

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE MEMORY OF WAR

Although Epstein was never granted the opportunity to enlarge his *Risen Christ* and instal it in a prominent public location, countless other sculptors received commissions for memorials to 'the fallen', as the slaughtered millions were so euphemistically described. Many of the resultant images were decorous to a fault, and so anxious to avoid upsetting the bereaved that they ended up conveying nothing about the tragedy their makers were supposed to commemorate.

Sir George Frampton, having prevented Epstein from becoming a War Artist, resorted to chivalric platitude when he carried out a commission to memorialize Lieutenant Francis Mond (Pl. 331). His bronze St George, one hand supporting a banner while the other grasps an elaborately ornamental shield, remains proud and erect. Both sculptor and patron must have drawn solace from the intact, resplendently armoured bearing of a figure whose mythical poise seemed to have emerged unsullied and gleaming from the long years of devastation. Looking at such an image today, we are entitled to balk at the self-conscious striving for a noble, exalted monument to heroism. In 1919 Herman Hesse, writing an essay on 'Self-Will', offered a timely corrective by declaring that 'it is an abuse of language to say – as is now fashionable, especially among stay-at-homes – that our poor soldiers, slaughtered at the front, died a "heroic death". That is sentimentality. Of course the soldiers who died in the war are worthy of our deepest sympathy. Many of them did great things and suffered greatly, and in the end they paid with their lives. But that does not make them "heroes." The common soldier, at whom an officer bellows as he would at a dog, is not suddenly transformed into a hero by the bullet that kills him. To suppose that there can be millions of "heroes" is in itself an absurdity.'<sup>1</sup>

The concept of a memorial dedicated to individual soldiers, rather than the celebration of a victory, was of relatively recent origin. So even the most resourceful sculptors experienced difficulty in finding appropriate imagery for the task, and Bourdelle struggled through several commissions searching for the elusive solution. His first opportunity arrived as early as 1916, when his brother-in-law's family asked him to produce a figure of *Saint Barbe* as a protective votary for their son in the army. Bourdelle made a tender, archaizing statue in coloured cement, originally installed in the church of St Julien de l'Herm near Lyons.<sup>2</sup> It was maternal enough not only to look after the young artilleryman, but also to excite rumours among worshippers at the church that the saint was pregnant and would therefore promote fecundity in the congregation. Bourdelle was delighted by the story, exclaiming: 'Bravo! I'm repopulating France.'<sup>3</sup> The statue,

however, seemed to belong to a remote past, ultimately incapable of affecting the world where the artilleryman and so many of his compatriots risked their lives in a murderous machine-age war against the German invader.

A similar sense of inapplicability detracted from Bourdelle's maquette for a *Monument to the Deputies who died for France*. Commenced in 1916 and then revived three years later, the project takes its cue from a figure of his friend Isadora Duncan made for his earlier Monument to Falcon. She had initially been shown dancing the Marseillaise, and an ecstatic pose was re-employed for the Deputies maquette. Symbolizing the *Victory of Justice*, Isadora is now made more militant by the addition of a heavy sword and an enormous Greek shield which she carries with conspicuous strength. Bourdelle ensured that the shield would fit in the central niche of the Palais Bourbon's Salle du Roi, where he wanted his memorial to chime with the paintings Delacroix had carried out in the room. Hence, perhaps, the echoes of *Liberty Guiding the People* in Bourdelle's figure, whose ample draperies explode from her body with the force of a shell-burst. Another eruption emanates from the gorgon's head on the back of the shield, but none of these spectacular passages impressed the politicians responsible for commissioning the monument. They rejected the project, possibly because Isadora Duncan's scandalous reputation was considered too unseemly for such a noble scheme.

Bourdelle was, however, able to realise his next war memorial, the *Monument to the Dead, in the War 1914-18, of Montceau-les-Mines* (Pl. 332). Perhaps chastened by the failure of his Deputies proposal, he moved away from the attempt to concentrate solely on the notion of the conflict's victorious conclusion. Moreover, disregarding his new patron's liking for triumphal arches, he decided this time to root the memorial in the mining life of the region. The great stone monument was crowned by a severely simplified miner's lamp, presiding like an industrialized equivalent of a symbolic beacon over the town and its inhabitants. This indispensable source of illumination succeeded, Bourdelle implies, in leading Montceau-les-Mines through the darkness of the war years. But he also pays tribute to the men who held it as they worked in the mines, thereby enabling France to maintain its vital power-supplies and manufacturing capacity during the struggle. One of the reliefs installed in the centre of the memorial depicts *Miners Underground*, gazing defiantly through their tunnel as they brandish the lamp and rest pickaxes on the ground. In order to stress the vital role played by miners at the Front as well, Bourdelle devoted another of these reliefs to the subject of *Sappers*. Unlike their muscular counterparts in the mine-shaft, these clothed and semi-naked



331 Sir George Frampton *Saint George* 1918. Memorial to Lieutenant Francis Mond REA RMF. Bronze, 57.5 × 21 × 14 cm. Imperial War Museum, London.

figures seem burdened by their task. All the same, they succeed in performing the caryatid-like function of holding the beam in the tunnel's roof and propping it up with a sturdy tree-trunk. The authenticity of the sappers' uniforms is carried over into the most allegorical relief, where a winged personification of France clutches a severely wounded soldier with fierce, protective zeal (Pl. 334). It might have been mawkish compared with the other panels on the monument, but Bourdelle charges the gesture with so much ardency that France becomes as impassioned as a mother attempting to save her son from death.

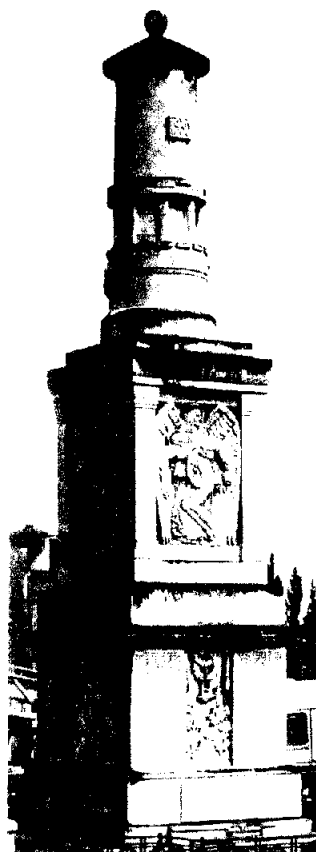
A transfusion of fervent feeling ensured that his most celebrated war memorial evaded triteness in its use of religious symbolism. Bourdelle received the commission for the *Virgin of the Offering* from his pupil Leon Vogt, who owned potash mines in Alsace. He carried out his mother's promise in 1914 that she would finance a sculpture of the Virgin if family property avoided devastation during the war. She died before hostilities ceased, and Bourdelle executed a small maquette for the project in 1919. It lacks both the grandeur and the rhythmic flamboyance of the intermediate version completed in 1921, which was installed above the altar in the crypt of the Ossuaire des Morts Inconnus at Hartmannswillerkopf. Bourdelle also produced

the mighty *Winged Angels of Victory* guarding the entrance to the crypt, where the remains of well over ten thousand unidentified soldiers are buried (Pl. 333). Bourdelle's confident ability to integrate these angels with the piers they support carries complete structural conviction, bearing out his belief that 'sculpture must graft itself to architecture like fruit grafts itself to the tree.'<sup>4</sup> These calm yet sombre presences, resting on their swords with the same resolve as the miners of Montceau-les-Mines and their pickaxes in repose, demonstrate Bourdelle's command of elegiac restraint. He was, however, able to invest his final, large-scale version of the *Virgin of the Offering* with a more complex, ambiguous emotion, poised halfway between tragedy and delight.

The immense stone monument, placed according to Mme Vogt's wishes on the slope of a thickly wooded hill above Niederbruck, Alsace, was unveiled in 1922 (Pl. 335). Cléopâtre Bourdelle posed for the Virgin in the head-dress she wore to keep dust out of her hair in the studio, but in the statue this modest wimple takes on a full-blown divine authority. It enables Bourdelle to enlarge the discreet veil worn by the Virgin in the first maquette, who holds her child with relative diffidence. Now, in order to generate a gesture capable of being seen and comprehended from a considerable distance, the Virgin leans outwards so expansively that Bourdelle can define an uninterrupted curve from head-dress to forearm. As Peter Cannon-

332 Emile Antoine Bourdelle *Monument to the Dead, in the War 1914–18, of Montceau-les-Mines* 1919–30. Stone, 11.5 m overall. Place Bourdelle, Montceau-les-Mines.

333 Emile Antoine Bourdelle *Angel of Victory* 1924. Bronze, 2.35 m. Ossuaire des Morts Inconnus, Hartmannswillerkopf, Ht.-Rhin.





334 Emile Antoine Bourdelle *France supporting the Wounded Soldier* 1924–8. Stone, 2.4 × 1.45 m. Place Bourdelle, Montceau-les-Mines.

Brookes pointed out,<sup>5</sup> the swaying rhythm is surely derived from the fructifying amplitude of *Saint Barbe*.

Here, however, the powerful swing initiated by the Virgin ends up directing attention towards the child, who rises above her with arms outstretched to embrace the world. Firmly supported by his mother, Christ occupies his commanding position with a subtle blend of modesty and assurance. Even so, his arms carry an unmistakable reminder of the martyrdom he will eventually undergo. Once the full duality of his pose becomes apparent, the *Virgin of the Offering* takes on an almost sacrificial significance. The woman standing so majestically on the Alsace hillside to gaze across the valley of Manavaux seems, in the end, to be presenting her crucified son as a divine acknowledgement of the suffering enduring by humanity during the war.

The most important war memorial in Prague, however, offers unequivocal affirmation through the agency of a female figure. When the Bank of the Czechoslovak Legion (*Banka Legii*) commissioned Josef Gočár to design a new building on a prominent site in the city centre, he produced a powerful Roman facade indebted to Bramante's *Casa di Raffaello* (Pl. 336). Not content with making his

own architecture as sculptural as possible, Gočár asked two leading Czech sculptors to produce major works for his vigorous frontage. Integrated remarkably well with the building, they nevertheless retain a robust and independent character. Surmounting the four idiosyncratic pilaster forms at the base of the bank, Jan Štursa's great limestone consoles all show deeply cut clusters of military figures who represent the four principal regions where Czech legionaries were stationed. Their urgent, straining gestures prove that they are still embroiled in battle, whereas Otto Gutfreund's monumental relief above deals with the consoling theme of the soldiers' return.<sup>6</sup> Working in an idiom more naturalistic than his earlier Cubist style, Gutfreund here produced his most ambitious and impressive post-war sculpture. Hugely influential, it simplifies the homecoming legionaries into robust, sturdy figures. But there is nothing triumphant about them. They are tired rather than swaggering, and Gutfreund emphasizes moments of reunion with women who have laboured at home. The heartening spirit which gives this relief a restrained dignity and warmth reaches its apogee in the centre, where a maternal figure reaches out from her throne-like chair to welcome and gather the soldiers into a redemptive embrace.

She might have strayed from a Renaissance relief, and Gutfreund certainly gives her the *gravitas* of a healing Virgin. So far as Henry Lamb was concerned, however, divine intervention could not be

335 Emile Antoine Bourdelle *Virgin of the Offering* 1922. Stone, 6 m. Niederbruck, Alsace.





336 Facade of the Bank of the Czechoslovak Legion (Banka Legii) in Prague, 1922, designed by Josef Gočár with four limestone consoles by Jan Stursa, 1922–3, and (above) Otto Gutfreund's frieze *The Return of the Legionaries*.

expected to alleviate the suffering of war's victims. Still afflicted by the after-effects of a gas attack, he managed in 1920 to execute a monumental commission from Manchester City Art Gallery (Pl. 337). Using as his starting-point a sketch called *Succouring the Wounded in a Wood on the Dorian Front*, he spent most of the summer painting the large canvas in a Dorset village. In a letter to the gallery's curator, Lamb discussed the urgency of his need 'to reconstruct the bellicose atmosphere' he had experienced in Salonika.<sup>7</sup> But the finished picture, executed with local villagers as models, concentrated on suffering rather than pugnacity.

Like his friend Spencer before him (see Pl. 307), Lamb avoided any direct representation of the fighting. *Advanced Dressing Station on the Struma, 1916* shows only the consequences of battle, with prominence given to the wounded figure lying on a stretcher near the foreground. Unlike Spencer's painting, though, most of the stretcher-bearers do not attend to the stricken men in their charge. While one of them, tea-mug in hand, strips to his shirt-sleeves and leans energetically towards the head of an inert figure, his colleagues remain curiously uninvolved. Standing around in awkward groups, they eat, sip tea, feed the donkey or stare apprehensively towards the overcast, purple sky. A recent rainstorm has left the foliage gleaming, and Lamb enjoys delineating the freshness of each grass-blade and bramble-leaf. But he contrasts nature with the bearers' stunned weariness. Two of them, overcome by exhaustion, slump down beside the stretchers. The hope extended in Spencer's painting by the redemptive, warmly lit operating theatre is nowhere to be seen, and what Lamb described as his 'melancholy scheme of colours'<sup>8</sup>

intensifies the feeling that nothing, ultimately, can prevent the wounded from prolonged agony as they endure an interminable wait for medical assistance. Viewed in this light, the empty space dominating the foreground takes on an ominous significance. Hollowed out of the dark earth, it resembles a grave newly dug for those who die before the doctors get around to tending them.

The ending of the war seems to have released even the most conservative of painters from any obligation they may earlier have felt to present it in a wholly positive light. Lady Butler, the most celebrated and redoubtable battle artist in late nineteenth-century Britain, lived long enough to witness the Great War in its entirety. Writing in the privacy of her diary in September 1914, when she visited her eldest son in a New Forest infantry camp, Butler gave vent to considerable misgivings about 'the biggest war the world has ever been stricken with... To think that I have lived to see it! It was always said a war would be too terrible now to run the risk of, and that nations would fear too much to hazard such a peril. Lo! here we are pouring soldiers into the great jaws of death in hundreds of thousands, and sending poor human flesh and blood to face the new "scientific" warfare.'<sup>9</sup> All the same, the drawing she made for him then conveyed nothing except patriotic optimism (see Pl. 75). Butler could not bring herself to reflect that insight in her work. As long as the war lasted, her pictures remained unquestioning and heroic, presumably because she believed so ardently in the justice of the Allied cause. She even had some patriotic stationery printed with a gung-ho ink drawing of a galloping Royal Horse Artillery gun team, close in mood to Lucy Kemp-Welch's painting (see Pl. 163) and

captioned with her own exuberant title *Action Front!!* The elegiac realism with which she had painted some of her finest war pictures in the 1870s played no part in her romanticized canvases of Dorset yeomanry overwhelming the enemy in the Libyan desert. Although Butler produced faithful likenesses of all the officers in this commissioned canvas, she glowingly admitted that 'their own mothers would not know the men in the heat, dust, and excitement of a charge.'<sup>10</sup>

After the Armistice, however, her inner understanding of the tragedy was finally allowed to surface in the paintings she produced. The most monumental, displayed in 1920 as the last picture she ever exhibited at the Royal Academy, recorded a British defeat rather than a victory (Pl. 338). It shows a squadron of the royal horse guards retreating from Mons in 1914. They were supposed to be covering the exposed left flank of the British Expeditionary Force, but the fatigue in the limbs of the bandaged cavalymen indicates that their fighting abilities are seriously impaired. The prevailing air of resignation leaves no room for the callow ebullience of the earlier Libyan canvas, and Butler now allows herself to include a desolate vista of ditched guns, dead horses and riderless mounts led along the muddy track by men who must have wondered whether they would be able to survive the dispiriting journey much longer.



