



La mémoire dans les œuvres littéraires néo-zélandaises



SARGESON, Frank (1903–82), was born Norris Frank Davey, the child of a middle-class family in Hamilton. He was educated there and in Auckland until he completed his training as a solicitor in 1926, when he went for two years to Britain and Europe. Returning in 1928, he decided not to pursue a career in law and instead worked at various jobs before settling on family land near Takapuna, where he was to remain for the rest of his life, most of it as a full-time writer.

THE LAST WAR

When the last war began I was in Standard IV. We used to write compositions on the war. We weren't bothered over the retreat from Mons, we said it was strategy. All except one boy. He said the Germans were getting the best of it, and we made his life a misery for weeks afterwards. Some of our teachers told us that we were born just at the right time. Such a lot of young men were being killed, and there'd be great careers waiting for all of us.

When the last war ended I was at the High School. We got the news of the armistice on our annual sports day. We all hated having to leave off our sports to go and take part in a demonstration held outside the Post Office. The mayor made a speech, and it bored us to death.

A man from our town came home from the last war without his legs. My mother wasn't satisfied until she made him come to tea. He came, and he answered all our questions; and except for answering our questions he didn't have anything to say. We asked him how many Huns he killed, and what it was like in the trenches. For tea we had cold boiled chicken, with lovely pieces of jelly sticking to it, and fruit salad and cream, and cake with filling nearly an inch thick.

Of course we had had things like that for tea right through the war. My mother kept on pressing our hero to eat. Do have some more fruit salad, she said. Oh, *won't you!*

That was how the last war affected us children. We wrote compositions about it, and believed there'd be great careers waiting for all of us; the armistice interfered with our annual sports day, and the man who came home without his legs came to tea. We also got a thrill of pleasure out of reading about the German atrocities; and once, towards the end of the last war we were badly frightened. There was a chance of our father's having to go. He was near the age limit, but he had to fill in a paper saying whether he'd be willing to go or not. We never said anything to each other but we were frightened. We were frightened too that our father would say on the paper that he wasn't willing to go. That was a worse fear. We were frightened in case we should find out that our father was frightened.

Of course the grown-ups were affected by the last war in lots of different ways. A lot of them, I know, actually did go to the war. But my uncles who were farmers were simply made. They gave a certain amount of money and land to the patriotic fund, and in 1920 they sold out and retired.

Overview

A short story, no information given about the date of publication,

Easy understanding : simple vocabulary and syntax, no rhetorical devices

first-person narrative, no names given, a feeling of anonymous setting as no clues given as regards the place except being an English country as references to "tea, boiled chicken and pieces of jelly" ..

Limited viewpoint

Time : "1920", "the last war", "the armistice", "the trenches", "German atrocities".

Characters : "I", "classmates", "the mayor", "my mother", "Huns", " a man" etc..

Topic : tips given about how people and especially schoolboys experienced WWI and the impact on their daily life and their way of thinking.

Comprehension

- "I" as being the writer : so the story as memories of how the 1914-1918 period affected him. He acts as a chronicler of events through an economy of language appropriate to the characters.

- Realism depicted through "Such a lot....all of us", "A man from....to tea", "But my uncles...retired" (social realism).

- Daily routine pointed out as school work with "composition on the war", "our annual sports day".

- Focus on his father: who may be seen as a coward, "we were frightened.. willing to go" .. - - - - - Repetition of "frightened" which means fearing the father would go to the war and could be killed or the father as being considered as a coward.

- 2 groups of people: the Young (children) and the Grown-ups.

- Soldiers considered as heroes: the need from the community to learn about the war. Everyone wants to talk to "our hero". Through his testimony and the fact that he is mutilated ("without his legs", the war comes true.

- some dialogue like "Do have...you!". But economy of language from the characters which may illustrate the gap between the soldier's war experience and the mother's focus on food. "Won't you! » may imply that the hero does not feel at ease, feeling of loneliness...

Conclusion

Actually, the writer excludes any falsity and tells about this dreadful time in a honest way. **On the one hand**, the children's feelings about The War and **on the other hand**, the adults' behaviour..

"Of course" may show the limits of the characters' understanding of the forces that move them.

