

Article

## Vocalizing the Angels of Mons: Audio Dramas as Propaganda in the Great War of 1914 to 1918

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**Abstract:** Sound drama production prior to the onset of the “Radio Age” underwent a pioneering development during the Great War. This was achieved by the making, publication and distribution of short audio dramas acted with sound effects and music in front of early microphones and released in the form of 78 rpm phonograph discs. Entertaining storytelling through dramatic performance was mobilized for the purposes of improving recruitment and disseminating patriotic endorsement recordings. This article focuses on the sound dramatization of the myth of “The Angels of Mons” released by Regal in 1915. The recording is examined as a text for its significance in terms of propaganda, style of audio-drama, and any cultural role it may have played in the media of the First World War. The Regal disc was an example of what was described at the time as “descriptive sketches.” This article explores why a sound phonograph was used to dramatize the myth that angels intervened to assist the British Expeditionary Force to resist the German Army invading France through Belgium in 1914. A number of historians have discussed the First World War as being a theatre for the first modern media war, in which the process of propaganda was modernized. To what extent does “The Angels of Mons” phonograph and the genre of descriptive sketches support this analysis? Does this short sound drama play have any relevance to the cultural phenomena of spiritualism, modernism and patriotic Christianity identified as being important during the Great War period?

**Keywords:** sound drama; propaganda; mythology; audio-drama; spiritualism; modernism; phonograph

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## 1. Introduction: Roadmap for Analysis

The article begins by analyzing the nature and extent of “descriptive sketches” produced for the phonograph during the Great War. I identify dramatized recordings as a specific genre of production and reception in sound entertainment and investigate their origin with evidence that the form began in the Boer War period at the junction of 19th and 20th centuries. The sketches, along with speeches, recitations, and a few actual documentary interviews, represent a wider cultural communication in recorded sound apart from music. In 1999, I identified phonograph dramatized short story recordings from the First World War as having significance in being the earliest mechanical record of audio drama [1] (p. 33). This was a specific reference to “In The Trenches”, devised by Major A.E. Rees for the Columbia Phonograph Company in 1917. Since 1999, I have uncovered many more dramatized performances of different aspects of the Home Front and sound re-enactments from the Western Front. It could even be argued that the genre was a hybrid of drama and documentary as many attempts were made to represent actual events through performance.

“In The Trenches” was in fact one part of a series of six episodes in an ongoing narrative titled “On Active Service” featuring the characterization of two British soldiers, Tippy and Ginger, leaving home, going to war in the trenches and then returning as heroes. These sketches were more fictional than factual. Major Rees produced a three-disc set for Columbia and it would appear that this is the earliest surviving example of a sound drama series [2]. I refer to Major Rees’ series because this is evidence that sound plays were created by military personnel on active service and were thus part of the propaganda matrix of First World War media production.

The sound dramas emerging from the Great War included the production in 1915 of “The Angels of Mons”, which I concentrate on because of its links to other media representations, including music and film, and a wider controversial debate about the veracity of the myth that Christian Angels intervened to help the British Expeditionary Force’s retreat from Mons in 1914. I conduct a textual analysis of the short play’s transcription, which is included in full. I move onto a discussion of its qualities as a sound drama; the cultural and social context of phonograph listening on domestic machines such as that featured in Figure 1; its relevance to spiritualism; its significance in terms of being a modernist text; and whether there is any substance to the argument that sound phonographs were part of a modernist form of propaganda during the First World War.

As “The Angels of Mons” dramatized an actual war event I also investigate the context of factual representations of the conflict. This includes the release two months later by the same record company of 19-year-old Edward Dwyer’s account of the retreat from Mons and his experiences in subsequent trench warfare. Dwyer’s eye witness account merits detailed comparison with “The Angels of Mons” drama because they demonstrate how the phonograph was used for the purposes of recruitment.

Little audio drama of BBC radio was either recorded or archived prior to the 1930s. The microphone plays of the 1920s can be studied from their original scripts and descriptions of what they sounded like. It would therefore appear that the pioneering work of descriptive sketch artists for Britain’s phonograph industry 1914–1918, and the years preceding it, represents the earliest surviving record of audio drama. I conclude the article with a summation of the significance and importance of *The Angels of Mons* in expressing the imagination of those authoring the drama and listening to it in

the Home Front of the Great War. Short definitions of critical terms used are provided after the notes and references.

**Figure 1.** A typical disc playing sound machine of Britain’s Edwardian period. This particular model was manufactured by Zonophone as its “Grand Opera ‘De Luxe’” and featured in a catalogue from 1904 [3]. Sound was amplified through the horn speaker and this would be a standard design for gramophones manufactured by Zonophone’s parent company ‘The Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd’ whose products would be better known in the 20th century as ‘His Master’s Voice’.”



## 2. Sound Storytelling and the Descriptive Sketches during the Great War

A number of studies have focused on the role of music and lyrics [4,5]. The period was attended by a successful and expanding production and reception of phonograph/record entertainment and communication. The leading record companies such as HMV (Gramophone Records), Columbia and Regal produced a sub-genre of sound performance records that were variously advertised as “Descriptive sketches”, “Recitations”, “Talking”, “Political Records”, and “Speeches” [6,7]. This article focuses on the dramatised performances of factual and fictional events and what would now be described as “faction” or docudrama. They appear to be evidence of an attempt to use sound recording to dramatised contemporary events of the Great War.

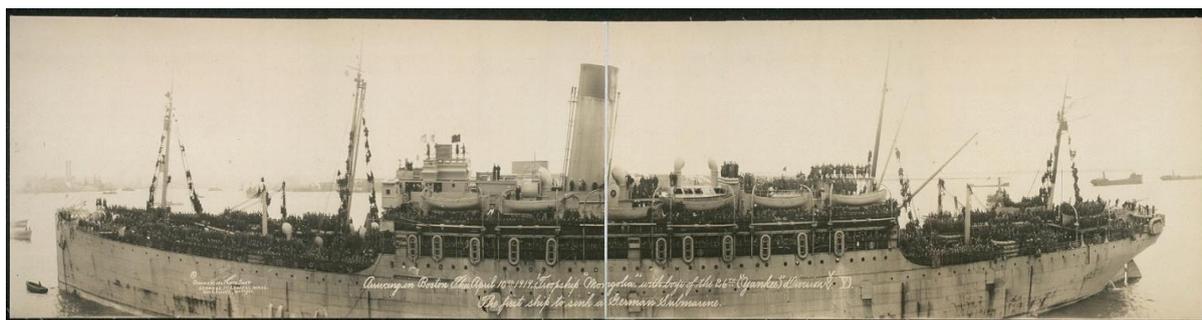
The production technology of this period limited the duration of the phonograph mini-plays. Surviving texts are, therefore, linear framed within three to three and a half, and sometimes four minutes. As already mentioned, at least one author/director, Major A. E. Rees, appears to have fashioned a series of episodes for Columbia in 1917 titled “On Active Service” [2]. Contextual influences and reference points may be derived from “the musical hall lightning cartoon sketch” that Haste said was transferred to film by private companies such as Neptune Films working closely with the War Office Cinematograph Committee in 1916 [8] (p. 46). Haste also discussed the invention by

the Ministry of Information in 1918 of the “film tag”, a two-minute form of narrative in which the parable of “Save Coal” or “Buy War Loans” would be placed at the end of newsreels [8]. Humor, wit and comedy would be deployed to accelerate the message in a genre that many decades later would be described in propaganda analysis as “infotainment”.

### 2.1. Pre-Great War Context, “The Departure of the Troopship”—a Boer War Origination?

The “descriptive sketch”, documentary, recitation and performance phonograph genres have a history prior to the 1914–1918 conflict. The chief recorder of the British Gramophone Company, Fred Gaisberg, noted in his 1946 memoirs that he was responsible for producing a descriptive record during “the Boer War period” of 1899–1902 titled “The Departure of the Troopship”. A typical image of a troopship taking men to and from war during this period is shown in Figure 2. He said that the sound performance consisted of “crowds at the quayside, bands sounding ‘All ashore,’ farewell cries of ‘Don’t forget to write,’ troops singing ‘Home, Sweet Home’, which gradually receded in the distance and the far-away mournful hoot of the steamer whistle” [9] (p. 45). Gaisberg credited the authorship of the piece to “my good colleague Russell Hunting” who was responsible for staging the recording. He proclaimed that: “The record became enormously popular and eventually historic. It brought tears to the eyes of thousands, among them those of Melba, who declared in my presence that this record influenced her to make gramophone records more than anything else” [9].

