

Article received on 30th October 2014
Article accepted on 17th December 2014
UDC: 78.01
316.75:94(100)''1914/1918''

Jeffrey Wood*

Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee

THE GREAT WAR AND THE CHALLENGE OF MEMORY

Abstract: An assessment of the responses of “classical” composers to World War I. A discussion of the responsibilities of the composer as they respond to war will be followed by a presentation of four different “modes” of artistic response: “heroic,” “elegiac,” “denunciation,” and “reconciliation.” These responses represent different modes of expression by which composers are able to respond to events such as World War I. Specific works representing these responses – Arthur Bliss’ *Morning Heroes*, Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, Edward Elgar’s *Violoncello Concerto*, John Foulds’ *A World Requiem* and Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* – will also be discussed.

Key words: World War I, remembrance, memorialization in music, Paul Fussell

In this article I would like to discuss the relationship between World War I and the varying kinds of musical responses it generated. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, I would like to discuss the relationship between war and remembrance itself, as seen from the standpoint of classical art music. Since the issue of how creative artists respond to historically cataclysmic events is a larger issue than just responses to this specific war by these specific composers, I will not confine my discussion exclusively to World War I. After all, it must be admitted that it is often difficult to separate the world wars: even Winston Churchill himself felt that World War II was simply the second part of a larger thirty years’ war.¹

* Author contact information: WoodJ@apsu.edu

¹ P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*. Harlow/London, Longman, 1988, 15.

One case in point concerning this conflation of the wars might be a work that is generally considered to be the single most famous musical response to war, Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*. This extraordinary work – which is very much a World War II piece – is often mistaken as a World War I memorial because it uses the poetry of World War I poet Wilfred Owen. This misunderstanding has appeared most notably in Hew Strachan's short history of the war, *The First World War* (2003) where he states that Britten had "used nine poems by Wilfred Owen in his *War Requiem*, which he dedicated to the memory of four friends who had been killed in 1914–18."² Given that Britten himself was born in 1913, the fact is that three of the four dedicatees of the *War Requiem* were killed in World War II between 1942 and 1944, and the fourth, who also served in that war, died in 1959. This error has been repeated often throughout the Internet.

Among the biggest challenges facing creative artists confronting the challenges of remembrance is the Holocaust, an event that has generated a tremendous amount of discussion about memorialization. Memorials are created, and each has inevitably brought its own kind of often bitter controversy. With this in mind, some of what I will discuss here will refer to the Holocaust as it has generated the greatest amount of discussion along these lines. I do not think this is entirely out of place: while the Holocaust has come to dominate issues of memorialization as they pertain to war and remembrance, it should be remembered that

It took a second world war to make the meaning of the first reasonably clear. ... In the Battle of Verdun, for example, casualties on both sides numbered over 750,000; at the Somme it was over 1,200,000 and the battle lines hardly changed. ... If Europeans could accept casualties on such a scale, they could accept almost anything in the way of slaughter. ... Verdun and the Somme opened the way to Auschwitz and Hiroshima.³

We are faced with another challenge when we consider memorializing World War I in music. While some of these events (World War II, the Holocaust, 9/11) remain within living memory, for the Great War – with the recent passing of the last surviving veterans – this is no longer true. This puts a particular responsibility on those who would wish to honor and memorialize that conflict.

The fact is, as time passes, the challenges of memory and memorialization become more complicated. The greatest danger seems to be the transformation of an event from its focus on survivors to the creators of what one might call

² Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, New York, Viking Penguin, 2003, xv-xvi.

³ Jack J. Roth, *World War I: A Turning Point in Modern History*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, 4–6.

“war mediations.”⁴ In an article about Steven Spielberg’s film *Saving Private Ryan*, author Nicholas Confessore stated that

For many Americans, World War II has been replaced by *World War II* – written by Stephen E. Ambrose, directed by Steven Spielberg, hosted by Tom Brokaw, and starring Tom Hanks.⁵

In other words, in the process of memorializing the war in that film, a distortion occurred that fundamentally changed our perception of that war, and not perhaps in an entirely good way.

