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Memory and trauma: Narrating the Western Front 1914–1918

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The memory of the Western Front still seems to haunt British society nearly 90 years after the Armistice. The mention of the battlefields of the Somme or Passchendaele, or references to 'the trenches' evokes sadness and poignancy as the Western Front represents a traumatic memory within Britain. The image of the soldiers suffering in the trenches as victims of the war appears so deeply ingrained that military historians have lamented the seemingly impossible task of revising the popular memory of the conflict. Attempts to show the tactical advances made by the army, the positive attitudes of the soldiers and the emphasis on the fact that the British Army was victorious in the war, have failed to make an impact on popular perceptions. This paper highlights that this failure stems from the narratives employed by historians of the war, which fail to accommodate or acknowledge the trauma still felt by contemporary society. By exploring alternative narrative styles this paper offers an alternative to the linear narratives, and stresses that through a non-linear narrative historians can begin to engage with the ideas which drive the popular memory. Using recent multi-disciplinary work which has drawn from archaeological and anthropological perspectives this paper describes the British soldiers on the Western Front as arriving at an understanding of a hostile war-landscape. Through an alternative narrative this paper demonstrates a way in which the conflict can be remembered and studied without being hidden within a veil of sentimentality.

Keywords: memory; narrative; trauma, conflict; rhizome; post-modernism

To speak of 'the trenches' of the Western Front is to call to mind a subject that still remains evocative within British cultural life. After the passing of nearly ninety years the trenches still have great resonance. The names of the former battlefields of northern France and Belgium still possess an evocative, haunting quality; Somme, Ieper, Arras, Vimy (Winter 1995, 1).

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Their mention appears automatically to conjure up an image of mud, waste, atrocious conditions and dejected, suffering soldiers. This popular memory of the Western Front in Britain is even reiterated with the very language that we use. The legacy in expressions, metaphors and similes has shaped and continues to shape our memory of the Western Front (after Schudson 1992, 154). Terms such as 'going over the top', describing argumentative positions as 'entrenched', using the 'Somme' or 'Passchendaele' to describe desolated areas, futile wastes or tragic encounters, further shape and define the popular memory of the Western Front as one of horror, pity and pointless attrition (Sheffield 2002, 5). The Western Front still possesses the capacity to evoke both fascination and great emotion. The tours of the battlefields remain ever popular, and the history and fiction of the war continues to be bought at a prodigious rate by a public eager to know more of the world's first industrialized war. Recent attempts by military historians to revise the popular memory of the war as a tragic waste have been unsuccessful, as the grip of this perception has appeared too hard to shift. These attempts at revision have been unsuccessful as historians have failed to understand the trauma that the war still evokes. This problem is in part derived from the narrative representation of the conflict; historians of the war have relied on a particular way of narrating the war since the Armistice. Exploring alternative styles of retelling the war enables an engagement with the memory of the Western Front and the distress it still causes. By altering the narrative frameworks within historical studies and by experimenting in narrative styles the trauma of the war can be addressed.

The memory of the Western Front

The battlefields of northern France and Belgium are remembered as tragic examples of the folly of war, an aspect of the popular memory which is unsurprising given the unprecedented losses of Britain's civilian army. Although British troops fought on a variety of fronts including Salonika, Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, it is the Western Front in France and Belgium which is remembered as *the* First World War. Over 700,000 British soldiers are thought to have lost their lives in this particular theatre of war (Winter 1985, 74). It is this fact coupled with the lingering appearance of the First World War as a war without meaning in comparison to the 'good war' of 1939–1945 which has ensured that its memory is still venerated. An indication of this can be gathered from the public outpouring of grief and commemoration which accompanied the eightieth anniversary of the Armistice in 1998. Newspapers and television programmes were filled with emotional reminders of the noble British Tommy suffering in the trenches (Moriarty 1999).

