Andrew Frayn

8 Richard Aldington, *Images of War* (1919) and *Death of a Hero* (1929)

Abstract: Richard Aldington is a distinctive and underrated writer. His Imagist poetry and his coruscating First World War novel *Death of a Hero* (1929) have continued to receive scholarly attention, but from the first assessments he has tended to be diminished by comparison to canonical modernists (Hughes 1931). Aldington was an important figure in the development and dissemination of literary modernism, and one of very few English high modernist authors. His writing about the war is both emotionally powerful and formally innovative. While there are substantial differences in form, tone and scale, Aldington returned in his great war novel to images and language he had previously used in poetry, particularly in describing bodies and landscapes (Gates 1979).

Key Terms: Bodies, Englishness, modernism, masculinity, satire

1 Context

Aldington (1892–1962) was an established, if still youthful, literary figure at the outbreak of the First World War. Although sceptical about the value of the conflict, he tried to enlist at the Honourable Artillery Company, only to be rejected because of a scar from an earlier hernia operation (Aldington 1968 [1941], 148). In the first two years of the war he continued to write poetry and edit *The Egoist*. *Images (1910–1915)* (1915) includes some searing poetic critiques of mass culture and should be read in the context of the War, itself a manifestation of the malign possibilities of industrialization. The Military Service Act 1916 was passed at the end of January to introduce conscription in July. Aldington enlisted shortly before the act would have compelled him to do so. While he was invigorated by the outdoor life, his burly physique becoming muscular from the training, he also felt degraded by aspects of military discipline and was pushed to the limits of his mental endurance as the war progressed. He wrote to friend and author John Cournos to describe a fatigue cleaning "one of the filthiest kitchens I ever saw in my life. […] For a while it broke me, old chap, and I'm not too ashamed to tell you that for a moment or two I just bent my head & sobbed" (Risk

1978, 6–7). “Fatigues” in *Images of War* begins by railing against “The weariness of this dirt and labour, of this dirty, melting sky!” (*IW* 13).[1]

Aldington crossed the channel just before Christmas 1916, and was posted to the front on 9 January 1917. He suffered the ill-effects of gas attacks in these first months of service for the rest of his life. He returned to England in May 1917 for further training, and was commissioned that November. Aldington went back to the Western Front in April 1918, as all available men were drafted back to France following the German spring offensive. He had a near miss in his final action on 4 November 1918, the same day as Wilfred Owen was killed (he wrote a poem “In Memory of Wilfred Owen” in 1931). He was in London for much of November after the Armistice, during which time he separated rancorously from H.D. Caroline Zilboorg notes the difficulty of ascertaining why poems made it into *Images of War* rather than his other volume of 1919, *Images of Love* (2004, 17–18). The conflict in Aldington’s personal life means that, while poems are framed in terms of the war, the referent is always ambiguous. He then returned to France until his demobilisation on in early February 1919 (Copp 2002, 29–34; Whelpton 2014, pt. 2; Wilkinson 1993).

During the 1920s Aldington established his reputation as a literary critic, translator and reviewer. He produced poetry sporadically without the critical acclaim of his earlier association with the Imagists. But in 1928 he left England for Europe, foregoing the security of the position he had built over that decade and devoting himself again to creative writing. He made a number of abortive attempts at interpreting his First World War experiences in prose throughout the 1920s, searching for an appropriate language and form. He believed that writing *Death of a Hero* was cathartic, and later commented that it “purged my bosom of perilous stuff which had been poisoning me for a decade” (Aldington 1968 [1941], 308). That catharsis was also painful: the son of Brigit Patmore, Aldington’s lover at the time, later recalled him going “through great agony [... and] lying on his bed crying when he remembered the terrible life in the trenches during the First World War” (Patmore 1968, 23).

