

Institution: University of Hertfordshire
Unit of Assessment: Panel D (29): English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Rediscovering World War I Theatre
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In the years 1914–19, over 1,000 war plays, pageants and revues were submitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s Office for licensing. Dr Andrew Maunder led a project that recovered these since-forgotten plays, introducing modern audiences to a largely unknown dimension of cultural life on the WWI Home Front through performances staged between 2011 and 2013. These allowed audiences to think well beyond the ‘war poets’ and to reappraise their understanding of the war and its culture. School-age and adult audiences have come to understand that, if theatre is cut out of the picture, it is impossible to gain a full and accurate sense of WWI culture and its legacy.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Andrew Maunder, Reader in Victorian Literature, began researching First World War theatre in 2010. The immediate context was the five-volume anthology <i>British Literature of World War I</i> (Pickering and Chatto, 2011), for which Maunder was General Editor (with Angela Smith, University of Plymouth). The anthology made available rare short stories, novels and plays from 1914–19, and looked beyond the iconic WWI texts in the popular canon (Owen, Sassoon, Kipling et al.)</p> <p>In planning the series, Maunder looked at a forgotten treasury of over 1,000 plays and revues in the Lord Chamberlain’s archives in the British Library. The majority of the plays existed only as typed or handwritten manuscripts, and were submitted for licensing between 1914 and 1919, often for merely a one- or two-week run. Alongside works by familiar names such as Barrie, Shaw and Galsworthy were plays by writers who are now unknown and whose work had languished in the archive. The vast number of submissions, together with the very detailed reports from the Lord Chamberlain’s readers, suggest a lively wartime theatrical industry – and one that needs to be acknowledged if we want anything approaching an accurate sense of World War I literature and, by extension, of early twentieth-century popular entertainment and recreation more generally.</p> <p>The ‘lost’ scripts chosen for republishing in the anthology were as follows: Edmund Goulding, <i>God Save the King</i> (1914); Edward Temple Thurston, <i>The Cost</i> (1914); Frederick Lonsdale, <i>The Patriot</i> (1915); Edward Knoblauch, <i>The Way to Win</i> (1915); John G. Brandon, <i>For Those in Peril</i> (1916); Berte Thomas, <i>For My Country</i> (1917); Gwen John, <i>Luck of War</i> (1917) and Herbert Tremaine [Maude Deuchar], <i>The Handmaidens of Death</i> (1919). Taken together, the texts served as a snapshot of some of the main trends in wartime theatre: the recruiting drama; the spy play; the well-made play; the melodrama; the missing husband who returns; the anti-war play.</p> <p>All of the plays were dramatically ambitious – <i>For Those in Peril</i>, for example, featured a submarine in a Scottish loch – and demonstrated strong performance potential, demanding a particular brand of melodramatic acting that stood on the cusp of the Victorian and the modern theatrical traditions. Many of the scripts were escapist; others fostered paranoia and/or patriotism in a straightforward way and have a relevance for contemporary scholars that is as much socio-historical as literary. Goulding’s and Lonsdale’s plays, for example, shed light on expected masculine codes of behaviour; Thomas’s and Brandon’s are reminders of the fears – shared by Kipling, amongst others – about spies and the ‘enemy within’. The plays by Gwen John and Maude Deuchar brought into sharp focus the female experience, challenging the long-held view that the conflict allowed new freedoms for women. Both plays were less than optimistic about the post-war prospects for women. As this body of work constituted such a rich source for understanding how the conflict and its challenges were represented at the time, the next logical step was to investigate how today’s audiences would respond to them in their intended context: in performance on stage.</p>

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Articles and Books

Andrew Maunder (ed.), *Drama*, volume 5 of *British Literature of World War I* series, General Editors Andrew Maunder and Angela K. Smith. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011, 268p. ISBN (5-vol. set) 978-1-84893-042-1

– *This output is listed in REF2*

Theatrical Performances

The anthology furnished acting texts for six theatre company productions:

7 June 2011: Seventy people attended *Remembering World War* at the Weston Auditorium, University of Hertfordshire, and saw performances of *God Save the King* and *For My Country* staged by Twisted Events Theatre Company.

