

Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, introduction by Christopher Ridgway (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929; the complete, original, unexpurgated text in paperback; London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 376 pages, including information about the author, publisher's note, and introduction.

“Richard Aldington was born in Portsmouth in 1892 and educated at Dover College and University College, London. One of the ‘Imagist’ poets associated with Ezra Pound, in 1913 he married the American poet H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), who describes their relationship in her novel *Bid Me to Live*. He was editor of the *Egoist* from 1914-17.

From 1916-18 Aldington fought in France, as a private and then an officer. During the next ten years he scraped a living as a freelance writer and translator, assisting Ford Madox Ford on the *English Review*, T. S. Eliot on the *Criterion* and reviewing French literature for *The Times Literary Supplement*. From 1928 he lived on the Riviera with the painter Brigit Patmore and there he finally completed *Death of a Hero*, a bestseller when it was published in 1929. Other successes followed: *The Colonel's Daughter* (1931), *All Men Are Enemies* (1933), *Women Must Work* (1934). In 1936 he moved to the United States with Netta McCullough, whom he married in 1938, but after the Second World War he settled in France.

Aldington was a passionate, quarrelsome character, a romantic idealist embittered by the First World War and disillusioned by post-war England. He achieved fame as a poet, novelist, translator and editor, but his last years were darkened by poverty and by the controversies surrounding his biographies of D. H. Lawrence, Norman Douglas, and T. E. Lawrence. He died at Sury-en-Vaux in the south of France in 1962.” [“The Author,” *Death of a Hero*].

“First published in 1929, *Death of a Hero* was described by its author as both a jazz novel and a memorial to a generation. The hero is George Winterbourne. Leaving the Edwardian gloom of his embattled parents behind him, George escapes to Soho, which buzzes, on the eve of war, with talk of politics, pacifism, and free love. He paints, he marries, he takes a mistress: the perfect hero of his time, whose destiny—like all those of that lost generation—is the bloody nightmare of the trenches.

Now reissued in a fully unexpurgated edition, Aldington's chronicle of the life and loves of this doomed favourite of the gods is a seering testament to the corrosive waste of human warfare. A ferocious, unforgettable attack on British hypocrisy and affectation, it once again takes its place alongside *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, *Goodbye to All That*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front* as one of the great novels of the First World War.” [Book Jacket].

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Ridgway's introduction gives excellent background information to *Death of a Hero* and also to Aldington's life, relationships, writings, and other British war literature of the late 1920s.

Aldington's dedicatory preface to Halcott Glover says a lot about his motives and his rationale for writing *Death of a Hero*. He describes the circumstance of its original conception, its delay for a decade, and its methodology. Aldington is quite intense, as he disdains the genre of the "professional novelist" as well as any attempt to caricature or categorize his work. He also expresses strong feelings of detachment from his Victorian upbringing, from a younger generation (he calls them "Swiftian ironists"), and, in his mind, from the war itself. He writes:

My Dear Hal, - Remembering George Moore's denunciation of prefaces, I felt that what I wanted to say here could be best expressed in a letter to you. Although you are a little older than I, you belong essentially to the same generation - those who spent their childhood and adolescence struggling, like young Samsons, in the toils of the Victorians; whose early manhood coincided with the European War. A great number of the men of our generation died prematurely. We are unlucky or lucky enough to remain.

I began this book almost immediately after the Armistice, in a little Belgian cottage - my billet. I remember the landscape was buried deep in snow, and that we had very little fuel. Then came demobilization, and the effort of readjustment cost my manuscript its life. I threw it aside, and never picked it up again. The attempt was premature. Then, ten years later, almost day for day, I felt the impulse return, and began this book. You, I know, will read it sympathetically for many reasons. But I cannot expect the same favour from others.

This book is not the work of a professional novelist. It is, apparently, not a novel at all. Certain conventions of form and method in the novel have been erected, I gather, into immutable laws, and are looked upon with quite superstitious reverence. They are entirely disregarded here. To me the excuse for the novel is that one can do any damn thing one pleases. I am told I have done things as terrible as if you introduced asides and soliloquies into your plays, and came on to the stage in the middle of a scene to take part

in the action. You know how much I should be interested if you did that - I am all for disregarding artistic rules of thumb. I dislike standardized art as much as standardized life. Whether I have been guilty of Expressionism or Super-realism or not, I don't know don't care. I knew what I wanted to say, and said it. And I know I have not tried to be 'original'.

