Laughter and War

Laughter and War:

Humorous-Satirical Magazines in Britain, France, Germany and Russia 1914–1918

By

Lesley Milne

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Laughter and War:
Humorous-Satirical Magazines in Britain, France, Germany and Russia
1914–1918

By Lesley Milne

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8686-6
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8686-4

To the Memory of
Michael Leonard Smith

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Figures

Plates

Foreword

This book has been a long time in the making, and many people have helped me along the way.

I should like to thank Elizabeth Boa, Paul Smith and other colleagues at the University of Nottingham, who were generous with their time and expertise.

In Russia, Violetta Gudkova, Anatoly Smeliansky and the late Alexandra Ilf helped collect research material. In France, Philippe and Danièle Séjourné were engaged in the project from first to last, decoding many of the cultural references for me. Thora van Male and Marie-Hélène Corréard acted as consultants on matters of idiom and translation. In the task of tracing copyright holders, Oleg Minin and Claude Zachary suggested fruitful leads for the Russian illustrations, while Ruth Negendanck of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, was invaluable in making contact with descendants of the *Simplicissimus* artists. Hans Zimmermann, editor of the *Simplicissimus* online edition at the Herzogin Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, kindly provided master-scans from the magazine's pages. Andre Gailani of Punch Ltd. was a mine of information on *Punch* and its archives. To all of them I record my most sincere thanks.

Many thanks go to Abigail Daly, who typeset the text, illustrations and front cover, also to all those at Cambridge Scholars Publishing who shepherded me through the production stages.

I am deeply grateful to Philip Morgan and Glen Lee for their friendship and encouragement, and to Philip for helping in so many ways, both intellectual and practical; also to Bill Speck, who read the manuscript and gave much useful advice. My sons, Robin and Duncan Smith, took a keen interest in the project and were always ready to lend an ear or a hand.

Finally and foremost, I should like to acknowledge a profound debt of gratitude to my late husband, Michael Smith, a man of great wit and encyclopaedic knowledge, who was by my side at the genesis of this book, whose voice threads all the way through it, and to whose memory it is dedicated. Any errors or misunderstandings are my own.

Acknowledgements

Material for this book was collected on research visits to Moscow and Paris, funded by the British Academy, to which I should like to express my thanks.

Image reproduction permissions are credited individually, alongside the images themselves.

I am grateful to transcript Verlag for permission to reproduce material previously published in my article "Letting Loose the Doggerel of War: Humorous and Satirical Journals in Britain, France and Germany 1914-1918", in Elisabeth Cheauré and Regine Nohejl (eds.), *Humour and Laughter in History. Transcultural Perspectives* (transcript Verlag, 2014), pp. 59-78.

Extracts from the poems "Heilands Geburtstag" and "Denken an den Freund bei Nacht" by Hermann Hesse are quoted by courtesy of Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin.

Extracts from works by A. P. Herbert, "The Death of DORA, 19**", "The German Graves", and "A Lost Leader", all originally published in *Punch* magazine, and *The Secret Battle* (London: Methuen & Co. 1919) are quoted with the permission of United Agents LLP on behalf of The Executors of the Estate of Jocelyn Herbert, M. T. Perkins and Polly M. V. R Perkins.

The following extracts from *Punch* magazine are quoted with permission of Punch Ltd., www.punch.co.uk. Epilogues to volumes 149, 150, 151, 152, 154, 155. "Essence of Parliament", 30 October 1918. "For Our Soldiers and Sailors", 11 August 1915. "Our Booking Office": 12 August 1914; 4 November 1914; 23 May 1917; 21 November 1917; 5 June, 1918; 4 September, 1918. "Pars" [snippets with comments]: 21 June 1916; 4 October 1916; 29 November 1916; 2 May 1917; 1 May 1918; 11 September 1918; 20 November 1918. Anonymous: Limerick, 3 October 1917; "Boycotting the Bard", 1 August 1917; "To the Bood. A Soddet", 14 November 1917; "Widowed", 20 November 1918. Miss P. Beach Thomas, "The Corn Field", 20 September 1916. Robert Bell, "The Plaint of A Topical Bard", 25 December 1918. W. W. Blair Fish, "The New Golf", 22 August 1917. A. Hilton Brown, "Lonely Soldiers", 9 August 1916. Miss F. L. R. Brown, "The Tower That Passed in the Night", 8 August 1917. Miss B. W. Chandler, "A Matter of Precedence", 29 May 1918. W. A. Darlington: "The Play's the Thing", 12 December 1917; "A Sea Change", 22 November 1916. H. N. Davey, "By the Canal in Flanders", 5 September 1917. Miss Eleanor

