CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE THE WAR

With one arm flung out perilously near the flames of his camp-fire, the sprawling man seems in thrall to a turbulent vision (Pl. 1). Oblivious of his immediate surroundings, where rocks and scrub provide no comfort for his exposed flesh, he succumbs to a dream which seems bound up with the apocalypse beyond. Although he might already have attempted to escape from the destruction engulfing the world, the effort appears to have exhausted him. Now, overcome by physical fatigue and spiritual turmoil alike, he submits himself to fate. So possessed has he become by the vision in his mind that there is no longer any clear distinction between fantasy and reality. Indeed, the catastrophe beyond could even be an extension of his own feverish imaginings, a backdrop onto which he has projected his most macabre anxieties about imminent annihilation.

Ludwig Meidner, the Berlin Expressionist who painted this seeming presentiment of Armageddon two years before the First World War commenced, was not alone in sensing disaster. Throughout Europe, some of the most alert artists of the emergent generation found themselves perturbed by similar intimations. Although no one could have predicted when such a war would break out, let alone foreseen the prolonged and harrowing course it took, painters of very different persuasions were united in a growing conviction that the world might soon be threatened by awesome devastation. The extent of the threat varied enormously, depending on the individual sensibilities of the artists concerned; but they all shared the sense of a cataclysm to come. None more than the 28-year-old Meidner, whose entire work was given up to a sustained series of equally tumultuous images between 1912 and the following year.

Apocalyptic Landscape is among the least exclamatory of these disquieting visions. A large part of the picture-surface is occupied by the recumbent man, and his supine stance has provoked speculation about the possible masochistic leanings of the artist who painted him. Meidner once admitted that 'I feared such visions, yet the final results gave me an especially warm feeling of satisfaction, a slightly Satanic joy.'[1] Such a confession led Donald E. Gordon to connect Meidner's 'passive open-legged figure' with the 'fantasies linking bisexuality, suicide, and the end of the world'[2] in Dr Daniel Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, published in 1903. It is certainly intriguing to find resemblances between Meidner's dreams and Schreber's account of his delusions in the sanatorium, where 'there predominated in recurrent nightly visions the notion of an approaching *end of the world*, as a consequence of the indissoluble connection between God and myself.'[3] But theories about the possible 'unmanning' of the naked figure in Meidner's *Apocalyptic Landscape* should not be allowed to dominate interpretations of his complex painting. The horror with which he views the extinction sweeping across the distant stretches of this terrain is, if anything, more trenchantly conveyed than any gratification he may have felt. Meidner's crisp yet agitated brushmarks re-enact, in their restless rhythms, the impact of the storm as it unleashes primal fury from a blackened sky on the dwellings below. Their inhabitants could never hope to survive such an onslaught, and the minuscule figures crowding the centre of the composition will find no protection in the tempestuous sea awaiting them.

Besides, the perverse strain of satisfaction plays a diminishing role in the apocalyptic canvases Meidner went on to produce during the two extraordinarily heightened years which mark the climax of his entire career. No passive observers can be found in the *Apocalyptic Landscape* in Saarbrücken, where the canvas is dominated by the splintering forms of buildings caught in a terminal convulsion. The few figures still discernible within the maelstrom are diminutive now, and they run from the fragmentation around them with scant hope of survival. Desperation rather than relish is the prevailing emotion here, and the source of destruction has taken on a more mechanized identity. Instead of storms or seismic upheavals, the cataclysm begins to resemble explosions created by titanic weaponry. In *The Burning City*, the glowing houses reel and totter in the face of fires that might well have been induced by a ferocious bombardment. This time, the foreground figures hide their faces from the conflagration, or turn back to confront its glare as they raise their hands in disbelieving protest.

The scale of the disaster is terrifying in its magnitude, and Meidner's own writings testify to the direct corporeal assault it launches against him. As 'the city nears', he declared in his prose poem *Im Nacken das Sternemeer*, 'My body crackles . . . I hear eruptions at the base of my skull. The houses near. Their catastrophes explode from their windows, stairways silently collapse.'[4] The devastation seems to arise here from some discharge caused by the frenetic energy of city life in the early years of the new century. Gerhart Hauptmann would have agreed with this diagnosis, for he complained in 1908 that the rapidly expanding Berlin 'is terrible – loved by few of those who are forced to live here. The sound of endless hollow thunder . . . If one could only call this mad orgy to a halt.'[5] But Meidner knew that a cessation of urban frenzy was impossible – indeed, the commotion could only grow more vehement and unbearable until, at last, all the accumulated violence burst the streets asunder.

Left: Ludwig Meidner *Apocalyptic Landscape* c. 1913 (detail). See Pl. 1.

1 Ludwig Meidner *Apocalyptic Landscape* c. 1913. Oil on canvas, 80 × 116 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.

The compassionate aspect of Meidner's vision was emphasized in November 1912 when he exhibited his new work, along with fellow-painters Richard Janthur and Jakob Steinhardt, in a group exhibition at the Galerie der Sturm called *Die Pathetiker* – The Pathetic Ones. Their name derived from Stefan Zweig's notion of the 'new pathos', which he believed the poet should adopt in the modern era to become 'the tamer and arouser of its passions, the rhapsodist, the challenger, the inspirer, the igniter of the sacred flame – in short, to become energy.'[6] Meidner owed a great deal to the stimulus of Expressionist poetry, declaimed with due vehemence at meetings held by the Zweig-inspired Neopathetic Cabaret. In 1911 Georg Heym, whom Meidner singled out admiringly in *Im Nacken das Sternemeer*, wrote a celebrated poem called 'The War', where an annihilating demon arises to destroy the world with a ferocity that directly anticipates Meidner's apocalyptic paintings:

> A great city sank down in yellow smoke,
> Threw itself without a sound into the belly of the abyss . . .[7]

Heym's use of a comet to signify the approach of conflagration in a poem entitled 'Umbra Vitae' proved particularly inspiring to Meidner, whose *Apocalyptic Landscape* in Münster (Pl. 2) could almost serve as an illustration of Heym's lines:

> The people on the streets draw up and stare,
> While overhead huge portents cross the sky;
> Round fanglike towers threatening comets flare,
> Death-bearing, fiery snouted where they fly.[8]

Ultimately, though, Meidner's visions stem more from his own charged and feverish imagination than from literary stimuli. Alone in his attic studio at Friedenau, which Thomas Grochowiak described as 'a hole of a garret, dark as a cavern, dominated by a pile of ashes and refuse',[9] this nervous, haunted and yet immensely vigorous young painter worked in a mounting frenzy of inventiveness on canvas after canvas. 'That angry, vicious summer began in the spring of 1912', he recalled; 'it was a strange and doom-laden time for me as none other ever was . . . By the end of May the heat was getting hard to bear. But I was going to hold out. I was damned stubborn . . . Bathed in sweat, I felt like a heavy-jowled hound careering along in a wild chase, mile after mile, to find his master – represented, in my case, by a finished oil painting, replete with apocalyptic doom.' The realisation that all these visions were at last being released from his overburdened psyche was cathartic enough to sustain Meidner as he pursued his single-minded course. 'So it went on', he remembered, 'day by day, every one of them sunny and scorching hot, all through June until the July moon eventually waned, still boiling hot, all through the hottest weeks of all, sweaty, unspeakably oppressive, devastating, arduous. But I never wavered: I consecrated myself to the service of the unfathomable and the arduous, and did not weaken.'[10]

Although Meidner must often have imagined that the blistering studio beneath its scorched slate roof might explode, it would be wrong to conclude that all his apocalyptic pictures were based on the notion of spontaneous combustion taken to a horrific extreme. The power unleashed in some of his visions does indeed seem to come, as Wieland Schmied argued, 'from within the picture itself'.[11] But it issues in other works from a source which relates far more to the world beyond the studio. The agents of destruction in Meidner's painting *Revolution* are human, embodied above all in the figure who, like a male equivalent of the heroic woman dominating Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, rises so defiantly from the barricades and yells his insurrectionary rallying-cry (Pl. 3). The men around him are embroiled in the battle, which this time appears solely responsible for the damage sustained by the blazing buildings. Meidner has included his own face here, half cut off by the base of the canvas as he cowers beneath the bullets. But his eyes are vigilant as well as apprehensive, impelled by a determination to witness the conflict with all the clarity he can muster. He even drew *Bombing a City* where everything, from the fires in the street to the immense explosions tearing through the sky, are caused unequivocally by heavy artillery (Pl. 4). Uniformed soldiers cluster near the gun-barrels, thereby identifying the barrage as a full-blown military engagement at last.

