Introduction

The First World War has occupied a central place in British popular memory for almost a century. Hardly any other historical event has been referenced so frequently and remembered so consistently and single-mindedly. With a plethora of rituals and memorials in place, the First World War continues to be part of popular consciousness in Britain, and although many of these commemorative efforts have come to encompass other wars as well as World War I, such as the British Legion's annual Poppy Appeal, they remain intricately connected in the minds of most Britons with what is seen as the archetypal modern war. The 'Great War' that failed to end all war is still the first to be invoked in many pacifist protests. Yet contemporary remembrance of the First World War is affected by the same selective processes that characterise all historical events: a narrowing down of what actually happened, of a plethora of different experiences and stories of the war, to a powerful but reductive master narrative. This process has resulted in a myth of the war that condenses a complex four-year conflict fought on a variety of fronts by vast numbers of people from all over the world to a nutshell image that is easily summarised and remembered. Writing about the place of the First World War in British literature and culture at a period of a renewed interest in the war in the early 1990s, Samuel Hynes described the war's myth as a master narrative of 'a generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England',[1] whose subsequent suffering and disillusionment served to establish an almost unbridgeable gap between pre-war Britain and the post-war world.

Taught in schools across Britain, used as the basis for innumerable films, documentaries, popular histories and television series, the myth of the war is intricately connected with the war's literature and centres on the Western Front trenches and the stricken soldiers and veterans described so powerfully in the war poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. This Western Front narrative has demonstrated enormous staying power

and is so deeply embedded in popular consciousness that it has so far resisted a variety of attempts by revisionist historians and critics to widen and nuance our view of the war. Dominic Hibberd, writing at the same time as Hynes, points towards this phenomenon when he states, 'There is no typical writer of the Great War; the literature which it produced was as vast and diverse as the colossal human effort which the war represented. Only a very little of that literature is still read today.'[2] For most Britons, their image of the First World War is informed largely by their familiarity with its poetry: Sassoon, Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, Edward Thomas and Rupert Brooke will be familiar to most readers who have been educated in British schools. For many, a selection of war novels and memoirs will also feature in their perception of the war, from Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) to Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) and Erich Maria Remarque's international bestseller *Im Westen Nichts Neues* [*All Quiet on the Western Front*] (1929). Film and television adaptations of these war classics have cemented both their appeal and imaginative hold over the war's popular memory in Britain. More recent literary treatment of the war reinforces these images, such as Sebastian Faulks's novel *Birdsong* (1993), adapted for the BBC and screened in January 2012.

Short fiction, on the other hand, rarely features in the war's literary memory, despite the fact that First World War short stories can be seen as 'particularly fruitful in terms of offering contexts through which readers can begin to complicate or question their responses to particular events and topics'.[3] While Rudyard Kipling and D.H. Lawrence might be tentatively named as writers who addressed the First World War in their short stories, few other names spring to mind. As this study shows, this is not due to ignorance or ill will, but results both from inevitable processes of selective reading and remembering, and from the particular circumstances affecting the production, distribution and consumption of the short story. Great War short stories encompass a wide variety of stylistic, artistic and ideological approaches. While this study looks at examples from the full range, in cultural terms it is the largely formulaic fiction published in magazines that is particularly interesting in its strategies of representing the war. Although later stories are a different matter, which will be treated separately in the final chapter of this book, First World War short stories in general (and magazine stories in particular) document a period in which a diversity of experiences and memories of the war were still existing side by side, with little precedence given to any one specific version. As Dan Todman points out, '[t]he inter-war years saw Britons wanting to

remember very different versions of the war. Although none completely obscured the horror and the suffering inflicted by the war, the meanings derived from those experiences varied widely.'[4]