**Figure 2.** A panoramic image of the U.S.S. Troopship Mongolia in 1919—typical scene of maritime transportation before and during the First World War of troops going to or returning from war. Picture: Library of Congress, Geo. H. Russell, 26 May 1919.



“The Departure of the (a) Troopship” features in the catalogues of the first sound cylinder and flat 78 rpm disc producers of the early 20th century. I have been able to trace and analyze several versions some of which have been uploaded to YouTube by collectors [10–13]. The dramatizer identified by Gaisberg, Russell Hunting is profiled by Peter Martland as an enlivening presence who was a key American and later European phonograph industry pioneer and who “made the transition from actor to self-taught recording engineer and performer” [14] (p. 12). Gaisberg also described him as “the star attraction of the phonograph parlors,” [9] (pp. 14–15) which on the basis of Martland’s research included the production of sound pornography. This resulted in a criminal prosecution in New York City in 1896 that had been agitated for by the campaigner against indecency, Anthony Comstock [14] (p. 13).

Hunting’s sound creation of troops being played aboard at embarkation with goodbyes and an emotionally resonant parting by fading steamship whistle exists in different versions. All follow a

common script of sound design sequence. There is no extended dramatic dialogue or narration. What makes the sound text so interesting is that the story's exposition is plotted by human cries, musical tunes and sound effects in montage form and cross-faded. The sense of realism is achieved by apparent improvisation. As mixing panels would not be invented until the 1920s, the dynamism of movement would have been produced by musicians, actors and sound creators slowly moving towards and pulling away from the single horn microphone and its mechanical recording machinery.

A single-sided 7-inch phonograph disc release by Zonophone is listed in the company's 1904 catalogue, shown in Figure 3, as "12791 Leaving of the Transport (introducing arrival and going on board of the Troops, with Bands Playing. Cheers of the Crowd. Blowing of Steamer Whistle, Pulling in of the Gang Plank, etc.)" [3] (p. 4). This record would have played back at 70 revolutions per minute and is included in the catalogue's section for "The British Military Band, London" which is described as the most experienced band in Europe in being recorded for "the talking Machine" [3] (p. 3). The catalogue entry is two years after the end of the Boer War.

**Figure 3.** The Zonophone catalogue for 1904 featuring on page 3 an advertisement for a 7-inch disc "Leaving of the Transport".



A disc titled "The Departure of a Troopship" was released by Zonophone in single and double-sided 10-inch phonograph records, playing back at 78 rpm prior to and during the Great War. The London Gramophone Company's general catalogue for its "His Master's Voice" label in 1911 also lists a record with the same name- again a 10-inch 78 rpm with the catalogue reference "2-108" under the category "Descriptive, etc." [15] (p. 6). This remained in the company's catalogues until deletion in 1930. When double-sided with a catalogue reference of Serial 564 as shown in Figure 4, the title appears in the Zonophone catalogue for 1913–1914 and is paired with a descriptive sketch titled "The

Wreck of a Troopship” that contains a plot and lines that have more in common with the narrative of the wreck of the HMS Birkenhead troopship off the coast of Africa in 1852 [16,17].

It seems likely the Gaisberg and Hunting “Boer War period” production of “The Departure of a Troopship” could have been re-released to become an inspiration for the more sophisticated dramatized sound sketches that followed. The Zonophone and HMV versions sound identical and so could have been pressed from the same master. The impressively improvisational drama reproduces the sound of a busy quayside starting with a voice that can be heard saying “Stand back, stand back.” This is followed by the “London Regimental Band” playing “Soldiers of the King (Queen)” written and composed by Leslie Stuart. As soldiers are played up the gang-plank voices shout “Bravo!” “There they are!” and “Farewell!” Another line that can be heard is: “Come on, come on, don’t crowd. There’s a lady here.” This segues into cries of “Here they are, here they are!” and the band then strikes up a quick medley of military tunes with bugles predominating. Further lines of “Well goodbye old man”, “Don’t forget to write home”, can be heard. This is followed by cries of “All ashore, people!” almost exactly as Gaisberg reported in his book *Music on Record* [9].

The montage of sounds is highly evocative: ship’s bell; whistle; cries of “goodbye” “We’re off now”, “Don’t forget to write home every week” and “Goodbye!”; cheers; and band music. The only departure from Gaisberg’s recollection is that the last sequence of music is the national anthem, certainly followed by what can be understood as “the far-away mournful hoot of the steamer whistle” [9]. The coinciding, or what would be described in future radio production as cross-fading, of the same key and note of distancing band and ship’s horn represents a remarkable achievement in sound creativity for its time. This tagging of different sounds by rhythm, melody and key would become a celebrated filmic sound device later present in the films of Alfred Hitchcock such as the 1936 *Thirty Nine Steps* and Anthony Minghella’s *The English Patient* sound designed by Walter Murch in 1996 [18] (pp. 15–17).

It is possible that Gaisberg confused the singing of the National Anthem with *Home, Sweet Home*, a song made famous during American Civil War (1861–1865), because Dame Nellie Melba had made the latter her “private property” during her singing career [19] (p. 480). Lord Horatio Kitchener, famous for being in command of the British re-conquest of the Sudan (1896), and victory in the Boer War (1899–1902) asked her to sing it at Government House after dinner when visiting Australia in 1909. King George V requested she perform it on a visit to Norway in 1921 as it reminded him of his time as a midshipman on the battleship/cruiser in which he was travelling [19].

Jeffrey Richards emphasizes that *God Save the Queen* (or King) achieves so much pre-eminence in the fusion of patriotism and imperialism during the Boer War that: “Lewis Winstock, having trawled through a host of diaries and memoirs, concluded: ‘there is no doubt that in 1899–1902 *God Save the Queen* had an appeal that has never been equaled; even in World War Two it would be difficult to find anyone writing of a concert that ‘the event of the evening was *The Queen*’” [19] (p. 94). The sound text of “The Departure of a Troopship” fuses the communication and reception of the ideological concepts of God, Queen/King, and country.

**Figure 4.** A surviving disc manufactured by Zonophone Records of “The Departure of a Troopship” originally sold by a branch of Larg and Sons, The Gramophone Specialists in Dundee, Scotland.



The language and sounds of Christianity, devotion and respect for monarchy and patriotism appear to be the political, social and emotional imperatives in many of the subsequent Great War descriptive sketches. The biographer of King George V, Kenneth Rose, discovered that repeated playing back of this disc was a feature of entertainment at Buckingham Palace: “Another well-worn record to be played after dinner was titled ‘The Departure of the Troopship’, a sentimental yet stirring piece. It ended with the National Anthem, at which everybody in the drawing room, including the King and Queen, rose to their feet. It was among their favorite tunes...” [20] (p. 318). King George and Queen Mary are shown in ceremonial costumes from this period in Figure 5.

Russell Hunting dramatized a separate version of “The Departure of a Troopship” for the Sterling Record Company of which he was a director between 1904 and 1908. The cylinder record version is distinctive in having horse hoof/metal shoe effects at the beginning as the troops muster to go on board [10]. Sterling owned the Odeon label until its bankruptcy when it was adopted by Carl Lindstrom Ltd [14] (pp. 75–80). Odeon released a double-sided disc, featured in its 1912 catalogue with side A titled “The Departure of the Troopship” and side B telling the story of “The Return of the Troopship” [21]. A further version of the departing troopship sound narrative was released by Nicole Records in 1904, a company that manufactured discs in the short-lived form of celluloid on card base. This version clearly has the sound of a woman performer taking part. She can be heard to cry “There they go our big (or very) strapping sons” [12,13]. This difficult to hear line from a sole woman performer distinguishes it from the Sterling, HMV and Zonophone productions.

**Figure 5.** King George V and Queen Mary during coronation events of 1911. The King was a devoted listener to the phonograph disc “The Departure of a Troopship” and would stand with all his after dinner guests as the national anthem *God Save The King* played out the sketch. Picture: George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress).



“The Wreck of a Troopship” is clearly dramatizing the heroic decision by British soldiers to allow women and children first into the few lifeboats available to the passengers on the HMS Birkenhead after she had foundered on rocks near Cape Town. It was a provisioning ship carrying stores and soldiers in support of a British colonial war in Africa in 1852. This event is the source of the “Birkenhead drill”—a protocol of honour decreeing that the lives of women and children were to be saved first in life-threatening situations. It was also immortalized in Rudyard Kipling’s 1893 poem *Soldier an’ Sailor Too* [22] (pp. 447–448). The Gramophone Company’s 1908 production for its label Zonophone shown in Figure 6 [23] competed with a 1907 Edison phonograph company release of a gold molded cylinder record titled “The Foundering of a Troopship” by the National Vaudeville Company and featuring the performance of Australian bass-baritone Peter Dawson [24]. This had fewer Scottish accents, and Dawson as Colonel Seton issues the command “Sound the Assembly” rather than “Sound the Fall In.” There is also a clearer almost choral chant from the soldiers of “We will Colonel, we will!” in reply to the order to stand fast [24]. Both re-enactments of this event with the doomed soldiers singing *The Old Hundredth* and giving three cheers for “his majesty the King” represent an evocative and patriotically emotional performance.