Farjeon: “Wormwood Scrubs”, 3 May 1916; “The Stock Exchange”, 7 June 1916; “Newington Butts”, 3 January 1917. Miss C. Fox-Smith: “Mules”, 16 August 1916; “The Amused and the Amusers”, 7 June 1916. Miss Rose Fyleman: “There are fairies at the bottom of our garden”, 23 May 1917; “The Best Game the Fairies Play”, 13 June 1917; “There Used To Be Fairies in Germany”, 4 July 1917; “The Goblin to the Fairy Queen”, 19 June 1918. Miss Ina Garvey, “Blanche’s Letters”: 19 May 1915; 20 September 1916; 29 November 1916; 11 April 1917. Mrs Glasgow: “Dulce et Decorum”, 26 January 1916; “We Give Our Sons”, 10 May 1916. Miss E. E. Helme, “My Philosopher”, 22 May, 1918. T. Hodgkinson, “A Literary War Worker”, 24 November 1915. Charles King, “Trench Mortar Tennis”, 19 July 1916. E. V. Knox (pseudonym Evoe), “The Great Petard”, 4 November 1914. F. O. Langley, “The Watch Dogs”: 24 March 1915; 28 July 1915; 24 May 1916; 21 June 1916; 5 July 1916; 1 May 1918. W. P. Lipscomb, “Ceremonial”, 27 November 1918. N. R. Martin: “The Terrors of War”, 9 December 1914; “Recruiting Ballad”, 25 November 1914; “Letters of a Boy Scout”, 18 September 1918. A. A. Milne: “Armageddon”, 5 August 1914; “The Two Recruiting Sergeants”, 9 September 1914; “The Last Line, 18 November 1914; “Eleven Seconds”, 6 January 1915. George Morrow, “C’s a Crown Prince” in “An Alphabet of the War”, Punch’s Almanack for 1915. W. H. Ogilvie, “Pretending”, 28 November 1917. G. T. Pinch, “The Keep-It-Dark City”, 17 February 1915. E. L. Roberts, “Sauce for the Goose”, 8 August 1917. Miss D. M. Stuart, “Gallipoli”, 13 November 1918. Miss Dorothea Sumner, “Fabulous Friends”, 17 July 1918. Mrs Vaizey, “The Lonely Soldier”, 24 February 1915. R. F. White, “A Territorial in India”: 17 May 1916; 25 August 1915.

Every effort was made to trace or contact copyright holders, but none were found for the following artists: Djilio (pseudonym not deciphered), Figure 7-2; Ricardo Florès, Plate 14; Vladimir Lebedev, Plates 4, 20 and 29; Marco (pseudonym not deciphered), Figure 5-2; Auguste Roubille, Figure 8-2; Wilhelm Schulz, Plate 12. Advice on these and any other omissions would be greatly appreciated, so that further acknowledgements can be included in future editions.

Note on Russian Transliteration

In the text a simplified transliteration system is used for names. Transliterated quotations, Notes and Bibliography follow the Library of Congress transliteration system.

There was an orthography reform that took effect from October 1918. All issues of *Novy Satirikon* were printed before that date, and some of the illustrations display the old orthography. In the titles and captions beneath the images this has been modernised.

Note on Dates

Until 31 January 1918 Russia used the Julian (Old Style) calendar, which by the twentieth century was thirteen days behind the Gregorian (New Style) calendar used in Western Europe. The day following 31 January 1918 was declared to be 14 February, and thereafter the calendars were in accordance.

As it is important to align dates with events of the war, references in the text to the Russian periodical *Novy Satirikon* give first the date in New Style, followed by the Old-Style date of publication as carried on the journal itself. In the inscriptions to the Plates, only the Old-Style date is given.

The Russian Revolution of spring 1917 disrupted publishing schedules, and the issue dated 2 April 1917 (Old Style) is the last to bear the day of publication. From then on, only the month is given. In order to maintain chronology, references to the journal after 2 April 1917 will indicate how many numbers appeared in that month, and the order within this sequence of the issue cited.

References to the Revolutions of 1917 are dated according to New Style: the March Revolution and the November Revolution.

Introduction

Love and war are accustomed partners, in idiom, in legend and in military vocabulary. The phrase "All's fair in love and war" equates them as areas where in extreme adversity the concept of "fairness" no longer applies; in Roman mythology Venus and Mars are lovers; the language of military attack and conquest uses words such as thrust and penetration.

Less frequently marked is the association between laughter and war, and yet war intensifies every function of humour. Mocking laughter asserts superiority over the enemy, but can also mask secret anxieties and fears. The incongruity that so often provokes laughter is inherent in the juxtaposition between war-time ways and the manners of peace-time, while irony comes into play as a means of transcending circumstances and contradictions. Laughter provides a release, a safety-valve for suppressed emotions; conversely, it can insulate and anaesthetise against both pity and horror. In its social function as a corrective to undesirable behaviour, laughter is deployed against those who are viewed as offending against the patriotic consensus. Within the consensus, laughter promotes social cohesion, raising the spirits and helping to maintain morale.[1] The First World War was a total war, mobilising every available resource of the combatant nations, soldiers and civilians alike. Among these resources was laughter, collective and individual.

This book surveys the conflict as "fought" in the pages of four humorous-satirical magazines: *Punch* in Britain, *Le Rire* in France, *Simplicissimus* in Germany and *Novy Satirikon* in Russia. These were all weekly periodicals and in their respective cultures each was a leader in its field. Radio was not yet a medium of mass communication during the First World War, which meant that a major role was still played by print journalism. As will be seen, each of the magazines had a specific profile, but they all fulfilled a similar task, using devices from the same repertoire of jibes, boasts, insults, challenges, shrugs and cheers as they rallied the nation in its time of crisis.

