The Spectre of Defeat in Post-War British and US Literature

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Experience, Memory and Post-Memory

Edited by

David Owen and Cristina Pividori

Introduction by Professor Andrew Monnickendam

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Once you hear the details of victory,
it is hard to distinguish it from a defeat.

—Jean Paul Sartre, *Essays in Aesthetics* (1964).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part Three: Post-Memory

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

1. War, Culture and Defeat

From Hastings to Antietam, from the beaches of Gallipoli to the Vietnam jungle, from Biafra to Berlin, the shadow of defeat has been cast over soldiers and civilians alike. The guiding principle of this collection stems from the commonplace belief that it is the victors who write history. Certainly, they write one history, but it is not the only one: the defeated also write their own—equally if not more eloquent—version of events. But also, almost counter-intuitively perhaps, in moments of exultation, when victory seems inevitable or may even have been attained, there are those victors for whom doubts (that veritable spectre of defeat) arise. Our collection explores the manifold ways in which defeat has made its steely presence felt through memory or perception to individuals and societies, even though they pertain to the winning side.

The literary texts analysed here help to mark out the distinctive contribution that literature has made, by establishing representational spaces for approaching and reconsidering the meanings of defeat and by exploring ideas and issues that remain unaddressed by other disciplines. Unlike historical descriptions or political analyses, fiction gains power through its aesthetic qualities, providing a particular account of the notion of defeat, one that grants access to the experience not only of the militarily defeated but also, and most importantly in the approach taken here, of the victorious-yet-somehow-defeated, without ever claiming that such accounts are factual or indeed without ever misleading readers into believing in arbitrary historical truths.

To counter the commonplace belief that winners write and hence right history, a brief look at Western archetypes reveals that early canonical literary accounts of conflict are riddled with doubts, uncertainty and ambivalence. For example, in the Bible, the more prominent military heroes lead lives that alternate between success and extreme failure. David kills Goliath in a daring act of heroism, but his personal life is plagued by his incontrollable libido and deviousness, if not outright treachery. The *Iliad* begins with an account of war-weariness that has led to a complete lack of motivation amongst the Greeks; it has to be overcome before battle can commence. The destruction of Troy is a stunning victory, yet Achilles—like David—hardly serves as a model of human behaviour, as

illustrated by the barbaric treatment of Hector's dead body, his sulking, and his legendary ire.

One reason why ambivalence plays such a major role in these texts stems from military language's extensive warehouse of euphemisms that gloss over uncomfortable realities. 'Friendly fire' or 'collateral damage' represent two examples that have become common parlance to such an extent that listeners or readers gradually lose sight of the fact that both death and the responsibility of its perpetrator are being neutralised and minimised if not completely erased. In fact, the word 'neutralise' itself indicates death or obliteration: when we hear that the enemy has been successfully neutralised, there is little doubt in our mind as to the outcome. Should not concentration-camps always be named after the purpose for which they were designed: death-camps? If we talk about 'the final solution', have we ingested part of its horror, knowingly or unknowingly?

Language as a weapon that envelops war is further evidenced by an abundance of grandiloquent titles, as well as by the constant use of acronyms and abbreviations. Since at least the First Gulf War (1990–1), we have become used to hearing of such things as 'Operation Desert Storm', 'Operation Iraqi Freedom', or 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. As the previous paragraph implies, such manipulation of language is commonly encountered throughout history. Evelyn Waugh poked fun at this in *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) by christening a purportedly important allied expedition 'Operation Popgun', a name that conjures up images of a children's nursery and unruly boys, such as Richmal Crompton's *William*, rather than professional soldiers operating with merciless efficiency. Likewise, Waugh occasionally bamboozles his reader through an accumulation of acronyms that make parts of the text incomprehensible—if taken seriously. In his study of the Second World War, Paul Fussell points out that '"precision bombing" became a comical oxymoron relished by bomber crews with a sense of black humour'.[1] He later adds that 'Indeed, every military or naval word or name, not just acronyms, invited travesty and ridicule'.[2] To take an example from contemporary writing, Phil Klay's *Redeployment* (2014)[3] makes great use of this device. The second short story in the volume, 'Frago', contains plenty: LT, HUMINT, IED, BOLO, SALUTE, AKs, RPKs, RPGS, NCO, PFC, NyQuil, IISR, CASEVAC, EPW, SOB, AQI, IFAK, IP, TQ, SITREP, CO, EOD, UXO, FOB, DFAC, COP, ID, TQ BOS, 04, BOS and KBR, all within ten pages.