Aldington hurried to finish his novel in late 1928 and early 1929 as he perceived correctly that the successes of *Journey’s End* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* were creating a market for novels in a similar vein (Copp 2002, 17; ↗ 27 R.C. Sherriff). Aldington’s is the earliest of the major British novels and memoirs of the 1929–1930 War Books Boom. While Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* and Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (both 1928) were published the previous year, neither is or was seen as a thoroughgoing criticism of the war (↗ 11 Edmund Blunden; ↗ 26 Siegfried Sassoon). While it has often been claimed that there was a ten-year gap to prose writing about the war, this was not the case; war memoirs, essays and novels were published throughout the post-war decade. However, the questioning and

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, page references in brackets with the abbreviation *IW* refer to Aldington 1919.

critical mode of writing which we now associate most strongly with the war had yet to achieve popular acceptance (Frayn 2014).

2 Basic Coordinates: Central Topics and Concerns

2.1 *Images of War* (1919)

Images of War returns insistently to the impact of the war on bodies, and particularly the male body.[2] Man's fragility and inability to influence his fate is also a concern for Aldington. Having highlighted this in the first part of "In the Trenches", early in the second part the speaker declaims: "Impotent, / How impotent is all this clamour, / This destruction and contest …" (*IW* 17). Fears about the decline of masculinity continued to be revisited throughout the war and the post-war decade, as authors wrestled with the inability of men's bodies and minds to cope. Classical models are invoked to highlight perfection in form in poems such as "Daughter of Zeus" and "An Earth Goddess: After the Advance 1917", but also highlight the peril for decadent civilisations.

Aldington, like other modernist poets, describes individual body parts to represent the fragmentation, dehumanisation and alienation of mass culture. In mass warfare, however, this means literal mutilation and decay. Two poems in the collection directly invoke the trenches in their titles, "In the Trenches" and "Trench Idyll". In the former, the speaker depicts the psychological torment of modern warfare:

> Each cruel bitter shriek of bullet
> That tears the wind like a blade, […]
> Wounds us also,
> Severs and rends the fine fabric
> Of the wings of our frail souls (*IW* 16–17)

The machinery of mass war is personified and imbued with intent. Psychological wounds are felt by many, but implicitly here the impact on the sensitive poet is greater. "Trench Idyll" uses more demotic language and quotidian imagery in a conversation, the title's irony bitterly apparent. The men look back nostalgically

2 This article uses the first publication of *Images of War*, a limited edition by C. W. Beaumont. An expanded version was published in the same year by Allen & Unwin. For details about the differences between the two volumes see Gates (1974, 65).

to London's pleasures before the conversation is paused by "a machine-gun swe[eping] the parapet" (22). As a result, the interlocutor ends up describing the one man he has seen killed, before telling the speaker about his most gruesome job, taking identity discs from long-dead men caught on the barbed wire: "They fell to pieces at a touch / Thank God we couldn't see their faces; / They had gas helmets on …" (*IW* 23). Aldington returns to a similar image in "Soliloquy I" (35) as he continues to assess the disintegration of the body politic: the bodies of soldiers fighting for their nation also represent it metaphorically.

Other poems that invoke tactility focus on distant pleasures. "Our Hands" grieves for lost indulgences of touch: "our hands that have caressed roses and women's flesh, old lovely books and marbles of Carrara" (*IW* 15). "On the March" offers no description of heels crunching in metronomic quick-time – unlike the following poem "Dawn" – but addresses the hedgerow fruits that catch the speaker's attention:

> Bright berries on the roadside […]
> Red, mottled berries,
> You are as beautiful
> As the points of a girl's breasts;
> You are as firm and fresh … (10)

Like many authors, Aldington looks away from the war for comfort and hope, and the reversion to the pastoral is a familiar device in times of war. The speaker concludes by fantasising about running naked "Among the firm red berries". This is not simple voyeurism. It is a plea for freedom, for a literal and metaphorical removal of the constricting military uniform. The berries in the razed landscape also seek the growth and fertility which seemed impossible, an image that would become familiar in many modernist works, notably T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). The speaker's fantasy, however, is interrupted by the commanding officer's cry: "Party—HALT!" (*IW* 10). The insistent reality of the war intrudes on mental processes in the present, a trope which also became familiar in post-war shell-shock literature.

