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**PAST PERSPECTIVES:
POSTERS, MODERNISM AND POPULAR CULTURE
IN ENGLAND AND CANADA
DURING THE GREAT WAR**

by

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ABSTRACT

Great War posters constitute an enormous cache of primary documentation that has been largely unresearched. Their significance in portraying the cultural impact of the war has perhaps been consequently overlooked. This thesis is primarily an analysis of the content, imagery and evolution of a broad selection of Great War posters from England and Canada. Of particular concern are those characteristics that are integral to the understanding of a new cultural mode here defined as Modernism. By tracing the expression of these characteristics and the frequency of their recurrences within the poster record, the thesis develops a general assessment of the conflict between elements of traditional and Modernist popular culture.

The protracted and unprecedented conflict of the Great War led to manifest societal change. Many of the dominant and widely-held popular conceptions of soldiering, warfare, gender roles, religion, patriotism and violence were irrevocably altered. Various poster artists and graphic designers incorporated their changed views of these issues in their depictions. The later works of the artists and designers constituted visual broadsides which indicated the ascendancy of Modernism over traditional, Edwardian representations. Through the examination of Great War posters, this thesis delineates some of the forces, processes and examples of a fundamental shift in twentieth-century attitudes.

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I

MODERNISM
AND THE
POSTER LEGACY
OF THE
GREAT WAR

"Remember: the past won't fit into memory
without something left over; it must have a
future."

Joseph Brodsky

"Posters...are to be seen on every hoarding, in most shop windows, in omnibuses, tramcars and commercial vans. The great base of Nelson's Pillar is covered with them. Their number and variety are remarkable. Everywhere Lord Kitchener sternly points a monstrously big finger, exclaiming 'I Want You'."¹

This quotation, penned in early 1915 by *London Times* journalist Michael MacDonogh, illustrates effectively the pervasive presence of civilian propaganda posters in war-time England. Throughout the First World War, the poster functioned as a primary means of mass communication, imparting all manner of messages to the civilian public within the warring nations, including England. Contextually, these 'war posters' arose from the novel necessity of extensive home front participation, a factor peculiar to the Great War and later conflicts. Indeed, unlike previous wars, the First World War grew quickly into an encompassing force, drawing virtually all aspects of society into its greater orbit. In just four years, the War precipitated economic, political and social change on a global scale. Particularly, it impacted powerfully upon the lives of home front civilians, often effecting tumultuous societal change. For example, the War necessitated the installation of new

¹ Michael MacDonogh, In London During the Great War (London, 3 January 1915), p. 51., as quoted in Cate Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning (London, 1977), p. 55.

technologies and new distribution methods pioneered during the nineteenth century, allowing national economies to reorganize extensively for the rapid mobilization of people and materials. In many cases, the entire industrial complex of the participating nation was reoriented toward fuelling the War effort. Such fundamental change was characteristic of War-time mass production.

A concomitant effect of this total mobilization through mass production was the emergence of what World War I historian Maurice Rickards has called the "multiple message." The art of printing, the "archetype of mass production," and the perfection of colour lithography, led to the dissemination of vast quantities of poster imagery concerning the War.² All types and sizes of posters urged the average citizen to enlist, buy war bonds, conserve food and fuel, re-cycle and 'do their bit.' Between 1914 and 1918, War posters, as the *Times* quotation indicates, were a ubiquitous presence in British Imperial society. Ultimately, these efforts to advertise and publicize various aspects of the Great War left behind an enormous legacy of War-time poster imagery, most of it largely unresearched.

In particular, both the Canadian War Museum and National Archives of Canada, and the Imperial War Museum in England, house impressive collections of First World War posters numbering in the thousands. Of specific interest are their predictably large English and Canadian holdings. It should be noted that the decision to

² Maurice Rickards, The First World War: Ephemera, Mementoes and Documents[sic] (London, 1975), p. 7.

limit the scope of study to posters from England and Canada was not a random one. Aside from a common language and a linked Imperial history, England and Canada shared in a number of similar experiences during the Great War. Of singular importance to the content of the poster record was both nations' reliance on a volunteer army during the War's early years, a fact which led both countries to make extensive use of a broad variety of enlistment posters. In contrast, within the other European nations, which had always possessed large conscript armies, enlistment posters were almost entirely absent. However, besides similarities, a number of compelling differences between English and Canadian war posters may be perceived. Specifically, unlike England, Canadian posters had to address francophones, as well as anglophones, a factor which led to the printing of many distinctly French-Canadian war posters. By comparing and contrasting Great War posters from both nations, a great deal may be learned about war-time popular culture within the British Empire as a whole.

In any event, First World War posters clearly represent an enormous cache of primary documentation, objects which may be considered constituent elements of early twentieth century culture and society. Yet despite the rich abundance of Great War posters presently in existence, most historians have largely shied away from the topic. Indeed, with rare exceptions, posters of all kinds have received little in the way of significant scholarly analysis. Researchers will routinely acknowledge posters' importance as "historical documents that help us understand" the "times" in which they were printed, but those same historians then fail to conduct

any sort of methodological investigation into the posters they hope to comment upon.³ As Joseph Darracott, writing for an Imperial War Museum catalogue, has noted, "there is no thorough modern study of First World War posters."⁴ There are a number of possible reasons behind this gap in the literature. First, neither mundane artifacts nor works of 'high' art, posters defy classification, making cogent analysis of their content problematic. In addition, the Great War poster record is far from homogeneous. Theme, subject, tone, style and a host of other qualities often shift from poster to poster. These factors perhaps explain why historians have been reluctant to study the subject seriously and exclusively.

Nonetheless, despite its somewhat ephemeral nature, the recent literature on posters is quite extensive, ranging from visually impressive coffee-table books to somewhat less impressive 'concise histories.' Standing apart from these are the more scholarly propaganda studies, thorough research works, some of which deal with posters of war and revolution. Generally speaking, however, sources which address First World War posters fall into four broad categories. The first consists of general, often glossy surveys detailing the evolution of the poster throughout history. Within the second grouping may be found annotated catalogues which accompanied museum and gallery exhibitions containing Great War

³ Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis and Paul Paret, Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives (Princeton, 1992), p. ix.

⁴ Joseph Darracott and Belinda Loftus, First World War Posters (London, 1972), p. 11.

posters. Sources examining posters and popular art inspired specifically by the First World War comprise the third category. Within the final grouping are all the various propaganda studies which touch upon posters and their role in the War. Taken together, these works constitute a rather significant collection of literature. However, within this somewhat diverse array of written material, a clear gap may be perceived. For while many of these sources constitute valuable attempts to trace and aesthetically evaluate the poster record, few attempt any sort of cogent analysis of the posters' content, and most neglect to do so entirely.

While general interest books on posters appeared regularly during the first half of the twentieth century⁵, poster surveys enjoyed a marked renaissance during the 1960s and 1970s. These years witnessed the printing of a wide variety of English language literature on the poster, much of it replete with full-colour reproductions. The reason behind this rise in published work on posters may be largely attributed to the international 'Pop Art' explosion of the same period. At its height, the trend saw colourful figures such as Andy Warhol elevate mass media culture to a new, loftier status. Repeated images of Marilyn Monroe and Campbell's Soup cans became centrepieces of exhibitions in respected galleries.⁶ As a consequence, the poster was recognized by many as

⁵ While some of these sources were collections of reproduced posters, most were discussions on the effective layout and design of mass media advertising posters. See Austin Cooper, Making a Poster (London, 1938), W.G. Graffe, Poster Design (London, 1929) and William S. Rogers, A Book of the Poster (London, 1901).

⁶ Bruce Cole and Adelheid Gealt, Art of the Western World (New York, 1969), pp. 312-314.

an "art form" rather than as a mere advertising medium.⁷ Thus, with certain expressions of popular culture being respected as artwork, English language poster surveys appeared with increased frequency.

One of the earliest works inspired by the Pop Art craze was Ervine Metztl's 1963 coffee-table edition, *The Poster: Its History and Its Art*. Concerned less with history and more with art and aesthetics, Metztl's book is a somewhat random international exploration of posters through the ages. Indeed, the sparse text is entirely overshadowed by the many beautiful black and white, and colour reproductions which fill the pages. This emphasis on reproductions is understandable, however, since Metztl was himself a successful poster artist who worked during the 1920s for groups such as the Chicago Opera Association. Thus, despite Metztl's intent to provide a history, what writing does appear is devoted to a chronological narrative evaluating posters based upon the author's assessment of their artistic merit, with little offered in the way of historical analysis. In the single chapter concerning posters and the Great War, Metztl dwells upon his perception of War posters as aesthetically barren artifacts, which were usually "flamboyant," and often "pretentious."⁸ In fact, Metztl dismisses virtually all First World War posters, condemning them as "rigidly literal," and "as ephemeral as the average daily cartoon on the editorial page of a newspaper."⁹ Clearly, the author's preoccupation with a purely

⁷ Ervine Metztl, *The Poster: Its History and Its Art* (New York, 1963), p. 11.

⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

aesthetic evaluation of the posters stems from his particular artistic perspective. Yet while lacking in historical inquiry, Metzl's exploration nonetheless sheds light upon Great War posters simply by collecting and reproducing their images -- the examination of which constitutes a necessary point of departure for any serious study of the subject.

By the 1970s, Pop Art was an established artistic genre, made famous by figures such as Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenbourg. As interest in the artistic merit of popular culture grew, more poster surveys appeared. Two of these are *A Concise History of Posters* by John Barnicoat and *100 Years of Posters* by Bevis Hillier, both published in 1972. While similarly brief in their written appraisals of the subject, each work is laid out quite differently. As the title implies, Barnicoat's book is of modest size, physically small, and numbering only 257 pages including plates. In contrast, Hillier has bound a wide variety of near full-sized poster reproductions, and prefaced the entire collection with a short essay. Both works are whirlwind studies of the poster's evolution, and thus both offer only brief commentaries on examples from the First World War. In Barnicoat's book, the author makes several interesting observations concerning the War, propaganda, and advertising. In a chapter entitled *Politics, Revolution and War*, Barnicoat spends a few paragraphs criticizing Great War posters as anachronistic. According to the author, First World War posters continued to exercise techniques of "commercial persuasion" throughout the War years, despite the gravity of the situation. Such posters, says Barnicoat, were merely "an 'artistic' form of

advertisement," and as such, were entirely inappropriate.¹⁰ In contrast, Hillier's discussion focuses on the aesthetics of Great War posters. Ironically, Hillier, an Englishman, applauds German posters for their superb, "almost elegant" designs, while condemning the pedestrian imagery of British posters as "primitive" and "bludgeoning."¹¹ While equally interesting comments appear in both books, their brevity, their lack of corroborative annotation and the absence of analysis indicate that a more scholarly and trenchant approach to examining posters might prove insightful -- and so historically valuable.

Yet it would be incorrect to assume all surveys devote similarly limited space to the examination of First World War posters. In *The Canadian Poster Book*, published in 1982, author Robert Stacey makes a valiant attempt to trace the 100 year evolution of the Canadian poster in a more polished manner. While still emphasizing the included colour reproductions, this book nevertheless approaches its subject in a more scholarly fashion. For posters are historical fragments, details of past popular culture, and should receive the same serious inquiry routinely directed toward other artifacts. Apparently acknowledging this omission, Stacey's analysis strives for historical accuracy, repeatedly referring to a number of collateral primary sources, including War-time journal articles.¹²

¹⁰ John Barnicoat, *A Concise History of Posters* (New York, 1972), pp. 222-223.

¹¹ Bevis Hillier, *100 Years of Posters* (London, 1972), pp. viii-ix.

¹² In the section on Great War posters, Stacey uses a 1919 journal article published by The Poster Advertising Association to support his claim that

Within the chapter entitled *Military Posters*, Stacey recounts the difficult maturation of the Canadian poster press during the Great War. In addition, he compares and contrasts the poster records of the First and Second World Wars, effectively illustrating the lack of "coordinated" planning undertaken by the Canadian printing industry during both conflicts. However, while making a number of compelling points, Stacey's book, like other poster surveys, proceeds without attempting any sort of methodological analysis of its subject. Thus, no effort is made to examine the content of Great War posters, save for a somewhat vague and unsubstantiated claim that Canadian posters "provide a more accurate indication of public feeling" than do writings from the same period.¹³ Perhaps, further analysis of that content might reveal hitherto undiscovered patterns, and so further illumine the landscape of war-time popular culture.¹⁴

Canadian posters stirred the public to action during the War. Robert Stacey, *The Canadian Poster Book: 100 Years of the Poster in Canada* (Toronto, 1982), p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, general poster surveys continued to be published. Predictably, most are impressive, glossy picture books, overflowing with gorgeous colour reproductions, and supplemented by sparse passages of authorial commentary. In Italian author Robert Philippe's 1982 book *Political Graphics*, posters and printing are examined for their political persuasiveness. Within the very brief section dealing with Great War posters, Philippe marvels at the "striking unanimity" of First World War poster designs, prompting the author to proclaim the conflict a "civil war" between essentially joined nations. For French author Alain Weill, whose book *The Poster: A Worldwide Survey and History* was published in 1985, posters were simply a tool used by belligerent nations to acquire men and money needed to fuel the "infernal machine" of war. The remainder of Weill's text on the Great War is a simple, though valuable, chronological narrative describing a seemingly random selection of posters from various countries. In contrast to Philippe and Weill, co-authors Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis and Paul Paret devote considerable space to World War I posters in their recent book *Persuasive Images*. Published in 1992, the work is an exploration of the posters produced by nations involved in wars and revolutions during the twentieth century. Yet despite its rather

enterprising mandate to examine posters as links "in a thematic and interpretive chain," *Persuasive Images* is undeniably another visually arresting coffee-table book, dominated by colour plates and interspersed with the odd kernel of intriguing commentary. Though important to historians of the subject for their reproductions and observations, such collections clearly never intended to methodologically analyze posters and their imagery. See Robert Philippe, *Political Graphics: Art as a Weapon* (New York, 1982), p. 198; Alain Weil, *The Poster: A Worldwide Survey and History* (Boston, 1985), p. 130; and Peter Faret, *Both Levin Lewis and Paul Faret, Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton, 1992), p. xv.

In any case, posters have certainly received little in the way of scholarly historical analysis within broad poster surveys. Generally, a similar statement may be made regarding published catalogues which accompanied exhibitions of First World War posters. These exhibitions, orchestrated by galleries and museums partly in response to the expanding public interest in Pop Art and partly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War, multiplied after 1968. Typically, the institution housing the exhibition would sponsor the publication of a short catalogue describing and commenting upon the major pieces in the showing. Yet despite their brevity, these catalogues are often invaluable sources of information, frequently containing details not published elsewhere. In addition, such catalogues would sometimes be written by respected historians retained by the institution specifically for the task. However, authorship aside, most catalogues are, by definition, exceptionally brief in length. Thus, they rarely analyze the content of the posters in any depth, and almost never offer an inclusive, cohesive argument.

A representative example of this particular sort of catalogue was published in 1969 by the National Gallery of Canada. Entitled *Posters from Three Wars* and printed as an accompaniment to a 1969-

1970 exhibition of the same name, the booklet was written by Rosemarie Tovell and Karl Schutt, two museum trainees. Only seven pages in length, the catalogue is devoted largely to small, single paragraph descriptions of the 33 posters showcased. Two pages, however, contain a short essay penned by Schutt which traces the birth of the "modern poster" and its use in the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. In the few paragraphs examining Great War posters, Schutt dwells upon the "very personal" and "artistic" design techniques of the various lithographers, complimenting their abilities. Techniques, writes Schutt, which generated "results that were seldom surpassed in the war posters to follow."¹⁵ Yet, while eloquent and informative, the author's words, unsupported by either corroborative annotation or a guiding methodology, stand essentially as commentary. Necessarily brief, such catalogues are clearly ill-suited to examine poster imagery in any manner save a cursory one.

In marked contrast to the National Gallery of Canada example, *WWI Propaganda Posters*, a catalogue produced by North Carolina's William Hayes Ackland Memorial Art Center, is a volume of some depth. Also published in 1969, the catalogue accompanied an international exhibition of Great War posters selected from the Bowman Gray Collection, normally housed at the University of North Carolina. Close to fifty pages in length, it is divided into two sections, the latter comprised of customary black and white

¹⁵ Karl Schutt, "Introduction," from Rosemarie Tovell and Karl Schutt, Posters from Three Wars (Ottawa, 1969), p. 2.

reproductions of the showcased posters, and the former contained two lengthy essays by the catalogue organizers, Phillip Fehl and Patricia Fenix. The first essay, penned by Fehl, imparts a fascinating description of the manner in which national governments co-opted the already existing commercial printing industry for propaganda purposes. Typically, says Fehl, "administrative lethargy," coupled with printers' experience at persuading and encouraging "vast masses of people," saw the formulation and production of almost all First World War posters fall to "run-of-the-mill" commercial advertisers.¹⁶ Similarly, in the second essay, author Fenix examines several specific commercial lithographers and their work during the conflict, paying particular attention to the English artists. Certainly then, while somewhat thin in analysis, catalogues often house rich deposits of historical data.

For example, the Imperial War Museum's rather lengthy catalogue entitled *First World War Posters* contains a great deal of compelling information. Essentially a small book, the 72 page catalogue was written by historian Joseph Darracott and published in 1972. While still lacking any sort of cohesive content analysis, a full page is devoted to the synopsis of each poster exhibited. In addition, Darracott prefaces the work with a comprehensive essay detailing the manner in which posters were exploited during the Great War, with significant attention paid to the English experience. Of particular interest is the author's vivid

¹⁶ Phillip Fehl, "Propaganda and the Integrity of Art," in Phillip Fehl and Patricia Fenix, WWI Propaganda Posters (Chapel Hill, 1969), pp. 7-8.

description of the "casual way" in which recruiting posters were commissioned in Great Britain. According to Darracott, poster design ideas, usually concocted by the printers themselves, were routinely approved by the government's Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in an altogether "haphazard" and vague petitioning process. Thus, quite often, says Darracott, famous poster images originated from the dinner-time conversation of "simple working-class" families.¹⁷

However, while a collection of such anecdotes is interesting, a more promising approach to the study of Great War posters would involve cogent historical analysis. For like the preceding literature, Darracott's catalogue does not conduct any sort of comprehensive examination of the posters and their contents. The absence of this kind of investigation represents a gap in the historical study of Great War culture. Simply put, posters deserve deeper study. Possibly, such an avenue of inquiry might ultimately 'rescue' these posters from the rather prejudicial category of simple state propaganda. That aside, later catalogues, including those published very recently, exhibit characteristics similar to the Darracott example. Yet it should be noted that most catalogues, including Darracott's impressive 1972 edition, are also of primary use for their often extensive bibliographies which routinely contain entries on obscure works.¹⁸

¹⁷ Joseph Darracott and Belinda Loftus, First World War Posters (London, 1972), pp. 6-7.

¹⁸ See Joseph Darracott, The First World War in Posters (New York, 1974)., Paula Harper, War, Revolution and Peace Propaganda Posters (Washington, 1975)., and Hugh A. Halliday, "Posters and the Canadian War Museum," in Canadian Military

In any event, public interest in the work of war artists, and hence certain Great War posters, led to a wide variety of gallery showings in the years immediately following the War. This interest in war art led to the concomitant publication of a very few books on the subject of war posters. One, entitled *War Posters Issued by Belligerent and Neutral Nations 1914-1919*, attempts to evaluate the various national poster campaigns aesthetically by making "accessible to the public in a convenient form reproductions of a small selection distinguished for their artistic merit."¹⁹ Written and compiled by English authors Martin Hardie and Arthur K. Sabin and published in 1920, the book is dominated by several dozen pages of black and white reproductions. However, the book is also introduced by several short prose chapters, each focusing on the poster record of a different nation. Predictably, the writings dwell upon the posters produced by the Entente powers, with particular attention paid to the "crude" and "vulgar" images turned out by British printing houses.²⁰ Nevertheless, despite its rather overt bias, the book is invaluable to historians for its reproductions and snippets of information.

While the ensuing decades spawned little written material specifically concerning war posters, the years surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the armistice saw the publication of a

History (Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994). While the last is not really a catalogue, it exhibits many of the same characteristics.

¹⁹ Martin Hardie and Arthur K. Sabin, War Posters Issued by Belligerent and Neutral Nations 1914-1919 (London, 1920), p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

number of books dealing with posters and other Great War ephemera. Interestingly, Maurice Rickards' *Posters of the First World War*, published in 1968, retains many of the features which characterize exhibition catalogues. Composed in large part of black and white reproductions, the book is introduced by a thoughtful essay describing the evolution of the English poster during the War years. According to Rickards, as the early patriotic works gave way to pathetic appeals to shame, Great War posters developed a dichotomous nature. At one end were the inferior printing department creations, while at the other were artworks by respected lithographers such as Gerald Spenser Pryse, a figure whom Rickards lauds as "a man of deep social conscience."²¹ Compellingly, Rickards is apparently the acknowledged authority on First World War posters, being routinely quoted by later historians examining the subject.²² This comes despite the brevity of his work and its lack of any corroborative annotation. These facts aside, the author's essay, though lacking somewhat in focus, contains a great deal of historically relevant information on the Great War poster record. Certainly, any scholarly study of poster content would draw heavily upon this and other works by Rickards.

During the 1970s, growing public interest in popular culture led to the publication of a number of books on the subject. Two of

²¹ Maurice Rickards, *Posters of the First World War* (New York, 1968), pp. 12-13.

²² See Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 56., and Michele J. Shover, "Roles and Images of Women in World War I Propaganda," in *Politics and Society* (Vol. 5, No. 4, 1975), p. 472.

these, *Popular Arts of the First World War* by Barbara Jones and Bill Howell, and *The First World War: Ephemera, Mementoes and Documents* [sic] by Maurice Rickards and Michael Moody, document the 1914-1918 period. Divided into thematic chapters, the 1972 work by Jones and Howell explores the massive store of cultural artifacts inspired by the Great War, including posters, postcards, pennants, china, toys and a staggering array of miscellaneous items. Within this broad study posters get but a cursory examination, and English posters in particular receive only passing mention as aesthetically barren examples of popular art.²³ Similarly, the book by Rickards and Moody, published in 1975, looks at a wide assortment of material, in this case focusing on printed items such as newspapers, magazines and posters as well. Once again, black and white reproductions are prefaced by a short essay, authored by Rickards, which introduces the collection and comments on the War and its relationship to printed ephemera. Within the essay, Rickards offers cultural and social commentary on the War years, asserting that between 1914 and 1918, Europeans' nineteenth century sensibilities were overwhelmed by the twentieth century realities of modern warfare.²⁴ However, limited to thirty pages, Rickards' text does not present a clear argument, nor does it examine the content of the printed material. Yet the author's intriguing ideas could perhaps benefit a more

²³ Barbara Jones and Bill Howell, *Popular Arts of the First World War* (New York, 1972), p. 12 and pg. 119.

²⁴ Maurice Rickards, "Introduction," in Maurice Rickards and Michael Moody, *The First World War: Ephemera, Mementoes and Documents* (London, 1975), pp. 24-25.

extensive and cogent historical analysis of the primary documents' content, specifically that of posters.

One author, political scientist Michele J. Shover, attempts just such a content analysis in her article entitled *Roles and Images of Women in World War I Propaganda*. Published in a 1975 issue of *Politics and Society*, Shover's piece is a brief socio-political analysis of the portrayal of women within the various national Great War propaganda campaigns. Focusing primarily on posters, Shover presents a general overview of the various published Great War propaganda images associated with the female form, paying particular attention to the innately "passive" portrayal of women.²⁵ Specifically, she identifies four major groupings into which all First World War poster imagery concerning women may be placed. The first, images of national service, include all portrayals of women as nurses, workers and aids to male recruitment. The second category, women as symbolic figures, contain all depictions of women as physical embodiments of sentiment, such as the 'Spirit of War' or the 'Symbol of Patriotism.' Within the third grouping, Shover places images of 'The Girl,' the sexy and saucy pin-up depictions of women culled from commercial advertising. Finally are the various portrayals of women as victims, used mostly to encourage men to enlist. Yet despite acknowledging the existence of certain liberating poster depictions of women, Shover nevertheless concludes her article by asserting that Great War posters served as instruments designed to encourage women's traditional and stifling

²⁵ Shover, "Roles and Images of Women," in *Politics and Society*, p. 469.

"social roles."²⁶ Clearly, while intriguing, Shover's somewhat limited socio-political analysis could be altered and expanded contextually so as to render it more historically compelling. Specifically, the poster record needs to be analyzed in the manner accorded other historically relevant artifacts -- thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Undeniably however, even limited content analyses such as Shover's are the exception within the historiography concerning war posters.²⁷ Indeed, turning finally to the work of propaganda researchers, their pages are discovered to contain very little on the subject at hand. For while propaganda studies tend to be more scholarly historical exercises, they rarely devote appreciable space to the examination of posters. In particular, initial early-twentieth century works on propaganda rarely even mention posters. Most offer lengthy discussions of imponderables or give abstruse analyses of hypothetical situations, with little included in the way

²⁶ Ibid., p. 485-486.

²⁷ Recent Canadian literature on the subject exhibits characteristics similar to the vast majority of previously written material. Canadian War Posters: 1914-1918, 1939-1945, written by Marc Choko and published in 1994, is a glossy exploration of Canadian poster art from the two World Wars, complete with numerous full-colour reproductions. Predictably, with the pages dominated by colour plates, little space is devoted to a written analysis of the posters. Choko's brief comments on Great War posters focus on their apparent lack of success in recruiting francophones to the cause. As well, Choko claims that as the War dragged on, Canadian posters reflected the general malaise that gripped the population, portraying images which were taboo at the War's outset. For example, says Choko, pictures of the trenches filled with wounded and dying soldiers would never have reached the public in 1914, but by 1917 such imagery was commonplace. While compelling, such analytical passages are quite rare in Choko's volume. Like much of the prior scholarship, Canadian War Posters is essentially another impressive coffee-table book, concerned preeminently with simply showcasing an exceptional array of war-time poster imagery. See Marc H. Choko, Canadian War Posters: 1914-1918, 1939-1945 (Laval, 1994), p.37 and p.23.

of concrete example.²⁸ By the 1970s, the relaxation of strict legislation governing access to War-time documentation led to the publication of a variety of propaganda investigations. Some of the first closely resembled their predecessors, possessing limited analytical content. For example, Charles Roetter, in his 1974 book *The Art of Psychological Warfare, 1914-1945*, presents an ostensibly personal assessment of what constitutes effective propaganda technique and then proceeds to evaluate, in broad terms, the various propaganda programs utilized during both World Wars.²⁹ Posters are referred to only rarely.