Although the war found expression in a number of literary genres, from histories to memoirs and novels, to the particularly abundant poetry of the war, none of these other genres fulfil quite the same snapshot function as the short story. Longer prose texts tended to be more panoramic and analytical in their treatment of the war, whereas poetry frequently sought to transcend the specific nature of one war and to appeal to universal human values and experiences – whether these are patriotism and sacrifice, or, in Wilfred Owen's famous words, 'the Pity of War'. Most war novels and memoirs of the inter-war period offer an in-depth view of the war's experience from the perspective of only one of its protagonists – often the archetypal junior officer (anti-)hero – and the canonised poetry of the war provides short commemorative texts useful for purposes of remembrance or anti-war protest. First World War short stories in all their diversity offer something else: a multi-perspectival view of the war which allows us to re-assess our current mythology of the war and to map a cultural history of the war's experience by scrutinising a genre located at the pulse and in the everyday sphere of its readers.

Due to their publication primarily in magazines, short stories were one of the most ephemeral genres in which the experience of the war was reflected. While they may not always be easily accessible to contemporary readers and researchers and sport gaps and oversights of their own, Great War short stories hidden in out-of-print story anthologies and back numbers of magazines can contribute significantly to completing our image of the First World War beyond the typical Western Front narrative. Short stories, particularly those published in popular magazines, were part of a narrative framework that offered readers a means of comparison for their own war experiences, a context within which they could locate themselves.[5] These stories cannot be read out of the context of other war writing, but although they cannot be said to be a unified body of work, they fulfil distinct social functions jointly with but perhaps more effectively than longer narrative prose texts. Just like actual lives, war stories reflect the multi-layered nature of war experience and both challenge and confirm the war's mythology. Their contribution during and immediately after the war was to help readers shape their own narrative identities as survivors and witnesses of war by placing them in a context of readily available fictional war narratives. Their very diversity allowed even those whose experiences have since come to be marginalised or forgotten to discover

themselves in what they read, to compare their experiences to fictional models, or to model their own behaviour on that of fictional characters.

Why is it, then, that First World War short stories have been largely disregarded for so long? This question takes us into the heart of research on the war's mythology, bound up as it is with what one might call the literary memory of the war. The war texts that have come to form such a potent part of the Western Front myth of World War I – the wartime trench poetry and disillusioned novels and memoirs of the late 1920s – are literary testimonies of immense power, in an ideological and often also an artistic sense. Because most of us have been reared on these writings in our perception of the war, it is hard to look beyond them and beyond the mythology of the war of which they form such an integral part. Difficulty also results from the fact that these texts are by no means giving us a *false* image of the war. Just as the myth of the First World War is reductive rather than factually incorrect, these canonical war texts are simply limited in the view on the war that they offer readers, restricted as they are to a predominantly male military or military-related experience of the conflict. The challenge lies in complementing them to gain a better view of the whole picture, rather than discarding these canonical war writings altogether in favour of a wholly new perception of the war. Short stories, as Andrew Maunder has argued, can 'offer a fuller picture of the war; snapshots that give us access to a different world view'.[6] They can shock and disturb as much as the most graphic war memoir, such as the privately published 'The German Prisoner' (1935) by James Hanley, in which two British soldiers torture and kill a youthful German soldier, or I.A.R. Wylie's 'All Dressed Up' (1930), which shows the devastating consequences of trying to turn reluctant civilians into soldiers. They can also throw new light on writers we thought we knew, such as Jessie Pope, better known as the much-reviled covert addressee of Owen's 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', whose short stories betray a much more nuanced and sensitive side of this writer of racy recruitment poems.[7]

Over the past decade, the First World War short story has slowly gained in critical acknowledgement, primarily but not exclusively through the publication of specialised anthologies, such as Trudi Tate's *Women, Men and the Great War* (1995) and the *Penguin Book of First World War Stories* (2007, eds. Barbara Korte and Ann-Marie Einhaus). The most recent and most groundbreaking anthology in this line is Andrew Maunder's *British Literature of World War I: The Short Story and the Novella* (2011), which forms part of a series of editions of little-known war texts and focuses on forgotten short stories mostly by popular writers. The anthology market and its impact on the reception of First World War short stories will