A first instinct today would be to dismiss this out of hand as "propaganda", but that would be to pre-judge the issues. Once the First World War had started, winning it was perceived as the best way to end it. As to why and how it started, two recent books have examined in detail the events that led to its outbreak: Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* and Margaret MacMillan's *The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace in the First World War.* Suffice it to say

here that both describe perspectives from which each of the belligerent states could at the time view itself as an innocent party. Clark identifies a defensive patriotism arising from "the complex aetiology of the conflict", which allowed all sides to be confident that their country had been provoked or attacked, MacMillan adding the proviso that "What may seem like a reasonable way of protecting oneself can look very different from the other side of the border."[2] And so it began.

The First World War is remembered differently in the different countries. In Russia during the Soviet period it became culturally invisible, represented as a jingoistic imperialist war and obliterated from the collective memory by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the Second World War, which was referred to always as the Great Patriotic War. For Germany after 1945, the task of coming to terms with the legacy of the Nazi era dominated public and historical discourse about the 1914-1918 conflict. The French remember the Great War, la Grande Guerre, as a triumph of national liberation and a highpoint of French power on the international stage, in uncomfortable contrast to the capitulation of 1940 and the dark years of Nazi occupation that followed. In Britain the Second World War is regarded with pride as a "good" war, something that "had to be done", the nation's "finest hour", whereas the First World War has become fixed in popular perception as a "bad" war, entered into needlessly, fought badly, and concluded with a peace that was not durable. It is indicative that in 2001 the military historian Gary Sheffield gave his book on the First World War the title *Forgotten Victory.*

What is remembered in the UK is the cost in lives, commemorated in the war cemeteries of Northern France and Flanders; the long lists of names on memorials there and in every parish in the land; the two-minutes' silence on Remembrance Day; and the cultural heritage left by the war poets, which is deeply lodged in the national psyche and which the former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion has called a "sacred national text".[3] The First World War appears forever summed up in the title of Wilfred Owen's poem "Futility". However, in 2010 Nicholas Murray in *The Red Sweet Wine of Youth: The Brave and Brief Lives of the War Poets* opened this "sacred text" to reinterpretation, revising the schoolbook view of the poetry as "anti-war", and setting out the case that the soldier-poets were not pacifists, but poets who accepted their obligations as soldiers; they were not "anti-war" but "anti-heroic".[4] This reflected a fresh process of revisionism that was taking place among historians. An overview of the earlier historical arguments was provided by Alex Danchev in his 1991 article "'Bunking' and Debunking: The Controversies of the 1960s", but Danchev remarked on how little the historical debates had affected the received version of the war as "futile",

a view further reinforced by the brilliantly savage end-of-pier satire in the 1963 play and 1969 film *Oh! What a Lovely War*, that most comprehensive "debunking" of the Western Front and the war itself.[5] At the start of the twenty-first century Gary Sheffield's *Forgotten Victory* took up the baton of "re-bunking" by challenging the view of World War I as pointless and "futile", laying out the very substantive issues at stake, and describing the on-the-ground problems of learning how to fight the first mass-scale industrialised war in human experience. Yet in 2013 David Reynolds in *The Long Shadow* noted that while revisionist historians like Sheffield had certainly shifted the terms of debate among specialists, their efforts had still not altered the public perception of the First World War.[6] This may change with the extensive media coverage of the centenary, heralded by the appearance in 2013 of such books as *Great Britain's Great War* by Jeremy Paxman, followed in 2014 by a BBC documentary television series presented by Paxman, *Britain's Great War.* Robustly trenchant, Paxman in his book attacks the "shared set of hazy assumptions" about the war, pronouncing the received wisdom about it to be "unsatisfactory" and declaring that this "won't do".[7] Assessments of the war will be contested in the debates, documentaries and dramas broadcast throughout the four centenary years, and it remains to be seen which view will in the end prevail in public consciousness. The perception of the war as "futile" holds a powerful grip on the imagination.

Danchev, Reynolds and Paxman all refer to the impact of *Oh! What a Lovely War.* Danchev points out that "Although accepted as anti-war, the film was more emphatically anti-authority, specifically upper-class authority. It was, in a word, anti-officer." The losses suffered by the "officer class" were virtually ignored.[8] Paxman dismisses the "easy caricature" of a war run by "upper-class twits" and comments that "It seems to have become much easier to laugh at—or cry about—the First World War than to understand it."[9] *Oh! What a Lovely War* does indeed laugh, but from the standpoint of a later generation, in a spirit of angry rejection that sees it as a swindle perpetrated by the ruling classes upon the unprivileged. As for the generation that had fought in the war, Reynolds quotes the response to the play by First World War veterans, who recognised that this was a caricature of their history but were moved by the songs that weave through the play and film: "To hear the songs we sang [. . .] is to catch again that whiff of wry, disillusioned resignation with which our armies faced trench life."[10]