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[1]   Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 14.
[2]   Ibid, 259.
[3]   Phil Kay, *Redeployment* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

This array might perplex readers or completely put them off. Recognition is frustratingly partial, as abbreviations relating to rank, such as LT or NCO are familiar, whereas others are baffling. The military world therefore becomes one which is partly visible, partly comprehensible, revealing huge gaps in our knowledge. Klay, it would seem, has a rather different aim from Waugh. The former highlights our scanty knowledge of the army, underlining how distant and alien it is to the citizens it protects. In contrast, Waugh displays its absurd esotericism in order to belittle its grandiose rhetoric: it is essentially inept. However, things are not that simple. In 'Frago', the abbreviation DFAC does not refer to a deadly poison or a weapon of mass destruction but to the highly mundane Dining Facility. We do not believe this is an attempt to dupe readers, it simply demonstrates that the violent, the heroic, the despicable, and the ordinary all live on the same plane.

War literature, from its origins, we propose, displays an essential unease towards the long-term consequences of victory. In addition to that hypothesis, this volume relies on two further precepts, the first being specificity. Up to this point, we have referred to both Ancient Greece and fiction about contemporary events in Iraq. Even though it is a valid exercise to indicate similarities, tendencies, or points of contact, it is not acceptable to elaborate a patchwork of resemblances in order to articulate a general theory of war or defeat extending from the time of shields and spears to the post-atomic age. Hence, we focus on texts from the First World War onwards. That conflict is now generally recognised as the one that radically shaped modern conceptions, not simply because it is, by general consent, the first massively industrialised war, a total war in a new sense, but for another important reason: its barbarity brought in its wake a new preoccupation. As Michael Howard puts it, 'the degree of intellectual concern about the cause of war to which we have become accustomed has existed only since the First World War'.[4] Analysing war was now a task undertaken on a much wider scale; it was no longer the remit of military historians alone.

2. Critical Background

Our volume is informed by three scholars who share the common belief that war and culture are closely linked, namely Carl von Clausewitz, Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Michael Howard. Von Clausewitz, the most influential theorist of war remains a contentious figure, one who has arguably influenced dictators of all shapes and colours, including Stalin

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[4]   Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (second edition), (Harvard: Harvard UP, 1983), 8-9.

and Hitler.[5] Much of the controversy his work has provoked revolves around strictly military and political strategies, the relations of which to literature or culture might appear tangential or non-existent. Our analysis therefore incorporates only a few of the many facets of *On War*, and in all cases will concentrate solely on those aspects that illuminate the question of defeat.

In his first chapter, 'What is war?', Clausewitz makes several pronouncements that have been discussed widely, among which is the declaration from the ninth section: 'The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date'. War, then is no longer per se an exceptional event, a culmination, a limit, instead, it forms part of a continuum, as war and politics merge, hence the remark 'in political conditions at some later date'.[6] If war and politics overlap, so do war and peace, making previously conceived binary opposites first cousins if not siblings.

Are we suggesting that Clausewitz is essentially a theorist? Initially, it would seem so, as in one brief sentence describing the temporariness of both victory and defeat, he has prophetically exposed the history of colonialism and postcolonialism, and, more specifically for European history, the events in the Balkans since the end of the nineteenth century. As stated, Clausewitz inaugurates his study with a simple question, 'What is War?'. He assures us that he will 'not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war'.[7] He proceeds by outlining some of its major features, to which we will return, often beginning a section with an axiom, 'War is Never an Isolated Act' or 'War Does Not Consist of a Single Short Blow', which he then elaborates upon. This has led, perhaps understandably, to viewing the text as a prescriptive manual of war and strategies. Clausewitz insists that 'when war is no longer a theoretical affair but a series of actions obeying its own peculiar laws, reality supplies the data from which we can deduce the unknown ahead'.[8] He does not therefore view himself a theorist, in the sense of someone who can devise a working abstract model, but as someone who records, analyses, and explains: in short, an empiricist who elaborates a theory that can explain the world at

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[5]   See Martin Bassford's *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Also available online at the Clausewitz website:
http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/CIE/TOC.htm.

[6]   Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), 89.

[7]   *On War*, 83.

[8]   Ibid, 90.

certain moments and in distinct locations. *On War* strives to examine reality or what reality reveals.

The ideas that most interest us in *On War* emerge principally from the first chapter where Clausewitz famously envisages war through metaphor: as a bout between two wrestlers whose aim is 'to compel our enemy to do our will'.[9] This might seem an odd figure with which to describe an enemy, but we must observe that at this point he talks of the enemy rather than, say, an army of hostile forces. Consequently, the enemy is a term no longer restricted to the military but more likely alludes to the nation state as a whole. Clausewitz does not define what he means exactly, so there is both room for speculation and the need for caution. For example, the following phrase uses pronouns, but what slice of the population do they represent? 'If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make'.[10] In the twentieth century, 'you must put him' has increasingly sucked civilians into conflict, whether through bombing, starvation, internment, or other forms of oppression.