This overwhelming public response found direction in the campaign begun in 1998 for the pardon of soldiers executed by the British Army

during 1914–1918 (Corn and Hughes-Wilson 2002). This campaign recently brought to a successful conclusion focus on using the popular image of the British 'Tommy' in the trenches as a victim of the war. The soldiers therefore as innocents or sufferers of shellshock were simply unable to be cast as deserters or mutinous as the popular memory of their status as 'heroic victim' was too ingrained (see Bond 2002). The continuing debates regarding the memory of the war have motivated many historians to challenge the popular memory of the conflict as one of a tragic, futile waste and to reassert the success of the British Army on the Western Front (see Griffith 1994). In this manner, historians have attempted to undermine the popular memory of the battlefields by pointing to its apparent 'invention' (after Hobsbawm 1983). Historians have also highlighted the ways in which the war has been created through the work of the war poets, Siegfried Sassoon and especially Wilfred Owen. These poets are shown to be highly unrepresentative of the majority of the British Army on the battlefields (Beckett 2001, 433). The manner in which the memory of the war has altered with societal changes from the 1960s on is also stressed with the anti-authoritarian attitudes seen to be replicated in the films and television programmes of the period (Sheffield 2002). The popular television show *Blackadder*, and the novels of Barker and Faulks in the 1990s are also criticized as encouraging the popular memory of the war (Todman 2005).

Despite the barrage of criticisms from military historians, the popular memory of the conflict persists. The war is still spoken of as a national tragedy, a 'private British sorrow' where an entire generation was lost (after Terraine 1980). The sense of trauma which persists in Britain regarding the war on the Western Front is palpable. Despite the array of discourse concerning the memory of the Western Front that has been published recently, the notion of addressing the cultural trauma of the war has not been considered by historians. Objectives which aim at revising the memory of the trenches and battlefields of Northern France and Belgium will inevitably fail if this trauma is not also examined. 'History as therapy', addressing the cultural trauma of the past, is a relatively recent area of study (Lambek and Antze 1996; Eyerman 2001). Assessing traumatic episodes of history has provided a wealth of literature regarding the ways in which trauma within individuals and societies is recognized (LaCapra 1994). The trauma of the past experienced by societies in the present can best be described through Freud's (2003, 203) discussion of melancholia. This condition produces a restless state within the subject, as they fail to overcome the sense of loss regarding the past. Roth regards this sense of trauma in history as one in which subsequent generations return to a past they cannot comprehend. It involves the analysis of the way societies have reacted to events, sympathizing with the way in which events are remembered and enabling a suitable discourse of the events to emerge. He has defined history as a 'service of the present' to engage with this trauma,

with the historian's task being therapeutic, enabling troubling aspects of the past to be exorcized (Roth 1995, 187). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa can be considered an example of this process as it facilitated the exorcism of a traumatic past and enabled the population to consider and think about its history (Nutall and Coetzee 1998).

Following Freud's (2003) method of psychoanalysis, this process seeks to address the repressed emotions which are constraining the subject. An important aspect of this work is the manner in which the past is told, the narratives which represent the past to the wider public. Narrative representation is the key in this issue as it is through narratives that a group's history, memory, pain and trauma are recognized and are seen to be accepted. Historians form part of this process as it is through the narratives they write about the past that they represent past events to the public (White 1978, 91–2). These ideas can be used to examine and represent the cultural trauma of the Western Front in Britain. Historical discourse is a way in which people remember the past. As such, the manner in which these narratives are structured and the way they represent their subject is all-important. Historians studying the Western Front have failed to make inroads into the popular memory of the conflict because they do not consider the representation of trauma in their work. Offering an alternative style of narration, one which is sensitive to the popular memory of the conflict, and which acknowledges the trauma of the events enables a new perspective to emerge. Regarding these ideas of 'history as therapy' with relation to the traumatic memory of the Western Front in Britain, facilitates a consideration of the way that trauma can be represented and understood by historians.

Narratives of war

Historians have in the main traditionally relied upon a particular way of representing their study, that of the chronological narrative. Events are laid out in a linear sequence so as to understand the processes proceeding and preceding their occurrence (White 1992). This mode of narrative representation has come under criticism, however, especially in relation to the Holocaust, where the ability to render the events of the genocide into an understandable narrative form has been disputed at length (Friedlander 1992). Nevertheless, the linear chronological narrative remains essential in much of historical discourse. This is certainly the case within military history, often described as the last bastion of 'empirical history', and the grand narrative style. Historians assessing the Western Front have drawn upon this linear narrative to order and understand the events of the conflict. From the post-war historical analyses of Basil Liddell Hart (1930) to the oral histories of the 1970s (Middlebrook 1971), and the contemporary military histories (Sheffield 2000), the linear narrative mode is the essential

feature of their work. Using official documents, personal memories, private papers, or oral testimonies, over the last 90 years, events on the Western Front have been constructed in chronological order, to explain and narrate the circumstances of the conflict from August 1914 to November 1918, and the specific events, individuals and battles of the war. In effect through their narratives historians have bracketed the events of the Western Front into the years 1914–1918 (Cobley 1993). Such a position inevitably prohibits a consideration of the effect the events have on contemporary society, it neglects the overwhelming public response to continue talking about the events and it closes off the past.

