visit the front during the First World War, travelling to France in December 1916, remaining there until May 1917, making records of the Australian involvement in the war. He was appointed an Official War Artist, attached to the AIF, in May 1917, working in France and London throughout the war. His commission was terminated in March 1920."

² W.H. Dyson, *Australia at war: a winter record / made by Will Dyson on the Somme and at Ypres during the campaigns of 1916 and 1917*; with an introduction by G.K. Chesterton (London: Cecil Palmer & Hayward, 1918), n.p.

³ 'The truth is that war has many moods', including 'exaltation' and 'cheerfulness' as well as 'misery' and 'depression', Dyson, n.p.

⁴ Kenneth Pickthorn, "History," *London Mercury* X, no. 59 (1924): 558.

⁵ Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) is another excellent example of a complex text that is too often either simplistically critiqued as disillusioned, or wholly overlooked. Manning's status as an Australian author is moot.

⁶ See for example Martin Stephen, *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), xi; Ian W.F. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914-1918*, H.M. Scott and B.W. Collins, eds, *Modern Wars in Perspective* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 3; Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*, *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare*, Jay Winter, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10. These works explain how disillusionment came to dominance; there is no intention to question its authenticity as a response to war.

⁷ For example, Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), xi-xiv explains the popular perceptions.

⁸ Todman, xii.

⁹ For example, Helen Dunmore, *Zennor in Darkness* (London: Viking, 1993); Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Hutchinson, 1993); Pat Barker, *The Regeneration Trilogy* (London: Viking, 1996); Robert Edric, *In Desolate Heaven* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1997); Michael Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful* (London: Collins, 2003); William Brodrick, *A Whispered Name* (London: Little, Brown, 2008).

¹⁰ See for example John Laird, *Other Banners: An Anthology of Australian Literature of the First World War* (Netley, SA: The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1971). Laird's anthology overviews a wide selection of Australian war writing, but finds only two works 'that are able to match the overseas classics, in terms of moral intensity and awareness, creativity and richness of life, and technical mastery' (5): Manning's novel *Her Privates We* (later published as *The Middle Parts of Fortune*) and Boyd's autobiography *A Single Flame*, both of which deal with expatriates serving in the British army, rather than diggers in the AIF.

¹¹ Holger Klein, ed., *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1976), 5.

¹² See for example Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994). The radical feminist perspective emphasises the way traditional stories such as the Anzac legend privilege the violence inherent in (and indivisible from) male power. Later feminist analyses, for example Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale: John Pearman, 1819-1908*, *History Workshop*, Raphael Samuel, ed. (London: Routledge, 1988) are less certain about the soldier's power. Steedman, influenced by post-structuralism, rejects realist-literalist interpretations of war texts, preferring to focus on the symbolic meanings of tropes such as journey, alienation, conflict and endeavour.

¹³ Simone Weil, "The Iliad or the Poem of Force," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, Sian Miles, ed. (London: Virago, 1986), 184, original emphasis.

¹⁴ Weil, 192.

¹⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

¹⁶ Michael Howard, "Military Experience in Literature," in *Essays by Divers Hands, Being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, Brian Fothergill, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1980), 31.

¹⁷ Todman, xiv.

¹⁸ Klein, 4.

¹⁹ See writers such as Andrew Rutherford, *The Literature of War: Five Studies in Heroic Virtue* (London: MacMillan, 1978); Adrian Caesar, "Review: Robin Gerster, Big-Noting," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 14 (1989); and Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939*, Jay Winter, ed., *The Legacy of the Great War* (Providence: Berg, 1993), who reassert the factual history of heroism, despite its demise in fiction. Aesthetic, moral and historical objections to the fictional representation of heroism rest, according to Rutherford (1), on 'the unexamined ethical assumptions' of readers whose rationalist beliefs make them doubt that there is any value, ideal, or person worth dying for.

²⁰ Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer: the Fate of Adventure in the Western World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

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- ²¹ Samuel Hynes, "Personal Narratives and Commemoration," in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Jay Winter, ed., Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 219.
- ²² Jay Winter, *The Experience of World War One* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 227.
- ²³ The most complete analysis of Australian war fiction is provided by Robin Gerster, *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (1988; repr., Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1992), citations refer to the 1992 edition. *Big-noting* interrogates the parochialism and exaggeration of much Australian war writing. Later analyses have also criticised the assertive dominance of the Anzac. See Donna Coates' work for a feminist reading, for example 'The Digger on the Lofty Pedestal: Australian women's fictions of the Great War', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 10 (1993): 1-22.
- ²⁴ See for example Laurie Hergenhan, "War in Post-1960s Fiction: Johnston, Stow, Malouf, McDonald and Les Murray," *Australian Literary Studies* 12.2 (1985): 248-260; Gerster; Jan Bassett, ed., *As We Wave You Goodbye: Australian Women and War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998); Don Watson, "Digging: A Moral Equivalent to Anzac Day," *The Monthly* (May 2008), 44-50.
- ²⁵ That said, some texts do occupy positions at extreme ends of the scale. As well as the novels mentioned in note 9, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) and Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977) are towards the disillusion end; for heroic novels, Mary Grant Bruce's *Captain Jim* (1916) and Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* (1922) are good examples.
- ²⁶ Barker, 584, 588.
- ²⁷ Craig Melrose, 'Triumphalism and sacrificialism: tradition in the public memory of the First World War in Australia, 1919-1939', *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 Conference Proceedings*, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2007), 239.
- ²⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), citations are to the 2000 edition, 144-54.
- ²⁹ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 5.
- ³⁰ Bracco, 7.
- ³¹ Bracco, 6.
- ³² Klein, 5-6.
- ³³ Dickens' beginning of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859, 1) could be describing the Great War: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way'.
- ³⁴ David Kent, *From Trench to Troopship: The Experience of the Australian Imperial Force, 1914-1919* (Alexandria, NSW: Hale & Iremonger, 1999), 7.
- ³⁵ Todman, xiv.
- ³⁶ *Looking for the Battalion*: The drawing, AWM ART02239, can be seen at the Australian War Memorial website: search for 'Dyson, Looking for the Battalion' at <http://cas.awm.gov.au>. The description reads: "Depicts two soldiers with full kit walking along a road, within a war damaged landscape, somewhere along the Western Front, France."
- ³⁷ Dyson, n.p.