

Both sides, now

THIS ISSUE OF *Amphora* coincides with the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of the First World War, which began with the November 11 armistice and became official with the signing of the treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919.

Thanks to the spread of general education in the 19th century, the combatants were some of the most educated and literate soldiers ever to engage in battle. Many did not return, but the letters, poems and essays (among other creative works) left a rich legacy that has done much to shape our understanding of war.

Written towards the close of the Boer War, Thomas Hardy's short poem "The Man He Killed" was one I memorized for a high school English class. It speaks of two soldiers who might otherwise have bought each other beers at the pub:

But ranged as infantry
And staring face to face
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

Hardy's poem reminds us how quickly the other side can be demonized, often in the interest of patriotism and politics. The politics of division are still very much alive in some quarters today, and even memories of past conflicts seldom go beyond what our own countries remember. War is a tragedy, not because of the losses others experienced but because of those that struck close to home. It's easy to forget that all soldiers are somebody's parent, somebody's child.

The work of German type designer Rudolf Koch doesn't let us forget. Well-educated and accomplished prior to enlisting, his experience of war and its aftermath echoes that of the English soldiers Siegfried Sassoon presents in "They":
"You'll not find / A chap who's served that hasn't

found some change." Dorothee Ader's essay, originally delivered at the close of an exhibition of Koch's work at the Port Moody Station Museum this past spring, explores the influence of the war on Koch's imaginative and creative life. What he sought to express will be familiar to many closer to our own generation, the veterans of peacekeeping missions in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Afghanistan. Koch's efforts to invest his experiences with meaning are profoundly moving. They also show that the damage war inflicts doesn't entirely displace the potential for good to once again take root and flourish. For the living, there is hope.

Centuries before Koch, the tradition of bestiaries established a very literary means of corralling our deep-seated anxieties and perhaps even taming them. Animals were emblems with moral significance, creatures from which we could learn how to live and what to avoid. Phyllis Reeve, a frequent contributor to *Amphora*, explores this ancient way of engaging with the world with items gathered into the ark of her collection. Now largely domesticated, contemporary bestiaries very often depict a greater range of fantastic creatures than their antecedents. Some are exercises in cryptozoology, surely proving that if we had no monsters we would have invented them.

We do have booksellers, however, and on the opposite page Spencer W. Stuart begins his exploration of how several well-established dealers in Europe are responding to changes in the trade and how today's bibliophiles are building their collections. The stories underscore the complex network of connections informing our activities across time and space, ultimately charting a course to the future.

~ Peter Mitham, editor