Wry resignation is a classic joking mode, and disillusion is a frequent component in irony. At the other end of the spectrum, songs with a cheerful marching rhythm are akin to jokes that buoy the spirits and boost morale. The present book is an attempt to recover, through the humour of the time,

traces of the spirit in which the war was experienced, encompassing not only the British perspective but also that of France, Germany and Russia, on both the fighting front and the home fronts, for the 1914-1918 conflict was a trauma shared across national boundaries and involving both soldiers and civilians. The source material is print-journalism addressed to an educated, predominantly middle-class readership—an "officer class" in the social hierarchy, but of the junior and middle ranks. Although relatively privileged, they were not in control of high-level strategy and in that sense they too were the foot soldiers of the war. The following chapters collect the—printable—jokes and tales with which they entertained, reassured and consoled themselves as they shouldered their obligation to "see the business through".

When times are hard, people turn to laughter as an antidote to the gloomy background. This was demonstrated in the UK in the winter of austerity 2011-2012, when the traditional British pantomime enjoyed a boom season.[11] During the crisis of war, the importance of laughter is all the greater, as attested by the American comedian Jerry Seinfeld, whose father, stationed in the Pacific during World War II, transcribed jokes he'd heard and stored them in a box for safe keeping. "A joke is an amazing thing," says Seinfeld. "It's something you save in a box in a war."[12] It is also something that preserves a record of the mind that conceived it and the circumstances that inspired it.

Punch, *Le Rire*, *Simplicissimus* and *Novy Satirikon* can be regarded as repositories that save for posterity the jokes of the time. All four were periodicals famed for their illustrations, but they devoted much space to written text as well: sketches, stories, quips; verse both light and serious. The cartoon is acknowledged as a valuable resource because it condenses a complex idea into one striking visual image.[13] Thus there are already extensive collections of cartoons and drawings from the First World War.[14] However, written text can likewise provide memorable encapsulations of a moment in history, as suggested by "The Plaint of a Topical Bard", which appeared in *Punch* on 25 December 1918:

> Close in the wake of capering Time
> I pant and still I pant in vain;
> I cannot catch him in a rhyme
> Nor snapshot in a passing strain.

Taking its cue from the "topical bard", this book shifts the main focus onto the verbal "snapshots" that fix a gesture, a stance or a mood: the telling line of verse, the exemplary story, the well-crafted caption, the joke that sums

up absurdity, desperation or relief. All quotations are given in English, but in the case of wordplay or of verse translations, the original is given in brackets or an endnote for readers who wish to compare versions. Often the point of a drawing can be conveyed by the caption accompanied by a description; however, any book dealing with these periodicals must also include a selection of their illustrations. This is all the more necessary because, although complete runs of *Simplicissimus* and *Punch* are available on the web,[15] *Le Rire* and *Novy Satirikon* are print only and are not readily accessible in the UK. Only the Taylorian Library in Oxford holds a representative run of *Le Rire*; no UK library holds more than occasional copies of *Novy Satirikon.* The spread of illustrations and examples will thus present *Le Rire* and *Novy Satirikon* alongside their nowadays more visible contemporaries, *Punch* and *Simplicissimus*, which are sufficiently famous to be included by Gary Sheffield in his list of the hundred objects that tell the story of the First World War.[16]

The period 1914-1918 is relatively close to us in historical time, and yet very distant in terms of mentality. Drawing on the "boxes of snapshots" preserved in four humorous-satirical magazines from the period, this book is an attempt to get under the skin of one specific class in four different societies, on different sides of the conflict, as they battled through, using laughter to cope with national and personal crisis. Laughter is a universal human response, here tested in an extreme situation that reveals its diverse functions with particular clarity, and in that sense the four journals provide a showcase for the stratagems of laughter. Recurrent patterns and devices are noted, but the approach is contextual and empirical rather than theoretical, since the primary aim is to use the material within a comparative cultural framework to achieve imaginative understanding of the war-time perspectives on both sides. Jokes, light verse or comic tales are good ways of breaking down preconceptions because they always contain an element of surprise, which turns into the pleasure of recognition. Not all the stories and verse in the pages that follow are comic, however; some are very direct evocations of grief and loss, and that is also recognisable as true to experience: not everything can be transcended with a stoical jest. Against the darkness of the backdrop, the performance of wit and humour stands illumined all the more poignantly.

Chapter One

The Magazines

In the years 1914-1918 *Punch*, *Le Rire*, *Simplicissimus* and *Novy Satirikon* were the leading humorous-satirical periodicals in their respective countries. *Punch* was an old-established satirical review that had been founded in 1841 on the model of the French *Charivari*, as indicated by its subtitle: *Punch, or the London Charivari*. The name *Punch* referred to the rowdy puppet of the Punch and Judy show, but by the 1900s *Punch* had become an institution, part of the establishment, Mr Punch himself acquiring in many of the illustrations a respectably bourgeois aspect, albeit still with a twinkle of mischief in his eye. *Punch* was a London paper, but it was read everywhere: in far-flung parts of the Empire; in public and preparatory schools; "in rectories and country-houses and the red-brick homes of Midlands solicitors and amid the chill discomforts of Scottish high life".[1] The journal thus represented the world of the leisured middle or upwardly middle classes, its ethos that of the public school and sport, with its codified rules of behaviour and fair play. The First World War increased the magazine's appeal for the public, a process repeated during World War II.[2] From the 1940s onwards, however, its circulation declined until its closure in 1992, and although an attempt was made to revive it in 1996, it closed again in 2002. The journal's slow decline contrasts with its role during the First World War. In July 1919 it published a month-by-month selection from its wartime coverage, *Mr Punch's History of the Great War*, which went through eight impressions in that year, testimony to widespread public affection.