Our perceptions of the Great War are no less a victim of this kind of distortion, and this occurs sometimes in surprising ways. In the preface to his anthology of First World War verse *Never Such Innocence*, editor Martin Stephen related an experience he had, interviewing a war veteran, a Norfolk man who had served during the war with the artillery:

He listened carefully as I waxed enthusiastic about Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Yes, he agreed, they were fine men, and fine poets. But, he added, I was not to think that they were altogether representative. ... He remembered the war with sadness, sometimes with repulsion, but more often with pride. They had taken on the most professional army in Europe, and beaten it in a fair fight.⁶

This example shows how even with the best of intentions the memorialization of events as complex and cataclysmic as World War I can sometimes distort the experience – however unintentionally – and shape it into something else.

The challenge of artistic memorialization, however, goes beyond even this. One of the most famous dictums on Holocaust memorialization was that of philosopher Theodor Adorno, who wrote:

The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.⁷

And while the slaughter on the Western Front pales in the face of the vast numbers of victims in the Holocaust, it would be wrong to belittle the dead of the earlier war simply because the numbers are smaller or that the victims were soldiers. In other words, one might just as easily say that to write poetry or music

⁴ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, New York: Routledge, 1999, xii.

⁵ Nicholas Confessore, “Selling Private Ryan: Stephen Ambrose, Tom Brokaw, Steven Spielberg, and the Abuse of Nostalgia,” *American Prospect*, vol. 12, No. 17, 7 June 2002.

⁶ Martin Stephen, *Never Such Innocence: A New Anthology of Great War Verse*, London, Buchan and Enright, 1988, 7.

⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, 1955, MIT Press. Reprinted London, 1967, 34.

after the deaths of 9,000,000 combatants and 7,000,000 civilians in World War I could also be seen as barbaric.

Nevertheless, we are confronted with war memorials in all forms of artistic media. Artistic memorials about World War I will continue to be written, and this is as it should be and, in fact, as it must be.⁸

I would like to present what I see as the problems concerning war memorialization in the form of a circular paradox:

[1] *We have an obligation to remember war and to commemorate and honor both its victims and its survivors.*

This may seem like stating the obvious, but there are significant challenges that artists must face if they are to meet this obligation. While we are reminded of George Santayana's famous statement that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it",⁹ some historical events represent significant challenges to conventional memorialization. In a 1974 essay entitled "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," Rabbi Irving Greenberg offered a "working principle" for memorialization of the Holocaust, which could be applied, I believe, to the memorialization of any major modern conflict. He wrote:

Let us offer, then, as a working principle the following: No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.¹⁰

Jeffrey Milligan, in his essay "Teaching in the Presence of Burning Children," responded to Rabbi Greenberg's dictum by saying:

[O]ne is tempted to remain silent in the face of such a principle lest anything one says falls short of it and risks banality, risks a trivial response to the most profound and troubling of human experiences. Moreover, the problem of evil and the inevitability of the tragic have vexed philosophical and theological reflection for centuries. [Greenberg's response] is simultaneously a call to speak out in response to such ex-

⁸ I should add here that in the interests of full disclosure, I have myself written many works along these lines, including a series of vocal works concerning the First World War: *MCMX-IV* (1985), *Kriegeslieder* (1988) and *Iyúl' 1914/July 1914* (1991), culminating in a chamber opera based in part on Lyn Macdonald's *The Roses of No Man's Land* (1980) called *Diaries: A Parable for Voices* (1995), as well as *Night* (1997/2004), *Lamentationes Ieremiæ Prophetæ* (1998) and *In the Dark Times Will There Also Be Singing?* (2011) concerning the Holocaust. In each of these works, I have struggled with the questions I raise here.

⁹ George Santayana (1905) *The Life of Reason*, "Reason in Common Sense," New York, Prometheus Books, 1998, 82.

¹⁰ Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust," in Eva Fleischer, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, 23.

periences as well as a measure of the credibility of such speech. ... We must, therefore, respond, albeit from the ultimately inadequate, provisional and circumscribed locations of our own experience, understanding, and insight.”¹¹

While commemorating the Holocaust and commemorating the First World War are obviously two very different things, Rabbi Greenberg’s “working principle” underlines the seriousness of the task of remembrance. Put another way, it would do memorializations of the Great War a grave disservice if all that is done is to trot out arrangements of *It’s a Long Way to Tipperary* and *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag*, as if these and other popular songs of the period fully summarized the war experience.