The technique of this book, if it can be said to have one, is that which I evolved for myself in writing a longish modern poem (which you liked) called 'A Fool i' th' Forest'. Some people said that was 'jazz poetry'; so I suppose this is a jazz novel. You will see how appropriate that is to the theme.

I believe you at least will be sympathetic to the implied or expressed idealism of this book. Through a good many doubts and hesitations and changes I have always preserved a certain idealism. I believe in men, I believe in a certain fundamental integrity and comradeship, without which society could not endure. How often that integrity is perverted, how often that comradeship betrayed, there is no need to tell you. I disbelieve in bunk and despotism, even in a dictatorship of the intelligentsia. I think you and I are not wholly unacquainted with the intelligentsia?

Some of the young, they who will 'do the noble things that we forgot', think differently. According to them, bunk must be parried by super-bunk. Sincerity is superannuated. It doesn't matter what you have to say; what matters is whether you can put it across successfully. And the only hope is to forbid everybody to read except a few privileged persons (chosen how and by whom?) who will autocratically tell the rest of us what to do. Well, do we believe that? I answer on your behalf as well as my own that we emphatically do not. Of course, these young men may be Swiftian ironists.

But, as you will see, this book is really a threnody, a memorial in its ineffective way to a generation which hoped much, strove honestly, and suffered deeply. Others, of course, may see it all very differently. What should they not? I believe that all we claim is that we try to say what appears to be the truth, and that we are not afraid either to contradict ourselves or to retract an error. Always yours, Richard Aldington, *Paris*, 1929.

### Prologue: *Morte D'un Eroë*

Aldington introduces his main character—George Winterbourne—after the fact. He writes:

The casualty lists went on appearing for a long time after the Armistice—last spasms of Europe's severed arteries. Of course, nobody much bothered to read the lists. Why should they? The living must protect themselves from the dead, especially the intrusive dead. But the twentieth century had lost its Spring with a vengeance. So a good deal of forgetting had to be done. Under the heading 'Killed in Action,' one of these later lists contained the words: 'Winterbourne, Edward Frederick George, A/Capt., 2/9 Battn. R. Foddershire Regt.' The small interest created by this item of news and the rapidity with which he was forgotten would have surprised even George Winterbourne; and he had that bottomless cynicism of the infantry subaltern which veiled itself in imbecile cheerfulness, and thereby misled a good many not very acute people . . . [11].

That cynicism, in Aldington's hands, obviously oozes, as he states:

His [GW's] vanity would have been a little shocked by what actually happened. . . . Our [human] vanity is interested by the hope that the rather tangled and not very luminous track we made will continue to shine for a few people for a few years. I suppose Winterbourne's name does appear on some War Memorial, probably in the Chapel of his Public School; and, of course, he's got his neat ration of headstone in France. But that's about all. Nobody much minded that he was killed. Unassertive people with no money have few friends; and Winterbourne hadn't counted much on his scanty flock, and least of all on me. But I know—because he told me himself—that he had rather relied on four people to take some interest in him and his fate. They were his father and mother, his wife and his mistress. If he had known what actually occurred with these four at the news of his death I think he would have been a little shocked, as well as heartily amused and perhaps a bit relieved. It would have freed him from certain feelings of responsibility [11-12].

Aldington goes on to debunk George's parents—Old Winterbourne (“the mess he got his life into would have baffled an army of psychologists to unravel,” 12) and Mrs. Winterbourne (a hypocrite with twenty-two lovers but “as sordid, avaricious, conventional, and spiteful a middle-class woman as you could dread to meet; like all her class, she toadied to her betters and bullied her inferiors,” 17). He parodies the Church (the Roman Catholics are “slimy” with “drivelling religiosity,” 13) and the sexual mores of the day (since “religious convictions” forbade divorce, “religious convictions are such an easy excuse for being nasty,” 13). He talks about the situation between George and his two lovers—Elizabeth, whom he marries, and Fanny, whom he really loves. The reaction to George's death in the war, characteristically, is flawed by the interminable restraints put upon each of the characters by a society that is seemingly out of touch with the reality of what is happening on the Continent.