Le Rire, founded in 1894, belonged to a different tradition of humorous illustrated journalism. In France censorship had been lifted from drawings in 1881 and this gave freedom to treat racy and risqué subjects.[3] *Le Rire* offered quite simply the "Laughter" of its title, presenting an image of Paris as a city of gaiety in the Belle Époque, that retrospectively named, two-decade golden age of peace, prosperity and pleasure which came to an end in 1914. The outbreak of war disrupted production to such an extent that no issues appeared between 1 August and 21 November 1914 because mass mobilisation emptied the printing works and editorial offices of manpower. When the journal resumed, it was under the war-time masthead of *Le Rire Rouge*, "red" indicating martial rather than politically radical intent. Its perspective was urban and urbane, but also with broad popular appeal, and

during the war it continued with its traditional themes and stock situations, now dressed in military uniform.[4] *Le Rire* closed down in 1940 when the German armies entered Paris, but was revived in 1946 and continued, with a brief break in publication 1949-1951, until it finally closed in 1971, no longer able to keep step with the changing times. During the First World War, however, its circulation increased,[5] and it retained a high standing thereafter in the inter-war period, when its front page was regarded as the "field-marshal's baton" for a French artist-caricaturist.[6]

Simplicissimus was founded in 1896, its mission to restore sharpness and radicalism to humorous-satirical journalism in Germany. The magazine took its title from the seventeenth-century German novel set in the Thirty Years' War, where the simpleton narrator observes the grotesque depravities of the warring armies. The journal's satire was aggressive, symbolised by its chosen mascot, a red, belligerent bulldog. Published in Munich, one of the magnet cultural cities of the time, *Simplicissimus* boasted a cosmopolitan array of artists and quickly secured an international reputation. As befitted its title it was strongly anti-militarist, right up to the summer of 1914, and when war broke out it was faced with a dilemma. However, along with the German Social Democratic Party, it took the decision to support the *Burgfrieden*—a truce among the social and political factions to ward off the external threat. During the Weimar Republic the magazine warned against political extremism from both left and right, but the fact that it managed subsequently to continue existence in the Nazi period damaged its reputation. Having ceased publication in 1944 because of paper shortage, it was revived from 1954-1967. The years 1896-1914 are regarded as its heyday, but during the First World War *Simplicissimus* gained new readers and undoubtedly expressed the opinions and tendencies across a wide range of the educated German public.[7]

Satirikon, founded in 1908 and in 1913 renamed *Novy Satirikon* (New Satirikon) after a spat with its original publisher, owed its name to the *Satyricon* of ancient Roman literature. The journal's emblem was a fat satyr, sometimes jovial, sometimes doleful, sometimes threatening, and sometimes accompanied by a whole family of the species. *Satirikon* swiftly became the foremost satirical magazine in Russia, widely read across the spectrum of educated, politically aware society. Strongly oppositional to the tsarist autocracy, like *Simplicissimus* it was faced with a dilemma at the outbreak of war; like *Simplicissimus* it declared a patriotic position in the face of a greater common danger. Its ethos was that of the Russian liberal intelligentsia and during the war its focus was on the ideal of participatory citizenship, the organization of an effective home-front war effort as an impetus to dismantling autocracy and establishing a civil society based on

democratic principles. Virulently anti-Bolshevik, the magazine was closed down by the Bolshevik regime in August 1918, the surprise being only that it lasted so long. In the annals of Russian humorous-satirical journalism, however, it remained a legend, a benchmark and a model, as shown by stubborn but short-lived attempts to revive it: in emigration in Paris in 1931, in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1951, and again in post-Soviet Moscow in 1997. During the First World War it was the mouthpiece of patriotic democratic Russia.[8]

Punch, *Le Rire*, *Simplicissimus* and *Novy Satirikon* all lent their unstinting support to the national war effort and were thus organs of propaganda. However, it has been pointed out that during a war of national survival people might be perfectly aware that they were being propagandised and not actually care; they wished to believe the best of themselves and the worst of the enemy. The key was that the propaganda had to be credible and not too much.[9] Humour is an excellent vehicle for propaganda, and the popularity of humorous and satirical magazines during World War I indicates a readiness to be propagandised in this way.