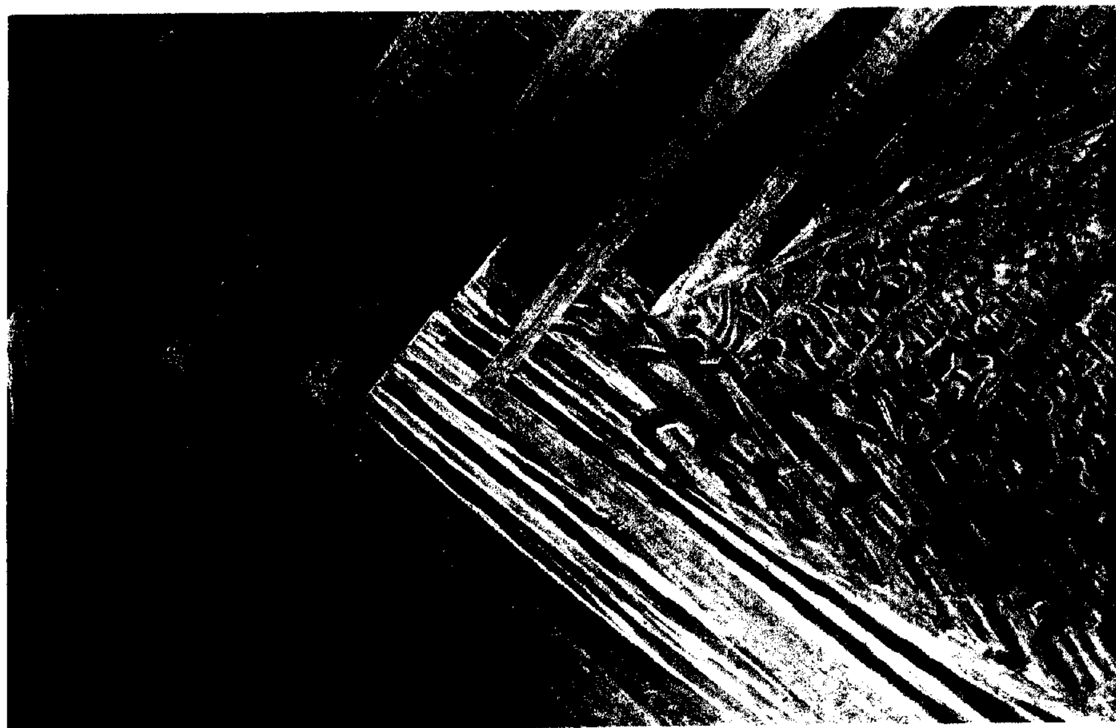
Since Meidner carried out these images in day-and-night bouts of activity well before the Great War was declared, their prescience may seem almost uncanny. Haunted by intimations of disaster unparalleled in its destructive capability, he took on the mantle of a prophet as one picture of shuddering calamity followed another in gruesome succession. In 1918, Meidner drew a portrait of himself clairvoyant in a prayer-shawl, ruminating perhaps on the mysterious imperative which had forced him to herald the long years of bloodshed with such vehemence (see frontispiece). His visions of 1912–13 remain a signal achievement, apparently an astounding example of an artist's ability to foreshadow and warn. But their troubled acuity should not blind anyone to the fact that they arose from a specific historical moment, when Germany was alive to the threat, at least, of a major conflict. During the months of uneasy peace which elapsed between the end of the first Balkan War in November 1912 and the onset of its successor in June the following year, the most belligerent voices of the German press declared themselves in favour of war as 'the saviour, the physician' rather than 'our destroyer'.[12] Re-examining the prospect of an armed struggle with Britain, which had first seemed possible during the short-lived 'Moroccan crisis' in 1911, *Das Neue Deutschland* went so far as to proclaim that 'England it can destroy . . . Germany would become what England is now, the world power.'[13]

Viewed in this ominous light, Meidner's preoccupation with visions of wholesale devastation no longer appear quite so intuitive. He later explained that, while his apocalyptic obsession was at its height, 'the

great upheaval ahead was already showing its teeth and casting its harsh shadow over my wailing brush.'[14] Stefan Zweig agreed, when he looked back on pre-war Berlin many years afterwards and recalled that 'it was not yet panic, but there was a constantly swelling unrest; we sensed a slight discomfort whenever a rattle of shots came from the Balkans. Would war really come upon us without our knowing why and wherefore?' It is impossible to discount the role of hindsight in any retrospective account of a period, and Zweig may be indulging himself a little here. All the same, his description of the accelerating tension in Europe carries fundamental conviction. 'The French industrialists with their big profits agitated against the Germans, who were fattening no less fast, because both of them, Krupp and Schneider-Creusot, wanted to produce more cannon', he wrote. 'The Hamburg shipping interests with their huge dividends worked against those of Southampton, the Hungarian agriculturalists against the Serbians, one corporation against another. The critical juncture everywhere evident had made them frantic for more and more.' Surveying pre-1914 Europe from the vantage of 1943, Zweig was obviously able to comprehend the precise workings of this 'critical juncture' with greater clarity than he could ever have commanded at the time. But that does not invalidate his account of a period when a 'wave of power... beat against our hearts from all the shores of Europe... In Germany a war tax was introduced in the midst of peace, in France the period of military service was prolonged. The surplus energy had finally to discharge itself and the vanes showed the direction from which the clouds were already approaching Europe.'[15]

Alongside this emergent national aggression, Meidner found himself exposed to an unprecedented blast of militarist zeal from avant-garde artists as well. Marinetti's 'Initial Manifesto of Futurism', first published by *Le Figaro* in 1909, appeared in Meidner's Berlin when *Der Sturm* printed a German translation three years later. 'We wish to glorify War – the only health giver of the world', cried one of the manifesto's most notorious passages, extolling 'militarism, patriotism, the destructive arm of the Anarchist, the beautiful Ideas that kill.'[16] Meidner is bound to have been aware of such an inflammatory outburst, published in March 1912 only weeks before he commenced his apocalyptic paintings. They may even have been precipitated by Marinetti's stimulus, and Meidner would have been among the most attentive visitors to the Futurist exhibition held at the Galerie Der Sturm in the spring of 1912. Although he described the Futurists' paintings as 'shabby goods',[17] Meidner benefited from their stylistic innovations and openly admired the panache of their manifestoes. There are, moreover, clear areas of concern uniting his scenes of revolution or bombardment with one of the largest and most vehement paintings in the Futurist exhibition: Russolo's *Revolt* (Pl. 5).

All the same, very significant differences remain. Russolo, in common with most of his Futurist friends, could easily have imagined himself in the vanguard of the scarlet figures who charge across the city, impelled by the unstoppable 'lines of force' carving through its nocturnal streets. Meidner, on the other hand, depicts himself in *Revolution* as a fearful observer rather than a heroic participant, and his vision of revolt lacks Russolo's triumphant certitude. The Futurists were dedicated to destroying the past, in the belief that an unshackled modernity would thrive once the inhibiting shadow of tradition had been ousted for ever. In 'Kill the Moonlight!', Marinetti's second Futurist manifesto published by *Der Sturm* in May 1912, war is alarmingly and naïvely described as 'our only hope, our justification for existence, our will. Yes, war! Against you, those of you who die too slowly, and against all the dead who bar the way!... We shall show all armed soldiers on earth how to spill blood.'[18] In view of the enthusiasm with which Marinetti voiced these belligerent convictions, it is surprising to discover how few pre-1914 Futurist paintings deal with the subject of war. Russolo's *Revolt* is almost alone in its readiness to tackle such a theme, and the official Futurist interpretation of this immense canvas saw it as a spontaneous popular uprising rather than a militaristic clash between opposed nations. 'The revolutionary element made up of enthusiasm and red lyricism', declared the



5 Luigi Russolo *Revolt* 1911. Oil on canvas, 150 × 230 cm. Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

6 Wassily Kandinsky *Composition VI* 1913. Oil on canvas, 195 × 300 cm. The Hermitage, St Petersburg.

explanation, is shown in 'collision' with 'the force of inertia and reactionary resistance of tradition.'[19] There is no hint, here, of the gruesome hallucinations which transfixed Meidner's imagination during this period.

Other artists beyond Marinetti's charismatic sphere of influence did, nevertheless, become preoccupied with the prospect of a *dies irae*. Even August Macke, whose disposition as an artist was fundamentally genial and pacific, painted in the same year as Russolo's *Revolt* a pessimistic vision of a *Storm*. It was the most important canvas he displayed at the historic first exhibition of the *Blaue Reiter*, and departed drastically from his characteristic lyricism. The entire landscape is caught up in a convulsion which threatens to destroy everything in its path. Trees tilt at alarming angles as the cataclysm reaches them, and the geological structure of the earth seems to be undergoing a seismic upheaval. Even the land at the base of the composition, as yet relatively unaffected by the disturbance, appears blighted.

When Macke painted this picture, he was heavily influenced by Kandinsky's apocalyptic thinking. In the latter's case it carries a powerful biblical charge, and many of his greatest pre-war paintings take as their springboard a whole cluster of notions about the last judgement, a deluge or apocalyptic riders. Behind their ostensibly innocuous titles, many of Kandinsky's *Compositions* and *Improvisations* are obsessed by images of engulfment on a global scale. The formidable *Composition VI*, for example (Pl. 6), was inspired initially by his earlier painting on glass called *The Deluge*,[20] and the sense of a cataclysmic drama gives the final canvas much of its exceptional vitality. Kandinsky seems to have approached the execution of the picture in a suitably martial spirit, for he described afterwards how 'the big battle, the great conquest of the canvas had taken place.'[21] But he was at pains to ensure that the finished painting defied any attempt to saddle it with a literal meaning, apocalyptic or otherwise. 'The initial motif of the painting has been dissolved and transformed into an independent, purely artistic inner being with its own objectivity', he emphasized, adding that 'nothing could be more wrong than to consider this painting to be the representation of an event.'[22]

Although his intentions deserve respect, it is impossible to avoid thinking of a primordial disruption when surveying *Composition VI*. Kandinsky's tumbling, dithyrambic rhythms are redolent of the chaos that once attended the origins of the world and now, in the early twentieth century, threatened to do so again. Even though nudes can be detected in the previous *Deluge* painting on glass, riding the tidal waves along with an assortment of frolicsome animals and fish, human life seems untenable in *Composition VI*. But its overall mood is far from unrelieved pessimism. Kandinsky balances its darker elements against a surprising amount of exuberance, especially in the

light and buoyant colours he deploys. Seeking to account for the painting's deliberate ambiguity, he wrote that 'a great objective disaster in its independent meaning is as much of a eulogy as a hymn about the new birth that arises from it.'[23] For Kandinsky was motivated, essentially, by a faith in the imminence of a world-wide spiritual awakening. However vigorously he concentrated on images of a universe in flux, his contemporaneous writings insist that the artist will be able to hear the voice of 'the invisible Moses' and spearhead a resurgence in divine values. His fervent book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912), is pervaded by the mystical certainty that a religious rebirth is at hand, and the extent of Kandinsky's belief in the eventual victory of the 'sacred' over the 'sinful' should never be underestimated.