In several summary type statements, Aldington shows just how bitter he is about the whole thing. Of Mr. Winterbourne's bedside place of prayer, “above, on a bracket, was a coloured B.V.M. from the Place St.Sulpice, holding a nauseating Infant Jesus dangling a bloody

and sun-rayed Sacred Heart” (16). On a certain occasion, after Mr. Winterbourne prays for George’s soul and pays five pounds to Father Slack, his confessor, he himself “got run over just by the Marble Arch as he was meditating on that blessed martyr, Father Parsons, and that other more blessed martyr, Father Garnet of Gunpowder fame. So, as the five pounds was soon exhausted, there was nobody to pray for George’s soul; and for all the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church knows and cares, poor old George is in Hell, and likely to remain there. But, after the last few years of his life, George probably doesn’t find any difference” (16).

Of Sam Browne, Mrs. Winterbourne’s current lover, he is “an adult Boy Scout, a Public School fag in shining armour—the armour of obtuseness. He met every situation in life with a formula, and no situation in life ever reached him except in the shape imposed upon it by the appropriate and predetermined formula. So, though he wasn’t very successful at anything, he got along all right, sliding almost decorously down grooves which had nothing ringing about them. Unless urged, he never mentioned his wound, his decoration, or the fact that he had ‘rolled up’ on August 4<sup>th</sup>. The modest, well-bred, etcetera, English gentleman” (18).

Of Mrs. Winterbourne’s reaction to news of her son’s death, “the formula for the death of a married mistress’s son was stern heroism, and gentle consolation to the wounded mother-heart. . . . But the effect of George’s death on her temperament was, strangely enough, almost wholly erotic. The war did that to lots of women. All the dying and wounds and mud and bloodiness—at a safe distance—gave them a great kick, and excited them to an almost unbearable pitch of amorousness. [And] . . . there was the deep primitive physiological instinct—men to kill and be killed; women to produce more men to continue the process . . .” (18-19).

Of the reaction of George's parents to the war, "like the Bourbons [Paris, 1815], the elder Winterbournes learned nothing from the war, and forgot nothing. It is the tragedy of England that the war has taught its Winterbournes nothing, and that it has been ruled by grotesques and a groaning Civil Service of disheartened men and women, while the young have simply chucked up the job in despair. *Gott strafe England* is a prayer that has been fully answered—by the insanity of retaining the old Winterbourne grotesques and pretending they are alive. And we go on acquiescing, we go on without even the guts to kick the grotesque Aunt Sallies of England into the limbo they deserve. *Pero, paciencia. Manana. Manana . . .*" (23).

Aldington contrasts Elizabeth and Fanny, who live with greater freedom, i.e., sexual freedom, liberation from Victorian restrictions (24-25), except for Elizabeth, who, when she gets pregnant, feels the pressures of familial and personal restraints (25). Nevertheless, they too accept news of George's death with a measure of apathy, except the narrator, who thinks that "George committed suicide in that last battle of the war" (23), and perhaps the Army, inasmuch as "they treat you like a gentleman, when you're dead" (i.e., war burial customs, 34). But for George, he "was killed soon after dawn on the 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1918, at a place called Maison Blanche, on the road from Le Cateau to Bavay. He was the only officer in his battalion killed in that action, for the Germans surrendered or ran away in less than an hour. I heard about it that night, and, as the Brigade was 'resting' on the 5<sup>th</sup>, I got permission from my Colonel to ride back to George's funeral. I heard from George's Colonel that he had got enfiladed by a machine-gun. The whole of his company were lying down, waiting for the flying trench-mortar squad to deal with the machine-gun, when for some unexplained reason George had stood up, and a dozen

bullets had gone through him. ‘Silly ass,’ was the Colonel’s comment, as he nodded and left me”

(34).

