

pared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other individuals." This, as Samuel Hynes has pointed out, is a good description of what Orwell himself did as a member of weltering humanity and not as a saint, which he was not.

At the same time this remarkable passage reveals why George Orwell, like E.B. White, was always the member of a party of one who lived in a time of fear but who was not too cowed to speak out. For that unflinching courage we owe him a continuing and unpayable debt, but Michael Shelden has made a handsome payment toward that account.

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## A Myth Imagined

by Frank Brownlow

A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture

by Samuel Hynes

New York: Atheneum; 514 pp., \$29.95

How quickly living tradition turns into history. The Great War of 1914-18 has almost entirely receded from memory. Very few of that generation are alive to tell their stories, and as for their children, they have their own war, the Second World War, to occupy and puzzle their memories. In the minds of the young people of our own day the two wars merge into one vaguely apprehended rumor of violence.

No doubt this is why, about twenty years ago, the First World War began to be a subject for historians and critics. The battlefields of the Western Front proved to be rich fields for scholarship. As a result, there is no shortage of information, opinion, and interpretation of that war, but it is almost entirely book-derived. The complexities of experienced memory have given place to the rather simple conventions of the researcher and writer.

Samuel Hynes' *A War Imagined* is a cultural history of England during the war of 1914-18 and the years immediately after it. The focus is chiefly upon literature, with some attention to painting, drawing, sculpture, and cinema, and even a little

to music. The range of material covered is wide. For instance, comment upon the popular writers John Buchan, Dornford Yates, "Sapper," and Warwick Deeping provides a surprising context for a reference to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, followed in turn by a discussion of the state of women's rights after the war. A book so encyclopedically compiled is bound to include familiar material, but it is equally sure to include things that will be interesting as well as new for almost everyone. To give a few examples from my own reading of the book, I had not known that C.R. Nevinson was so powerful a draftsman, or that Sir William Orpen had such a strong vein of satire in him. I now want to see more of Orpen's pictures, and to read his memoirs as well. Hynes has also made me curious about the war memoirs of Colonel Repington. To judge from the quotations, he was an interesting man as well as a very good writer. And then there are the piquant details that any book as fat as this should supply: I am delighted to learn that Malcolm Sargent, a notorious womanizer, should have conducted the British Women's Symphony Orchestra.

Hynes's book is not all fun and discovery, however. There is a thesis organizing its materials and directing its narrative of the war's influence on English culture. It is a familiar, even a conventional one:

A generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid

battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned, and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.

Hynes repeatedly describes this thesis as a myth, a word which suggests that he might not think it true, but he hedges by defining myth as "not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it." For all that, his use of the thesis suggests that he believes it. He continually repeats the idea that the war caused "a gap in time," a "radical discontinuity" with the past, which he finds exemplified by all the major work of the period, and much of the minor. For instance, he praises Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" and the "Hell Cantos" of 1925 very highly, the first as an elegy for a dead civilization, the second as an Inferno representing postwar England. He believes that Pound finally took the war seriously because, "It confirmed the corruption of English culture." In these and other passages one detects a note of agreement between Hynes and his authors. When he writes, "Hell was England-after-war—the ruin that Masterman saw, that Montague saw, that Lawrence saw, and that they all hated," it is apparent that, at least for the time being and for the purpose of writing his book, he agrees with them.

### LIBERAL ARTS



### PRISONS AND AIDS

An Indiana prison inmate filed a lawsuit that would "force the state to provide prisoners with condoms," the *Chicago Tribune* reported last February. Arthur Squires, a convicted burglar and sex offender, fears the effect "a high rate of homosexual activity" will have on the spread of AIDS. A spokesman for Westville prison said providing condoms would contradict existing policy that prohibits "the type of activity that spreads the AIDS virus."

The result of that unreflective acceptance of writerly authority is a conventional book that never asks the more interesting questions of its materials. Where, for instance, did Pound get his emotions about civilization and war? It is no use insisting, as the myth requires, that the experience of war must authenticate the art and poetry based on it, if we then say that Ezra Pound wrote a great war poem without ever setting foot in a trench. If he did, then the whole thesis, that it was the soldiers' unprecedented experience that created a new reality, collapses. It appears that one can get just as worked up about a "botched civilization" from reading newspapers as from suffering a bombardment—a method Pound was to employ for the rest of his career. Nor is Hynes very informative about the war poets themselves, whom he treats for the most part as passive embodiments of his thesis. One would hardly guess from his account that there was anything eccentric or personal in the backgrounds of Graves, Sassoon, or Owen that might have affected the poetry they wrote.