Each journal adopted an attitude of defiance. The mode of *Punch* is defiant levity, subsequently defined in *Mr Punch's History of the Great War* as "that peculiar and blessed birth-right which enables [an Englishman] to overthrow the Giant Despair with the weapon of whimsical humour".[10] For *Le Rire* the mode of defiance is explicitly identified as Gallic "*gaîté*", again seen as part of a national birth-right. The laughter of *Simplicissimus* is that of defiant challenge, against encirclement by a whole world of enemies but specifically against Britain (almost always, however, referred to as "England"); this is challenge to the old order, the old empire that seeks to deny the new young nation its rightful "place in the sun". *Novy Satirikon* expresses the defiant dreams of the Russian liberal intelligentsia, not only of victory against Germany but of a transformed Russia, dreams that did seem to be coming true in March 1917 with the overthrow of autocracy in the first Revolution of that year, but which after the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 turned into the nightmare of a humiliating separate peace with Germany negotiated by the new regime at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. The journal gives vent to the double anguish of military defeat by the external enemy and political defeat at home.

The four magazines provide material for a comparative study because they all occupied a similar position in their respective cultures. It might be thought that the trench newspapers of the First World War would be a more authentic voice of wartime humour, but this was a total war, affecting both soldiers and civilians, and trench newspapers convey only the soldiers' experience. The home front had its experience too, which also deserves a

hearing. Both home and fighting front were represented in *Punch*, *Le Rire* and *Simplicissimus*, which all engaged in a two-way communication with the trenches. Their contributors of military age and fit for active service had volunteered or been mobilised, and they continued to send in items for publication. In the British lines *Punch* was delivered to the front by the postal service, a current copy being an essential "index of swank" for the standard officers' dugout.[11] A *Simplicissimus* drawing on 29 December 1914, "Silvesterpunsch", shows a copy of the journal in the background of the officers' quarters as they celebrate the New Year. Announcements in *Le Rire* assure that the magazine is delivered "even to the front line", and offer special subscription terms for the troops, including three- or six-month subscriptions rather than the normal twelve—a pragmatic but poignant detail, for which soldier would tempt fate by assuming his own survival for a twelve-month? For readers in the trenches, asking their own versions of Macduff's question in *Macbeth*, "Stands Scotland where it did?" the journals provided reassurance: yes, there are changes consequent upon the war but your country, or city in the case of Paris, retains its essence. For readers at home, the front-line contributors put on the brave face of humour, wit, or ironic stoicism. It was what they did with each other at the front too, after all. In his "Preliminary" to *Undertones of War*, first published in 1928, Edmund Blunden refers to a "forced gaiety then very much the rage".[12] In retrospect Blunden finds this "depressing", but it clearly captures the mood at the time, which also found expression in the trench newspapers, the most famous of which, *The Wipers Times*, has been described as "a kind of military *Punch*".[13] It is therefore not surprising to find this mood reflected in both *Punch* and *Le Rire.* In *Simplicissimus*, by contrast, the tone in contributions from the front tends more towards the meditatively stoical.

Novy Satirikon displays a telling difference from the other magazines in that it does not have the two-way communication with the fighting front. The reasons lie in the composition of the Russian army, which conscripted from Russia's vast resources of manpower. If Russia had conscripted in the French manner, she would have called up sixty million men. As a result, there were many deferments, including for university students. "For most of the time, deferments by reason of education were maintained and the universities of Russia continued at full blast."[14] This contrasted with the situation in Britain, France and Germany, where the educated classes, from which all the journals drew their readers, volunteered or were mobilised from the outset. An example is provided by "Essence of Parliament", the *Punch* parliamentary sketch, which reported on 10 March 1915 that two-thirds of University men were under arms and of those that remained, all the physically fit had joined the Officers' Training Corps. In Russia a volunteer

from the educated classes was liable to be demobilised on the grounds of political unreliability, as happened in the case of the *Novy Satirikon* contributor Arkady Bukhov.[15] An interesting confirmation that such recruits were regarded as suspect comes in a dispatch on the Russian army by the British colonel Alfred Knox in March 1914, in which Knox stated that too many reserve officers came from the "unpatriotic" intelligentsia.[16] The army needed officers, however, and by the end of 1915 some encroachments were being made on the universities.[17] This increase in recruitment from the educated classes must have entailed a corresponding increase in the number of *Novy Satirikon* readers at the front. But they remained readers, not contributors. The composition of the *Novy Satirikon* contributing cohort did not alter to take in this front-line experience and the journal continued to focus on the war effort as reflected on the home front.

By 1914 each magazine had a specific format, which was maintained throughout the war. The first page of *Punch* each week was the "Charivaria", containing snippets of news (real or manufactured), trivia or gossip from the previous week; this "Charivaria" page was a dialogue with readers that has been compared to today's Twitter.[18] Another popular feature of *Punch* was the "pars"—misprints or inadvertencies sent in by readers from all parts of the globe and printed with a short title or follow-up. Meanwhile "Essence of Parliament", first introduced in 1855, had led to *Punch* becoming "the house journal of the political world".[19] The editorial each week was, with very rare exceptions, in verse, and even when the topic was a serious one, devices of light verse such as ingenious rhyme could come into play. Unlike the other three periodicals, *Punch* did not use colour for its drawings, which remained a virtuoso display of black and white. In each issue there were only two full-page cartoons, the others sharing the space with text. By thus restricting the number of large-scale drawings, *Punch* both drew attention to them as "statements" and also reduced the element of grand-gesture heroics.