Aldington concludes this Prologue or *morte d’un eroe* with the following comments:

The death of a hero! What mockery, what bloody cant! What sickening putrid cant! George’s death is a symbol to me of the whole sickening bloody waste of it, the damnable stupid waste and torture of it. You’ve seen how George’s own people—the makers of his body, the women who held his body to theirs—were affected by his death. The Army did its bit, but how could the Army individually mourn a million ‘heroes’? How could the little bit of Army which knew George mourn him? At dawn next morning we were hot-foot after the retreating enemy, and did not pause until the Armistice—and then we had our own lives to struggle with and disentangle.

That night in Venice, George and his death became a symbol to me—and still remain a symbol. Somehow or other we have to make these dead acceptable, we have to atone for them, we have to appease them. How, I don’t quite know. I know there’s the Two Minutes’ Silence. But after all, a Two Minutes’ Silence once a year isn’t doing much—in fact, it’s doing nothing. Atonement—how can we atone? How can we atone for the lost millions and millions of years of life, how atone for those lakes and seas of blood? Something is unfulfilled, and that is poisoning us. It is poisoning me, at any rate, though I have agonized over it, as I now agonize over poor George, for whose death no other human being has agonized. What can we do? Headstones and wreaths and memorials and speeches and the Cenotaph—no, no, it has got to be something *in* us. Somehow we must atone to the dead—the dead, murdered, violently-dead soldiers. The reproach is not from them, but in ourselves. Most of us don’t know it, but it is there, and poisons us. It is the poison that makes us heartless and hopeless and lifeless—us the war generation, and the new generation, too. The whole world is blood-guilty, cursed like Orestes, and mad, and destroying itself, as if pursued by an infinite legion of Eumenides. Somehow we must atone, somehow we must free ourselves from the curse—the blood-guiltiness. We must find—where?—how?—the greater Pallas who will absolve us on some Acropolis of Justice. But meanwhile the dead poison us and those who come after us.

That is why I am writing the life of George Winterbourne, a unit, one human body murdered, but to me a symbol. It is an atonement, a desperate effort to wipe off the blood-guiltiness. Perhaps it is the wrong way. Perhaps the poison will still be in me. If so, I shall search for some other way. But I shall search. I know what is poisoning me. I do not know what is poisoning you, but you are poisoned. Perhaps you too must atone” [35-36].

Part I, 1. Enter turn-of-the-century England (ca. 1890), “morally buried in great foggy wrappings of hypocrisy and prosperity and cheapness” (39). Aldington narrates the middle class background of the Winterbournes, an unabashedly sycophantic patriarchal (hen-pecked), matriarchal (queenly) type family with repressive Protestant religious values—the paragon of Tradition (43). From this atmosphere, young George Augustus is “generated” when he meets and marries Isabel Hartly (43). [When Aldington writes about the bonding of Isabel and young G.A., I felt like I was reading or listening to Garrison Keillor, 43-45]. But both G.A. and Isabel have dire inadequacies for married life (48-50).

Part I, 2. Enter baby George. In Sheffield, the situation of Isabel at her in-laws and pregnant is, at best, tolerable (53-55). Little George is born at a seaside hotel (55-56).

Part I, 3. Enter “family.” Isabel turns out to be a good mother (57-58). She “saved young George’s life—saved him for a German machine-gun” (58). “The first four years of George’s life passed in a welter of squabbling, incompetence, and poverty, of which he was quite unconscious, though what harm was done to his subconscious would take a better psychologist than I to determine. I imagine that the combined influence of dear Papa, dear Mamma, Ma and Pa Hartly, George Augustus, and Isabel started him off on the race of life with a pretty heavy handicap weight” (58). G.A. becomes an aesthete and decides to write (60). He tries to break out of the constraints of British life and society, but in reality he is only “a grotesque and didn’t matter much” (60). Aldington lectures, “So, look out, my friend. Hasten to adopt the slimy mask of British humbug and British fear of life, or expect to be smashed. You may escape for a time. You may think you can compromise. You can’t. You’ve either got to lose your soul to them or have it smashed by them. Or you can exile yourself” (60). G.A.’s new venture isolates

him from the family and causes trouble (61-62). Dissatisfied, Isabel returns to the Hartly home in Kent, so amidst concerns about “what would people say,” G.A. goes to the Hartly home to get his wife (63-64). Hostility from the Hartly clan forces G.A. to move to Kent, where he continues his attempt at writing—“George Augustus really worked—three hours a day—like all the great authors” (67). Isabel, with a home of her own, seems content, but soon the couple and baby exceed their means, so G.A. takes up his practice of solicitor once again (68-70). In time, they prosper, amass property and wealth, and have more children (71-72).