In contrast, Cate Haste refers extensively to posters in her impressive propaganda study entitled *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. Published in 1977, Haste's book describes the manner in which the various arms of propaganda were professionalized and placed under state control within most nations during the War years. "Official government propaganda," writes Haste, "was established to counter the propaganda of 'subversive' groups, to refurbish the images tarnished by war, and to reinvigorate popular support for the war."³⁰ Haste's thesis, however, unfortunately limits the extent to which she can explore posters. They are examined only as part of the author's evaluation of overall national propaganda strategies which involved a multiplicity of expressions, including music,

²⁸ See Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York, 1938), and Frederick Elmore Lumley, *The Propaganda Menace* (New York, 1933).

²⁹ See Charles Roetter, *The Art of Psychological Warfare, 1914-1945* (New York, 1974).

³⁰ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 4.

cartoons, and all various forms of writing. Indeed, the authors of most recent propaganda studies, including Haste, use only particular posters to support their assertions, and thus cannot possibly conduct any real analysis of Great War poster content.³¹ Clearly, such an analysis might shed further light upon the cultural complexion of nations and so prove historically relevant.

Yet while it may be true that the contents of individual Great War posters "rarely provide complete and unambiguous testimony" of the societies from whence they came,³² an examination of a great many posters could reveal telling patterns regarding cultural trends. Indeed, posters might shed additional light upon popular cultural perceptions held during the 1914-1918 period. These posters might thus function as a kind of cultural barometer, the character and content of their images indicative of larger cultural trends and divisions. In particular, Great War posters could be employed to gauge the shape and nature of the clearly observable bifurcation contained within the cultural expressions produced by Canada and England during the conflict. Specifically, by placing these posters within the context of a broader cultural canvas, they can facilitate an understanding of the shifting popular cultural climate resulting from clashes between traditional Edwardian values and perceptions, and Modernist ones. Ultimately, Modernist cultural

³¹ See also Roland H. Stromberg, Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914 (Kansas, 1982)., Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring (Toronto, 1989)., and Gary S. Messinger, British Propaganda and the State in the First World War (Manchester, 1992).

³² Paret, Lewis and Paret, Persuasive Images, p. ix.

expression emerged triumphant from the crucible of War, displacing the traditional,³³ a fact clearly demonstrated in the poster record.

Modernism, a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century movement and mood, saw a drastic shift in most aspects of cultural expression across the planet. Yet despite its rather obvious cultural manifestations, as a movement, Modernism is singularly resistant to definition. As critic and historian Michael Levenson has written, Modernism "is at once vague and unavoidable. Anything more precise would exclude too much too soon; anything more general would be folly."³⁴ At its most basic, however, Modernism can be considered a pervasive mood of rebellion which shaped the creative impetus for all manner of artists, prompting them to cast off what they perceived were the outmoded cultural and aesthetic conventions of the previous centuries. Indeed, during the first decades of the twentieth century, most established cultural traditions came under attack by Modernists. Accepting one's social position, unswerving loyalty, patriotism, the sporting nature of conflict, doing one's duty, and even Christianity, became "questionable ideals." The Great War of 1914-1918 "dramatically crystallized and hastened" this change in popular perception.³⁵

³³ See Peter Faulkner, Modernism (London, 1977), p. 14., Michael H. Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 77-79., Norman F. Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture Modernism to Deconstruction (New York, 1988), pp. 130-133., and Eksteins, Rites of Spring, pp. xiv-xvi. Most historians and literary critics view the Great War as a watershed period in cultural history signalling the demise of traditional expression and the blossoming of Modernist expression.

³⁴ Levenson, Genealogy of Modernism, p. vii.

³⁵ Faulkner, Modernism, p. 14.

However, can the First World War posters of England and Canada, ostensibly tools of state-sanctioned propaganda, be illustrative of the prevailing cultural climate? Even cursory research indicates that the answer is yes. For while still a form of propaganda, most historians of the subject agree upon Great War posters' status as representative examples of popular cultural expression. The reasoning behind this is two-fold. First, since literally thousands of designs were commissioned during the conflict, government control over the content of posters was inconsistent and ill-defined. Second, this haphazard commissioning process meant most posters were the creations of printing house operators and lithographers -- average working men.³⁶ Thus, posters, like other popular artworks, could be considered culturally representative.

Considering the vast number of Great War posters in existence, as well as the mercurial nature of Modernism, discovering a way to methodologically analyze this imagery is somewhat problematic. Fortunately, the Poststructuralist concept of the "linguistic turn," which enables the historian to 'read' cultural artifacts as a kind of 'text,' offers potentially useful ideas. The technique, utilized by material and cultural historians for decades, even suggests a possible course of historical inquiry. Indeed, by -- in a sense -- 'reading' Great War posters, their constituent traditional and Modernist cultural elements might be discerned.

³⁶ See Hardie and Sabin, War Posters, pp. 8-10., Rickards, Posters of the First World War, pp. 12-14., Darracott, The First World War in Posters, pp. 6-9., and Fehl and Fenix, WWI Propaganda Posters, p. 7.

That is, by clearly expressing some specific characteristics central to the Modernist ethos and then tracing their expression and frequency of expression within the Great War poster record, these posters can be seen to illustrate the conflict between traditional and Modernist popular culture.³⁷ In addition, by comparing the experiences of two nations, England and Canada, a general assessment regarding European and North American cultural expression might be made.

Again, it should be noted that this notion of 'reading' cultural artifacts is far from original. In fact, several recent examples of historical precedent exist. For instance, in the essays *The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order* and *Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince*, by historians Mary Ryan and Randolph Starn respectively, the Poststructuralist concept of the "linguistic turn" may be readily discerned. Looking at parades as a kind of 'text,' Ryan forwards the essential idea that a relationship, or "discourse," was created between the participants in the parade and those who watched. Groups within the parade, separated by occupation, class and ethnicity, impressed "their group identities on the minds of

³⁷ Care must be taken to avoid the trap of using 'texts' -- here posters -- as self-referential objects supportive of a particular context. That is, it would be wholly inaccurate to paint a cohesive contextual picture of early twentieth century English and Canadian culture based on the imagery of specific posters. Posters, elements of a created cultural environment -- the context -- could be used to support, perhaps falsely, a contextual determination first indicated by the imagery contained in the poster itself. Thus, contextual conclusions based on the information imparted by said poster imagery must be necessarily limited and qualified. Specifically, all cultural assessments and determinations alluded to by poster content could only be very general in nature. See Norman Bryson, "Art in Context," in Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer, eds., *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis* (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 70-73.

countless bystanders," solidifying the social separations through rhetorical display.³⁸ Thus, social organizations based on class and ethnicity grew as the discourse furthered some groupings and discounted others.

In Starn's essay, the author conducts a detailed cultural investigation into the art and architecture of a Renaissance court. According to Starn, a relationship existed between the prince and a painting on his chamber ceiling. Compelled by the architecture of the vault and the nature of the frescoes to view the ceiling in a specific way, the prince was "empowered," positioned in a "place of honour" in relation to the rest of his court. The view of the "occulus" was especially made for the prince, for it was "proportioned to his perspective and subject to his gaze." Ultimately, says Starn, the entire effect created a "Renaissance political discourse" revealing the perfect order "conferred by princely rule."³⁹

A somewhat similar methodological approach may be taken to the examination of Great War posters. By analyzing, or in a way 'reading,' the content of individual posters from England and Canada, they can be shown to indicate the ascendancy of Modernist cultural expression over the traditional. Indeed, poster imagery underwent manifest transformation during the course of the

³⁸ Mary Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order," in Lynn Hunt, ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley, 1989), p. 139.

³⁹ Randolph Starn, "Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince," in Lynn Hunt, ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 220-222.

conflict.⁴⁰ Particularly striking are the changes in portrayals of men and women. For example, while most English and Canadian posters emphasized the sporting, chivalric and honour-bound image of the soldier in 1914, by 1916-1917, Modernist portrayals of men were commonplace. In fact, within posters printed as early as 1915, the soldier is seen alternatively gripped by pathos or shamed into service, both potent Modernist images. The depiction of women underwent a similarly drastic shift. Feminism, a quintessentially Modernist "cultural phenomenon" after the War,⁴¹ seemed to influence poster imagery years earlier. For instance, traditional portrayals of women early in the conflict, as the mild, dutiful wife and mother, were later overshadowed by entirely non-traditional, Modernist depictions. Everywhere, broadsides featured women actively 'doing their bit,' both in the workplace and in the armed services.

As well as with images of men and women, Great War posters revealed a further change in popular cultural perception. Specifically, as the War continued, posters exhibited a cultural and aesthetic break with the past. Religious and patriotic images gave way to wholly secular posters demonizing the Alliance powers. Also, some Modernist artistic stylings crept into poster imagery,

⁴⁰ Yet caution must be taken to avoid exaggeration and generalization -- for it would be unreasonable to assume that said poster imagery indicates an abrupt and complete cultural transformation during 1914-1918 period. Traditional Edwardian cultural values, deeply entrenched, persisted, and were only gradually ousted by Modernist sensibilities over decades. Clearly however, the War acted as a catalyst which hastened this process. War posters offer a compelling glimpse into that period of accelerated cultural change.

⁴¹ Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 121.

replacing traditional designs. Further, poster imagery also began to indicate the gradual widespread acceptance of the conflict as bloody, terrible and destructive. Indeed, as the War "devalued life" and "desensitized popular feeling," suffering, cruelty and horror took on added legitimacy as normal aspects of human life.⁴² This pervasive shift in cultural perception may be seen clearly illustrated in posters printed after 1915, as images of hardship, violence and cruelty became increasingly frequent. Ironically, it could thus be said that the advent of violent and destructive poster imagery in part heralded the bloom of a new cultural order, and the concomitant passing of the old.

⁴² Ibid., p. 133.

II

FROM SOAP FLAKES TO SOLDIERS

"...and the universal eruption of posters imploring us to subscribe to the War Loan indicates the emergence of a new Art -- that of Government by advertisement."

Punch Magazine, 1915

On the eve of the First World War, the lithographic poster was the centrepiece of a maturing printed advertising industry. Commercial interests had successfully exploited the medium for several decades. Printing houses plastered their broadsides across walls in virtually every urban centre in the British Empire. Much like advertisements of today, these posters hawked an extensive array of products and services, from soap and cigarettes, to exotic excursions abroad. By 1914, the marketing of such things through print media constituted a necessary economic expenditure for most businesses, both in Europe and in North America. In fact, the purchasing of advertising space on walls, billboards, and within the pages of virtually every publication, rendered 'the ad' a commonplace fixture of urban life.¹ With the onset of hostilities in August, governments thus found a proven publicity apparatus already in place. As Maurice Rickards notes, the lithographic poster medium "was accepted and understood by the public at large;

¹Interestingly, this reliance worked both ways. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, press interests, including most newspapers, became increasingly dependent upon commercial advertising to finance their publications. In Canada, for example, historian Paul Rutherford has determined "that 67.9% of the income of the Ottawa Citizen in 1900 came from ads, 65.5% of that of the Hamilton Spectator in 1902, and 76.1% of that of the Toronto News in 1906. By the First World War a newspaper needed to fill at least 60 to 65% of its space with advertising to be profitable." Clearly then, advertisements were a ubiquitous presence. See Mary Vipond, The Mass Media in Canada (Toronto, 1992), p. 17.

it was tried and tested -- and it was cheap."² Moreover, since both nations relied exclusively on volunteer armies, Great Britain and Canada *had* to advertise the War.

Consequently, utilizing this established advertising mechanism, each government commissioned thousands of posters, with recruitment and investment in the war effort forming the primary motifs. Early lithographs also exhibited a decidedly nineteenth century sensibility concerning war, emphasizing pomp, duty, God, and country. Realism, since it was not in keeping with the widespread Edwardian perception of a neat and tidy War, was scrupulously avoided. The horrible and disruptive realities of the Great War, however, soon pierced this idealistic fog. First to evaporate were risible notions of a brief conflict that would be 'over by Christmas.' With the close of 1914, staggering Entente casualty numbers saw Empire nations field some two million men, volunteer replacements for the ranks decimated at Mons and Ypres.³ Further, the flood of returning wounded came home maimed and psychologically damaged, most of whom were permanently affected by the searing experience of the front. As the conflict dragged on into the second year and the third, casualty lists were joined by other home front difficulties, including zeppelin raids, labour shortages, and a scarcity of foodstuffs. Clearly, the hardships and terrible

²Rickards, Posters of the First World War, p. 8.

³To appreciate the scale of casualties, consider the 11th Brigade of the British Expeditionary Force. By December 20, 1914, just 18 percent of its original officers and 28 percent of its men remained. See Eksteins, Rites of Spring, p. 100.

destructiveness of the War were difficult to ignore, and many poster artists gradually conceded this fact.

Accordingly, despite a supposedly rigorous censorship effort in both countries, lithographs from the latter half of the conflict often contained brutally honest, bleak, and altogether Modernist imagery more in keeping with post-War perceptions. Specifically, artists and graphic designers acknowledged the Great War's ruinous and violent nature by depicting in posters a variety of horrors, hardships and atrocities. In addition, some of the concomitant truths arising from the conflict, such as the collateral empowerment of women, began to appear. The intrusion of such Modernist imagery into, by definition, instruments of propaganda, recalls the Pop Art mimicry of "the perception of the modern world," itself a Modernist idea.⁴ Two factors in particular allowed these posters to be so altered.

First, in both nations, government supervision of poster printing was often lax and irregular. Administrative bodies, which were established in 1914 and later, to organize and distribute printed propaganda had enormous, even overwhelming tasks to oversee. Ostensibly, over the course of the War, the content of all pamphlets, newsletters, flags, postcards, newspaper advertisements, as well as posters, was strictly regulated by a successive string of government agencies. In reality, however, the formulation and realization of these lithographs, and some other printed materials,

⁴Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, "Feminism and Modernism: Paradoxes," in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin, eds., Modernism and Modernity (Halifax, 1983), p. 201.

was delegated to others. In fact, administrators "relied" almost exclusively on commonplace "artists and printmakers to convey the call to arms,"⁵ thus assuring the inclusion of popular sentiment within poster designs. The second factor -- and a direct consequence of this delegation of authority -- were the effects the War's prolongation had on the creative process. That is, it clearly became impossible for these artists and graphic designers to deny the hardships faced by home front populations. Even further, some lithographers, such as Britons Frank Brangwyn and Spenser Pryse, actually spent significant periods at the front, surrounded by the very trench horrors they would later depict. Thus, the profound shift from a "culture of hope" to one of "nightmare"⁶ that would accompany the ascendancy of Modernism in the 1920s may be seen temporally conflated in the content of Great War posters from England and Canada.

Not surprisingly, the process whereby these posters were commissioned was similar in both nations. In Great Britain, shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, Prime Minister Asquith established an official war propaganda bureau, appointing as director former Cabinet member Charles F.G. Masterman. Installed at Wellington House in London, this organization was responsible for the production and distribution of all printed and pictorial propaganda dealing with the War, including posters. Working in

⁵Shover, "Roles and Images of Women," in Politics and Society, p. 469.

⁶In essence, contends Modris Eksteins, the "Great War was to be the axis on which the modern world turned." See Eksteins, Rites of Spring, p. 237.

conjunction with the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, the bureau (which would later become the Department of Information) commissioned hundreds of posters during the War years, most designed with little or no creative input from the government.⁷

Indeed, as Joseph Darracott indicates, there was very limited "co-ordinated effort between the government and the billposting interests." Most often, the commissioning of posters was "done in a haphazard way," each design needing only perfunctory approval from British officials.⁸ As a consequence, commercial printing firms became the pre-eminent creative source behind poster content.⁹ In his personal memoirs, Paul Gunn, formerly an employee with Johnson, Riddle and Company, commented on the "casual" origins of most lithograph designs:

We printed about 43 different ones, all of which were my own ideas. I used to conceive an idea... get a sketch made by myself by our own artist ... and take it round to No. 11 Downing Street. If they liked it, no one else could stop it.¹⁰

Many English posters, then, while commissioned by official bodies, were nonetheless generated by average working-class men, largely independent of governmental controls. As a result, sentiments and

⁷For a more detailed examination of the English propaganda apparatus, see Roetter, The Art of Psychological Warfare, pp. 32-37., Hardie and Sabin, War Posters, pp. 9-11., and Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning, pp. 25-33.

⁸Darracott and Loftus, First World War Posters, p. 6.

⁹Fehl and Fenix, WWI Propaganda Posters, p. 18.

¹⁰As quoted in Rickards, Posters of the First World War, p. 12.

concerns affecting the general public -- such as ire over bombardments and privation -- certainly crept into poster designs.

Similarly, in Canada, poster production during the Great War proceeded with only scant official supervision. In fact, during the entire course of the conflict, not a single government agency was tasked with the regulation of poster content.¹¹ Accordingly, expediency dictated the adaptation of numerous English designs to a Canadian context. When wholly Canadian posters were produced, commercial advertisers were directly commissioned by those interested in mounting a campaign, a process mirroring the British model. Again, it was routinely printing house staff members themselves who formulated and executed each order. However, unlike those in Britain, such commissions came most often from private rather than governmental sources. Initiatives ranged from charity appeals sponsored by wealthy citizens, to funding drives promoted by commercial businesses. Even recruitment posters were ordered by individual regiments, with the commandant himself "responsible for posting them in appropriate spots."¹²

Since the majority of these broadsides were printed regionally, most Canadian posters displayed local colour, and are "full of hometown references" and "expressions of partisan pride."¹³ Poster runs were also typically small, numbering in the hundreds

¹¹See Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 69., and Stacey, The Canadian Poster Book, p. 19.

¹²Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 69.

¹³Stacey, The Canadian Poster Book, p. 19.

rather than the enormous printings characteristic of state sponsored issues. Still, the Canadian government did become involved with poster production in the latter years of the conflict. Established in 1916, the War Poster Service commissioned a variety of lithographs for the federal government, primarily in response to growing home front difficulties. Among other themes, posters advertised for the War Loan and encouraged families to conserve and preserve foodstuffs.¹⁴ Once again, however, it was largely printing company graphic designers and artists that determined the shape and content of those prints.

Often, those very artists were exposed to some of the harshest and most violent conditions associated with the War. For instance, Frank Brangwyn and fellow Briton Spenser Pryse spend considerable periods at the front, where the everyday horrors of trench life provided potent inspiration. Both produced exceptionally bleak, "documentary style" poster images "that gave a faithful and horrific account of the miseries" created by the conflict.¹⁵ Pryse even toted huge slabs of limestone directly to battle sites, where he would etch his designs in the "heat-of-the-moment."¹⁶ Obviously, figures like Brangwyn and Pryse did much to alter the general

¹⁴Commissions from the War Poster Service went mostly to the largest of Canada's printing houses. At the time, most of these were based in the major urban centres, namely Toronto, Montreal, and Hamilton. In addition, designs were usually issued in identical French and English text versions. See Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 70.

¹⁵Barnicoat, A Concise History of Posters, p. 223.

¹⁶Similarly, Brangwyn too worked directly upon stone close to hand. "Here was genuine emotion, a first-hand involvement in the war, the raw and urgent energy of men convinced." See Rickards, Posters of the First World War, p. 13.

perception of the conflict. Indeed, as Maurice Rickards accurately asserts, by 1916-1917 the Edwardian image of war "could be sustained only with difficulty. Too many people had heard, seen and done too much."¹⁷ Moreover, as the "realities" of the War "emerged"¹⁸ and became lodged in the public consciousness, increasingly violent and grim poster imagery became an attendant truth -- banal and expected.

In Canada, meanwhile, Great War art, much of it harshly truthful in depicting the conflict, flourished during the 1914-1918 period, the result of generous federal funding initiatives. Under the "enlightened" direction of figures like Lord Beaverbrook, talented artists such as Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson, and F.H. Varley received sizeable commissions to document on canvas the experiences of the front.¹⁹ These men painted extensively, often sketching their designs right in the trenches (see Figure 2.1). Further, the establishment of the Canadian War Memorials Fund in 1916 "offered artists a full-time opportunity to paint, officer's rank and pay," as well as "current acclaim by art critics and public institutions."²⁰ Of course, dozens of artists participated, many of whom also lent their designs to posters. J.E.H. MacDonald, Percy

¹⁷Rickards and Moody, The First World War, p. 24.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Beaverbrook recognized the importance of having artists work at the front. Pieces like Nevinson's "could never have been produced," he commented, "unless he had spent months in France. It was the actual contact with the fighting which had given him that appreciation and realization of the realities of war..." As quoted in Maria Tippett, Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art, and the Great War (Toronto, 1984), p. 34. See also Stacey, The Canadian Poster Book, p. 20.

²⁰Tippett, Art at the Service of War, p. 13.



Public Archives of Canada Photo, 1916



F.H. Varley, The Sunken Road

Figure 2.1

Erskine Nobbs, and others contributed pieces to a variety of poster campaigns, including official War Loan drives.²¹ Certainly, the influence these contributions had upon the work of other poster artists cannot be discounted, either in Canada or in England.

In any event, haphazard government controls in both nations, coupled with artists' exposure to domestic hardships and continental horrors, allowed grimly honest, altogether Modernist imagery to appear in propaganda posters with increasing frequency as the War progressed. This was a profound transformation -- from posters portraying wholly idealistic circumstances while trumpeting nineteenth century sensibilities, to grisly depictions of trench violence. In that respect, poster artists and graphic designers were quite prescient in their designs. By incorporating this Modernist imagery in their work, they anticipated the pervasive alteration in sensibilities consistent with post-War disillusionment.

Finally, contrary to dire predictions at War's end,²² these lithographs have survived the passage of time. In fact, thousands of posters remain available to us, carefully preserved in archives and museums specially created for the maintenance of such documents. Public collections even expand with the occasional private donation from families and individuals who discover caches of War

²¹See Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 83., Stacey, The Canadian Poster Book, p. 20., and Ibid., p. 11.

²²Writing in 1920, historians Martin Hardie and Arthur K. Sabin lamented: "Save for the very limited number of copies that wise collectors have preserved, the actual posters of the Great War will be lost and forgotten in fifty years." See Hardie and Sabin, War Posters, p. 5.

memorabilia, long forgotten. However, First World War posters should not be dismissed simply as quaint artifacts of a bygone time. Indeed, they offer compelling glimpses into a culture profoundly altered by the unheralded -- and unimagined -- realities of modern war. Ultimately, without their inclusion in the broader tapestry of the Great War, that picture remains incomplete.

III

THE MODERNIST MAN

Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
--Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

Wilfred Owen, 1920

In the late summer of 1914, a young man named Rupert Brooke was commissioned as an officer in the British Royal Navy. Aged 27 when the War broke out, Brooke was an exemplar of the traditional English soldier. He possessed a keen mind and was highly educated, having attended Rugby School and King's College, Cambridge. Later, he became an accomplished essayist and poet, his writings inspired by extensive travels abroad. Physically and intellectually, Brooke was the ideal picture of British youth. Athletic, strikingly handsome, intelligent and witty, he possessed all the characteristics associated with the Byronic image of young men so beloved by Britons during the Edwardian period. In 1915, Winston Churchill described Brooke as "joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body," in every way one of "England's noblest sons."¹ Like many of his fellows, Brooke undoubtedly perceived military service as the expected and logical continuation of his personal growth and education. In the Edwardian world, War encouraged the principles of fair play, built character, emphasized discipline and fostered pride in one's national and military heritage. However, the Great War was unlike any previous

¹M.H. Abrams, The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York, 1986), p. 1892.

European conflict, and men like Brooke were ill-prepared for its realities. He himself died of dysentery and blood poisoning a mere four months into his tour of duty.

For Jack Girling, another young Englishman, participation in the First World War was a primary ambition. Head of his house at Wellington College, a prize-winning student, prefect and member of the First Eleven football team, Girling was a "brilliant all-rounder," seemingly destined for Oxford.² However, his upbringing coupled with Wellington's long military tradition ensured his enlistment in the armed forces. Hence, shortly after his eighteenth birthday, in December of 1915, Jack joined the British Army to serve in France, only to meet an unfortunate end within his first year of service, just like Brooke. Canadian Harold Innis, who would later become the renowned poet, was moved to enlist in 1916 directly following his graduation from McMaster University, so abandoning a promising career in either law or the clergy. Yet while Innis obviously did not perish in the Great War, he was nonetheless permanently scarred by it, both physically and emotionally, his stint in the trenches remembered as a time of "unmitigated horror."³

The unhappy stories of these brilliant and beautiful young men are legion. Indeed, the First World War and the phrase 'lost youth' have become inextricably linked, the event and the concept bound up together within the history and popular culture of the early

²Lyn Macdonald, The Roses of No Man's Land (London, 1980), pp. 169-170.

³Sandra Gwyn, Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War (Toronto, 1992), pp. 360-363.

twentieth century.⁴ Poems, memoirs and posters of the Great War paint a tapestry of loss, conjuring images of scared young men trapped in a sea of mud and death. Such imagery represented a fundamental, Modernist shift in how the military man was seen. For Britons and Canadians especially, the conflict impacted tremendously on the perceived image of war and soldiering. Traditional Edwardian conceptions of the soldier as the nattily uniformed, sporting Tommy, prideful and eager, no longer obtained. The reality of soldiering in the Great War was utterly removed from such an image.