Ricœur states that this is the key feature and *raison d'être* of the narrative form, especially the historical narrative, as linear narratives offer the only way in which an event can be comprehended. He states that

> a complete description of an event should therefore register everything that happened, in the order in which it happened ... that is, the whole truth concerning this event cannot be known until after the fact and long after it has taken place. (Ricœur 1984, 145)

In this position, linear narrative form derives its power and value from what Ricœur (1984, 168) terms 'emplotment'. Narrative meaning is enabled within emplotment because we can read into narratives the anticipation of its structuring power of a beginning, middle and end; granted by the position of retrospective analysis these historical narratives can be ordered and emploted (1984, 76). Ricœur leans heavily on Aristotle's conception of plot for his theories of narrative, as Aristotle (1941, 1462) in his *Poetics* stated that

> a whole is that which has beginning, middle and end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing, and has also another after it. A well constructed plot ... cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described.

Such conceptions of linear narratives of the Western Front have dominated the representation of the battlefields, providing a frame of reference and an established form of discourse, ensuring that the conflict is remembered and represented in a similar manner. Popper argued that such representations should always be considered not as 'real' or 'true' articulations of fact, but necessary reductions as part of the explanation offered in historical narratives (1957, 135). He even argued that within these grand narratives 'the war' or 'the army' were in actuality rather abstract concepts, and the only concrete part of such studies were those, 'who were killed or the men and women in uniform' (see Collingwood 1989, 110). The apparent

self-evident nature of these linear narratives therefore should not go unexamined, as this narrative form does not necessarily represent the only way in which the war on the Western Front can be narrated or remembered.

Ricœur's (1984) conception of narrative rests upon the traditional structuralist notion of narrative, as forming a bounded, homogeneous space in which events are relayed in chronological order. Jameson refers to this as a 'prison-house' of language, as 'structuralist criticism came to view the form and system of narrative as its only content' (Jameson 1972, 198). Post-structuralist and postmodern theorists have undermined this conception of narrative and narrative theory by focusing on the multiplicity, open-endedness and acentered nature of narratives (Hutcheon 1989, 76). The Derridean (1979, 87) concept of deconstruction has also been used to question structuralist, linear narratives, and what were presumed to be the 'classical assurances of history and the genealogical narrative' (Derrida 1989, 15). As Derrida states, 'the "line" represents only a particular model, whatever might be its privilege' (1979, 86). Whereas structuralist narratology emphasized the geometric nature of narrative construction, post-structuralist critiques undermined this assumption by stating the absence of structure between sign and signifier, an 'insurmountable plurality of significations and multiplications' (Levinas 1998, 65). Foucault (1980, 114), naming himself as an anti-structuralist, reiterated this position by stating that the structuralist conception of narrative was undermined by 'realising that there are actually a whole order of levels of different types of events differing in amplitude, chronological breadth, and capacity to produce effects.' This therefore entails the fluidity of the post-structuralist narrative form; 'the centre is at the centre of the totality ... totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not a centre' (Derrida 1972, 248). Such a position has given rise to a number of oppositions. These criticisms state that if structure and form become a matter of 'play', and well-established boundaries and traditions are not adhered to, narrative itself as a way of communicating is rendered meaningless (see Jameson 1981, 108). Post-structuralist narrative theorists, however, do not deny the role of narrative in communication; rather, they challenge the legitimacy of the linear, structuralist narratives by revealing the malleability of the narrative form (Lyotard 1992, 44). This position derives in part from the 'language games' described by Wittgenstein (1968, 8e), which stress the heterogeneity of narrative style. He states, 'this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten' (Wittgenstein 1968, 11e).