Nevertheless, during the course of 1913 he found himself drawn into an ever more overt engagement with visions of conflict. As its title declares, *Improvisation Deluge* marks the moment when Kandinsky admits that the seeming abstraction of this tumultuous canvas is inspired by visions of an immense inundation. It remains generalized rather than specific, of course, but his readiness to reveal the full extent of the upheaval grew as the year proceeded. Whether he realised it or not, his work became increasingly caught up with the military tensions of his own time.

Collectors who supported him were quick to notice the new development. Michael Sadler, Kandinsky's first English patron, received the gift of a large painting from the artist for Christmas 1913. It was, apparently, a non-representational work, 'a free pattern of coloured arabesques, explosive and ballistic in its design.'[24] But Sadler, whose early enthusiasm for Kandinsky's art was far in advance of anyone else in Britain, decided to name it *War in the Air*. A few months before receiving the present, he had told the Conference of the National Union of Women Workers in Hull that 'in their present mood the arts of painting and of music were like "voices prophesying war".'[25] Kandinsky's gift confirmed him in this belief, for 'the design, strong in structure and balance, suggested hurtling masses in impending collision. The dominant colours were vermilion, black, purple, sulphur yellow, and blood red. Some of the lines of the picture called up the thought of swift arrows, aircraft and exploding shells.'[26] It impelled Sadler to find out if the artist had himself intended a prophecy. 'A year later', he recalled, 'by which time we were only too familiar with bombs and fighting planes, I wrote to Kandinsky in Sweden to ask whether, when he painted the picture, he had foreboded war. "Not this war", he replied, "but I knew that a terrible struggle was going on in the spiritual sphere, and that made me paint the picture I sent to you."' Kandinsky's remarks prompted Sadler to become 'aware of the sensibility of an artist of genius, shown at times in a flair of anticipation of what's coming.'[27]

When Kandinsky completed *Improvisation 30*, the bracketed word *Cannons* was added to the title as if to concede that its representational elements had now assumed a new significance (Pl. 7). Not only are the cannons themselves frankly depicted in one corner of the canvas; the smoke issuing from their barrels billows across the picture and affects many of its other elements as well. The vertiginous diagonals deployed elsewhere in the painting, evoking a mountainous terrain leaning at an angle close to collapse, suggest that the cannons threaten to undermine the landscape's stability. As they roar, everything around them reacts by reeling away from their impact. Kandinsky himself felt ambivalent about the pictorial significance of the weaponry he had included here. 'The designation *Cannons*, selected by me *for my own use*,' he told Arthur Jerome Eddy, the Chicago collector who bought the painting, 'is not to be conceived as indicating the "contents" of the picture. These contents are indeed what the spectator *lives*, or *feels* while under the effect of the *form and colour combinations* of the picture.' All the same, he went on to reveal that 'the presence of the cannons in the picture could probably be explained by the constant war talk that had been going on throughout the year.' Kandinsky was anxious to stress that 'I did not intend to give a representation of war; to do so would have required different pictorial means.' But he had no desire to underestimate the powerful psychological forces which had driven him, probably against his prior expectations, to paint this prophetic canvas. He explained to Eddy that *Improvisation 30 (Cannons)* was a 'picture which I have painted rather subconsciously in a state of strong inner tension. So intensively did I feel the necessity of some of the forms that I remember having given loud-voiced directions to myself, as for instance, "But the corners must be heavy!"'[28]

Compared with Meidner's visions, with their wholesale commitment to *Götterdämmerung*, Kandinsky's paintings still seem lyrical. Even the *Improvisation* he went on to execute, and then subtitle *Sea Battle*, is a strangely exuberant affair. It seems to view the struggle with rapture, as a necessary prelude to the great awakening he hoped for; and without the titles to guide us, we could be forgiven for failing to notice the military strain in his work of this period. When Roger Fry saw the *Cannons* canvas with two other Kandinskys in 1913, he ignored their representational elements completely. 'They are pure visual music', he argued, concluding that 'I cannot any longer doubt the possibility of emotional expression by such abstract visual signs.'[29] Fry, however, was in no position to understand how insecure Kandinsky became as the 'constant war talk' steadily gathered momentum. The cannons and fighting ships had invaded his art because he feared, as a Russian living in Germany, that his whole life might be disrupted by the onset of hostilities. His misgivings proved only too well-founded: Kandinsky felt obliged to escape from Germany immediately the war arrived in August 1914.

Artists' awareness of militarism was not confined to Berlin visionaries and Russian *émigrés*. In Russia itself, two leading young proponents of the emergent avant-garde became preoccupied with army images at an early stage in their careers. Mikhail Larionov's interest arose directly from his own period of military service, which began in 1908 when he was called up at the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. His first soldier paintings date from that period, and convey the easy-going tempo of life during the summer at a camp just outside the capital. The insouciance of these smoking, card-playing figures is matched by the informal style Larionov adopts, drawing freely on folk-art traditions and even inscribing bawdy words on the second version of *The Soldiers* with the slangy bravado of a boy scrawling graffiti on a street corner. The carefree life hailed in these engagingly relaxed canvases is far removed from the reality of battle. When Larionov painted *Soldier on a Horse*, the uniformed figure on a rearing mount looked as playful as a dressed-up marionette astride a rocking-horse (Pl. 8). A holiday mood prevails, albeit laced with an irreverence which flouts the whole sacrosanct notion of a dignified army in thrall to the Tsar's unquestioned authority.

Larionov's contemporary Chagall relished an even more satirical approach to military life in several of his pre-war works. Without any enlistment experience of his own, he relied on memories of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904–5. Russian soldiers were billeted on his family in provincial Vitebsk, and *The Soldier Drinks* may derive from Chagall's recollection of a garrulous lodger who regaled him with stories by the dripping samovar. While holding one finger under the ornamental tap, the soldier lets his cap fly off to float, with typical

8 Mikhail Larionov *Soldier on a Horse* c. 1912. Oil on canvas, 87 × 99.1 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

9 Marc Chagall *Soldiers* 1912. Gouache on board, 38 × 32.5 cm. Private collection.

Chagallian buoyancy, at a tipsy angle in the air. The diminutive couple dancing on the table-top indicates that his memories are predominantly happy, but his other hand gestures towards a window where a more disturbing scene is disclosed. The house beyond appears to be threatened by a fiery glow irradiating the night sky, as if to suggest that the boisterous soldier is neglecting the very real menace about to destabilize Russian life. Soon after the war commenced, Chagall would become one of the first artists to define its essential tragedy, and in these pre-war images an incipient alarm is already detectable. A small but violent gouache from the same period shows an enraged Cain assailing his brother in a field serrated with saw-tooth patterns. Chagall's rasping urgency makes the picture a worthy forerunner of Corinth's far more lacerating version of the same biblical theme, executed during the darkest days of the conflict (see Pl. 239). Although Chagall shared Larionov's levity when depicting the pre-war Russian military, the smiles on the faces of his *Soldiers* are markedly more vicious (Pl. 9). Even then, when the war itself was still years away, Chagall could not help seeing this cluster of grinning, wild-eyed recruits as a potential source of brutality.

His misgivings were not shared by the Parisian Cubist Roger de La Fresnaye, who in 1910 became preoccupied with images of soldiering. Working on the illustrations for Claudel's drama *Tête d'Or* gave him the original impetus to develop an interest in the subject, and his large canvas of *The Cuirassier* stems from an involvement with the past rather than the present. Its starting-point is Géricault's celebrated *Wounded Cuirassier* in the Louvre – even if La Fresnaye transforms this apprehensive figure into a yelling semi-Cubist warrior, with his sharp-beaked helmet and commanding stance. But by the time he painted *Artillery* a few months later, the march of a modern army had replaced Géricault's inspiration altogether (Pl. 10). Executed at a moment when, as Germain Seligman pointed out, 'Europe was already tense with political conflict and the Agadir incident had even brought open talk of war',[30] it employs a simple, classicizing idiom which has grown more rigidly schematic since La Fresnaye painted *The Cuirassier*. The bodies of the cavalry officers, with their elegant epaulets and shakos, are confined inside the same angular straitjacket as the helmeted artillery-men. All the figures seem to have taken on the machine-like impersonality of the weapons they accompany. The protruding gun-barrel is forcefully registered, and establishes the thrusting diagonal interplay which gives the entire composition its taut energy. There is, nevertheless, a brittle feeling about the picture which prevents it from becoming ominous or awesome. Robert Rosenblum perceptively argued that the structures in *Artillery* 'have a fragile, disjointed quality that belies ironically their ostensible firmness and obedience to gravity.'[31] As a result, La Fresnaye's depiction of an armed convoy lacks any sense of an inflexible progress towards the battlefield. There is an almost balletic lightness about the trumpeting, drum-banging soldiers in the distance, and even the wheels bearing the gun are wittily summarized in a sequence of playful arcs.