Simplicissimus, *Le Rire* and *Novy Satirikon* all had a full-page colour illustration on the front and back pages of each issue, with full-page drawings on other pages too, as well as smaller drawings on pages with text. In *Simplicissimus* a drawing would sometimes be accompanied by verses beneath the image, instead of a caption, and this also happened on occasion in *Novy Satirikon*. The first item in *Simplicissimus* was a long prose piece, usually of artistic literature, and not necessarily comic or satirical in tone. This meant that *Simplicissimus* could treat issues in greater depth than the other three periodicals. Under the heading "Lieber Simplicissimus" (Dear Simplicissimus), the magazine printed anecdotes and curious observations sent in by readers, while "Vom Tage" (Of the Day) included a brief comment or observation on some small event, the significant marginalia of history.

The prose items in *Novy Satirikon* were humorous or satirical tales, and the journal also had a section entitled "Volch'i iagody" (Dogberries)—a kind of wild gooseberry (*Ribes cynosbati*) bearing large prickly berries. Here were to be found short reports of events throughout the Russian Empire, or from newspapers in both the allied and enemy countries during the war, accompanied by a brief comment that could be admiring or acerbic, depending on the context. These "Dogberries" took in a wide range of internal affairs, and as the war progressed, this section not infrequently had blank spaces where an item had been cut by the censor.

Le Rire was definitely the raciest of the magazines. Its staple fare was the humorous portrayal of the relations between men and women, the conduct of such affairs now adapting to war-time circumstances. The fighting front and the ravaged war zone were mainly represented in *Le Rire* through drawings; the home front was portrayed both visually and verbally, favourite forms being the satirical *chanson* of the music hall or the short comic tale. Of particular interest is the opening item in every issue, "Le Rire de la semaine" (The Laugh of the Week). The author, who always used a pseudonym, played the role of *flâneur* in wartime Paris, a city perilously near the front line. Paris was "the inter-allied capital of twenty-five nations at war" and of strategic, material and symbolic importance to the Allied cause. Soldiers passed through on leave, seeking "the hurried pleasures of rest and recreation: gastronomic, alcoholic, and sexual".[20] With its tales, *chansons* and weekly running commentary, *Le Rire* projects vivid images of the fabled "City of Light" at war.

Le Rire did not number its pages, as if thereby disclaiming all seriousness of intent. *Novy Satirikon* numbered the pages within each issue. *Punch* was paginated in terms of bound volumes, each of a six-month run, with pagination running consecutively throughout.[21] *Simplicissimus* too was paginated consecutively, in this case throughout an entire year (which began in April, the month in which the first-ever issue had appeared). This consecutive pagination announces the status of *Punch* and *Simplicissimus* as journals of record, to be preserved for posterity. *Le Rire* and *Novy Satirikon* may not have declared themselves so explicitly in this way at the time, but none the less they fulfil the same function. Taken together and interleaved through comparison, the four periodicals combine to form an album of snapshots capturing moments in the conflict and giving insight into moods and attitudes in response to the unfolding events.