338 Lady Butler *In the retreat from Mons: the royal horse guards* 1920. Oil on canvas. Durban Art Gallery.

Even if they did survive, many soldiers never recovered from the atrocious damage their bodies had suffered on the battlefield. While artists in the Allied countries preferred to avoid depicting these victims, Dix became obsessed by the most gruesome manifestations of war injury. He had been fortunate enough to emerge from active service without serious physical disability, but his mind was far from unscathed. More, perhaps, than any other artist who had fought in the war, Dix was unable to shake off the experience in the post-Armistice period. Indeed, his work suggests that war memories dogged him as relentlessly as they invaded the dreams of a funeral monument

337 Henry Lamb *Advanced Dressing Station on the Struma, 1916* 1920. Oil on canvas, 186.6 × 212.3 cm. Manchester City Art Galleries.



director in Erich Maria Remarque's novel *The Black Obelisk*. He had been buried by an explosion in 1918, and five years later the novel's narrator wakes on a quiet Sunday morning to find that 'suddenly a dreadful scream breaks the stillness and is followed by gasping and groaning. It is Heinrich Kroll, who sleeps in the other wing. He is having his nightmare again.'<sup>11</sup> Like most Germans of his generation, Dix would have agreed with the conclusion reached by Remarque's narrator, who is disturbed by the extreme, confusing disparity between memories of pre-war childhood and the ensuing horror: 'You cannot simply push it away. It keeps bobbing back disconcertingly, and then you are confronted by irreconcilable contrast: the skies of childhood and the science of killing, lost youth and the cynicism of knowledge gained too young.'<sup>12</sup>

No post-war artist could have been more cynical than Dix, who turned his anger on the military in a corrosive painting called *Souvenir of the Mirrored Halls in Brussels* (Pl. 339). The scarlet-faced officer bares his teeth as if to bite off the nose of the prostitute on his lap. While one hand is outstretched in a carousing gesture, the other clutches her pendulous breast with predatory greed. Dix employs a crude, cartoon-like style to emphasize the callousness of this barking maniac, who seems to equate lust with cruelty. The war has dehumanized him so completely that he is nothing more than a barbarian, who lifts his hobnailed boot like a bully determined to stamp out anyone rash enough to oppose his brutality. Dix enhances the nightmarish atmosphere of his ironically named 'souvenir' by surrounding the principal scene with a flurry of reflections – above, to the side and even below, where the whore's vagina is finally revealed. The use of multiple mirrors makes the image resemble an insane, endlessly repeated ritual, and in these reflections the sexual act is depicted with an increasingly rancid sense of revulsion and shame.

Dix also felt repelled by the sight of ex-soldiers exposing their deformations in the street. They became, for him, a symbol of the disillusionment engendered by the war, which he had initially greeted with such bull-necked aggression in 1914 (see Pl. 112). Now all the

Nietzschean hopes of renewal through destruction had vanished, and the enraged Dix devoted most of his energy in 1920 to an obsessive, savage and immensely disturbing sequence of war-cripple paintings. The largest, now lost, shows four of these veterans parading in a frieze-like progression along a harshly patterned pavement. It was exhibited, with Grosz's *Germany, A Winter's Tale* (see Pl. 324) and equally outspoken satirical images, at the Berlin 'Dada Fair' of 1920, where the gallery was dominated by a stuffed soldier hanging from the ceiling (Pl. 340).

Dix also produced an etched version of his *War Cripples* painting, and it makes clear that these pitifully maimed figures persist in wearing their uniforms and medals with obstinate pride. The man leading the procession sports an iron cross ostentatiously on his chest, while confirming his apparent cockiness by puffing on an outsize cigar with the aid of a hook attached to his artificial arm. Even the terrible gash in his face resembles a self-satisfied leer, and he leads the cripples on with martial briskness. They cannot, of course, hope to match the vigour of a real soldiers' march: even the standing figure at the parade's end only remains on two feet with the aid of mechanical joints which Dix outlines on greatcoat and trousers alike. Their resolve is undeniable, however, and the imperious hand of an

339 Otto Dix *Souvenir of the Mirrored Halls in Brussels* 1920. Oil on canvas, 124 × 84 cm. Private collection.



340 The Berlin 'Dada Fair', 1920. A stuffed 'soldier' dangles from the ceiling. Dix's lost *War Cripples* hangs on the left, Grosz's lost *Germany, a Winter's Tale* on the right. Those present include Raoul Hausmann (in cap, left), Johannes Baader (with beard), Hannah Höch (seated, left) with George Grosz and John Heartfield (standing, right).

advertising sign directing them ironically towards a shoemaker's shop accentuates the military mood.

The pointing hand also directs the viewer's attention towards Dix's own surname, inscribed with the date on the keystone of a window. The same three capital letters reappear on a plate next to the door where his *Match Vendor* sits, scanning the street for customers as he props a box-full of wares on his false leg. The empty sleeves of his jacket, pinned up uselessly against the cloth, reinforce the notion that he is pleading. None of the pedestrians seems interested, though. They hurry past him, legs stretched wide as they try to escape with the greatest possible despatch from his contaminating presence. Dix makes them appear even more callous by cutting each figure off near the waist, thereby depersonalizing them and, in a curious way, subjecting them to pictorial amputations which parallel the bodily severings suffered by the match-seller himself. Even the dog swerves away, cocks his leg and urinates on the cripple as if impelled by an instinctive horror of deformation. The man's position on Dix's doorstep confirms the feeling that veterans are inescapable, burdening with an intolerable sense of guilt everyone fortunate enough to have survived the war with body intact.

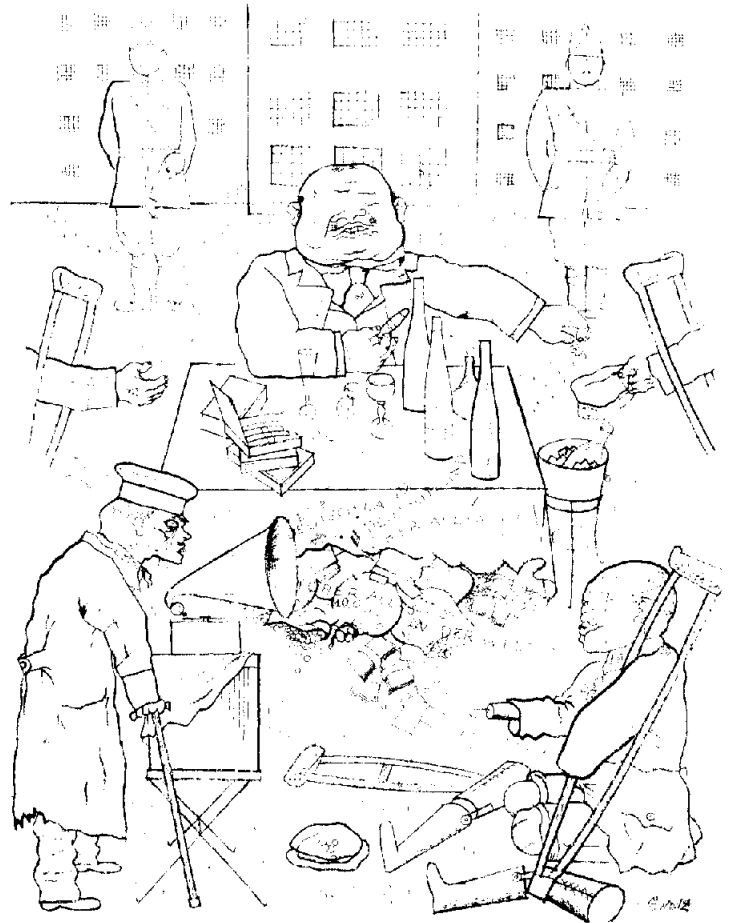
All the same, Dix was not prepared to depict himself in anguished confrontation with these victims, as Beckmann had done in a lithograph the previous year (see Pl. 322). He wanted to arraign the whole of post-war German society in his paintings of cripples, showing how they take their place at the very bottom of a social order riddled with cruelty, racial prejudice and greed. In *Prague Street*, the disabled veteran does not even have any matches to sell (Pl. 341). He is reduced to begging, and his outstretched palm only receives a token postage stamp from the passer-by's immaculately gloved hand. On the other side of the picture an overweight woman swathed in a puce dress rushes away, her heavy platform shoes adding to the suspicion that she would think nothing of trampling the mendicant under-

341 Otto Dix *Prague Street* 1920. Oil and collage on canvas, 101 × 81 cm. Galerie der Stadt, Stuttgart.

foot. He would be unable to resist such an invasion, for the poles protruding from his torn trousers are still more rudimentary than the match-seller's wooden leg. All he can do is sit on the ground, with one artificial arm jutting from his hunched shoulders, while a ragged girl scrawls graffiti on the wall behind. The shop-windows above mock his predicament with their profusion of corsets, wigs, legs and arms better crafted by far than his wretched appliance. He even seems to be scorned by the fierce, moustachioed man in bowler hat and bemedalled jacket who bustles past on a trolley. Although his body has been grievously truncated, he does at least command a manoeuvrability denied to the wreckage of a man beyond him. The indifference of the big city, envenomed by a snarling dog and anti-Semitic propaganda headlined 'Jews Out!', is defined with rasping accuracy in a picture which prophesies the complete disintegration of civic order and responsibility in post-war German society.

The most macabre of all Dix's cripple paintings is located indoors, away from the casual brutality of street life (Pl. 342). Three war veterans play cards, their wooden legs difficult to distinguish from the equally dark legs of the chairs and table. Their faces are far more grotesque than any of the cripples Dix had depicted out on the pavement, and each crudely stitched set of features amounts to an

342 Otto Dix *Skat Players* 1920. Oil and collage on canvas, 109.8 × 85 cm. Private collection, Germany.



343 George Grosz *These war invalids are getting to be a positive pest!* Ink on paper, 52.8 × 41.2 cm. Nierendorf Gallery, Berlin.

indictment of the hasty cosmetic surgery inflicted on the injured soldiers. The man on the left, whose pink and scarred flesh testifies to hideous burning, has lost most of his hair and the whole of his right ear. A gruesome blue tube snakes down from his ear-drum to a listening instrument positioned on the table-top, and he overcomes the lack of a right arm by lifting his intact leg towards his chin. There, in a disconcertingly convoluted position, his toes act as surrogate fingers and display the cards for inspection. Although he surveys them with an apparently sightless eye, the contortionist is at least able to hold his cards with greater aplomb than the man in the centre, who resorts to clutching a King between his teeth. The rest of this player's head is still more distressingly damaged than his neighbour's. Half his brain has been crudely patched up with a plaster-like material, on which someone has drawn an obscene cartoon of a female nude. Painfully evident stitching runs down his forehead, and an outsize artificial eye stares into nothingness with manic intensity.

He appears, as a result, more detached than the eager figure on the right. Trimly dressed, and with a neat parting in his partially shaven hair, he seems undefeated by the loss of both legs. His trunk rests firmly on the cane seat as he hoists his artificial arm high in the air and then plunges it down towards the table. This fiercely angular movement is reminiscent of the cranking limbs deployed by the mechanistic participants in Léger's *The Card Game* three years earlier

(see Pl. 214). A comparison between the two paintings reveals, however, just how disenchanted Dix's view of war has now become. Léger's painting, for all its sinister undertones, still adheres to a belief in the forcefulness of modern combat. But Dix's cardplayers have been reduced to grotesque caricatures of their former, soldierly selves. The machine age, having invented the weapons which tore through their bodies on the battlefield, is unable to provide anything other than the most rudimentary technology to repair their shattered jaws, eyes and arms.

Although Grosz shared Dix's willingness to anathematize post-war society, he was readier to point an accusing finger at the underlying cause of the malaise. After joining the new Communist Party with John Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde at the end of 1919, he took on a more sharply polemical note in drawings which denounce the evils of capitalist exploitation. In *These war invalids are getting to be a positive pest!* (Pl. 343), the foreground is inhabited by veterans almost as severely maimed as Dix's street cripples. But they are defined with greater pathos than their counterparts in Dix's rasping images. Moreover, the centre of Grosz's drawing is occupied by the corpulent figure of a magnate savouring fine wines and cigars at his dinner-table. While deigning to drop a niggardly bank-note into a veteran's proffered cap, he sneers at the invalids and rests his feet on a mound of bags stuffed with cash. It should be hidden from view under the table. Grosz, however, lifts the cloth and juxtaposes the heaped-up wealth with the patriotic words spewing out of the loudspeaker: 'Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles, Uber Alles In Der Welt.' The attempt to rouse nationalist sentiment could only, in Grosz's view, lead once again to war, and he makes sure that the bloated plutocrat is framed by military guards who survey the scene with standardized severity.

Grosz despised the belligerent patriots who revived the fighting spirit that had led Germany to disaster between 1914 and 1918. He saw them as hollow men powered by clockwork rather than human feelings, and *Republican Automaton* reveals the mechanical cogs and wheels which make a dinner-jacketed figure emit a routine cheer ('1, 2, 3, HURRA') through his brainless head. His truncated arms and brazenly displayed iron cross suggest that he is a war veteran. But his sleek attire and complacent bearing prove that he is prospering, and his bowler-hatted companion likewise seems determined to overcome the disability signified by his wooden leg. He raises the tricolour of the new republic in an apparent attempt to rouse patriotic sentiment, and yet his blank face stamped with numerals reveals that he is nothing more than a mindless cipher. Grosz's target here was the kind of jingoistic veterans who met for an annual jamboree in Marburg. He described in his autobiography how disabled carousers bellowed patriotic songs and then, at the climax of their singing, took off their artificial limbs and roared three cheers to their courageous army years.<sup>13</sup> *Republican Automaton* lays bare the idiotic conformity behind such antics. The façades of the buildings echo this uniformity, with their insistent reiteration of empty, impersonal windows.