[2] In commemorating and remembering, however, we must acknowledge that we cannot possibly know or understand what the participants went through – the soldiers, the survivors, the victims – so therefore we have no right to pretend that we can understand, and as such, we must forego any right to speak for them: to do so would be an act of co-opting their suffering for our own purposes and as such would be morally and ethically wrong.

A very interesting take on this problem appeared in a recent article by Robert Zaretsky, “Dissolution: My Life as an Accidental Holocaust Expert – and Why I Decided to Quit,” where the author relates an experience he had addressing an audience as a Holocaust scholar where an elderly man raised his hand and announced he was a survivor.

[The man] suggested [that] anyone who tried to offer a literary or theoretical account of Auschwitz was little better than an interloper. I tried to respond but soon gave up; as a survivor, [the man] commanded not just the moral high ground but the ontological depths, too. What could I say? He was right: I had not been there. ... With a wince, I recalled Elie Wiesel’s claim: “Any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined about what happened.” As a historian, I knew Wiesel’s statement was nonsense; but as a Jew facing a survivor, I knew it was irrefutable.¹²

This clearly states the enormous challenge that memorializing the Holocaust – and by extension both world wars – presents to anyone who chooses to take it on.

[3] However, the only way that we can remember, to fulfill our obligation to remember and our obligation to the dead, is, in fact, to speak for the dead. Once the survivors are gone, and an event is no longer in living memory, they are no longer around

¹¹ Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, “Teaching in the Presence of Burning Children: Attending to Tragedy and Faith in Philosophy of/and Education,” *Educational Foundations*, 2003, 55–56.

¹² Robert Zaretsky, “Dissolution: My Life as an Accidental Holocaust Expert – and Why I Decided to Quit.” *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*, 19 December 2011.

to bear witness. Therefore, even though co-opting the suffering of others is morally and ethically wrong, we must speak for them because ...

[1] We have an obligation to remember war and to commemorate and honor both its survivors and its victims.

It may seem that I have overstated my concern: after all, isn't any form of memorialization, if done with sincerity, meaningful? For myself, I believe it to be of great significance artistically. As a composer, one ignores these concerns at the peril of producing music that is dishonest to the subject matter it pretends to represent. It dishonors the memories of the survivors and the dead by creating what amounts to trivial or even distorted responses to some of the most profound and troubling of experiences in human history.

Four Responses

I am going to attempt to organize the musical responses to war into four categories. These categories, of necessity artificial, might help in bringing about an understanding about how art music has dealt with the subject of war and some of the challenges that these approaches create.

I am using as my model categories that Paul Fussell defined for the literature of World War I in his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), a study of the cultural impact of World War I on modern society as seen through the literature of the group of British writers known collectively as "the war poets." Fussell divides that literature into three "modes": "epic," "realistic" and "ironic." The epic mode can be defined as where the hero stands above us, in the manner of gods; the realistic mode is defined as one where the hero's freedom of action is about the same as ours: our hopes and aspirations are theirs; finally the ironic mode is defined as where the hero's freedom of action is decidedly less than ours. His life is bounded by the grotesque, the absurd, and the imminence of death.¹³

I'm going to adapt Fussell's terms by calling my three "modes" – to which I will add a fourth – the "heroic mode," more or less equivalent to Fussell's "epic" mode; the "elegiac mode," equivalent to his "realistic" mode, a mode where the hero's tragedy is our tragedy and his suffering our suffering; and finally the "denunciation mode," loosely parallel to Fussell's "ironic" mode, where the hero, as the victim of the absurdity of war and the immanence of death denounces the actions of those who have put him in his predicament. To this I add a fourth mode, the "reconciliation mode," where the intent of the artist is not to celebrate

¹³ J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, 226–229.

heroically, or to simply mourn, or much less to denounce, but to offer an artistic space where people may come together with a greater understanding of what is being memorialized. Of course, many pieces will not comfortably fit into these categories, but for our purposes they will be useful.