## 2.2. “The Wreck of a Troopship”—Developing the Descriptive Sketch Narrative

Odeon Record’s more optimistic pairing of the troopship’s departure with its return on double-sided discs was in contrast to Zonophone’s decision to place “The Wreck of a Troopship” on their B side. This had been produced as a single sided 10-inch 78 phonograph disc between 1908 and 1911. To the sound of theatrical storm effects, bugles and music members of the 74th Highlanders are assembled on

deck to face death: “Attention. Officers and men of the 74th Highlanders in a few minutes the ship will sink beneath the waves and we who are men and soldiers of the King will be no more. We have faced death together before on many a well fought field without shrinking. And as our enemy now is not man, but God’s elements, it beholds us to meet the death that now awaits us with the same indomitable courage as yore” [18]. After the order to “present arms” the band plays *Rule Britannia* and is drowned out by a crescendo of raging storm and sea sound effects.

**Figure 6.** The image of a surviving single sided Zonophone disc release of “The Wreck of a Troopship” produced between 1908 and 1911.



### 2.3. Spoken Word Phonographs in Politics and Journalism

By 1914, the phonograph had established itself as a form for political and propagandist communication. Gramophone Records, through its HMV label, had Prime Ministers such as Herbert Asquith, Chancellors of the Exchequer, such as Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, explorers such as Sir Ernest Shackleton, and suffragettes such as Christobel Pankhurst enunciating policies, creeds and experiences [6]. In April 1905, Adolf Beck, who had been the victim of a notorious miscarriage of justice through false identification in court, described his “Trial and Sentence; and ‘prison experiences’ in a three part series [7] (p.1/3). In January 1905, Hamilton Hill recorded a message titled ‘Good Luck Japan’ for Rex Lambert cylinders. This production expressed British sympathy and support for Japan in its war with Russia between 1904 and 1905 in which the Tsar’s Baltic Fleet had been annihilated by Japanese naval power, modernized, equipped, and trained by the British. Ross observed that after Russian ships fired on some English fishing boats there was even more sympathy for Japan” [7] (p. 1/25).

Dr. Wilfred Grenfell described his mission and use of gramophone in the Arctic and Canadian Labrador coast in 1908, followed by an account of being adrift “on an ice floe in the Arctic Ocean” in

1911 [7] (p. 1/23). Ernest Gray, the pseudonym of Robert Carr, dramatized a representation of the Titanic disaster for Winner Records in 1913 with “Be British/Stand to your posts”. This is described by Ross as “an audio-descriptive piece, recording disaster, heroism and patriotism, ...helped by a good ballad, sung in a pleasing baritone, this lugubrious offering must have sold well” [7]. The phonograph record had thus established itself as a commercial and sought after form for spoken word. There was a clear demand met by the leading record companies for the testimony of witnesses and participants in the journalistic events of their day. When they were not available the events would be dramatized in short sketches. The phonograph was also used for education in the recitation of poetry and prose and early language courses such as French and Russian [6].

#### 2.4. *The Great War Phonograph Context—1914 Onwards*

The narrative and theory of Great War propaganda has a massive hinterland of scholarship. For the purposes of this article I focus on how the sound phonograph and spoken word were marshaled for the propaganda effort. Fred Gaisberg confirmed that his expertise in producing persuasive sound was used specifically on the Italian Front in 1918 for extending Lord Northcliffe’s “scheme of propaganda behind enemy lines” [9] (p. 75). He was deployed with Colonel Baker to Isonzo where Slavs, Jugoslavs, Croats and Serbs, Hungarians and Czechs were “manning the trenches on the Austrian side, sometimes a few hundred feet from the Italian lines” [9]. Gaisberg recalls he was sent to Vicenza from where he was taken in army lorry under military escort to various prison camps. He said: “Deserters of those nationalities would record their folk-songs, dances and spoken words, urging their listeners to desert without fear as friends would receive and care for them. These records were played back at points in the trenches opposite the places where those nationals were known to be posted and, according to Colonel Baker, resulted in a fine harvest of deserters” [9] (p. 76). Ross regrets that “the Imperial War Museum has no examples of this type of ephemera, and it seems unlikely, although not impossible, that any have survived” [7] (p. 1/28).

Historians of propaganda have already established that the propaganda sought to serve different theatres of reception. This was certainly the case with sound. The British Empire designed a separate propaganda campaign directed at subjugated colonial peoples, US public opinion as well as that of other neutral countries in order to seduce and entice more countries to engage Germany and her allies, known as the Central Powers, in a global war. The British had to exploit the invasion of neutral Belgium and the outrage that could be stoked by the sinking of passenger vessels and neutral shipping [25,26]. On Great Britain’s home front, the motivation for war had to be transformed from a battle of imperial military and economic powers to a war of civilization, an apocalyptic struggle for good against evil [27,28].

#### 2.5. *The Recruiting Sketch-Facing down “Cowards” and “Slackers”*

A country that distrusted military culture had to be persuaded that war, uniform and armed service represented honor, patriotism and the only decent aspiration in life. This led to the creation of the recruitment phonograph to mirror what was being done by sheet-music and music hall acts in the surrounding culture. In 1914 the discs would dramatize British troops arriving and passing through Boulogne, usually with references to journeying onto Berlin. Anyone aspiring to soldiery, or having already taken the King’s shilling could learn Morse Code from a signaling Sergeant-Instructor and

also the words of command from a Drill Sergeant. Gramophone/HMV would produce Miss Ruby Helder singing “Courage” which was the “official Recruitment Song of the London *Daily Telegraph*” that had enjoyed “big sales as sheet music; it has been, and is, a feature of many an important concert these war months” [6].

In December 1914 Regal Records released the dramatization of “Christmas in Camp with Kitchener’s Boys” by Scott and Harrington that followed the earlier release of “Arrival of the British Troops in France” by Brooks and Ridout [29] (p. 53). Many record companies would produce sketches about security on the Home Front, particularly the spy mania of the first year of the war, hence the popularity of Regal’s “Special Constable Smith” and its kind [29] (p. 55). In January 1915 Regal would begin the distribution of Western Front re-enactments with Charles Penrose and Billy Whitlock staging “The Charge of the London-Scottish” and “Nobby Clark, V.C.” also mirrored by Winner’s release of “British Troops in Action”. Regal had dramatized naval action off the coast of Heligoland in October 1914. The message to people avoiding their duty and staying out of uniform was clear in the descriptive release by Regal in April 1915 of “Jerry Jinks, Scallywag: The Unwilling Recruit” [29] (p. 57).

Regal’s January 1916 documentary account of the marching retreat from Mons and fighting in the trenches by 19-year-old Victorian Cross winning NCO Edward Dwyer can be regarded as somewhat paradoxical as a sound recruiting tool. Dwyer is not seeking in any way to find euphemisms about the reality of the Western Front campaign: “You people over there don’t realize what our boys went through in those days. That march from Mons was a nightmare” [30]. This is hardly an advertisement for selling candy floss at a holiday camp. He talked about “an agonizing time.” On the second side of the disc, Dwyer self-deprecatingly says he’ll talk about what it is like for the boys in the trenches if “you are not already fed up with what I’ve said” [30]. Anybody listening would hear that such service could involve 18 day spells in the trenches and shortages of food. No fires allowed during the day because of smoke and no fires allowed at night because of the glare. In addition, as for a water supply, anybody thinking of taking the King’s shilling could look forward to a cup of tea brewed from melted snow. At Christmas, Dwyer had nothing to say about swapping Christmas puddings and playing soccer with “Fritz”. Any seasonal cheer was abruptly halted with “two of our boys being picked off by snipers” on Boxing Day [30].

Dwyer pretends he cannot remember the incident where he won his Victoria Cross, though he is more than happy to somewhat bloodthirstily explain his enthusiasm for throwing “bottle bombs”. Such expertise and prowess means he would be allowed an extra two hours of sleep. An intriguing aspect of this “recruiting phonograph” is that the prospective soldier should be in no doubt about the reality, and that includes Dwyer’s rather threatening “last word”: “I’m only youngster. Barely twenty. And I’m doing my bit. I tell you, you’re wanted. And wanted badly. If you people at home are anything worth fighting for, be a sport. Come up and show the Germans that we’re better men than they are any day. Don’t stay at home singing ‘Til the Boys Come Home’. Or when the boys do come home, nothing will be too good for them. And you slackers will have to go and hide your faces.” [30].