This numbing sense of dreariness and alienation receives its most overt expression in a painting now called *Grey Day* (Pl. 345). The same monotonous office blocks proclaim their depressing anonymity in the distance, accompanied this time by factory chimneys whose thick smoke fouls the already overcast sky. A featureless worker carrying a shovel walks past them, his head bowed in an attempt to avoid looking at the oppressive environment. Another figure, bespectacled and bowler-hatted, lurks by the street-corner as though waiting to secure a deal on the black market. But most of the picture-space is devoted to a pair of sharply contrasted pedestrians: the war



344 Hubertus Maria Davringhausen *The Profiteer* 1920. Oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm. Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf.

veteran hobbling past on a stick, and the moustachioed bureaucrat who turns away from the cripple as he struts in the opposite direction. When Grosz displayed this painting in a 1925 *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition at Mannheim, he gave it the far more specific title *Council Official for Disabled Veterans' Welfare*. But this spruce and rigid figure, whose rapier-scarred face bears witness to a militaristic past, does not even acknowledge the existence of the haggard, uniformed victim whose future is supposed to depend on his ministrations. Instead, his eyes converge crazily on his nose as he avoids looking at both the cripple and the post-war society which, in his view, compares so poorly with the pre-1914 world. The black band on his sleeve indicates that he mourns the demise of the old imperial order, even though a wooden L-square implement under his arm suggests that he is actively engaged in erecting the walls of the new world he detests. Perhaps this pompous official derives satisfaction from realising that the bricks rising up behind will soon segregate him from the veteran altogether, thereby reinstating the pre-war social hierarchy symbolized by the imperial colours borne like a badge of loyalty on his trim lapel.

He remains, nevertheless, an absurd and antiquated anomaly in post-war Germany, where Klee likewise ridiculed the twirled moustache and helmet-shaped head of a figure whose sympathies lie entirely with the Kaiser-dominated past. The real power and wealth now belonged to men like *The Profiteer* whom Davringhausen portrayed around the same time (Pl. 344). Unlike the protagonists in two of his earlier paintings, the madman and the prisoner (see Pl. 179), this sleek personification of commercial cunning has benefited from the war. He sits in his ruthlessly geometrical office with ample views of the other, equally dehumanized buildings which have helped to make his fortune. Vintage wine and cigars give his table a luxurious air, but the up-to-date telephone is far more essential from the business point of view. So is the compass lying on the paper where, pencil grasped in a determined hand, he makes his calculations



for even more lucrative ventures in the future. The precision of Davringhausen's *Neue Sachlichkeit* style catches the cold, machine-like certitude of a man bent solely on expanding his bank balance. He is untroubled by the melancholy afflicting the otherwise similar profiteer in Nevinson's moralizing portrait *He Gained a Fortune But He Gave a Son*, where no amount of wealth can compensate the bald entrepreneur for the tragedy he suffered during the conflict (Pl. 346).

A more outspoken sense of melancholy afflicts the women in Egger-Lienz's *War Wives* (Pl. 347). Having marked the official termination of the conflict with several monumental images of slaughtered soldiers (see Pls. 246, 247), this independent artist might reasonably have concluded that he had nothing more to say on the subject. Over the next few years, however, he turned his attention to the plight of people for whom the war would never wholly end. Condemned to worry about the men who had left them for the battlefield, the women in Egger-Lienz's large painting make no attempt to disguise their anguish. Apart from the younger woman who gazes in at the window, and the figure viewed from behind at the other end of the room, the assembled wives are almost unable to cope with the trauma they undergo. Enclosed in a chamber almost as claustrophobic as the attic in Beckmann's *The Night* (see Pl. 323), they find no relief in their monotonous tasks. The boredom entailed in this drudgery only encourages them to brood over their husbands' plight, fighting a war which Egger-Lienz's nation was doomed to lose with heavy casualties. The inevitability of defeat hangs in the air, making the room still more oppressive. Combined with the use of distorted perspective, which makes the wooden floor rise up with precipitous steepness, this despondent mood appears to acknowledge the likelihood that the wives will soon become widows. They certainly look inconsolable, lowering their eyes as if in trance-like anticipation of the bereavement which may well blight their post-war lives.

The dread conveyed here found more innovative and disturbing expression when Ernst resumed work after the Armistice. Marriage to Louise Strauss, a student of art history, was swiftly followed by his involvement with the German Dadaists, who loudly announced in the 1918 Berlin Dada Manifesto their contempt for Expressionism and

346 Christopher Nevinson *He Gained a Fortune But He Gave a Son* 1918. Oil on canvas, 40 × 50.6 cm. University Art Gallery, Hull.

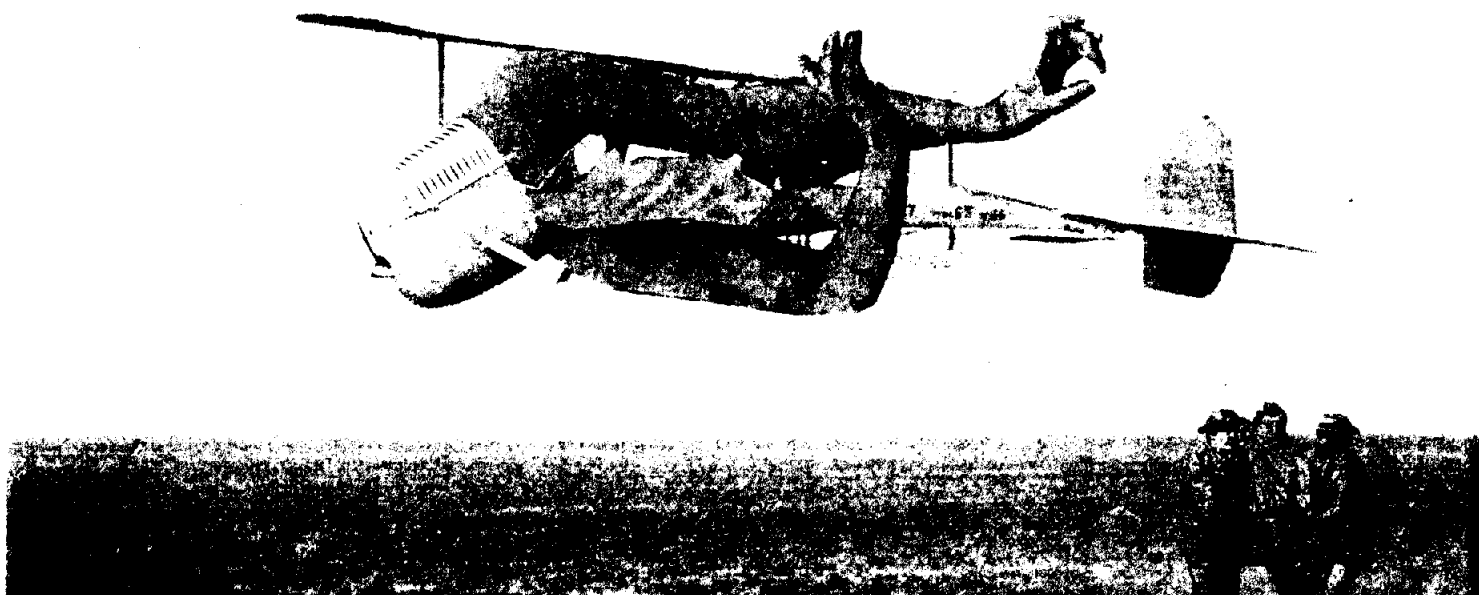


347 Albin Egger-Lienz *War Wives* 1918–22. Oil and tempera on canvas, 145 × 247 cm. Museum Schloss Bruck, Lienz.

belief that 'Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colours and spiritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality... Dada is the international expression of our times, the great rebellion of artistic movements, the artistic reflex of all these offensives, peace congresses, riots in the vegetable market.' Ernst and his colleagues had no intention of lapsing into a pacific or nostalgic vein, like so many artists who returned from combat with a desperate need for quietism.

Among the photographic collages Ernst made in a prodigious flurry of activity between 1919 and 1920, defining a 'topsy-turvy world' distorted by his memories of the battlefield, two images of his continuing obsession with the war stand out. One, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, seems to refer to the aerial bombardment inflicted on civilians during the conflict (Pl. 349). The aeroplane, bearing a paradoxical resemblance to the macabre creatures who had struggled with each other under the water in Ernst's wartime work (see Pl. 222), floats like a grotesque, multi-winged predator in the night sky. The three figures leaping towards the edges of the picture appear to be escaping. But they are all drawn from the same stencil, and might just as plausibly represent the empty outlines left behind in the ground by bodies incinerated during an air raid. The idea of brutal flattening is reinforced by the structures reminiscent of railway tracks, which give the collage so much of its disorientating power. As Werner Spies has confirmed, they are in fact derived from the façades of Venetian buildings.<sup>14</sup> Partially transformed here into archetypes of a machine-age metropolis, they imply that neither renaissance cities nor their twentieth-century equivalents can be protected from the pounding inflicted by modern armaments.

The threat of attack from the air also inspired a tiny yet unforgettable collage called *The Murderous Aeroplane*, which shows the aggressor hovering over the earth as a monstrous apparition (Pl. 348). The flat, featureless landscape offers no protection from the marauder, whose womanly arms wave playfully in the air as they relish the prospect of inflicting further damage. The ground has already been stripped of all identifying features by successive bombardments, and the soldiers carrying a wounded comrade have scant hope of reaching their destination alive. They dare not look up at the hybrid menace above them, part machine and part seductive harbinger of death. Compared with the angels bringing destruction from the sky in Goncharova's 1914 lithograph *The Doomed City* (see

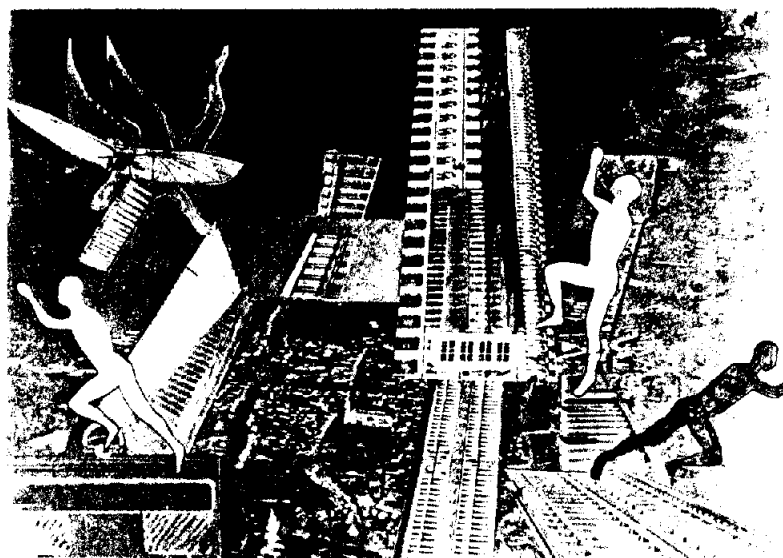


348 Max Ernst *Untitled, or The Murderous Aeroplane* 1920. Collage of photographs on paper, 6.7 × 14.3 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.

Pl. 44), this airborne hallucination is at once more beguiling and more lethal. Its spiked metal helmet is curiously reminiscent of the nickname Ernst himself was given after being twice wounded: 'the man with the head of iron'.<sup>15</sup> But there is no suggestion that the helmet encloses anything as reassuring as the artist's own features. Anonymous and devoid of conscience, the murderous aeroplane takes an inhuman delight in calculating its next onslaught.

The threat posed by instruments of war was not ousted from Ernst's mind after he had executed this venomous collage. On the contrary: it grew to such monstrous proportions that the following year he devoted a large canvas to an apparition more gruesome by far than the aeroplane (Pl. 350). Ernst called the painting *Celebes*, the name of a substantial Indonesian island near Borneo. He afterwards

349 Max Ernst *The Massacre of the Innocents* 1920. Collage with photographic elements, pastel, watercolour and ink, 21.5 × 29 cm. Mrs Edwin A. Bergman, Chicago.



told Roland Penrose, though, that the title really derived from some cheerfully obscene verses chanted by Ernst and his fellow schoolboys in pre-war Germany:

The elephant from Celebes  
has sticky, yellow bottom grease

The elephant from Sumatra  
always fucks his grandmamma

The elephant from India  
can never find the hole ha-ha<sup>16</sup>

The *Celebes* painting itself is, however, a great deal more threatening and macabre than these couplets would imply. Although the lumbering, dark green presence occupying so much of the picture has elephantine aspects, its armour-plated surface and other appendages are removed from any conclusive kinship with an animal. It possesses a boiler-like, clanking menace quite divorced from the photograph of a Sudanese corn-storage bin which Ernst used as the primary visual source for his behemoth.<sup>17</sup> The corn-bin was photographed at the same angle as the principal image in *Celebes*, and looks very similar, but in every other respect the painting transforms its starting-point entirely. Instead of positioning the monster in southern Sudan, where the Konkombwa tribe used the corn-bin communally, Ernst removes it to a cooler and more militaristic locale. The mechanistic beast's legs – oddly reminiscent of the stumps which war cripples were forced to cope with after amputation – stand on flat, marked-up ground reminiscent of an airfield. The suggestion is strengthened by the distant smoke-trail falling through the sky, apparently referring to the descent of a blazing aeroplane.

All the same, Ernst has no desire to be pinned down to a single, unarguable interpretation of his setting. Two fish, one of them startlingly elongated, swim in the sky. They indicate that he was still haunted by the submarine metaphors employed in his series of fish pictures executed during the war (see Pl. 222). The presence of the

350 Max Ernst *Celebes* 1921. Oil on canvas, 125.4 × 107.9 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

fish also proves how determined Ernst was to set his painting in a disorientating, dream-like region, related only obliquely to the conflict he had witnessed. *Celebes* is a transitional work, retaining elements from his Dada period but exploring the irrationality of the emergent Surrealist movement as well. It carries the forceful yet inexplicable charge of a recurrent nightmare, suffered by a man who had survived the war years and now struggled to exorcise their lingering legacy in his work. If the headless woman who beckons from the foreground can be related to the death of Ernst's elder sister in 1897,<sup>18</sup> she is equally redolent of the damage inflicted on countless human bodies between 1914 and 1918. Ernst draws a visual parallel between the rod balanced on the woman's gaping neck and the similar device resting on the strange tree-form beyond. Both are truncated, and Paul Nash would have understood why Ernst wanted to link human with tree as victims of war's destructive power.

For all her mannequin-like rigidity, though, the woman seems to retain a semblance of life. Her seductive gloved hand flirts with the monster, perhaps in an attempt to entice him forward. The gesture provokes a response, in the sense that the brutish phantasm appears to acknowledge the existence of this siren. But its horned head seems to have eye-sockets as empty as the black hole bored through the centre of its body. Despite the phallic swagger of the coiled, tubular neck projecting from its upper section, the horned head may well lack the intelligence to command the rest of the monster to follow the woman. A pair of sharply pointed tusks protruding from the left suggests that another head might lurk on its other side. Moreover, the true seat of sentience is probably to be located in the cluster of mechanistic structures on top of the monster. Reminiscent of propellers, fins, observation turrets and other components from modern weapons of war, they contain an aperture where a white eyeball presides vigilantly in the darkness. It may be about to take aim, like the commanders of the tanks which terrorized German troops for a while during the Somme campaign.