The Heroic Mode

While the war music of the 19th century often fits into this category, this is a mode that has tended not to serve war remembrance in the 20th century terribly well. It was in fact the First World War that changed this artistic climate: Paul Fussell observed,

We may conclude that, (as Francis Hope has said,) ‘In a not altogether rhetorical sense, all poetry written since 1918 is war poetry.’¹⁴

I would extend this to include really all forms of artistic expression and not just poetry. There were pieces that were written for the purposes of what can be described as propaganda. Certainly the former Soviet Union provides no shortage of examples of what was known as “socialist realism,” and these heroic pieces were often dreadful, even when written by otherwise fine composers.

There is one notable example of the heroic from the years immediately following the war. English composer Arthur Bliss (1891–1975), who served with the Royal Fusiliers during the war, found himself struggling with his wartime memories in the aftermath. By way of an act of exorcism, he began to compose a new work. The result was *Morning Heroes* (1930). This large-scale work scored for speaker (called “orator”), chorus and large orchestra struggles at times to find a musical and gestural language appropriate for expressing the nearly inexpressible. The piece attempts to present the war heroically, using texts from Homer’s *Iliad* (“Hector’s Farewell to Andromache”), Walt Whitman’s *Drum Taps* (“The City Arming”), as well as poems from two war poets, Wilfred Owen (“Spring Offensive”) and Robert Nichols (“Dawn on the Somme”). It is not always a comfortable mix that Bliss creates between the war poems and the spoken text from the *Iliad*, and the work could be described as being somewhat overly grandiose in its rhetoric. It is clear that Bliss was attempting what some would say was the impossible by trying to cast World War I in terms of ancient Greek epic/heroic models.

Denunciation Mode

The denunciation mode is probably the most familiar response to the modern artist. It is, in fact, almost a required part of the contemporary artist-figure,

¹⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, 325.

vociferously condemning an insensitive and ignorant public for their aesthetic blindness and moral shortcomings. However, in the years immediately following the end of World War I, any piece that denounced the war would clearly not serve the needs of a public still in mourning. Because of the nature of its more public presentation, music had greater difficulty offering denunciations of the war in the years that followed than did the painters, poets and authors of the period. Poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, painters such as Otto Dix and authors such as Robert Graves contributed to our popular sense of World War I being a war that, in the words of historian Leon Wolff, “had meant nothing, solved nothing, and proved nothing.”¹⁵

One problem composers immediately ran into was that outside of the musical experiments of modernist composers such as Arnold Schönberg, Béla Bartók and others, traditional musical languages seemed insufficient for describing what they had experienced. So it is not surprising that probably one of the most successful denunciation responses to the war came in the form of Alban Berg’s (1885–1935) opera, *Wozzeck*. While not specifically a World War I piece, the work was written when the composer was on leave from his regiment in 1917–1918 and shows the influence of the war in its treatment of its title character. In him we have the perfect manifestation of the tragic-comic hero whose life is bounded by the grotesque and the absurd. One can also see echoes in *Wozzeck* of earlier works that dealt with similar kinds of victims, from Arnold Schönberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) – whose “moon-drunk” Everyman is presented in a series of grotesquely tragicomic vignettes; to Igor Stravinsky’s *Le sacre du printemps* (1913), whose death of a “chosen innocent” before watching “elders” become chillingly prophetic (the work was originally titled “The Victim”).¹⁶

In *Wozzeck* Berg found a perfect expression of the feelings of victimization that permeated Europe after the war. The title character is unable to connect in any meaningful way with the world around him, and ends up destroying the one person he loves (Marie) and ultimately destroying himself. He is a tortured Everyman, a victim of the meaninglessness of post-war life. Berg’s musical language juxtaposes passages of almost romantic tonality and lyricism with a far harsher atonal expressionism, a perfect mixture of musical language that few composers were able to master.

¹⁵ Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign*, London, Penguin Books, 1979, 317.

¹⁶ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989, 39.