At other moments, Clausewitz extends conflict beyond its traditional boundaries into those areas our volume engages with, as the following examples reveal. In the second section, he argues that nations can be whipped up into frenzies of hatred, because it is 'an obvious fallacy to imagine war between civilised peoples as resulting merely from a rational act on the part of their governments'.[11] The irrational, that is to say, the emotional and the subjective, including the all-important question of common perception, will always play a significant role in determining policy. At the risk of repetition, he insists that

> … war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on by other means. What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means.[12]

One reason for the need to maintain morale in the civilian and military spheres derives specifically from modern warfare: there is no such thing as a brief, victorious, campaign; war is never over by Christmas, as was touted in 1914. The Second World War lasted six years, contemporary conflicts drag on even longer. Strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo started in 1997, showing little sign of ever finishing; the Arab Spring began in 2011, from which the civil war in Syria was triggered. Should we likewise date the Israeli-Arab conflict back to 1948? It would be logical to

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9   *On War*, 83.
10   Ibid, 85.
11   *On War*, 84.
12   Ibid, 99.

propose that the longer a war lasts, the greater the role perception will play in sustaining the irrational belief that victory lies just around the corner.

Clausewitz's innovative ideas predict and confirm what we have stated above: that civilian life will become a zone of conflict, and that culture potentially makes and breaks wills. Clausewitz himself, active during the Napoleonic campaigns, would not have approved of this extension of warfare, as 'he had an instinctive revulsion against barbarities such as slaughtering civilians and killing prisoners committed by ill-disciplined guerrillas in Spain or the Cossacks in Russia'.[13] He believed that a well-disciplined army could rein in the horrors that the irrational produces, but in this particular instance he was woefully mistaken.

Wolfgang Schivebusch's *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Morning and Recovery* (2003) is the fullest account of that central Clausewitzian observation that the 'defeated state often consider[s] the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date'.[14] This is one of the two basic reasons why our study engages with many of its concerns. The second is that, as the title indicates, it centres on culture, and by extension the views, opinions, and all other elements that Clausewitz's irrational may encompass. The will to continue war or surrender are shaped here, as is the process of determining how societies interpret historical events and subsequently act. We think it would be fair to say that *The Culture of Defeat* develops its predecessor's thought with an awareness of how extensive the term 'will' has become in modern times. Culture lies at the heart of the matter more than ever before, as civilians have become—particularly in the age of terrorism—the major victims of war. On the one hand, it is true that Clausewitz could not know this. Civilians had been the major target in siege warfare, particularly in the Middle Ages, but he assumes that such barbarism is less likely to happen when wars are carried out by modern armies following the policy of the state. On the other hand, 'he was the first military theorist to place the psychological element at the centre of the study of war';[15] subsequently his findings will illuminate how defeat is processed.

The influence of Clausewitz's method is evident both in the book's central ideas and structure. For example, the Nazi regime's ideology seems very much to conform to the above-mentioned observations on transitory evil. Schivelbusch takes the axiom a notable step further when he argues that 'defeat is not an outcome that must be acknowledged and accepted,

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13   Hugh Smith, *On Clausewitz*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 74.
14   *On War*, 89.
15   *On Clausewitz*, 74.

but an injustice to be rectified'.[16] The defeated believe deeply 'in their cultural and moral superiority over the newly empowered who have ousted them',[17] which would seem to be a reaction not confined to Germany but forming a wider response among the European powers to American hegemony after the Treaty of Versailles.[18] Many Germans could not fully understand why their generals had surrendered in 1918, as they were 'im Felde umbesiegt', or 'undefeated on the field of battle'.[19] In short, their bewilderment resulted from the belief they were not inferior either militarily or culturally to British, French or Americans; indeed, quite the contrary.

The consequences of defeat, Schivelbusch claims, manifest themselves in peculiar expressions, for example 'dance mania can be seen as part of a general explosion of sensuality and hedonism in response to the restriction on pleasure and entertainment during wartime'.[20] In this particular instance, he is describing events in Germany, alludes to St. Vitus, but equally conjures up images of the Jazz Age. On a much more significant scale, his chapters on France after the Franco-Prussian War and Germany after the First World War indicate many points of convergence. Controversially, he develops Hitler's admiration for Henry Ford into the hypothesis that his 'vision of a continental European empire dominated by Germany was copied not from the British Empire, but from the contiguous and state-filled landmass of the United States'.[21] Again, it would be pertinent never to lose track of the priority of specificity over the general, as the latter only exists if the specific case allows us to trace common patterns.