Thus, it was not simply the scale of loss which so affected people, for England and Canada had been involved in life-draining conflicts before. This war, clearly, was *different*. Soldiers, expecting a brief, clean and orderly campaign, quickly discovered the monstrous reality of the front. For war itself changed drastically in 1914, its conduct, as well as what it demanded of its combatants, and this had a profound effect upon the popular perception of soldiering, particularly amongst the soldiers themselves. Yet while several years passed before English and Canadian public feeling concerning the Great War altered such that words like "glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene,"⁵ some clearly saw the fighting through a Modernist filter well before

⁴Writing in 1917, F. Scott Fitzgerald lamented: "After all, life hasn't much to offer except youth and ... Every man I've met who's been to war, that is this war, seems to have lost youth and faith in man." Andrew Turnbull, ed., The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1968), p. 434. Quoted in Geoff Dyer, The Missing of the Somme (London, 1994), pp. 104-105.

⁵Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1929), p. 191.

1918.⁶ Among them were poster artists, several of whom spent significant periods at the front. As early as 1915, posters appeared revealing soldiers in non-traditional, Modernist modes. For while Edwardian traditionalism emphasized the militaristic pomp, sport and historicism of soldiering, Modernism disdained such sentiments.⁷ It was a perceptual shift acknowledged, though sometimes obliquely, in the poster record of both nations. Poster soldiers, depicted more honestly, became embattled figures, dirty and far from sporting. Appeals to a chivalric military history gave way to images designed to recruit men by arousing guilt. And the lithograph of an English soldier viciously murdering his adversary became one of the most popular posters of the Great War. Potent Modernist portraiture, indeed.

Certainly, the image of the First World War soldier has grown into an enduring archetype -- the beleaguered, trench dwelling grunt, filthy, exhausted and looking altogether older than his years. The life is depicted as one of stultifying tedium, pathos and brutal violence. In short, a truthful portrayal. Prior to about 1915, however, soldiering was perceived in an entirely different

⁶Notably, Futurist painter Franz Marc presaged the horror visited upon innocence and nature by Great War soldiers in his 1913 work The Fate of the Animals. See Cole and Gealt, Art of the Western World, pp. 282-283.

⁷In 1918, the seminal British Modernist Lytton Strachey published Eminent Victorians, "a humorous and savage prostration" of four Victorian icons, one of whom was military hero General Chinese Gordon. The book, which characterized Gordon as an incompetent psychopath, was an immediate best seller. Geoff Dyer writes: "...Modernism...seemed to identify itself with defeat or,...with hostility to the values in whose name the war had been waged." Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, p. 65. See also Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 35, pp. 131-132., Stromberg, Redemption By War, pp. 7-8., and Faulkner, Modernism, pp. 14-15.

manner. Traditional, sentimental feelings regarding military service prevailed within the minds of most Britons and Canadians. Central to this Edwardian perception of war was the notion that soldiering should be, essentially, a sporting enterprise. When the British poet Sir Henry Newbolt lauded England's military sentinels abroad in an 1898 work, he likened them to schoolboy players on the fields at Eton.⁸ In 1914, amidst the growing continental conflict, very little had changed. Indeed, during the initial months of the Great War, all media were saturated with sports imagery, as men were entreated to join in the 'real game' overseas. Within the War's first few weeks, in a poem ironically entitled *Peace*, Rupert Brooke himself compared youthful soldiers to "swimmers into cleanness leaping."⁹ For Britons and Canadians both, sport and 'the game,' traditionally linked to military service, constituted a central motif associated with the Great War soldier, as recruiting posters from both nations illustrate.

England's August 4 declaration of war on the Central Powers initiated an enormous call to arms. Since Great Britain and Canada relied heavily upon volunteer armies, huge numbers of posters were printed urging men to enlist. This tremendous recruitment drive, which lasted only until conscription was enacted, routinely utilized Edwardian sporting imagery when depicting soldiers. As Paul Fussell indicates, posters adopted an approach similar to that used by the press in 1914, giving soldiering an altogether familiar "Explorer

⁸See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 122.

⁹Quoted in Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 123.

Club" overtone. Traditional sportsmanlike images suggested that "what was happening was not too far distant from playing games, running races, and competing in a thoroughly decent way."¹⁰ One early British recruiting poster depicted three smartly uniformed men playing cards in the trenches, the caption *Will You Make a Fourth?* emblazoned across the top. In early 1915, *Punch Magazine*, too, echoed similar sentiments, proclaiming English military men the only "true sportsmen."¹¹ For soldiering in war was widely perceived as a friendly competition, not a life or death struggle. Before 1914-1918, declared writer Osbert Sitwell, war was considered

only a brief armed version of the Olympic Games. You won a round; the enemy won the next. There was no more talk of extermination, or of Fights to a Finish, than would occur in a boxing match.¹²

Soldiers themselves readily identified with the sporting image of soldiering, and posters acknowledged this. Diary entries and letters sent home by soldiers during the War's first year routinely contained references linking the fighting to sport. "Our men are a fine lot of fellows, every one of them played the game all the way through," wrote a young Canadian officer to his mother in May,

¹⁰The journalistic formula "The Race to the ____" was ready to hand, familiar through its use in 1909 to describe Peary's "Race to the (North) Pole" against Cook." Obviously, the sentiment would have struck a nostalgic and sentimental chord with the public. See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1973), p. 9.

¹¹*Punch Magazine*, Mr. Punch's History of the Great War (Toronto, 1920), p. 30.

¹²Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning!* (Boston, 1947), p.199. Sitwell's analysis of the "classic equation between war and sport" recognized the traditional conception of war as a "strenuous but entertaining" enterprise. As quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 25.

1915.¹³ While serving in France, the English poet Siegfried Sassoon noted that the men behaved "as if at a football match," rowdily "cheering" at the battle scene.¹⁴ To the young British and Canadian men making the journey to the front in 1914, war was just that -- a grand, loud, strenuous football match. It was a traditional sporting spirit which led to the foundation and poster advertisement of several 'sportsmen' battalions in both nations.

In Canada, the 148th Overseas Battalion, affiliated with McGill University in Montreal, placed sportsmanship at the centre of their recruiting poster campaign. In one anonymous lithograph, a rugged Canadian soldier, rifle drawn, gazes over his shoulder at a mental image of home. The imagined scene is of a crowded arena, the fans applauding an ice hockey game in progress. The caption reads *WHY BE A MERE SPECTATOR HERE WHEN YOU SHOULD PLAY A MANS PART IN THE REAL GAME OVERSEAS? -- JOIN the 148th Battalion (sic)*. Another Overseas Battalion, the 199th Irish Canadian Rangers, specifically targeted sport-minded men in a 1914-1915 poster. *JUMP INTO YOUR PLACE IN THE SPORTSMAN'S COMPANY*, shouts the tag line. Beneath, a chiselled athlete hurdles between a parade of dashing soldiers, the line parted, anticipating a new arrival (see Figure 3.1).

Englishmen, too, conflated sport with soldiering. By the end of 1914, Edwardian sporting tradition led over half a million Britons to volunteer for military service through various athletic

¹³Amy Gordon Grant, Letters From Armageddon: A Collection Made During the World War (Boston, 1930), p. 108.

¹⁴Rupert Hart-Davis, Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918 (London, 1983), p. 82.

**JUMP INTO YOUR PLACE
IN THE**



SPORTSMAN'S COMPANY



OF THE

**IRISH CANADIAN
OVERSEAS BATTALION RANGERS**

**Headquarters :
91 STANLEY ST.
MONTREAL.**

**Under
Lt. Col. H. J. TRIHEY.**

Figure 3.1

organizations.¹⁵ In fact, one British battalion, the 17th Middlesex Regiment, advertised itself as the "Football Battalion." Composed largely of English football players and other avid sportsmen, the battalion attracted recruits by explicitly portraying soldiering as akin to participating in a raucous football match. Also known as "the Die Hards," the 17th released a number of posters during the War's first years, each emphasizing the regiment's sporting spirit. One in particular was a retort to an article from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* which specifically mocked the Football Battalion (see Figure 3.2). *YOUNG MEN OF BRITAIN!! -- THE GERMANS SAID YOU WERE NOT IN EARNEST*, exclaims the caption. Beneath the offending quotation is an image of several impeccably appointed soldiers firing rifles from a trench at an unseen target.¹⁶ Above them floats a dreamy scene of footballers on the pitch. The whole picture is redolent of Edwardian country club bonhomie -- the imagery recalls turn-of-the-century advertisements for skeet-shooting competitions rather than the brutal realities of military service. Nonetheless, the poster exhortation to *JOIN the FOOTBALL BATALION and PLAY the GREATER GAME* clearly filled the ranks.

These poster images of the sporting Tommy were joined by other traditional portrayals of soldiering during the Great War's early stages. Perhaps foremost amongst them in terms of volume were the

¹⁵Early in the conflict, the French writer Louis Mairat scoffed at the British attitude concerning soldiering: "They consider the war a sport," he complained. Mairat himself was killed in the game in April of 1917. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 125.

¹⁶The *Frankfurter Zeitung* excerpt reads: "The Young Britons prefer to exercise their long limbs on the football ground, rather than to expose them to any sort of risk in the service of their country."

YOUNG MEN OF BRITAIN !! THE GERMANS SAID YOU WERE NOT IN EARNEST

Extract from Frankfurter Zeitung -

The young Britons prefer to exercise their long limbs on the football ground rather than to expose them to any sort of risk in the service of their country.



and **GIVE THEM THE LIE !**
PLAY *the* **GREATER GAME**
and **JOIN** *the* **FOOTBALL BATTALION**

Figure 3.2

dozens of lithographs showcasing Edwardian militaristic pomp. Pre-War recruiting posters emphasized the flashy ostentation of military duty, and the 1914-1915 English and Canadian designs closely followed this tradition. For example, in a 1902 British broadside for *His Majesty's Coldstream Guards*, poster artist Ernest Ibbetson filled his work with somewhat anachronistic images of soldiers clothed in "the full panoply" of dress regalia.¹⁷ For even though the Boer War had introduced Britons and Canadians to the realities of trench warfare and the machine gun, soldiering was still largely marketed, and perceived, as a life of parading around in columns whilst clad in excessively ornamented uniforms. It was a sentiment which persisted well into the Great War, as the poster record indicates.

The longevity of traditional militaristic pomp saw fussy, ostentatious poster images of soldiers abound during the War's first years. This despite the utterly false impression of soldiering such posters imparted.¹⁸ One particular lithograph for the Canadian Grenadier Guards 245th Overseas Battalion showcases a single elaborately decorated soldier, standing at attention, festooned with busby, trumpet and drum kit (see Figure 3.3). Entitled *FALL IN THE GUARDS*, the anonymously rendered print imparts nothing of the true

¹⁷For a more detailed description of the poster, see Paret, Lewis and Paret, Persuasive Images, p. 6.

¹⁸Of course, such misrepresentation was partly deliberate. Apart from their other characteristics, and despite the rather lax control exercised over their content, posters were nonetheless components in a state sanctioned propaganda apparatus. For more on British and Canadian recruiting propaganda, see Roetter, The Art of Psychological Warfare, pp. 32-37., Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, pp. 21-24., Rickards and Moody, The First World War, pp. 16-17., and Stacey, The Canadian Poster Book, pp. 15-19.

CANADIAN GRENADIER GUARDS

245th Overseas Battalion

Lt.-Col. G. G. BALLANTYNE
OFFICER COMMANDING

"FALL IN THE GUARDS"

"THE CALL FOR
MEN OF COURAGE"

NOW RECRUITING

RECRUITING DEPOTS:

Canadian Grenadier Guards' Armoury, Fletcher's Field, Montreal	
Windsor Arcade Building	149 Peel St., Montreal
Witness Building	Cor. Craig and St. Peter Sts. Montreal



Figure 3.3

nature of soldiering in 1914. *FALL INTO YOUR PLACE*, exclaims the caption to another anonymous 1915 English poster. Below the phrase is the image of several civilians joining an infinitely long column of dashing soldiers on the march. These are typical examples of the anachronistic, fantastical images of soldiering presented by posters in the War's early going.

This anachronism was perhaps best exemplified by the fatuous poster depiction of mounted cavalry chargers in 1914. Despite the fact that the "last successful cavalry charges had taken place at Waterloo," all belligerents, including England and Canada, fielded significant cavalries in the Great War.¹⁹ Consequently, notwithstanding the advent of heavy artillery, the machine gun and motorized vehicles²⁰, the traditional image of soldiers on horseback filled the first recruiting posters. *FORWARD!*, screams the caption of one 1914-1915 British lithograph by Lucy Kemp-Welch. Below, a dapper British officer astride a racing mount thrusts his rapier directly at the viewer, the bold words *ENLIST NOW* beneath the hooves. In another recruiting poster, this for the *CANADIAN MOUNTED RIFLES*, a natty group of mounted officers survey a distant town (see Figure 3.4). The image projected -- that of an antedated military

¹⁹Rickards and Moody, *The First World War*, p. 13. In Great Britain, the cavalry requirements of the Expeditionary Force necessitated the 'call up' of some 120 000 horses from across the country. Farmer's work-horses, tram-car horses, and the valuable thoroughbreds of English gentlemen were commandeered. The well-to-do, "chagrined to see their fine-bred steeds departing on War Service as 'officers' chargers', were not much consoled by the comparatively generous payment of £75 in exchange for a favourite mount." Lyn Macdonald, *1914* (London, 1987), p. 59.

²⁰Maurice Rickards writes: "The military mind, apparently unmoved by the growth of war machines, could not bring itself to abandon the concept of the massed horseman." Rickards and Moody, *The First World War*, p. 12-13.

experience -- likens soldiering to a comfortable reconnaissance ride in full military dress. Unfortunately, for both men and beasts, the front bore little resemblance to any such traditional depiction.

In addition to flashy militarism, early English and Canadian Great War posters featured close links between soldiering and a traditional historicist sentiment concerning war. Specifically, Britons and Canadians still perceived war through a lens of Victorian-Edwardian chivalric romance in 1914. Indeed, for men "going up the line," the heroic figures of "Victorian pseudo-medieval" fiction were a major inspiration²¹, one which posters acknowledged. Further, potential soldiers, most notably French Canadians, looked with nostalgic pride upon the military accomplishments of the past, and thus posters were tailored to include several specific historical references.

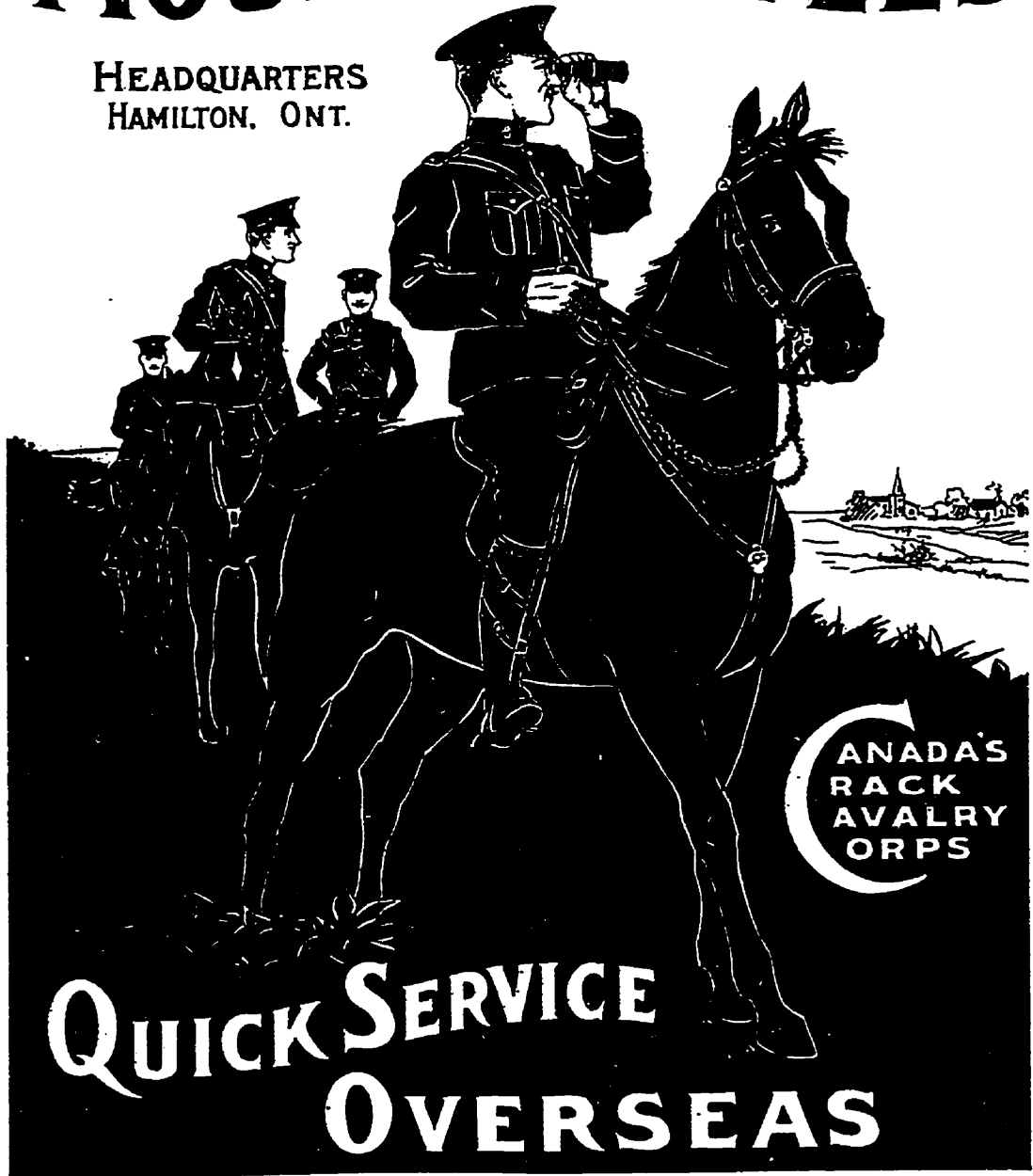
In England, however, early recruiting posters looked primarily to a literary rather than a literal tradition for inspiration. For young British males in 1914, most of whom were highly literate, military duty was often equated with Edwardian pop-fiction sentiments. Truly, they made up a "generation to whom terms like *heroism* and *decency* and *nobility* conveyed meanings that were entirely secure..."²² Consequently, romantic tales such as William Morris' 1896 novel *The Well at the World's End* were hugely popular amongst the men making their way to the front. Filled with stylish medieval-sounding diction, Morris' romance and other similar works

²¹Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 135.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

CANADIAN MOUNTED RIFLES

HEADQUARTERS
HAMILTON, ONT.



were founts of inspirational imagery to young soldiers. Poster artists, too, were clearly inspired by this popular pseudo-medievalism, as a number of early recruiting prints featured mythical warriors of the distant past. Perhaps the most memorable example, a striking depiction of an armoured and mounted Saint George lancing a dragon, was first posted in 1915 (see Figure 3.5). Entitled *BRITAIN NEEDS YOU AT ONCE*, the heraldic image most certainly follows in the Edwardian tradition of Morris' prose stylings.

Yet while some historicist posters showcased soldiers of legend, others mythologized the combatants of actual past military endeavours. That is, in portraying past conflicts, such prints often glorified and romanticized the soldiering experience. For example, in late 1915, English artist Bernard Partridge released a lithograph commemorating a 1389 battle involving Britain's Great War ally, Serbia. Entitled *KOSSOVO DAY IS THE SERBIAN NATIONAL DAY*, the poster features a highly traditional image of iconic Serbian and English officers crossing swords on a rocky promontory with their Austrian and Turkish counterparts. Beneath is a lengthy account of "heroic" Serbia's past struggles for freedom, concluding with an Allied pledge to restore the previous government at War's end.²³

²³The caption reads: "At the Battle of Kossovo in 1389, Christianity and Freedom were overwhelmed in the Balkans, but the Serbs have each year since then kept the day in stern determination to be free once more. They drove back the Turks, they twice drove back the Austrians. To-day, Serbia, exiled but not disheartened, asks us to join in the celebration of her National Day, as a pledge of the Allies' Victory and Anglo-Serbian friendship." See Hardie and Sabin, *War Posters*, pp. 32-33.



Figure 3.5

In Canada, too, romantic historicism comprised a central element of several early francophone recruiting posters. Two in particular encouraged French-Canadian men to follow in the footsteps of frontier soldier Dollard des Ormeaux. A recent arrival to New France, young Adam Dollard des Ormeaux led a small band of French soldiers and Huron warriors against a vastly superior Iroquois invasion force in the spring of 1660. According to historian Andre Vachon, his sacrifice and that of his comrades allowed the New France settlers "to harvest their crop and escape famine" that year.²⁴ Poster artists were inspired. *CANADIENS*, shouts the caption of one anonymous 1915 lithograph, *Suivez l'Exemple de Dollard des Ormeaux* (see Figure 3.6). The image below is an exceptionally romantic rendering of the battle, featuring an all but solitary Dollard des Ormeaux, unmarked, facing a swarm of marauding enemies with hatchet and dagger. A second 1915 poster, by artist Arthur H. Hider, contained script equating Canadian Great War recruits not only with Dollard des Ormeaux, but also with the soldiers of Montcalm and Levis.²⁵ Entitled simply *Canadiens-Francais Enrolez-vous!*, the poster, with its accompanying image of two dashing men in uniform, one French the other French-Canadian, thus blends both traditional militarist and historicist aspects.

²⁴Andre Vachon, "Dollard des Ormeaux," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. I (Toronto, 1966), p. 274.

²⁵Later 1915 British and Canadian posters even tried to historicize the combatants from battles early in the War: Langemarc - St. Julien - Festubert New names in Canadian history. More are coming-- Will you be there? ENLIST!

CANADIENS

Suivez l'Exemple de
Dollard des Ormeaux
N'attendez pas l'ennemi au coin du
feu, mais allez au devant de lui.



En Avant! Canadiens-Français
Enrolez-vous dans les Régiments
Canadiens - Français

□□□

Adressez-vous au
Comité de Recrutement Canadien-Français

MONTREAL,

Avenue de l'Église, Québec

QUEBEC,

Place Jean-Baptiste-Corbin, 100, rue de la Capitale

OTTAWA,

106, rue York

SHERBROOKE,

rue Wellington

TROIS-RIVIERES,

71e, rue Champflour

JOLIETTE,

110, rue Manseau

CHICOUTIMI,

rue Racine

Figure 3.6

Table 3.1. *Great War Casualty figures for Great Britain and Canada*

Allies	Military dead	Military wounded	Missing & prisoners
Empire	908 371	2 090 212	191 652
Canada	54 114	172 951	4 430

Certainly then, Britons and Canadians -- most notably recruits and poster artists -- understood soldiering from a very traditional perspective in 1914. This persistence of Edwardian thinking ensured that early Great War posters depicted soldiers as sporting and chivalrous, regally uniformed, and with a proud, romantic history behind them. Reality, however, gradually intruded. As Europe careered into its first major conflict in over thirty-three years, those who had confidently predicted a quick and orderly campaign were soon disillusioned. In fact, by December of 1914, most of the 160 000 strong British Expeditionary Force had been "wiped out."²⁶ Instead of a decisive conflict, the Great War settled into a punishing stalemate on the continent, with troops occupying about 25 000 miles of trench on either side of a front that stretched from the North Sea to the Swiss border. Here, the realities of soldiering were horrifying. Aside from the immediate threat of death from shells, bullets and gas, men had to contend with lice, rats, frostbite, rheumatism and trench foot. Come the close of the

²⁶Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 100.

War, the casualty numbers for both nations were staggering (see Table 3.1).²⁷

By Christmas of 1915, the War's realities saw many of the traditional sentiments concerning soldiering evaporate. In their place, more honest, negative and altogether Modernist concepts associated with soldiering took root. On the home front, however, the shield of official censorship made this process a slow one. But for those who had felt the searing effects of the trenches, and this included many poster artists, the very idea of military service was irrevocably altered. As Roland Stromberg notes, no circumstance "could have lived up to the extravagant expectations of the war's beginning, but the disenchantment of reality was particularly brutal."²⁸ Amongst the uniformed literati, soldiering quickly became a wretched and dishonourable function, and figures like Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon expressed their disillusionment through their writing.²⁹ Meanwhile, Modernist intellectuals and artists, like Strachey and Cubist-

²⁷Statistics taken from: Felix Gilbert, The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present (New York, 1964), p. 163., and Donald M. Santor, Canadians at War 1914-1918 (Toronto, 1978), pp. 44-45.

²⁸Stromberg, Redemption by War, p. 151.

²⁹See Edmund Blunden, Undertones of War (London, 1928)., Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (London, 1929)., Wilfred Owen, War Poems and Others (London, 1973)., Siegfried Sassoon, The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon (London, 1983)., and Siegfried Sassoon, The Memoirs of George Sherston (New York, 1937). While the major memoirs were not published until after the War, many anti-war poetry collections saw print well before November, 1918. In addition, in July of 1917, Sassoon issued A Soldier's Declaration, a public statement to his commanding officer condemning the military authorities for "deliberately" prolonging the War. "I believe," said Sassoon, "that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest." See Hart-Davis, ed., Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, pp. 173-176., and Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, pp. 99-100.

influenced painter Franz Marc, alternatively viewed soldiers as downtrodden, pathetic creatures or psychopathic defilers of nature. Further, English and Canadian poster artists, many of whom spent significant periods at the front, inserted unmistakable, though sometimes subtle, Modernist shadings into their depictions of soldiering. After 1915, sporting, militaristic imagery gave way to austere and grim poster testimonials. In addition, traditional romantic and historicist images were gradually replaced by pictures of ignoble men -- cowards, shirkers and malingerers.