Ultimately, however, the machine-age menace dominating *Celebes* takes on the baleful significance of a threat without a name – a mythical aggressor whose invasive potential seems limitless in comparison with the murderous instruments Ernst had encountered at the Front. It is the shape of things to come, borne of the deepest fears he underwent during the war and the belief that, sooner than anyone cared to expect, the world might be overshadowed by a destructive force of hitherto unimagined capacity. W.B. Yeats was obsessed by a similar presentiment, for in the very same year that Ernst painted *Celebes* he published 'The Second Coming'.<sup>19</sup> After lamenting that

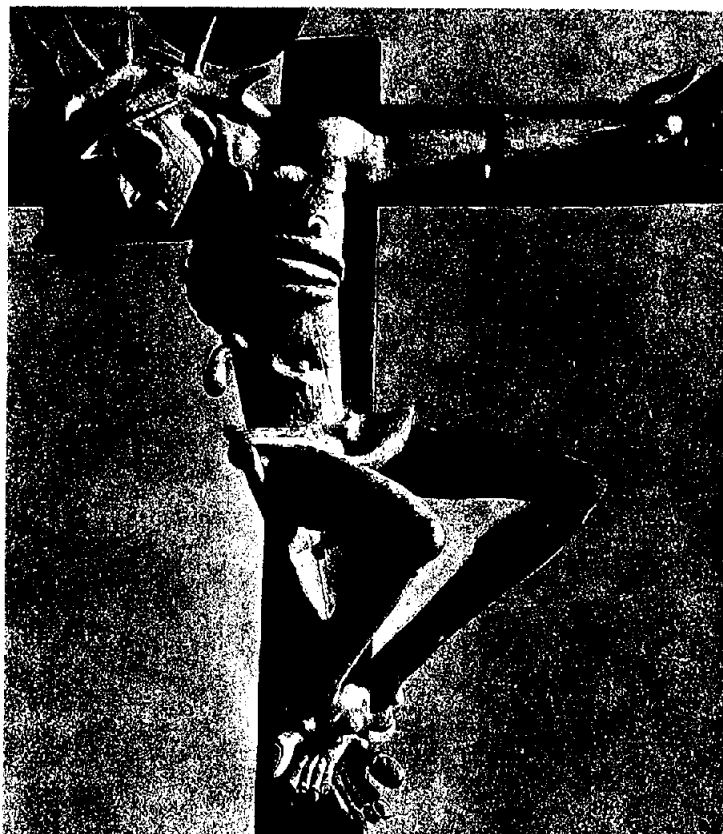
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned . . .

Yeats reluctantly arrives at an apocalyptic conclusion:

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The 'vast image' which troubles the poet's sight, and is in many ways compatible with Ernst's vision, possesses

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds . . .  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?<sup>20</sup>



351 Ludwig Gies *The Crucifixion* 1921. Painted wood, life-size. Formerly St Marienkirche, Lübeck. Destroyed.

If Ernst had ever attempted to convey his savage perturbations in the form of a public war memorial, he would have been execrated by a significant proportion of the German public. In the same year that *Celebes* was painted, the Expressionist sculptor Ludwig Gies encountered the most intolerant and vicious opposition when he carved a life-size wood crucifix as his entry for a war memorial competition held in Lübeck (Pl. 351). Gies produced the image specifically for the north German Gothic nave of St Marienkirche, and his passionately distorted language chimed with the architecture of the building where he hoped *The Crucifixion* would find a permanent home. The pulled-up legs jutted out sideways in a triangular form which honoured the nearby arches and vaults as closely as the sharply pointed edges protruding from the rest of the sculpture. Like Beckmann before him (see Pl. 241), Gies ensured that its conception and style were in keeping with the sculptural achievements of fifteenth-century Germany, and the 'artistically educated members of the congregation's progressive governing body'<sup>21</sup> responded warmly to his aims. They displayed the carving for a while in the ambulatory of the cathedral, 'against a plain white wall, the right hand's blessing a phantasmal silhouette before the tall church window'. According to an eye-witness, 'the effect was astonishing . . . a work of modern craftsmanship and spirit proved to be equal to the architectural power of the Middle Ages.'<sup>22</sup>

Some lay observers, however, reacted violently to the sculpture. If Gies had executed it simply as a crucifix, it might not have aroused any hostility: the image of Christ's suffering at its most extreme had, after all, played a central role in German art for many centuries. But this carving was intended as a memorial, and it impressed the

director of the Lübeck Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte so profoundly that he declared: 'it would be hard to find a symbol which would impress posterity more powerfully and deeply with the meaning of the World War and its fallen heroes.'<sup>23</sup> Such sentiments were anathema to a growing number of Germans. They wanted nothing to do with an image of the war which stressed their nation's recent humiliating plight.

True to his Expressionist convictions, Gies had been uninhibited in his dramatization of Christ's experience on the cross. He went out of his way to retain the rough-hewn character of the original oak blocks in the finished sculpture. Moreover, he heightened its gruesome emotional impact by staining the body green-blue, deploying red freely on the blood-stained planks forming the cross, and making the polished plate of the gilded nimbus reflect the head's ghostly green hue. Such a highly emotive use of colour meant that the image's emphasis on incipient death was impossible to ignore. Instead of a beatific figure, serenely resigning himself to martyrdom and inwardly envisaging the resurrection to come, Gies's Christ is as battered and helpless as his predecessor on the Isenheim altarpiece. Hideously swollen toes bulge out from the nails piercing his feet, and a goblet of blood bursts from his gashed side to hang in space. Gies, working in collaboration with the Expressionist sculptor Otto Hitzberger, stressed the cadaverous etiolation of Christ's physique by scoring harsh furrows in his torso to signify a ribcage starved of sustenance. His equally gaunt head hangs down with hollowed eyes in the direction of his tormentors below, while the spikes surmounting the crown of thorns find an answering echo in the left hand's bony fingers as they splay outwards from the cross.

This bowed and pinioned victim was, in the eyes of its detractors, far too abject to be accepted as a memorial to Germany's role in the war. Protests began in the newspapers, where enraged observers 'spoke of blasphemy, of folly, of a public disgrace that demanded expiation.'<sup>24</sup> It took the form of a ritualistic decapitation. Some of the townspeople entered the Marienkirche, knocked off Christ's head and threw it into the local millpond. Supporters of the sculpture retrieved the mutilated part from the water before successfully returning it to the sculpture. Soon afterwards, Gies's restored masterpiece was displayed in the hall of the Bauhaus at the *Deutsche Gewerbeschau* in Munich. Subsequently, however, it was destroyed completely. The crucifix's supposed defeatism could never be accepted by those who wanted above all to avenge their country's downfall and make Germany triumphant over its adversaries.

Only the most optimistic war images could satisfy them, and another remarkable Expressionist memorial remained unscathed precisely because it conveyed a spirit of resurgence (Pl. 352). Bernhard Hoetger had no intention of regarding his monumental Worpswede memorial to the men killed in action from Lower Saxony as an incitement to German militarism. He called it *Peace Memorial*, and made his political affiliations clear by dedicating another public carving to the workers who had died in the November Revolution at Bremen.<sup>25</sup> But his great brick structure at Worpswede was sufficiently phoenix-like to escape the condemnation of vandals, and it remains *in situ* as the winged fulfilment of Hoetger's exalted belief that 'the artist is the purification-vessel for the most beautiful and most awful experiences, a frightening aestheticist, a dancer on the fields of the dead, a filter, a detoxifier.'<sup>26</sup>

Now that memorials to the Great War are so often taken for granted and even overlooked, it has become easy to underestimate the significance they possessed when unveiled. Even modest communities

insisted on erecting them as a tribute to the memory of the men from their locality who had died. Sometimes, as in the stacked, deliberately primitivist monument built high above the sea at Swanage, they eschew figurative imagery in favour of a structure symbolizing rudimentary yet stubborn endurance. The refinement of an artist's hand appears to play no part in the Swanage memorial, which looks across the water towards a still more weather-worn range of Dorsetshire cliffs.

Surprisingly ambitious and elaborate works of art were, however, commissioned for places smaller by far than seaside resorts. At Steep, near Petersfield, Muirhead Bone commissioned Spencer to paint a picture for the club-room of the Memorial Hall in 1921. Bone, who lived in the village, invited Spencer to stay in his house while working on the project. It appealed to Spencer, prompting him to overcome his earlier resistance to the notion of producing a successor to his great *Travoy's* canvas (see Pl. 307). Having lost his 'Balkanish feelings' in 1919, he now recovered them sufficiently to commence work on a *Crucifixion* rooted in his soldiering experiences. The strange location Spencer chose for his painting derived from wartime memories of

352 Bernhard Hoetger *Peace Memorial: Lower Saxony Monument* 1915–22. Brick. Worpswede.



a mountain in a range dividing Macedonia from Bulgaria. He remembered seeing it 'away behind' his quarters, and thinking that 'it would be wonderful to be on it: it seemed so remote, so long since gathered to the mountains of its forefathers.'<sup>27</sup> The optimistic feelings it had generated within him at the time made Spencer imagine that the mountain might provide an appropriate setting for an ascension picture. After executing a watercolour study in Steep, however, he abandoned the idea and began working on an alternative. He later described how 'I wanted to bring the geography . . . of the mountain into one state of being and expression with some great human happening.' The fact that 'three long gashes'<sup>28</sup> seemed to have been taken out of the mountain convinced him that it would lend itself to a crucifixion instead. So he produced an elaborate oil study on paper, placing each of the three crosses at the bottom of a ravine.

The white-robed men nailing and tying the condemned figures are therefore able to balance on the ravines' edges. Their precipitous poses emphasize the drama of the event; and the grieving Virgin, having 'slithered down the escarpment side', sprawls at an awkward angle at the base of the cross. Even the nearby cluster of priests adopt expressive poses, 'wagging their heads'<sup>29</sup> at the crucified forms. Only the Centurion, isolated in the foreground and leaning against his horse, lacks this agitation as he gazes across at Christ hanging between the ridges. Spencer intended ultimately to paint a larger *Crucifixion*, which would have included at the top of the composition the walls of Jerusalem, the rending of the veil of the temple,<sup>30</sup> and a group of newly resurrected figures arrayed in their funeral shrouds. The last of these additional scenes suggests that he was close, now, to the theme of joyful renewal which provided him with the culminating image of his Memorial Chapel at Burghclere several years later (see Pl. 399). The Steep project collapsed in July 1922, when Spencer described to a friend how 'Bone has given me the sack . . . Of course, it was a great blow to me, because I loved the idea of doing that place at the back of my mind and I wanted to cogitate about it for years.'<sup>31</sup> The work he carried out at Steep was not, however, wasted. His ability to combine biblical and wartime themes in the *Crucifixion* painting prepared the way for a similar, albeit far more sustained and ambitious fusion on the walls of the Burghclere chapel.

By the time Bone terminated the Steep commission, Spencer had moved to a house in Petersfield with a view guaranteed to stimulate his thoughts of resurrection. In February 1922 he excitedly told Henry Lamb that, since his rented room overlooked Petersfield churchyard, 'I am in immediate communication with the dead. They are buried in the side of a bank, so that they only have to push the gravestones a little bit forward and lo! they are in my room, like extinct gentlemen – a very Cookhamesque place, as you can see.'<sup>32</sup> The vision he outlined in this letter with the aid of a swift pencil sketch led on directly to his epic canvas *The Resurrection, Cookham*, commenced two years later. But it also played a part in his decision to paint at Petersfield a powerful picture called *Unveiling Cookham War Memorial* (Pl. 353). Produced in response to a commission from the distinguished collector Sir Michael Sadler for 'a sort of religious picture',<sup>33</sup> this intensely personal image has nothing to do with the dutiful recording of a pompous ceremony replete with officialdom. Dignitaries are nowhere to be seen in Spencer's canvas. They might, perhaps, have stood behind the memorial, making speeches and ensuring that reporters and photographers registered their presence at the event. Spencer excluded them from the painting, however, and does not bother to show who was responsible for the unveiling. He had no desire to let a local politician or councillor deflect attention from his altogether more heightened vision of the event.

In a detailed preparatory drawing, he outlined a large vase of flowers tended by a girl in front of the memorial. In the painting itself, though, the vase is replaced by a rumpled Union Jack. As well as increasing the vivacity of the scene, the flag looks as if it has only just been removed from the monument and fallen, still billowing gently, towards the ground. This concentration on the moment of disclosure enhances the wonder which pervades the whole picture. The crowd of Cookham villagers assembled there, with programmes in their hands, seem awed by the sudden advent of the simple white cross. While a couple of the young men at the front seem more interested in the girls surrounding the memorial's base, the majority stand and gaze silently at the monument or press forward eagerly from behind to gain a better view. After finishing the canvas, Spencer claimed that he had deployed 'what I call my Ascot fashions, my sweet-pea colours'.<sup>34</sup> But this lighthearted, slightly deprecating description does no justice to the remarkable luminosity of the painting itself. The cross's pristine stonework glows in the sun, luxuriating in its heat as much as the hollyhocks, wisteria and warm brown brickwork of the cottages beyond. They induce a mood of irresistible high-summer drowsiness, which becomes still more seductive once the village ends and the picture opens out into the richly foliated Berkshire countryside.

Several figures succumb to the temptation offered by the edge of Cookham Moor and lounge on its grass. Others standing above them appear dazed by the sunlight, while the row of girls' bonnets nearby flower as expansively as the petals in the shrub behind them. There is a universal sense of unfolding and burgeoning after the long privation of the war years, and Spencer aimed at contrasting this beneficent image of Cookham life with the misery commemorated by the monument. He later explained that the painting 'was intended to express the absence of hurry . . . and to express the peaceful life that I visualized people could live if there was no war.'<sup>35</sup> Hence, perhaps, the particular importance he attached to the figure of the foreground girl kneeling by the side of the memorial. Dressed in the white of innocence, she places one reverential hand on the stonework and, with the other, instals a black vase of daisies on its base. Although her face is hidden by a bonnet, she could easily be kissing the memorial in a spontaneous gesture of respect for the dead. She might also be pushing aside the flag of nationalistic pride in order to make room for the alternative values symbolized by the small yet potent flowers in her grasp. Spencer appears to attach special significance to the proximity of feminine grace and austere monument. He ensures that the apex of the cross is juxtaposed with a girl resting on the sill of an upper window. Caressed by the flower-spattered curtains blowing around her, she seems to bestow on the memorial a tacit blessing which affirms the need for a future liberated at last from the cyclical curse of war.

Although the Cookham monument was devoid of carved imagery, plenty of sculptors found themselves commissioned to produce figurative work for memorials elsewhere in the country. Many of them were timid or merely hackneyed, conveying little except their makers' inability to reflect on the war and transmit an authentic, heartfelt response to the tragedy. But alongside this failure of nerve, by sculptors and patrons alike, a few projects did succeed in rising above the prevalent banality. Eric Gill, who had demonstrated his capacity to carve on a monumental scale in his wartime *Stations of the Cross* for the nave of Westminster Cathedral, was invited to produce memorials and plaques for a range of small communities across southern England.<sup>36</sup> They reject the rhetoric which mars most of their grandiloquent counterparts in major urban centres, and ex-



emply Gill's passionate determination to provide even the humblest of locations with modest yet memorable images.