Rhizomatic narratives

Linear narratives are not the only means by which the war on the Western Front can be narrated. Certainly it can be said that the chronological mode

as self-evident can be questioned, considering that those experiencing the conflict would not have used 'emplotment' to understand their place in the battlefield. As Ward (2004, 112) states in his call for a different narrative of the Battle of the Somme:

> we ought to write in an odd way, oughtn't we? After all, what most people experience most of the time isn't a set of coherent phenomena but a kind of tolerable and tolerated low-key randomness; things which are instantly translated moment by annihilating moment, into fleeting and undisciplined sounds of emotion.

Such fragmentary narratives have already been explored elsewhere within historiography (see Sydnor 1998, 253). This experimentation with narrative form within historical studies has come to the fore with many historians challenging rigid conventions (see Jenkins and Munslow 2005). Following these works we can therefore consider a non-linear narrative, which observes no chronological boundaries, a rhizomatic narrative construction.

Rhizomatic is a term used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to define a non-linear progression. Deleuze and Guattari characterize a rhizome as 'dimensions or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milleu) from which it grows and which it overspills' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). Rather than a narrative which unveils a unilinear progress from beginning to end, this narrative 'flows in a turbulent and chaotic manner' (see Serres 1998, 45), taking into account that 'not everything has yet happened' (Derrida 1979, 145). An example of this narrative form can be found in Kristeva's (1986, 160–86) essay 'Stabat Mater' which demonstrates this acentered narrative, as Kristeva's personal reflection on her experiences of motherhood are weaved together with a parallel essay on the Virgin Mother in an echoing and anticipatory dialogue. Derrida (1979) also challenges the linear conception of narrative, by similarly constructing two parallel and simultaneous essays, which reject simplistic notions of endings and beginnings, boundaries and divisions. Derrida wrote, 'no one inflection enjoys any absolute privilege, no meaning can be fixed or decided upon. No border is guaranteed, inside or out' (1979, 78).

Narrative, memory and trauma

Through their reiteration within the historical narratives of the war the chronological dates of 1914–1918 act as parentheses, bracketing the four years of war so effectively within the minds of many that the expression of the numerical figures appear themselves to hold meaning. This 'bracketing' can be seen as a role of historical discourse, to provide what would now be termed within modern psychotherapy, as a feeling of 'closure'. The value of such a notion of conclusion must be questioned in the light of the catharsis

witnessed with the anniversary of the Armistice in 1998. However, rather than examine the reasons behind the enduring public fascination with the war, historians have been quick to lament the existence of the continuing emotional appeal of the battlefields (see Bond 2002). The eminent professor of the Great War, Jay Winter reiterated this sentiment with his oft-quoted remark, 'the First World War is over' (quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 2002, 7). This drive by historians to seal off the past, to enable an objective historical analysis to occur, disregards the pressing and continuing desire from the public in Britain and indeed elsewhere in Europe to return to their painful history (see Moriarty 1999, 693). This inevitably results in an inability to appreciate and understand the motivations of 'the myths we live by' (see Samuel and Thompson 1990). In part this situation stems from the historians' own work, which provides a sense of 'closure' within a chronological, linear framework. This provision of a conclusion is inevitably still a product of historical discourse, and can be seen to be a fabricated impression of an ending, failing to accommodate the continuing trauma of the war in popular memory (after Freidlander 1992, 51).

By considering a narrative format which proposes no beginnings, or endings, an acentred narrative which resists the tradition of conforming to a linear, chronological framework, this project forms a suitable mode in which to examine, express and perpetuate the memory of the soldiers on the Western Front (after Žižek 1999, 13). This is in contrast to Roth's (1995) perspective as he seeks to bring the fragmented past into a coherent whole to address the trauma of history. Edkins (2003, 229), however, has identified the non-linear structure of trauma in the memory of the historic past. He states that 'trauma is that which refuses to take its place in history as done and finished with. It demands an acknowledgement of a different temporality, where the past is produced by – or even takes place in – the present' (Edkins 2003, 59). The historians 'closure' fails to engage with the trauma of the war, it seeks to prevent continuing discussion and in some ways may be responsible for the continuing legacy of the conflict in society. Linear, chronological narratives have failed in the need to satisfy the present about the past. In this respect historical studies which seek to provide an ending, a sense of 'closure' are inadequate, as they fail to sympathize with the popular memory, and the way the memory of this trauma is articulated and voiced by contemporary society (Hynes 1990, 99).