Certainly, as casualty lists mounted, later posters ceased to look on the military past with pride and nostalgia, but instead emphasized negativity in their recruiting appeals. Also, elements of chivalric romance all but vanished, supplanted by scenes of non-enlistees tormented by guilt. Obviously, this represented a fundamental change in how military service was perceived. Underlining this shift, the English playwright and social critic George Bernard Shaw opined in 1917: "The notion that these heavily bored men were being heroic, ...or anything in the least romantic or sensational, was laughable."³⁰ Indeed, Edwardian chivalric fantasies were entirely removed from the Great War realities of Mons, Ypres and the Somme. Sir Herbert Read, the English poet and literary analyst, declared that "one week in the trenches was sufficient to strip war of its lingering traces of romance."³¹

³⁰George Bernard Shaw, London Daily Chronicle (London, 5-8 March, 1917)., as quoted in Stromberg, Redemption by War, p. 152.

³¹As quoted in Stromberg, Redemption by War, p. 151.

Clearly, many British and Canadian poster artists came to share this sentiment, even prior to 1917.

Well before conscription was enacted in either nation, pictures of noble Saint George were replaced by negative poster images designed to evoke in men feelings of guilt. That is, as traditional sentiments associated with soldiering dissipated, posters assumed a much bleaker, Modernist characterization of man. Harshly truthful images of cowardly malingerers appeared, portraits consistent with Modernism's negative and sad perception of human nature.³² Elias Canetti, the Viennese novelist and social philosopher, expressed succinctly this Modernist view of man: "Human beings ... accuse themselves by representing themselves as they are, and this is self-indictment, it does not come from someone else."³³ Echoing this sentiment, a Canadian man asks himself *WHY DON'T I GO?* in an anonymous 1915-1917 poster (see Figure 3.7). Impeccably dressed and surrounded by opulence, the central figure, reclining with pipe and newspaper, dwells upon his failure to enlist. Above him floats an imagined scene of a beleaguered soldier at the front, this juxtaposed with several small pictures of various home front leisure activities below. Here, notions of chivalry and romance are noticeably absent -- soldiering has become a grim, and unwanted, obligation.

Shirkers and the dishonourable were similarly featured in a number of later British and Canadian posters. One, an enlarged

³²Cantor, *Twentieth-Century Culture*, pp. 40-41.

³³As quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 40.

OVERSEAS CANADA BATTALION
148
 GRAND ESCORT AVANT GARDE

AFFILIATED WITH
 McGill University Contingent
 CANADIAN OFFICERS
 TRAINING CORPS.

**WHY DON'T
 I GO ?**

THE
148TH BATTALION
NEEDS ME

HEADQUARTERS
 1ST PEELE ST.

J. GIBBONS LIMITED **A. AMASEE LTD.** **MONTREAL TORONTO WINNIPEG**

Figure 3.7

Bernard Partridge *Punch Magazine* cartoon from March, 1915, extended this negative perception of men to the home front by comparing soldiers with slacking industrial labourers. The print, entitled *SOLDIERS ALL*, depicts a wounded English officer castigating a "disaffected workman" for selfishly ignoring his duty. The caption reads: "*What'd you think o' me, mate, if I struck for extra pay in the middle of an action? Well, that's what you've been doing.*" Taken in the context of England's recruiting difficulties, the presumably unintentional irony of the poster is compelling.³⁴ In another 1915-1917 Canadian poster by H. Barr, the traditional soldier is explicitly contrasted with the Modernist man. Directly beside the image of dashing Edwardian officers taking aim is the portrait of a malingerer, hands in pockets, callously smoking as he reads a casualty list. The viewer, ordered to *LOOK on This Picture and On That!*, was thus obliged to acknowledge just how far Canadian men had fallen since 1914. Apparently, the noble enlistee, honourbound to serve, had indeed disappeared.

In addition to the fading of romantic portrayals, recruiting posters ceased gazing backward with prideful historicism, and instead anticipated a much darker reality. Posters depicted a post-War future in which men who did not do their 'bit' were shamed by the reproaches of family and community. Perhaps the best known

³⁴For more on this poster and the 1915 Clyde Engineers' strike which inspired it, see Darracott and Loftus, *First World War Posters*, P. 46. Canada also produced posters attacking those who shirked their home front duties. One example in particular, a 1917 French Canadian print by E. Henderson, sharply criticized the extravagant lifestyles of some Canadians during War-time. The image of a helmeted Wilhelm II asks a group of fat, smoking aristocrats: *ETES-VOUS UN AMI DU KAISER?* See Choko, *Canadian War Posters*, p. 66.

example is British artist Savile Lumley's 1915-1916 print of a father with his children (see Figure 3.8). While his son plays with toy soldiers in the foreground, his daughter asks the unanswerable question: *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?* Averting his gaze, eyes strained with self-recrimination, the father struggles to provide an explanation for his individual moral failure. Bleak Modernist sentiment characterized later Canadian recruiting posters as well. For example, an anonymous 1917 lithograph played upon the shame associated with being drafted. *DO IT NOW!*, shouts the caption, *DON'T WAIT FOR THIS*. The image, that of a cowardly male figure, wringing his hands as he is presented with conscription notice and uniform, is the antithesis of the traditional historicist recruiting poster. Grimly honest rather than sentimentally nostalgic, the poster suggests a bleak future entirely "hostile" to history.³⁵

As casualty lists grew and convalescent hospitals were overwhelmed, the naked truths of what it meant to be a Great War soldier inevitably seeped into public consciousness. Historian Geoff Dyer paints a vivid picture of England near War's end:

It was as if a terrible plague had swept invisibly through the male population of the country -- except there were no bodies, no signs of burial, no cemeteries even. Ten per cent of the males under forty-five had simply disappeared.³⁶

³⁵Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 35. See also Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, p. 65., Stromberg, Redemption By War, pp. 12-13., and Faulkner, Modernism, pp. 14-16.

³⁶Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, p. 122.



Figure 3.8

The reality of soldiering then, rather than a gaudy parade, was in fact a potentially mortal enterprise endured in mud and filth. For poster artists such as Briton Gerald Spenser Pryse, this awareness was born of experience -- Pryse served England during the War as an army officer as well as an artist. He and a few others thus drew inspiration directly from the source -- the men at the front. Indeed, figures like Pryse and fellow lithographer Frank Brangwyn would have deemed the militaristic pomp traditionally associated with soldiering absurdly misplaced. Consequently, a distinctly Modernist perspective coloured and informed their depictions. After 1915, anachronistic poster images of flashy soldiers faded away, replaced by more accurate, and clearly anti-militaristic³⁷, depictions of the front.

In fact, Pryse actually created honest images of the Great War before 1915. In his late 1914 recruiting poster entitled *THE ONLY ROAD FOR AN ENGLISHMAN*, the setting is that of a blackened and devastated city somewhere in France. Yet while the context is grim, the natty column of Tommies in the foreground, in decorous procession, is resolutely Edwardian. However, as the War plodded on, the importance of rank order became increasingly dubious, particularly to soldiers themselves. Captain Geoffrey Keynes, an English medical officer in the War, recalls a 1918 occurrence:

In the middle of the night, when we'd been marching for hours and hours on these congested roads, up came a staff officer on a horse and gave me a proper dressing-down. 'You must keep

³⁷See Cantor, *Twentieth-Century Culture*, pp. 130-131.

the men in proper ranks,' he said. I said nothing at all. Under any other circumstances I might have laughed, but I simply didn't answer him I was so irritated.³⁸

Such a comment would have been unthinkable just three years before. It was a Modernist response to the exigencies of an unprecedented conflict, and one which later posters illustrated.

By 1915, both Pryse and Brangwyn were creating exceptionally truthful poster images of soldiers. In Pryse's poster *BELGIUM REFUGEES IN ENGLAND*, the customary pomp and swagger is conspicuously absent. The British military men attending the fleeing civilians are grim-faced, resolute and haggard. In addition, the group is in a markedly disordered formation. *AT NEUVE CHAPELLE*, a 1915-16 Frank Brangwyn recruiting poster, contains a highly detailed and honest portrayal of several front line soldiers (see Figure 3.9). Dirty, wounded, and gesturing frantically, the group is engaged in a fierce firefight. The altogether bleak image conveys convincingly "the discomfort and squalor of life in the trenches," while perversely exhorting enlistment.³⁹

Perhaps most tellingly suggestive of this movement from ornamental tradition was the gradual disappearance of Sassoon's gallant cloth-capped soldier.⁴⁰ Singular, even isolated, figures are central to two anonymous British and Canadian war bond posters

³⁸Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land*, p. 251.

³⁹Paret, Lewis, and Paret, *Persuasive Images*, p. 36.

⁴⁰From *The Redeemer*, Sassoon's antedated tribute resonates: "... , only a woolen cap/He wore — an English soldier, white and strong..." Siegfried Sassoon, *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (London, 1983), p. 16.

NEUVE CHAPELLE



DESIGNED AND LITHOGRAPHED BY FRANK BRANGWYN, ARA.

PRINTED BY THE ABEYER PRESS LTD, SOUVERIE ST, LONDON, ENG.

YOUR FRIENDS NEED AGE YOU. BE A MAN

Figure 3.9

of 1918 (see Figures 3.10 and 3.11). In each, an individual -- divorced from the reassuring element of the camaraderie of his fellow soldiers -- appeals for civilian support through a direct, personal solicitation. Both austere images bear the brutal reality of the steel helmet. This is in stark contrast to the fatuous idealism of the handsome, but useless, cloth cap, emblematic of 1914's militaristic, gentlemanly depictions of warfare. Edmund Blunden averred: "The dethronement of the cloth cap clearly symbolized the change that was coming over the war," a change which marked a fundamental shift in understanding. The War was no longer a dashing, exciting contest, but rather "a vast machine of violence."⁴¹ The realities of war, then, heralded Modernism's overthrow of an utterly discredited militarist mythology.

Finally, a cold, dark epiphany emerged from the latter posters. The jolly, "sporting" images of soldiering, so prevalent in the early War posters, were supplanted by shadowy and demonic representations of horrific violence. Any suggestion of sportsmanship or "fair play" is entirely absent from both the late Canadian recruiting poster and the English war bonds appeal. In the former, entitled *Thrust All Obstacles Aside*, a strained, silhouetted soldier grapples violently with an enemy. The figures are set in sharp relief against a blasted and chaotic landscape -- no playing field or parade background here. In the latter, another Brangwyn lithograph, the viciousness of hand-to-hand combat is graphically illustrated through the stark portrayal of a bayonetting (see Figure

⁴¹Blunden, Undertones of War, p. 73.

3.12). *PUT STRENGTH IN THE FINAL BLOW*, shouts the caption, thus marking Modernism's normalization of violent action -- a world away from the "teamwork" and esprit du sport subtexts of early poster imagery.⁴²

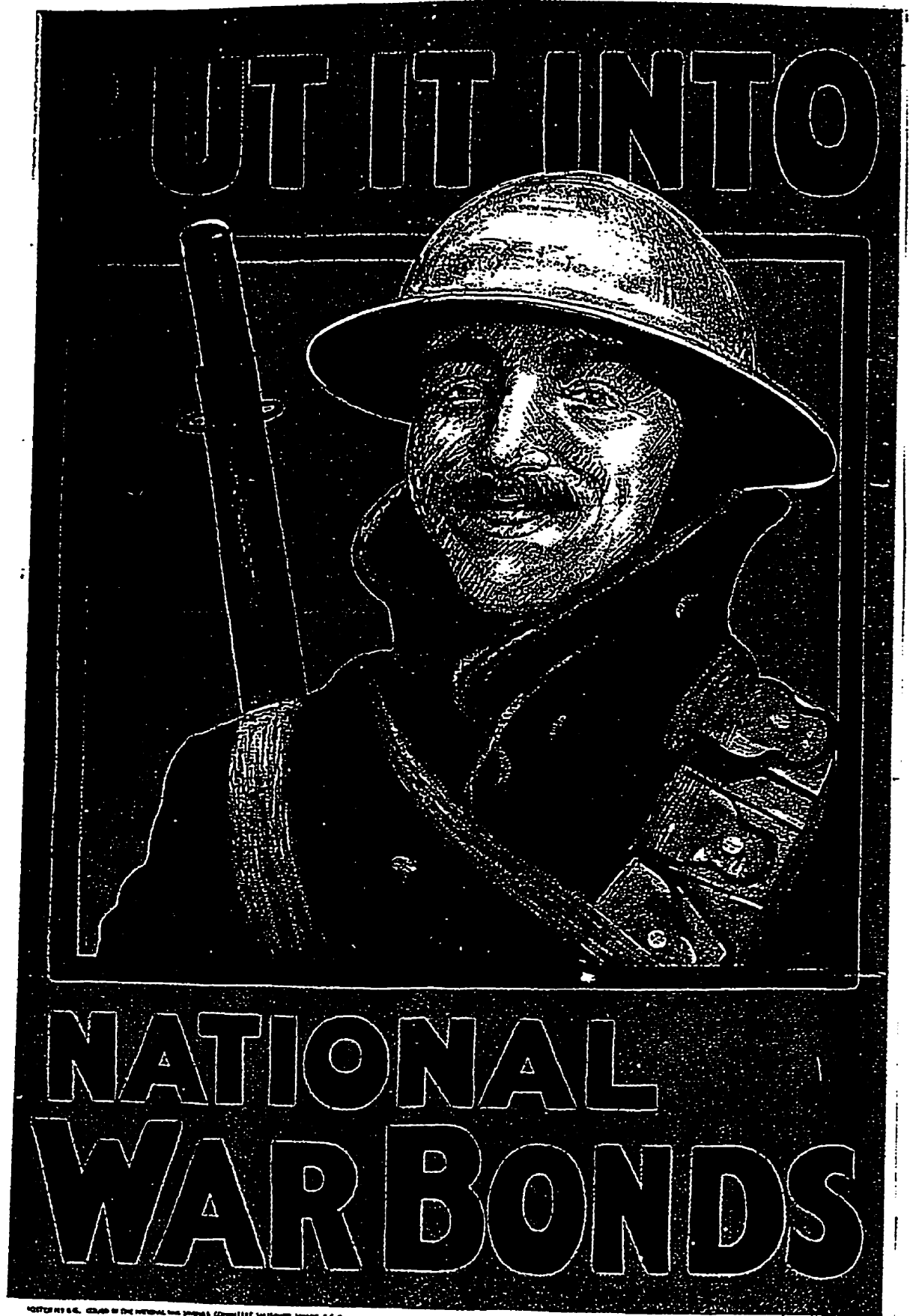
The tragic chronicle of the "Footballers Battalion" (the 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment) whose football star recruits were supposed to inspire British youth, provides a poignant underscoring to the cruel incongruity of sports and warfare. After spending most of 1914 and 1915 playing matches at home to boost enlistment drives or trouncing frontline regimental teams (allegedly to lift troop morale), in 1916 the battalion was sent into action at Vimy Ridge and Beaumont Hamel. In December of that year, the formerly invincible "Die Hards" were able to eke out only a 2-1 defeat of the 34th Brigade. By 1918, fewer than thirty of the battalion's more than two hundred footballers remained and the Regiment was disbanded.⁴³

⁴²Brangwyn's print, originally posted early in the War, initially met with considerable criticism. Many felt the image "went too far" in its realistic depiction. However, by the latter half of the conflict, the poster was extremely popular, and was reprinted on several occasions. See Darracott and Loftus, *First World War Posters*, pp. 8-9.

⁴³Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, pp. 125-126.



Figure 3.10



OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL WAR BONDS COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

1 1/2 x 1 1/2 INCHES

Figure 3.11



Figure 3.12

IV

THE MODERNIST WOMAN

"What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, . . . which has become, I suppose, since the war, half a phantom to many men and women, which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin..."

Virginia Woolf, *The Mark on the Wall*, 1921

In 1910, amidst some public furor, a young artist named Egon Schiele completed a painting entitled *Standing Female Nude With Crossed Arms*. The image, that of a naked, emaciated and haggard woman, skin reddened and raw, is characteristic of the approach taken to the female form by avant-garde artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That approach, pioneered by figures such as Schiele and his fellows in the Vienna Secession, explored female imagery in decidedly non-traditional ways. Specifically, the somewhat conservative portraiture of nineteenth century painters such as Renoir and Cezanne gave way to the highly stylized techniques emblematic of Modernist artistic endeavour. This altered sensibility amongst artists, particularly in Europe around the turn of the century, saw the production of a great many original and often shocking depictions of the female form. Especially shocked were those who maintained traditional nineteenth century conceptions of the role and image of women. Prior to the searing effects of the Great War, that number equated to the vast majority. Indeed, in 1912, after creating several pieces consisting of provocatively nude women, Schiele himself was charged with "obscenity" and jailed for three weeks.¹

¹ Cole and Gealt, Art of the Western World, p. 263.

Clearly, prior to the First World War, Modernism, and an evolving pattern of women's roles and images, had not yet penetrated the public consciousness. Thus, non-traditional ideas concerning women, like those of fighting men, generally remained alien and unrecognized before 1914. The Great War did much to alter that perception, however. While women in many western nations clamoured for the vote in the years leading up to the conflict, it could be argued that increased public awareness of women's status "owed far more" to the economic exigencies of the War than to "feminist agitation."² This circumstance certainly obtained in both Great Britain and Canada where most people did not become accepting of the altogether new, Modernist representations of women as independent and increasingly self-actualized until well into the War. For that majority, the deeply entrenched Edwardian perception of women persisted, a fact evidenced by the early twentieth century poster record. Almost exclusively, such imagery showcased the traditional nineteenth century vision of the female, alternately portraying women as maternal or romantically symbolic.

However, the First World War led to manifest change in the depiction of the female form in posters, as economic necessity led to the widespread, though grudging, acceptance of women in non-traditional societal roles. Many of these were positions of some responsibility, roles which contributed to female empowerment. Certainly, it was a trend poster artists acknowledged in their work.

² Arthur Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (New York, 1965), p.90. See also Arthur Marwick, Women at War (London, 1977).

For, after 1916, Britons and Canadians were exposed to a wide variety of poster imagery displaying women in these temporarily empowered, non-traditional situations. This coincidence of early twentieth century female role changes and the Modernist movement has far ranging implications for the critical analysis of poster imagery.

Yet, it should be noted that such imagery, while often displaying women in empowered scenarios, must not be confused with feminist representation. In fact, some scholars have recently critiqued the connection between Modernism and feminism. One in particular, sociologist Janet Wolff, has written several essays on the subject. In her study on the experience of women in mid-1800s European urban centres during the advent of Modernity, she describes the period as a time of the anonymous, independent male *flaneur*, or wanderer. Ultimately, Wolff characterizes Modernity as an intrinsically masculine phenomenon, produced by males for males, and one which uniformly excluded female participation. Yet, as the author herself recognizes, mid-nineteenth century Modernity and early twentieth century Modernism should not be "conflated."³

In another essay entitled *Feminism and Modernism*, Wolff attacks directly the "over-enthusiastic claiming of modernism for feminism."⁴ In support, she cites several examples of marginalized feminine artistic expression from the Modernist period. But in

³ Janet Wolff, "The Invisible *Flaneurs*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," in Janet Wolff, Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture (Cambridge, 1990), p. 36.

⁴ Janet Wolff, "Feminism and Modernism," in Wolff, Feminine Sentences, p. 57.

presenting her argument, the author is far too dismissive of women's involvement in the First World War. For, if, as Wolff asserts, women's role *vis-a-vis* the Great War was widely perceived as secondary, it was a consequence of the lack of an accurate depiction of the real activities of women, rather than a result of their lack of War-related experience. Indeed, if proximity to combat and its consequences, "bonding" with one's fellow combatants, "activism and involvement," were central elements of the Modernist conception of the War, women, as later evidence will reveal, were active participants, though their decision-making power remained negligible. So, while an honest artistic representation of women may in fact have been stifled by "powerful masculinist and misogynist" currents,⁵ the empowering activities associated with the War effort *involving* women -- in jobs previously only done by men -- were widespread. Further, thousands of posters publicly displayed images of women in these non-traditional scenarios. By War's end, broadsides featured women as machinists, farmers, and even soldiers. Thus, Modernism, non-traditional roles for women, and popular culture in relation to the Great War became coincidental phenomena.

In fact, the Great War can be seen as a watershed event which precipitated an increased acceptance of Modernist trends and of changing sensibilities about women, a notion supported by the poster catalogue. So by 1918, the public's perception concerning women was sufficiently altered to tolerate the ubiquitous poster image of a

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

woman in the workplace. Yet during the early stages of the Great War, the posters disseminated in England and Canada bore female imagery more accurately associated with popular printed works from the previous century.

By the mid-1900s, commercial advertisers relied heavily on the poster medium. Cheap and easy to produce and display, posters "spoke clearly" to the general public, and were "easily understood even from a distance."⁶ The female image, most commonly depicted as a maternal or mythical icon, was often a central motif in these early poster advertisements. When British and Canadian commercial printing houses began advertising the world conflict in 1914, they continued to produce posters featuring women as figures either wholly traditional or symbolic, but within the context of war. Consequently, during the Great War's initial stages, much of the female poster imagery closely resembled the archetypal Edwardian woman which for years had been used to advertise cigarettes, soap flakes and clothing. Alternatively, women also appeared in posters as universal 'feminine' icons. However, rather than lauding the attributes of a particular automobile, these women embodied the spirits of patriotism, war or charity.

Such iconic representations of women were common in posters distributed during the first years of the War, both in Great Britain and in Canada. Within this class of poster, images of augustly appointed women commanded the viewer to enlist, led soldiers into

⁶ Paret, Lewis and Paret, Persuasive Images, p. 2. See also Austin Cooper, Making a Poster (London, 1938).

battle and ministered to the fallen. As Michele Shover accurately describes, "women so portrayed were almost always classically -- sometimes romantically -- draped, heroic figures who project alternately stateliness, sensuality, or furious wrath."⁷ Perhaps the most famous British example of this type of poster is Bernard Partridge's piece entitled *Take Up the Sword of Justice* (see Figure 4.1). Commissioned by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in 1915, the poster's central image is that of a woman in cape and cowl hovering above choppy seas, sword arm raised, her face alight with righteous indignation. In the background a passenger liner sinks, probably a representation of the English cruise ship *Lusitania*, torpedoed by German U-boats off the coast of Ireland in May of that year.⁸

The Canadian counterpart to *Take Up the Sword of Justice* was an often reprinted poster first displayed in 1914. Entitled *Be Yours To Hold It High!* and signed by its lithographer F.L. Nicolet, the poster entreats the viewer in bold characters to "Buy Victory Bonds." Beneath the title caption, a soldier and a worker are heralded by a young woman appearing as a robed angelic icon,

⁷ Shover, "Roles and Images of Women," in Politics and Society, p. 479.

⁸ The sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, claimed the lives of 1198 civilians, including 120 Americans. The vessel's destruction came on the heels of Germany's announced intention in February to conduct "unrestricted submarine warfare" in the enforcement of a naval blockade of Great Britain. Several other passenger liners were sunk by U-boats that year, but it was the loss of the *Lusitania* which "brought down the wrath of the neutral world on Germany." The disaster inspired several posters, including perhaps the most poignant American piece of the War -- a woman and her infant child sinking to the ocean floor accompanied by the single word caption "Enlist." Eksteins, Rites of Spring, p. 167. For information on American Fred Spear's poster "Enlist," see Paret, Lewis and Paret, Persuasive Images, p. 26.

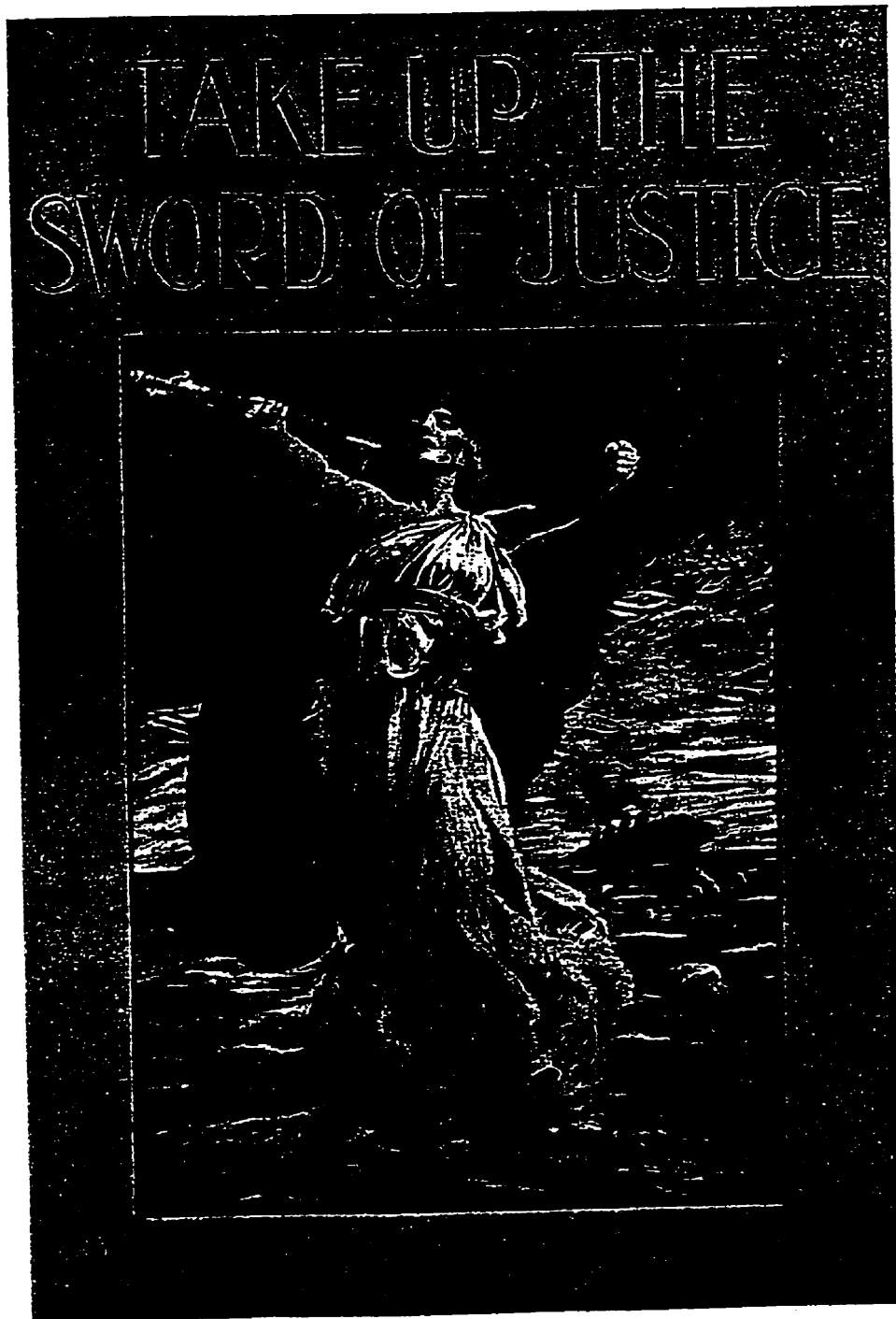


Figure 4.1

complete with wings and bearing a torch. Yet it is of note that the depiction of women as angels appeared most commonly in English and Canadian posters for the International Red Cross, an organization with which the traditional image of the nurse as an 'angel of mercy' had long been associated.⁹ In any event, whether embodying war, nationhood or charity, all these iconic female images shared a common commercial heritage. The classically draped female figure was a traditional Edwardian totem, readily identified, and consequently an element central to western poster advertisements for decades prior to the War. Partridge and Nicolet might have been inspired by any number of pre-War examples, from everyday advertisements for milk, to French actress Sarah Bernhardt's "stained-glass saint" publicity posters (see Figure 4.2).¹⁰ Thus, it was in keeping with tradition that both England and Canada produced a great many posters featuring such iconic female images during the early portion of the Great War. Often, when the robed, gesturing female symbol demanded that the Briton *Remember Scarborough!* or asked French Canadians the question *Attendrons-Nous Que Les Nôtres Brulent?*, it was military recruitment that was the poster's central function.