be discussed in depth in Chapter 3. Naturally, these new publications on the short fiction of World War I must be seen before the backdrop of a wealth of critical material on the First World War and its cultural and literary history, as well as criticism on the short story as a genre. This study owes a great debt to a range of seminal studies of the past three decades, such as Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined* (1990), Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1990), Rosa Maria Bracco's *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War; 1919–1939* (1993), and Vincent Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003) to name but a few, as well as to some groundbreaking studies in the war's cultural history, including Janet S.K. Watson's *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (2004), Dan Todman's *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005) and Adrian Gregory's *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (2008), which in turn lean on earlier work such as Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965) and Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Although I may in places disagree with their conclusions, my own perspective on First World War writing has evolved from three decades of revisionist research in the war's literary and cultural history, and any disagreements primarily result from my looking at a different genre and new source material than these previous studies. While my work on the short story of the First World War builds on these earlier studies, it also endeavours to negotiate between acknowledging existing research and avoiding to simply repeat lines of argument that are already well-established. There may be the occasional moment of disappointment on finding that a particularly evocative story has not been included in the present study, or that its analysis and previous critical treatment have received less attention than they seem to merit. The purpose of my study is explicitly to move away from texts that are already well-explored towards texts and aspects of the war that have so far received little or no critical attention. References to existing critical material are consequently often kept down to a minimum to afford more room for the treatment of hitherto unexplored material.

The overall aim of this book is two-fold. One of its purposes is to engage with the existing mythology of the war by opening up a wealth of fictional writing about the war that is also a source of alternative cultural history. It also endeavours, however, to answer a number of more specific questions. The key concern of this study is why a genre as productive and popular during the First World War as the short story did not become part of the war's literary memory, unlike, for instance, the similarly prolific poetry. Following from this central question, a secondary concern addressed is how far the specific genre characteristics of the short story on the one

hand, and the stories' treatment of the subject of war on the other, are at the root of their non-canonicity. Last but not least, this book strives to determine how these matters change over time, bearing in mind that short stories about the war are still being published. Its main proposition is to view short stories about the First World War as crucial contributors to two important social functions: on the one hand, they helped contemporary readers reflect on, evaluate and come to terms with their own experience of the war by offering a wide range of different fictional interpretations to choose from, and on the other, they constitute for modern readers a cultural archive of the war that can challenge and add depth to the myth of the war and its literary canon.

Although Andrew Maunder has recently opened up the field of First World War short fiction both through his anthology and a chapter on war stories in *The British Short Story* (Liggins, Maunder and Robbins, 2010), there exist at present no book-length critical studies of World War I short fiction. The few monographs or articles on the wider subject of First World War literature that discuss some of the war's short stories do so briefly, in an incidental manner, and only as a supplement to discussions of longer prose texts or poetry. Recently, excellent work has been done on magazine short stories in particular, mostly with a specialised research interest in mind: Carol Acton has contributed a fascinating essay on the treatment of the First World War in popular magazines for young working-class women,[8] and Michael Paris's work explores the juvenile literature of the Great War, its origins and continuities.[9] None of this recent work, however, has set out to take a systematic look at the short story of the war in particular. It is in this sense that this book makes its contribution to existing research, in opening up a vista on short stories of the war as a whole, with regard to a wide variety of forms and subject matter, as well as their peculiarities of publication and reception.

In book-length studies of the war's literature, short fiction does not usually feature or receives only passing attention, mainly in connection with modernist writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf or Katherine Mansfield. Early influential studies such as Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965), Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), as well as Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined* (1990), and indeed more recent works such as Sarah Cole's *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (2003) and Santanu Das's *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005), largely favour other genres over short fiction, particularly the prose memoir, the autobiographical novel and the poetry of the war. Historical studies, on the other hand, tend to either draw on

oral history interviews and contemporary news reports, or work with literary texts that already form part of the established canon. The resulting selective approach, which often takes recourse to the same limited range of literary testimonials, has the potential to unwittingly skew our critical engagement with the war. Exploring the short-story genre as a new field of writing about the war contributes to opening up new avenues for critical inquiry.