Soon after *Artillery* was completed the spirit of patriotic fervency increased rapidly in France, prompting the newly elected Prime Minister Poincaré to adopt a more belligerent attitude towards Germany. He supported Russia's clandestine founding of a 'Balkan League' with Bulgaria and Serbia in March 1912, the month when the *Daily Telegraph* detected a startling new mood in the annual review of the Paris garrison's reserves. It was, declared the newspaper's correspondent, 'the most remarkable demonstration of patriotism I ever remember having seen here ... For a couple of hours this evening I have been hearing at frequent intervals the tramp of boots, the crashing and rolling of regimental bands, and roars of cheers along the boulevards beneath my windows.' The sound served to convince the reporter that 'the change in the French national temper is one of the most remarkable events in Europe today',[32] and Poincaré continued to build up his country's military strength as the year proceeded. In October 1912 Serbia and Bulgaria, along with Montenegro and Greece, finally declared war on Turkey. A month later, having expelled the Turks, Serbia claimed most of Albania

10 Roger de La Fresnaye *Artillery* 1911. Oil on canvas, 130.2 × 159.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Anonymous gift, 1991.

from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In predictable response, Austria mobilized its forces; but Russia, as yet unprepared for war, decided against siding openly with Serbia and escalating the conflict. Although the Tsar's vacillation enabled treaty negotiations to commence in London, they were only concluded in May the following year with an agreement so fragile that it led, soon afterwards, to the eruption of the Second Balkan War.

When Picasso started experimenting with the revolutionary possibilities of collage in October 1912, therefore, the French newspapers were devoting a substantial amount of space to reports and often excitable speculation about the progress of the First Balkan War. Over half the journalistic cuttings used in his *papiers collés* during the closing months of 1912 are concerned with that war and its effect on the political and economic condition of Europe. But how deliberate was Picasso's decision to include material dealing with the conflict? In recent years some historians have claimed a considerable amount of significance for these political reports: Patricia Leighten maintained that they 'had special resonance for an artist deeply tied to the anarcho-Symbolist, antimilitarist traditions of Barcelona and who was daily immersed in the raging arguments over the pan-European war universally acknowledged to be threatening.'[33] More cautiously, David Cottington decided that Leighten's willingness to regard Picasso's war references as antimilitarist 'is attractive but ultimately unsatisfactory, for it ignores the questions of how the cuttings signify in relation to each work as a whole, and of the *terms* on which Picasso incorporated such extraneous material into his art.'[34] Cottington is surely right to warn against the rashness involved in attaching concrete political meanings to the collages of 1912, but their inclusion of so much war-related material still deserves to be analysed.

In *Guitar, Sheet-Music and Glass*, probably one of Picasso's earliest *papiers collés* and the first to include a newspaper fragment,[35] a headline from a November 1912 edition of *Le Journal* announces that 'The Battle is Joined'. It originally introduced a report from Constantinople about the First Balkan War, and Picasso ensured that the four dramatic words were preserved intact when he removed them from their front-page context. He might, however, have intended them as a metaphorical reference to his friendly rivalry with Braque, who had produced the first *papier collé* in September 1912. Picasso thrived on their competitive relationship at this stage in the development of Cubism, and 'The Battle is Joined' could also convey his excitement at embarking on a formal strategy certain to provoke antagonism in Paris art circles. As its title indicates, however, this important picture contains elements more important by far than the fragment from *Le Journal*. The other six pieces of paper pasted on to the ground of lozenge-patterned wallpaper are concerned with a still life unaccompanied by any belligerent associations. They occupy most of the available space, implying that music-making and wine-drinking were of greater interest to Picasso than the Balkan conflict.

A similarly subservient position is occupied by the cutting in *Violin*, where segments dealing with a musical instrument predominate once again. This time, however, the newspaper report has moved nearer to the violin itself, suggesting perhaps that the world of military affairs is encroaching on Picasso's life in the studios and café tables of Montmartre. The cutting deals with the Montenegran army's occupation of St-Jean-de-Medua and the Turkish resistance, but it is briefer and less vivid than the extensive war report incorporated in *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (Pl. 11). Here, in a diagonal position to the right of the still life placed on a blue oval table, lies an

11 Pablo Picasso *Glass and Bottle of Suze* 1912. Pasted papers, gouache and charcoal, 65.4 × 50 cm. Washington University Gallery of Art, St Louis, University Purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946.

often harrowing account of the Serbian army's advance towards Monastir in Macedonia. Although its writer wonders about the effect of famine on Adrianople, the subject of Marinetti's celebrated siege-poem, Picasso's priorities are radically removed from the Futurist leader's lust for destruction. Instead of lauding violence, the report in *Glass and Bottle of Suze* stresses the suffering of Turks who had fallen victim to a cholera outbreak. 'Before long I saw the first corpse still grimacing with suffering and whose face was nearly black', wrote the reporter. 'Then I saw two, four, ten, twenty; then I saw a hundred corpses. They were stretched out there where they had fallen during the march of the left convoy, in the ditches or across the road, and the files of cars loaded with the almost dead everywhere stretched themselves out on the devastated route.' The reporter goes on to describe the thousands of bodies strewn across 'the cursed route where a wind of death blows', before adding, ominously, that 'I had seen nothing yet.'[36]

Picasso's decision to include such a gruesome document indicates that he wanted to present a view of war deliberately at odds with nationalistic accounts of the triumphant Serbian invasion. Compassion is aroused here for the enemies of France's allies, and on the left side of *Glass and Bottle of Suze* he places a cutting about a mass protest meeting of left-wingers and anarchists whose speeches unite them in a condemnation of the war. Since Picasso is likely to have been broadly in sympathy with their position, the inclusion of this report was probably meant to reinforce the revulsion expressed in the account of the cholera epidemic on the right side of the collage. All the same, the significance of both these cuttings can easily be overstressed. For one thing, the report from Macedonia is positioned upside-down. Even though Picasso may have wanted the inversion to convey his belief that the Turks' anguish reflected the topsy-turvy values of a world gone mad, the report would have been illegible to all but the most diligent onlooker. Moreover, both sets of cuttings are subordinate to the principal aim of the collage – a sophisticated Cubist play on methods of depicting a bottle and glass with cunning ambiguity and wit. This is the true focus of Picasso's concerns, and neither the Balkan conflict nor pacifist polemic is allowed to distract much attention from this central obsession with the ordinary objects of everyday life.

It is important, then, not to be carried away by the proliferation of war references in Picasso's *papier collés* during the autumn and winter of 1912. Another collage, *Table with Bottle*, certainly makes striking use of an inverted page from *Le Journal*'s financial section discussing the effect of the Balkan truce on the European economy. But the bottle retains its dominant position in the collage, just as it does in a related picture called *Table with Bottle, Wineglass and Newspaper* where the cutting is reduced to a far smaller role again. Here Picasso makes clear just how detached he feels from the reality of the conflict. Even if the cutting refers very clearly to Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, their true significance is undermined by the playful way in which the headline above is shorn of its original meaning. 'UN COUP DE THÉATRE' becomes, with the aid of Picasso's scissors, 'UN COUP DE THÉ'. War news is turned, adroitly, into a Cubist joke for the amusement of the artist reading his paper at a café table. And when Picasso came across news of the peace negotiations in London, he inserted a segment from *Le Journal* which juxtaposes a report on the armistice talks with an item about a peacetime Parisian 'drama'. Once the First Balkan War looked as if it would eventually be resolved, his interest receded and turned instead to other aspects of current events. *Table with Bottle and Wineglass* in the Menil Collection is concerned, above all, with an elegant, thorough-going demonstration of Cubism at its most formally economical. The charcoal lines are now allowed to impose their magisterial order unchallenged, for the most part, by journalistic material of any kind.

A related unwillingness to allow militarism a substantial reality prevented Jacques Villon, a year later, from making his *Marching Soldiers* wholeheartedly aggressive (Pl. 12). Villon himself coined the phrase 'Impressionistic Cubism'[37] for the style he employed here, and it helps to explain the curiously insubstantial character of the figures in this subtle painting. Their forms are difficult to pin down as they dart through the scaffolding of directional lines Villon has erected to articulate their hurried movement. The vigour and efficiency of a crisply regimented column is conveyed with admirable economy, and Villon's stabbing structure hints at the slender yet deadly bayonets jutting out from the soldiers' equipment. All the same, the sheer refinement of *Marching Soldiers*' formal organization and bleached colours ensures that a robust view of the army is avoided here. Fragile rather than boisterous, these figures lose much of their solidity in the 'synthesis of movement through continuity'[38] which Villon wanted to achieve at this early stage in his career.