Most often, however, it was the traditional figure of the stereotypically domestic Edwardian woman, in need of protection, supportive and nobly embodying a sense of duty, which spearheaded

⁹ Nursing was one of the only War-related jobs occupied by women right from the outset of the conflict. In the western hemisphere, it was a well-established female profession which pre-dated both Modernism and the feminist movement. Indeed, referring to the 1914-1918 period, Maurice Rickards accurately asserts, "only in nursing was the female role familiar." See Rickards and Moody, The First World War, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰ Paret, Lewis and Paret, Persuasive Images, p. 5.

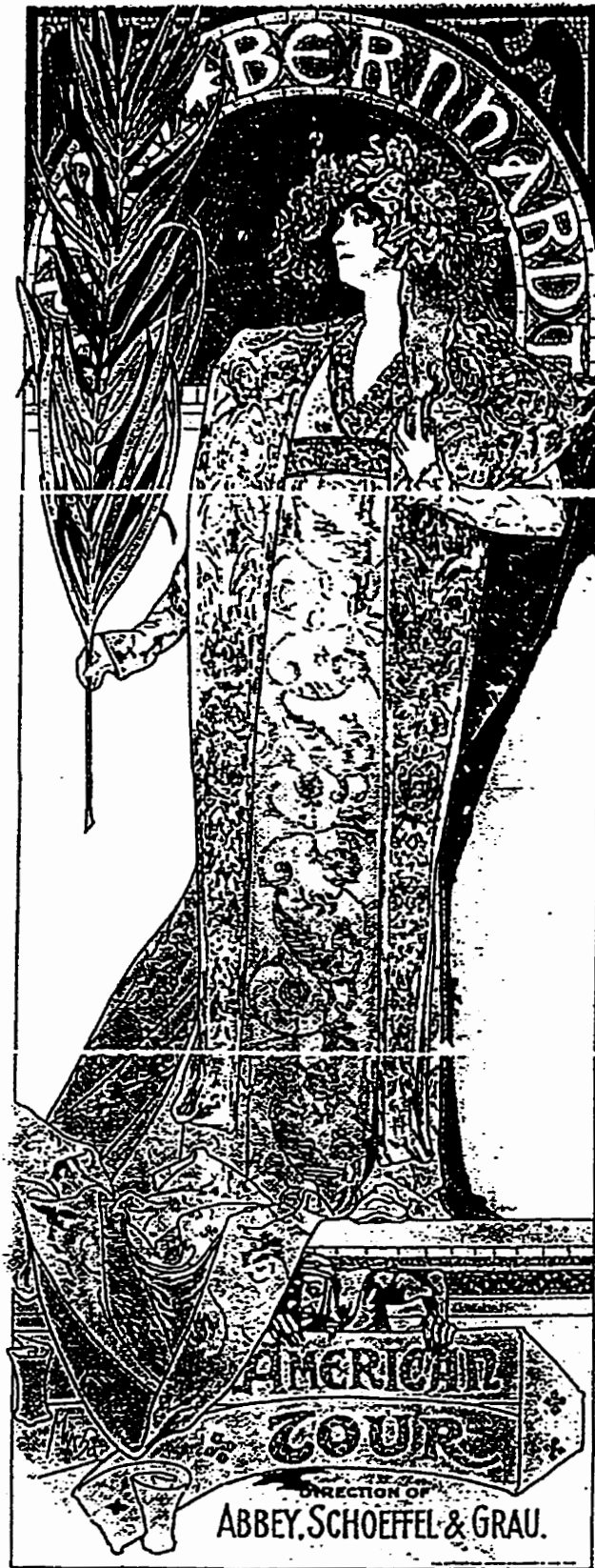


Figure 4.2

poster recruiting drives in both England and Canada. They were campaigns the thrust of which was "by no means oblique."¹¹ In striving to engage women as recruiting agents during the Great War's first years, these posters showcased an idealized image of the Edwardian woman, emblematic of 'home and hearth.' Within each poster of this type, mothers, daughters, wives and sweethearts appeared, fulfilling their traditional domestic roles as supportive yet strident embodiments of the Edwardian moral compass.

In fact, prior to the introduction of compulsory military service, women were perceived as the primary means of encouraging men to enlist, and the poster record illustrates that fact.¹² Artist E. Kealey's 1915 *Women of Britain Say -- "GO!"* (see Figure 4.3) is perhaps the best known example of this kind of poster. Beneath the title caption, it depicts two women positioned romantically at a window casement with a small child. The pair, presumably mother and daughter, gaze upon a line of British soldiers moving away. The women's faces, conceivably watching their loved ones depart for the last time, convey those sentiments appropriate to Edwardian women with respect to their men -- worry, support and admiration. Clearly, despite the Great War context within which these posters appeared, the contained female images were wholly traditional, reminiscent of the pictures of frail, pretty and entirely domestic women which filled British and Canadian

¹¹ Rickards, Posters of the First World War, p. 11.

¹² Ibid., and Rickards and Moody, The First World War, pp. 17-20. Conscription was introduced in England in May, 1916, and in Canada in August, 1917.

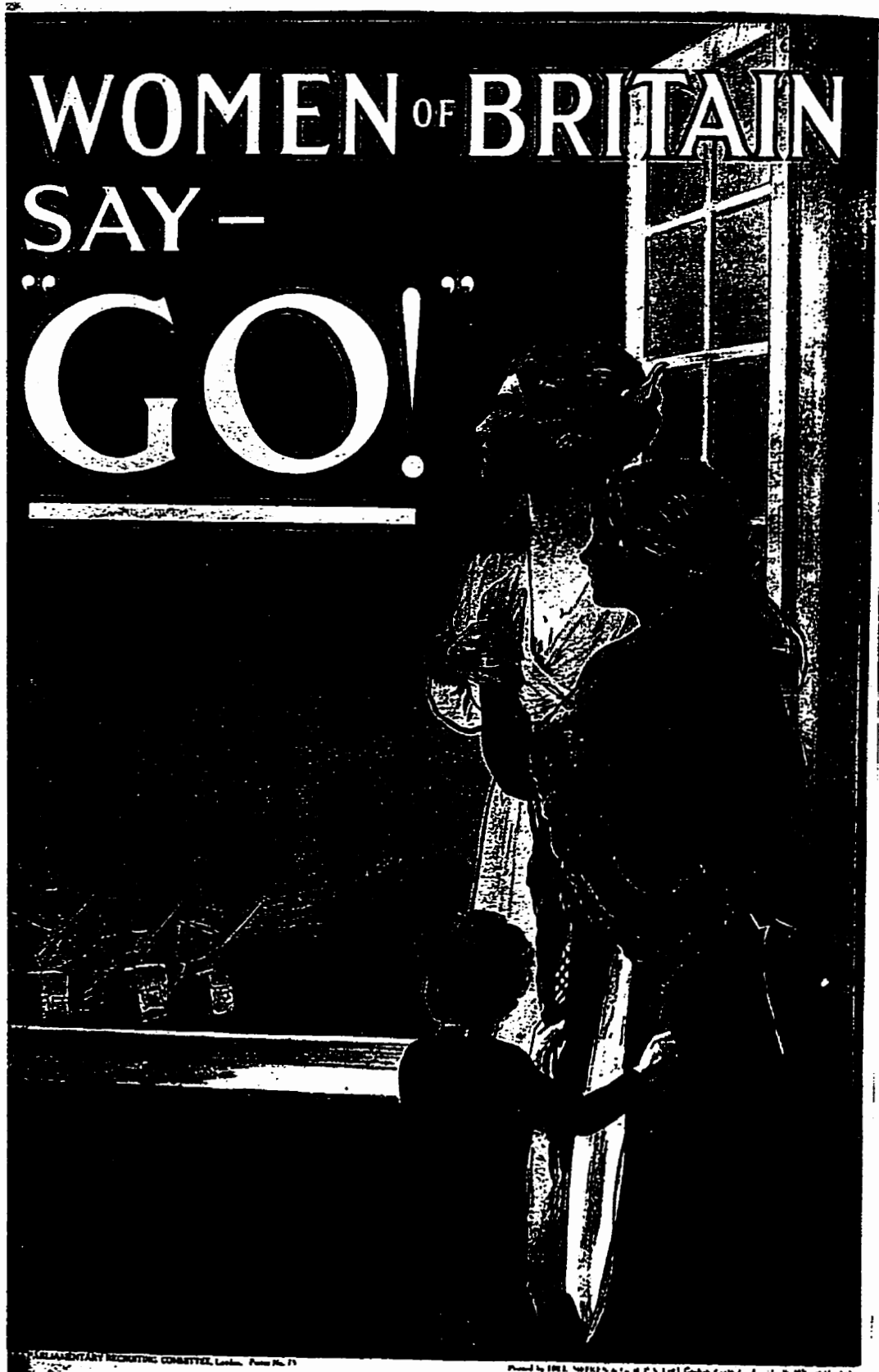


Figure 4.3

advertisements before the War. Indeed, the 1915 poster image of the traditionally dressed Irish¹³ maiden demanding *Will You Go Or Must I?*, would certainly have been considered an absurd depiction by most men, and women, at this early point in the War. Most Britons and Canadians would have thought it a risible notion that a female could potentially take on what had always been seen as a man's role, particularly in the military. Prior to the First World War, the "overwhelming social expectation" for middle-class women was that they should remain in a domestic milieu, married, monogamous and bearing children.¹⁴ However, amongst some fringe segments of society, that sentiment had changed, even before the War.

Many western writers, poets, and artists of every description had come to embrace the Modernist creative vision in the two decades before 1914. Modernism, for its proponents, was both a movement and a mood which encouraged individuals to cast off what were perceived as the outmoded aesthetic conventions of the previous century. In rejecting Edwardian traditionalism, many avant-garde artists began to depict women differently. For many Modernist supporters, the Edwardian separation of the male and the female on moral, biological, or psychological grounds was artificial. To them, the

¹³ In the years prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Ireland teetered "on the brink" of civil war. Concerned that people in Ireland perceived the War as an 'English conflict,' the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee specifically catered a number of posters to Irish viewers. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p. 6. See also M.S. Anderson, *The Ascendancy of Europe 1815-1914* (London, 1965), pp. 224-225.

¹⁴ Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Sayers, *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (Boston, 1987), p. 12.

movement was "androgynous."¹⁵ Hence, when artists, like Egon Schiele, portrayed the female form in non-traditional ways, they were consciously rebelling against Edwardian sensibilities. However, altered representations of women were not entirely subsumed under the Modernist ethos until the First World War was well under way. As some literary critics have indicated, the War in fact "strengthened" women's position by making many avant-garde figures aware of their vulnerability to a repressive and violent patriarchy.¹⁶ As the seminal Modernist author Virginia Woolf wrote years after the conflict, the Great War "was a shock" to women in particular, especially with respect to their perceptions concerning the feminine role in society.¹⁷ Yet it was not merely avant-garde figures who were so affected by the conflict. As the Great War passed the midpoint of its second full year, ordinary English and Canadian women came to realize the Modernist vision as "a way of life."¹⁸

Specifically, by 1916-1917, the drain on human and material resources caused by the War led to drastic increases in the

¹⁵ Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 121, and Matei Calinescu, Faces of Modernity (Bloomington, 1977), p. 3.

¹⁶ Julian Symons, Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature, 1912-1939 (New York, 1987), p. 61, and Shari Benstock, Women of the Left Bank (Austin, 1986), pp. 30-31.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London, 1930), p. 23. Further, as literary critic Makiko Minow-Pinkney points out, Woolf viewed the War as an event which "shattered the male illusion," and was thus "a liberating experience for women." The resultant loosening of societal constraints left women with "'an intoxicating sense of ... freedom.'" See Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Virginia Woolf & the Problem of the Subject (New Brunswick, 1987), pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ Hanscombe and Sayers, Writing for Their Lives, p. 11.

responsibilities, duties and occupations shouldered by women. A necessary consequence of this was a change in the popular perception of the female role. *Punch Magazine*, a widely read English periodical, had occasion to comment on the subject in June, 1916:

It is quite impossible to keep pace with all the new incarnations of women in war-time -- 'bus-conductress, ticket-collector, lift-girl, club waitress, post-woman, bank clerk, motor-driver, farm-labourer, guide, munition maker. . . . whenever he sees one of these new citizens, or hears fresh stories of their address and ability, Mr. Punch is proud and delighted.¹⁹

To use a later locution, by 1916-1917 women had certainly been "liberated" from the home.²⁰ Clearly then, the exigencies of a protracted and punishing War which had already necessitated conscription and spawned countless funding drives, ultimately led to a different realization of roles for women and the context of Modernism. As females in both Great Britain and Canada left their staid, Edwardian domestic spheres in unprecedented numbers, posters depicted this dramatic societal change.

Indeed, in 1916 and after, the images of nineteenth century goddesses and Edwardian housewives, while still in evidence, were largely displaced by posters depicting women as empowered individuals actively engaged in the War effort. Such imagery clearly provided a pictorial basis for a new representation of acceptable roles for women. Yet, some scholars disagree. Socio-

¹⁹ *Punch Magazine*, Mr. Punch's History, pp. 95-96.

²⁰ Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 121.

political scientist Michele Shover categorically denies any such notion. In fact, she contends that the "posters give no hint" of an altered perspective on women.²¹ This is a broad and somewhat inaccurate generalization, however. While explicit references to female empowerment may have been absent from Great War posters, the claim that empowering images were wholly lacking is questionable.

Shover's analysis fails to explain adequately the undeniable shift in female poster imagery, a fact the author herself paradoxically recognizes.²² Ultimately, Shover's is a rather weak critique, presenting an unsubstantiated, even conspiratorial, analysis of the Great War poster campaign. Her assertion that governments actively "attempted to preserve the traditionally passive feminine role" through poster propaganda is contradicted by a host of historians, all of whom agree there was little organized planning in the dissemination of posters, particularly in Great Britain and Canada.²³ Certainly, Shover's views notwithstanding, the widespread poster depiction of women in entirely non-traditional, often paid positions, indicated an acknowledgement of at least some aspects of an evolving female representation in popular culture. By 1916-1917, such portrayals were commonplace. On pillars, posts and walls everywhere posters heralded the 'arrival' of the Modernist

²¹ Shover, "Roles and Images of Women," in Politics and Society, pp. 472-473.

²² Shover acknowledges that Great War posters "encouraged" an "expansion of women's established social roles, including war production work and voluntarism." See Ibid., p. 486.

²³ Ibid., p. 469. Also, see Darracott, First World War in Posters, p. 6. See also Rickards, Posters of the First World War, p. 12., and Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 16.

Table 4.1. *Trends in female employment in England, 1914-18*

Period, measured from July	Women entering workforce (000s)	Females in workforce (%)
1914-15	382	--
1915-16	563	26.5
1916-17	511	46.9
1917-18	203	46.7

woman. Again, it was imagery which indicated the enormous change to English and Canadian society wrought by the War.

For as the third Christmas passed with no end in sight to the debilitating continental stalemate, large numbers of English and Canadian women began assuming positions from which they had been traditionally barred. This was particularly true with respect to the paid workforce. In both urban and rural settings, women attended to decidedly non-traditional duties in unheralded numbers. In England, the rise of the working class female saw the number of women gainfully employed double in just a single year (see Table 4.1).²⁴ Officially termed "dilution" or "substitution," thousands of British women accepted all manner of traditionally masculine

²⁴ Standing Joint Committee of Women's Industrial Organisation, The Position of Women After the War, p. 4., as quoted in Deborah Thom, "Women and Work in Wartime Britain," in Jay Winter and Richard Farll, eds., The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918 (Cambridge, 1988), p. 306.

occupations in the latter half of the War. In the field of commerce, for example, the female labour force increased by close to 400 000.²⁵ But perhaps the greatest gains made by English women were in the industrial manufacturing sectors, a fact once again noticed by *Punch* in February, 1917:

War has taught the truth that shines
Through the poet's noble lines:
"Common are to either sex
Artifex and opifex."²⁶

Between 1914 and 1918, total female employment in British industry increased by approximately 800 000. In particular, munitions plants saw a marked rise in the number of female workers, from 212 000 in 1914, to 819 000 in 1917.²⁷

Within Canada, the growth of the war-time female work force, while less rapid and extensive than in England, was nonetheless significant.²⁸ Like their English counterparts, a great many Canadian women were compelled to replace men at jobs traditionally inaccessible to females. During the decade encompassing the Great War, approximately 125 500 Canadian women joined the paid working

²⁵ Jay M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London, 1988), p. 174.

²⁶ *Punch Magazine*, *Mr. Punch's History*, p. 139. *Artifex* is an archaic latin term meaning "artificer" or "craftsman."

²⁷ Harwick, *The Deluge*, p. 91.

²⁸ Unlike Great Britain, Canada did not face immediate total military engagement and thus was not forced to mobilize as extensively nor as rapidly for the War. Consequently, Canada did not see an appreciable male labour shortage until conscription was initiated in August, 1917 — more than a year after the English draft and only fifteen months prior to the armistice.

population, an increase of nearly thirty-five percent.²⁹ At the close of the conflict, this figure represented over fifteen percent of Canada's total labour force over the age of ten.³⁰ Of that number, over twenty-five percent were women employed in manufacturing and industrial works, including munitions factories. Indeed, by the end of 1917, just within Ontario and Montreal, more than 35 000 women were employed as munitions workers, a substantial figure for a nation of only eight million.³¹ Clearly then, as was the case in Great Britain, Canada witnessed the feminization of its industrial and munitions labour force as a result of the War. The trend inspired various official printing houses in both nations to acknowledge and advertise women's commitment to the war effort. Consequently, by 1916-1917, non-traditional, Modernist poster images of women were common, appearing on every hoarding, bus shelter and subway wall.

Particularly potent were those posters featuring women labouring at jobs traditionally reserved for men. The Edwardian images of goddesses and the like were greatly diminished. In their place sprang up depictions of entire factories populated by female workers, using tools and running heavy machinery. In England, as early as 1915-1916, posters showed women working alongside men in

²⁹ Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women during the Great War," in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, eds., Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930 (Toronto, 1974), p. 296.

³⁰ Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Canadian Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," in Modernist Studies (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1974-75), p. 6.

³¹ Ramkhalawansingh, "Women," in Acton et al, Women at Work, pp. 276-280., and R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith, Destinies (Toronto, 1988), p. 176.



DESIGNED BY LT GEN SIR R S BADEN POWELL.

Are YOU in this?

Figure 4.4

industrial settings. One specific example designed by Lord Baden-Powell emphasized the immense importance of women's work to Britain's war effort. Entitled *Are YOU in this?* (see Figure 4.4), the poster showcases several figures together in the general shape of a pyramid, each engaged in a different type of war work. At the top of the pyramid are front-line soldiers, supported by the labourers and munitions workers beneath. Amongst them appears a stolid woman, positioned at her work bench, manufacturing bullets. Suddenly, the war-time phrase 'doing your bit' applied to women outside the domestic sphere, a notion virtually unthinkable in 1914.

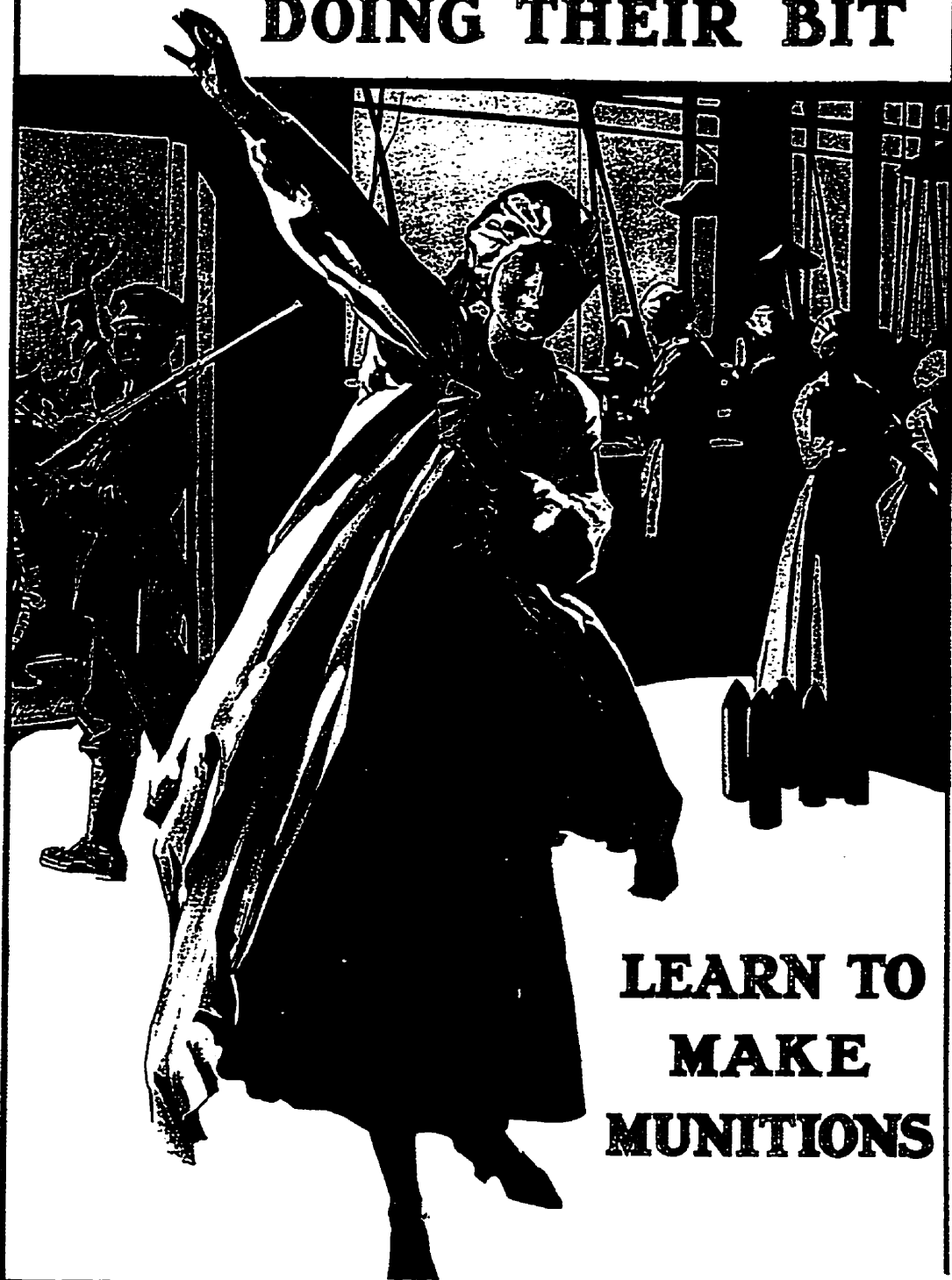
Yet by 1916-1917, Britons and Canadians were exposed to such non-traditional imagery on an everyday basis. Indeed, as women entered factories "*en masse*,"³² posters from the latter half of the War detailed their further expansion into traditionally male-dominated employment sectors. Specifically, in Great Britain, the labour shortage saw women take on greater and more strenuous duties in munitions and other plants. The same was true in Canada where women increasingly "moved from light industrial work into a wide range of heavier work."³³ An abundance of printed poster imagery illustrated this shift. Posters thus captured the generally accepted perception of the female war worker as successful, independent, responsible, steadfast and "heroic, with an immense machine under her control."³⁴ Again, these patently empowering

³² Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 55.

³³ Rankhalavansingh, "Women," in Acton et al, Women at Work, p. 275.

³⁴ Thom, "Women," in Winter and Warll, eds., Upheaval of War, p. 309.

**THESE WOMEN ARE
DOING THEIR BIT**



**LEARN TO
MAKE
MUNITIONS**

Figure 4.5

poster images were far from isolated, anomalous specimens. Individual prints normally had runs in the thousands, with each poster's longevity largely determined by public response.