While this book is by no means the first to critically engage with the mythology of the First World War, it draws on a wide range of new primary material and adopts a wider temporal scope, leading it up to the end of the twentieth century. Most existing studies focus on already canonised war fiction, or adopt a very specific angle on the war's literary heritage, such as gender roles, class, memory, or propaganda. A comparable approach to the one of this book is taken in Janet Watson's *Fighting Different Wars* (2004), but Watson's aim is primarily to revisit 'classic' war texts rather than to work with new literary material, and her analysis is informed by a particular interest in class distinctions with regard to the war's experience. Brian Bond, in *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (2002), similarly limits himself to reinvestigating canonical war texts from an historical angle. Adrian Gregory in his more recent *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (2008) explores new material alongside classic war texts, but as an historian uses exclusively non-fictional sources from newspapers and oral history transcripts. Jane Potter's *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914–1918* (2005) is one of the few literary studies to also examine popular narratives of the war, but Potter's study has a specific interest in publishing history and primarily focuses on gender issues in soldiers' and nurses' memoirs, whereas my own approach is deliberately broader.

Accounts of the history and theory of the short-story genre mostly fail to address First World War-related short fiction beyond some modernist work. Adrian Hunter's *Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (2007), necessarily reductive, restricts its exploration of early twentieth-century short fiction to modernist, experimental fiction. Paul March-Russell in *The Short Story: An Introduction* (2009) acknowledges the critical bias amongst academics in favour of the modernist, 'plotless' short story, but nevertheless devotes his chapter on early twentieth-century short fiction to modernist narratives, helping to perpetuate the idea that the First World War invariably triggered stylistic innovation when he says 'One of the many casualties of war […] is the linear narrative: the ability to tell a story straight is irredeemably affected by the stop-start

procedure of trench warfare, in which intense bursts of violence are contrasted with long periods of boredom'.[10] The sole exception to this rule is the aforementioned *The British Short Story* (2010) by Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder and Ruth Robbins, which devotes a section to First World War stories in the realist style. Their selection, however, is necessarily confined by the bounds of a book chapter and consequently focuses on only a few well-researched representatives of familiar literary positions: 'soldier-writer' 'Sapper' H.C. McNeile, 'war-lover' Rudyard Kipling and 'outsider' Radclyffe Hall. While the authors challenge the idea that war writing was necessarily modernist, the aim and scope of their book does not allow for in-depth critical engagement with the war's mythology or the potential of First World War short fiction to challenge and complement existing cultural assumptions about the war.

This study adopts a largely thematic approach to the subject of First World War short stories, covering a range of topics that seem of particular pertinence. The stories treated in this book account for a wide variety of writers from within British society: men and women, combatants and non-combatants, young and old, commercial and coterie, comic and serious, mainstream and avant-garde; a diversity that hopefully reflects much of the actual, heterogeneous experience of the war in Britain. The noticeable bias of this study is in favour of the home front and the popular magazine market, the most productive arena for short story writers addressing the war. The majority of stories about the war were written for a wide audience and published in popular media; coterie stories also addressed the First World War, but did so with a different ideological and aesthetic agenda. As a result, modernist short fiction about the war is treated mainly as a foil for the larger number of 'popular' narratives.

Although the number of Great War stories published after 1945 fell sharply compared to the prolific output of the decades between 1914 and the Second World War, a steady drizzle of stories still appeared, in particular around the ninetieth anniversary of the First World War. In analysing such a wide range of stories, one has to draw clear distinctions between the different periods of writing. Whether or not short-story writers had personal memories of the war, second-hand or only third-hand reminiscences; what political or ideological agenda informed their writing; what media they published in and which audiences they targeted; all these factors change radically over time and affect the texts and their possible readings. I have consequently tried to differentiate between those stories published during and in the wake of the First World War, those published in the aftermath of the Second World War, and those that appeared

comparatively recently, in the last two decades of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium.