In short, this book confuses art and history in ways not cleared up by the evasive word "myth," and the result is not so much the history of a culture as of the development and transmission of a received idea about it. And even so, having grown up in an England that remembered the First World War very well, I'm in a position to say that as a book about the English people's understanding of the war's effect on their culture, *A War Imagined* is as wrong as many of the writers whom it quotes. It represents the opinion of a tiny minority. In my experience, even people who enjoyed the war writers' work did not always believe the version of the war presented; they accepted it as any

reader accepts a writer's fiction or personality. As for the ex-servicemen, the war had been a terrible and unique experience for them. All the ex-soldiers I knew had been in some way marked by it, but none of them believed that it was either a unique historical event, or that it had separated them from their past. In some cases it made the past more precious to them. And they all treated the silly journalistic ideas that it had been fought "to make the world safe for democracy" or "to end wars" as meaningless rant. They knew well enough they had served for king and country, as serviceable a way of putting things as any.

Very early on, too, I understood something that never surfaces in Hynes's book, that in important ways the Boer War had made a strong prior impression on that generation's imagination. The Boer War exposed the weakness of the empire, and its losses had been keenly felt. The elegiac feelings it aroused, expressed in the Waggon Hill epitaph (sneered at by Hynes), in Elgar's and Stanford's music, and in the poetry of Kipling and Newbolt, prepared and strengthened people's minds for the losses of the Great War. In fact Newbolt's "Vigil," printed as Hynes tells us in the *Times* on August 5, 1914, but written as Newbolt said "in mystical anticipation" 16 years earlier, appears in his *Collected Poems* of 1912 among poems about the Boer War. Those poems (like the soldier poems of Housman not even mentioned by Hynes) also make the contrast between pastoral England and foreign battlefields that was so basic to the best poetry of the 1914-18 war, including Siegfried Sassoon's.

Another fact not mentioned by Hynes, but relevant to his thesis, is that the American Civil War anticipated the high ca-

sualty rates of the Great War. The unpleasant realities of the American war made a strong impression in England, and that may be why *The Red Badge of Courage*, arguably the first modern war narrative, was initially more successful there than in America. What happened on the battlefields of the Great War could hardly have been a surprise to everyone in England.

The notion of "radical discontinuity" really is a myth, and like other myths it has various uses. Used by a writer like Lawrence to explain the war as a uniquely modern event, it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. After all, historical discontinuity was one of the premises of modernism. The myth also expressed the trauma and dismay of some of the men who experienced the war. In that case it conveyed an intensely personal emotion. It was certainly never a fact: the most obvious thing about postwar England was its continuity with the past. No doubt that is what so irritated the disappointed prophets of apocalypse like Pound and Lawrence. The Great War was an immense tragedy, but no more than any other event did it validate the modernist anticipation of the end of history.

After the lapse of over seventy years we can see that it is best to take longer views. History always has tricks up its sleeve. The music of Charles Villiers Stanford, for instance, whom Hynes consigns to the dead past, is now being played again. He was a kind of Anglo-Irish Dvorák, a nationalist whose style was a dialect of a common European musical language, and so, by modernist principles, unacceptable. Yet the music proves to be very good indeed, and his setting of Newbolt's "Farewell" and "The Middle Watch" are intensely felt pieces.

But one doesn't have to argue from details. In England the same classes that provided the subalterns of the first war provided the fighter pilots and junior officers of the second, and to say, as Hynes does, that they went "expecting nothing except suffering, boredom and perhaps death" misses the point of their performance just as the jingoistic formulas of 1914 misrepresent their predecessors'.

This is a book to read for its information. As a portrait of a period described by Anthony Powell as "given over to mixed and changing symbols," it is a disappointment.

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## LIBERAL ARTS

### L.A. GAY LAW

Law firms in major cities are stepping up efforts to recruit homosexuals, the *New York Times* reported last February. Two New York firms "have amended their anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation," and Munger, Tolles & Olson of Los Angeles "sends recruitment letters to gay and lesbian student groups and arranges interviews between homosexual students with gay lawyers." Bruce Deming, co-chairman of the Committee on Gay, Bisexual and Lesbian Legal Issues at Harvard Law School, "wanted to go to a place where I felt I could put a picture of my lover on my desk, take him to firm functions—where people treat you as a normal person."