Elegiac Mode

In recent years the elegiac mode has taken on greater prominence than even the denunciation mode. Elegiac works can be hard to pin down to a specific event: oftentimes the grief expressed is one that goes beyond words, and, thus, the original inspiration for the grief can sometimes be lost. One superb example is Edward Elgar's *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra in e minor*, op. 85 (1918–1919). This work is a powerful and heartfelt elegy, and is one of the most moving examples of elegiac war music from the 20th century. One of its more extraordinary aspects is the composer's decision to approach memorialization without the benefit of words. Elgar had written more overtly patriotic works with text, such as *The Spirit of England* (1916) using poems of Lawrence Binyon and *The Fringes of the Fleet* (1917), and using the poems of Rudyard Kipling. However, the *Violoncello Concerto* is the far superior memorial. Its haunting 9/8 theme – written in March 1918 in Sussex, where the composer could hear artillery from across the Channel – drew the composer out of a period of inactivity brought on by the war. As an instrumental piece it is not possible to assign specific meanings or interpretations to various moments. Nevertheless, insofar as an elegiac response to the war, the *Violoncello Concerto* is one of the finest examples of the genre.

Reconciliation Mode

I define this fourth mode as an attempt on the part of the composer to go beyond the earlier modes: these pieces are not interested in patriotic display; nor are they content to “point a finger” and call down righteous wrath upon monstrous war-mongers. And they are not simply offering a dirge for the fallen, however heartfelt. These works are attempting to get past these responses into a more transcendent realm that pleads for peace without shirking responsibility for war in the first place.

There are few works that have achieved this transcendence in my mind: while certain works seem to fulfill this role, even though they are not technically “war pieces” (Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* is a good example), among works that were written in response to World War I specifically, John Foulds' (1880–1939) remarkable, if somewhat eccentric, *A World Requiem* (1918–1921) was certainly a noble attempt in this direction. For a brief time after the première on 11 November 1923, *A World Requiem* almost stood as the “official” musical response to the war. It received performances through 1926, at which point it fell from favour and lay neglected until a performance given on 11 November 2007 brought it out of obscurity.

A World Requiem is a curious work: it mixes elements of the heroic and the elegiac, but it is ultimately a powerful attempt at a broader and more inclusive

response to the war. Foulds avoids specifics as Bliss did with his use of war poetry; nor does he opt for a conventional religious response as might be expected in the years immediately following the war. The libretto, assembled by Foulds's wife Maud MacCarthy, is an elaborate mixture of lines from the *Missa pro defunctis*, the Old and New Testaments, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and fifteenth century Hindumystic Kabir. It attempts to mix religious traditions still within a largely Christian context, in an attempt to create a more global awareness (there are calls to all quarters of the earth in the movement "Audite," and in the "In Pace" movement the word "Om" [spelled "Aum" in the score] – the mystical Sanskrit sound sacred to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism – is used). In the end, the strange mixture of texts and philosophies, along with a fairly conventional musical language, which at times is at odds with Bliss' conception of the piece, prevented it from becoming the "world requiem" the composer had hoped for.

Certainly the most successful reconciliatory work of the 20th century has been the *War Requiem* of Benjamin Britten (1913–1976). Written for the consecration of Coventry Cathedral in 1962, Britten's vast canvas brings widely disparate elements together for a work of unparalleled power and emotional impact. As indicated earlier, the *War Requiem* is not a World War I piece, for all that it has been popularly connected with that war. That being said, the *War Requiem* has become inextricably and perhaps unavoidably connected with the First World War both in the literature on the piece and even in one notable filmic interpretation (Derek Jarman's *Requiem* [1988], which superimposes a series of filmed silent vignettes over Britten's own recording of the piece from 1963).

Britten's *War Requiem* is unique among requiems in that it gives the dead the opportunity to have their say. When one remembers that a requiem is really intended for the living, this is an important distinction. The performing forces also reflect these disparate elements: it uses a full symphony orchestra with chorus, representing the massed voices of all people; a chamber orchestra with tenor and baritone soloists, representing the voices of the dead; and a boy's choir accompanied by a small organ that is used to project a kind of angelic liturgy that points beyond death. The texts also reflect this tension in Britten's combination of the *Missa pro defunctis* in Latin with Owen's poems in English.