There is something of a fiery temperament present in Dwyer’s occasionally hesitant delivery. The Surrey Regiment Museum’s holding of newspaper cuttings on Dwyer reveals how on occasion he would not hide his contempt for those failing to do their duty: “‘Is there not a single MAN here?’ he declared at one meeting at which not a single recruit had come forward. ‘I shall be glad to get back to the Front. It makes me sick to see civilian clothes on the backs of men fit and able to do their share’” [31].

Dwyer's "brand value" as a kind of super star model of gallantry would transfer from state marketing for volunteering to advertising for clothing manufacturing. An advertisement for "Dri-Ped, the super-leather for soles", in *The Cornishman* 13 April 1916, carries an endorsement from "Lance-Corp'l Edward Dwyer, V.C: 'Wounds and nerves are only some of the troubles of the trenches, wet and swollen feet are the limit. The terrible banging of the guns you get used to. But if your feet are bad, life's a misery. I got a straight tip from a pal before going into the trenches. My pal sold me some "Dri-Ped" soles to fix to my boots. A lot of chaps are wearing them. I must say it was money well spent, they're simply grand and keep your feet fine and dry, even in the wettest trenches' [32]

On the Home Front, the propaganda had to deliver voluntary enlistment from 1914 on, and then the justification for conscription from 1916 on. It successfully negotiated the feminist struggle for equal franchise in a troublesome contract that would give women the vote in parliamentary elections in 1918 in return for figuratively "emasculating" any male who had conscientious objections to participation in the war effort [8,33,34]. Zonophone's October 1914 release of "Recruiting" warned that men who did not sign up would face the ignominy of women shouting "Say young fellah, you can cheer alright. Why don't you go? Are you afraid?" with fiancés breaking off engagements and a general mood of humiliation [35]. A woman performer demands to be taken on as a soldier, saying "I'm 16 tomorrow," and any reluctant men loitering and hesitating heard the recruiting sergeants triumphantly declare: "There's a plucky one for you. Yes, we'll make a general of you very likely! Sign your name" [35]. Dynamic suffragettes and suffragists diverted their campaigning energies to harass men out of uniform with the public and private shame of white feather branding. As a result, the legitimacy of male identity depended on a militaristic endorsement from the center of feminized power—mother, sister, girlfriend, fiancé or wife. Feminized power would also be exercised in doing the very jobs abandoned by the men who had gone to war [8] (p. 57).

## 2.6. Mobilizing the Sound of Hatred

The politics of hate were essential. Germans had to be portrayed as mutilators of children, rapists of women, and the epitome of savage barbarity [36]. Accordingly, rumors and lies about the bayoneting of children, chopping off of children's arms, corpse factories to process the fat of battle casualties, summary execution of non-combatants, defilement of nuns and nurses would be encouraged and amplified [28]. In phonograph productions the Kaiser would be ridiculed and insulted and "the dirty Hun spy" unmasked behind British lines would receive summary justice. In March 1915, Charles Penrose and Billy Whitlock would ridicule the Kaiser and his son through mockery and comedy in the sketches "The Kaiser in a Zeppelin" and "The Clown Prince makes a report" [29] (p. 56). Regal's release of Harry Champion singing "My old Iron Cross" a month later would end with the adlibbed line "Kaiser made of old pig iron" [37]. The comedian Gus Harris would record sketches in June 1915 titled "Let's all go out and find some Germans" and "They all did the goose-step home" [29] (p. 59). The general prejudice against anything German would be entrenched through the campaign launched by the right wing newspaper proprietor and publisher of *John Bull*, Horatio Bottomley. He set up his own record label "Bull Dog Records" to publish the sound of his speeches and patriotic war doggerel [7] (p. 11/2). In advertisements in *The Talking Machine* he would also urge the boycott of German records and phonograph equipment [7] (p. 11/15).

The Jumbo Records release from December 1914 about the capture of a spy in a British trench on the Western Front is particularly chilling despite its period language and stilted performances. Listeners can hear the prisoner being searched, the discovery of a packet of papers including signal codes and military telegrams. His denials and refusal to answer questions are met by being blindfolded and stood up against a wall to be shot. The German's repeated and desperate cries of "Mercy! Mercy!" fall on deaf ears [38]. His crying and wailing continues as the Colonel is dramatized offering no due process of trial and coldly ordering his execution. The rather blood-thirsty attitude is continued in similar productions by other record companies such as Winner which in 1915 released "Drummed Out" and "The German Spy" [7] (p. 11/12). In the words of the contemporary *Talking Machine News* these amounted to serious descriptive sketches about a foreigner who "has sneaked into the British Army and has also proved a coward. The drumming out, amid the execrations of his erstwhile comrades, is vividly told" and "a seemingly simple countryman turns out to be a German spy, and meets his deserts" [7].

### 2.7. Great War Phonograph Development: from Descriptive Sketch to Journalism and Documentary

The First World War historians Tonie and Valmai Holt wrote that songs and music hall drama sketches of the First World War amount to a "national melodic propaganda for the Home Front" [39]. The audio drama recordings represent the harmonies and disharmonies of sound propaganda in the context of emotionalizing ideologies. The mini-plays dramatize a wide range of narratives including a German bombing raid on a seaside town, embarkation by the troops to France and a mother's tearful farewell, heroic Victoria Cross winning action in the trenches, a re-enactment of the Great War myth of the Angels of Mons—the ghosts of angels said to have saved British troops from the German advance, and the sinking of the *Lusitania* by U-boat off the coast of southern Ireland [40]. These are also supplemented by clear evidence of early sound documentary, journalism and actuality recording.

The Regal production of "Angels of Mons" released in November 1915 needs to be contextualized by the January 1916 production, already discussed in relation to recruitment, of "Sergeant E. Dwyer, V.C." This double-sided disc "With our boys at the front" was divided into the two themes: "On the March" and "In the Trenches". The Regal catalogue states that the recording was arranged by Herbert Ridout. Dwyer provides an objective correlative to the fiction of the "Angels of Mons" descriptive sketch because he experienced the retreat from Mons and provides a realistic account of it in his own voice. It has been credited as "the only recording to survive of a soldier serving in the trenches, made at the time" [31]. Dwyer's recording consists of uninterrupted narration, and at the end of the first side of the disc he breaks out into a one-man performance of the singing of "Here We Are, Here We Are Again" [30].

One of the earliest examples of a recorded interview is present in the Gramophone/HMV release of the account from a victim of submarine warfare. The British actor Kenneth Douglas survived his experience of the U-Boat sinking of the *Arabic* on August 18th 1915 and recorded his story a month later [41]. In "Experiences of the Sinking of the Arabic" Douglas responds to an interview format, although the style of questioning differs from the style we are used to hearing today: "How did you find it my dear fellow. I'd like to hear all about it?" It also sounds scripted: "I boarded that ill-fated liner, the *Arabic*, to go to America where I was to fulfill a theatrical engagement in New York" [41]. But there are aspects of the sensational and journalistic which carry across the urgency and drama of eye-witnessing to this very day: "There came that terrifying and never-to-be-forgotten thud which

shook the ship from bow to stern. The steward rushed in and cried out ‘Torpedo!’ What was your first thought at that moment? Ah! All I could think of was overcoat! Have you got many of them? Four big overcoats and a Burberry” [41].

In early 1916 Gramophone/HMV released another eye-witness account in the journalistic form titled “The Man Who Dined With The Kaiser” featuring Antonio Cippico, who along with other reporters, had attended a royal luncheon “during a tour of occupied Serbia, prior to Italy’s entry into the war on the side of the Allies in May 1915” [7] (p. 11/8). Dr. Antonio describes the Kaiser, his entourage, and the effects of war on the Germans as a result of getting an opportunity to take part in a press conference for journalists from neutral countries [7].