1 July 2011: Three of the anthologised WWI plays – *For My Country* (Thomas), *The Patriot* (Lonsdale) and *The Pacifist* (Brandon) – and another wartime drama, *The Quitter* (Sewell Collins), were staged at the Drill Hall, London by professional actors for an audience of twenty-five.

29 June 2012: Eighty students and staff saw *The Handmaidens of Death* (Herbert Tremain) at [text removed for publication] St Albans, staged by a company of professional actors.

4 August 2012: Fifty people attended *The Pacifist* (Brandon) and *For My Country* (Thomas), staged by Twisted Events Theatre Company at Newhaven Fort, East Sussex.

8 November 2012: 120 people saw *The Handmaidens of Death* at the DeHavilland Sports and Social Club, staged by professional actors and University of Hertfordshire students.

17 July 2013: An audience of 20 saw two performances by Twisted Events at the Swedenborg Hall, Bloomsbury, central London: *The Pacifist* (Brandon); and *Conscientious Objector or Coward? The Case of Arthur Waterman* (new work in progress, by Twisted Events in collaboration with University of Hertfordshire; Society of Friends, Hitchin; and Bishop's Stortford Museum).

Grants

British Academy Small Research Grant Scheme. **£6,000**. Awarded to Andrew Maunder (July–October 2012).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

While researching the 'missing' WWI plays, Dr Maunder realised that they could present today's audiences with a dimension of 1914–18 cultural life that would allow them to see beyond the war poets and re-appraise their understanding of the period. He took the scripts to theatre companies that regularly revive 'lost' works, including the Orange Tree, Richmond; the Finborough, London; Theatre Royal Brighton Productions; and the National Youth Theatre. All rejected the plays as unstageable or uncommercial.

Nevertheless, convinced that the works had contemporary resonance, in 2010 Maunder advertised for a director, recruited two with good track records in period drama, raised production funds and nurtured small, flexible 'repertory companies' of experienced, professional actors who remained with the project over two years and six productions. In 2011, two one-act spy plays (*God Save the King* and *For My Country*) were performed at the Hertfordshire Heritage Hub's 'Remembering World War I' symposium. The audience included ten pupils from St Albans, whose teacher said they had gained 'a different view of WW1 than the one which is mentioned in History lessons. It made them think from a very different perspective and what life was like on the Home Front . . . they didn't realise that people would . . . be willing to go and spy in that way.'

This prompted Maunder to consider school students as a particular audience, especially those studying World War I for examinations, and this group was accordingly added to the audience base for the project's next phase. In summer 2012 *For My Country* and *The Pacifist* were performed at Newhaven Fort (East Sussex), attracting a paying public; in concurrent development was Maude Deuchar's *The Handmaidens of Death* (1919), a two-act drama about female munitions workers first performed at [text removed for publication] St Albans, where some pupils joined the professional performers on stage or wrote reviews. A second production in Hatfield in November 2012 was attended by thirty-five Stevenage sixth-formers, who received copies of the script as A Level study texts. At a 90-minute seminar afterwards, the students, soon to visit the French battlefields, were struck by the play's alternative focus on women's wartime experience and its suggestion that women shared responsibility for the slaughter. The performance was repeated that evening for a public audience.

In January 2013, the project entered a third phase, of further dissemination in advance of the 2014 centenary. A July 'showcase' in central London, advertised via *Time Out*, specialist mailing lists and a Twitter campaign, attracted a small but fully engaged audience who braved one of the hottest nights of the summer to see *The Pacifist*. One person commented that the play 'opened my eyes to the official attitude to the war on the home front', while another found that it 'portrayed a layer of meaning of pacifism in particular and the war in general that I had not considered before'.

