

Preface

The First World War was a watershed event in modern history, and it still looms large particularly in British consciousness over a hundred years after the last shot was fired. The Great War has spurred literary and filmic production in Britain like no other historical occurrence, and it has never stopped inspiring authors and filmmakers since 1914. A plethora of poems, novels, short stories, autobiographies and theatre plays as well as film narratives have commented on the War while it lasted, in the immediate after-war years, and in the decades since, continually shaping British cultural memory and identity.

While some elements of Great War representation have been of remarkable longevity, emphases and evaluations of the experience and meaning of the war have changed over the decades. Each generation has tackled the First World War differently, and new perspectives from the various groups of people involved with the war have emerged over time. Different literary and media genres have offered writers and producers a range of options for engaging with the War, and at the same time imposed some restrictions, creating genre-specific modes of First World War representation. As a consequence, a great variety of aesthetic strategies have been employed in the evoking and evaluating the experience and memory of the First World War in Britain. The present handbook surveys this multifaceted field of British literary and cultural production from 1914 to today. The chapters in the first section assess the impact of the major literary genres, both poetic and narrative, fictional and autobiographical, as well as narrative film, on First World War representations; questions of gender and of colonial relationships are also addressed as inherent parts of such productions. The readings in section two then go on to demonstrate the importance of both the key texts and authors that have dominated the war-related cultural production, and of the voices less frequently associated with the Great War.

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