The most celebrated documentary recording to survive from the Great War is “Gas Shell Bombardment” released by Gramophone/HMV at the end of 1918. This disc purports to be the “Actual recording of the Gas Shell Bombardment by The Royal Garrison Artillery (9 October 1918), preparatory to the British Troops entering Lille” with profits derived from record sales being donated to the King’s Fund for the Disabled [6]. Fred Gaisberg’s brother Will was responsible for the production from a nearby farmhouse and he was said to have been slightly gassed in the expedition. He died from pneumonia and influenza shortly afterwards. A debate has arisen about the integrity of the recording. Brian Rust asserted that it represented “the only authentic sounds of World War I...recorded and preserved forever” [6]. Sleeve notes for a CD release in 2001 reported “One theory is that his attempt to capture genuine actuality recordings failed, and that this ‘bombardment’ by penny whistles and kettle drums was concocted as a form of memorial” [40]. Another theory has it that the phonograph release was a combination of genuine field recording enhanced by over-dubbing in the studio. The CD sleeve notes for *Oh! It’s A Lovely War Part 3* published in 2003 includes an account published in *The Voice* where a veteran of the Royal Garrison Artillery, Major C. J. C. Street M.C. attests to the record taking him “back again among the guns themselves [...] So fine is the recording that when Number Three fires a round with a loose driving-band, one can detect the characteristic note that reveals the fact” [42].

## 2.8. Great War Descriptive Sketch- Angels and the Divine Service for King and Country

First World War propaganda harnessed the psychological and emotional resonance of religion. Any “war of civilization” had to be a crusade that exercised the core of spirituality in the individual human. Religion and spiritual exhortations were central to exploiting the moral imagination of the propagandist target. “The Angels of Mons” production indicates the expression of a rich vein of mythology and supernatural legend. However, the contextual evidence points to the script of the production being informed by Christianity and patriotism rather than the late 19th and early 20th century interest in secular spiritualism that has been the subject of so much academic investigation and writing. God, King and Country, and also Empire, are the concurrent themes of descriptive sketches produced and released by British record companies before, during and after the release of “The Angels of Mons”. In April, May and June 1915 Gramophone/HMV would release in consecutive months the sound of “Divine Service” on the battlefield, battleship and army camp; each conducted by the Reverend J. R. Parkyn [7] (p. 11/12). These were not actuality recordings but representations arranged by Vivian Bennetts with “prayer and exhortation”. Gramophone/HMV advertised “Divine Service on a Battlefield” by highlighting the presence of the “effects of the whistling of ‘Jack Johnsons’ during the

service, bringing home to the listener the ever-present dangers of every minute of life in the firing line and just behind. The prayers and exhortations are impressively given by the Rev. J.R. Parkyn and the singing of the hymns and playing of the band are splendid. As is usual, the band breaks into a lively air at the finish” [6]. In February/March 1916 Regal Records produced a two-sided descriptive record (G 7245 d.8/31) titled “A Battalion Church Parade on Active Service” and “The Last Post: a military funeral,” symbolizing the connection between the Western Front and death [29] (p. 82).

### 2.9. Major A.E Rees and “On Active Service Series”

I have been unable to establish any formal military and propaganda arrangements behind the production of Regal’s “The Angels of Mons”. However, research has demonstrated that such links can be proved in relation to other descriptive and instructive phonograph productions. Captain, and later, Major A.E. Rees remained an active and serving army officer during the First World War when he authored and directed productions for Columbia, the American parent company of Regal. In 1915, he was responsible for the double-sided “Infantry squad drill without arms” (Columbia 2528) and then the three disc series with six separate sketches “On Active Service” published in 1917 [7] (p. 11/30). The identity of Major A.E. Rees correlates to a surviving War Office file in the National Archives. A. Ross speculates in *British Documentary Sound* that the success of the Drill record of 1915 “probably hastened Capt. Rees’ promotion. On subsequent records he is shown as ‘Major Rees Arranger’” [7].

Alfred Edward Rees, a territorial officer before the outbreak of war, had served in the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to Gallipoli in 1915 before returning to England after contracting dysentery to serve in “recruiting duties”. These recruiting duties harnessed an ability to produce dramatic sound productions, perhaps somewhat incongruous in an officer who was a sanitary and building surveyor by profession [43]. However, this involvement of the military in private media publications serving propaganda purposes coincides with the agreement and strategy disclosed in secret War Cabinet documents that the hand of government should be concealed. Chairman of the National War Aims Committee Frederick Guest argued in February 1918: “I do not see how a Government Department can undertake Home Propaganda without its activities being liable to misconstruction and frequent attack on the grounds that it is Government propaganda in disguise” [44].

The Army Drill record arranged by Alfred Rees as an officer in the Second London Regiment of the Royal Fusiliers in 1915 would be described in the catalogues of Columbia Records “of unique interest” because “by its aid squads of soldiers were actually drilled in public view in London in Trafalgar Square” [45] (p. 103). The “On Active Service” series is also self-fashioned by Columbia as a “unique series” “being practically a 6-part serial of thrilling war scenes” featuring “scenes and incidents in the life of a soldier under war conditions” [45]. The six parts are divided into three and half minute dramatized sketches titled separately “Leaving for the Front”, “In the Trenches”, “The Night Attack,” “The Big Push,” “For Valor!” and “Back Home in ‘Blighty’” [45].

The “On Active Service” series, when judged by the tastes and values of the present, has a tendency to sound like the characterization and plotting of cartoon, comic or newspaper strip. However, the author/creator succeeds in establishing two brothers-in-arms characters Tippy and Ginger. “Leaving for the Front” establishes that they are prone to mischief with hints of time in the guardroom. There are subtle layers of irony beneath the “old man” and “Hello Boys” and “Alright me lads!” male bonhomie.

Impatience and skepticism over speeches from the red tab Generals is hinted at. The pathos of leaving home is nearly bathos, but the sentiment vocalizes and extends the sentiment of “Departure of a Troopship”:

“Whistle. Music stops.

Tippy: Come on Ginger. Jump in! Hello. Who’s this old lady Ginger eh?

Ginger: Mother! Fancy you coming all this way.

Mother: My boy! I thought I must come to see you safely off. Goodbye and God Bless you my boy.

Ginger: Amen, mother darling. Say mother. I’m never late in the morning now. Goodbye, Goodbye.

Sound of stream train leaving station and the band striking up the tune of Old Langsyne.

Soldiers also shouting goodbye to people on the station platform” [46].

The next episode has Tippy and Ginger fighting in the trenches in a sophisticated audio drama without narration and developing action with foreground and background. Tippy rescues a wounded comrade in No Man’s Land despite shell-fire, machine-guns and the attentions of a sniper:

“Ginger: Got him the dirty Hun! Come on Tippy my boy. That’s it. Let me give you a hand.

Tippy: Thanks Ginger. You pinched that sniper fine” [46].

The series works as a serial in the sense that specific themes and plots, always involving action, are resolved at the end of each part. The tendency for superficial and cartoon style treatment is sometimes diluted with touches of realism; particularly in “The Big Push” when the singing of soldiers of “Just Before the Battle, Mother” in the trenches is recreated without band accompaniment and with the men adding their own lyrics. The realism soon evaporates when the men cheer the captain’s announcement that they are about to go over the top. However, the script continues to link sentimental dialogue with an ever-present truth that the next sequence of action could be their last:

“Tippy: We’ve been good pals together ain’t we Ginger? Do me a favour. If I’m out of it, give me things to my dear old mother.

Ginger: Course I will you old sport. And I know you’d do the same for me. Shake hands Tippy.

Tippy: Wait a minute. We’re going to be alright. Ah! Here’s the orders at last. [...] Fix bayonets and prepare to advance!” [47].

### 3. The Angels of Mons: the Audio Play—Textual and Contextual Analysis

The historian David Clarke is the leading scholar on the cultural significance in terms of propaganda of *The Angels of Mons*. His research output has involved academic journal publication “Rumors of Angels: A Legend of the First World War” (2003) [48] and the monograph *The Angel of Mons: Phantom Soldiers and Ghostly Guardians* (2004) [49]. His extensive study of the phenomenon extends from newspaper, book, music phonograph, pamphlet, music hall and film. It does not include the phonograph audio drama produced and released by Regal. Clarke concludes “the Angel of Mons can be interpreted only within the context of what Paul Fussell describes as “a world of reinvigorated myth” that appeared in the midst of a war characterized by industrialism and materialism [48] (p. 171).

Clarke identified three factors from his analysis: “The obvious presence of literary invention; the power of propaganda and lies; the influence of tradition and folklore” [48].

Both of his texts explain how the legend had its root in the 70,000 strong British Expeditionary Force (BEF), known as “old contemptibles” arriving in France 14 August 1914 as the Belgian army was retreating and while the French were being pushed back on the southern end of the front. He explained that the BEF, under the command of Sir John French, were professional soldiers, many of whom had fought in the South African wars. After almost four days of continual marching, 36,000 men from this small but resourceful army were immediately thrown into a clash with a vastly superior German force.