Let us take a further example. In his chapter on the American South, Schivelbusch appraises certain important historical considerations. He states that the South suffered terribly, losing '20 per cent of its white adult male population'.[22] He then moves into economics and history:

> Until 1830 the North had acted as an agent of the plantation in all its significant economic activities, including the slave trade, the transportation

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16   Wolfgang Schivelbusch*, The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, (London: Granta Books, 2003), 18.
17   Ibid, 19.
18   John Maynard Keynes acted as one of the most critical voices of the time; his objections to the treaty are articulated in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919).
19   Ibid, 19.
20   Ibid, 12
21   Ibid, 284. The idea of vast, newly conquered territories, underlines the significance of *Lebensraum* to the regime, as expounded by Mark Mazower in *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (2009).
22   Ibid, 38.

of tobacco and cotton to Europe, and credit and finance. It was therefore no wonder that the South felt abandoned and betrayed by the North's sudden moral and economic turnaround.[23]

These two sentences illustrate a move from the material to the psychological. An economic argument would point out how trade relationships changed in 1830 and after. However, 'abandoned and betrayed' are definitely not words belonging to economics: they pertain, instead, to perception. Schivelbusch employs this interdisciplinary approach throughout. It is a method that we empathise with and adapt.

Does Schivelbusch push the centrality of collective psychology too far when stating, for example, that 'it was the myth of the South's military genius that most influenced the outcome of the early battles'?[24] There is no simple answer to this, as there is none to a similar myth, if that is the correct term, that accompanied the invincible Nazi armies until insuperability was displaced by the defeat of Erwin Rommel in 1943 at the conclusion of the North-Africa campaign. For the purpose of this collection of essays, we have to identify where exactly the myth comes from and how it operates. In the case of the South, we are on familiar ground, that already trodden by Mark Twain, especially in chapters 46 and 47 of *Life on the Mississippi*. As is always the case with Twain, it is difficult to know just how seriously we should take him. He certainly moves in a relatively straightforward way when he discusses Scott's negative influence on Southern literary style, but it is more difficult to know what to make of the famous remark that 'Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war'.[25]

The proposal is not as absurd as it might seem at first. Ann Rigney presents an extensive account of the life of post-Scott chivalry, pointing out that 'the Virginian town of Red Bluff was changed to Ivanhoe in 1885 and in the same year, a Confederate veteran successfully moved to have the town of Hawkins Prairie in Texas renamed Ivanhoe… in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), the book that the young Jem is force to read to the scary old lady Mrs Dose is *Ivanhoe*'.[26] These small details should not be seen as inconsequential, unconnected anecdotes but rather, following the line taken by Twain, as forming part of a potent image of self-representation, most vividly and controversially visible in D.W. Griffith's classic film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), itself based on

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23   Ibid, 42.
24   Ibid, 56.
25   Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1951) XX
26   Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 120; 121.

Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). It is therefore safe to say that Schivelbusch gives expression to the constituent parts of Clausewitz's 'irrational' in the most articulate form to date.

Briefly, what we integrate into this volume is the belief that literature is a common medium for negotiating and imagining defeat, particularly when history is approached 'from below', challenging the authoritative voices in the narration of events and bringing 'the losers' into the centre of the story. If to this we add the examples of Griffiths, or Reni Liefenstahl's 1934 *Triumph of the Will* or the 1938 Olympic film, and the powerful role played by the collective. Parallel to the expansion of the theatre of war, a proliferation in media also occurs. After all, as Fussell noted about the Second World War, 'Penguin New Writing sometimes sold as many as 100,000 copies per issue, very many of them by military subscribers', before adding that '[t]he terrible fact is that the comic-book was the book of the war'.[27]

The third text that informs this volume is Howard's *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (2001). The title might antagonise some, who may conceivably link it to a misconstrued postmodern free-for-all where opposites fuse into versions of each other. Nothing could be more distant from the truth. Howard sets out to historicise our conceptions of peace and, consequently, our understanding of war (and peace). Clearly, if we accept Clausewitz's assertion that war is an extension of policy, then policy is the constant rather than the variable throughout the modern age. A second misjudgement that we would like to avoid stems from Schivelbusch's remark that '[t]he empathy felt for the vanquished by a minority of intellectuals within the conqueror's camps should not be confused with the appropriation by the victor of the losing side's cultural symbols'.[28] A most vivid example of intellectual empathy was Christopher Isherwood's 'German Literature in England', published in April 1939. The article comprises a fervent defence of a younger generation of Anglo-Americans who rebelled against the prejudice of their parents. Younger writers admired Germany, as it had become 'the most cultural and artistic nation in Europe'.[29] The Isherwood example, urging us to believe that both camps share values, essentially questions basic assumptions about victory, defeat, allegiance, and the lack of rationale in waging war. He places culture at the very centre of the debate.