A parallel sense of impending dematerialization affects Malevich's painting *The Guardsman*, produced in the same year (Pl. 13). Among the radically fragmented forms that refer to the figure himself, references as specific as the stars on his cap are included. The buttons emblazoning his uniform are discernible, too, rendered as a sequence of simple discs, but the guardsman has in the main become a dehumanized assembly of signs. They exemplify Malevich's growing commitment to irrationality, an art of 'non-sense realism' which, taking the formal discoveries of Synthetic Cubism as its starting-point, here subverts the conventional depiction of military life as thoroughly as possible. This undermining process, which Camilla Gray described as 'a pictorial interpretation of the contemporary ideas in poetry put forward by Khlebnikov and Kruchenikh,'[39] reaches its climax in the mysterious yellow quadrilateral which makes such a presumptuous appearance over on the right half of *The Guardsman*. It cancels out any further attempt on Malevich's part to refer to the figure who, according to the picture's title, forms the 'subject' of this deeply questioning picture. Although John Golding decided that the movement of the quadrilateral is ambiguous,[40] it does in the end seem more in favour of leading our eyes to the canvas's right edge. Confirmed in that direction by the arrow inscribed in the pigment, the quadrilateral asserts a geometrical clarity quite at odds with the planar complexity elsewhere in the composition. It seems to propose a more unruffled and lucid order of seeing, strikingly prophetic of the great 1917 *Suprematist Painting* where another yellow quadrilateral is permitted to inhabit the picture-space in potent isolation.[41] Although Malevich would reveal an instinctive patriotism and readiness to fight the enemy once war had been declared (see Pls. 47–8), he uses incipient Suprematism at this stage to threaten the guardsman with pictorial dissolution.

In Berlin, the young American painter Marsden Hartley likewise became fascinated by the challenge of dealing with army themes in a near-abstract language. But he approached the task in a spirit far removed from Malevich's attempt to challenge the dominance of the ostensible subject. 'I like Deutschland', Hartley wrote to Gertrude Stein several months after he arrived there in January 1913, adding that 'I think I shall like it for long . . . there is a wholesome hum here.'[42] A large part of his enthusiasm stemmed from the stimulus of meeting Kandinsky and other artists associated with the *Blaue Reiter*. Since they urged him to participate in their exhibitions, he experienced none of the alienation which an American expatriate might

12 Jacques Villon *Marching Soldiers* 1913. Oil on canvas, 64.8 × 92 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

easily have suffered. 'I have no sense of *heimweh* here on German soil',[43] Hartley wrote, and in a painting called *Military* he celebrated his new-found involvement with the armed forces.

Far from viewing German soldiers sceptically, as members of an increasingly powerful and confident fighting unit, he reduced them to a complex of triangles and circles handled with romantic ardency. Subsequent paintings would disclose his homoerotic passion for a particular officer (see Pl. 110), and *Military* can be seen as a preliminary declaration of Hartley's infatuation with the symbolism and paraphernalia of the *junker* élite corps. Although Kandinsky's influence can be detected in the near-abstract language Hartley employs, thereby placing him among the most audacious American painters of his generation, *Military* carries no presentiment of an apocalypse. Instead, the numbers on this painting reflect his almost mystical commitment to numerology. 'I was told before I came to Berlin to look for 8-pointed stars', he explained, and this willingness to discover occult significance in mathematical combinations focused on the insignia of the German army at its most glamorous.

Hartley was particularly captivated by a military review he observed in May 1913, celebrating the cavalcade of uniformed riders in a painting of *The Warriors* where their pageantry assumes an ecstatic significance. 'I am seeing eight-pointed stars here by the thousands', he wrote excitedly to Stieglitz, explaining that 'a symbolist friend says it is a fine star for me – on the Kaiser's breast it is always – on the helmets of the thousands of soldiers.'[44] In *Portrait of Berlin* the image which dominated *The Warriors* is confined to a single circle, resting like a medallion on the painting's bottom edge. Around this tribute to the virile cavalryman Hartley now felt free to inscribe his favourite number within a thickly framed triangle, while further up the composition an eight-pointed star bursts like a manifestation of divine guidance in the sky. The respect Hartley received from the *Blaue Reiter* artists and Herwarth Walden, who displayed five of his paintings alongside Kandinsky and Rousseau in the progressive Herbstsalon of 1913, further emboldened the young American. He ceased to rely on figurative references altogether, filling his *Painting No. 48, Berlin* with enlarged and radiant affirmations of the star and the mystical eight alike (Pl. 15). Enclosed in mandala-like contours, they blaze out Hartley's belief in cosmic transcendence triumphing over the material world.

Without first-hand experience of war, few artists in the pre-1914 period could be expected to appreciate the darker implications of

13 Kasimir Malevich *The Guardsman* 1913. Oil on canvas, 57 × 66.5 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

mounting militarism. The Czech painter Bohumil Kubišta did, however, undergo active service on the Adriatic coast in 1913, and the work he executed there conveys a far harsher vision than Villon, Malevich or Hartley would have deemed appropriate. Before his enlistment, Kubišta had displayed an encyclopaedic engagement with different aspects of the European avant-garde. The Expressionism which led to his membership of the *Die Brücke* group in 1911 was followed by Cubist affiliations, and they in turn gave way to the impact of Futurism when self-styled Kubišta saw the Italian movement's exhibition at Berlin in the spring of 1912. By the time the 29-year-old painter was sent to the Adriatic coast, these Futurist leanings had gained dominance over his work. While Marinetti and his allies talked about the importance of war but avoided depicting it, Kubišta witnessed real battles and made them central to his art.

Heavy Artillery in Action brings the spectator into the thick of a bombardment (Pl. 14). Raised gun-barrels blast off missiles in thunderous unison, and the outcome of their salvoes is dramatized by the explosions lower down the canvas. Futurist simultaneity enabled Kubišta to fuse disparate times and places in a single image of assault. But the impact of the massive machine-age weaponry is not presented with wholehearted Marinettian ebullience. Although the figure silhouetted in one corner of the painting may be responsible for firing a gun, he is a furtive presence who ducks away from the shattering outcome of his actions. Wholly overshadowed by the machinery of war, he seems diminished in stature as the shells scream through the air and detonate around him.

Kubišta's appropriately fragmented vision of war, which includes a gunner's circular view of a destroyer in the upper section of the painting, is more murderous by far than Marinetti's rendering of 'The Siege of Adrianople', his notorious *parole in libertà* poem which he zestfully performed 'with various kinds of onomatopoeic noises and crashes'[45] to intensify the verbal assault. It became the centrepiece of his boisterous volume of poetry *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, which rejoiced in pounding attack without a hint of combat's tragic dimensions: 'hurrrrrrrah tatatatatata hurrrrrraaah tatatatata PUUM PAMPAM PLUFF.'[46]

It is easy to see the extent of Marinetti's debt to Nietzsche, who had urged readers of his enormously influential *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in a section chillingly entitled 'Of War and Warriors': 'You should seek your enemy, you should wage your war – a war for your opinions . . . You should love peace as a means to new wars. And the short peace more than the long. I do not exhort you to work but to battle . . . You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I tell you: it is the good war that hallows every cause.'[47] But Nietzsche's mesmeric hold over artists was by no means confined to the Futurist camp. His greatest following was in his native Germany, where Zarathustra's sharply original odyssey through the contemporary world exerted a seminal hold on German artists of the Expressionist generation.

When Ernst Ludwig Kirchner first met Erich Heckel in 1904, the latter entered his Dresden lodgings declaiming passages from *Zarathustra* at full volume. They may well have come from the book's prologue, which supplied the emergent *Brücke* group with its name by declaring that 'what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*.'[48] Danger was of the essence in Zarathustra's view of man as 'a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still.'[49] Sacrifice was admirable if it carried a purgative force, and Zarathustra claimed that 'I love him who justifies the men of the future and redeems the men of the past: for he wants to perish by the men of the present.'[50]

By 1913 this sense of danger and sacrifice had begun to be expressed with unprecedented forcefulness by many artists in the Nietzschean orbit. Heckel's *Landscape in Thunderstorm* appears at first no more than a climatic phenomenon, powerfully observed. After a while, though, it assumes a preternatural dimension. The colossal bulbous clouds expanding in the sky seem on the point of unleashing an onslaught too great for the countryside to withstand. Moreover, this looming monstrosity bears a resemblance to a gigantic head, bending over the defenceless earth like an agent of wholesale destruction. Half-obscured by shadows, his cheeks are pregnant with the swollen, accumulated weight of the whirlwind he is about to blow across the land. In this respect, he could be regarded as an embodiment of those who earned Nietzsche's highest praise in Zarathustra's

14 Bohumil Kubišta *Heavy Artillery in Action* 1913. Oil on canvas, 37 × 49.5 cm. Národní Galerí, Prague.

16 Otto Dix *Sunrise* 1913. Oil on millboard, 50.8 × 66 cm. Private collection, Germany.

Prologue: 'I love all those who are like heavy drops falling singly from the dark cloud that hangs over mankind: they prophesy the coming of the lightning and as prophets they perish. Behold, I am a prophet of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called *Superman*.'[51]

In other words, Nietzsche did not view this 'dark cloud that hangs over mankind' as a baleful threat. The storm which generated the lightning would be an emetic, purging Europe of its pervasive rottenness and heralding the vitalistic new order he cherished. If the entire continent were engulfed by the impending cataclysm, so much the better: the renovation of society would be still more widespread and effective. Whether the artists who venerated Nietzsche entirely shared his ideas about war remains debatable. There is considerable foreboding in Heckel's *Landscape in Thunderstorm*, and a similar complexity informs the dramatic *Sunrise* painted by Otto Dix in the same year (Pl. 16). The precocious Dix, still a student at the Dresden School of Arts and Crafts when he executed this picture, admired Nietzsche to the point of hero-worship at the time. He had already modelled a green-painted, life-size plaster bust of the philosopher, and the cataclysmic quality of *Sunrise* owes a great deal to Nietzschean ideas. The vigorous manipulation of impasto, no less than the presence of black crows flapping across the land, also testify to the direct inspiration of Van Gogh. But the extraordinary vehemence with which this sun appears above the horizon is impelled by a rasping power that belongs to Dix alone. The great disc of white and gold bursts like a bomb, exploding outwards in black splinters aggressive enough to drive away the thick mass of cloud which accumulated during the night. Although snow smothers the frozen winter fields, this fiery apparition emanates such a brazen amount of light and heat that everything will surely melt before it. The crows, shocked out of their nocturnal sloth, have already decided to flee from the angry intrusion. But its violence is as extreme as a Meidner eruption, and their wings may yet be caught by the inferno. Indeed, as the sun ascends its ferocity will grow, so that the entire landscape might eventually be consumed in a conflagration of epic proportions.