For instance, possibly the most memorable such Modernist image, a 1917 British example, was also obviously quite popular. Entitled *These Women are Doing Their Bit* (see Figure 4.5), high demand saw the lithograph reprinted on several occasions both in England and in Canada. Created by poster artist Septimus E. Scott, the image is the antithesis of Kealey's wholly traditional *Women of Britain Say — "GO!"*. Rather than homey, comfortable hues, Scott's print is coloured in sombre purples and greys. Below the title caption, the central female figure stares not after her departing man, but instead strides purposefully away from the soldier at the door, joining her working sisters in the munitions factory. On her face is determination and strength, not worry. The picture is certainly an empowering one, casting women not as domestic bystanders, but as active, employed participants in the Great War. Considering the exigencies of that conflict, such female participation inevitably spread beyond the urban setting.

On farms across Great Britain and Canada women also replaced absent men, taking up positions at granaries and behind plows. By 1916-1917, over 196 000 English women were employed in the agricultural industry, up from 130 000 in 1914. The 66 000 new female farm workers represented a three year increase of over fifty percent.³⁵ Canada's women too shouldered increased responsibilities

³⁵ Standing Joint Committee of Women's Industrial Organisation, The Position of Women After the War, p. 4., as quoted in Ibid., p. 307.

on the land. Largely a rural nation at the outbreak of the Great War, Canada had approximately 16 000 paid women farm labourers listed in its 1911 census. By the close of the conflict that number had risen only moderately. However, census statistics did not include the some 750 000 unpaid women farmers who "in practice if not in theory" shared in the operational duties of family owned farms.³⁶ After 1917, the War's leaching effects on Canadian manpower undoubtedly increased the scope of those duties as female farmers absorbed the slack of absent male family members. Thus, like their English counterparts, Canadian women were compelled to 'do their bit' on the land.

But of the two nations, it was Great Britain that took notice. *Punch Magazine* lauded the abilities of British farm women in a four panelled cartoon within its September, 1918 issue. In it, a male farm owner is shown growing progressively richer from the toil of a lone female farm labourer.³⁷ The confident, independent, masculinely attired figure scarcely resembles the waifish Edwardian women who hawked soap flakes in 1914. Yet *Punch* was simply acknowledging an altered public perception concerning women's war-time role on the farm. That is, as in the urban setting, women were fully capable of entering and succeeding in a traditionally male-dominated working environment. It was a theme often repeated within a variety of

³⁶ Ramkhalavansingh, "Women," in Acton et al, Women at Work, p. 266-267. Interestingly, the Canadian government did not acknowledge these women as labourers until the 1970s. Had they been recognized as unpaid workers in the 1921 census, their numbers would have amounted to at least one-third of the labour force.

³⁷ *Punch Magazine*, Mr. Punch's History, p. 253.

media. Not surprisingly, posters too seized upon this evolving motif. A great many were printed featuring non-traditional representations of women during the latter portion of the War, though Canada, largely spared a rural labour shortfall, produced few specifically farm-oriented examples. England, however, faced with tremendous labour shortages after 1916-1917, was particularly motivated in creating posters advertising and promoting its female rural work force.

In fact, by mid-1916, enormous losses at the front coupled with the enactment of conscription led to the first British posters portraying these newly independent farm women. Interestingly however, early examples retained echoes of the traditional. As a consequence, such posters often displayed somewhat incongruous images of domestically appointed Edwardian housewives labouring on the land. One specific lithograph entitled *I Leave the Land to YOU* is actually reminiscent of the window casement scene from *Women of Britain Say -- "GO!"*. Signed U.J.B. by its artist, the poster is a romantically stylized depiction of a departing English soldier apparently bidding farewell to his wife and child. On the surface, the woman is clearly cast as an Edwardian female archetype -- maternal, domestic and self-sacrificing. Yet the image is also a novel and empowering one. For unlike the domestic bystanders of Kealey's poster, here the central female figure is remaining behind as a war-time farm labourer. By 1917 and after, examples were more explicitly empowering, featuring women farm workers as a common

rural feature and a necessary fact of English war-time life.³⁸ Obviously, poster content was altered to acknowledge the increased numbers of British women doing "men's jobs" on the land.³⁹ Indeed, the appreciable demographic shift was accompanied by a variety of decidedly Modernist images.

Quite numerous were posters advertising and recruiting for the various official women's farm auxiliaries. As the continental deadlock bled male populations, England responded by establishing several home-front paramilitary labour organizations, a number of which employed women on the land. Members of these groups wore uniforms and were regimented in a manner closely resembling the armed services. The sight of olive-clad women labouring in the English countryside was not uncommon, either in reality or in posters. Emblematic of this kind of poster is lithographer H.G. Gawthorn's piece for the Women's Land Army entitled "*God Speed the Plow and the Woman Who Drives It*" (see Figure 4.6). Quite popular when first issued in 1917, this and similar broadsides were reprinted several times. The image is of a solitary, uniformed female at sunrise, directing a horse and plow toward a great expanse of untilled soil. Depicted as a strong and independent figure, the woman is turned away from the viewer, her attention directed to the work at hand. Clearly, the sober, empowering image contrasts

³⁸ For instance, see J. Walter West's poster entitled "Harvest-Time, 1916: Women's Work on the Land." The entirely unromantic image is of a group of overall-clad women labouring on a farm and is characteristic of this kind of poster. See Hardie and Sabin, War Posters Issued by Belligerent and Neutral Nations, pp. 34-35.

³⁹ Rickards and Moody, The First World War, p. 20.



Figure 4.6

starkly with traditional, early war-time poster depictions of women. Here, not a trace of the frail Edwardian housewife may be found, an image which might well have shocked the average Briton but a few years earlier.

Similarly Modernist images of women also filled English armed forces recruiting posters from the latter half of the Great War. Such portrayals followed the formation by 1916 of a "fair variety" of women's military auxiliaries. More accurately characterized as paramilitary organizations, these groups sprang up in response, once again, to the enormous drain on male populations caused by the continental stalemate.⁴⁰ Unlike the Women's Land Army, however, said auxiliaries directly assisted the fighting forces, often within the theatre of battle itself. In fact, such women were "in theory" subject "to the same military discipline as men," though few authorities ever "implemented their right to court-martial a woman for desertion."⁴¹ In any event, by the beginning of 1917 these various groups were consolidated by the British government into the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACS); added subsequently were the WRENS and the WRAFS, all providing for intrepid women "an opportunity" to serve in a capacity "hitherto denied them."⁴²

As increased numbers of women entered the English military as auxiliaries, clerks and uniformed helpmates, again lithographers acknowledged and legitimated the female invasion of a traditionally

⁴⁰ Marwick, The Deluge, p. 93.

⁴¹ Rickards and Moody, The First World War, p. 20.

⁴² Marwick, The Deluge, p. 93.

masculine sphere by creating poster images featuring women in formerly male-only work sites. Lithographer Joyce Dennys revealed the independent spirit of these women in her broadside for the Women's Royal Naval Service. The image is of a single uniformed female, face stern and purposeful, her arms gesturing toward the sea and horizon. In the background, a ship steams into the distance. In a similar poster, a woman in full WRAF uniform and gear stands before aircraft on a runway. Another, this one for the army, showcases three women, all in decidedly masculine overcoats, positioned on a quay with military vessels behind them. Clearly, by the later stages of the War, women had successfully insinuated themselves into the final stronghold of male endeavour -- military service. Equally clear is the message conveyed by the posters printed during this period -- that the English public largely accepted women in such non-traditional roles.

In truth, this empowerment of women through the feminization of a traditionally masculine military and workforce was an inherently Modernist event -- a notion supported by the Great War poster record. Such widespread dissemination and apparent acceptance of imagery depicting responsible, independent women in entirely non-traditional spheres marked a clear break with Edwardian tradition. Certainly, the altogether common and often popular poster images of the female as labourer, farmer and military auxiliary represented a polar shift in the general perception of women. What most Britons and Canadians perceived as a woman's natural station at the outset of the conflict, according to the poster record, changed utterly by the War's conclusion. Gone were

the pictures of traditional icons and Edwardian figures of homey domesticity, replaced instead by Modernist images of temporary female empowerment.

Ultimately, it was the human toll taken by the Great War which forced the practical realization of the Modernist, androgynous perception of women, both in reality and in the somewhat reflective forum of popular culture. Ideas that had been avant-garde and fringe in 1914 were suddenly and necessarily made mainstream as a direct result of the War's draining effects. Thus, Modernist portraiture like Egon Schiele's, while objectifying women with its provocative, sexualized presentation, nonetheless functioned as a kind of harbinger of future trends. Indeed, by the close of the conflict, War-scarred populations were entirely accustomed to seeing women in non-traditional milieus. It was, however, not to last. Mirroring the simultaneous decline of the more positive and progressive aspects of Modernism, the hedonistic twenties and depressed thirties led to the gradual erosion of the modest gains secured by women during the Great War.⁴³ Regrettably, by the start of the next world conflict, women's assumed 'place' had returned to the kitchen. Yet, for a brief time, a radical change in the depiction and understanding of acceptable roles for women partnered the rise of Modernism in popular culture.

⁴³ Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 122. Interestingly, the sole lasting gain secured by women as a result of the War was the vote. In England, the franchise was extended to women by Commons ballot on 6 February, 1918. Canada granted women the federal vote on 1 January, 1919. See Marwick, The Deluge, p. 105, and Francis, Jones and Smith, Destinies, p. 218.

V

"THE OLD LIE..."

"It is obvious that nothing could be worse than the present conditions under which humanity is suffering and dying."

Siegfried Sassoon, 1917

"The main purpose and outcome of war is injuring."

Elaine Scarry

Located at Vimy Ridge, in the midst of a vast and empty expanse of parkland, is a towering memorial to Canada's missing in the Great War. Approached by twin stone paths, the colossal Memorial rises from a stepped base -- its power invariably strikes dumb the busloads of chattering visitors. Ghostly white, two sculpted marble pylons rise starkly into the French sky, their surfaces inscribed with the names of 11,285 men with no known graves. On the east side of the monument a group of stone figures breaks a sword, watched from above by two additional figures, one near the apex of each column. Between the pylons, at the Memorial's base, more figures extend a torch upward to those perched above. Some distance removed from the columns, surrounded by a sea of grass, is the solitary stone figure of a robed woman, her head bowed over a tomb. Allegorical representations, the figures embody Faith, Peace, Hope and -- of course -- Grief.¹ The shrouded woman, and indeed the Memorial itself, are testament to the profound grief and agony of a generation's loss.

In the years following the armistice, grief led communities large and small to erect Great War monuments throughout England and

¹Walter Allward, the Memorial's sculptor and designer, described the grieving woman as a representation of Canada itself, "a young nation mourning her dead." See Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, p. 112.

Canada. Of these, the ubiquitous Cenotaph was perhaps most emblematic of this need for a tangible representation of families' anguish. The dead *had* to be grieved. Writing in 1921, Stephen Graham saw the Cenotaph "gather[ing] to itself all the experience and all that was sacred in the war."² Indeed, as historian Geoff Dyer acknowledges, whatever Edwardian sensibilities and virtues were eroded by the War, "Sacrifice" remained "undiminished." However, at the Vimy Memorial specifically, sacrifice is "confronted with the consequence of its meaning"³: the pain of loss. Finally completed in 1936, after eleven years of construction, Vimy was the last of the great War Memorials to be unveiled. Its completion signalled the end of nearly two decades of bitter grieving.

Concomitant with this prolonged grief, an abiding cynicism and outrage gripped many Britons and Canadians alike. Slowly, from mourning grew a corrosive anger over the incalculable waste wrought by the War. "The true horror" of the Great War, wrote R.M. Watt, "was the fact that *so many men died and achieved nothing by it.*"⁴ With the senseless death of millions, Western civilization was seemingly destroyed by a "self-inflicted death blow,"⁵ providing the basis for a deep cultural malaise. The elegant and facile literary world of the Edwardian period was gradually supplanted by the surreal and nightmarish visions of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The*

²Stephen Graham, The Challenge of the Dead (London, 1921), p. 173.

³Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, pp. 112-113.

⁴As quoted in Santor, Canadians at War, p. 44.

⁵Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers (London, 1998), p. 353.

Waste Land. Further, disillusioned and heartsick at the falsity of the religious and patriotic fervour which had led to such appalling loss, most Britons and Canadians discarded in fact, though not in overt expression, the traditional values of the previous century.⁶ In addition to rejecting jingoistic patriotism and religion, the ascendancy of a more negative Modernist ethic in the 1920s asserted the normalization and internalization of violence, cruelty and atrocity.

While cultural mores took years to manifest this radical change in popular attitudes, Great War posters were clearly prescient in their depictions. The transformation from the Edwardian to the Modernist, catalyzed by the War, can be seen temporally conflated in the poster imagery of those four years. Lithographs of religious iconography gave way to wholly secular, often grimly truthful posters, while patriotic representations were replaced by images demonizing the enemy. In addition, portrayals of the conflict as neat, jolly and entirely civilized gradually evaporated. Instead, posters ultimately acknowledged a banal truth -- that the Great War was destructive, bloody and cruel.

First, however, a dozen months of brutal trench warfare were needed to bring any such Modernist sentiments "to consciousness."⁷ In fact, close scrutiny of English and Canadian posters from the

⁶Thus, the Great War was a catalyst to the spread of Modernist sensibilities originating in the decade prior to 1914. "The twenties, as a result, witnessed a hedonism and narcissism of remarkable proportions. ... The rituals of public life were still rooted in the positivistic certainties of the previous century, but the backdrop to the play acting consisted of nightmare and hallucination." See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 236.

⁷See Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 23.

War's early period depict only the perfervid patriotism characteristic of the Edwardian era. This fanatical love of one's country was a universal sentiment -- patriotism, in 1914, was "not only a reputable but modish idea," arousing and inspiring intellectuals and commoners equally.⁸ The Great War seemed a 'serendipitous' event, remarkably convenient for the expression of such aggressive jingoism. To those on the home front, and especially to soldiers, the sappy patriotic verse of popular song and poetry was a potent inciter of cheap emotion. Rupert Brooke's bathetic lines from *The Soldier* capture well the near lunatic patriotism which gripped most Britons and Canadians in 1914:

If I should die think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;⁹

Even in the light of the poet's miserable end, in May of 1915, fellow writer Robert Graves was gladdened by Brooke's "fitting" death, "in such a good cause."¹⁰ In both nations, this militant nationalism provided the essential context for numerous early War

⁸See Stroenberg, Redemption by War, pp. 32-33.

⁹M. H. Abrams, The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York, 1986), p. 1893. Brooke's intense feelings of patriotism were once likened to religious devotion: To him, "The actual earth of England held a quality which ... if he'd ever been sentimental enough to use the word he'd have called 'holiness.'" See Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰Paul O'Prey, ed., In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1914-1946 (London, 1982), pp. 31-32.

poster campaigns, including recruitment drives, war bonds sales and charity appeals.

Central to these patriotic posters were national symbols, especially flags. Imagery containing British and Canadian colours -- the Union Jack, flag of the Empire -- filled lithographs printed during the first years of the War. The standard was perceived as the ultimate patriotic emblem, an entirely positive image around which to rally. In a telling passage, *Punch Magazine* noted in June of 1915, that "a new day" had been "added to the week -- flag day."¹¹ Often, English posters sporting the flag incorporated the mythical figure of John Bull in their designs. Perhaps the best known example, an anonymous lithograph first issued in 1915, features the pugnacious Bull gesturing directly to the viewer, his waistcoat, as always, a Union Jack. *WHO'S ABSENT?*, asks the caption, *Is it You?*, while in the background several rather stiff soldiers stand at attention.

Canadian posters also made use of flags in their patriotic messages, particularly in broadsides encouraging enlistment. One exceptionally spare design for the 207th Overseas Battalion features a single officer pointing to a monstrous Union Jack, the flag fully one third of the poster (see Figure 5.1). *THIS IS YOUR FLAG*, states the tag line, *FIGHT FOR IT*. In another Canadian example, this for "Kitchener's Own,"¹² the 244th Overseas Battalion, a British

¹¹*Punch Magazine*, *Mr. Punch's History*, p. 43.

¹²Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the British Minister of War, had several battalions established in his name throughout the Empire. Kitchener was one of the only government officials who recognized in 1914 that the War might not be quick and clean. "We must be prepared," advised Kitchener, "to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years." The subsequent

standard forms the entire background, stretching to the poster's four corners. Finally, in an anonymous 1915 French Canadian recruiting poster, the French flag and Union Jack are shown flying alongside the colours of the other Entente powers (see Figure 5.2), while representative soldiers march arm in arm toward the viewer. The rather lengthy caption is a reminder to *Canadiens-Français* -- remember *notre PAYS*.

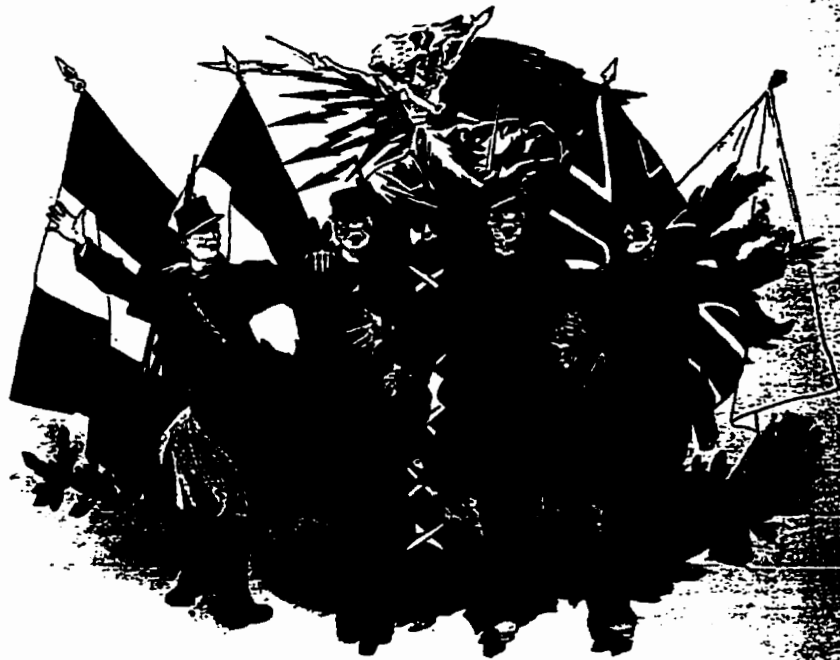
Sometimes, however, a love of one's country was an insufficient motivator for enlistment. Consequently, other patriotic posters attempted to arouse a fighting spirit by targeting specific cultural groups. Of these, French Canadian examples were by far the most numerous. This was so because Quebeckers, many of whom perceived the Great War as an 'English' conflict, were often loathe to volunteer for military service.¹³ In an effort to neutralize this perception, several posters were printed emphasizing cultural elements unique to the French Canadian heritage. In particular, images of the rough and tough, earthy rustic idealized in Quebecois culture frequently recurred. For instance, in an anonymous 1915 lithograph for the 163rd Overseas Battalion, a single unshaven *gallante* poses, casually smoking a cigarette, his rifle slung informally on one shoulder. Addressed to *TOUS LES VRAIS POIL-*

masses of new enlistees, rapidly trained for the field, became widely known as "Kitchener's Army." Interestingly, his poster image pointing directly at the viewer -- Alfred Leete's Kitchener Wants You -- became the most imitated design of all. He died on June 5, 1916 when the British cruiser Hampshire struck a mine and sank off the Orkney Islands. See Eksteins, Rites of Spring, p. 101., and Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, p. 13 and p. 37.

¹³During the Great War, 257 infantry battalions were formed across Canada. Of these, 95 were raised in Ontario, 87 in the western provinces and only 20 in Quebec. See Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 37.



Figure 5.1



Canadiens-Français

A l'heure du plus grand péril
 qui ait jamais menacé notre
PAYS et L'HUMANITE
 oublierons-nous les Traditions
 qui ont fait la

GLOIRE et L'ORGUEIL de
 notre **RACE**

L'Association Civile de Recrutement
 du District de Québec

PARLADONNÉS ACTUELLES 11E

Figure 5.2

AUX-PATTES, the poster accents the French Canadian frontier self-image, invoking an allegiance somewhat removed from the Imperial context.

Of course, this kind of cultural appeal appeared in posters outside of Quebec as well. One noteworthy example first printed in 1915, again for recruitment, was directed at Canada's Jewish population (see Figure 5.3). The central image reveals a bound figure, presumably a Jewish businessman, being freed by a Canadian officer, while a shadowy group of soldiers charges in the background. "You have cut my bonds," says the man, "now let me help you set others free!" Above this scene, the caption exclaims: *THE JEWS THE WORLD OVER LOVE LIBERTY HAVE FOUGHT FOR IT & WILL FIGHT FOR IT*. Arrayed below these words are the portraits of three prominent English Jews, including Viscount Reading, with the ubiquitous Union Jack draped behind -- thus linking together cultural heritage and country. Most interestingly, the lithograph was also released in a Yiddish version.¹⁴

In addition to traditional patriotic appeals, English and Canadian posters released during the War's first months also routinely contained typically Edwardian religious imagery. In 1914-1915, the British Empire largely perceived the conflict as a kind of jihad, a vast initiative fuelled by a "militant Christianity."¹⁵ For Canadians in particular, the War

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁵Cantor, *Twentieth-Century Culture*, p. 131.

**THE JEWS THE WORLD OVER LOVE LIBERTY
HAVE FOUGHT FOR IT & WILL FIGHT FOR IT.**



**ENLIST WITH THE INFANTRY REINFORCEMENTS
FOR OVERSEAS**

Under the Command of
Capt, FREEDMAN
Headquarters -
**786 ST. LAWRENCE BOULEVARD,
MONTREAL.**

MONTREAL LITHO CO LIMITED

Figure 5.3

demanded that the Allied nations become agents of divine retribution, cleansing the earth of those who defiled Christendom . . . The Great War became a crusade, a holy war that pitted Christians against the pagans of Europe. At stake was not the territorial integrity of Belgium or the holdings of some farmers in Picardy, but the very values upon which Christianity was founded. This was a war for righteousness. . .¹⁶

It was a sentiment most Britons and Canadians shared. Indeed, just prior to joining up, in early 1916, Harold Innis wrote that "if the Christian religion is worth anything to me [enlisting] is the only thing I can do. . ."¹⁷ For Edmund Blunden, during the War's early stages at least, Christianity, like his "pocket Testament," went with him "always."¹⁸ Poster artists too became caught up in this jingoistic religious fervour, filling their works with Christian iconography.

Alongside Saint George, other familiar hagiographic figures were presented to English and Canadian viewers. In particular, the Knights of Columbus (an international organization of Catholic laymen) sponsored a number of posters featuring a traditional crusading warrior. This Christian knight, a longtime symbol of religious zeal, dominates a Canadian lithograph advertizing a 1915

¹⁶Further, high level Canadian church figures supported the cause vehemently. For instance, in a 1915 sermon, Methodist Church general superintendent Samuel D. Chown actually declared khaki "a sacred colour." See Jonathan F. Vance, Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War (Vancouver, 1997), p. 35.

¹⁷Gwyn, Tapestry of War, pp. 361-362.

¹⁸Blunden, Undertones of War, p. 2.

charity drive. The armoured figure, lance in his right hand, kneels behind a massive shield emblazoned with the Knights of Columbus device. *GIVE! GIVE! GIVE!*, shouts the tag line, while behind the knight soldiers march and tend to the fallen. The heraldic appeal of the shield, coupled with the obeisance of the knight, evokes the sanctity of militarism in a holy cause. In fact, for Britons and Canadians in 1914, the call to arms was inextricably linked with the powerful endorsement of religious authority. In October of that year, the *Presbyterian Record* declared the conflict "a war for truth and plighted pledge, for freedom against oppression," in short, "God's war."¹⁹ Initially then, the Great War truly resembled a modern crusade, a holy war waged by the faithful. Certainly, posters from both nations acknowledged this popular sentiment.

The Knights of Columbus were not alone in using religious imagery to solicit funds. The International Red Cross often featured a robed angelic icon in their poster appeals. For example, in an English lithograph by Charles Buchel for the Belgian Red Cross, a nurse draped in white tends to an injured soldier, ghostly wings rising from her shoulders (see Figure 5.4). These 'angels of mercy' were joined by posters of divine heralds calling populations to action. In F.L. Nicolet's lithograph for the 1914 Canadian Victory Bond campaign, a winged angel, bearing a torch, appears to lead soldier and worker along the righteous path -- to war. Poster artists then, like most Britons and Canadians, were quite simply swept up by the religious and patriotic mania which gripped the

¹⁹As quoted in Vance, *Death So Noble*, p. 35.

BELGIAN + RED CROSS



DONATIONS MAY BE SENT TO THE HON. TREASURER,
THE RHT. HON. THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON,
OR TO THE PRESIDENT, BARON C. GOFFINET.
28, GROSVENOR GARDENS, S. W.

COPIES OF THIS POSTER MAY BE OBTAINED PRICE 1/- EACH FROM 28, GROSVENOR GARDENS, S. W.

Figure 5.4

Empire during the War's first months. However, the continuance of this fervour rested wholly upon another Edwardian perception of war, and of the Great War specifically.

That is, in 1914-1915, the conflict was widely viewed, unrealistically of course, as an entirely positive, tidy and 'civilized' undertaking. Civility in war, especially for Britons, was inseparable from the tradition of pluck and good sportsmanship held over from the previous century. An apt illustration can be found in the story of a lone German Taube aircraft that successfully eluded sixteen British and French planes in late 1914. In a letter home, an English artillerist who witnessed the event called it "the greatest sight" -- especially because the German escaped. "And we gave him a great cheer, for the odds were against him, and he must have been a great chap." Such was the popular sentiment that if the "spirit was right," war should be "a victory for everybody."²⁰

This overarching, positive 'spirit' spawned thousands of cheerful depictions of the Great War. Literally dozens of different poster designs featured soldiers happily donning uniforms or smiling broadly whilst on the march. One French Canadian Victory Bond poster by Arthur Keelor depicts a single officer drawing on his uniform jacket, his face contorted in an almost manic grin. Entitled *ALLONS! Finissons la Besogne*, and first printed in 1915, the lithograph projects an intense positivity, characteristic of these first posters. *The Happy Man Today*, exclaims the caption to

²⁰Of course, notes Modris Eksteins, as "the war dragged on such sentiments would fade." See Eksteins, Rites of Spring, p. 124.