The relationship of the civilian world to the war is depicted ambivalently in *Images of War*. In "A Ruined House" Aldington discusses the disappearance of its occupants:

> Nothing remains,
> Except their trampled, dirtied clothes
> [...] Their marriage bed, rusty and bent,
> And a broken toy left by their child … (18)

The terseness of "nothing remains" offers a synopsis. Things that usually signify hope offer no solace here: the marriage bed is rusting, rather than indicating intimacy or fertility, while the child's toy is both broken

and abandoned. The treatment of the clothes removes any final trace of humanity from the victims of the conflict. Experience is intensified during war in both directions. Just as the impact of this violence is shocking, in "A Village" the speaker shows his increased appreciation for things outside of the war as a result of it:

> Now if you saw my village
> You'd not think it beautiful,
> But flat and commonplace—
> As I'd have called it half a year ago … (25)

In the context of the trenches, where experience shifted unpredictably between moments of quiet tension and extreme danger, dullness becomes prized. Aldington shows an acute sense of empathy for his comrades and those who were affected by the war without having chosen to participate.

2.2 *Death of a Hero* (1929)

Death of a Hero has five sections. Its prologue depicts events after the end of the war and the novel, showing the joyless hedonism of the post-war decade and immediately situating it as a tragedy, while the epilogue is a six-stanza poem in *vers libre* that has old men looking back portentously to the fall of Troy. The three main sections of the novel parody the family saga series exemplified by John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921), in which the domestic discord of a *nouveau riche* upper-middle-class family is underscored by the inability of money and material possessions to bring pleasure. While it is a war novel, only the last of these sections describes service in the trenches; for Aldington the war is inseparable from its causes. The first section describes the upbringing of the protagonist George Winterbourne in an atmosphere of Victorian cant and hypocrisy. For the narrator, those values are culpable for creating an environment in which such a war could take place. George is educated unwillingly at a minor public school, his artistic sensibilities clashing with the muscular Christian focus on games and proto-military training. His unwillingness to conform leads him to fall out with his parents, and in the second section he pursues an artistic career in London. The third section describes Winterbourne's war service and his precipitate decline towards the inevitable conclusion.

Generational conflict underpins *Death of a Hero*, both in terms of family life and the army. Aldington wrote in his "Notes on the War Novel" that "The War was not a sudden misfortune sprung upon an innocent world. I am convinced that it was the inevitable result of the life which preceded it" (Aldington 1998 [1929], xvii). The Winterbourne grandparents are quickly dismissed before getting to George Augustus and Isabel, the protagonist's parents. His father is an aesthete-dreamer who has been brought into

line to work by a naively unfortunate marriage. His mother is from a family that, according to the narrator, is “poor Army. Pa Hartly had chased all round the Empire, dragging with him Ma Hartly, always in pod and always pupping in incongruous and inconvenient spots – the Egyptian desert, a shipwrecked troopship, a malarial morass in the West Indies, on the road to Kandahar” (Aldington 1965 [1929], 43). The daughter of this military family’s control of George is an ironic precursor to his war service later in the novel, and the decidedly inglorious depiction of Imperial outposts shows the narrator’s opinion of that service.

The gender politics of the novel have long attracted attention and opprobrium (Ellis 1998, 446; Guest 1984). The narrator demonstrates his feelings on the subject of women, and particularly their role in the war:

> And the women? Oh, don’t let’s talk about the women. They were splendid, wonderful. Such devotion, such devotion! How they comforted the troops! Oh, wonderful, beyond all praise! They got the vote for it, you know. Oh, wonderful! Steel-true and blade-straight. Yes, indeed, wonderful, wonderful! What ever would we have done without them? White feathers, and all that, you know. Oh, the women were marvellous. You can always rely upon the women to come up to scratch, you know. Yes, indeed. What would the Country be without them! So splendid, such an example. (Aldington 1965 [1929], 201)

The irony and bitterness of this invective are reinforced by pointed repetition, the cynicism behind the word ‘wonderful’ becoming more pronounced with each of its five repetitions. Mothers come in for particular criticism, and the narrator criticises Isabel’s reaction to George’s death as that of “not only a sadist, but a necrophilous one” (20). Mothers were becoming seen as the dominant parent (Thom 1998, 174), but the narrator – and it is important to separate Aldington from both George and the narrator – sees this as the exchange of the domination of one gender for another, rather than a desired move towards greater equality.