Howard's study suggests that the binary of war and peace is one that requires delicate handling, first, because concepts change, and second,

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[27]   *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, 244; 250.
[28]   *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, 21.
[29]   Christopher Isherwood, 'German Literature in England', *The New Republic*, (5 April 1939), 254-55.

because it is quite common for the polarities to be untrustworthy. The most vivid example of the Clausewitz coupling of war and policy is Fascism: '[p]eace did not exist in the fascist vocabulary, except as a term of mockery and abuse. Fascists regarded war not just as an instrument of policy but as a thoroughly desirable activity in itself'.[30] In an entirely different context, that of postcolonialism, Franz Fanon insisted on the importance of aestheticizing violence, as '[v]iolence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths'.[31] In both instances, violence is harnessed to art, or violence requires it. Is the observation that peace is undesirable limited to these two scenarios alone? If we are engaged in a war against terror, do we share some sympathy with this?[32] Did the daily press conferences given by Jamie Shea during the NATO campaign against Serbia in 1999 not share the same purpose?

We take from Howard several concrete ideas and an overall hypothesis. The first is that '[a] Jacksonian bellicosity remains very much part of American popular culture',[33] though it remains to be seen how far bellicosity reaches beyond American popular culture. Second, in trying to define peace in a way that detaches itself from its common opposite, war, Howard declares that '[p]eace is the order, however imperfect, that results from agreement between states'.[34] This uncertainty, if it is such, results partly from a similar doubt as to what constitutes victory, what constitutes defeat, and what constitutes the culture of victory and defeat.

At this juncture we would like to briefly recap, then state a few pertinent points that will—we hope—clarify certain doubts that this introduction might have produced. First, that victory and defeat are not polar opposites would seem the logical result of such expressions as a Pyrrhic victory. Pyrrhus defeated his enemies but at such a cost that second thoughts would modify our view of what victory means. Furthermore, if the tragic heroes are by definition flawed (we recall the figures of King David and Achilles), literary convention depicts the victor before he loses something of greater value than any military achievement. Within the victory itself, we find the seeds of defeat, both real and feared.

Our three theorists go much, much farther than that, as they interrogate the concepts themselves and extend them far beyond their common use and application. If their findings are taken on board, then we

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[30]   *On Clausewitz*, 68.
[31]   Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 118.
[32]   The introduction to Alex Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature* (2002) is especially useful in understanding reactions to 9/11.
[33]   *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order*, 102.
[34]   *On Clausewitz*, 68.

should be able to trace instances where the victor senses or questions his own actions and basic perceptions, in other words, senses the spectre of defeat. The location has to be, for the very nature of this volume, literature. As an example, the British (and imperial), French, and American armies won the First World War, but, an alien, with no knowledge of world history, on taking up a volume of trench poetry based on the Owen-Sassoon school, would justifiably come to the opposite conclusion, arguing that 'Strange Meeting', as a representative example, is incontestably a poem of such unconcealed pessimism that it could only be written by a combatant staring into the abyss of defeat. Our alien would hopefully also have noticed that the victors have been deprived of their own significance as human beings. Victory has eliminated agency, which signifies an additional great loss to that of the dead and wounded.

Christianity supposedly evolves from a church-militant to a more peaceful and forgiving faith. In the light of the following statement, it would be difficult to pinpoint when.

> At the dawn of the twentieth century Europe was a very bellicose, very militaristic society, and the inflated spirit of patriotism and xenophobia which fuelled an alarmingly intensive arms race could not be laid at the door of the old aristocracy.[35]

For the believing Christian, in a historical moment in which war no longer falls into the category of justified—*jus ad bellum*—but is 'a function of Staatspolitik',[36] what reasoning condones killing? Or, more pointedly, is not victory therefore a defeat of basic principles? Is it not a legitimised form of revenge, a negation of Jesus's own teaching? Such doubts require us to consider the role of civilians in war.

The cover of Angus Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz* shows a milkman at work, walking over still-smoking rubble.[37] The image reflects Calder's central concerns: that the blitz took lives and destroyed homes; government propaganda tried to draw a positive message from terror and the spectre of defeat. The message was that life goes on as normal, an idea that morphs into resistance in the clichéd response that Londoners could take everything that could be thrown at them. This represents the ever-present tension between an event and a perception, followed by a strategic use of the myth that is nothing less than the conflation of the two items.