The most resonant of all his village monuments is the Cross erected at Briantspuddle in Dorset (Pl. 354). It occupies a commanding position, at the point where a quiet road lined with thatched houses ends and open countryside begins. The full-length figure of Christ gazes over the fields, with one hand clasping the handle of a sword and the other solemnly raised to expose the nail gash in his palm. This gesture is reminiscent of the hand upheld by Epstein's *Risen Christ* (see Pl. 330). Perhaps Gill had been impressed by his old friend's bronze, for the Briantspuddle Christ shares the same sense of gaunt resignation. The presence of the sword does not give the figure a belligerent air. On the contrary: Christ appears to be robbing the weapon of destructive force by pressing it into his robe, and the gashed hand laid over its handle implies a warning about the brutal consequences of unleashed aggression. Gill allies the figure so completely with the narrow verticality of the cross that Christ's slenderness is taken to the point of outright etiolation. He looks burdened by his awareness of the lost lives inscribed on the arched stone block beneath him, and the quotation from Julian of Norwich surmounting the list of names issues a melancholy moral: 'It Is Sooth That Sin Is Cause Of All This Pain.'

Although the names continue on the sides of the Briantspuddle memorial, the sense of intolerable anguish eases at the rear. For here, sheltering within a sturdy porch supported by thick metal columns, a veiled Virgin sits with offspring on lap. Her expression is sombre as she offers her breast for the reassuringly plump child to suckle. Although she is united in mood with the attenuated figure on the other side of the cross, the woman does possess a consoling amplitude. She embodies the form as well as the spirit of redemptive nurture, and dedicates herself to feeding the generation who will emerge in the wake of war. This time, the niches below are devoid of tragic names, while the accompanying inscription, again from Julian of Norwich, affirms: 'And All Manner Of Thing Shall Be Well.'

No such comforting emotion lay behind Gill's most ambitious war memorial, completed for Leeds University in 1923 (Pl. 355). The strange idea of taking as his subject *Our Lord driving the Moneychangers out of the Temple* had occurred to him as early as 1916, when he proposed a design for a large bronze memorial to the London County



354 Eric Gill *The Cross* (front and back views) 1920. Stone. Briantspuddle, Dorset.



155 Eric Gill *Our Lord driving the Moneychangers out of the Temple* 1923. Portland stone, 168 × 459 cm. The University of Leeds.

Council's dead employees. While sitting for his portrait, and trying to decide 'between thinking about women (in some detail) and thinking what I could do for the LCC Monument', Gill suddenly realised 'that the act of Jesus in turning out the buyers and sellers from the Temple when he did was really a most courageous act and very warlike'.<sup>37</sup> The proposal, not surprisingly, was turned down, and Gill supposed that the LCC 'took fright, or were insulted at the awful suggestion that London were a commercial city or that England were a Temple from which a money-changer or two might not be missed'.<sup>38</sup> While feeling just as angry about the war profiteers as Grosz or Davringhausen (see Pls. 343, 345), he believed that the money-changers story justified the British decision to take up arms against Germany. 'Thus for all time', he wrote of Christ's precipitate action, 'the use of violence in a just cause is made lawful'.<sup>39</sup> More alarmingly, Gill argued that houses of God required purging in the twentieth century just as urgently as in Christ's day. When he heard about the damage inflicted on Reims by the German advance, he angrily insisted in a letter to a friend on the 'need to construct a whip of thongs wherewith to drive the money-changers out of the Temple of England. God has found a whip of German guns wherewith to deprive the money changers of the temples of France. Why should Paris be indignant? What was Reims to it? A blooming museum – a kind of provincial branch of the Louvre'.<sup>40</sup>

It was an odd, overheated attitude to adopt, and Gill's apparent sanctioning of a great cathedral's destruction would hardly have commended him to a patron capable of commissioning the memorial he wanted to produce. All the same, Michael Sadler became interested in the proposal. Before the war he had been Kandinsky's first supporter in Britain (see Chapter One), and the remarkable audacity Sadler had shown at that time resurfaced when he considered Gill's scheme. Having recently commissioned a war memorial picture from Spencer (Pl. 353), who in 1921 painted his own interpretation of *Christ Overturning the Money Changers' Tables*,<sup>41</sup> Sadler would not have been surprised by Gill's interest in the same subject. Besides, as Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, Sadler had recently received a £1,000 legacy from a Yorkshire lady to be used for the University's benefit.<sup>42</sup> So he decided to spend it on Gill's memorial, and did not

even waver when the sculptor gleefully announced that 'I'm thinking of making it a pretty straight thing – modern dress as much as possible, Leeds manufacturers, their wives & servants, don't you see.'<sup>43</sup> Both Gill and his patron must have known that such an image would cause deep offence, especially among local businessmen who had suffered the loss of sons during the war and expected a far more decorous, conventionally dignified monument. But Gill was bent on assuming Christ's purifying role when he carried out this 'revolutionary job',<sup>44</sup> and Sadler managed to obtain the university's consent for the inflammatory carving.

In one respect alone did Gill temper his onslaught on the sensibilities of the people he criticized. The biblical inscription running along the cornice of his immense relief declared: 'Go to now, you rich men, weep and howl in your miseries which shall come upon you. Your riches are putrid.'<sup>45</sup> He decided, however, to carve this execration in Latin, and employed the same language for the inscription on the right of the relief where the expulsion story is summarized.<sup>46</sup> Beneath the words, incised with all the skill and elegance Gill commanded as a letter-cutter, the hound of the Lord rushes past an overturned money-changer's table with a burning torch gripped between his teeth. He initiates the movement which runs through the entire frieze, and the curve of his tail is echoed by the seven cords swinging from the whip in symbolic recognition of the Seven Deadly Sins. Christ flings back this scourge to aim it at the targets of his scorn, and his draped figure is handled in a deliberately archaizing idiom – as if Gill's long-held admiration for the far more deeply scored early medieval stone carvings of Christ at Chichester Cathedral had been filtered through his love of the smoother and more sinuous rhythms of Indian sculpture.

These influences, carried over in part from his *Stations of the Cross* reliefs in Westminster Cathedral, are countered in the rest of the relief by Gill's determination to attain contemporary relevance. The depiction of figures in twentieth-century clothes is carried out in a style commensurate with the work of contemporaries like William Roberts, who had himself recently painted a characteristically rigid and angular interpretation of the money-changers story. Although the five fleeing men in Gill's relief are supposed to represent, from right

to left, two financiers, a politician, a pawnbroker's clerk and his master, they all look strangely similar. Even their movements echo each other, like a Muybridge-derived Futurist sequence of successive stages in the motion of a single figure. Perhaps Gill wanted to convey his scorn of the ousted crowd by the mocking deployment of repetitive, robot-like poses. There is a comic-strip air about these cowed, scurrying outcasts, and the absurdity is heightened by the contrast between their bunched-up ungainliness and the cool, austere dignity of the arches running behind them. Ridicule is spiced with a hint of salaciousness near the end of the relief, where the pawnbroker carries the balls symbolic of his profession. Gill slyly makes sure that only two of them are visible, and allows the 'fashionable woman' to grasp one of the poles supporting the balls. The gesture is surreptitious: her hand sidles out behind her dress, and might easily be mistaken for the pawnbroker's. Once seen, however, her brazen fingers imply that the woman is just as stealthy in the pursuit of her own interests as her male companions. She holds up her vanity bag with a possessive zeal reminiscent of the clerk hugging the ledger with 'LSD' inscribed so prominently on the cover. Gill clearly wanted to scotch any illusions on the viewer's part that expulsion may have humiliated the money-changers into repenting of their venality.

When the memorial was installed on an exterior wall<sup>47</sup> near the university library in 1923, it provoked fierce controversy. The Conservative *Yorkshire Post* even attempted to 'cancel or delay'<sup>48</sup> the Dedication ceremony, and a defiant Gill exacerbated the scandal by publishing a thoroughly contentious pamphlet about the memorial's political aims. It confirmed, to the disgust of his detractors in a town renowned as a financial centre, that he was obsessed by modern war's relationship with the generation and accumulation of capital. Sadler, for his part, found himself besieged by journalists on his arrival at Southampton from a trip to Canada. Although he was privately angry about Gill's pamphlet, and later complained in his diary that the sculptor had 'departed egregiously (without telling me until it was too late) from the earlier design he had chosen',<sup>49</sup> the Vice-Chancellor supported the carving in public. By championing the artist's right to make an image in direct opposition to the social order, Sadler proved himself a courageous patron. All the same, he harboured reservations about the emphatic way Gill had underlined his polemical intentions, in pamphlet and sculpture alike. While saluting Gill's robust independence, and admirable refusal to modify his convictions in the face of antagonism, Sadler may still have wondered if such a heavily debunking image was an appropriate means of commemorating the soldiers' deaths.

Down in London, the summer of 1923 likewise proved a controversial period for another artist memorializing the war. William Orpen had already expended a great deal of effort on two government-sponsored paintings of the Peace Conference in France. Observing at close quarters the assembled statesmen of Europe pursuing their own arrogant ends generated within him an accelerating anger and disgust. Memories of the horrors he had witnessed on the battlefield and attempted with varying degrees of success to paint (see Pls. 263, 264) were still alive in his mind. They made the manoeuvrings of the sleek and self-regarding politicians nauseate an artist plagued in addition by an attack of blood-poisoning. He dismissed the pomposity of the proceedings as 'an *opéra bouffé*', and pointed out that 'all these "frocks" seemed to me very small personalities in comparison with the fighting men.'<sup>50</sup>

*The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles* duly subordinates the assembled heads of state to the gilded ornamentation of their surroundings. Although each individual is conscientiously portrayed,

they all look like mannequins relegated to the base of a composition which implies their insignificance. The centre of the canvas is devoted to the disjointed reflections in a mirrored wall. Its shimmering glass panels offer an unstable glimpse of two silhouetted figures at the other side of the Hall. They appear to be gazing outwards, as though in contemplation of the uncertain future confronting Europe after the ratification of these profoundly ill-advised negotiations. Orpen's insistence on fracturing the tall windows adds to the sense of unease in a painting only too prophetic of the divisions ahead.

At this stage, however, his misgivings remained covert rather than nakedly expressed. Only in 1923 did he unleash the full extent of his dissent by displaying, at the Royal Academy summer exhibition, an indignant painting called *To the Unknown British Soldier in France* (Pl. 356). It was supposed to have been the third of Orpen's conference pictures, and he had previously spent nine frustrated months working on the same canvas to produce a dutiful image of thirty-six statesmen and armed forces' representatives positioned in the ironically named Hall of Peace. Then, tired of coping with all the meticulous little portrait-heads required by the commission, he painted them out. 'It all seemed so unimportant somehow,' he declared in an interview with the *Evening Standard*, relating how 'I kept thinking of the soldiers who remain in France for ever.'<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, he replaced the group of dignitaries with a far more emotive and, indeed, protesting reference to the war: a lone coffin, draped in the British flag, with partially naked soldiers standing at either side. Based on the dishevelled and shell-shocked Tommy in Orpen's war drawing *Blown-Up - Mad*, their reciprocal stances mock the theatricality of artificial posing, and Orpen injects further mordant satire into the picture by adding a pair of cherubs. They cavort above the soldiers with absurdly inappropriate garlands, emphasizing the contrast between the Tommies' ragged etiolation and the splendour of the polished marble and chandeliers around them. Here, the picture seems to be insisting, is the true legacy of the conflict. Once the calculating negotiators have left the Hall, reality remains in the form of two tattered infantrymen guarding their comrade's corpse.

Orpen can have been no more surprised than Gill at Leeds by the strength of feeling which his painting eventually aroused. At first, when it was inspected in his studio by the Secretary of the Imperial War Museum, the reaction was guarded. 'It is very difficult to get sentiment out of Orpen,' the Secretary reported to Sir Alfred Mond, 'but I rather gather that his idea is that after all the negotiations and discussions, the Armistice and the Peace, the only tangible result is the ragged unemployed soldier and the Dead.'<sup>52</sup> The museum decided to hold its option on the picture open until it was displayed at the Royal Academy summer show, where the trustees would all be able to study it and arrive at a conclusive verdict. So far as the exhibition's visitors were concerned, the painting's disillusionment was both valid and memorably expressed. By voting it 'Picture of the Year', the viewing public demonstrated its solidarity with Orpen's emphasis on the futility of the war and its despicable aftermath. But most of the exhibition's reviewers condemned the picture for its bad taste and technical ineptitude. 'True to its name, *The Patriot* proclaimed that the painting was nothing more than 'a joke and a bad joke at that.'<sup>53</sup> The *Liverpool Echo* was almost alone in opining that 'the shadowy legions of the dead sleeping out and far will applaud it with Homeric hush.'<sup>54</sup>

The museum's representatives could hardly be expected to echo such sentiments. They rejected the painting, on the grounds that 'it does not show what we wished shown',<sup>55</sup> and Orpen found himself contesting the Treasury's proposal to deduct nearly £1,000 from his





356 William Orpen *To the Unknown British Soldier in France* (first version) 1922. Oil on canvas, 152.4 × 128.3 cm. Altered later. Imperial War Museum, London.

payment. The outcome of this financial wrangling is unclear,<sup>56</sup> but in the end official disapproval affected the artist's attitude to his picture. Five years after its controversial triumph at the Royal Academy, he contacted the museum and offered to obliterate the offending soldiers, garlands and cherubs. Perhaps he thought that the human cost of war was still underlined by the proposed repainting: the coffin may have been covered by a Union Jack, but it was still impossible to ignore. The museum, however, greeted his suggestion with gratified relief. The amended canvas was duly accepted by the trustees, who clearly felt that the coffin no longer seemed objectionable in its new and more respectful context. After all, Orpen was now presenting it to the museum as a memorial to Earl Haig, so no disrespect was suspected. Nor can it really have been intended, for the altered version of *To the Unknown British Soldier in France* seems a disappointingly neutered affair compared with its bilious predecessor.

No such accusation could be levelled at Rouault. Again and again in an anguished sequence of prints inspired by the war, he hammered home the gravest consequences of the bestiality it had fostered. If Rouault the painter often seems indebted to the burnished colours and thickly leaded structure of medieval stained-glass windows,

Rouault the print-maker here announces his fascination with the Dance of Death imagery which originated in the same period. Like Kubin, de Bruycker and Uzarski before him (see Pls. 250, 178, 238), he appropriates the skeletal figure who rampaged through so many morality plays in the late middle ages. Death then personified the plague which decimated Europe relentlessly in those centuries. By re-employing this fell figure for his own purposes in the *War* prints, Rouault implies that the conflict assailing the same geographical area between 1914 and 1918 was just as devastating in its consequences.

Religious faith offers no protection against the struggle's ruthless advance. In *This will be the last time, dear father!* (Pl. 357), a young soldier makes this promise by kneeling as near as he can to his frowning confessor. Their physical proximity carries echoes of the prodigal son's return: the intimacy of the penitent's whisper, and the hand he brings to rest on the older man's right arm, suggest a parent/child relationship rather than the formality of a church confessional. The soldier affirms that he will never sin again, without any awareness of the potential irony involved in such an assurance. Rouault, however, makes the promise unavoidable by placing Death immediately behind the young man. Baring his teeth in a predatory leer, the skeleton closes on his victim with a resolve which guarantees the soldier's demise. Once the skeleton's intentions have become clear, the expression on the confessor's face takes on a new meaning. As well as responding to the gravity of the penitent's sin, he seems oppressed by a reluctant recognition of the slaughter to come.