The institution of marriage is seen as partly culpable. George ends up in an unconventional relationship with his wife Elizabeth Paston and his mistress Fanny Welford. The narrator notes in the prologue George’s “simple-Simon” belief in the ideals of free love (Aldington 1965 [1929], 25). The marriage comes again from the man’s lack of diligence, when Elizabeth believes she is pregnant. The narrator is critical of the hasty disavowal of the principles of free love: “George ought to have hiked her off to a gynaecologist at once. Instead of which, he behaved as stupidly as any George Augustus would have done under the circumstances” (192–193). The values of previous generations are again culpable for the need to preserve reputation. Criticisms of this aspect of the novel often come from misreading of it as a *roman a clef*: while inevitably there are correspondences with Aldington’s relationships, neither character can be identified clearly with any real-life figure (Crawford 1987).

What is at stake in the representation of these divisions is Englishness. Aldington was always out of step with official Englishness, and in *Death of a Hero* he disavows its formalities and "cant". George's weaknesses are ascribed to his "Public School, kicked-backside of the Empire training" (Aldington 1965 [1929], 162). The narrator rejects the "quantitative and British Public School solutions" to economic and sexual issues. He vituperates:

> the Rudyard Kipling or British Public School solution […] is a harnessing of the same primitive instincts to the service of a 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; never mind whether you are rich or poor, do what the Empire tells you, and so long as the Empire is rich and powerful you ought to be happy. (167–168)

Aldington speaks powerfully to the reasons for which the war was fought: duty to the Empire, after the First World War, seemed less secure due to the failure of post-war promises to improve conditions, illustrated by the continuing industrial unrest through the decade. Aldington was always out of step with Britishness and, at the time of writing *Death of a Hero*, he was making his final break with the country that had formed his life and literature.

The war section of the novel is the most acclaimed, its realism appealing more to most readers than the brutal satire of the pre-war sections. In indirect discourse George insists on the masculinity that is implicitly the counterpoint to all civilians, offering an emphatic summary of what it means to be a combatant:

> These men were men. There was something intensely masculine about them, something very pure and immensely friendly and stimulating. They had been where no woman and no half-man had ever been, could endure to be. […] They looked barbaric, but not brutal; determined, but not cruel. Under their grotesque wrappings, their bodies looked lean and hard and tireless. They were Men. (253)

Aldington's concern to maintain the unsullied aggressive masculinity of the army sits uneasily with the pointedly capitalised "Men" as an idealised race (Das 2002, 64). The focus on physicality derives from concerns after the war about the recuperation of wounded men, both mentally and physically. Not only were men "unmanned" by being unable to master the situation in which they found themselves, but in many cases they returned home incomplete – fleshly losses and mental illness meant that traditional ideas of manliness were felt to be under threat.

The new phenomenon of shell-shock was a major part of these anxieties about masculinity. Previously, mental illness had often been considered a female malady (Showalter 1987), exemplified by the gendered term "hysteria", but men were now in increasing and unavoidable numbers succumbing to the pressures put upon them. George's decline in *Death of a Hero* is charted from a pre-war position in intellectual society, albeit struggling to remain in the lower echelons of this group. Before going to war, his attitude to the returning soldiers is one of incomprehension: "he was almost entirely ignorant of life in the trenches. Newspapers, illustrated periodicals, almost useless. He had heard a lot of tales from returned wounded soldiers. But many of them either blathered or were quite inarticulate" (Aldington 1965 [1929], 238). Immediately after his posting to the Western Front, George is unconcerned by the danger around him, and we see his reaction to a shelling compared to the experienced Lieutenant Evans:

> When a shell exploded near them, both men appeared equally unmoved. Winterbourne really was so, because he was fresh, and had no months of war neurosis to control. Evans only appeared so, because he was awkwardly and with shame struggling to control a completely sub-conscious reflex action of terror. (287–288)

His composure quickly declines with continued exposure to gun and shell fire, as he comes to "realize the terrific inhuman strength of heavy artillery" (296). Courage has to become a conspicuous display for the benefit of others. Shell shock "undermined men's authority, and with it the traditional roles of the sexes in the family" (Shephard 2000, 147).

3 Aesthetics

3.1 *Images of War*

Aldington was one of the original Imagists, along with his wife H.D. and Ezra Pound, who coined the term, and was influential in developing the tenets of the movement. Those guiding principles cluster around exactitude and concision in the presentation of an image, and the desire for novelty (although newness is not fetishised). His poems in *Images of War* show a progression from the strong classical influence of his earlier work as in the powerful "Choricos" (Aldington 1948, 21–23). This influence remains, but becomes less prominent as primary subject matter. He is also clearly moving away from strict adherence to Imagist principles.

Free verse is the most common form for Imagist poetry, and it is the most common form of this collection. A particularly effective example is its combination in "Trench Idyll" with the rhythms of

everyday speech. Aldington also experiments in this volume with the prose poem, suggesting a transitional point in the move towards prose as a form in which matters of note can be discussed. “Sorcery of Words” illustrates Aldington’s self-consciousness about the act of writing poetry at this time. It is a poem about writing that considers the validity of writing poetry in wartime, with its associations of elevated and formal language, the representation of beauty, and abstract thought. There is a sense, Aldington suggests, in which that incongruity is wholly apposite. The speaker of the poem is struck by the phrase: “The poetry of winter—these words, remembered from some aesthetic essay, return to my mind with an ironic persistence” (*IW* 12). The irony derives from the appositeness of the phrase in the jarringly different context, returning to notions of aridity and sterility. The aesthetic quality of poetry also contrasts with the speaker’s own state: “Yes, one can be hungry, sore, unshaven, dirty, eyes and head aching, limbs shivering, and yet love beauty.” (12)

Aldington also looks to the emotions in attempting to find an appropriate way to represent the war in poetic form. For him, stoicism and taciturnity – the “stiff upper lip” – are major problems with the English mindset. The final two poems of the collection, “Terror” and “Apathy”, demonstrate the rapidity with which experience in wartime shifts between fear and monotony. The third section of “Terror” begins “We have known terror”, before the insistent anaphora of the next eight lines. These all begin with “The terror of”, highlighting fears in war and peace, before concluding with “the terror of apathy” (42). The final poem, “Apathy,” harangues someone who refuses to meet the speaker’s gaze for their “inarticulate impotence” (45). The conclusion to the poem exemplifies the disjunction seen by Aldington between combatant and non-combatant. Dead bodies intrude on the speaker’s recounting of his encounter with apathy: “The way one corpse held its stiff yellow fingers / And pointed, pointed to the huge dark hole / Gouged between ear and jaw right to the skull …” (46). The lines enjamb, but are halted to force attention towards the fatal injury. He brushes off the enquiry about what concerned him: “Just a joke they told me yesterday, / Really, really, not for ladies’ ears. / Forgive me; I’ll not laugh so suddenly again” (46). The pointed accusation is that war is a burden borne solely by young men. Apathy is both a result of the gap between civilian and combatant experience, and the social conventions which mean that any attempt to breach that gap in words is considered taboo, obscene, or insane. Aldington continues to write against this falsity.

