

CONCLUSION

English literature of the First World War has both a historical and a literary interest. This combination of interests and aspects is, of course, true for any literary age. But there can surely be no other previous period in history in which such enormous changes occurred in such a limited period. The few years from 1914 to 1918 were to see great upheavals in social, political and artistic life. Quite apart from the more obvious political changes in Europe, there were great changes in the individual consciousness and awareness of reality.

It is often difficult to give a clear answer to a direct question on the relative value of literature. What one can say, however, is that changes in the individual social awareness can usually be most clearly seen through the eyes of the poet or the novelist. If we accept even partially the concept of the poet or the novelist as the most sensitive "sounding-board" of his age, then we must give careful attention to what he has to say.

These changes in awareness in society in general are reflected by the writers of the First World War. There is a chronological gap of only two or three years between the poetry of Rupert Brooke and that of Wilfred Owen. But the gap in experience and maturity between them is vast; it is only necessary to compare two of their more famous poems. In "The Soldier," Brooke writes with almost maudlin self-romanticism:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England.

There is a great difference between this and the grim pity of Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth":

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

The sincerity of Brooke's patriotism was no doubt very real. But the shortcomings of him and his contemporaries, both in imagination and poetic methods, were absolute. Charles Sorley, for example, wrote: "The voice of our poets and men of letters is finely trained and sweet to hear ... it pleases, it flatters, it charms, it soothes : it is a living lie."

Writers like Owen and Sorley did manage to produce, out of the chaos, not just anger and hate, however realistic those emotions may have been in their circumstances, but also something real and positive:

"Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War and the Pity of War. The Poetry is in the Pity."

The direct results of the War are with us to-day. Some are of general significance. The almost unquestioning belief in the essential efficiency and ability of the ruling groups was no longer valid to an age that had seen slaughter compounded by their leaders' stubborn inhumanity. The fairly rigid social divisions of European society were to become more fluid. To intelligent people, the concept of war being in any way noble or heroic or romantic was considerably altered by the muddy, anonymous deaths of the Somme and Verdun.

In literature, there were to be significant changes. It is possible to date the death of the romantic concept of Poesy fairly exactly to this time. Poetry, and to a lesser extent prose, finally became a medium for dealing with the realities of life. Literature as a whole was to be revitalized, to deal more firmly and precisely with the problems of life as it is, not just as it ought to be. In this period of war, the important fact is surely not that Owen was a better poet than Brooke. Given time, perhaps Brooke would have written in the similar way as Owen. What is important is that, within such a short time, such complete reality of vision should have become the only possible outlook. This reality, and this understanding, in addition to producing some great art, also made radical changes in the literature and the social outlook of subsequent generations.



NOTES

PART I

¹
V.de S.Pinto, Crisis in Modern Poetry 1880-1940 (London: Grey Arrow Ltd., 1963), p. 155.

²
Rupert Brooke, The Collected Poems (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1960), p. 21.

³
Edmund Blunden, War Poets: 1914-1918 The British Council and the National Book League: Writers and Their Works, No. 100. (London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1958), p. 18.

⁴
Charles Sorley, Marlborough and Other Poems (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1919), p. 91.

⁵
T.Sturge Moore, Some Soldiers Poets (New York : Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1920), p. 15.

⁶
John H. Johnston, English Poetry of the First World War (New Jersey:Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 40.

⁷
Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937), p. 228.

⁸
Ibid., p. 219.

⁹
Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁰
Ibid., p. 225.

11
Ibid., p. 230.

12
Ibid., p. 255.

13
Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry-Officer (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937), p. 386.

14
Op.cit., pp. 256-257.

15
Ibid., p. 270.

16
Ibid., p. 268.

17
Op.cit., p. 296.

PART II

1
John H. Johnston, English Poetry of The First World War. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964) p. 71.

2
Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry-Officer (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937), p. 247.

3
Ibid., p. 360.

4
Ibid., p. 387.

5
Ibid., p. 401.

6
Ibid., p. 420.

7
Ibid., p. 457.

8
Ibid., p. 458.

9
Ibid., p. 472.

10
Ibid., p. 496.

11
Ibid., p. 509.

12
Frederic Manning, Her Privates We (London : Pan Books Ltd.,
1964), pp. 18-19.

13
Ibid., p. 24.

14
Ibid., p. 41.

15
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16
Ibid., p. 96.

17
Ibid., p. 105.

18
Ibid., p. 183.

19
Ibid., p. 191.

20
Ibid., p. 192.

21
Ibid., pp. 138-139.

22
Ibid., p. 104.

23
Ibid., p. 24.

24
Wilfred Owen, Poems, ed. Edmund Blunden (London: Chatto & Windus), p. 27.

25
John H. Johnston, English Poetry of the First World War.
(New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 168.

26
Op.cit., p. 31.

27
Ibid., p. 32.

28
Op.cit., p. 160.

29
Op.cit., p. 35.

30
Op.cit., pp. 185-186.

31
Op.cit., p. 42.

32
Ibid., p. 46.

33
Ibid., p. 28.

PART III

- 1
Charles Sorley, Marlborough and Other Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 97.
- 2
Ibid., p. 98.
- 3
Ibid., p. 105.
- 4
Ibid., p. 109.
- 5
Ibid., p. 110.
- 6
Ibid., p. 104.
- 7
V. de S. Pinto, Crisis in Modern Poetry 1880-1940 (London: Grey Arrow Ltd., 1963), p. 159.
- 8
Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937), p. 386.
- 9
Robert Graves, Goodbye To All That. (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1957), p. 213.
- 10
Ibid., p. 120.
- 11
Ibid., p. 167.
- 12
Ibid., p. 162.
- 13
Ibid., p. 183.

14
Ibid., p. 201.

15
Ibid., p. 202.

16
Ibid., p. 205.

17
Ibid., p. 217.

18.
Ibid., p. 231.

19
Ibid., p. 230.

20
Ibid., p. 168.

21
Ibid., p. 169.

22
Ibid., p. 167.

23
Ibid., p. 144.

24
Ibid., p. 184.

25
Ibid., p. 246.

26
Edmund Blunden, Undertones of War (London: Collins
Clear - Type Press, 1928), p. 18.

27
Ibid., p. 219-220.

28

Ibid., p. 145.

29

Ibid., p. 6.

30

loc.cit.

31

Ibid.

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