Part I, 4. Enter young George’s early days. For Aldington’s vivid portrayal of this period in George’s life, the nostalgic description harkens to an era of school-age innocence (72-75). This innocence is broken by his school master’s demur moralism: “‘Within ten years one half of you boys will be DEAD!’ Moral: prepare to meet thy god, and avoid smut” (75). To which, Aldington sarcastically remarks, “Did he know, that blind prophet? Was he inspired, that stately hypocrite? Like a moral vulture he leaned over and tortured his palpitating prey. Motionless in body, they writhed within, as he painted dramatically the penalties of Vice and Sin, drew pictures of Hell. But did he know? Did he know the hell they were going to within ten years, did he know *how* soon most of their names would be on the Chapel wall?” (76). Aldington then, in a rambling way, experiences catharsis about smut, sin, and fornication: “Are there two religions? A few more years shall roll, in ten years half of you boys will be dead, Smut, nose dropping off, fornication and all other deadly sins. Oh, wash me in Thy Precious Blood, and take my sins away. Blood. Smut. And then the other—a draught of vintage that has been cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth, tasting of Flora and the country green, dance and Provencal song, and sunburned mirth? Listening to the sound of the wind . . . Watching the blue butterflies . . .

Taking off your clothes . . . Watching the sun go down . . . Getting up very early in the morning . . . Wanting to be alone and think about things and feeling strange and happy and ecstatic—was that another religion? Or was that all Smut and Sin? Best not speak of it, best keep it all hidden. I can't help it if it is Smut and Sin" (76-77). Meanwhile, young George learns to paint, something he likes very much, and to shoot a gun and kill, something he dislikes very much (77-79). He especially disdains the military training at school: "George hated the idea of the O.T.C.—he didn't quite know why, but he somehow didn't want to learn to kill and be a thoroughly manly fellow. Also, he resented being ordered about. Why should one be ordered about by thoroughly manly fellows whom one hates and despises? But then, as a very worthy and thoroughly manly fellow (who spent the War years in the Intelligence Department of the War Office, censoring letters) said of George many years later: 'What Winterbourne needs is discipline, *Discipline*. He is far too self-willed and independent. The Army will make a Man of him.' Alas! it made a corpse of him. But then, as we all know, there is no price too high to pay for the privilege of being made a thoroughly manly fellow" (79). So George finds himself chastised and then isolated at his school, as he resolutely maintains his independence (79-84). Eventually, he finds company in his "fight against the mould" from various childhood acquaintances that affect him significantly. He learns confidence in others from Mr. Barnaby Slush, the touch of a girl's hands and lips from Priscilla Hamble, friendship and French prose from Dudley Pollak, and companionship along with the joy of life from Donald and Thomas Conington (85-97). With this evolutionary development in his life, the world to young George seems wonderfully romantic, even idyllic (99-101).

Part I, 5. Enter separation from the family, or out on his own. After the family fortune wanes, young George is forced to decide a career—painting—which holds little promise for any steady income. In time, he finds work with a journalist, does a job for him, comes home late that evening as a result, for which angry Isabel creates a row. G.A. asks the young George to leave the home, and he does (101-105).