3.2 *Death of a Hero*

Death of a Hero is notable for the strident tone of its narration. It is a brutal satire on the pre-war world and the dislocation between civilian and combatant experience. Aldington wrote to H.D. after reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* that the war had been “so brutal that its brutality cannot be exaggerated” (Zilboorg 2003, 219). The novel is written in a forceful vernacular that required expurgation to be published, and is often criticized for its lack of restraint (e.g. Morris 1976, 184). That was Aldington’s point. For him, the war could and should not be understood by detachment, because to be detached meant to fail to understand

its impact (Tylee 1990, 237). For the expurgations, he borrowed Djuna Barnes's method in *Ryder* (1928), which was to replace omitted words with an asterisk for each letter – as well as the transparent use of "mucking" to replace the demotic Anglo-Saxon. The asterisks even provided a mawkish guessing game for the first readers. Many of them would have been surprised to find out the answers as they wondered which "***** ********" was not an appropriate comparison to "Prehistoric beasts, like the ichthyosaurus [… who] have laired and copulated" (Aldington 1929, 128); most would have been surprised to find out that the answer was "Queen Victoria" (Aldington 1965 [1929], 118).

The novel was also formally distinctive. Aldington's claim that *Death of a Hero* was a "jazz novel" provoked critical reaction both at the time and in retrospect. While the structure of the novel is unusual, it is hardly alien. An epistolary preface is a common feature going back to the very beginnings of the novel, such as Aphra Behn's seventeenth-century *Oroonoko*. Beginning the novel with events which occur after its end situates the novel as a tragedy, and Aldington claimed surprise that reviewers failed to spot the kinship with classical tragedy; he published a translation of Euripides' *Alcestis* in 1930, and alludes to it in the novel (Aldington 1965 [1929], 135). The family saga form was also familiar and popular at the time, and a poetic epilogue was not a new idea: Edmund Blunden used the same device more extensively in *Undertones of War* (2000 [1928], 195–234; ↗ 11 Edmund Blunden). Later critics certainly misunderstand when they see it as "wilfully formless" (Bergonzi 1996, 173; see also Morris 1976, 185). Aldington's comment in "Notes on the War Novel" that "'War writers' should utterly ignore the technique of the professional novelists" was perhaps too persuasive (Aldington 1998 [1929], xix) and the stripping of conventions in subject matter, which he saw as vital, heightened the sense of unfamiliarity.

4 Reception

4.1 *Images of War*

The critical response to *Images of War* was ambivalent (for a more general account of the development of the critical reception of Aldington's poetry see Gates 1974, ch. 1). Aldington wrote to Pound that he was "glad you found the war book not too hopeless" (Gates 1992, 54). May Sinclair, an admirer of Aldington's, wrote an essay in praise of him in the *English Review* (1921; see Raitt 2000, 182–185); prominent critics such as Walter de la Mare and Alec Waugh offered qualified praise while noting that he was suffering from the decline of the Imagist brand (Whelpton 2014, 227; see also Baum 1929; Blackmur 1934). Some notable criticisms were received from quarters from which Aldington might have expected sympathetic responses. Reviewing the collection for Chicago's *Poetry* magazine, Marjorie Allen Seiffert judged that "Aldington's

genius could not use the crude, painful and bitter experience he was made to undergo" (1919, 341). Her suggestion that success in poetic representation was to "ignore, perhaps scarcely feel the filth" misses Aldington's point that such experience should neither be repressed nor sanitised. William Carlos Williams (1919), a fellow Imagist, made a similar complaint against other war poems of Aldington's in *The Little Review*. Aldington wrote to Harriet Monroe, the proprietor of *Poetry*: "Did he – a doctor – imagine that artistic calm, detached vision, were possible to men who were reduced by inadequate diet, sleeping in wet clothes out-of-doors, months of physical torment and mental stagnation in a desert of mud, broken walls, hell?" (Whelpton 2014, 228). Like his sometime friend D.H. Lawrence, Aldington continued to write against detachment, and continued to be criticised for it; it is notable that these two, perhaps the major modernists of English descent, saw this as a vital part of their response to modernity.

