

extent created modern American pop culture. "Even in the supreme black achievement of jazz . . . Jewish musicians—Goodman, Gershwin, Mezzrow, and Whiteman among others—not only played the music, but also served as critics and interpreters. In a racially controlled prewar America, it was the Jew who popularized black life, transforming a folk tradition into an art mode." Blacks, who "saw their uniqueness compromised" by this cultural appropriation, inevitably resented Jewish success, believing that "the gain and fame of their culture went to the accursed Jewish cultural middleman, while the purity of their performance remained undersupported and undernourished." But it is doubtful that black cultural forms would ever have enjoyed their triumph without the help of the "cultural middlemen" who made it acceptable for white audiences.

In making these observations, Horowitz has displayed considerable courage. The ethnic roots of American culture are buried under tons of official mythology, the slag of the melting-pot ideology, and given the choice between truth and legend, most writers and publishers will always "print the legend." The childhood portrayed in *Daydreams and Nightmares* is a gritty little piece of reality, the irritant from which pearls are made.

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A Writer for All Seasons by George Core

Orwell: The Authorized Biography
by Michael Sheldon
New York: HarperCollins;
497 pp., \$25.00

E.B. White described Henry David Thoreau, that thorny individualist, as a regular hair shirt of a man; and no matter how much we may like the Thoreau of *Walden* and his other writing, few of us could bear having him as a neighbor. Such, too, is the case of Eric Blair, who would become George Orwell; but who, regardless of his name, was from boyhood a difficult and complicated human being, one probably far more likable on

paper than in person.

When we learn something like the whole story of Blair's passage through St. Cyprian's School in southwest England, we are much more inclined to see the side of the embattled headmaster and his aggressive wife than we are in reading Orwell's "Such, Such Were the Joys," an essay that may turn any of us against all boarding schools. Orwell, in looking back, viewed his as a microcosm of the totalitarian state. However imperfect most of them are, the worst seldom rival, say, the Third Reich or the Soviet Union for exquisite brutality levied against minorities and protesters and all others out of step with phalanx of jackboots marching down the main thoroughfare of the state.

George Orwell, as Samuel Hynes has observed, was not a great writer in the sense that he forged an overmastering book or permanently affected any literary mode, even the essay, of which he was the most brilliant practitioner in English in our century. But Orwell made a greater impact on general culture and the common man than any other English writer in our century except Winston Churchill and perhaps H.G. Wells. He did so by a gritty and unflinching pursuit of the truth as a writer and political thinker that makes even megalomaniacs and monomaniacs seem laggards by comparison.

This compulsiveness sometimes diverted Orwell from a reasonable course in his public and private life, shunting him more nearly toward madness than sainthood. He was not simply courageous but fearless in a way that often seems insane, as Michael Sheldon makes plain in several sequences. Orwell took absurd chances in the front lines during the Spanish Civil War and was shot in the throat in consequence; later, not long before his death, he endangered the lives of a boating party by being oblivious to the perils of the situation—being at sea in an open boat that had lost its motor and that was being drawn into a whirlpool. At such moments Orwell seems a caricature drawn from a boy's adventure yarn—a figure he would have immediately recognized in another person or within the covers of a book. He was also so set on seeing the aftermath of the war in Europe that he, although seriously ill himself, was abroad when his first wife underwent surgery (and did not survive it). And, although he was devoted to her in some ways, he was not faithful to her—odd behavior for the man often called the conscience of his generation. Orwell wrecked his health for rea-

sons that seem more nearly frivolous and whimsical than anything else.

So you may emerge from reading Mr. Sheldon's strong biography feeling dashed about the person who, against very considerable odds, made himself into a fair to middling novelist, a good broadcaster for the BBC, a superb satirist, and a great essayist. Not a man for all seasons but a writer for all seasons. A writer who could stand up for common humanity and for the common toad; a writer who could celebrate the joys of ordinary life; a writer who could attack political stupidity and savagery of all stripes, whether in England or elsewhere; a writer who did more than any other in our time to uphold human decency through the medium of the written and spoken word.

The author of *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of "Horizon,"* Sheldon came well equipped to write a new biography of Orwell. This book, however, was not authorized by Sonia Brownell, Orwell's second wife and late widow, who did her best to prevent a biography from being written and thus carry out her husband's quixotic wishes. Sheldon does add new material to the earlier accounts of Orwell's life by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams and, more recently, Bernard Crick. Stansky and Abrahams have written two volumes that take us only to 1938; Crick's life of Orwell is more detailed but more laborious than Sheldon's. I am glad to have this faster paced and more readable life but think that the flag under which it sails—Authorized Biography—is closer to being the Jolly Roger than anything else. Anyone seriously interested in Orwell will want to read Sheldon and will be well repaid, but the serious reader should remember that much of the writing about Orwell, from George Woodcock's *The Crystal Spirit* onward, remains permanently valuable.

During the last year of his life, when he was failing rapidly from tuberculosis, Orwell pondered the meaning of Gandhi's life and reflected on ordinary human existence versus sainthood. "Sainthood is . . . a thing that human beings must avoid," he observed. He reached this conclusion after presenting the heart of the matter about our frail nature: "The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is pre-

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

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

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A Myth Imagined

by Frank Brownlow

A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture

by Samuel Hynes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIBERAL ARTS



PRISONS AND AIDS

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