Part II, 1. In London. George's early experiences at work as a journalist frame Aldington's invective against British society—the establishment and especially organized Christian religion (i.e., “the Sabbath ennui,” 109-112). George associates with Mr. Frank Upjohn, a sensationalist or “Suprematist” painter (112-116). They talk about social problems, which gives Aldington a chance, as an aside, to compare cities with the trenches of war. He says:

How curious are the cities, with their intricate trench systems and perpetual warfare, concealed but as deadly as the open warfare of armies! We live in trenches, with flat revetments of house fronts as parapets and paradoss. The warfare goes on behind the house-fronts—wives with husbands, children with parents, employers with employed, tradesmen with tradesmen, banker with lawyer, and the triumphal doctor rooting out life's casualties. Desperate warfare—for what? Money as the symbol of power; power as the symbol or affirmation of existence. Throbbing warfare of men's cities! As fierce and implacable and concealed as the desperate warfare of plants and the hidden carnage of animals. We walk up Church Street. Up the communication trench. We cannot see ‘over the top,’ have no vista of the immense no-man's-land of London's roofs. We cannot pierce through the house-fronts. What is going on behind those dingy, unpierceable house-fronts? [117-118].

George and Mr. Upjohn discuss human nature (118-119), then they pay a visit to Mr. Shobbe, who runs a literary review.

Part II, 2. A cocktail party at Mr. Shobbe's. George naively mingles with “polite” society and meets Elizabeth Paston. This setting gives Aldington a chance to criticize marriage as “a punitive institution . . .” (130). He also compares the vanity of men and women and finds “both sexes are equally vain” (134). And, he offers an ode to “sacred Aphrodite” or “the

imperious reproductive instinct” as the ruler over all living things (134-135), as he develops unorthodox views about Christ and Christianity (136-137).

Part II, 3. The bus ride to Hempstead. George and Elizabeth explore their mutual likes and dislikes, thoughts about the war (146-147), and other things.

Part II, 4. In London. Aldington compares the sexual mores of his generation with that of his forebears (153-156). He chides “the taboo system” in favor of “wise promiscuity” (154). George and Elizabeth enjoy a day at Hampton Court (157-166). Aldington uses this setting to reflect on “the state of mind of a generation of young men who mostly perished in their twenties” (161-164).

Part II, 5. In Soho and thereabouts. Aldington waxes philosophic and writes, “There are two centres or poles of activity in every adult life—the economic and the sexual. Hunger and Death, the enemies. Your whole adult life depends on how you deal with the two primitive foes, Hunger and Death. . . . You can never really get away from Hunger and Death, from the need to eat and the will to live again. Thus, two problems are created—the economic and the sexual. There is no cut-and-dried solution of either. Existence is tolerable—I will not say ‘happy’, though I believe in happiness—to the extent that as an individual you are successful in solving these two problems” (167). To this dilemma, he offers two possible solutions. The first he calls the “primitive, the proletarian, the common man and woman solution is merely one of *quantity*. Get all the grub and copulation you want and more than you want, and *ipso facto* you will be happy” (167). The other he designates the “Rudyard Kipling or British Public School solution, not so far removed from the other as you might think, for it is a harnessing of the same primitive instincts to the service of the group—the nation—instead of to the service of the individual. Whatever is

done for the Empire is right. Not Truth and Justice, but British Truth and British Justice. Odious profanation! You are the servant of the Empire” (167-168). Further along, Aldington quickly dismisses the hunger problem in order to thoroughly discuss the sexual problem. Strikingly, he concludes:

The simple process of dissociating sex life from the philoprogenitive instinct was performed by the War Generation—at least on the grand scale, for isolated practitioners had long existed. . . . The old alternative of burning or marrying disappeared. And the following, far better, proposition arose. It was perfectly possible for man or woman to live a satisfactory sex life without having children. Hence, by the scientific process of trial and error, it became possible for each to seek the really satisfactory lover; while those who were philoprogenitively inclined might marry (*en attendant mieux*) for the sake of the children. Thus there was a return to the wise promiscuity of the Ancients, which was a great advance on humbug, domestic tyranny, furtive promiscuity, and whoring. One definite result, which we see today, is an undeniable decline in the number of whores—the first time this has occurred since the Edict of Milan [171].

This is the new modern option, but not so new after all, and is the one chosen by George and Elizabeth in their romantic affair (172-176). At a small Soho restaurant, the two happen upon Elizabeth’s friend, Fanny, and her companion Reggie Burnside, a young man from Cambridge. George finds an immediate attraction to Fanny, as well as George to Elizabeth (177-182).