In order to confirm the inevitability of Death's presence, Rouault produced *Man is wolf to man*. Now the skeletal figure stalks the battlefield itself, dominating the composition with even greater forcefulness than in the previous print. Unlike his predecessor, he wears an army cap and his face possesses more flesh. This time, too, his mouth remains shut, but it is widened in a smile which conveys the extent of his perverted satisfaction. Wherever he strides, extinction ensues. The skulls on the bare earth testify to his lethal powers, and his deeply shadowed eye-socket suggests that he has no need of sight to carry out his purpose. For Death's exterminating will is implemented without discrimination. He simply stretches out his forearms and extends bony fingers towards the ground. This simple gesture is sufficient, and Rouault's use of etching acid ensures that the darkened sky flickers with a corrosive light generated by the figure's malevolence. Writing of *Man is wolf to man* in the middle of the Second World War, Wyndham Lewis asked: 'How can man be otherwise than degraded and blasted to the bone and to the bottom of the soul by the awfulness of his servitude to evil? – And how could a "painter of original sin" look at things otherwise than that?'

Rouault dealt with Christ's redemption later in the *War* series (Pl. 360), but for the moment he wanted to concentrate on the plight of those endangered indirectly by the conflict. *War, hated by mothers* looks at first like an affirmation of the intimacy between a woman and her child (Pl. 358). There is, however, nothing at all reassuring about their relationship. The son belies his youth by kneeling on his mother's lap and trying to face her. Far from burrowing into her body and rejoicing in their proximity, he asserts his autonomy. With an erect back, and legs ready to rise up, he reaches out to the woman in a decisive gesture more akin to leaving than embracing. For her part, the mother seems aware of the boy's incipient desire for independence. She bows towards him, as though anxious to enfold her child in an arc of protective affection. Her lowered head ends up, nevertheless, in tacit acknowledgement of the fact that the boy's growth will eventually make him eligible for the battlefield. Although her hand still grasps his body, she seems defeated by the inevitability



357 Georges Rouault *This will be the last time, dear father!* 1927. Etching, aquatint and heliogravure, 58.8 × 43 cm. City Art Gallery, Birmingham.



358 Georges Rouault *'War, hated by mothers'* 1927. Etching, aquatint and heliogravure, 58.4 × 44 cm. City Art Gallery, Birmingham.

of loss in a world where men are condemned at an increasingly young age to conscription and death. Darkness has already intervened between the two figures, as a presage of the final separation to come.

In *My sweet country, where are you?*, Rouault reveals the alienation awaiting these young soldiers once they become embroiled in active service. Although the figures in this scene may once have been eager to leave their native country and fight in foreign territory, lassitude has overtaken them in a town they do not even bother to scrutinize. The fatigue and disorientation they experience is more thoroughgoing than the mood conveyed in Nevinson's comparable painting of *Troops Resting* (see Pl. 170). Instead of bunching together in a jagged pyramid of uniforms and equipment, they sprawl on the ground like the sleepers in the underground shelter images drawn by Henry Moore during the Second World War. The fires ascending into a sky apparently choked with smoke-fumes imply that destruction has taken place, perpetrated either by the soldiers or their opponents. Some houses and a tower still stand, but they have been denuded of identifying features and look as anonymous, now, as the buildings in Bonnard's *Village in Ruins near Ham* (see Pl. 201). Their bleakness echoes the feelings of the men, who seem so demoralized that they may not even know which country they inhabit. All they do recognise is a profound longing for the land of their birth, and a fear that

it could have become equally desolate during their prolonged, seemingly interminable absence.

In the rest of the *War* series, Rouault emphasizes that none of these mournful figures is likely to return home. Death reappears to stalk the battlefield, and nothing else can be seen on the deserted ground he occupies. The skeletal figure has prevailed over everything, and yet he is no longer the indomitable figure who strode across *'Man is wolf to man'*. Death himself now seems to falter, as though stricken by the same malady he administered to so many others. His right forearm falters as it rises up to deal the next fatal blow, and his knees sag inwards with the effort of struggling to stay upright. Even Death, Rouault appears to be indicating, finds that the unparalleled slaughter of the Great War ultimately has a debilitating effect on him. Gorged on a superfluity of corpses, the exterminator seems to be afflicted by nausea at the height of his triumphal progress. The 'bed of nettles' alluded to in the title of this complex image suggests an intolerable pain, and no amount of killing can ameliorate his malaise.

In the next plate, Rouault stresses the suffering that death imposes on the victim's relatives (Pl. 359). The woman and child, who bear an unmistakable resemblance to the figures in *'War, hated by mothers'* (Pl. 358), stand stricken at the soldier's feet. They are inconsolable, and incline their heads towards each other in a vain attempt to share



359 Georges Rouault 'The just man, like sandalwood, perfumes the blade that cuts him down' 1926. Etching, aquatint and heliogravure, 58.5 × 42.2 cm. City Art Gallery, Birmingham.

the grief. Unlike *'War, hated by mothers'*, however, some consolation is at last offered elsewhere in the print. Rouault's title emphasizes that *'The just man, like sandalwood, perfumes the blade that cuts him down'*, thereby hinting at the purifying power of the soldier's sacrifice. Moreover, the upper half of his body does not lie abandoned on the earth. It has been lifted up in anticipation of a rebirth, and the angel supporting him is a muscular, broad-necked protector whose ample wings are eminently capable of enfoldng the corpse in a redemptive embrace. In order to reinforce the affirmative meaning of the image, Rouault ensures that the darkness shrouding the main group gives way to a suggestion of daybreak beyond the door. Regeneration is imminent, not only in nature but through contact with Christ as well. For his head, isolated on the veil of Veronica, floats above this twentieth-century Deposition like a promise of the celestial consummation awaiting the dead man. The aureole around Christ pierces the shadows, attesting to the potency of the Godhead presiding over the sorrow below.

The beneficial effect of this divine presence is revealed in the concluding prints from the series, where Rouault finally allows himself to admit an element of hope. *'Arise, you dead!'* concentrates, like Spencer at the Burghclere chapel, on the prospect of a resurrection. Unlike Spencer, though, Rouault does not suppose that the re-



360 Georges Rouault 'Obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' 1926. Etching, aquatint and heliogravure, 58 × 42 cm. City Art Gallery, Birmingham.

emergent bodies resemble their former selves. Instead, they are as skeletal as the figure of Death who haunted earlier images in the *War* cycle. Their rising is, moreover, unaccompanied by a sense of triumph. Rouault presents it as a painful process, with one corpse on the left hardly seeming capable of heaving the rest of his body from the earth. He stretches his stiff arms with hesitation, unable to convince himself that the grave's constriction has given way to the freedom of the open air. Crosses on the horizon remind him of the incarceration he has endured, and his upturned head flinches as he finds another skeleton descending on him. Spencer's universal feeling of awakened wonder and relief is replaced, here, by an altogether bleaker mood. The central corpse reels backwards to avoid the outflung elbow of the commanding skeleton, whose dark eye-sockets and bared teeth betray no sign of joy.

He does, even so, wear a soldier's cap and appears vigorous enough to resume an independent existence beyond the boundaries of the grave. Rouault's mood is ultimately less excoriating than Masereel's in his 1917 woodcuts, where the same cry of 'Arise, you dead' is interpreted with a sharper amount of mortified despair (see Pls. 236, 237). However gruesome the future may seem for Rouault's wavering cadavers, as they emerge into the blackness of a world where extinction has prevailed for so long, they receive their impetus

from the artist's belief in the idea of redemption through suffering.

In the end, Rouault had faith in the transforming power of Christ's sacrifice, and *'Obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'* affirms the central significance of Calvary (Pl. 360). The figure who dominates this image is in the throes of final anguish, and his sagging head lacks the poise of the face Rouault had depicted on the veil of Veronica (Pl. 359). Moreover, his emaciated body is as vulnerable as the torso of the man subjected to such callous inspection in *Face to face*. Pinioned to a cross from which there is no escape, Christ undergoes the agony of a prolonged and humiliating martyrdom. All the same, in this supreme act of 'obedience' Rouault identifies a source of solace. For the crucified man is transfigured by the light irradiating his head. Its luminosity spreads outwards, penetrating the darkness and offering hope to those slaughtered on the battlefields.

Such consolation is notable by its absence from another great post-war print sequence which sought to confront the human cost of the hostilities. Käthe Kollwitz's series of seven woodcuts called *War* derive their intensity from the anguish she experienced soon after the conflict began. In October 1914 her younger son Peter was killed in Flanders, having volunteered for active service during the initial wave of martial enthusiasm. Devastated by his death, Kollwitz became obsessed by the image of a grief-stricken mother who insists on clutching and hugging a dead child. After 1914, when Peter Kollwitz's loss plunged his mother into bitter mourning, her preoccupation with this theme was understandable enough. Eleven years before the tragedy, however, she had produced a print of a naked woman who enfolds her lifeless offspring in an embrace so fiercely possessive that she seems determined never to let the corpse go. Uncannily, Kollwitz disclosed at the time that the print was based on a drawing, executed with a mirror's help, of herself clasping the seven-year-old Peter in her arms.<sup>57</sup> The woman depicted in the print could almost be trying to breathe some semblance of life back into the pale body, and the attempt disturbingly foreshadows Kollwitz's own frantic desire, after her son's death, to recover him through art.

She fought a depression so severe that it threatened to incapacitate her completely, and for years Kollwitz failed to resolve the struggle. In August 1916, for instance, she confessed her dissatisfaction with a new drawing of 'the mother who takes up her dead son in her arms. I could make hundreds of pictures like this but they still wouldn't bring me closer to him. I seek him. As though I would be able to find him in the work. And everything I am able to do is so childishly weak and unsatisfactory . . . I am crippled, exhausted by crying, weakened. I feel like the poet in Thomas Mann: he can only write; to live what he writes is beyond his powers. It's the opposite with me. I no longer have the strength to shape what I have lived. A genius could do it, and a man. But I cannot.'<sup>58</sup>

Eventually, though, Kollwitz did succeed in embarking on a sustained sequence of prints dealing very powerfully with her attitude to the pain of war. In June 1920, impressed by some Barlach woodcuts displayed in the Secession, she began experimenting with the same medium. The initial outcome, a large and tragic *Memorial sheet for Karl Liebknecht*, was so successful that Kollwitz felt encouraged to tackle more personal themes with the greater directness and harsh



361 Käthe Kollwitz *The Victim* 1922–3. Woodcut, 37 × 40 cm. Kunsthalle, Bielefeld.

362 Käthe Kollwitz *The Volunteers* 1922–3. Woodcut, 35 × 49 cm. Kunsthalle, Bielefeld.

363 Käthe Kollwitz *The Parents* 1923. Woodcut, 35 × 42 cm. Kunsthalle, Bielefeld.

simplicity she had achieved by scoring the wood with her knife. In *War* she wielded her cutter's tool unsparingly, carving into the block like a surgeon intent on slicing with such sureness that every diseased tissue is exposed and eradicated. Just as a surgeon is impelled by the need to discover the truth, and thereby hope to bring about a change for the better, so Kollwitz aimed at locating and combating the anguish she dissected. The outcome went some way towards satisfying even her most demanding standards. 'I have repeatedly attempted to give form to the war,' she told the novelist Romain Rolland in 1922. 'I could never grasp it. Now finally I have finished a series of woodcuts, which *in some measure* say what I wanted to say . . . These sheets should travel throughout the entire world and should tell all human beings comprehensively: that is how it was – we have all endured that throughout these unspeakably difficult years.'<sup>59</sup>

Her central involvement with the mother-child relationship is disclosed in the first *War* print, *The Victim*, which explores the duality of death and new life, protection and loss (Pl. 361). Kollwitz had at last succeeded in defining the image of 'the mother who takes up her dead son in her arms', and she reinforces its sombre mood by juxtaposing the vulnerable white figures with an enveloping black cloak. Its theme is similar to Rouault's '*War, hated by mothers*' (Pl. 358), but Kollwitz intensifies the woman's suffering by giving her a far more demonstrative relationship with the child. Her upraised arms strain with the effort involved in holding her offspring, and she struggles to prevent him from eluding her grasp. Rouault's mother seems, by contrast, resigned to the inevitability of her fate.

This protesting emotion is dramatized still more forcefully in *The Volunteers*, where the physical bond between mother and child is sundered as the army moves off to the Front (Pl. 362). A trio of howling women give vent to their chorus-like distress, and Kollwitz accentuates the fragmentation of their lives by breaking off their figures well before the bottom of the composition. The jagged strokes convey the wrenching pain of departure, and one distraught mother still insists on clutching her son's hand. The grip has already loosened, however. The young soldier, his eyes closed and head thrown back in a trance-like state, is swept along by the irresistible surge of motion propelling him towards the battlefield. Kollwitz makes this suicidal onrush even more formidable by incising an arc in the sky. The ecstatic volunteer submits himself to it, unaware of the fact that a fellow soldier has already been enfolded in a mortal grip by Death. With his other hand, the skeletal leader of the march raises a stick in



365 Käthe Kollwitz *The People* 1922–3. Woodcut, 36 × 30 cm. Kunsthalle, Bielefeld.

the air to beat his drum, confident that the young men will all feel compelled to obey its preemptory rhythm.

Instead of following the volunteers to the Front, Kollwitz devoted the rest of *War* to the plight of those left behind. By doing so, she remained faithful to her own experience of the conflict, and the remaining five prints close in on different aspects of the bereavement theme. In *The Parents* she shows how a grief-stricken mother and father try to support each other (Pl. 363). The woman pitches towards her husband and buries her face in his left arm, thereby locking them into a single dark mass. Kollwitz isolates them against an empty white background, which stresses their bulk and helps to explain why she responded so profoundly to Barlach's work. Since Kollwitz was already planning the memorial figures she eventually erected in a Belgian military cemetery (see Pl. 393), the sculptural emphasis of *The Parents* is comprehensible enough. They both appear to have been hewn from the same rock, and rise up like a mountain of sorrow from the ground.

In so far as the cemetery monument separated the inconsolable man from the woman, to drive home their isolation more strongly, it seems bleaker than *The Parents* print. Despite their physical proximity, though, the interlocked figures in the woodcut are burdened by a more intolerable sense of woe. Without the support provided by her husband's arm, the wife would very probably collapse altogether. The straggling lines cut into her dress transmit the woman's frailty with distressing clarity, whereas in the memorial sculpture she is able to

364 Käthe Kollwitz *The Widow II* 1922–3. Woodcut, 30 × 40 cm. Kunsthalle, Bielefeld.



maintain a kneeling position on her own. Compared with his stoical counterpart in the Belgian cemetery, the father here likewise gives vent to a storm of sorrow. He, in turn, relies on his wife's body to support the arm raised towards a face mercifully hidden from view. Although Kollwitz denies us access to his features, we have little difficulty in imagining how contorted they must appear beneath the shielding fingers.