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[35] Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986), 61.

[36] *The Causes of War*, 13. Howard is referring to Frederick the Great in this instance, but this equally serves as an example of modern politics as a whole.

[37] John Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London: Pimlico, 1992).

Although it is clear that night-bombing responded to three policy imperatives (namely, lower cost, the destruction of infrastructure, the targeting of civilians), the myth essentially highlights the third. More sober accounts suggest that Hitler's priorities were different. Like the spirit of Dunkirk, such myths have a long afterlife, infiltrating political discourse years after the initial event.

The Second World War ended in what we might label cataclysmic victory. Victory, in the sense that Germany and Japan were defeated. But it was catastrophe, not just because of the Holocaust or the atomic bomb but in the number of deaths, summarised in an easy-to-remember formula: six years of conflict, sixty-million deaths. Humanity had defeated itself. Theodor Adorno's remarks on art after Auschwitz indicate an apparent acceptance of futility and nihilism. Many writers, using a similar philosophical platform, such as Joseph Heller in *Catch 22* (1961), Kurt Vonnegut or Thomas Pynchon throughout their works, respond to this victory-cum-defeat through a relentless use of the absurd, as the basic terms of reference seem ridiculous. Victory and defeat simultaneously mean too much and too little.

Overnight, the Second World War was quickly followed by the Cold War. What kind of victory is that, when the ally rapidly develops into the enemy and the world seems closer than ever to complete oblivion? Andrew Hammond argues that there is indeed a school of British Cold-War writing that is obsessed by apocalyptic fear. This appears in predictable places, such as the dystopian fiction or the work of John Wyndham. The value of Hammond's work resides in identifying unexpected locations, such as in John Sillitoe's 'post-atomic winter landscape', but also in his ability to illustrate how extensive the fear of defeat through obliteration became. It even reached secondary-school classrooms throughout the UK when Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) became a set-text.

The final example is highly contemporary. The lack of exit strategies in the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that it is close-to-ridiculous to assert that those campaigns had become victories, even before considering the rise of DAESH. One recent development in fiction has been the chronicle of war through the viewpoint of the perpetrator. Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (2010) and Martin Amis's *Zone of Interest* (2015) are narrated by people actively and willingly involved in the Holocaust. Understandably, such fiction can lead to ethical problems, when such a distinctive viewpoint could turn a reader's attempt to understand a perverted mentality into empathising with mass murderers. One potential though not undisputed reason for this possible affinity is that trauma affects executioners too, in the form of PITS (perpetration-induced traumatic stress). In the case of servicemen returning from the above-

mentioned campaigns, this is particularly common, such as that narrated—for example—by Kevin Powers in *Yellow Birds* (2012). In sum, the traumatised victors come home defeated by the very victory to which they have contributed.

3. The Spectre of Defeat: Experience, Memory and Post-Memory

The previous scenarios demonstrate that one of the most exciting new departures for our understanding of war literature should focus on the spectre of defeat. We believe that it has a wider presence than recognised to date.

The chapters in this volume explore a broad and illustrative body of US and UK fiction and other writings in English published from the First World War onwards, including works from very recent years. These writings are approached from three distinct perspectives: the experience of defeat, the memory of defeat and the post-memory of defeat. These three specific ambits form a comprehensive and often inter-relating network around and about which we contend that the tension between defeat and its perception is intrinsically constructed.

From a theoretical perspective, these approaches lend themselves readily and with relevance to the works analysed in this volume, as they allow several issues, topics and themes to be raised that are central to our understanding of the texts. Part 1, 'The Experience of Defeat' explores defeat in its psychological and cultural complexity and in its various manifestations: collective trauma, bitter soul-searching, or popular condemnation and criticism. In Chapter 1, David Owen presents the argument that Wyndham's apocalyptic fiction of the 1950s (*The Day of the Triffids*, 1951 and *The Kraken Wakes*, 1953) is particularly valuable as an insight into the underlying social preoccupations of ordinary post-war Britons, who—in spite both of victory in the Second World War and Prime Minister Macmillan's optimistic assurance that they had 'never had it so good'—faced the twin uncertainties of East-West nuclear tensions and large-scale immigration into the United Kingdom. In Owen's view, Wyndham's apocalyptic fiction points to a collective pessimism from a certain sector of society for the future and particularly to a sense of abandonment in light of the apparent unwillingness or inability of *the authorities* to satisfactorily mitigate these preoccupations. In this regard, Wyndham's novels strike an emphatic chord with the populace at large and, in doing so, point to the real-life concerns of a people for whom the reality of post-conflict victory ironically brought the shadow of a deeper eradication. In her reading of Pat Frank's novel *Alas, Babylon* (1959), Sara Martín (Chapter 2) assesses the process by which post-World War Two