4.2 *Death of a Hero*

The review response was coloured by speculation about the expurgations. While the war section was largely admired, the attack on the Victorians tended to be criticized for its violence (e.g. Mais 1930, 5). St. John Ervine wrote in the *Daily Express* that "For sheer petulance and ill-temper I doubt if *Death of a Hero* can be matched" (1929, 8). His criticism is rather undercut by the suggestion that Aldington should be viewed as a naughty child to be spanked. Even the Irish critic Thomas MacGreevy, a friend of Aldington's, commented that "The author of *Death of a Hero*, acting as Chorus, may at times seem a little over-intrusive with his comment" (1974 [1931], 57). This again misses the point that the narrator and protagonist are fictionalized aspects of Aldington, rather than necessarily identifying him with either.

There were some markedly positive reviews. The anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement* was by fellow war writer Edmund Blunden. Aldington had worried about Blunden's response, but the review by the former combatant is much more supportive and laudatory than the conservative newspaper reviewers. Blunden wrote that "the quality of Mr. Aldington's book is its indignation and study of revenge", going on to observe that "there is no coolness or detachment here" (1929, 713). It is accuracy in the war sections – "some of the closet and strongest narration of Western Front warfare that has been produced" (713) – that justifies the earlier anger. Blunden concludes by praising the novel's emotional power: "the 'helpless grief and pity' with which the writer ends are the reader's too, deeper than ever" (713). A.C. Ward stressed the importance of *Death of a Hero* in his survey of *The Nineteen-Twenties*: "It exactly expressed the mood of thousands in England, and served as a drainage channel for the suppressed indignations which had troubled them" (1930, 161). This praise sees the novel as cathartic, and not just for the author: its value is in looking directly at the subject and expressing feelings which are not habitually discussed by British people.

Aldington made a good career in the 1930s as a writer of fiction. The best of his novels is *All Men are Enemies* (1933), a delicate tale of a love affair halted by the war; the conflict features only as an elision. *The Colonel's Daughter* (1930) is filled with pathos for the lot of young women after the war, and the collections of short stories *Roads to Glory* (1930) and *Soft Answers* (1932) offer a series of compelling vignettes about aspects of the war. Having attempted a career as a screenwriter in Hollywood, he returned to Europe after the Second World War, primarily writing biography and criticism in his later years. His enduring reputation has been damaged significantly and unfairly by his *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry*. Aldington's precisely scholarly debunking of the myths around the great hero of the First World War was unwelcome, even more so the extensively reasoned and supported claim that many Arabs viewed Lawrence as a "pederast" and a victim of the same – despite the fact that Lawrence's own account suggests as much (Aldington 1955, 80, 206; Lawrence 1935, 456). The essential details of Aldington's account are now generally considered accurate (Daumas [1993], 175–176; Crawford 1998), and his daughter claims that she "met Peter O'Toole a few years after he worked on David Lean's film. He admitted that he had taken the dark side of T.E.L. from Aldington. There was never any credit" (C. Aldington). At the time, however, the outcry choked Aldington's sales to zero and he was unable to live by his pen. He found himself reliant on the hospitality and patronage of others for the first time in his nearly fifty-year writing career as a result. This meant that he was out of print and out of fashion when modern critical methods were developing.

Aldington worked for eleven years after the First World War to produce his definitive, explicit statement what led to the conflict, soldierly experience, and the way it was fought. *Death of a Hero* is his only extended prose narrative that tackles the war head on. At the margins of what was acceptable to publish in the late 1920s, this novel should be seen in the context of other expurgated and banned works by Radclyffe Hall, Djuna Barnes and D.H. Lawrence. The pinnacle of Aldington's popular success, the novel offers a complementary view about the war to the memoirs of Blunden, Graves and Sassoon in a dramatically contrasting style. The visceral anger of the narrator is compelling. Aldington's clear, modern prose style and emphatic conviction makes this an important novel in the development of modernism and literature about the First World War, and one that is long overdue rediscovery outside the academic sphere.

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5.2 Further Reading

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