Afterwards, George and Elizabeth enjoy a walk through the city but take note of its slums and the poor on the streets (184-186).

Part II, 6. In London (Soho). Fanny visits London on occasion, and so does Reggie who makes an offer of marriage to Elizabeth. She refuses but then demands that George marry her, since she thinks she is pregnant (but it’s only a false alarm). Aldington talks about the changing perceptions through all this of the Triumphal Scheme of Complete Sexual Freedom agreed upon by George and Elizabeth (186-198). Aldington chances some thoughts on the events leading up to the war, but pessimistically notes, “But for us the debate is vain, as vain as the pathetic and

reiterated enquiry, ‘*Where* did I catch this horrible cold?’ If any body or bodies engineered this catastrophe they must have been gratified by its shattering success” (198-199). As for 1914, it was heralded “as a great release, a purgation from the vices supposed to be engendered by peace! My God! Three days of glory engender more vices and misery than all the alleged corrupters of humanity could achieve in a millennium. . . . ‘Our splendid troops’ were to come home . . . We were to have a great revival in religion . . . We were to have a new and greater literature . . . We were to have . . . but really I lack courage to continue. Let those who are curious in human imbecility consult the newspaper-files of those days . . .” (200). He then conducts a tirade or what he calls “a vendetta of the dead against the living” (200-201). Meanwhile, when Elizabeth leaves London to pay a visit to her parents, Fanny comes to London to pay a visit to George, and thus begins their romantic triangle (202-212).

Part II, 7. In London (Chelsea), Summer 1914. News of impending war hits the London papers. George is concerned but no so Elizabeth, Fanny, and Reggie (212-218). A Socialist peace rally which turns belligerent occurs at Trafalgar Square (219-220). For George, it is serious business, but for Aldington, it is so much the old Cant, Delusion, and Delirium (221-223). Aldington vilifies especially what he calls “Victorian Cant” (223) and explores George’s psychological frame of mind and notes, “I do know that George suffered profoundly from the first day of the War until his death at the end of it. . . . In George’s case, the suffering which was common to all decent men and women was increased and complicated and rendered more torturing by his personal problems, which somehow became related to the War. You must remember that he did not believe in the alleged causes for which the War was fought. He looked

upon the War as a ghastly calamity, or a more ghastly crime” (224). The war causes a permanent rift in George’s relationship with both Elizabeth and Fanny (225-228).

Part III, 1 (231ff.). The draft, training, preparing to leave.

Part III, 2 (238ff.). Troop movement by railroad, diversity in the ranks, physical fatigue, mental fatigue, brief history of war in general, Winterbourne bid farewell from London by Elizabeth and Fanny.

Part III, 3 (250ff.). Arrival at Folkestone, “depression, monotony, boredom,” the lack of emotion and feeling, worry, the channel crossing, determination and duty, appreciation for the men, disdain for the men, trivial talk versus talk about real experiences, lack of vindictiveness among the men, arrival at Boulogne, lack of information from superiors, camp conditions, the real enemy of both English and German soldiers (i.e., the “fools who had sent them to kill each other”), government by bunk, the vanity of life.

Part III, 4 (260ff.). Rations, the Calais base camp, personal gear and weapons, the cold, Christmas dinner, movement by train to the front line.

Part III, 5 (266ff.). As a private with the Pioneers, a quiet sector of the trenches, fighting the cold, the landscape, “the graveyard of the world—dead trees, dead houses, dead mines, dead villages, dead men,” the howitzers, the cold and the soldier’s clothing, frozen boots and frozen food, the dirty water for washing, the first night in the line, the process of getting into the trenches, the various obstacles in the trenches, the shelling, sentry duty, digging a sap, strafing fire, the repetitious request for candles, job of platoon runner, memories of Elizabeth and Fanny.

Part III, 6 (279ff.). Monotonous activity in the trenches, repair work with frozen mud, the well-fed trench rats, the latrine, the problem with lice or chats, wisdom from “old hands,” heavy

artillery bombardment, German prisoners, illnesses in the trenches, work with Lieutenant Evans, the views of Evans who believed in the war (286), feelings about fear and nerves, the soldier's degradation and desensitization (288-289), a direct hit on a sap.