Chapter Two

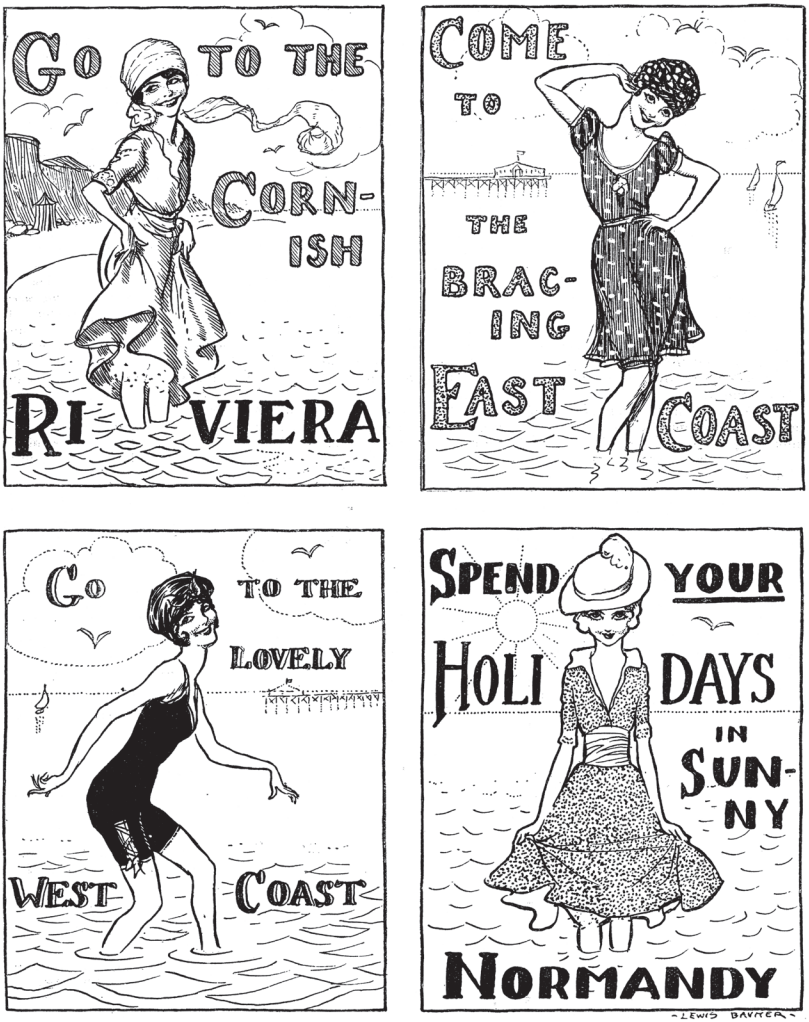
Adjusting to War

On 28 June 1914 the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo and thirty-seven days later Europe was at war. As weekly periodicals, the magazines could not react to events on a daily basis. *Le Rire*, *Simplicissimus* and *Novy Satirikon* used colour, which entailed a fairly lengthy production process and meant that there could be ten to fourteen days before an article or a drawing appeared.[1] *Punch*, using only black and white, had a lead-in period that could be as short as six days,[2] but no weekly journal could keep up in late July 1914, with the situation emerging unexpectedly and changing from one day to the next. The magazines in the spring and summer reflect a background rumble of international tension, immediate concern in July with other issues, and then the sudden intrusion of crisis when the summer holiday season was in full swing.

On 8 July 1914 *Punch* carried "Mr Punch's Holiday Pages", depicting the "annual problem" of choosing a resort, when the advertised scenery is so very similar. (Fig. 2-1) There were also comical drawings of the British in preparatory training at home for what they think awaits them: hardening the feet for beach walking (a family picks its way barefoot over shards scattered on the garden path); toughening the interior for a lodging-house diet (father at the dinner table carves an old boot).

In politics, the topic of the day was the bill on Home Rule for Ireland. War between Britain and Germany was declared on Tuesday 4 August, but the publication time-lag meant that it took until the issue of Wednesday 5 August for even the prospect of a general European war to be mentioned in the journal. The extent to which events took everyone by surprise can be gauged from "Essence of Parliament", reporting on the House of Commons session on Monday 27 July:

> Today set apart for consideration of Navy Estimates. Tomorrow assigned a Second Reading of Home Rule Amending Bill come over from the Lords. Up to yesterday evening public attention centred on latter event. [. . .] This afternoon the war-cloud lies low over East of Europe. News momentarily expected—it arrived before the dinner hour—that Austria had declared war against [Serbia]. Match thus applied to trail of gunpowder, no one can say



THE ANNUAL PROBLEM.

Showing how helpfully the hoardings distinguish between the characteristic features of various localities.

Figure 2-1. Cartoon by Lewis Baumer. Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd., www.punch.co.uk.

> how far or in what direction the flame may travel. Meanwhile ominous fact that by way of precaution other Powers are preparing to mobilise.

A prose piece on 5 August by A. A. Milne, "Armageddon", parodied events and the web of European alliances—the Entente of Britain, France and Russia versus the Central Powers of Germany and Austro-Hungary. "Armageddon" starts in the smoking room of a golf club, where a certain Mr Porkins, having "marched around the golf course in ninety-seven that morning", now opines that "what England wants is a war": "We're getting flabby All this pampering of the poor is playing the very deuce with the country. A bit of a scrap with a foreign power would do us all the good in the world." The scene now moves to Olympus, where it is well understood that Porkins and his kind must not be disappointed. Accordingly the gods set to work. A broken engagement in Ruritania escalates into a stand-off with Essenland, the leader writers compose editorials with multiple use of the word "blood", the statesmen issue ultimatums, Essenland invades Ruritania, Borovia in turn mobilises its army "amidst a wonderful display of patriotic enthusiasm by those who were remaining behind". A very young god, who has observed all this, is perplexed, but the others explain the alliances linking Felicia with Essenland, Marksland with Borovia, and England as "the ally of the ally of the Country which holds the balance of power between Marksland and Felicia". The young god still thinks that the whole thing might be stopped, if someone thought it stupid or unjust, but the gods tell him gravely, trying not to laugh, that it is a matter of "prestige".

> And when a year later the hundred thousandth English mother woke up to read that her boy had been shot, I am afraid she shed foolish tears and thought the world had come to an end.
>
> Poor, short-sighted creature! She didn't realise that Porkins, who had marched around in ninety-six the day before, was now thoroughly braced up.
>
> (*"What babies they all are," said the very young god.*)
>
> [Italics in the original.]

With its irony, pathos and prescience expressed in whimsical mode, this is a very characteristic *Punch* piece. On 5 August the verse editorial introduced lines entitled "The Logic of Ententes" with reference to "what looks like the eve of a general European war". Designed "to represent the views of the average British patriot", the verses express his opinion that conflict in the Balkans between Austria and Serbia is not his concern, but that as a result of German involvement, he will now be "Dragged into somebody else's war, / For that's what a *double entente* is for." [Italics in the original.]