

Audio file

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Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Welcome to a writers war, a National Lottery Heritage fund, First World War Centenary project produced by Chrome Radio for the University of Oxford, faculty of Mediaeval and Modern Languages. In partnership with year 10 students from Oxford Spires Academy in this group of podcasts.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

We learn about different responses to the First World War in Britain, France, Germany, and former colonies of the British and French empires.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

We hear now from Professor Toby Garfit, Emeritus fellow of Modelling college, about the response in France.

00:00:37 Speaker 1

Art adventure love.

00:00:49 Speaker 3

My name is Toby Garfield. I've been a fellow of modern college, Oxford for nearly 40 years. I've just retired.

00:00:56 Speaker 3

We're sitting in wooden college annealed practise room. That's where the choristers used to do their singing practise these days they do it just along with clusters, but you can still often hear them.

00:01:06 Speaker 3

Practising in the morning.

00:01:08 Speaker 3

One of the things I've been teaching for many years is literature of the First World War, particularly French literature.

00:01:16 Speaker 3

The first thing we need to understand when looking at French literature of the First World War is that it comes out of quite a different experience from what produced the literature from Britain or Germany, because the French were defending their own territory.

00:01:29 Speaker 3

The French had been invaded. Their country had been overrun. The Germans reached the very gates of Paris. What we call today Charlie Goal Airport before they were pushed back to the Marne, the Battle of the Marne.

00:01:41 Speaker 3

And then the line stabilised a bit further away from Paris, but the French very nearly lost their capital, as of course they had in 1870 in the Franco Russian War.

00:01:51 Speaker 3

French families had been overrun and dealt with in nasty ways in the North East of France. And of course there was the experience of Belgium that had been overrun before and the French.

00:02:01 Speaker 3

Were desperately afraid that the same would happen to them some of the iconic French buildings were targeted by the German forces, and in particular the cathedral at House rooms where so many of the French kings had been crowned. One of the great symbols of France. It was as if Westminster Abbey had been tired.

00:02:18 Speaker 3

Fitted and the drums deliberately bombarded it day in day out for years. So for the French there was a feeling that they had at all costs to defend their soil, their families, their fatherland, their battery. There are also very different attitudes between the British and the French.

00:02:39 Speaker 3

Or somebody who understood these differences very well was a man called Online Wawa, who served with the British Army.

00:02:47 Speaker 3

He was a freshman. He served as an interpreter. He realised that the British, particularly British officers, approached the war in a very different way. They treated the war as if it was a game, as if it was a.

00:02:59 Speaker 3

Boxing match for instance, or a football match. British officers did not sit around Philosophising about the war, they just wanted to get on with it and treat it like.

00:03:08 Speaker 3

A game and because he understood that there was such a different attitude between the French and British, he wrote a novel which was designed to help the French understand the British attitude.

00:03:20 Speaker 3

It's called the silence of Colonel valuable. They see last year going into Bramble and we see various British officers talking with a French.

00:03:29 Speaker 3

Interpreter who is the more who are persona in the novel and they have all sorts of interesting conversations in which the different attitudes to the war are spelled out in this short extract.

00:03:39 Speaker 3

Northerners fictional counterpart or hell is walking back from a boxing match organised by Scots Brigade with Con Bramble and Major Parker.

00:03:48 Speaker 3

The major explains how war and sport are perceived quite differently by the two sides.

00:03:57 Speaker 3

Match the books.

00:03:58 Speaker 3

Before we do.

00:04:03 Speaker 3

Seemingly, I'm gay.

00:04:04 Speaker 3

There really tend to do surgery cameras online match to books, detenue colour bar bar.

00:04:13 Speaker 3

There's approval Puma medical killing never sportsman. If you see every log per britannique.

00:04:21 Speaker 3

Bar left foot due to decreased monoclonal lager. Please ensure did gentlemen.

00:04:30 Speaker 3

One of the best French novels of the war was not published until just after the war. It's called Licuado Bois. The woman crosses by overlong Welsh or less.

00:04:41 Speaker 3

A particularly interesting thing about this novel is that it was very much read during 1920s in French primary schools to help the French understand what the experience of the war had been.

00:04:52 Speaker 3

Like one young Frenchman in Algeria at his primary school, who heard this model. Read to him by his primary teacher was Albert Camus Camus had lost his father at the Battle of the Marne.

00:05:06 Speaker 3

His father didn't die on the battlefield. He was evacuated to a hospital Maria, and eventually he died. In fact, Cameron never discovered.

00:05:13 Speaker 3

Until 30 years later where his father was buried in Brittany, the fact that camera, as a youngster heard this novel by daughter less read by his primary school teacher, helped him to make that connexion with his father, who would never rule alone because he was only two when his father died.

00:05:32 Speaker 3

But the great French novel of the First World War is *Le Feu*, or *Under Fire* by Erich Maria Remarque. The extraordinary thing about this novel is that it was written in 1916.

00:05:43 Speaker 3

1915 would have levels in both Britain and France from 1914, which talked about heroism of war. But of course, by the end of 1914 the trenches were.