Kollwitz was in no mood to minimize suffering, and her next print strips a grieving woman of all the comfort a husband can provide. For this figure is a widow, and she has been left alone to deal with her loss unalleviated by any help from relatives or friends. She turns inwards, unable to prevent her exhausted head from subsiding on to her shoulder. Two hands stand out, veined and calloused against the funereal blackness of her garment, and they strive without success to supply the comfort she needs. There is something terminal about the grief assailing this woman, whose bedraggled hair and drab clothes surely identify her as one of the working-class patients Kollwitz used to study when they visited her husband's surgery in a poor district of Berlin. The widow in this woodcut may even be pregnant, and the advent of a baby will only make survival more difficult. Deprived of the economic support her husband used to supply, she could easily succumb to the fate of the widow in Kollwitz's fifth *War* print (Pl. 364).

Here, the position of the woman stretched out on the hard floor is reminiscent of Manet's *The Dead Torador* – a figure itself based on a painting once thought to be by Velázquez.<sup>60</sup> There is the same emphasis on the upturned feet, the hand resting on the body, and the midnight void beyond. Kollwitz, however, injects a far greater degree of expressive emotion into her image. The feet are bare, and the woman's robe is as rough as the bark of a tree. Manet savours the elegance of the torador's costume, and admits no trace of the suffering he must have experienced during his final encounter with the bull. Kollwitz, on the other hand, tips the widow's upturned face towards the viewer, so that her agony is fully exposed. Moreover, an equally motionless child lies across her breast. Although the mother's hands at one stage tried to protect the infant, Kollwitz's elegiac print implies that the struggle has ended in death for both of them.

As if in panic-stricken reaction to such a fate, the women in *The Mothers* huddle together in a defensive mass. Some children peer out apprehensively from the tightly-packed throng, and two of the mothers press babies against their own faces with wirily resolute hands. The woman on the left appears to be pleading with the forces that threaten them, but her features betray the extent of her alarm. All the offspring are at risk, and there is no guarantee that the solidarity so evident here will offer permanent protection. The arms which reach out to cover other women's backs cannot stay raised for ever. No one is safe from the demands of a war-machine greedy for human fodder, and in the final woodcut Kollwitz shows how easily a mother can feel marooned within a society riven by the conflict (Pl. 365).

Instead of a maternal crowd united by a common resolve to resist, the gaunt woman now finds herself obliged to look after her child alone. Around her jostle faces demented by grief. They look menacing, as though perversely determined to force on the central figure the anguish they are scarcely able to endure. For her part, she glances at them with wary concern. Scarred by privation, this blanched and spectral woman exemplifies what Kollwitz described as 'the gravity and tragedy of the most miserable kind of proletarian existence'.<sup>61</sup> The hand covering her child is resolute in its desire to ward off danger, but the faces encircling her indicate that disaster will be



366 Otto Dix *The Trench* 1920–3. Destroyed.

impossible to avoid. That is why the *War* cycle carries far more conviction than 'No More War!', a poster Kollwitz produced for the Central German Youth Day at Leipzig in August 1924. Each underlined word possesses the urgency of graffiti scrawled on a street wall, but the fiercely uplifted arm thrusting between them seems powerless to implement its almost frantic belief in the beleaguered cause of pacifism.

The despair laid bare in Kollwitz's *War* sequence was redoubled in the greatest post-war cycle of prints devoted to the conflict. Obsessed by the disparity between his pre-war Nietzschean hopes of a purged and renewed world after the holocaust of battle, and the grotesque reality of carnage and defeat, Otto Dix continued to brood over his experiences as a soldier long after completing the war-cripple pictures of 1920 (Pls. 341, 342). During the same year he began to plan and lay in an extraordinarily elaborate painting called *The Trench* (Pl. 366). Finally completed in 1923, after he had moved into a studio with Wollheim and perhaps been stimulated by the latter's harrowing *The Wounded Man* (see Pl. 326), this elaborate image used heavy impasto and an almost hallucinatory accumulation of detail to condemn the destruction. In this respect, it represented a dramatic departure from the brusque, Dada-influenced style he had employed in the cripple pictures. For all its Expressionist vehemence, *The Trench* marks Dix's definitive move towards Verism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The erstwhile Cubo-Futurist revolutionary now allied himself squarely with a native tradition extending at least as far back as Grünewald. Like Beckmann before him (see Pl. 241), Dix was now proud to draw inspiration directly from the early German school, and he cultivated a pictorial technique which placed great emphasis on a degree of skill and finish redolent of the old masters. Since he had never worked in such a meticulous manner before, *The Trench* absorbed an inordinate amount of his energy. Dix himself complained

that he had undertaken it 'in defiance of all economic sense',<sup>62</sup> and this determination to carry it through demonstrates the urgency of his need to arrive at the heart of his war memories.

*The Trench* shows just how gangrenous those recollections really were. A few years earlier, while he was still on active service, Dix had drawn a swift charcoal study of two riflemen continuing defiantly to defend their trench by firing over their dead comrades' bodies (see Pl. 204). Now, by contrast, the militarist spirit has been extinguished. Gouged almost beyond recognition by successive bombardments, the trench itself is nothing more than a dumping-ground for the soldiers' shattered corpses. If the macabre landscape of *The Temptation of St Anthony* in the Isenheim altarpiece is evoked, Dix goes further than Grünewald in stressing the desolation of his locale. Very little sky is admitted to a painting where the pummelled mounds of earth are defined with claustrophobic insistence. The only figure who remains outside the accumulation of putrefying flesh and broken weaponry is the man lying on twisted metal above the trench's remains. But he is hideously battered, and his outflung arms and legs have long since been paralysed by *rigor mortis*.

As for the bodies below, they have tumbled down the side of the trench to end up in an open-air charnel-house of festering remains. Occasionally an inverted face or a twisted hand can be discerned among the human detritus. Most of the soldiers are, however, so disfigured that they have been robbed of their individual identity and reduced to anonymous carcasses fit only for worms to feed on. Compared even with the skin afflictions defined with such disconcerting clarity in the Isenheim altarpiece, these victims represent a far more extreme degradation. No residue of heroism is detectable in Dix's rubbish-pit, an image aimed above all at those who were working so hard to rekindle thoughts of martial ardour and revenge among the German people.

They soon exacted their punishment. After completing his suppurating masterpiece, Dix was able to sell it to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. He was paid the substantial sum of 10,000 Reichsmarks, but hostile voices quickly mounted a campaign of vilification against the painting. 'Brains, blood, and guts can be so painted as to make one's mouth water,' protested Julius Meier-Graefe in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, asserting that *The Trench* was 'not just badly but atrociously painted' and 'makes you puke'.<sup>63</sup> Dix might well have been gratified to learn that his picture had induced nausea. It was certainly his intention, and a number of German artists rallied support for the painting in the wake of this attack. 'I consider Dix's painting to be one of the most important works of the post-war period,' Max Liebermann wrote to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum's director. In 1914 Liebermann had been prominent among the artists who produced belligerent propaganda for a swift German victory (see Pl. 61), but now he told the director that 'particular credit is due to you for acquiring Dix's painting for the museum, though I cannot help regretting that it did not find its rightful place in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin.'<sup>64</sup>

Although praise from such an eminent quarter should have been enough to guarantee *The Trench*'s survival, the influence commanded by its enemies was now formidable. The painting was hung behind a curtain and in 1925, only two years after its purchase, the Mayor of Cologne Dr Konrad Adenauer revoked the museum's acquisition and dismissed the director from his post. Such a vindictive action, by the man who would later become West Germany's first Chancellor, was a measure of the militaristic feeling then approaching its hysterical ascendancy throughout the country. Amends were made in 1930, when Saxony's state collections purchased the painting. The respite

was, however, all too brief. Three years later *The Trench* was included in the Nazis' first attempt to discredit artists opposed to their cause. *Images of the Decadence in Art* was the title of this exhibition, a predecessor of the still more pernicious *Degenerate Art* show which hounded so many painters of Dix's generation. *The Trench*, a prime target for all those who wanted to eradicate the humiliation of defeat from Germany's history, became the centrepiece of the Munich *Degenerate Art* exhibition in 1938, and was subsequently toured through Germany as 'a witness to the attempt to undermine the German people's attempt to defend itself'. Then, the following year, the Nazis probably burned it along with Dix's equally uncompromising painting of *War Cripples* (Pl. 340).

A similar reception met the publication, in 1924, of Dix's outstanding print sequence. Its terse title, *War*, belies the epic scale of a cycle encompassing fifty often very elaborate images, many of which deserve to be counted among his outstanding achievements. The Berlin art dealer Karl Nierendorf, who included *The Trench* in a touring pacifist exhibition called *Never again war!*, agreed to publish and promote the series in the misplaced hope that Dix's work would thereby attract a wide audience. For his part, Dix dedicated to Nierendorf an end paper drawing for the cycle (see frontispiece). Entitled *This is How I Looked as a Soldier*, it portrays the artist as a battle-scarred veteran – the man who had fought on both the Western and Eastern Fronts and sustained several wounds as he struggled to survive at Flanders, Champagne and the Somme. He returned to Dresden at the war's end with the Iron Cross (Class II) and the Friedrich-August medal, honours reflecting the tenacity with which he had conducted himself throughout the campaign. Dix remained proud of his toughness, and the drawing defines the narrowed eyes and clenched, stubbly jaw of a man determined to withstand all the bestiality of prolonged combat. 'You have to be able to say yes to the human manifestations that exist and will always exist,' he explained later, pointing out how 'that doesn't mean saying yes to war, but to a fate that approaches you under certain conditions and in which you have to prove yourself.'<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, however, *This is How I Looked as a Soldier* conveys an implicit self-accusation. Six years after the Armistice, Dix is here looking back on the man with the battered helmet and detecting a strain of dehumanized, almost demonic ferocity in his frowning features. This is a man trained to kill, and he cradles his machine-gun with an intimacy which suggests a disturbing identification between soldier and weapon. Whether or not Dix accepted a measure of responsibility for his metamorphosis into an efficient slaughterer, he certainly admits in his unsettling self-portrait that the military system had brutalized him and, by extension, everyone else caught up in its collective insanity. As if to reveal the consequences of this nightmare, the *War* cycle commences with an image of a *Soldier's grave between the lines*. Indeed, nearly all the ten prints in the first of Dix's five portfolios are concerned with the dying, dead and decaying victims of the martial zeal he defines so frankly in *This is How I Looked as a Soldier*. Even when the depicted soldier is still alive, as in *Wounded (Autumn 1916, Bapaume)*, the man's death throes are presented with such horrifying, contorted conviction that his fate is effectively settled.

The abundance of drawings Dix brought back from the Front helped him to depict the mud-smeared world which still visited his dreams (see Pls. 203, 204, 205). Many years later, he defined the difference between the young man who endured active service and the artist he became a decade later, explaining that 'you don't notice, as a young man you don't notice at all that you were, after all, badly



367 Otto Dix *Wounded man fleeing (Battle of the Somme, 1916)* 1924. Etching on paper, 19.7 × 14 cm. British Museum, London.

affected. For *years* afterwards, at least ten years, I kept getting these dreams, in which I had to crawl through ruined houses, along passages that I could hardly get through. The ruins were constantly in my dreams.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, the studies he made for *The Trench* (Pl. 366) formed the basis of several prints in the sequence. But Dix relied on a diverse array of other sources as well. In an ambitious attempt to convey the true extent of his complex feelings about the conflict, he fused personal memories with inspiration derived from artists of the past. During a visit to Switzerland, he found particular fascination in 'Goya, Callot, and earlier still, Urs Graf – I asked to be shown prints of theirs in Basle'.<sup>67</sup> He also drew skulls in the Palermo catacombs during the winter of 1923, and scrutinized with special care photographs from Ernst Friedrich's anti-war publication *Krieg dem Kriege*, enlarged for him by the photographer Hugo Erfurth. In addition, Dix supplemented his own recollections of corpses on the battlefield by attending anatomy classes, where he executed watercolour studies of dead bodies, exposed entrails and brains.

On a technical level, his preparation was no less intensive. Realising that the knowledge of intaglio methods he had gained from previous drypoints left a great deal to be desired, Dix studied etching techniques with Herberholz at the Düsseldorf Academy. The time he

spent there paid off, for the prints in *War* are handled with a consummate grasp of the medium's expressive resources. He knows just how to vary the technique according to the distinct aim of each image. In *Wounded man fleeing*, the dramatic culmination of the first portfolio, he relies on the direct, stabbing force of line alone (Pl. 367). The bandaged face, glimpsed with snapshot swiftness at the Battle of the Somme and never forgotten, harbours the frenzied eyes of a soldier who has encountered sights appalling enough to threaten his sanity. Blood streams from the victim's gashed head and spurts out of his bandaged hand as well, causing him to gasp as he staggers away from the carnage. Dix's brusque and staccato lines echo the man's stumbling motion, confirming the disorientation and panic which transform his features into a macabre mask.

The same whiplash attack is deployed to define total lunacy, when a woman deranged by mourning kneels beside a dead child in the ruins of St Marie-à-Py. Dix's linear ferocity, which stiffens the woman's spiky hair as it explodes from her head in a black outburst of grief, prevents any sentimentality from impairing his work. His etching needle assails the plate with as much singleminded belligerence as the British aeroplane dropping its bombs on Lens, where screaming civilians scatter while the pilot dives low on the pummelled street. Dix concentrates his figures in the foreground and the dis-

368 Otto Dix *Visit to Madame Germaine at Méricourt* 1924. Etching and aquatint on paper, 25.7 × 19.3 cm. British Museum, London.







370 Otto Dix *Skull* 1924. Etching on paper, 25.5 × 19.5 cm. British Museum, London.

tance, leaving the rest of the street so empty that the plane's shadow can register its faint yet eerie presence on the road. This bare thoroughfare also helps him to accentuate the swiftness of the bomber's advent, for the street frontages race back to the horizon with the same unnerving speed and vigour that the airborne apparition commands. Even so, Dix ensures that our eyes finally come to rest on the human cost of the attack, personified in the wild-eyed old woman who almost seems to push herself out of the picture-space as she lurches, screaming, away from the bomber's path.

When the focus shifts in *War* from moments of sudden terror to slower and still more insidious themes, Dix introduces other technical resources. The macabre spectacle of shell-craters near Dontrien lit up by flares is given a chilling edge by the use of relief etching. Its white lines strike through the night with a phantom-like force reminiscent of Urs Graf's woodcuts several centuries before. With their help, Dix delineates a landscape as alien from the natural world as a lunar desert. The craters stretch into the nocturnal void like an array of wounds long since deprived of essential nourishment. Nothing else appears to survive in this abused locale, where extinction has blighted the land with the enveloping finality of a nuclear winter.

At their most unnerving, though, the prints in *War* rely extensively on a corrosive use of aquatint. It enables Dix to expose the decay infecting so many of the scenes he investigates. Sometimes the subject is alive, like the repellent Mme Germaine who still plies her

syphilitic trade at a Mérencourt brothel despite the putrefaction riddling her slack-bellied body (Pl. 368). With one predatory hand claspng the soldier's shoulder and an equally nauseating leg straddling his thigh, she closes on her client like a fatal epidemic. The hypnotized man does not appear to care about the condition of the whore's flesh. Dix implies that he has encountered far too many horrors at the Front to be disconcerted by Mme Germaine's pox-ridden condition. The fact that her upper arm is visible through his cheek suggests a gruesome fusion of the two figures, ensuring that he becomes infected by her proliferating diseases. Perhaps the soldier has concluded that he would rather die in the pestilential brothel than return to the wasteland of war.