This mirrors developments elsewhere in the study of memory of the twentieth century, especially in the study of the remembrance of the Holocaust (LaCapra 1998, 8–9). Friedlander (1992) has even criticized historical studies which provide fabricated conclusions as a means of constructing a meaningful narrative, arguing that such 'naive historical positivism' inevitably leads to 'self-assured historical narrations and closures' (Friedlander 1992, 53). Friedlander calls for historians to 'disrupt the facile linear progression of the narration, introduce alternative

interpretations questions any partial conclusions and withstand the need for closure (Friedlander 1992, 53). In effect this argues for a narrative form which returns to the past, which directly engages with the effects of the past on the present, which acknowledges that in many respects, for many people, the past is certainly not over (see Latour 1993, 76). The rhizomatic narrative model used in this analysis provides this sense of openness, of continuation, of dialogue with the past. It does not seek easy or comfortable resolutions, and in this manner impacts on the way in which the battlefields are remembered. It demonstrates how the memory of the war can be perpetuated through engaging, not dismissing the memory of the trauma and pain of the past. As the generation which fought in the conflict passes away, such a perspective serves to reinvigorate memory and in this respect reiterates what Nietzsche described as the 'festering wound' in the mind needed to prolong and continue the remembrance of the past. Nietzsche (1910, 66) wrote, 'something is burnt in as to remain in his memory: only that which never stops hurting remains in his memory.'

Following these essays this project will utilize these non-linear parallel narratives, which will entwine, repeat and contradict to demonstrate the alternative narratives in which the battlefields can be represented and the fallacy that a linear narrative is required in the study of the Western Front. Using the archive material housed in the Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds (hereafter, LC), an alternative narrative of the war will be proposed. This narrative will focus on the British soldiers of the Western Front, how they came to an understanding of their surroundings. While this narrative focuses on the trenches and battlefields of the Western Front it must be remembered that this was only part of the soldiers' world as most of their time was actually spent behind the lines (see Edmonds 1929). 'The front' still occupied the soldiers' minds, however, and this narrative aims to assess how the soldiers through their actions participated in the construction of the landscape. This will employ recent multidisciplinary work regarding the Western Front which has seen the incorporation of anthropological and archaeological perspectives in the study of the conflict (Saunders 2004). This will focus on how soldiers experienced the war landscape, how they acted with the materials of the war. As such it will engage directly with the popular memory of the war, of the ordinary soldiers in the trenches. Through placing this study within this rhizomatic narrative type, the way the trauma of the war impacts upon society can be assessed.

An alternative telling

The war-torn landscape of the Western Front was not viewed as an empty space by the soldiers but a way of seeing the world.

This created what Taussig (1987) has defined as a 'space of death' along the landscape of the Western Front.

Soldiers imagined and constructed a landscape of fear, through a lingering threat of death, their own violent actions and the scenes of devastation along the front line. The space of death in the landscape is pre-eminently a space of transformation, as 'through the experience of death, through fear ... the individual experiences a radical shift in understanding and behaviour' (after Taussig 1987, 7). The actions of the soldiers were strictly governed and ordered along the Western Front (Fuller 1990, 61). It was central to British Army policy throughout the war to create an aggressive front line, encouraging the soldiers to attack and harass the enemy at every available opportunity (Keegan 1999, 198). Fighting in the trenches and the battlefields was therefore believed to require an army disciplined and inspired by the idea of the attack (Englander 1997, 126). It should be 'capable of crushing the enemy armies in the open' (HMSO 1916, 5). The orders of the military hierarchy shaped the actions and the perceptions of the war landscape for the soldiers (after Tilley 1994, 12). Through these orders British soldiers were encouraged, and largely accepted their roles to act brutally and to kill (Bourke 1999, 4).