American fiction started representing US citizens as victims of nuclear warfare rather than examine America's role as perpetrator of the first and only nuclear attack in History. Martin claims that despite the impact of John Hersey's report of the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing in his non-fiction book of the same title (1946), there is not a single comparison in Frank's novel between the situation of the Japanese real-life survivors and his own fictional Florida survivors in the small town of Fort Repose. The chapter builds around Frank's failure to enhance sympathy for the Japanese victims and survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and for other civilian victims around the world (including Soviet citizens) and, most importantly, around his negligence to examine in depth the US role in starting the Cold War and its nuclear weapons race. Also concerned about Western decadence, Christoph Houswitschka (Chapter 3) addresses the exhausting and painful impact of legally or morally questionable military campaigns conducted by the British Army in its encounter with *guerrilla* tactics and civilians whose loyalties remain doubtful. After the military successes of the liberation of the Falklands and Kuwait, fighting wars in the wake of 9/11 and invading Iraq on the grounds of forged evidence claiming to seize Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction brought about long and futile wars and the painful experience of defeat in spite of military superiority. Staged at the Tricycle Theatre, *The Great Game* introduces the theatre goer in twelve plays to 150 years of British interventions in Afghanistan. Houswitschka focuses on *The Great Game* to explore changing aspects of defining British identity based on various aspects of defeat suffered by the former imperial world power and its enemies.

The first part of our volume is also intended to discuss defeat from the subjectivity of the victims of Western discrimination and harassment policies. In her reading of Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) in Chapter 4, Teresa Iribarren analyses the double defeat of refugees—both in their city of origin and in the European metropolis. Iribarren praises Hamid's endeavours to turn literature into a means of promoting recognition and respect for those who are defeated in our global world, and suggests that, in an age of the global circulation of currency, tourists and communications, Hamid's novel presents a veritable dystopia in which the *other* is regarded as a barbarian, and thus, denied the most fundamental rights of any human being: the setting down of roots.

Part 2, 'The Memory of Defeat', explores the question of remembering defeat, how it has been perceived, analysed and commemorated, by reconsidering and reshaping the 'established' narratives written by the great actors (and their associated ideas and values). Departing from the idea that memories tend to transcend defeat as the sole framework within which war is remembered and narrated, in Chapter 5, Cristina Pividori

studies Ivor Gurney's letters and poems to explore the contradictions between personal and cultural images embedded within his texts and the impact of the Great War on his writings. Her contention is that although war meant both battling against the German and against Gurney's own mental instability and distress, it was also a break from his personal horrors, an inspirational force, and a sexually liberating experience. In this sense, Gurney's texts become the means through which these feelings are confronted and an opportunity for healing to occur, as they are impregnated not much with the anxieties for victory on the battlefield, but with a recurrent hope for mental stability and self-coherence. In Chapter 6, Jordi Coral also explores the complex relationship between collective history, the past, and a personal sense of defeat. His analysis of Robert Graves's post-war memoir, *Goodbye to All That* (1929) reflects on the meaning of the heroic in post-war culture, on the possibilities of bidding farewell to one's past and on the hope that doing so becomes an act of freedom. Coral claims that Graves's memoir not only achieves liberation but also raises fundamental questions about the nature of autobiography and, more generally, about the therapeutic function of creative writing.

In Chapter 7, Martin Löschnigg focuses on the aesthetic and structural consequences that the exposure to the *war machine* and the feeling of being mere cogs in this machine had for renderings of the war experience in a number of British and German poems, novels and memoirs of the First World War. According to Löschnigg, the literature of both victors and defeated has become a site of redefinition of pre-war traditions. As the representative power of language is seriously challenged, this reaches from new artistic expressions to the reliance on comforting traditions and to narrative fragmentation. The British and German texts studied by Löschnigg show the disruption of a realist narrative paradigm comprising a sense of *agency* and render the *reliving* of experience through the quasi-filmic re-presentation of events, thereby indicating that experience cannot be relegated to the past, as the narrator's capacity for giving structure and meaning to that experience has been defeated, as it were, by the overwhelming scale of events. The assumption that some elements of the spectre of defeat can be traced in Evelyn Waugh's writings has inspired Carlos Villar's chapter (Chapter 8). Although the 'ineluctable shadow' of war looms ominously in Waugh's early fiction, Villar examines *Put Out More Flags* (1942) as a highly valuable source for the literary reconstruction of the emergence of a state of exception and of the propaganda machinery demanding commitment and collective effort among individuals. Villar claims that the shadow of defeat first appears in the lives of the civilians who, urged by conscription, expediency, propaganda or an induced idealistic misconception, become soldiers and adapt themselves to the workings of the military machinery, but also in the