The Happy Man Today is the Man at the Front

**Royal
Highlanders
of
Canada**
Allied with the
**BLACK
WATCH**

Have Enlisted at their
Armoury for Overseas Service

13th Bn. C.E.F.
Now in France

42nd Bn. C.E.F.
Now in England

AND THE
73rd Bn. C.E.F.
is now Mobilizing



**JOIN
THE
73rd
NOW**

IF YOU WISH TO JOIN, WRITE TO
73rd ROYAL HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA
429 BLEURY ST., MONTREAL

ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE MADE FOR LOCAL MEDICAL EXAMINATION, AND TRANSPORTATION TO MONTREAL

Figure 5.5

another 1915 broadside, *is the Man at the Front* (see Figure 5.5). Beneath this patently absurd phrase, a hearty Royal Canadian Highlander steps lightly, rifle on his shoulder, his gaze directed enticingly at the viewer. Such imagery nearly always characterized war as a jolly adventure, perhaps strenuous, but certainly neat and brief.²¹ Clearly at odds with these Edwardian sentiments, Modernist images of violence, destruction and, of course, the often gruesome facts of death, were almost entirely absent from posters printed before 1916.

Indeed, mortal sacrifice, particularly in war, was a glorious and fitting end for those defending the Empire -- but only in the abstract. In the War's early months, the popular portrayal of combat was painted in altogether rosy hues, and cheerful self-sacrifice was a laudable goal. This prevailing sensibility prompted even Wilfred Owen, who would later become one of the most outspoken poetic opponents of the War, to pen the following in 1914:

O meet it is and passing sweet
 To live in peace with others,
 But sweeter still and far more meet,
 To die in war for brothers.²²

As late as December 1915, a figure like Siegfried Sassoon could still exclaim "Anything but a 'cushy' wound! That would be an awful

²¹See also Figures 3.3 and 3.4. In particular, the poster for the Canadian Mounted Rifles most effectively illustrates this idealized view of a neat and tidy war.

²²Taken from Abrams, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, p. 1892.

disaster."²³ For Sassoon and his contemporaries, death on the battlefield epitomized the Edwardian romantic ideal. This perception of noble self-sacrifice, divorced from its horrible, messy reality, was the ultimate demonstration of patriotism and piety. Canadian poster artist F.L. Nicolet effectively captured this pervasive sentiment in another 1915 Victory Bond design (see Figure 5.6). "*If ye break faith,*" reads the caption, "*-- we shall not sleep.*" These words, coupled with the image of the lone soldier, his head bowed over the grave of a fallen comrade, call forth romantic notions of duty performed to the last -- cleanly and anonymously.

However, the realities of the Great War contrasted starkly with this vision. Acts of destruction, elements of horror, and scenes of atrocity, privation or hardship, either in combat or on the home front, clearly did not correspond with Edwardian conceptions concerning warfare. Yet as the conflict dragged on, such realities became more difficult to ignore, throughout the Empire. Growing casualty lists, shocking incidents of violence and devastation, as well as persistent home front difficulties saw traditional cheery sentiment wane. As an English historian writing in 1920 commented, "The grimness of the world-struggle was not realized in its intensity until driven home by staggering blows at our very life as a nation."²⁴ Consequently, by 1916, sentiments of

²³Nevertheless, elsewhere in the same diary entry, Sassoon's vehemently cheery words seem somehow forced, as if trying to convince himself: "But I am happy, happy; I've escaped and found peace unbelievable in this extraordinary existence which I thought I should loathe." See Hart-Davis, Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, p. 26.

²⁴Hardie and Sabin, War Posters, pp. 2-3.

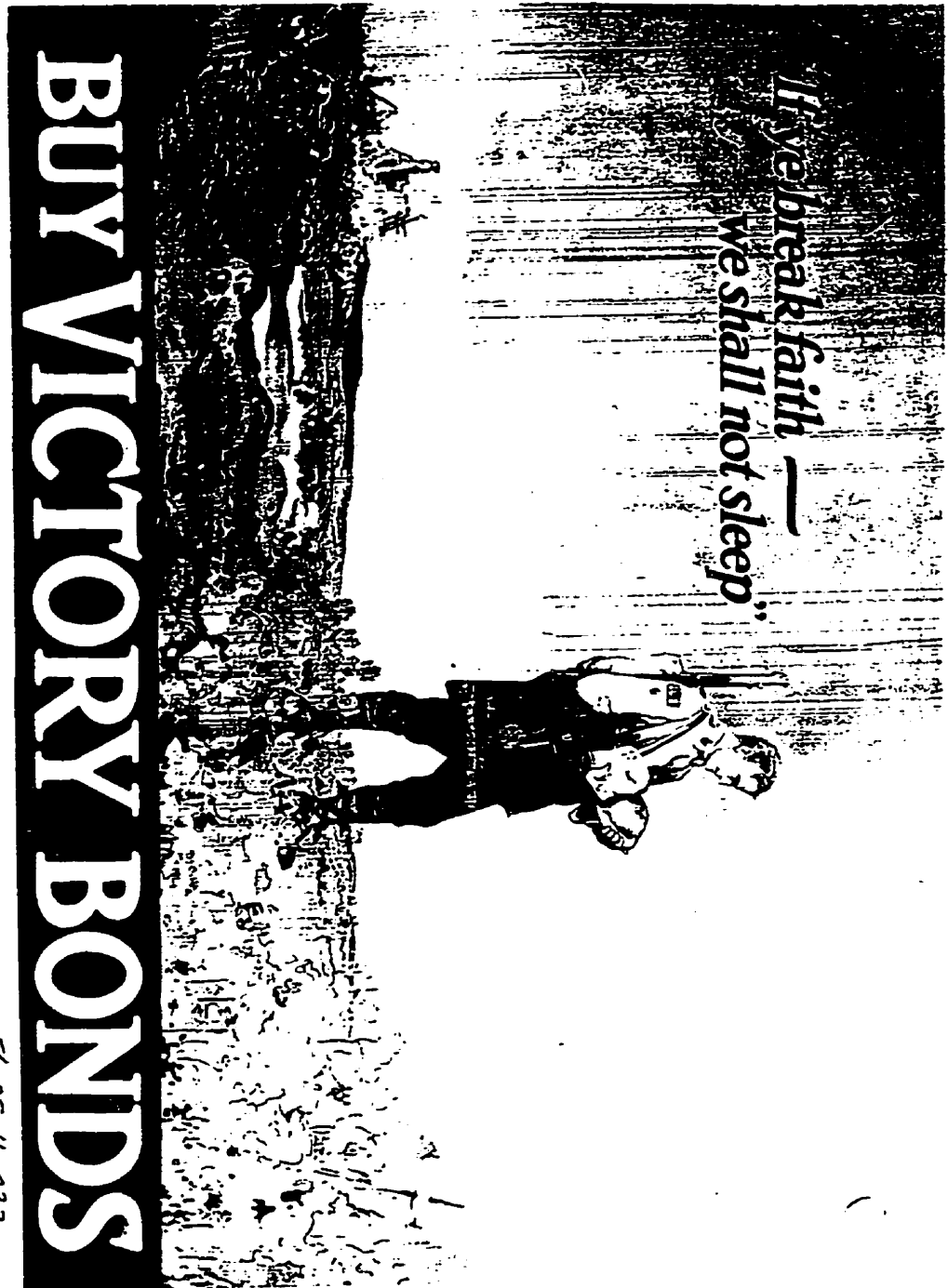


Figure 5.6

jingoistic religion and patriotism were more difficult to sustain. Quite simply, the economic, human and emotional drain of literally years of fighting "exhaust[ed]" this "early zest for war."²⁵

As positive and traditional feelings about the War faded, increasingly negative and Modernist perceptions took their place. Certainly, even before hostilities ended, many became disillusioned with the old order that had, after all, precipitated the conflict in the first place. In particular, by 1916-1917, a powerful disenchantment gripped members of the artistic community, prompting numerous strong protests condemning the War's prolongation. Hence, Wilfred Owen composed his *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, Siegfried Sassoon issued his famous Declaration, and Dadaist painter George Grosz completed the *Funeral Procession*.²⁶ To these men, the Great War "demonstrated that the Modernist hostile view" of Edwardian culture "was well founded."²⁷ The horror and meaningless waste of the conflict had confirmed utterly what Henri Lefebvre called the "rupture" with "classical and traditional" ideas, specifically, "the divine and the human."²⁸

²⁵Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p. 48.

²⁶Also called the *Dedication to Oskar Penizza*, Grosz' dark painting depicts a chaotic and horrifying funeral. Surrounded by vile creatures, Death himself rides a coffin through a nightmare cityscape, a priest leading the procession. Grosz intended the piece to represent humanity "awash in the consequences of its own insanity." Upon its completion, he declared, "I am unshaken in my view that this epoch is sailing down to its destruction." See Cole and Gealt, *Art of the Western World*, pp. 284-285.

²⁷Further, to "the extent Modernism hated nationalism, militarism, historicism, and traditional Christianity, the First World War presented solid justification for its hatred." See Cantor, *Twentieth-Century Culture*, p. 132.

²⁸Henri Lefebvre, "Modernity and Modernism," in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin, eds., *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax, 1983), pp. 1-2.

Significantly, English and Canadian poster artists also, many of whom spent considerable periods surrounded by the horrors of the front, acknowledged this shift in sensibilities by producing non-traditional, decidedly Modernist imagery. After 1915-1916, jingoistic and "vulgar appeals to patriotism"²⁹ gave way to posters which focussed largely on demonizing the enemy. As well, images trumpeting a militant Christianity faded, replaced by grimly secular posters stressing the need to collect 'filthy lucre' in order to get a distasteful job done. Finally, cheery depictions of a clean and orderly war all but disappeared, supplanted by bleak images of privation and suffering. Most importantly, the final months of the conflict generated posters illustrating a most profound shift to a Modernist perspective: the normalization of violence and cruelty. That is, the numbing effects of years of slaughter and meaningless death brought about "a loss of conventional respect for human life,"³⁰ making commonplace notions of horror and atrocity.

Perhaps the first Edwardian sentiments to evaporate were naive and patriotic calls to the flag. As Edmund Blunden noted tellingly in the summer of 1916, in the context of raging battle, "mad ideas of British supremacy ... sank instantly."³¹ In its place, a more negative sensibility took root, one which sought to arouse popular

²⁹Hardie and Sabin, War Posters, p. 2.

³⁰Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, pp. 132-133.

³¹Blunden, Undertones of War, pp. 54-55.

ire by painting the enemy, specifically Germans, as brutish and savage. In the words of Arthur Bryant:

...quiet inoffensive English gentlemen and ladies who had never seen a blow struck in anger ... spoke of the whole German race as they would of a pack of wild beasts.³²

Rather than patriotism, hate and vengefulness motivated Britons and Canadians to the cause. In fact, by the summer of 1918, 'Hun baiting' had become "a national sport."³³ Even Punch Magazine participated enthusiastically, routinely running caricatures of high-ranking leaders as "The German Ogre."³⁴ Everywhere, citizens called for the internment of long naturalized German residents, while posters demonizing 'the Bosches' appeared in windows and covered walls.

One particularly graphic French Canadian example was reprinted several times during the last months of the conflict. Entitled *CANADIENS C'EST LE MOMENT D'AGIR*, and signed C. David by the artist, the poster depicts a slaughtered mother and child lying in the snow before their ruined homestead (see Figure 5.7). Behind, a sneering German soldier stands in his great coat, a smoking rifle held

³²Indeed, as Geoff Dyer accurately asserts, British civilians "bayed for blood and victory," while their German counterparts "sang specially composed hymns of hate against England." As quoted in Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, pp. 50-51.

³³Macdonald, The Roses of No Man's Land, p. 275.

³⁴One cartoon in particular depicts a grossly distorted General Hindenburg, clad in barbarous costume, surrounded by brutalized Belgian corpses. Below, the caption reads: "Heaven knows that I had to do this in self-defence: it was forced upon me. — (aside): Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum!" See Rickards and Moody, The First World War, pg. 145.

loosely. Further beyond, a large group of German troops in spiked helmets (which, incidentally, had long been abandoned by this point)³⁵ marches callously into the distance. The message is clear: the savage Hun represents an immediate threat -- he will even come and kill wives and children in peaceful Quebec villages.

A similarly barbarous group of German soldiers populates a 1918 British lithograph by F. Gregory Brown (see Figure 5.8). *To prevent this --*, warns the tag line, *BUY WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES NOW*. The accompanying image portrays an imagined German slave labour factory, the captives and guards dwarfed by immense pieces of machinery. In the background, shadowy prisoners toil wretchedly at unspecified tasks, while in the foreground uniformed overseers mercilessly whip a prone worker. Off to one side, an absurdly exaggerated bayonet in his hand, another officer observes all dispassionately. The scene evokes an inchoate terror of a brutal, mechanized, and emotionally sterile world in which violence is a regular occurrence -- a potently Modernist notion. In any event, posters from both nations routinely demonized the German soldier.

Interestingly, however, men were not always the exclusive target of these attacks. In another later English poster, this designed by David Wilson, it is a female figure that is depicted as inhuman (see Figure 5.9). The image consists, in part, of an English Tommy, bandaged and gesturing frantically from a stretcher. *WOUNDED AND A PRISONER*, exclaims the tag line, *OUR SOLDIER CRIES FOR*

³⁵Even though the German army had discarded the spiked helmet well before 1916-1917, posters continued to use it throughout the Great War "as an effective anti-German symbol." See Paret, Lewis and Paret, *Persuasive Images*, p. 22.

CANADIENS

C'EST LE MOMENT D'AGIR

N'ATTENDEZ PAS QUE LES BOCHES
VIENNENT METTRE TOUT A FEU
ET A SANG AU CANADA

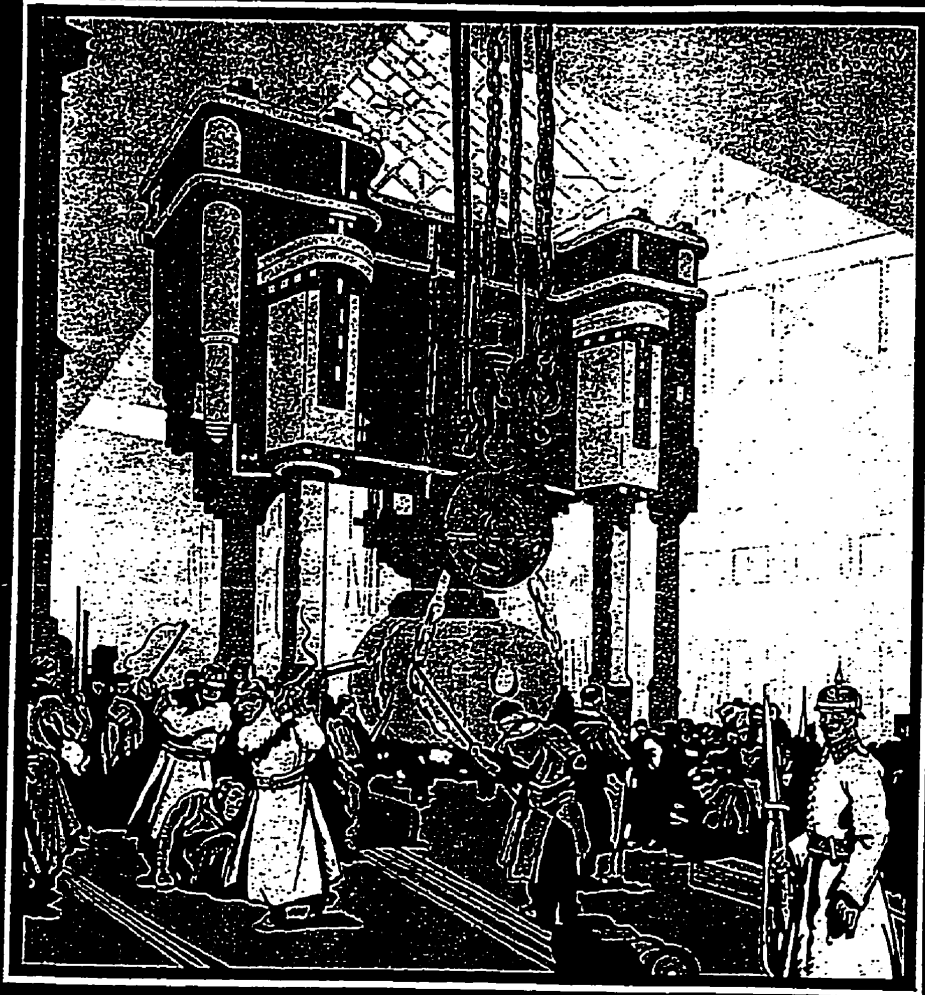
**CANADIENS SOYEZ HOMMES! NE RESTEZ PAS EN ARRIÈRE
ENROLEZ-VOUS DANS NOS REGIMENTS CANADIENS-FRANÇAIS**

Adressez-vous au **Comité de Recrutement Canadien-Français**

MONTREAL 1111 RUE ST-JACQUES
SHERBROOKE, RUE WELLINGTON
QUEBEC 1111 RUE ST-JACQUES
TROIS-RIVIERES 111, RUE CHAMPLAIN
OTTAWA 111, RUE 101E
JOLIETTE 111, RUE MARIE-ROSE
CHICOUTIMI, RUE SAGUÉ

Figure 5.7

To prevent this -



**BUY
WAR SAVINGS
CERTIFICATES
NOW**

Figure 5.8

WATER. A few feet from the man, an exceptionally malevolent looking nurse -- *THE GERMAN "SISTER"* -- upends a glass into the dirt. *RED CROSS*, accuses the caption, *OR IRON CROSS?* Obviously, the use of such negative imagery to demonize the enemy represented a fundamental shift away from the eminently positive and patriotic designs found in broadsides printed before 1916. With this in mind, while posters featuring John Bull and the like were still produced, by the latter half of the War they were largely overshadowed by depictions incorporating a negative, Modernist sensibility.

Similarly, as with patriotic appeals, posters embodying a militant Christianity became less common as Britons and Canadians wearied of years of war. As historian Jonathan Vance rightly comments, while the tireless efforts of Church officials continued:

the white heat of religious fervour that surrounded the declaration of war ... could not be sustained, however. The slaughters of the Somme and Passchendale made it increasingly difficult to reconcile the war with a benign, omnipotent Creator.³⁶

Thus, a fading Christian zeal was gradually supplanted by a more secular ethic, a shift that was acknowledged by many poster artists. Depictions of religious iconography consequently diminished,

³⁶Vance, *Death So Noble*, pp. 35-36. Ironically, as the War raged on, a number of religious figures, in attempting to motivate populations, evoked some peculiarly Modernist sentiments -- namely the ordinariness of violence and devaluation of life. In fact, in the conflict's last stages, the Right Reverend A.F. Winnington-Ingram, bishop of London shouted, "Kill Germans! Kill them! ...kill the good as well as the bad...kill the young men as well as the old..." As quoted in Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 236.

RED CROSS OR IRON CROSS?



WOUNDED AND A PRISONER
OUR SOLDIER CRIES FOR WATER.

THE GERMAN "SISTER"
POURS IT ON THE GROUND BEFORE HIS EYES.

THERE IS NO WOMAN IN BRITAIN
WHO WOULD DO IT.

THERE IS NO WOMAN IN BRITAIN
WHO WILL FORGET IT.

Figure 5.9

replaced by images which cast the War in a decidedly temporal light. The conflict was no longer "a crusade," but "a terrible destiny,"³⁷ an onerous and distasteful task to be completed. It became as well, a test of endurance and will which demanded increasingly greater contributions of men and money from England and Canada. Ultimately, the need for fresh troops necessitated the enactment of conscription in both nations by 1917. Taxation legislation, however, could not secure finances sufficient to meet the tremendous demand. Accordingly, in the latter half of the conflict, posters soliciting funds for the War effort increased dramatically. "Money," the saying went, "is the sinews of war,"³⁸ and crusading religious imagery dissolved before this cold, secular need to collect hard currency.

In Canada alone, several "Victory Bond" drives held during 1917-1918 yielded dollar totals in the hundreds of millions, each campaign heavily advertized by posters. Throughout the Empire, broadsides entreated the viewer to give to and invest in the cause. Often, the images in these lithographs embodied a pessimism characteristic of Modernist thinking³⁹, though at times this expression was subtle. For example, in an anonymous 1918 Canadian poster for the *VICTORY LOAN*, an immense hand dispenses money above a

³⁷Dyer, The Missing of the Somme, p. 56.

³⁸As quoted in Choko, Canadian War Posters, p. 50.

³⁹In contrast to the positive and optimistic view of the future held by most during the Edwardian period (even Friedrich Nietzsche was certain about the world's future betterment), the Modernist perspective was one of negativity, despair and "pessimism." The world was seen as a "hospital," and "not a very hopeful one." See Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 40. See also Faulkner, Modernism, p. 15., and Eksteins, Rites of Spring, pp. 123-125.

patchwork landscape with the caption *EVERY DOLLAR SPENT IN CANADA* in one corner. On the horizon, atop an image of the rising sun, is a single word -- *PROSPERITY*. The image pessimistically suggests that, without everyone's war-time financial support, a prosperous Canadian tomorrow will remain out of reach.

While some designs thus preyed upon people's vague fears of the future, still others strove for a more immediate and personal impact. In another lithograph from later in the War, it is the viewer's family who faces mortal risk should the flow of public money dwindle. The poster displays a stylized painting of three British toddlers, the title *FOR YOUR CHILDREN* stencilled above in bold script (see Figure 5.10). *BUY WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES*, advises the caption, *and they will live to thank you*. Again, as in the previous example, there is the grim and threatening implication that, without extraordinary financial sacrifice, a secure future is in jeopardy. Other similar designs urged Britons and Canadians, young and old⁴⁰, to buy war bonds, contribute to liberty loans and collect thrift stamps -- 'or else.'

This negative, Modernist sensibility contrasted starkly with the religious and patriotic jingoism of posters printed before 1916. Indeed, the optimism traditionally associated with Edwardian sabre-rattling had largely faded by the last years of the Great War. The harsh and secular realities of casualty lists and amputees rendered

⁴⁰On the home front, both in Great Britain and in Canada, all members of the community were expected to donate money to the war effort. Men who did not fight contributed from their wages, while employers deducted bond money from payrolls. As well, housewives economized on family budgets in order to purchase thrift stamps. "In the end, children would be asked to do the same." See Choko, *Canadian War Posters*, pp. 49-50.

FOR YOUR CHILDREN



BUY WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES
and they will live to thank you

56-04-11-115

Figure 5.10

such idealistic notions increasingly absurd as the conflict dragged on. Sassoon's bitter words from the front in June 1917 capture this sentiment:

The Jingos define it as 'an enormous quarrel between incompatible spirits and destinies, in which one or the other must succumb'. But the men who write these manifestos do not truly know what useless suffering the war inflicts.⁴¹

Sassoon was not alone in his feelings. Earlier, in the spring of 1916, Robert Graves voiced similar thoughts, sarcastically mocking the "official attitude" responsible for the terrible suffering and death of his fellow soldiers.⁴² In any event, whether blame fell upon militarism or the 'Bosches,' the perception of war had changed fundamentally. Even at home, where news of the War's actual conditions was scrupulously censored, tales and rumours of monstrous crimes visited upon Belgium circulated widely.⁴³ Clearly, facts notwithstanding, many no longer perceived the War as neat and tidy.

Furthermore, the conflict's prolongation eventually ensured the intrusion of real war-time horrors into everyday life.⁴⁴

⁴¹Hart-Davis, Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, p. 175.

⁴²O'Prey, In Broken Images, p. 42.

⁴³See Lyn Macdonald, 1914-1918 Voices & Images of the Great War (London, 1988), pp. 38-39.