The fullest impact is strongly indicated to occur in the centenary year. Dr Maunder has been asked to run a workshop on the plays at an English Association/Historical Association event scheduled for April 2014, supported by the British Library and featuring Michael Morpurgo as keynote speaker. Jermyn Street theatre, in London's West End, has offered a week-long booking for May 2014, while Centre Stage youth theatre (Gretna) is looking at *Handmaidens* as inspiration for a new work about a local munitions factory. Letchworth Arts Centre is planning several performances of *Handmaidens* connected with a project on women, munitions and pacifism, and other local groups are developing their own productions.

Audience experience, reaction and feedback

The 'lost' 1914–18 plays have offered an alternative to familiar post-war representations such as *Journey's End* (1927) and *Oh What a Lovely War!* (1963). They tend to express pro-war sentiments and anxieties that today's audiences have sometimes found uncomfortable or laughable but that also voice aspects of wartime life rarely found elsewhere. Analysis of audience surveys conducted after each show suggested that well over half (68%) felt that the dramas had altered, added to or complicated their views of the period. Feedback gathered after *Handmaidens* performances illustrates the powerful shift in ingrained thinking that can occur:

'[It] reminded me of the number of spinsters and maiden aunts who were around when I was growing up. I had not really thought about the effect of the loss of so many young men in this way before.'

'The play has given me a completely new perspective on WWI, of the women who stayed at home and their concerns.'

School pupils who previously studied only the 'war poets' felt that *Handmaidens* augmented their knowledge 'by posing questions that need to be considered', and finding it 'thought provoking – the ending is left very open (and initially annoying!)'. Tellingly, it also alerted one pupil to alternative perspectives on women's lives at that time: 'I think this play has altered my perception of WWI as before I used to think that all the women did was cry and wait for their husbands to come home.'

Audiences for *The Pacifist* were similarly intrigued 'to see pacifists portrayed as spies, as opposed to the more modern, positive idea of pacifism', finding that the play 'gave such a strong female voice to the women back at home and highlighted the paranoia that must have been present'.

Overall, audience reaction indicates that the project has filled a gap in cultural understanding, reminding us that theatre-going remained a potent force during the 1914–18 conflict.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Local Press Reviews

Hard and/or electronic copy of the following articles are available on request:

Duncan Hall, 'The Overriding Sense of Duty: *For My Country* and *The Pacifist*', *Brighton Argus* (4 August 2012), p.22.

Catherine Meek, 'Theatre: For my Country and The Pacifist', *Brighton Argus* (7 August 2012), p.15.

Audience Feedback

A file of audience questionnaires and written feedback is available on request. The audience response rate is as follows (no feedback was solicited for the 1 July 2011 performance at the Drill Hall, London):

7 June 2011, Weston Auditorium, Hatfield: *God Save the King* and *For My Country*
 61 questionnaires completed (85% audience response rate).

29 June 2012, [text removed for publication] St Albans: *The Handmaidens of Death*
 29 questionnaires and student reviews completed (36% response rate).

4 August 2012, Newhaven Fort, East Sussex: *The Pacifist* and *For My Country*
 13 questionnaires completed (26% response rate).

8 November 2012, DeHavilland Sports and Social Club, Hatfield: *The Handmaidens of Death* (two performances, afternoon and evening)
 49 questionnaires completed (40% response rate, the majority originating from the school audience).

17 July 2013, Swedenborg Hall, Bloomsbury, London: *The Pacifist*.
 13 questionnaires completed (65% response rate).

Videos of Performances

For My Country, Weston Auditorium, 7 June 2011 (video in two parts):

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxY2sUjJvw>

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MGk_FsGjQA>

God Save the King, Weston Auditorium, 7 June 2011 (video in three parts):

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iqgMOtfm9I>

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfShVImMP8>

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=u65RKNcYG3Y>