The rough energy with which Dix painted his visionary sun, boiling in the sky as forcefully as the flames of the foundry where his mould-maker father worked, conveys exhilaration and disquiet in equal measure. For Dix, even as he shuddered at the prospect of a catastrophe overwhelming nature, was sufficiently Nietzschian to be excited by the idea of creation through destruction. During the course of 1913, this notion also took hold of Franz Marc's imagination. Until then, he had been the painter least likely to align himself with such a disturbing notion. Convinced that great art needed a strong religious dimension, the former theology student had devoted himself to the development of a pacific and idyllic world. Turning away from 'impious' humanity, he preferred to concentrate on images of animals inhabiting a primal landscape. Graceful, compassionate and athletic, these idealized horses, does and tigers rejoiced in an unblemished moral unity which contrasted with the decadence of urban society. But the paradise Marc constructed from his simple Alpine existence, where he pursued 'the animalization of art' by studying his subjects in all their apparent purity, could not last. In 1913 his mood suddenly darkened, and Eden became a place haunted by hitherto unimagined dangers. *The Unfortunate Land of Tyrol* reveals a blighted terrain, eerie and forlorn. The bird perched on a bare, stunted branch extends his wings in a helpless gesture, as if to deplore the barren locale surrounding him. But nothing can be done to alleviate the bleakness of this impoverished place. Paradise has turned into a wasteland disconcertingly akin to the battlefields of Belgium and France during the war, and Marc's once-masterful horses are reduced to picking their disconsolate way through a terrain where nothing seems capable of growth.

Worse was to come. Expanding the size of his work in order to accommodate the calamitious events which seized his imagination, Marc embarked on a painting clearly intended as a youthful masterpiece (Pl. 17). 'The Trees Show Their Rings, the Animals Their Veins'[52] was the biblical title he originally gave this turbulent panorama. For the world which had earlier appeared so unsullied and intact now became an exposed and vulnerable domain, riven by devastation of terrifying potency. The whirlwind courses through the forest, bent on subjugating trees and animals alike. Its onslaught is so severe that trees shed drops of scarlet blood, and the green horses struggle to retain their balance as the hurricane distorts their bodies with brutish velocity. On the back of the canvas Marc's subtitle, apparently derived from the Hindu Vedas, stresses the overriding importance of nature's agony as his principle theme: 'And All Being Is Flaming Suffering.' As if to bear out this declaration, the severed tree-trunk below the horses exposes its white pulp so openly that it glistens in the darkness of the wood. But the annihilating forces have not yet completed their mission. Jagged missiles penetrate the upper corner of the picture, piercing the shadows with incandescent shafts. The surviving animals' only resort is to seek shelter beneath the tree, which leans in a noble yet beleaguered diagonal across the surface of the canvas. If it withstands the rest of the attack, with roots still firmly embedded in the ground, then at least some remnants of life might be sustainable after the fury subsides.

When Marc's prodigious painting was itself seriously damaged by fire, it must have seemed as if the warning he conveyed here was about to reach fulfilment in the most literal manner imaginable. But enough of the canvas was rescued to convince his friend Klee that a restoration should be undertaken. If Klee's retouching is all too evident today, he did succeed in remaining faithful to Marc's initial intentions. He also renamed the picture *The Fate of the Animals*, the concise title by which it has been known ever since. By choosing the determinist word *Schicksale*, Klee emphasized the Nietzschean strain in Marc's thinking as well. For he seems to have reached the con-

17 Franz Marc *The Fate of the Animals* 1913. Oil on canvas, 195 × 263.5 cm. Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

clusion, during 1913, that the renewal promised in his earlier animal idylls would never be achieved by a peaceful transition. Only by submitting to wholesale assault would the new order eventually emerge, and in *The Fate of the Animals* there is more than a hint that such a catharsis will come to pass. The trunk bending at such a vertiginous angle across the centre of the composition is an evergreen ash, the tree which North German mythology regards as indestructible. By stretching his neck upwards to echo the direction of the ash, therefore, the blue deer is not simply hiding from the tempest. He is attempting to identify with the tree as closely as possible, in the expectation that he will take on the ash's power of survival. Marc holds out a similar hope for the pair of pink animals clustered together in the lower reaches of the forest. Their chances of withstanding the apocalypse seem high, and the affection with which they nuzzle each other implies a readiness to propagate the new race of pure beings in the future.

When Marc was sent a postcard reproduction of *The Fate of the Animals* at the Front in 1915, he recognised with a shock that 'it is like a premonition of this war, at once horrible and stirring. I can hardly believe that I painted it. Yet it is artistically rational to paint such a picture before the war, and not simply as a dumb memory after it is all over. That is the time to be painting formative pictures symbolic of the future.'[53] The territory in his art may not have been inhabited by humans, but their actions were echoed and interpreted throughout the metaphoric world which Marc created. The last major painting he produced before the war made this ambition more evident than before. *Fighting Forms* seems, at first glance, a wholly abstract work (Pl. 18). The two eruptive areas of red and black dominating the composition cannot easily be related to any of the landscape or animal images which enlivened his earlier pictures.

18 Franz Marc *Fighting Forms* 1914. Oil on canvas, 91 × 131.5 cm. Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich.

They appear to be embroiled in a struggle so apocalyptic that it threatens to spread outwards and fill the entire canvas with strife. Only after a while does the volcanic red area disclose the suggestion of a bird, which immediately gives the painting an airborne dimension and suggests that the black mass is whirling through the air like a typhoon.

One historian has argued that *Fighting Forms* dramatizes 'the power of Mind contending with the forces of the material world',[54] but such a reading diminishes the baleful implications of Marc's vision. Painted in the early summer of 1914, its convulsive violence seems to be riddled with an unsettling presage of the war. A few months before, Marc had tempered the pessimism of a large canvas called *The Unhappy Tyrol* by adding a haloed Madonna, who holds her child as she shines out ameliorating shafts of hope into the chaos around her. The tragedy of the Balkan Wars, to which the painting clearly refers, is here redeemed by the healing presence of Mary the comforter. But by the time Marc produced *Fighting Forms*, his imagination was possessed by a premonition which no amount of religious faith could dispel or even lighten. Despite his belief in the affirmative consequences of destruction, this strangely feverish picture indicates that Marc felt overwhelmed by a sense of havoc ahead.

In Britain, the forebodings were far less anguished. But if no artists shared Marc's Teutonic willingness to expose his most fearful visions of disaster, some did feel impelled to prefigure the hostilities ahead. Douglas Goldring, a young publisher who admired the avant-garde circle preparing to launch the Vorticist movement, afterwards described how 'the Season of 1914 was a positive frenzy of gaiety'. The mood of raucous hysteria seemed to him inherently self-destructive, and 'long before there was any shadow of war, I remember feeling that it couldn't go on, that something *had* to happen.'[55] However much Goldring benefited from retrospective wisdom when he wrote those words in later life, the truth is that a considerable amount of the experimental art produced in London during these pre-war months was powered by an overwhelming urge to attack and destroy.

Wyndham Lewis, the editor of the aggressively titled *Blast* magazine, was the Vorticist most keenly prepared to place this belligerence at the heart of his current work. In an exclamatory tirade written to announce the publication of *Blast* in July 1914, he cried:

> Well then! This is what it is time to do.
> We must kill John Bull.
> We must kill John Bull with art![56]

Lewis's fury was directed primarily at all those forces in British culture – philistinism, nostalgia, an unwillingness to engage in radical transformation – which he considered inimical to the development of a vital new art. Images and words were his weapons, and none of the Vorticists looked forward to a real war with the enthusiasm displayed by Marinetti. All the same, their boisterous and often volcanic behaviour in the first half of 1914 anticipated the war fever which gripped the entire country once hostilities against Germany were declared. Lewis later described how, within his highly combative milieu, 'all the artists and men of letters had gone into action before the bank-clerks were clapped into khaki and despatched to the land of Flanders Poppies to do their bit. Life was one big bloodless brawl, prior to the Great Bloodletting.'[57]

Although the Vorticists were concerned with aesthetic revolution rather than a real military offensive, Lewis still found himself painting images of war which heralded political events in Europe with chilling accuracy. The most monumental was a tall canvas called *Plan of War*, which he remembered executing 'six months before the Great War "broke out", as we say.'[58] (Pl. 19). Clearly intended as a major manifestation of his new-found Vorticist style, this tautly organized picture was reproduced in *Blast* to prove that Lewis's work implemented his theoretical preference for an art of bareness and austerity, calmly inhabiting the concentrated centre of modern life's metaphorical whirlpool. 'The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest',[59] he asserted in a manifesto entitled 'Our Vortex', and *Plan of War* exemplifies this paradoxical state by enclosing its militant blocks of diagonally orientated form in rigid, schematic outlines. Since only a monochrome photograph of the painting now survives, it is impossible to tell how important a role colour played in the original work. But Lewis's contemporaneous pictures often deployed venomous, high-keyed colour oppositions, and when *Plan of War* was exhibited in June 1914 one reviewer remarked that 'the severe emphasis on geometrical forms seems to enhance the intensity of the colour.'[60] Even in reproduction it seems a very lucid design: the directional thrust of the blocks is clarified by juxtaposing them with ample areas of bareness. The ascending structures are thereby enabled to assume an awesome authority as they dispose themselves on the picture-surface, preparing for battle.