Part III, 7 (291ff.). Rest behind the lines, the Gas & Fire Picket, the bawdy-houses, back into the lines, the mud of springtime, more heavy artillery, repairing the berms, digging up bodies, bones, and skulls, the use of gas, the attack on Hill 91, a tear-gas attack, lost in the trenches, Evans and Winterbourne pass in the trenches a retreating platoon of the Frontshires Battalion after they suffer heavy losses.

Part III, 8 (305ff.). Clearing the Nero Trench, a lengthy phosgene gas attack, damaged cottages in the village, development or evolution of the soldier in the trenches, the decaying effect of the gas on the landscape, parcels from home and letters from Elizabeth, Fanny, and Mr. Upjohn (316-319).

Part III, 9 (320ff.). The beginning of a great battle, "two thousand British guns in action" (320), "an immense rhythmic harmony, a super-jazz of tremendous drums" (321), "nothing could live within the area of that storm except by a miraculous hazard; already in this first half-hour of bombardment hundreds upon hundreds of men would have been violently slain, smashed, torn, gouged, crushed, mutilated" (321).

Part III, 10 (322ff.). Preparing to attack the enemy line, the battle was "a timeless confusion, a chaos of noise, fatigue, anxiety, and horror" (323), the psychological change in soldiers who went through that battle—an "anxiety complex" and a "cynical discouragement" (323), crossing No Man's Land and entering German trenches, the carnage of death, the perils of the company runner, repositioning of lines, the cries of the wounded and the dying.

Part III, 11 (328ff.). Mop-up work, assessment of diminished troop strength, Winterbourne volunteers for a commission, death of other runners, feelings of guilt, mixed feelings about returning to England, feelings of “self-indifference” (337), the return to England.

Part III, 12 (340ff.). The “distance” of British society, the “insensitivity” of the soldier at home, Winterbourne’s destruction of things from his pre-war past, such as old sketches and a small portrait, the loneliness of the soldier who is fading out of memory and almost forgotten, the deception by the government to parents of soldiers (351-352), horrid stories from the Somme campaign (354), Officers’ Training Camp, a month on leave, mechanical personal relationships.

Part III, 13 (357ff.). In command of a company in Etaples, a careerist colonel, interaction in the trenches with the Canadians, the problem of inexperienced recruits, the psychological deterioration of Winterbourne (365-366), the heap of decay and dead bodies (366-367), the downing of a British airplane in No Man’s Land, the “wretched countryside” (368), the retreat of the Germans, the physical deterioration of Winterbourne (370-371), Winterbourne is killed.

Epilogue:      Eleven years after the fall of Troy,  
We, the old men—some of us nearly forty—  
Met and talked on the sunny rampart  
Over our wine, while the lizards scuttled  
In dusty grass, and the crickets chirred.

Some bared their wounds;  
Some spoke of the thirst, dry in the throat,  
And the heart-beat, in the din of battle;  
Some spoke of intolerable sufferings,  
The brightness gone from their eyes  
And the grey already thick in their hair.

And I sat a little apart  
From the garrulous talk and old memories,  
And I heard a boy of twenty  
Say petulantly to a girl, seizing her arm:  
“Oh, come away; why do you stand there  
Listening open-mouthed to the talk of old men?  
Haven’t you heard enough of Troy and Achilles?  
Why should they bore us for ever  
With an old quarrel and the names of dead men  
We never knew, and dull forgotten battles”?

And he drew her away,  
And she looked back and laughed  
As he spoke more contempt of us,  
Being now out of hearing.

And I thought of the graves by desolate Troy  
And the beauty of many young men now dust,  
And the long agony, and how useless it all was.  
And the talk still clashed about me  
Like the meeting of blade and blade.

And as they two moved further away  
He put an arm about her, and kissed her;  
And afterwards I heard their gay distant laughter.

And I looked at the hollow cheeks  
And the weary eyes and the grey-streaked heads  
Of the old men—nearly forty—about me;  
And I too walked away  
In an agony of helpless grief and pity.