00:05:52 Speaker 3

Beginning to be set and the war became pretty static.

00:05:57 Speaker 3

Early Remarque was anti war himself, but he felt it was his duty to go to war. Perhaps something could be changed in French society as a result.

00:06:06 Speaker 3

Of the war.

00:06:07 Speaker 3

He served in 1915 and wrote this novel based on his own Diaries. It gives a careful account of what the experience.

00:06:17 Speaker 3

Of frontline troops was what did they spend all their time in the trenches? A lot of the time was spent recovering, getting ready, getting food, opening letters.

00:06:28 Speaker 3

Just generally chatting and getting to know each other because all these French troops came from different parts of France.

00:06:34 Speaker 3

They spoke different dialects. They had to be moulded into a fighting unit and he takes you through a cycle. The subtitle of the novel is the diary of a squad Jean and Eunice squad although.

00:06:48 Speaker 3

Not every soldier had exactly the same experience. Every soldier could recognise that experience of waiting, preparing eventually being in the trenches and being called to go over the top. And then what happens after.

00:07:02 Speaker 3

That there's also the experience of having sappers digging under their trenches and trying to blow them up, and equally the French digging mines under the German trenches.

00:07:14 Speaker 3

This novel, which was published in serial form in 1915 and then in book form at the beginning of 1916, was an absolute revelation.

00:07:23 Speaker 3

It's extraordinary that the censors allowed it to be published, because you could say that this was going to underline the morale of the troops.

00:07:31 Speaker 3

Undermining morale of the people at home because the newspapers were always giving nationalistic jingoistic propaganda. Everything is going so well, we'll be in Berlin before the end of the year or whatever it might.

00:07:43 Speaker 3

Be when they.

00:07:44 Speaker 3

Would be so awful they realised that was not going to happen, but it was just a long drawn out terrible experience.

00:07:51 Speaker 3

That people are going to find it very hard to recover from.

00:07:54 Speaker 3

I think the censors allowed it because they realised that people did actually need to know what it was like before getting fed up with the propaganda. They no longer believed the propaganda they needed to have something authentic.

00:08:09 Speaker 3

This novel full was awarded the programme Cool the Conqueror Prize in 1916.

00:08:15 Speaker 3

And huge numbers of people bought it hundreds of thousands of copies were sold was read by the people at the front and they said yes.

00:08:22 Speaker 3

This is our experience. It was read.

00:08:24 Speaker 3

By people at home.

00:08:26 Speaker 3

People in Paris. People in the provinces who at last felt they had a connexion with the men at the front.

00:08:33 Speaker 3

When people think of British literature from the First World War, they tend to think first of all of poetry.

00:08:39 Speaker 3

That's partly because the school syllabus has raw poetry honours, but it's also because for some reason, the British expressed themselves better in poetry than impose. There are great prose works from the First World War.

00:08:53 Speaker 3

But the best, I think, is the poetry. Now that's not the case in France. Then we might ask why?

00:09:00 Speaker 3

The French had a particular attitude to poetry. Poetry was a national jewel. Poetry was something that expressed the genius of France.

00:09:10 Speaker 3

The Great French poets often celebrated the greatness of France, and poetry tended in France to be in rather set forms expressing.

00:09:20 Speaker 3

Rather, traditional opinions. There wasn't much of poetry written during the war, but much of it is rather conventional and predictable.

00:09:29 Speaker 3

There was some good anti war poetry and there was some good poetry not in set forms, but it's only really just beginning to be discovered.

00:09:40 Speaker 3

At the beginning of the First World War, probably the greatest living French poet was uncalled for. Claudel, Claude L was a diplomat.

00:09:49 Speaker 3

He did not engage in the war himself, he was at quite a distance. In fact, during the war he was in South America, but he linked his pen to the French calls.

00:09:59 Speaker 3

He wrote some quite well known poems. One of them is called anything like General Donkervoet Limoges. 'I'll do anything to defend France, so this was rather traditional jingoistic poetry. One might think of Kipling in the British Connection.

00:10:19 Speaker 3

There was one poet who was very different and his name is Guillaume Apollinaire opinions. Poetry was not militaristic, jingoistic, but it was not anti war either. It was our strange kind of poetry. It was really the poetry of an artist.

00:10:38 Speaker 3

Opinion there was much in fact himself French.

00:10:41 Speaker 3

He became Frenchy acquired French nationality because he fought in the French army during the war. In fact, that was the major reason why he joined the army so that he could acquire French nationality.

00:10:51 Speaker 3

His mother was Polish. His father was possibly Italian. Nobody quite knows he came to living in Paris before the First World War, and he was an artist and a poet and he mixed with.

00:11:01 Speaker 3

All the artistic community. He was great friends with Picasso and people like that.

00:11:06 Speaker 3

He was involved in Cubism and when he joined up he saw it as a wonderful opportunity to experience something.

00:11:16 Speaker 3

Will always going to be an experience and one could sum up a billionaire's approach to war. In three words, adventure, art, and love.