It was against the background of the German forces slowly overwhelming the British force with some regiments in danger of being surrounded that the myth gestated. Although the military position had been precarious—1600 men lost as casualties—the situation was rescued by an exhausting, frightening though orderly retreat to the French frontier. The rumors of angelic intervention related to the retreat from Mons between 23 and 26 August in a newspaper frenzy of sensational and exaggerated newspaper dispatches [48] (p. 153).

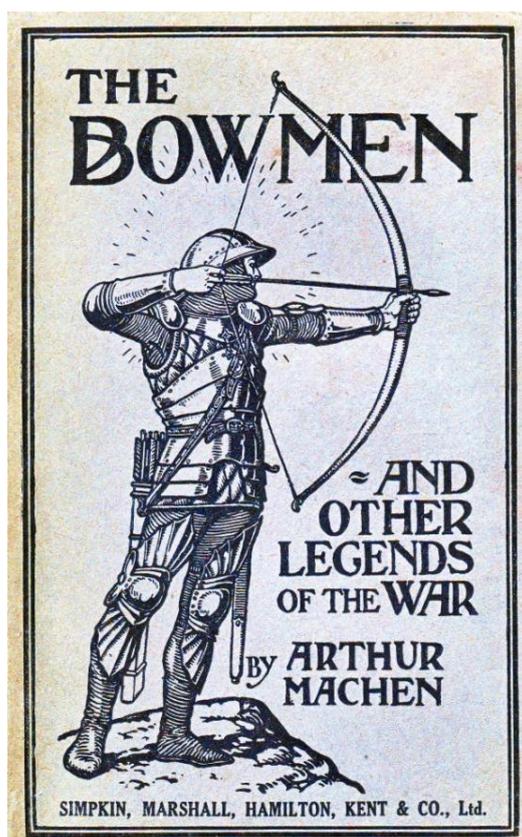
*The Angels of Mons* sound play dramatizes the retreat of the British Expeditionary Force from Mons and focuses on the fortunes of two characters Tommy and his comrade Jim who is tiring and needs carrying. It seems they are about to be overwhelmed by charging Germans but the Angels intercede and drive the attackers back and they are rescued. The composition is attributed to somebody called Wilvir who is also responsible for the “Descriptive Sketch” on the other side titled “The Soldier’s Wedding” which dramatizes a wedding at the Home Front. “Wilvir” is a mysterious phenomenon. It is not clear if the name is pseudonymous to one or more people in the entertainment industry. The name appears only in one more Regal publication released in December 1915 which was another descriptive “war sketch” titled “Her Dream part 1 and 2” for each respective side of the phonograph disc [29] (p. 78). Wilvir may appear to have its equivalent in Afrikaans as part of the verb sentence construction “Ek wil vir jou” meaning “I want you”. Research in media databases covering 125 years up until the time of writing fails to bring in any references to the name.

Clarke states the primary source text claiming to fake and originate the legend of the Angels of Mons was produced by Arthur Machen, a leader writer on the *London Evening News*. Machen authored the short story “The Bowmen” that he said was the single source for the Angels legend. It describes the ghosts of Agincourt’s bowmen coming to the rescue of the BEF and killing thousands of Germans [48,49]. They were summoned by the desperate soldiers invoking the Latin cry: “Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius” (St George help the English). Soon after publication the editor of *The Occult Review* and the spiritualist magazine *Light* contacted Machen seeking to reprint a story they had interpreted as fact and not fiction [48,49]. Machen was so concerned how his short story was being transformed into fact that he had published *The Angels of Mons: The Bowmen and other Legends of the War* in 1915, seen in Figure 7, and explained in his introduction: “This affair of ‘The Bowmen’ has been such an odd one from first to last, so many queer complications have entered into it, there have been so many and so divers currents and cross-currents of rumour and speculation concerning it that I honestly do not know where to begin” [50] (p. 5).

In the same year, Harold Begbie published *On The Side Of The Angels: The Story of the Angels At Mons- An Answer to “The Bowmen”*, seen in Figure 8, arguing that “Angels” did intervene and

supporting the views of those who believed in “divine intervention” [51]. Begbie believed Machen had consciously, or unconsciously, translated a vision experienced by soldiers into fiction. He was also a patriot who realized the story was an inspiration to the British war effort and felt it should be defended. Telepathy rather than coincidence explained the source of Machen’s inspiration: “Mr Machen, on that Sunday morning, when he read with supreme sympathy that ‘awful account’ in his newspaper may have received from the brain of a wounded or a dying British soldier in France some powerful impression of the battle held at Mons” [51] (p. 21).

**Figure 7.** The cover of *The Bowmen And Other Legends of the War* by Arthur Machen, London: Simpkin Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1915.

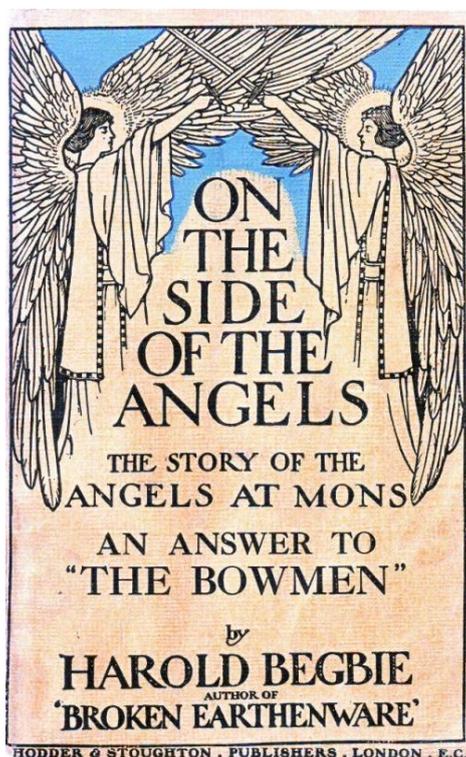


Clarke’s monograph and journal article chart the exponential and varied media manifestation of the legend during the Great War. This was driven by the public entertainment of the time centered in the theatre and music hall, which intersected with the huge market in sheet music. “Angels of Mons” (Reve Mystique) by Sydney C. Baldock was released by Gould and Bottler, Oxford Street in 1915 and “Angels of Mons Waltz” by Paul Paree was released by the Lawrence Wright Music Company in 1916 and Clarke observes: “The splendid color cover was inspired by the stories collected by Phyllis Campbell. It featured a winged angel-knight, mounted upon a white charger emerging from a white cloud above the trenches. Beneath the warrior angel was a panorama of shell-bursts above a landscape of trenches and advancing soldiers” [49] (p. 168). The new medium of film produced a celluloid representation of the legend: “In September 1915 the director Fred Paul released a film, *The Angels of Mons*, that was one of a large number of productions featuring his comedy character, Pimple. The film

was described in the *British Film Catalogue* as “A War Drama based on popular topical myth” but unfortunately, all surviving copies have been lost” [49] (p. 169).

Clarke’s thesis rightly investigates the question of whether the Angels were “carefully used to encourage an army of new recruits to fight on in dreadful conditions, safe in the knowledge that God was on their side and victory was therefore certain?” [49] (p. 5).

**Figure 8.** The cover of *On The Side Of The Angels: The Story of the Angels At Mons—An Answer to “The Bowmen”* by Harold Begbie, published by Hodder and Stoughton, 1915.



He also intersects his inquiry with a consideration of how rumors and myths “spread like wildfire from the trenches to the Home Front and back again” [49] (p. 12) and Fussell’s seminal text *The Great War in Modern Memory* encourages the belief that “such a myth-ridden world could take shape in the midst of a war representing a triumph of modern industrialism, materialism, and mechanism is an anomaly worth considering” [52] (p. 115).

*The Angels of Mons* sound drama released by Regal and created by “Wilvir” would have been recorded in a one horn microphone studio, probably at the record company’s factory in Bendon Valley, Garratt Lane, Earlsfield in South West London, rebuilt after a fire in 1913. As the transcript below suggests, the script and production reproduces the myth through characterization, drama, sound effects and music with some skill. There is clear understanding of the need for focus in direct recording and the “blocking” of foreground and background sound and action. Without the benefit of editing technology the performance and production through acting, sound effects and singing had to be achieved live and in one take in the same studio environment. The sound for phonograph production was recorded at this time using a mechanical acoustic method. This depended on sound waves being registered via vibrations and impressions of a needle on a wax master. Electrical recording, which

substantially increased quality of reproduction because of a much higher range of sound frequency response, was not introduced until 1926 [53].