The actions of the soldiers mirrored in effect the savagery and brutality they witnessed and experienced around them (see Taussig 1987, 133). R.M. Luther (LC) described the following scene in his memoir: 'when we tumbled in, I fell on top of some of the enemy, and one put his teeth in my cheek and held on. I was dragged close to him, but my arms were free, and I tried to get my thumbs into his eyes and push out his eyes, but found his throat instead, and squeezed his windpipe. I felt my cheek being released, and my enemy struggled no more. Immediately I grabbed my rifle and clubbed him with the butt'. Lieutenant K.A. Townsend (LC) wrote in a letter in October 1917 that 'to kill Germans with my own hands would be my greatest joy.' This violent and hostile landscape confronted soldiers with moments of brutality, where the regulated use of weaponry was ignored, and the soldiers reacted to the world in which they inhabited (Bourke 1999, 7–8). Weapons such as rifles and bayonets lost their official purpose and were reused by the soldiers as clubs and knives, picks and spades became weapons as well as 'any physical object which could harm the enemy' (Smith et al. 2003, 91–2).

The 'government' of the soldiers was not complete however (Leed 1979). Some officers and other ranks participated in tacit truces with the enemy in a 'live-and-let-live' policy (Ashworth 1980). The

Wilfred Owen (1963, 52–3) subtly refers to this violence in his poem Spring offensive when he speaks of, 'immemorial shames' and 'superhuman inhumanities'. Fear in the war landscape was rife (Bourne 1989,

repeated and almost obsessive orders from the General Staff were nevertheless largely successful in ensuring that the soldiers knew their roles. Notes for bombing units issued by the General Staff (1916, 20), recommended that soldiers should be ready to use 'a bayonet or special stabbing knife or weapon for hand-to-hand fighting, such as an axe or knobkerry (trench club)'. Sassoon (1940, 302) recalls in his memoirs, his preparation for a raid on the enemy's trenches, 'it was time to be moving; I took off my tunic slipped my old raincoat on over my leather waistcoat, dumped my tin hat on my head, and picked up my nailstudded knobkerrie (sic)'. Museum displays of these trench weapons can now only give a limited impression of the context and values associated with these implements, the landscape which engendered their use (Audoin-Rouzeau 1998). Private Lewis (LC) recalled in his memoirs his own trench weapon, 'there was a great big horse's shoe nails all around the top and a lump of lead drilled into the top.'

Although some sections of the battle zone were not as badly affected, the soldiers arriving at the main areas of fighting, Ieper and the Somme, were confronted with a 'panorama of devastation' (Eksteins 1989, 146). Graves (1982, 211) later recalled these scenes, describing the horror of corpses in no man's land, 'after the first day or two the bodies swelled and stank'. H.L. Carrall (LC) wrote in September 1917, that 'this war 214), as the war created a landscape of terror for the soldiers (Taussig 1987, 7). This awareness of the war environment is described by Rosenberg (1962, 80), who illustrated the anonymous fear and terror present, when he wrote how 'death could drop from the dark'. The threat in the landscape was certainly evidential as even to raise their heads above the parapet in some sections of the front line was recklessly to invite the sniper's bullet (Griffith 1994, 38). J.C. McLeary wrote, 'we were all told to keep our heads down. A boy named Prendergast took a look over the top and a bullet hit him on the forehead blowing his brains out at the back.' Besides the anonymous threat of death the soldiers on the Western Front were also confronted with an 'otherworldly landscape', containing 'a bizarre mixture of decayed bodies, spent ammunition and the presence of the dead amongst the living' (Winter 1995, 68–9).

J.C. McCleary (LC) wrote that in the Ieper Salient, 'shell hole was touching shell hole, all with water in, duckboards were blasted all over the place, and men were lying about dead'. Private, later Corporal D.F. Stone (LC) described the soldiers' perception within the war landscape, when he wrote in his diary in October 1918, that 'death seemed to lurk in every yard of the ground'. This wasteland was captured by the

defies description ... no words or photographs can picture the awful scenes'. The desolation of the battlefields framed the 'space of death', as intense moments of brutality and violence war were witnessed within the destroyed landscape (after Taussig 1987, 4). These war-ravaged scenes acted to instil the violent and brutal values, actions and associations within the soldier. This ruined landscape deeply affected the soldiers. R.G. Ashford (LC) described the battlefield at Trones Wood, France, as 'there was no green anywhere. The meadows were just seas of brown craters, there hardly remaining a square yard anywhere without a shell hole.' The visual impact of the battlefields was striking.

war artists such as Nash and Nevinson, who accurately depicted images of intense anxiety and uncertainty (Gough 1997, 409). Tactics, military procedure and the soldiers' own actions are also shaped by the military technology of the war, a subject often neglected by cultural and literary historians (Tate 1998, 120). There remains a great tradition of the British Army being characterized by the equipment its ordinary ranks carried, and the British soldier of the Great War was no different, the short magazine Lee Enfield rifle (SMLE) was firmly associated with the British 'Tommy' (Richardson 1997, 333). The Lee Enfield was issued to each soldier, and formed part of the basic equipment carried by the combatant (Winter 1978, 107). The British General Staff (1917, 11) called for 'a high standard of skill at arms'.

