

Wartime Refractions: *Editor's Preface*

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An e-mailer from the United States, responding to a review in an earlier edition of *Literature & History*, paused to think for a moment as he wrote: was the journal called *Literature & History* or *History & Literature*? It was an interesting hesitation and one that may have taxed the journal's founders over a quarter of a century ago. In the business of war, which this special issue addresses, the formulation is of particular relevance. Given the universality and consistency of war as an expression of political aims, its attendant representation in writing and other cultural forms might indeed suggest 'which comes first, history or literature?' as a legitimate question. The wars of the twentieth century, for example, have been mediated for subsequent generations by representations that will outlive the combatants: the poetry of the First World War, the novels and films of the Second World War, the songs, memories and Hollywood dramas of Vietnam. Yet these images and accounts clearly occupy a fragile space *between* wars and to a very large extent shape and inform the next one. Thus people marched off to the Second World War singing the songs of the First World War just as the current American president draws upon narratives of the Frontier in order to visualise the present war against terrorism, a war that is itself a response to an attack that could only be adequately described by some observers as resembling an image from a disaster movie. This kind of analogy perhaps confirms that the ideological relationship between history and fiction is at its most acute in the cycle of war, just as war itself is the great catalyst in the fusion of memory and amnesia. However asymmetrical war may become and however compounded by historical narratives of legitimacy and terrorism,

definition and determination, it will surely be fiction that has to deal with the image summoned by the soldier Williams in Shakespeare's *Henry V* of 'all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle' (IV.i.135).

The articles in this edition of *Literature & History* address the representation of war across a range of historical periods and in a variety of geographical locations, starting with Gavin Edwards's compelling piece on Watkin Tench. He explores the relationship between soldiering and storytelling in the late eighteenth century, and the impact of the French Revolution and its resonance in the settlement of New South Wales. Mary Hammond's account of *Vanity Fair* describes the paramount place occupied by the Battle of Waterloo in the shaping of an 'official' history of war in the mid-nineteenth century and Thackeray's critique of this practice in his satirical novel. John Simons has researched the broadsheets that were meant to boost the morale of soldiers and sailors in the First World War and during the following years. They reproduced inspirational extracts from fiction, accounts of earlier battles, or dreamy visions of home, in order to inspire those on active service. Simons's investigation of the criteria for the selection of these texts, and the means of their distribution, shows most clearly how 'literature' was thought to be able to influence history in an immediate and material way. Andrzej Gasiorek's work on the politics of cultural nostalgia in the years between the world wars is represented in this issue by his perceptive discussion of the Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*. Gasiorek examines the paradox in the book's vision of a feudal past as a response to a certain kind of political despair in the years following the First World War, exploring a number of key critical issues for an understanding of modernism in the light of some relatively unknown writing. For Nick Rance it is the Vietnam War that gave rise to a fundamental shift in the relationship between history and literature. Arguably, just as that war effected far-reaching changes in the tactics and sensibilities of US foreign policy (and its overall sense of its own national destiny), it also influenced the course of the American novel beyond measure. Rance examines Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* in the context of the 'new journalism' and the 'nonfiction novel' and moves on to offer a wide ranging account of the experiments in genre (including film) that proceeded from America's experiences of the Cold War and its involvement in South-East Asia. In the context of recent events in America this essay has a particular authority, yet it is hoped that this entire special issue on war, including Roger Richardson's informative review article on books concerned with the English Civil Wars, will raise important issues about the relationship between literature and history in the context of this most enduring field of human activity.

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