19 Wyndham Lewis *Plan of War* 1914. Oil on canvas, 255 × 143 cm. Lost.

For all its willingness to use a remarkable degree of abstraction, almost as extreme as work of the same period by Kupka, *Plan of War*'s references to a martial engagement remain inescapable. Indeed, Frank Rutter, a critic who was broadly in sympathy with Lewis's art, claimed in retrospect that the painting amounted to a literal transcription of army manoeuvres. *Plan of War* was, he argued, 'no more "abstract" than the blocks of wood used in the War Game. What Lewis had done was to take for his point of departure the familiar diagram of a battle that we see in history books, with rectangles for infantry divisions, little squares for cavalry, white for the British, shaded for the enemy, and so on.'[61] But even if Rutter had been told about this starting-point by the artist himself, it would be wrong to conclude that Lewis relied too heavily on such a source. More of a metaphor than a transcription, *Plan of War* coolly evokes the power-politics of a period when restless European nations aired their armies in practice displays of muscle-flexing menace. It is as if Lewis had divined what A.J.P. Taylor described as the 'factor of high strategy' which had such a 'decisive and disastrous effect' on the build-up to world war. 'All military authorities in Europe believed that attack was the only effective means of modern war,' Taylor wrote, 'essential even for defence. They were quite wrong about this. They could have learned from the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, and from the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 . . . that defence was getting stronger and attack more difficult. None of them learnt this. Every chief of staff had offensive plans, and only offensive plans.'[62]

Plan of War seems to mirror this fatal priority, and other Lewis paintings share this preoccupation with titles like *Signalling* and *Slow*

20 Wassily Kandinsky *Improvisation Gorge* 1914. Oil on canvas, 110 × 110 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. Gabriele Münter Bequest.

Attack.[63] In the latter canvas, the assembled ranks which dominated *Plan of War* have begun to assail each other and merge in unruly combat. One piston-like form manages to break free from the mêlée and stretch upwards, terminating in a claw that clutches at an enemy flank above. On the whole, though, the opposing armies appear to be locked in a struggle unlikely to yield a decisive outcome. In this respect, too, Lewis was strangely prophetic of the war's inconclusive conduct. Rutter stressed 'the mental alertness of the artist', marvelling at Lewis's ability 'to feel early in 1914 that there was "war in the air", and to begin a series of these strange designs all with titles taken from a military text book, and all based on the tactical dispositions of *Kriegspiel*.'[64] But Lewis himself, writing only two years before the

Second World War, maintained that 'it is somewhat depressing to consider how as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it.' So far as he was concerned, *Plan of War* demonstrated that 'with me war and art have been mixed up from the start. It is still. I wish I could get away from war.'[65]

In 1914, however, neither Lewis nor the other European artists aware of the impending crisis had any alternative open to them. War seemed to be an inescapable prospect, and it even affected Kandinsky's response to the majestic countryside he saw on an excursion to the Bavarian Alps in July 1914 (Pl. 20). *Improvisation Gorge*, the painting which takes its title from that trip, refers to memories of an area explored by Kandinsky during his visit: the Höllentalklamm, or Devil's Gorge. It may have contributed to the sense of unbounded exaltation that constitutes part, at least, of this painting's complex meaning. But the vertiginous sensation induced by looking into the mouth of the gorge plays a still more potent part in Kandinsky's tumultuous image. Wondering at the 'heterogeneous patterns, with no relationship to each other, [which] seem to have been let loose on the canvas', Hans K. Roethel concluded that 'there appears to be no visible underlying principle for the composition as a whole.'[66] It is, perhaps, the most deliberately discordant of all Kandinsky's early works, and a preparatory pencil drawing discloses the full extent of his intentions. For the two figures in Bavarian clothes who stand on a jetty in this drawing are overshadowed by the cataclysm above them. Its agent appears to be the helmeted rider who charges in from the left side of the pencil study. Brandishing a pair of scales like a weapon above him, he is surely the horseman of the Apocalypse described by the Revelation of St John as the rider on a black mount with 'a pair of balances in his hand.' In the final painting, however, the rider bestrides a white charger, alarmingly reminiscent of the fourth rider on 'a pale horse'. He is named, in one of the New Testament's most disturbing passages, as 'Death, and Hell followed him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.'[67]

In *Improvisation Gorge* his progress seems unstoppable, as he urges his eager mount to traverse the landscape before them. The Bavarian couple, in all their pre-war innocence, cannot prevent the advance of a rider who will destroy them as readily as he lays waste to the rest of the world. Everything in this hectic, alarmingly destabilized canvas seems doomed to be cast down into the depths of the Höllentalklamm which impressed Kandinsky so profoundly on his Alpine expedition. There, only weeks before the outbreak of war, he must have instinctively felt that an apocalypse was imminent. The blood-red sun boiling near the top of his painting seems about to set, spreading a lurid stain across the land. As if to acknowledge its terrible finality, Kandinsky wrote on his drawing a Russian word translatable either as 'setting' or 'downfall'. *Improvisation Gorge* is turbulent enough to suggest that the latter meaning was foremost in his mind when he painted this wild, cacophonous warning.

Since Kandinsky had been expecting the onset of such a calamity for some years, his frenzied canvas comes as no surprise. But during 1914 the sense of an unavoidable conflict even began to preoccupy artists who had shown no previous interest in the theme. Overt aggression never disrupts the eerie placidity of de Chirico's pre-war paintings. Most of them are uninhabited, so that statuary is free to cast long, melancholy shadows past arcades which refuse to disclose their penumbral mysteries. When people do appear in the otherwise empty piazzas, they are little more than minuscule silhouettes standing immobile in the afternoon sunlight. The only sign of movement is provided, from time to time, by a train emitting smoke in soft clouds. But it is usually relegated to a distant area of the composition, and does nothing to break the paralysis afflicting everything in sight. Gradually, however, the mood pervading de Chirico's 1914 canvases undergoes a subtle change. Lassitude and silence give way to a sense of greater uncertainty, and his choice of picture titles reflects an emerging obsession with expectancy and loss. One painting is called *The Anguish of Departure*, another *The Enigma of Fatality*. The trains seem to play a more active part in taking these anonymous bystanders away from the stage settings which de Chirico favours. Although he provides no hint of their destination, they might be leaving because of a threatened war.

His imagination certainly started brooding on military concerns, for he made a specific reference to them in an important painting called *The Philosopher's Conquest* (Pl. 21). All the familiar elements are there; but this time the arcade has grown to monstrous proportions, and it casts an implacable iron-grey shadow across the middle of the composition. Within the arcade, an unexpected glimpse of a white tower festooned with flags introduces a martial note, albeit medieval rather than modern. And this mood is reinforced by the intrusive cannon-barrel, thrusting itself into the picture-space from a white plinth where the cannon-balls rest in readiness. Ever-elusive, de Chirico goes some way towards deflating the sinister impact of the weapon by likening barrel and balls to the male genitalia in a state of arousal. He fortifies the absurdity by juxtaposing the virile member with two artichokes. The contrast is bathetic, and yet the artichokes' leaves are turned into sharp-edged segments capable of pricking anyone rash enough to touch their tips. In this respect, they confirm the menace of the cannon's open mouth, raised so expectantly in the air. De Chirico distorts the perspectival handling of the mouth so that its gaping aperture is exposed with greater prominence. It looks hungry for ammunition, and everything else in the painting appears to be held in suspense. Sailing-ship, train, factory chimney and figures lurking behind the arcade all wait for something to happen. Even the outside clock seems arrested, unable to move on towards half-past one. The sense of paralysis suddenly becomes intolerable, and the most likely way to end it must be the firing of the gun.

Why did de Chirico elect to deploy the image of a cannon and its ammunition, in a painting completed several months before the outbreak of war?[68] It may simply be a reference to the kind of nineteenth-century military monuments which had already appeared in his work, casting their shadows across the otherwise deserted squares. He could also have been drawing on boyhood experiences, for de Chirico recalled that 'while my father was away the cook Nicola kept a strange revolver under the pillow on his bed. It consisted simply of a cylinder attached to the stock . . . Later, in Italy, I saw revolvers of this type, but fitted with a barrel, on monuments representing soldiers and heroes of the Risorgimento. I was deeply impressed when I saw this strange mysterious weapon.'[69] He was equally excited when, gazing out from the balcony of his family home in the Thessalian port of Volos, he noticed an old ship called *Vesuvio* 'whose principal ornament consisted of an enormous cannon which had to be loaded from the breach, not with a single, compact shell, but with separate explosive, missiles and percussion cap.'[70]

These potent childhood memories do not altogether explain why de Chirico should give a cannon such a prominent position in one of the largest and most considered paintings he produced in the first half of 1914. He shied away from any attempt to pin down the motives behind his work or the meanings they harboured, arguing

that 'the revelation we have of a work of art, the conception of a picture *must* represent something which has no sense in itself, has no subject, which from the point of view of human logic *means nothing at all.*' But he also explained that he was driven to paint 'by a force greater than the force which impels a starving man to bite like a wild beast into the piece of bread he happens to find.'[71] An anxious, unaccountable premonition of war would amount to just such a 'force', and de Chirico may well have used his early recollection of a revolver and a cannon to give this urgent intuition pictorial expression.