Weighing just over nine pounds and fitted with magazines of ten bullets, with a 21-inch sword bayonet attached, the upkeep of the rifle in a man's possession was strictly observed, with rifle inspections advised daily in the trenches (Winter 1978, 107–8; HMSO 1916, 43). This technology should be considered as acting upon the individual, creating 'a dramatic and vivid effect on the social actor' (Tilley 1999, 272). The operation orders for the Eighth Division bomb throwers, called for the 'rifle to be carried over left shoulder for right handed men and over right shoulder for left handed men. Rifle not to be

The rifle represented for men a symbol of their security in their own hands (Winter 1978, 108). The soldiers were more than aware that the rifle held a capacity, indeed a dictated purpose to maim and kill, in this way soldiers made sense of the world through the physical objects that surrounded them (see Miller 1987, 85). Captain Watts-Moses (LC) recalled, 'we went in with our rifles without bayonets fixed or with bayonets only. Using bayonets in the form of a dagger and rifles as clubs and they were much more effective that way.' The soldiers' identity and actions developed through a process of continual interaction with the

slung across the body' (Second Lieutenant R.E.M. Cherry, LC). Over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is introduced, 'fastening them to one another' (Foucault 1979, 153). This constitutes a 'body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex', creating a 'coercive link with the apparatus of production' (Foucault 1979, 153). Careful handling, familiarity and repetition of the place and value of the rifle was almost guaranteed by the frequency and rigour of rifle inspection (Winter 1978, 107). The weapon became an extension of the body (Scarry 1985, 67).

This attitude towards the bayonet charge persisted within the Army throughout the war. Orders issued by the General Staff (1918, 15) late on in the war state, 'the use of the rifle must become an instinct and the aim and object of all ranks must be to come to close quarters with the enemy as quickly as possible.' The rifle was believed by the General Staff to be easier to harass the enemy with (Griffith 1994, 69).

material objects contained within the landscape (see Gosden 1999, 120). Soldiers of the Great War were conditioned by the technology around them which could form and control actions, purpose and the perception of their surroundings. This is demonstrated in the primacy accorded to the use of the bayonet, derived from the belief that this would encourage the offensive and fighting spirit amongst the men (Bourke 1999, 90). The War Office (1914, 222) maintained that 'in a bayonet fight the impetus of a charging line gives it moral and physical advantages over a stationary line.'

This apparent characteristic of the rifle and the prescribed use of the rifle and bayonet in close combat situations, were considered by the General Staff to be ways in which the orders of the creation of an 'active front' would be embodied by the men. Embodiment explains how culture is incorporated into the body, how it becomes naturalized in actions, behaviour and belief (Attfield 2000, 241).

Conclusions

The literary scholar Paul Fussell (1975) in his highly influential and contentious work *The Great War and modern memory* argued that the conflict ushered in a modern way of thinking and thereby remembering the war. Fussell argued that the war was uniquely traumatic and that it was only through irony and modernism that it could be thought of and remembered. What may be offered in reply to this thesis is a 'postmodern memory' of the conflict, a memory which engages and acknowledges that the events on the fields of Flanders and Northern France ninety years ago still affect contemporary society. By acknowledging that there is no inherent reason

why a linear narrative should be employed in the analysis of the war, historians can engage with the trauma of the conflict. This can work towards addressing the popular memory of the conflict by moving towards the rejection of the idea of soldiers as passive victims. By working through the sense of trauma still felt within society historians can begin to engage with other areas of the war such as the violence and brutality, describing, for instance, how soldiers came to an understanding of their roles within a hostile landscape. The trauma of the war cannot be dismissed, and by engaging with alternative narratives historians can begin to represent and consider this trauma in their work.

Notes on contributor

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