## Letter From Stockholm

by Allan Carlson

### The Ants and Elephants of Swedish Politics



In February, I returned to Sweden after a 15-year absence, and discovered a very different land. In 1976, Americans were viewed with suspicion. We carried the immediate legacy of the Vietnam imbroglio and a vague reputation as "protofascists." These were the heady early days of Prime Minister Olaf Palme. The Swedes were, as always, polite, but they were more than a little haughty as citizens of a ruggedly independent nation, in solidarity with international socialism and the Third World. In 1992, an American strides the streets of Stockholm as a kind of king, or conqueror. With communism dead, and the Swedish economy in a swoon, capitalism is triumphant, and America looms as the center of the world, the protector of the New World Order. Swedish youth in double-breasted suits crowd around, wanting to hear about the wonders of American commercial television or the latest conservative gossip from Washington. Even the Social Democrats are humble and self-deprecating, ever willing to shine an American's ideological shoes. Only in Stockholm could I appreciate the utter mystification of James Baker and George Bush (the Swedish tabloids label them "the world's most powerful men"), who must experience in spades the same fawning adulation whenever they step beyond the American border. With the world as our oyster, they have to ask, how can the voters possibly respond to the Sirens' song of "America First"?

Most Swedes have given up on the dream of splendid neutrality and the "middle way." In retrospect, the whole notion of Swedish autonomy rested on socialist chutzpah. With foolish courage, the Swedes sought to organize the "non-aligned states" behind their leadership. The Soviet Union and the United States, they reasoned, equally threatened Swedish sovereignty. Gunnar Myrdal, Dag Hammarskjöld, and Palme wandered the globe

as prophets of a better world order based on secular moralism and a planned economy.

Alas, these dreams are all now in ruin. Sweden has been in a home-grown depression since 1989, with little likelihood of renewed growth before 1994. A huge public sector (taxes gobble up 57 percent of the Gross Domestic Product), strangling work rules, high inflation, low work effort, and fleeing capital have destroyed the old certainties. "The Social Democrats didn't know when to stop," goes the standard explanation. A smaller number cite the consequences of 60 years of welfare state incentives on notions of personal responsibility and family integrity. Among all Swedes, confidence in state-directed solutions is at a 20th-century low. Except for the aging denizens of the Left Party (formerly the Communists), everyone believes that "only the market can save us." It is also clear that the very logic of the Swedish "third way" rested on the wondrous gift of the Cold War, with its warring blocks of "Marxists" and "capitalists" leaving plenty of room for rhetorical and policy maneuvering. The end of the Soviet Empire, it seems, has been as disorienting for Swedish socialists as it has been for American conservatives.

Sweden's big political event came last September, when the Social Democrats suffered a stunning setback at the polls, their vote total falling to 37.6 percent, a level unseen since the 1920's. At the local hustings, they fared even worse: only one out of ten Swedish municipal and county councils are now under socialist control. In a nationwide straw vote of high school students, the socialists won only 16 percent. These results have shaken their confidence, with odd but interesting consequences. An acquaintance of mine who works for the Labor Movement Archive, tending the papers of Branting and other socialist heroes, despaired over cutbacks in government and party grants. I asked what the response had been. "Well, we've had to put a price on our services, create a marketing strategy, and sell our work to the individual trade unions. And we've started a fund-raising program." Alas, a specter still haunts Europe, but it has a vaguely Austrian countenance.

Nonetheless, the electoral reversal of

1991 was not enough to stimulate a fundamental rethinking of other Social Democratic positions regarding "rights," "equality," and "solidarity." The Social Democrats' historic triumphs in the 1930-68 period came in large degree as the party wrapped itself in the regalia of "nation" and "family." Their social program originated in "population policies" designed to "save the nation" through support of motherhood and large families. In the late 1960's, though, the party reoriented its message around radical individualism, a derivative of left-wing feminism that shattered lingering attachments to pre-modern sentiments. Anders Isaksson, Sweden's most thoughtful Social Democratic journalist, sees no sign of change: "equality" and a regime of "rights" mediated through the state, he told me, have irreversibly triumphed.

The election brought to power a Center-Right coalition government composed of the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the People's Party (or Liberals), and the Center Party. Winning 21.9 percent of the vote, the Moderates placed the 42-year-old Karl Bildt in as prime minister. Closely tied to the Swedish Employers Confederation, the Moderate Party resembles our Republicans. Indeed, one right-winger describes Bildt as "a young, Swedish Bush," bound politically to international business interests, lacking other deeply held political principles, and born to parents in the public sector. His office is peopled by former associates at TIMBRO, an American-style think tank which has enjoyed uncommon success (the socialists complain bitterly about TIMBRO's infiltration of the universities). The Bildt team dresses snappily, admires the United States enormously, and looks with pleasure at the new order taking shape in Washington and Brussels.

The Moderate Party's first goal is the integration of Sweden into Western Europe. As Olof Ehrenkrona, Bildt's chief of staff, puts it, Swedish nationalism now means "a seat at Brussels." Bildt also envisions an informal linkage to the American defense umbrella, partly through a United Nations under the effective control of the U.S. State Department (as during the Persian Gulf War). A sense of destiny drives the Moderates. Their mentor