A similar compulsion, to deal with warlike subject-matter by referring to the past rather than the present, is detectable in a grand frieze-like canvas which Man Ray started painting during the summer of 1914 (Pl. 22). In America, artists had every excuse to remain oblivious of the rising militarist tide threatening European stability. Man Ray, sequestered in the rural fastness of Ridgefield in the hills on the far side of the Hudson River, could easily have concentrated all his energies on landscapes and portraits of his lover the Belgian poet Donna Lacroix. When he began work on this ambitious picture, however, the subject turned out to be centrally concerned with combat. He recalled later that it was executed 'on a specially prepared canvas to make it look like a fresco painting, which was first to fill a space in our living room.'[72] Reading about Uccello's perspectival researches had prompted the desire to make the image, and its dimensions seem to have been conceived as a homage to the San Romano battle-pieces. Other artists would be inspired by the same source after the war had commenced (see Pls. 45, 305), but Man Ray set out to ignore the spatial recession for which Uccello had striven. Having recently been impressed by the spirit of renewal in the Armory Show, he was anxious to honour the integrity of the flat canvas by working in a two-dimensional manner. Although the figures in his picture possess an almost sculptural solidity, he did not allow them to penetrate far behind the surface of the design. They remain gathered at the forefront, struggling with each other in a space clotted with the mass of their bodies, deep blue pitted against a rust-coloured ground reminiscent of dried blood. Simplified into their most elementary compoments, these gesticulating forms are devoid of individuality. Hostilities have, it seems, transformed them into featureless fighting machines dedicated to violence alone. The men seated on their mounts nearby are equally dehumanized; and although Man Ray thought of 'the Trojan horse'[73] while painting them, they are not limited to a particular moment in history. Rather does he strive for universality in this sombre, remorseless picture, inspired by the belief that war is a continually recurring urge.

Man Ray would have been astonished and dismayed to learn, when he began this painting, that a world war would break out before its completion. But in August 1914 his obsession with conflict was borne out by the news from Europe. 'I was finishing my large canvas', Man Ray remembered; 'Donna said it was prophetic, that I should call it War. I simply added the Roman numerals in a corner: MCMXIV.' By prefixing them with the letters 'AD', he made clear his own awareness of the picture's unlooked-for topicality. The decision to employ Roman numbering demonstrated, nevertheless, that he viewed the onset of a fresh war in the context of all its gruesome predecessors. Ridgefield itself remained unaffected by the news, and when Man Ray visited New York he found the city in a repugnant state of elation. 'It was a field day for the newspapers with their accounts of battles and atrocities', he recalled, describing how 'Wall Street was booming; speculators were reaping fortunes in a day. During my lunch hour when in town I walked around the streets near the stock market, filled with gesticulating employees shouting to men in the open windows of the offices, transmitting orders to buy and sell. It was like a great holiday, all the profits of war with none of its miseries.' Returning to Ridgefield, he realised that the grimmest forebodings expressed in *A.D. MCMXIV* had been confirmed. 'Walking home in the evening through the silent wood, I felt depressed', he wrote, 'and at the same time glad that we had not yet been able to get to Europe. There must be a way, I thought, of avoiding the calamities that human beings brought upon themselves. Wasn't it enough to wage the slow battle against nature and sickness?'[74]

Man Ray must have known, however, that events in Europe had gone too far to be halted now. When Donna wrote a pacifist poem for a portfolio published some months later, he illustrated it with a drawing of his big war picture.[75] But such protests could not affect the course of events in Europe, which had assumed an unstoppable momentum ever since the first fateful decisions were taken. In Vienna, at the heart of the Hapsburg Empire, Kokoschka heard the newsvendors calling through a hot July morning that Austria had declared war on Serbia. Although the Austro-Hungarian army did not cross the Danube to invade Serbia for several weeks, the declaration of hostilities set in chain a sequence of similar decisions which swept up the rest of Europe in the conflict. It was as if the elemental disturbance dramatized in Kokoschka's recent painting, *The Tempest*, had widened to encompass an entire continent (Pl. 23).

The picture was principally concerned with the relationship between the artist and Alma Mahler, whose mutual infatuation began to wane in 1914. Despite their physical proximity, in a painting which seems initially to celebrate the union they once enjoyed, Kokoschka has awoken and stares mournfully beyond the sleeping Alma. Conscious of his isolation, he digs his anguished fingers into each other and surveys the impermanence of a love about to be destroyed by the force of the storm encircling them. Kokoschka was sufficiently influenced by Vienna's proccupation with the power of the unconscious to appreciate that the tempest was the result, not of a climatic crisis, but of their own inner tensions. Sleep gave him access, through dreams, to the source of his anxieties, and he used the tempest as a metaphor for the forces which threaten to sunder their intimacy. They already appear to be adrift, floating in an ice-blue region where

24 Dorothy Shakespear *War Scare, July 1914* 1914. Watercolour on paper, 25.5 × 35.5 cm. Collection of Omar S. Pound, Princeton.

angry waves fuse with equally turbulent clouds beneath an elegiac moon. Kokoschka depicts himself as an emaciated figure who seems to be confronting the prospect of death. He made sketches for a crematorium mural around this time, and *The Tempest* echoes these funereal concerns by giving him the blanched aspect of a corpse. Kokoschka had no means of telling, at this stage in 1914, that he would eventually be close to death on the battlefield. But *The Tempest* seems, with hindsight, to be haunted by a premonition of his near-fatal wounding, just as the storm itself anticipates the commotion which afflicted Europe soon after he completed the painting. It seems wholly appropriate that Kokoschka should have decided, soon after completing *The Tempest*, to sell it in order to raise money for the uniform he needed to join the cavalry and fight in the war.

When Dorothy Shakespear executed a watercolour in London entitled *War Scare, July 1914*, she hardly needed prophetic powers to divine the import of the event which inspired her (Pl. 24). Inscribed on the back of the paper is a brief explanation, testifying that the watercolour was executed 'when the Stock Exchange shut, before war was declared'. Although Shakespear refrained from revealing the reason why the picture was made, it shows how disturbed she felt by the end of that uneasy month. The language employed is virtually abstract, but most of the forms seem to be aimed at the large architectural mass in the uppermost area of the design. Evoking gun-barrels, missiles and shafts of lightning, they converge on their target like an invading force determined to eliminate the opposition as quickly and efficiently as possible. The prospect of war pushed Shakespear into making an image far more belligerent than anything she had earlier produced. Before marrying Ezra Pound in April 1914 and frequenting Vorticist gatherings at the Rebel Art Centre, she had been devoted to landscape painting of a decidedly lyrical kind. Meeting the emergent Vorticists transformed her art, and she was especially impressed by Wyndham Lewis's role in the group, 'I watched it all with deep interest', she remembered, adding that 'I certainly never had any "lessons" from him but the movement came just as I needed a shove out of the Victorian.'[76] *War Scare, July 1914* shows just how much of a 'shove' she was prepared to accept. Jolted both by Lewis's provocative example and the mounting rumours of war in London, Shakespear here pushed her work towards a non-representational extreme, deploying a range of outspoken colours which accentuate the picture's strident impact. She may subsequently have concluded that it was too radical, for the inscription on the back of the watercolour declares that it ought 'NOT *to be shown* to any body.' But *War Scare, July 1914* now looks like a wholly appropriate response to the historical moment which inspired it. The abstraction developed by Shakespear helps to emphasize the looming, destructive and above all impersonal character of the conflict ahead.

Only an artist of Meidner's visionary fire was, however, capable of defining the anguish of a nation about to be engulfed by war. At the very beginning of August 1914, Germany waited for Russia to respond to an ultimatum demanding demobilization within twelve hours. If Meidner's inscription on the drawing is correct, he produced *On the Eve of War* during that period of acute tension (Pl. 25). Berlin crowds jostle beneath a banner bearing the word ULTIMATUM in forceful capitals, bigger and more exclamatory than any hoarding. A cluster of arms rise up before it, as though to salute the spirit of apparent resolve behind the German government's demand. But as they become visible, the faces in Meidner's agitated drawing bear expressions very far from gleeful. The bowler-hatted men look apprehensive, even appalled. The women share their concern, and in the foreground one of them widens her eyes to the point of outright hysteria as she contemplates the prospect ahead. As for the old man on the left, he opens his mouth in an involuntary cry. His anguish is intensified by a sense of impotence, for the crowd knows that the ultimatum can only have one outcome. On 1 August, after the request to demobilize was rejected, Germany declared war on Russia. Listening to the proclamation on that decisive day, Meidner would have realised that the Armageddon forecast two years before in his apocalypse paintings was about to be unleashed. All the same, not even he could have guessed at the full, protracted extent of the horrors inflicted on Europe during the struggle to come.

25 Ludwig Meidner *On the Eve of War* 1914. Pen, pencil and ink on paper, 83 × 66.5 cm. Städtische Kunsthalle, Recklinghausen.