The groups are in conflict throughout most of the piece. In the first movement, the "Requiem æternam," after the massed voices of humanity ask that the dead be granted "eternal rest" –intoned over chimes articulating a C – F-sharp tritone that dominates the work and which musically represent a dramatic tension inherent in the piece –the tenor soloist responds with the opening line of Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth": "What passing bells for these who die as cattle?" From the very beginning of the piece we are made aware that there will be no "comfortable words" in this requiem.

In the “Agnus Dei” Britten combines the two orchestras for the first time. The sacrificial message of both the Latin and English texts are important here. In the requiem Mass, the communicant asks to “*dona eis requiem, dona eis requiem sempiternam*/grant them rest, grant them rest everlasting.” However Britten departs from this by having his tenor soloist, who has so far been singing Owen’s “At a Calvary Near the Ancre,” add the Latin words from the daily Mass, “*dona nobis pacem*/grant us peace” in response, the only words in Latin sung by the soloists. This allows the dead to, in effect, cross over from their place to address a greater humanity. The entire movement is superimposed over an ostinato built off of the same C – F-sharp tritone. This is the moment of reconciliation for the *War Requiem*, between the living and the dead. It is a powerful and extraordinary moment.

Conclusion

Of the pieces discussed here, only a small number have successfully entered the popular imagination as an appropriate response to war. The challenges of memorialization being what they are, it is interesting to note that in two very recent works, Steve Reich’s Holocaust-themed *Different Trains* (1988) and John Adams’ 9/11 tribute *On the Transmigration of Souls* (2002) the composers depend on pre-recorded voices to make their point. Perhaps, in so doing, they avoid the pitfall of attempting to memorialize survivors in a voice different than that of the survivors themselves: in a sense it is left for the survivor alone to speak, a variation on Britten’s use of Owen’s poetry to represent the voices of the dead. These recorded voices bring a form of legitimacy to these composers’ memorializations.

And while this is certainly a graceful solution to the problems I have articulated here, it is by no means clear that it fully addresses the difficulties of memorialization. The voices, however authentic, are frozen in time: we cannot engage with these voices, we cannot talk to them or ask questions of them; the voices cannot be interpreted. In time, I fear that the voices would become predictable, their every nuance memorized and thus they will exist without spontaneity, without a necessary degree of immediacy. We already know what they are going to say and how they will say it: the reality, however horrific, becomes muted because the voices never change.

Nevertheless, however fraught with problems war memorialization continues to be, there is a vital role for the creative artist to play in our collective remembrance. There is a need for the kind of nuanced, carefully thought out response as seen in these works – a non-commercial response if you will – as this music has the power to bring us closer to understanding our feelings about

these events than any sentimental Hollywood blockbuster, however good the latter may make us feel.

One of the greatest fears of survivors is that they will be forgotten, that their experiences will no longer be remembered, or, worse, that their experiences will cease to be believed because later generations find the memory “inconvenient.” But when their voices are finally stilled with the passage of time, I would have to say that even the recordings of their memories won’t be enough. It will have to be interpreted: by historians, certainly, but also by artists. With all deference to Elie Wiesel, I can’t entirely agree with his statement that “any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined about what happened.” Their testimony is vital, of course, but it will become inevitably frozen: the living voice will be silenced, and only the memory will remain.

Creative artists can help. However, they must continually explore their motives and biases. They must consider the paradox of war and memory and attempt to treat the subject matter with the seriousness it deserves, that it is, in fact, entitled to. To forego this responsibility would dishonor the memory of these events.

The pieces mentioned here are only a very small sampling of works that deserve to be part of our collective consciousness relative to our memories of these events. The best of them are not designed to make us feel better about ourselves, nor are they designed to lay blame. They avoid the pitfalls of excessive patriotic display, overbearing self-righteous condemnation or of elegiac sentimentalization. They achieve a balance of the expressive modes I have presented here, with a recognition of mutual responsibility that allows for a reconciliation of them all. That is what they have to offer, and in so doing, they honor the memory. And this is what we are obliged to do.