Just how unnerving the battlefields have become, in Dix's memory, is clear from the prints which focus unflinchingly on bodies in an advanced stage of decomposition. The third image of the series introduces us to the spectacle of *Men killed by gas*, laid out on a hillside to rot. Their blackened faces and hands already reveal a gruesome amount of decay – so extreme, indeed, that they are no longer identifiable as individuals. The two red cross orderlies standing beside them appear dazed by the corpses and uncertain how to proceed. Paradoxically, however, they also seem less substantial than the dead soldiers. Although disfigured beyond recognition, the gas victims are invested with a grotesque presence which makes the orderlies look strangely flimsy by comparison. The dead, in Dix's

371 Otto Dix *Skin graft* 1924. Etching and aquatint on paper, 19.9 × 14.9 cm. British Museum, London.





372 Otto Dix *House destroyed by bombs (Tournai) 1924*. Etching, engraving and aquatint on paper, 29.7 × 24.4 cm. British Museum, London.

perverse world, are more mesmeric than those left alive.

Take the two soldiers seated on a steep slope at Cléry-sur-Somme (Pl. 369). They appear, at first, to be still conversing. Frozen in the positions they must have held when the enemy arrived, their bodies are prevented by *rigor mortis* from subsiding on to the ground. But the putrescence oozing from the gashes in their uniforms confirms that death arrived long ago. Aquatint helps to give the stains shadowing their bodies a terrible authenticity, while blades of wild grass sprout from the clotted hairs and mangled jelly in one man's exposed brain. It is a vision even more repellent than the spectacle recorded by Robert Graves during the Somme campaign, when he discovered 'a certain cure for lust of blood' in Mametz Wood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,  
In a great mess of things unclean,  
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk  
With clothes and face a sodden green,  
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,  
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.<sup>68</sup>

Some of Dix's most disturbing meditations centre on decay's ability to sustain and indeed nourish new life. The grisly study of a *Dying Soldier* shows wounds in eye, cheek and hand which are crawling with murky activity. While dead leaves flutter down to settle in his gaping mouth, insects appear to burrow through the penumbral yet ominously glinting cavities inflicted by shrapnel elsewhere in

his head. The extinction of humanity breeds ghoulish alternatives, nowhere more repugnantly than in the print called *Skull* (Pl. 370). Every crevice is alive, here, with worms. They coil out of the nose-hole and wave sickeningly in the air. The few tufts of hair that still project from the skull's head attract their burrowing attention as well. Curling with serpentine relish from teeth-stumps, eye-sockets, moustache and jawbone, the worms give the etching an ironic vivacity. They demonstrate that existence of a kind persists even when apocalypse has reduced the terrain of war to a universal burial-ground.

Dix makes clear, however, that these signs of renewal are no substitute for the lives already sacrificed. In a particularly despairing print, *Destroyed trenches*, the gouged hollow acts as an unofficial grave for the corpses slumped in its shadows. They seem this time to be merging with the earth, producing a ghastly compost that threatens to breed diabolic phantoms instead. Because the print is close to the Grunewald-inspired world of *The Trench* (Pl. 366), no sane limit can be set on the monstrous aberrations which might eventually spring from the darkness. Only hybrids, Dix appears to be asserting, can thrive in such desolation.

As for the wounded who managed to survive, *Skin graft* has no hesitation in confronting the true awfulness of their disfigurements (Pl. 371). Dix goes much further than Tonks's earlier studies of facial injuries (see Pl. 176). He juxtaposes the two sides of the patient's face with unflinching frankness. The relative normality of the fea-

373 Otto Dix *Nocturnal meeting with a madman 1924*. Etching and aquatint on paper, 25.8 × 19.4 cm. British Museum, London.



tures on one side makes the agglomeration of mashed and twisted fragments on the other even more disconcerting. The base of the man's elephantine nose has been broken off and wrenched towards his cheek, leaving a dark hole in its place. Beside the reconstituted mouth are remnants of its battered predecessor, pushed violently away from the natural position and still leaving a clutch of teeth exposed to view. The soldier himself bears this hallucinatory damage with numbed resignation. His one normal eye seems glazed as he awaits the next painful bout of operations. Dix is careful to define the man's pyjama jacket with aquatint, stressing his vulnerability and the likelihood that his stay in hospital will be prolonged. The stripes on his jacket echo the iron bedstead behind, which curves round the patient's head like the bars in a prison window. They act as a metaphor for the plight of a man trapped within a face so misshapen that he will never escape from the limitations it imposes.

But at least he is still living, unlike most of the people whose agony is laid bare in the unrelenting images of *War*. Far more typical of the portfolio is the woman dangling upside-down from the exposed structure of a house shattered by a bombing-raid at Tournai (Pl. 372). The form assumed by her body is a direct tribute to Goya's *Ravages of War* in the *Disasters* cycle – a precedent which had already been saluted in Jaeckel's remarkable print sequence of 1914–15 (see Pl. 131). Dix may well have been impressed by Jaeckel's achievement, but *House destroyed by bombs* is the product of an independent vision as well. Unlike either Goya or Jaeckel, Dix frames his composition with the building's broken walls. Its corner has been blown apart to disclose the devastation within, where naked legs are suspended among the rafters while night-clothes and bedding hang forlornly from splintered floorboards. A possible echo of Kollwitz's *The Widow II* (Pl. 364) can be found at the bottom of the sheet—a dead mother whose blood-smeared baby lies motionless across her body.

The stimulus provided by Goya's *Disasters* cycle undoubtedly spurred Dix in his ambition to create a graphic series of extraordinary power and authority.<sup>69</sup> *War*, however, is not excessively dependent on his profound and accelerating respect for tradition. Just as he must have admired Goya's resolve to let the *Disasters* rest on a secure foundation of personal testimony, so he made sure that his prints stayed close to the obscenity of the carnage witnessed with his own eyes at the Front. Dix specified the locations of the scenes in many of his captions, so that even an image as spectral as *Meal-time in the ditch (Loretto heights)* is firmly anchored in first-hand observation. Wrapped up against the cold, a soldier feeds himself from a rudimentary can without paying any overt attention to the skeleton decomposing beside him. But the skull might once have been the face of a comrade, and its presence here suggests that the soldier no longer has enough energy to accord him a proper burial. All he seems capable of doing is staying alive, and his staring eyes suggest that the unreality of the surroundings have driven him insane.

Several prints in *War* deal with outright lunacy, most notably a phantasmic image called *Nocturnal meeting with a madman* (Pl. 373). Wandering among the ruins of a village, a youth whose head seems too large for his emaciated body looms out of the debris. Although he stands in near-silhouette against the moonlit devastation beyond, his ribs are visible beneath the shirt and both eyes shine out like glow-worms from his otherwise obliterated features. We do not need to see any more of his face in order to appreciate the extent of its derangement. Shell-shocked and doubtless crazed by the death of family and friends as well, this anonymous itinerant confronts the unseen artist like a startled animal.

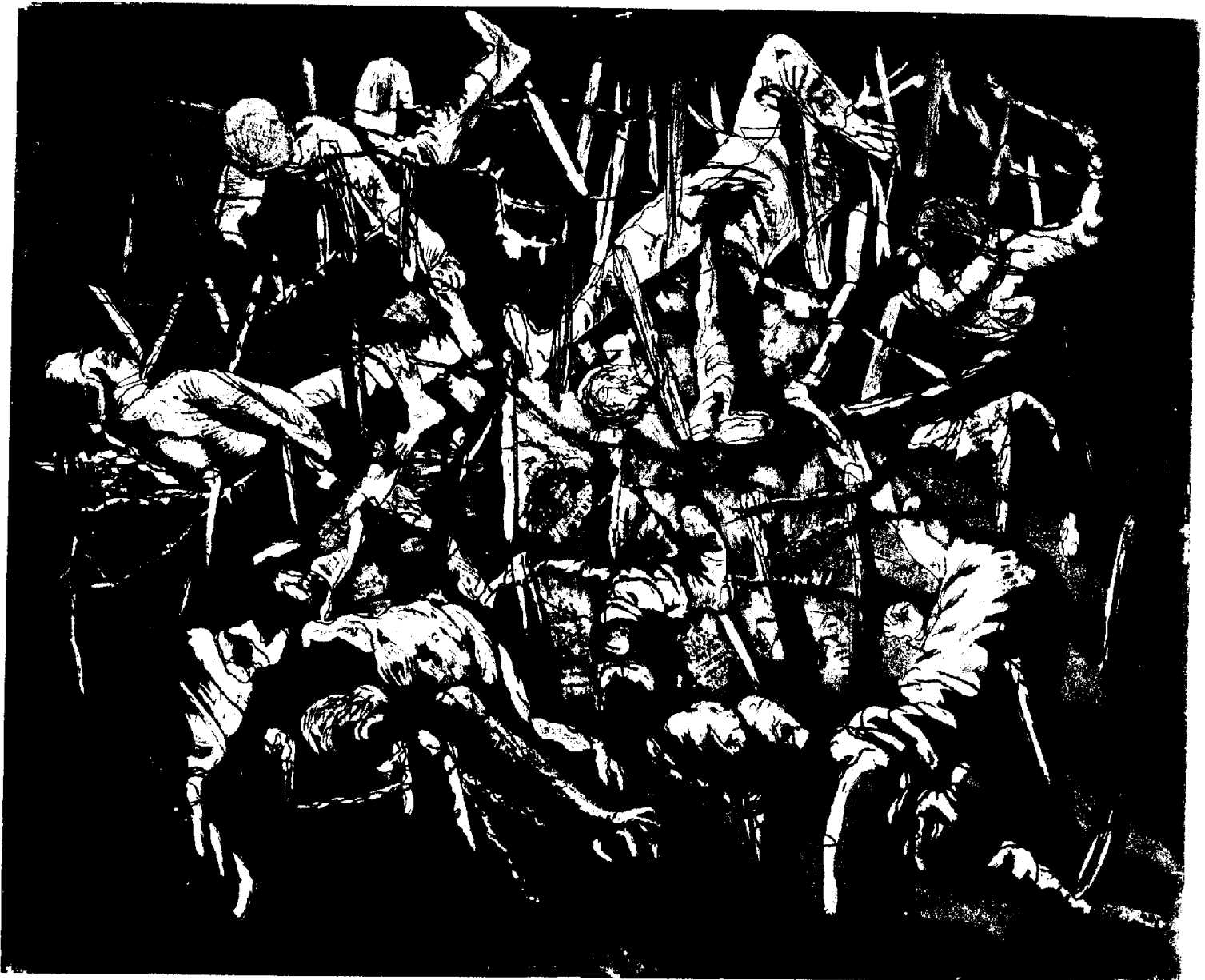
Another etching, *Dug-out*, proves that Dix has no intention of



374 Otto Dix *Dug-out* 1924. Etching and aquatint on paper, 19.5 × 28.7 cm. British Museum, London.

presenting that madness as the preserve of civilians (Pl. 374). For the hunched figure clasping his hands in the foreground of the shallow, claustrophobic space bears a distinct resemblance to the nocturnal madman. He cowers in the lamplight, behaving so strangely that the card-player behind appears to be shouting at him. Quite apart from dreading the prospect of another day's warfare, the semi-naked soldier might easily have been unnerved by the stifling conditions in this makeshift shelter. Dix emphasizes the severe compression of space, so that everyone seems crammed together to an intolerable extent. Compared with these beleaguered card-players, their counterparts in Léger's great painting of 1917 enjoy a far greater amount of elbow-room (see Pl. 214). The constriction in the dug-out is almost intolerable, and the men attempting to sleep are slotted into low, narrow niches redolent of a mortuary. Like the men stretched out in the predella panel of Dix's later *War Triptych* (see Pl. 402), they appear to hover between survival and extinction.

Ultimately, though, this gruelling cycle insists on the inescapability of death. Despite the intimations of renewal in some prints, Dix would never have permitted himself to betray the horror of his experiences by stressing regeneration too often. *Shell crater with flowers*, one of the few etchings directly dependent on a wartime drawing, lacks the conviction of the most impassioned images in the series. Its restraint borders on the picturesque, whereas *Dance of death, 1917 (the dead man's mound)* is charged with a wild, raw vehemence which reveals the full measure of Dix's engagement (Pl. 375). Although the title attests to his awareness of Holbeinesque precedents, there is nothing self-consciously historicist about this print. It derives above all from the urgency of the artist's own need to come to terms with a memory of soldiers impaled on barbed wire and stakes after a futile advance. The ungainliness of their outflung and contorted limbs gives these corpses a ghastly animation for an instant, as blazing light picks them out in the gloom. This is the choreography of slaughter, where bodies take on a paradoxical vitality in the frozen flamboyance of their death throes. Fascinated by such grisly contradictions, Dix devoted the final image in the sequence to a pair of decayed heads grimacing and snapping at each other. The title discloses that he had seen them in front of the position at Tahure, doomed to appear forever exclaiming over the fate which condemned them to such an end. Caught halfway between screeching and snarling, they exemplify Dix's determination to confront even the most repellent of the de-



375 Otto Dix *Dance of death, 1917 (the dead man's mound)* 1924. Etching and aquatint on paper, 24.4 × 29.9 cm. British Museum, London.

pradations he had come across during his years in active service.

When *War* was published, in an edition of seventy sets, many critics greeted it with acclaim. The portfolios were exhibited in several German and Austrian cities, and a reasonably priced book edition containing twenty-four offset reproductions with an introduction by Henri Barbusse sold well. Barbusse, already celebrated as the author of the fiercely anti-war novel *Le Feu*, confirmed the condemnatory strain in the cycle. Erich Maria Remarque shared Barbusse's admiration, telling Dix in later life how much *All Quiet on the Western Front* was anticipated by the imagery employed in *War*. Remarque's response to the prints accorded with the sentiments expressed by the critic of *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, who declared that 'anyone who sees these images and does not vow to oppose war with heart and soul can hardly be called human.'<sup>70</sup>

In one significant respect, though, such calls had a counter-

productive effect. However loudly the reviewers demanded that *War* should be acquired by all the important graphic art collections, most of the prints failed to sell. Only one set from the edition of seventy was purchased, by a private individual. Although 1924 had been declared International Anti-War Year, German museum directors, aware of the controversy surrounding Cologne's acquisition of *The Trench* (Pl. 366), probably felt nervous about the political consequences of buying Dix's latest reflections on the conflict. Friedrich Heckmanns has argued that 'the history of the work is, to an exemplary degree, the history of its suppression'.<sup>71</sup> As the humiliating Armistice receded in time, more and more Germans refused to accept the verdict which Dix had so bravely insisted on delivering. The memory of war was already being traduced, and in years to come it would endanger the lives of those who continued the struggle to tell the truth.