ways civilian population cope with the new constraints and threats, the rationing, air raid precautions, evacuations, the blitz and other massive attacks. In Villar's view, Waugh refuses to write a historical epic and rather chooses to show a miniature pattern meant to undermine the grandiloquence of war, its moral stature and overall organization, making the point that no idealistic approach can beautify its absurdly nightmarish nature. In a similar vein, Umberto Rossi's chapter (Chapter 9), reveals how the spectre of defeat imbues both the personal experience of Louis Falstein, who fought in the Second World War as a USAAF airman; and his novel *Face of a Hero* (1950). Because of its lack of success in terms of sales, the cover of its 1951 reprint suggests that *Face of a Hero* is a risqué novel, probably to make it palatable to pulp paperback readers. What readers find instead is an honest and sometimes embarrassing story told by an American airman, Ben Isaacs, who is often scared by war and ashamed by the attitude of his buddies to the Italian people.

Finally, Part 3, 'The Post-Memory of Defeat', addresses defeat transformation, reconciliation, post-traumatic testimonies and the representation of defeat in the aftermath of war. Such post-memory-related transformations in the representation of defeat are the subject of Laura Gimeno's chapter (Chapter 10). By comparing it with another *choral* novel, *The Known World* (2003), published only two years prior by Edward P. Jones' and also concerned with the retelling (and questioning) of nineteenth-century slavery, Gimeno examines E.L. Doctorow's novel *The March* (2005) to show how the northerners' collective victory also signified a profound moral defeat for their region of origin, and also to stress the blurry boundaries between what is moral and respectable and what is not in the fates of many different characters (southerners, slaves, immigrants, soldiers) who are, in her view, the main protagonist(s) of the actual march through Georgia and the Carolinas. In Chapter 11, Paula García analyses the literary presence of the Biafra War (1967–70) in Nigerian narrative. To attempt and explanation of the causes of the conflict as well as not to forget the suffering inflicted to the population, many Ibo intellectuals have found in narrative a good means for the construction of a personal discourse after the successive defeats involved in the colonisation and decolonisation processes. García stresses the substantial difference between the writers of memory (Ike and Amadi) and those of post memory (Adichie, Abani, among others), to explore how history and literature interrelate to recover from the injuries of the past.

Alicia Muro's chapter (Chapter 12) explores Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and his portrayal of the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, Although generally presented as a victory of the British Army, Muro focuses on the shadow of defeat, which can be traced through the use of certain literary techniques and the focus on the traumatic memories of the

event. In fact, in her view, the word *evacuation* suggests a failure of some kind, the necessity to withdraw and retire once the enemy troops have taken over the territory. Muro also claims that the novel emphasises the cruelty of war, filtering the evacuation episode through the eyes of Robbie, a man who finds himself in the middle of warfare without any warning and who sees the episode as a defeat of humanity.

Drawing on the fact that a bee society is essentially a military one with special ranks for the victors and the defeated, Andrew Monnickendam's chapter (Chapter 13) focuses on bee-keeping, bee history, the habits and mysteries of bees, among which is their intelligence, to ascertain how Robert Edric's *In Zodiac Light* (1999) and Jill Dawson's *The Great Lover* (2009) recreate the lives of two key World War One poets: Ivor Gurney and Rupert Brooke respectively. In an attempt to explain why bad humans produce bad bee societies, Monnickendam focuses on the world that bees inhabit and on what the bee motif can add to the contemporary fictional accounts of the lives of Gurney and Brooke.

As seen above, this arrangement of chapters has facilitated a clearly defined theoretical framework that can be applied transversally to US and UK fiction, and to other narratives in English. The grounding of our discussion in these three perspectives has aimed at redressing the imbalance caused by the victors' writing of history and at focusing on the other, more-shaded side of that history, on the pathos—in other words—of those who apparently fail, without disregarding the ethical issues involved in the analysis of defeat and the experiential, memorial and post-memorial condition of the works under discussion. The ultimate aim of this collection, taken as a whole, is not to answer a specific question but, rather, to set out a series of suggestions that have a common thread: the significance of defeat as the core subtext of the literary representation of conflict.

Andrew Monnickendam