### 3.1. Transcript of Original Phonograph Disc of “The Angels of Mons”

A copy of the original 78 rpm phonograph in the author’s possession and played back on a record turntable has been digitized and uploaded to an open access online platform for reference [54]. It is shown in Figure 9. Every effort has been made to transcribe the dialogue accurately but one or two phrases and expressions are difficult to determine with certainty.

**Figure 9.** The original 78 rpm phonograph *The Angels of Mons* as released by Regal in 1915.



*Sounds of battle. Machinegun, artillery and shouting. Bugles sounding.*

Tommy: Come on Jim old man. Buck up a bit. We’ll soon catch up with the rest of the boys.

Jim: It’s no good old man. I can’t do it. I can’t even stand. You leave me here and look after yourself. I can’t.

Tommy: Oh no, old boy. Here get hold of my neck. See if I can carry you.

Jim: No. You’re a married man. I’m not. I’ve got nobody at home. You save yourself. Here the beggar’s done.

Tommy: Don’t matter whether I’m married or not. My old woman would never forgive me if I left you here. Besides I ain’t going to do it. Down old man. Here’s another shell.

*Sound of theatrical artillery.*

Tommy: Lord. It’s a bit hot. I can’t make out where we are. It’s so dark.

Jim: It’s no use Tommy boy. I can’t walk.

Tommy: Rot. Here. Hop on my back lad. Hold on to the old gun. If you’ve got to go the Angels, I’m coming too.

*Bugle sounding. Gunfire.*

Tommy: Now then. Hold on tight and keep your head down. Here they come.

*Shouting of attacking men. Gunfire.*

Jim: Heavens. What a pity. They'll have us.

Tommy: Sorry old man. I'm afraid it's all up. I can't go any further.

Jim: Well. Leave me old chap. And save yourself.

Tommy: That'd be blown for a sail. Here. Just sit here under this old cottage. You be the gun. I'll have one or two before they have us.

*Sound of shouting and approaching men.*

Tommy: There's one or two left anyway. Now old man Goodbye.

Jim: Look down. Look there. In that light.

*Sound of hymn "Abide with me" in the background.*

Jim: Listen to that singing. There. Look. There's some people all in white singing over there. Look. They look like Angels.

Tommy: Poor old Jim. I'm afraid it's all up with you.

Jim: No. No. They're waving the beggars back.

Tommy: Good Heavens Jim! I see them. They look like the Angels we used to see in the plays of home old boy. Thank God we're saved. Here! They are Angels.

Soldier/officer approaching: There are two more.

Another soldier reinforcing: You hurt boys?

Tommy: No sir! Only Jim here. Be careful. Thank Heaven I got him here safely. And the Angels were real ones after all.

*Fade out the sound of battle. [54].*

### 3.2. Textual Analysis of "The Angels of Mons" Phonograph as Audio-Drama

The descriptive sketch has an intensity of action, dialogue, characterization, sound design and sound performance that uses the limited characteristics of mechanical recording technology very well. Jim and Tommy will have been placed as close to the main horn microphone as possible and in the early phonograph company studios it was unusual to use more than one.

The script focuses on the fortunes of the two main characters being chased by the grey hoards of the Kaiser's infantry and also being bombarded by German artillery. The story dramatizes the exhaustion and desperation of the retreat from Mons. This is what Edward Dwyer in real documentary for Regal described as a nightmare with the proviso: "unless you've been through it you can't imagine what an agonizing time it was. We used to do from 20 to 25 miles a day" [30]. The difference in language between the fiction and the documentary is that Dwyer speaks like a 19-year-old greengrocer's assistant from Fulham who joined the army about eighteen months before the outbreak of the Great War. The dramatization of Jim and Tommy appears to be how middle class producers or officers would imagine the other ranks speaking to each other. Grammar is fouled but the representation is respectable and sentimental: "Don't matter whether I'm married or not. My old woman would never

forgive me if I left you here.” And it is “old man” and “old chap”, and “poor old”. It may be significant that it is the other ranks who are characterized as seeing and hearing the Angels and believing that they “were real ones after all.” Perhaps it was not seemly to invest the officer class with any hint of vulnerability or susceptibility to hallucination, supernatural suspicion, or need for religious vision.

It would be another eleven years before anyone attempted to write a book on how to script sound dramas. This would be *Radio Drama And How To Write It* by Gordon Lea [55] and a response to the new world of radio broadcasting by the BBC that had been experimenting with storytelling for the microphone from 1922. Lea’s views as a practitioner of radio drama production coincided with analysis and debate in various editions of *The Radio Times* during the 1920s [55–63]. He advocated a direct and intimate method [55] and the creation of a total mental vision so that the listener operates as somebody who overhears drama [55].

“The Angels of Mons” could be said to follow his preferred method. The 1915 phonograph drama dramatizes character through action in Lea’s preferred “Self-Contained Method” of technique [55] (pp. 54–56), understands the importance, role and value of music [55] (p. 37), is written and performed “not to make its appeal to a crowd but to an individual” [55] (p. 43). The word picture is developed gradually with exposition of the story through dialogue even in a duration of less than three minutes. The action develops in dialogue combined with sound effects “to produce an illusion of naturalness” [55] (p. 56). In this way “The Angels of Mons” connects with what Lea defined in his eponymous chapter “The Listener’s Part” [55] (p. 67). In the mini-drama recorded by Regal, the actors are intensely performing an emotional crisis for a new dramatic medium in which “The listener is in direct touch with the player—there is no intervening convention- no barrier. Soul speaks to soul” [55] (p. 69).

The sound effects are undoubtedly cartoonish and theatrical to 21st century ears. However, radio drama had a long way to go during the 1920s before a settled method and art of representing reality through sound symbolism could be developed. There was a celebrated occasion when the BBC’s first director of drama productions let off a shotgun in the open staircase of the BBC’s Savoy Hill headquarters in his quest for better gunfire sounds in radio plays [64] (p. 169). “The Angels of Mons” production would have required the signing of “Abide With Me”, the simulation of artillery and guns and the shouting of approaching Germans to be performed five to ten feet from the actors playing Jim and Tommy. As Martland writes, the Australian singer and performer Peter Dawson, became aware that a special technique was required in order to maximize the potential of the early horn microphone: “In those days one of the most important secrets of making a good evenly balanced record was the weaving in and out from the mouth of the funnel. You had to think ahead of your tone emission to know when to move forward and when to move away” [14] (p. 182).

However, the dramatic imperative of “The Angels of Mons” record succeeds in communicating what was raw and real in Edward Dwyer’s recollection of retreating in a march with little to eat or rest: “We filled our haversacks with biscuits and ate them as we marched along. [...] Although I’m only a youngster I’ve seen about as much fighting as is good for any man.” [30] In the sound drama the character Jim is certainly experiencing what Dwyer called a “nightmare”: “I can’t do it. I can’t even stand. You leave me here and look after yourself. I can’t.” [54] Dwyer’s service papers reveal he was treated for a septic heel in the autumn of 1914, probably the result of the forty mile march from the Aisne to the Marne [31]. Is it any wonder that in the exhaustion of that campaign soldiers may have dreamed or hallucinated about Angels giving assistance? “The Angels of Mons” drama does not state

categorically that supernatural forces intervened to save the BEF. The play presents the idea that the two fictional characters Jim and Tommy thought they had seen the Angels and that they were real to them. There is no reference whatsoever to Arthur Machen's bowmen of Agincourt. There is therefore absolutely no reference to ghosts. The soldiers' imaginations are manifesting a vision of Christian iconography and faith; drawn from the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

### 3.3. *The Cultural and Social Context of Phonograph Listening*

Martland asserts that by the beginning of the Great War cheap gramophones and records "were an essential part of domestic leisure activity, especially in the homes of the skilled and semi-skilled working classes" [14] (p. 117). Phonograph and gramophone consumption was therefore no longer the preserve of the elite and affluent middle classes. He sees the industry as having become an "established feature in the growing leisure, cultural and communications revolution" [14]. The beginning of the First World War saw a consumer panic and sudden drop in the sales of luxury goods, but the British record companies responded with war record supplements and the marketing of patriotic records. This was certainly an initiative of Louis Sterling, the European manager of the Columbia Phonograph Company. This initiative was widely imitated by the other competing companies [14] (p. 207). Sales rapidly recovered after 1914 and the expansion of consumption through the conflict was substantial for most of the British companies. For example, Winner Records peaked with sales of 2,100,000 in 1917 compared with less than a million in 1914 [14] (p. 210).