At the outset of this volume, it also seems appropriate to explain the use of the term 'British' as used in this study. By 'British' I refer to writers who were either citizens of, or spent the greatest part of their adult lives in England, Scotland or Wales. On occasion, this includes writers such as New Zealander Katherine Mansfield or Mary Borden, an American by birth. The restriction to British writers was on one level a necessity to limit the number of stories to be addressed, but it also reflects a particular interest in a specifically British cultural experience of the First World War. Just as the conflict was experienced in different ways by individual participants or witnesses, what one might call national experiences and remembrance of the Great War differ considerably. The 'memory culture' of other English-language countries that participated in the war frequently focuses on different aspects of its experience: in Ireland, the war is overshadowed by the violent struggle for independence; in the United States, as well as in many European countries, the Second World War has largely eclipsed the first; in the former dominions Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the memory of the war quickly became inextricably bound up with a nascent sense of national identity and the birth of a new, independent nation. Similarly, countries such as Jamaica and India – whose substantial participation in the First World War has only recently become the focus of historiographical attention – experienced the war in relation to a growing sense of nationalism and movement towards political independence.[11] To attempt to combine all these divergent experiences and memories in a single study is nigh on impossible, as these differences inevitably inform the literature written about the war in any of the participant countries. With regard to colonial testimonials, particularly from countries in which English was not the first language and where the majority of the population was non-literate, it is moreover hard to come by contemporary accounts of the war other than letters and the occasional memoir, as fictional narratives addressing the First World War by colonial participants from Africa, Asia and the West Indies are rare. Santanu Das points to this problem when he comments on Gail Braybon's verdict that 'more words have been written about the British war poets than about all the non-white troops put together' by observing that 'the fact remains that the war poets have written more words about the conflict than all the non-white troops put together'.[12] Consequently, this book limits itself to the British experience and memory of the war as evidenced in its short fiction, with all the regrettable bias in terms of subject matter and approach

this entails: beyond a few casual (and casually racist) asides, non-white colonial troops are virtually invisible in British First World War short fiction.[13] However, while non-white colonial troops and workers involved in the war received only marginal treatment in British magazines and story anthologies, at least British war stories do offer us views of white British participants in and theatres of the war beyond the Western Front.

Last but not least, I should add that defining the short story is a difficult and contentious issue, and it serves no practical purpose to become embroiled in lengthy debates over the nature and aims of the genre. Consulting any one of the more recent works on the short story, one will inevitably come across the realisation that the short story, more than perhaps any other literary genre, is extremely hard to define, and that its definition has changed so often over time that it is virtually impossible to agree on any other common denominators than that a short story ought to be a piece of prose fiction, and that it ought to be relatively short. Even its shortness, however, can vary between a few hundred and several thousand words. It is partly this difficulty of definition that troubles all histories and critical studies of the short story because it is hard to decide which stories to include and exclude, how to compare them and most of all, how to discern what Dominic Head calls a 'developing aesthetic'[14] of the short story. For the purpose of this study I will regard as a short story any self-contained, short, fictional narrative published in a periodical, anthology or collection, regardless of internal features such as style and structure.[15]

In terms of organisation, the first chapter of this book introduces the theoretical framework on which the study is based. This framework combines aspects of short-story genre theory (particularly issues pertaining to form and publication of short fiction), memory studies (and the evolution of a mythologised remembrance of World War I in particular), research on modernism (as a critical starting point for analysing First World War fiction), and canonisation (in relation to genre attributes on the one hand and the social functions of literature on the other). A cornerstone of the first chapter is the mapping of a new kind of reader-response theory based on Paul Ricoeur's concept of the social function of narratives as fictional 'laboratories' for rehearsing experiences and decisions. The idea of narrative fiction as a testing ground for reality offers an ideal tool for interrogating the social and formal dimensions of First World War fiction. By focusing on their implied reader, the subsequent analysis of short stories from the research corpus can identify expectations regarding the experience of war created by short fiction. Because short stories were published in a plethora