⁴⁴By 1916-1917, Britons and Canadians would have seen and felt a variety of horrible and taxing Great War realities, including zeppelin raids, food shortages, and specters of the returning wounded. Poster content soon altered to acknowledge these elements. In fact, as early as 1915, English broadsides decried the December 1914 German bombardment of Scarborough. One in particular, perhaps the earliest English atrocity poster, depicts a decimated brick building with a forlorn child and baby in the foreground (see Figure 5.11). The caption

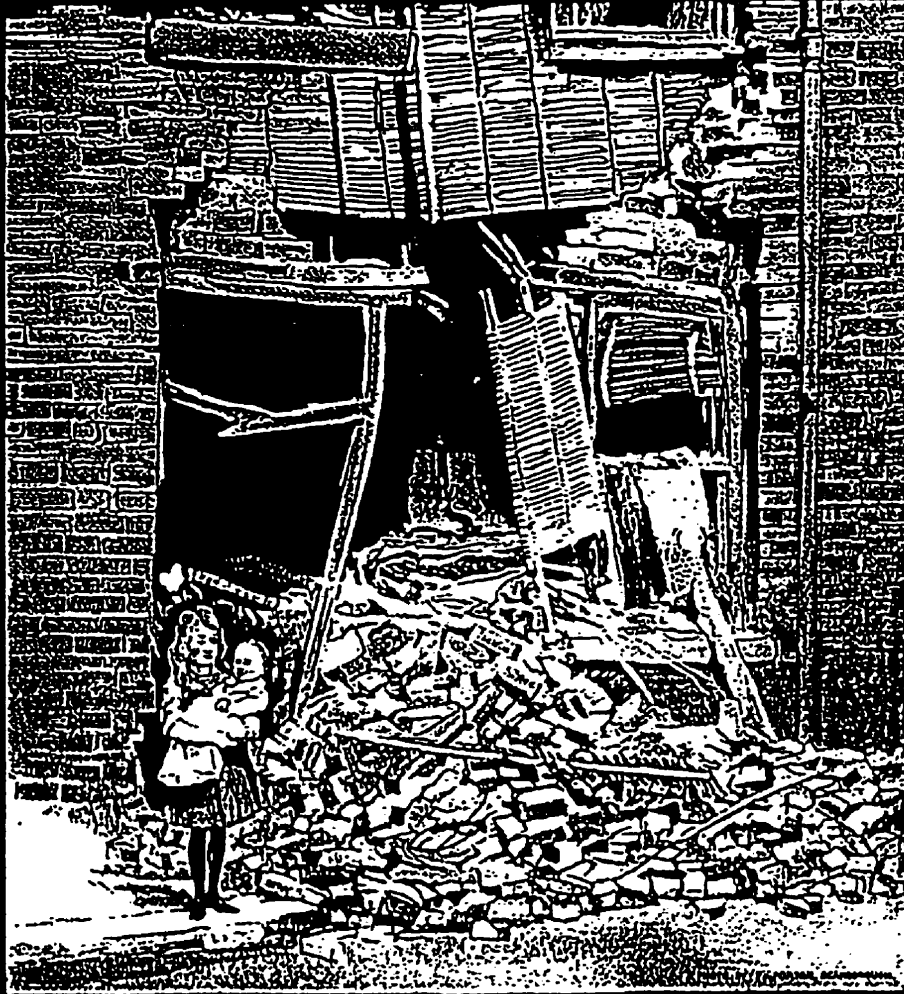
Atrocity, privation, as well as suffering and violence, became ordinary and regular truths to many Britons and Canadians, including several poster artists. Gradually, as these conditions became "normalized," there began a process whereby populations were largely "desensitized" to images and instances of hardship and violence -- a peculiarly Modernist notion.⁴⁵ In essence then, even as citizens of the Empire, including many soldiers, railed against the conflict's appalling effects, horror nonetheless became the expected concomitant of the War. Everywhere, magazine advertisements, postcards, flags, and posters exhorted men and women to *Remember Belgium* and give to *The Prisoners of War Fund*. In light of this, fatuous depictions of clean and civilized warfare common in 1914-1915 posters undoubtedly seemed grotesquely risible, especially to those who witnessed trench horrors first-hand. Gradually, even those on the home front came to know atrocity and privation, the hard facts of war-time life which poster designs often acknowledged.

Actually, the atrocity poster, an unthinkable idea in 1914, began appearing regularly by late 1915. Three notorious events in particular prompted a number of popular poster designs. The first was the sinking of the passenger liner *Lusitania* by German U-boats in May 1915, an incident which convinced many of the "infamies of

reads: MEN OF BRITAIN! WILL YOU STAND THIS? 78 Women & Children were killed and 228 Women & Children were wounded by the German Raiders -- ENLIST NOW.

⁴⁵Of course, this process unfolded slowly over the succeeding decade, giving rise to the cultural malaise of the 1920s. However, posters were quite prescient in their portrayals, often embodying a sensibility more commonly associated with the post-War period. See Cantor, *Twentieth-Century Culture*, p. 133. See also Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, pp. 27-29., and Fehl and Fenix, *WWI Propaganda Posters*, p. 14.

MEN OF BRITAIN! WILL YOU STAND THIS?



No 2 Wykeham Street, SCARBOROUGH, after the German bombardment on Dec. 16th. It was the Home of a Working Man. Four People were killed in this House including the Wife, aged 58, and two Children, the youngest aged 5.

78 Women & Children were killed and 228 Women & Children were wounded by the German Raiders

ENLIST NOW

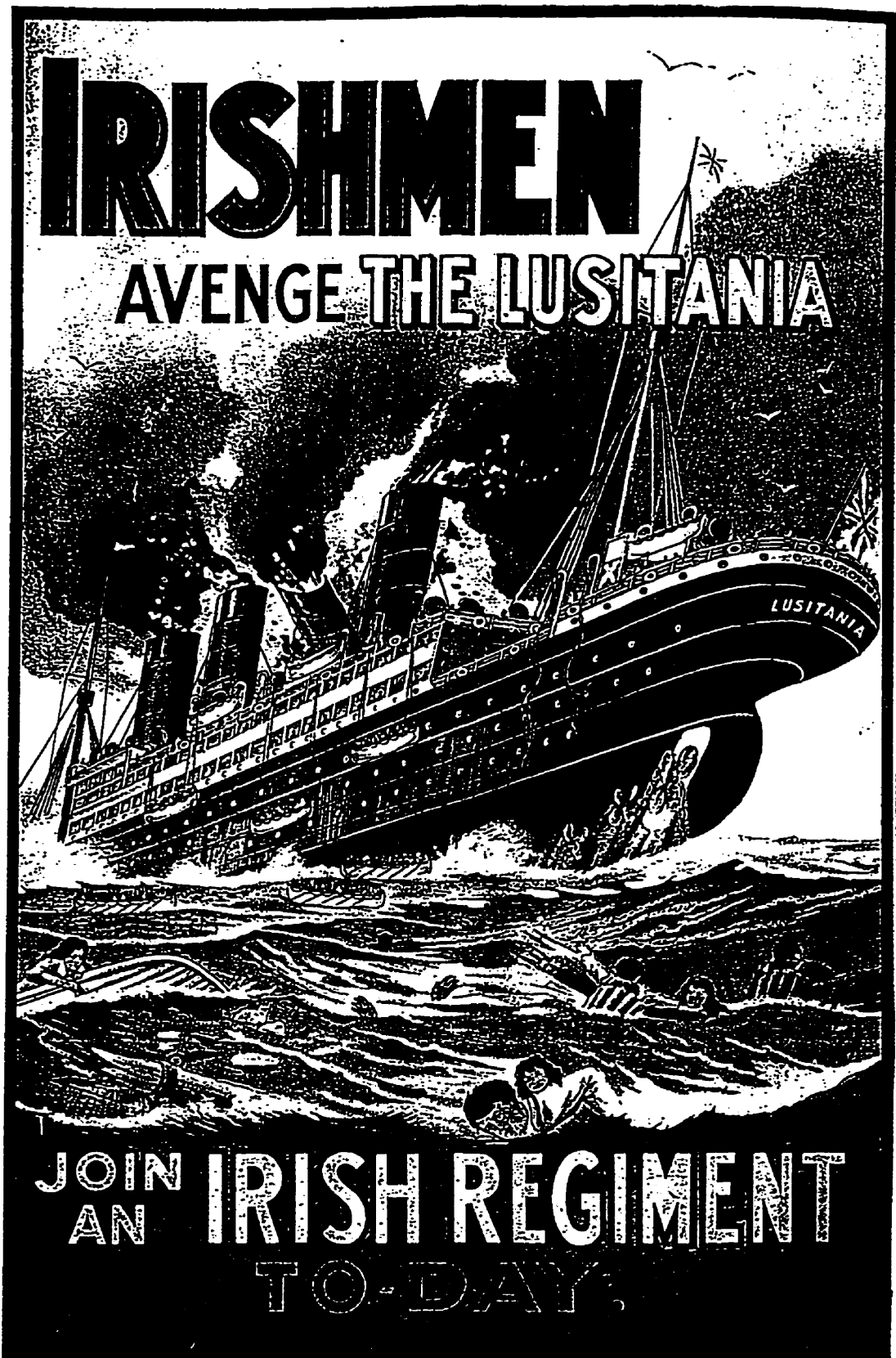
Figure 5.11

Prussian warfare."⁴⁶ *IRISHMEN*, shouts the caption to one anonymous British poster, *AVENGE THE LUSITANIA* (see Figure 5.12). The accompanying graphic depiction of drowning civilians and burning vessel would certainly have shocked an Edwardian viewer to his or her foundations. By 1915-1916, however, such imagery appeared routinely. A second torpedoed boat spawned similar portrayals near the end of the War. In June 1918, 234 lives were lost when the Canadian hospital ship *Llandoverly Castle* was sunk between Halifax and England. One poster depicts the incident's aftermath, a Canadian seaman adrift on the water, cursing his German attackers, the body of a nurse cradled in his arm. The tag line reads *VICTORY BONDS WILL HELP STOP THIS*, while in the foreground floats a life preserver stencilled with the doomed ship's name.

Finally, another perceived atrocity, the late 1915 German execution of British nurse Edith Cavell, provoked several withering lithographic denunciations. One anonymous Canadian example, a recruiting poster for the 99th Overseas Battalion, includes a reproduced photographic portrait of Ms. Cavell (see Figure 5.13). *MURDERED BY THE HUNS*, exclaims the title, a somewhat overwrought declaration considering Cavell did indeed serve as a spy for the French military.⁴⁷ That aside, *ENLIST*, the viewer is told, *AND HELP STOP SUCH ATROCITIES*. Similarly, another Canadian print, which recruited for the 221st "Bulldogs," presents a painted image of Ms. Cavell, the date of her execution set beneath. *THIS INFAMOUS ACT*

⁴⁶Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 167.

⁴⁷See Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, p. 129.



ISSUED BY THE CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR THE ORGANISATION OF RECRUITING IN IRELAND.

John Shuley & Co. Dublin. No. 11th-12th St. S. 11

Figure 5.12

MURDERED

OCTOBER 12TH, 1915

By ^{THE} Huns



MISS EDITH CAVELL

ENLIST IN THE 99th

AND HELP STOP SUCH ATROCITIES

PUBLISHED BY THE ESSEX COUNTY RECRUITING COMMITTEE

Edward Frost, Whitby

Figure 5.13

MUST BE AVENGED!, shouts the caption, "*SIGN UP*" TODAY. Certainly, these sentiments were well "outside" the "format" upon which earlier Great War lithographs were based.⁴⁸ But by the War's conclusion, the atrocity poster was simply another fixture in a distasteful and destructive conflict. Like the very atrocities that inspired them, such imagery was expected.

Together with atrocity, privation also became a routine truth for home front populations. By 1917-1918, Canadians, and especially Britons, were forced to conserve on virtually everything. Coal, metals, fat and foodstuffs were scarce and expensive, prompting massive recycling initiatives and rationing drives. As historian Lyn Macdonald accurately comments, "If it was a case of 'back to the wall' at the Front, it was a case of 'backs to the wall' at home too."⁴⁹ Poster artists acknowledged this state of affairs by creating several designs urging men, and particularly women, to *SAVE BREAD* and *WASTE NOT -- WANT NOT*. Initially, these images encouraged rationing by attempting to arouse feelings of guilt in the viewer. For instance, in a 1917 British lithograph by J.P. Beadle, a hardened seaman, presumably on leave, gazes upon a loaf of bread in the gutter (see Figure 5.14). *We risk our lives to bring you food,* the viewer is admonished, *It's up to you not to waste it.*

Ultimately, however, efforts at conservation would prove

⁴⁸Barnicoat, & *Concise History of Posters*, p. 222.

⁴⁹In addition to rationing, in England, conscription was extended in 1918 to include those up to the age of fifty-one. Furthermore, the "cost of living soared and wage disputes erupted in a rash of discontented strikes and industrial unrest among the war-weary workers..." Clearly, early War optimism and idealism had vanished. See Lyn Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land*, p. 275.

insufficient. By 1918, severe food shortages in England necessitated donation campaigns at home and abroad. Posters thus began heralding collection drives for specific food items, particularly to aid returning British soldiers. One example, an anonymous lithograph proclaiming May 27 *NATIONAL EGG DAY*, emphasizes both War-time privation and violence (see Figure 5.15). *ONE MILLION EGGS WANTED WEEKLY*, reads the tag line, *FOR THE WOUNDED*. As well, outside Great Britain, posters emphasized the need for Empire nations to increase their already vast export levels. In Canada specifically, dozens of prints reminded populations of their Imperial obligations by pressing them to conserve foodstuffs. Like broadsides documenting incidents of atrocity, such posters simply conceded the sober facts of War-time privation.

Closely linked to these were lithographs containing images of hardship. By the War's last years, information and rumour about continental Europe's destitute civilian population had reached virtually every corner of the Empire. Magazine editorials and newspaper articles across England and Canada decried the plight of homeless families and orphaned children. The phrase "poor little Belgium" became a mantra to those bemoaning the horrors -- both real and imagined -- visited upon innocents as a consequence of the War.⁵⁰ Poster artists too, many of whom witnessed such hardship directly, incorporated many of these harsh truths in their work. In 1917 and after, altogether bleak and pathetic imagery accompanied lithographs for organizations like the *Belgian Canal Boat Fund* and

⁵⁰See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, pp. 158-159.

We risk our lives to bring you food.
It's up to you not to
waste it.



Figure 5.14

**NATIONAL
EGG DAY**
MONDAY, MAY 27TH



**ONE MILLION EGGS
WANTED WEEKLY FOR THE WOUNDED**

*Send Donations to the Treasurer, HORACE G. HOLMES ESQ., J.P.
3, RUPERT ST. COVENTRY ST. W.I.*

Figure 5.15

Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Perhaps the most poignant example, a British poster by Frank Brangwyn for the French *ORPHELINAT DES ARMEES*, depicts a presumably deceased mother, her stricken children (likely destined for an orphanage) looking on from across the dinner table (see Figure 5.16).⁵¹ Another English poster by T. Gregory Brown portrays a ruined village, a weeping mother with her children in the foreground. Created for the War Bond campaign and entitled simply *THEIR HOME! BELGIUM 1918*, this and similarly Modernist poster images certainly embodied a sensibility far removed from their Edwardian predecessors. While such depictions would most likely have stunned home front viewers early in the conflict, by 1918 they were entirely commonplace.

In contrast, for the Great War soldier, privation and hardship were perhaps the least of an index of horrors faced daily. In *Undertones of War*, Edmund Blunden casually describes a sandbag pit, where "among its broken spades and empty tins" he discovers "a pair of boots, still containing someone's feet."⁵² To Canadian soldier V.E Goodwin, some "poor fellows" cremated by an exploding gas tank in 1918 warrants only an idle comment.⁵³ To these men, death and destruction were grim and ordinary realities of combat, a truth one appreciated within a few weeks of reaching the front. However, those at home needed years to recognize something that, over

⁵¹The caption reads: "To ensure that the little orphans shall have a home and motherly care, education in the country, a career suited to each child, and the religion of their fathers."

⁵²Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 68.

⁵³David Pierce Beatty, *Memories of the Forgotten War: The World War I Diary of Pte. V.E. Goodwin* (Saint John, 1986), p. 171.

ORPHELINAT DES ARMÉES



ASSURER AUX PETITS ORPHELINS:
LE FOYER ^{ET LA} TENDRESSE MATERNELLE
L'ÉDUCATION ^{AU} PAYS. UNE CARRIÈRE
APPROPRIÉE A CHAQUE ENFANT. LA
RELIGION DE LEURS PÈRES

Figure 5.16

time, has become a cliché -- that the Great War, far from an Edwardian romp, was in fact, a horror of unimaginable dimensions. But while this recognition only became widespread throughout civilian populations in the decade following 1918, poster artists were clearly prescient in their designs. Lithographs from the War's final years portrayed suffering and violence with a pedestrian regularity characteristic of later Modernist expression. Indeed, the banal truths of war which would eventually serve as the basis for such black artistic explorations as *The Waste Land* may be found within broadsides printed years earlier.

First, acknowledging the return of thousands of injured soldiers, both nations produced a variety of posters depicting wounded and disabled men. In all of them, their assimilation is presented as an ordinary event, simply another fact of the War. In *THE WOUNDED SOLDIER'S RETURN*, a uniformed Canadian officer mans a metal press, an artificial right hand working the controls (see Figure 5.17). Another anonymous Canadian lithograph, entitled *CANADA'S WORK FOR WOUNDED SOLDIERS*, features a single soldier cresting a hill, his left arm wrapped in bandages. Lastly, contrary to Alain Weill's contention that Great War posters "never" exhibited "scenes of butchery,"⁵⁴ several designs depicted just that. Beside the thrusting bayonet of Brangwyn's most famous lithograph, families lay shot in the snow and a civilian woman has been stabbed through the heart (see Figure 5.18) -- portraiture anticipating the horrific paintings of George Grosz. In accepting, like Grosz, the Modernist

⁵⁴Weill, *The Poster*, p. 130.

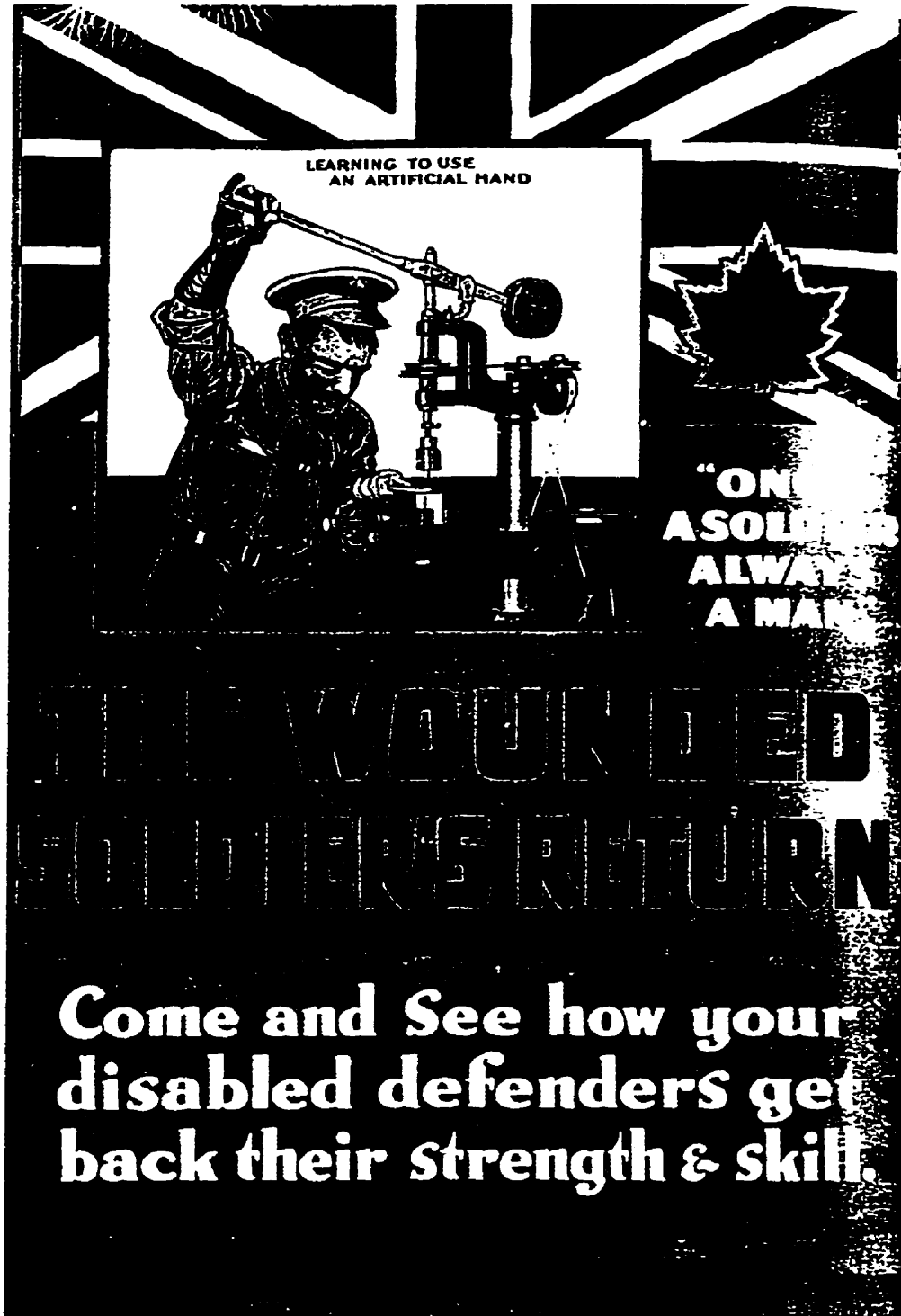


Figure 5.17

230^{EME} VOLTIGEURS CANADIENS FRANCAIS



EN AVANT!
POUR LE ROI
POUR LA PATRIE,
POUR LA FRANCE
VOTRE SANG,
POUR L'HUMANITE
ET LA LIBERTE

FORGE AVE
SUPERBE
MERCY A
FAIBLE

AUX ARMES!

Figure 5.18

notion that violence and cruelty were "an inseparable part of life,"⁵⁵ poster artists thus acknowledged War-time truths with brutal imagery ahead of its time. While the transformation of popular perspectives -- from Brooke to Joyce -- took years, it began with the acceptance by most Britons and Canadians of Modernist images "on every hoarding, in most shop windows, in omnibuses, tramcars and commercial vans."⁵⁶

* * *

Finally, the remarkable facts of the displacement of an entire set of social constructs over the course of a few years can only be comprehended by understanding the power of a populace's anguish, grief and outrage at such vast and senseless slaughter. Heartbreaking memorials and endless cemeteries provided the ground from which there emerged new sensibilities. Most tellingly, such profound alteration of public consciousness was forecast in the universal acceptance of the Modernist views expounded so graphically in the later War posters. The extraordinary reversal of the population's attitudes is exquisitely captured in the poetic journey of Wilfred Owen. From the Imperialist devotion of the early war poems to the coruscating, entirely Modernist, cynicism of his literary explosion of "the old Lie" in his most famous poem, *Dulce*

⁵⁵Cantor, Twentieth-Century Culture, p. 133.

⁵⁶As quoted in Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning, p. 55

Et Decorum Est, Owen's poignant verse echoes the cruel education of a generation and the end of a world:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.⁵⁷

⁵⁷As quoted in Abrams, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, p. 1912.

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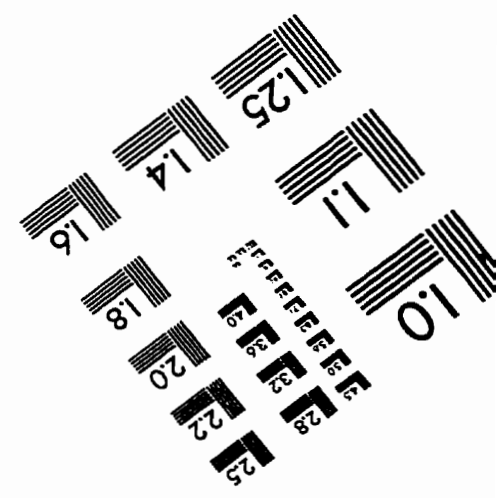
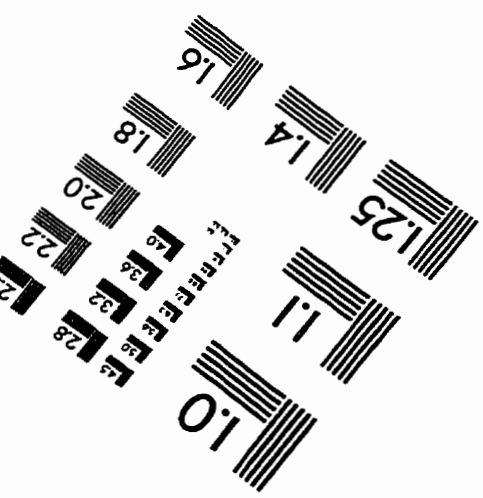
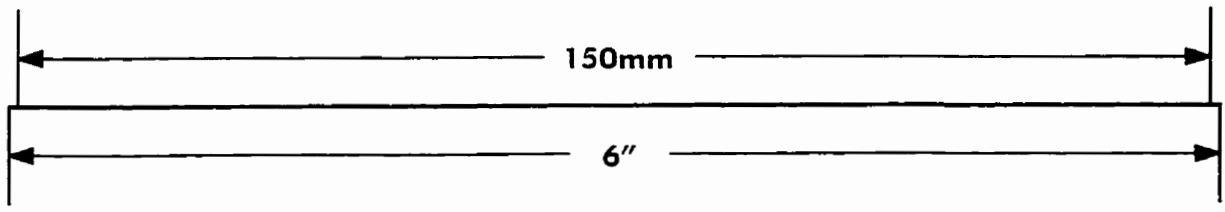
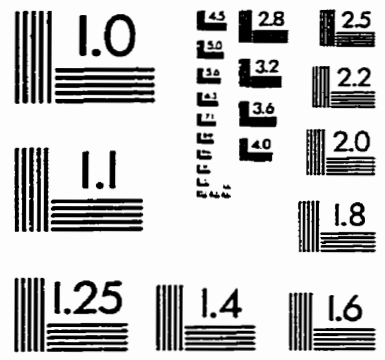
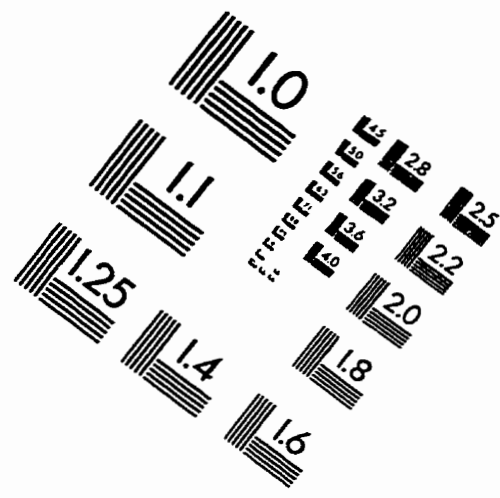
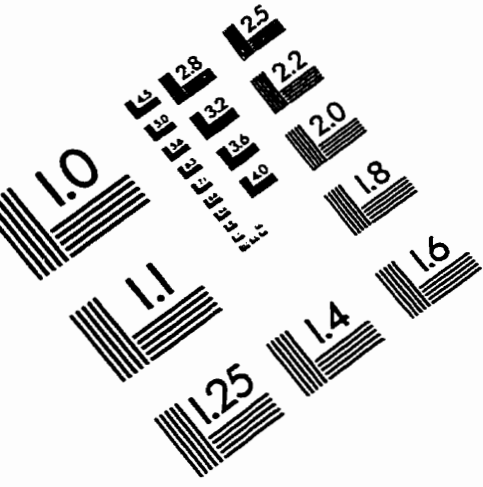
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