00:11:26 Speaker 3

Not perhaps 3 qualities that you would normally associate with war poetry.

00:11:31 Speaker 3

A billionaire served first in the artillery and then in the infantry, where he was seriously wounded, and in fact he died just after the end of the war while.

00:11:40 Speaker 3

In the artillery, he managed to print some of the poems that he'd just written and distribute them to his friends in the artillery batteries. So this really is war poetry produced.

00:11:50 Speaker 3

On the.

00:11:51 Speaker 3

Far some of it is rather what one might call epic heroic. There's a poem that begins our do cool idea is really how beautiful how lovely war is.

00:12:03 Speaker 3

This is a short poem talking about a cavalryman leaving his love in order to ride off to rule. Now you might have had.

00:12:11 Speaker 3

That in the Middle Ages, it's not particularly modern. It doesn't talk about the modern experience of war, but alongside that approach, which is informed by literary traditions, there's a remarkable responsiveness to the realities of modern war.

00:12:26 Speaker 3

There as a billionaire sat by his artillery battery on the trench as an infantryman, he could see the shells exploding overhead.

00:12:35 Speaker 3

He could see the tracer lights in the sky and to him it looked like a firework display or a bunch of roses exploding out of ours. And because he was an artist.

00:12:47 Speaker 3

He described it like that, and some people might find that offensive that he enjoyed looking at the spectacle. Of course, it was also.

00:12:56 Speaker 3

Terrible and he has bones about a shell exploding very close to him. The volume of poetry in which his war poems are collected is called kaligram calligrams, which means that really beautiful writing calligraphy. It's the same word, but many of the poems are actual works of art instead of.

00:13:16 Speaker 3

Writing ordinary lines of poetry has the words scattered over the page.

00:13:21 Speaker 3

To make pictures and one of the pictures is indeed of an exploding shell. One of the words that is scattered across the page is the word mother phone and a shell exploding.

00:13:31 Speaker 3

Sounds like something very loud, so the word megaphone is appropriate as well as adventure and art I mentioned love now billionaire.

00:13:40 Speaker 3

Had two lovers to whom he wrote throughout the war.

00:13:44 Speaker 3

And some of his poetry was written for them. The poetry is in part, and meditation on love when he's looking at shells exploding.

00:13:52 Speaker 3

I mentioned roses coming out of ours, but he also sees it in terms of a blouse being ripped open and breasts appearing defusal.

00:14:04 Speaker 3

Rose it at Moe. Can do some killing the graph.

00:14:09 Speaker 3

So two tracer shells burst of pink like 2 breasts that are being revealed.

00:14:17 Speaker 3

And that same stars are of the poem that I was quoting. Just now ends with the words in capital letters. Ill shoot.

00:14:24 Speaker 2

In me.

00:14:25 Speaker 3

He knew how to love. He was a great lover. That's how Appolonia wanted to come across in his poetry as a great artist, but also as a great lover. Apollinare was certainly a very.

00:14:37 Speaker 3

Unconventional person in his personal life and in his writing people didn't really know quite what to make of his poetry because you couldn't pigeonhole it easily.

00:14:48 Speaker 3

You couldn't say this is virtually that is supporting the war. You couldn't say this is bercher that is against the wall.

00:14:54 Speaker 3

Well, it was poetry that was closely associated with the war. It arose out of war out of the direct experience of war, but it was something different and it took people a while to come to terms with it apparently was very much appreciated by the artistic community, but by the French public as a whole.

00:15:15 Speaker 3

It wasn't so much his war poetry that was important. It was a collection that he published.

00:15:19 Speaker 3

Before the war.

00:15:20 Speaker 3

People could see that he was doing interesting things in poetry and that was alright when it wasn't about the wall, but when he was doing interesting things in poetry and talking about the war at the same time, that was harder to come to terms with.

00:15:33 Speaker 3

One group of people.

00:15:35 Speaker 3

Who understood what war was all about, particularly if they read Bell basis. Marvel was win.

00:15:42 Speaker 3

Some of them went out to work, but many of them stayed at home. Keep the home fires burning. They had to see off their sons, husbands, brothers to war. They stayed at home weighted.

00:15:53 Speaker 3

And prayed and hoped both coming back on leave and then sent them off to the.

00:15:57 Speaker 3

Front again and.

00:15:59 Speaker 3

More poetry by women is being discovered, and some of it is.

00:16:03 Speaker 3

Very good indeed.

00:16:04 Speaker 3

Read our end by reading a stanza from a poem by Sissy Behar which combines a veiled attack on those who promoted war who seemed to love war treated war like a lover and the contrast with those who were taken in by all that propaganda.

00:16:24 Speaker 3

The innocent crowd of people who were led like lambs to the slaughter.

00:16:31 Speaker 3

Triples a Circuito, Siri on camera.

00:16:35 Speaker 3

A circuit exactly gay government, a circuit or far?

00:16:41 Speaker 3

I found participa supreme lefew insult.

00:16:58 Speaker 1

You have been listening to a writers wall. I do hope you'll join us for the next podcast in the series.