Indeed, as readers, we could think the characters are heartless as the atrocities of the war do not really affect them, far from the trenches and war restrictions (food, moving etc.). They live in an isolate environment and their way of life has not really changed. **However**, their sensitivity is present.

Viewpoint

Personally, we have enjoyed reading this short story. It clearly illustrates how people far away from the battle fields could have experienced the war at that time. It may sound careless, heartless, insensitive but that is reality. The War was true to them when one of their families was committed to it or when the soldiers came back to their homeland. And then, they paid tribute to them!



MANSFIELD, Katherine (1888-1923) was born in Wellington. After moving to England at age 19, Mansfield secured her reputation as a writer with the story collection Bliss (1920). She reached the height of her powers with her 1922 collection The Garden Party. Her last five years were shadowed by tuberculosis; she died from the disease at the age of 34.

An Indiscreet Journey is her only story that is directly about war. It is based on her own experience of her brief liaison with the French novelist Francis Carco and her visit to him in the war zone at Gray, in France, in February 1915.

Excerpt from AN INDISCREET JOURNEY(1915)

Ah! the train had begun to move. The train was on my side. It swung out of the station, and soon we were passing the vegetable gardens, passing the tall blind houses to let, passing the servants beating carpets. Up already and walking in the fields, rosy from the rivers and the red-fringed pools, the sun upon the swinging train and stroked my muff and told me to take off that Burberry. I was not alone in the carriage. An old woman sat opposite, her skirt turned back over her knees, a bonnet of black lace on her head. In her fat hands, adorned with a wedding and two mourning rings, she held a letter. Slowly, slowly she sipped a sentence, and then looked up and out of the window, her lips trembling a little, and then another sentence, and again the old face turned to the light, tasting it ... Two soldiers leaned out of the window, their heads nearly touching—one of them was whistling, the other had his coat fastened with some rusty safety-pins. And now there were soldiers everywhere working on the railway line, leaning against trucks or standing hands on hips, eyes fixed on the train as though they expected at least one camera at every window. And now we were passing big wooden sheds like rigged up dancing halls or seaside pavilions, each flying a flag. In and out of them walked the Red Cross men; the wounded sat against the walls sunning themselves. At all the bridges, the crossings, the stations, a *petit soldat*, all boots and bayonet. Forlorn and desolate he looked,—like a little comic picture waiting for the joke to be written underneath. Is there really such a thing as war? Are all these laughing voices really going to the war?

These dark woods lighted so mysteriously by the white stems of the birch and the ash—these watery fields with the big birds flying over [...]

What beautiful cemeteries we are passing! They flash gay in the sun. They seem to be full of cornflowers and poppies and daisies. How can there be so many flowers at this time of the year? But they are not flowers at all. They are bunches of ribbons tied on to the soldiers' graves

I glanced up and caught the old woman's eye. She smiled and folded the letter. "It is from my son—the first we have had since October. I am taking it to my daughter-in-law".

".....?"

"Yes, very good," said the old woman, shaking down her skirt and putting her arm through the handle of her basket. "He wants me to send him some handkerchieves and a piece of stout string."

What is the name of the station where I have to change? Perhaps I shall never know. I got up and leaned my arms across the window rail, my feet crossed. One cheek burned as in

infancy on the way to the sea along these rivers with a white cat and a pot of mignonette to bear me company.

Down the side of the hill filed the troops, winking red and blue in the light. Far away, but plainly to be seen, some more flew by on bicycles. But really, *ma France adorée*, this uniform is ridiculous. Your soldiers are stamped upon your bosom like bright irreverent transfers.[...]

A young woman alone, is on a train in France. Many of her fellow passengers are young soldiers on their way to war. This excerpt highlights the seeming innocence of the soldiers and the beauty of the passing countryside with a foreknowledge of what will soon happen to the soldiers and in the beautiful fields. The natural beauty, such as "rivers green and blue in the light", "full of cornflowers and poppies and daisies" is depicted as a painting and contrasts with death and horror coming among the young men. Some details like "two mourning rings", "The red Cross men", "the wounded", "cemeteries" make war come true. Strong imagery of "bunches of ribbons tied on to the soldiers' graves" which look like "flowers" We feel loneliness though life and hope through "Are all these laughing voices going to war?" seem to prevail in this passage.



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