*Talking Machine News* speculated that the demand for domestic leisure entertainment was driven by a social trend for people to retreat into their own homes rather than visit music halls and cinemas. It is also true that the standard of living for the working class population was rising. In addition, as Martland observes: "the largest single market for records and gramophones were the British armies fighting in France, Flanders and elsewhere" [14] (p. 222). The BBC and Radio Normandie broadcaster Christopher Stone recalled the significance of the Decca portable gramophone machine at the Front Line: "The Decca arrived with half-a-dozen records while the battalion was in reserve billets at Bouzencourt, near Albert, in January 1917, and from that moment life in the headquarters mess was altered" [14] (p. 224).

Further evidence that gramophone listening was a source of entertainment on the Western Front and other global theatres was provided in the memoirs of war correspondent Sir Philip Gibbs. He recollected discovering an officer listening to opera in the ruins of a city in Northern France and compared it to hearing a lark's song at dawn in Pompeii when the lava had cooled: "Suddenly there was the sound of a voice singing loud and clear with birdlike trills, as triumphant as a lark's song to the dawn. It was a woman's voice singing behind the shutters of a shelled city! Some English officer was there with his gramophone" [65] (pp. 27–28).

Fred Gaisberg of the London Gramophone Company reflected in 1946 that during the war "the cheap, portable machine became all the rage and proved a boon to the soldiers, as it broke the monotony of their routine existence in the dug-out. Popular patriotic songs were recorded and distributed in thousands; the gramophone was encouraged by the military authorities of both sides, who looked upon it as a vital necessity" [9] (p. 76). Gaisberg said soldiers returned home with the vast quantities of these cheap machines and so "paved the way for a wonderful post-war boom" [9] (p. 77).

Academics in cultural and media studies have theorized about the significance of phonograph listening and culture, and their studies do include some textual and contextual analysis of the scripts and sounds produced. Examples of the genre include Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* and Kate Lacey's *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* published in 2005 and 2013 respectively [66,67]. Sterne briefly engages with a few early accounts of recording for the phonograph and entries on descriptive records such as from a 1904 Columbia catalogue offering "Capture of the Forts at Port Arthur (a scene from one of the Russian forts, with cannonading, and shriek of shells. The Russian Band is heard playing the National Anthem. The Japanese approach, headed by their band playing their National Air, and take possession of the forts, amid loud cries of 'Banzai!)" [66] (p. 244). He recognizes that "descriptive specialities were the predecessor of more enduring audio arts, such as Foley effects in film and the use of sound effects in radio drama" [66] (p. 245). This certainly touches on what had been achieved in the pre-radio age. His study theorizes the present media world through an investigation of the past: "Sound leaves its traces, and our interest in those traces is a fact of modern life. The call to turn our attention to a continuously constructed audible past is part of the present" [66] (p. 351). He argues that "*The Audible Past* is a story about how that power came to be" [66].

Lacey is similarly strong on theorizing the present by drawing on secondary sources concerning phonograph listening. When investigating what phonograph listening meant to its contemporary audience, she argues: "not only do the recordings sound dim and 'imperfect' to contemporary listeners, the localized and partisan decisions about *what* and *who* to record are also more plainly evident in hindsight, belonging to a particular moment in gender, race, and other social relations, bound up with particular concerns about status, authority and propriety, and expressions of particular modes of address and entertainment that disturb modern sensibilities and expectations" [67] (p. 91). Again this is a good example of the present judging the past.

Such writing appears to be analyzing an imagined world of constructed memory in order to comment on, or seek to explain the present media world. This may account for the fashion of engaging with Jacques Derrida's idea of hauntology set out his 1993 text *Specters of Marx* [68,69]. He discusses a tendency for present day society to rely and exist only in relation to the ghosts of the past: "...this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes [...] an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets..." [68] (pp. 63, 202). In some respects the 1996 *Guardian* feature article on the phonograph recording of the real witness of the retreat from Mons, Edward Dwyer, hauntologizes him when it speaks of his leaving "a rare memorial", and concludes "And there it all lies: the story of just one of the 750,000 British men of the first world war who never came home. Alone among them though, this one left a recording of his voice and so a little bit of him still lives" [31]. The feature writer, Stephen Bates, had been particularly impressed, or should I say "haunted" by Dwyer's singing of "Hello, Hello, Here We Are Again": "Then, with a final whoop, the voice died away, the final hellos hanging mournfully in the air as if calling out from the grave" [31]. It would seem Bates found the truth about Edward Dwyer's fate "almost unbearably poignant", because he would learn that the young soldier would return to the front after collecting his V.C. and undertaking his recruiting duties, only to be shot dead in action during the Battle of the Somme on September 3rd 1916 [31].

### 3.4. The Relevance of Spiritualism

Sound and spiritualism were cultural and intellectual preoccupations during this period and had scientific legitimacy. However, to what extent did the expression of spiritualism in sound serve a propagandist objective? When John Durham Peters in *Speaking Into The Air* referred to Sir Oliver Lodge's 1916 publication *Raymond, or Life and Death, with Examples of the Evidence of Survival of Memory and Affection after Death* [70] (p. 164) this is evidence of how the war claimed the lives of nearly one million people and the catastrophic rippling out of family grief in British society would place much greater imaginative and emotional significance in the present voices of past beings declared dead. Public interest and reflection on myth, sound, ghosts and spiritualism can be appreciated with the popularity and impact of a phonograph reproduction of the poet Robert Browning's voice in May 1915, some 26 years after he had recorded it in the year of his death [71].

Lacey places great store on a *Times* newspaper advertisement for the Gramophone company release in 1910 of "Tolstoy's Last Message [67] (p. 58). This was a gramophone genre of celebrity voices that would continue to be marketed as the public interest preservation of famous people who had died. The *Times* would later report in August 1925 a collaboration between the BBC and the London Gramophone Company to produce a program of 'speeches, vocal and instrumental music, and recitations by distinguished persons now dead to be broadcast from old gramophone records. [...] The first broadcast in the series will be made from a gramophone record made by Tennyson'" [72]. A spiritualist reading of the idea that the replaying of a dead person's voice is in some way ghostly is a cultural backdrop to a time of immense social grieving. It is not in itself a tool of propaganda.

The issue of sound recording, playback, ghosts and spiritualism is therefore very much in the background to "The Angels of Mons" phenomenon. It is categorically stated in the public debate that Arthur Machen had about it. His fabrication through fiction of the ghosts of the historical Bowmen of Agincourt has informed the imaginative myth of divine Christian Angels saving British soldiers in the role of ghostly munitions of either the mind or materialized battlefield weaponry [50]. Christian spiritualism in symbolizing the idea that God is on the side of Great Britain and her allies is therefore deployed for propagandist purposes. It is useful to investigate the direct or indirect links between spiritualism and this specific sound media production and in doing so it would be right to acknowledge at the very least an indirect link.

It would also be useful to respect the considerable body of literature exploring the background of spiritualism and psychical research in England through the late part of the 19th century and leading up to the Great War. Janet Oppenheim in *The Other World* proved that there was public fascination with spiritualism as a surrogate religion or science of the future [73]. Alex Owen in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* [74] and *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* [75] has effectively investigated the paradox of metaphysical quests and occult experimentation during the dawn of modernism. Marlene Tromp has also investigated the rise of spiritualism and how it undermined traditional female roles and the rhetoric of imperialism in *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* [76].

Jeffrey Sconce in *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* has successfully argued that at this time there was a publicly imagined second world [77]. This existed in the spaces between the sender and the receiver of new media communication. The phonograph was

new media. The ability of sound recording technology to preserve the sound of the voices of the dead was indeed a novelty. Sconce defines those spaces that transport and harbor electricity, impulses, waves and data as “sovereign worlds” [77] (p. 9). A considerable amount of scholarship has been generated that investigates the connections between late Victorian fiction, the representation of ghosts, disembodied voices, hearing, and sound reproductive technology. This includes John M. Picker’s *Victorian Soundscapes* that would be quoted in Melissa Kendall McLeod’s dissertation on “Sound of Terror: Hearing Ghosts in Victorian Fiction” [78]. She quotes Picker’s observation that the phonograph became “the repository for voices from all time” [79] and links this with Charles Babbage’s assertion that “the essence of these voices survives their material aurality” [80].

I think there is a valid argument that the manifestation of the symbols of the Christian miracle in “The Angels of Mons” was a sovereign world separate from the reality that Sergeant Edward Dwyer was talking about. Between the middle of the 19th century and through to the end of the First World War, the private and public imagination was coming to the terms with a preservation of an imitation of individual being after death. This involved photography, phonography, and filmography. Of course there is a difference between experiencing a Christian religious vision, perhaps through hallucinatory exhaustion, and seeing and believing in the ghosts of Henry the Fifth’s archers at Agincourt being retrieved from the medieval battlefield of 1415 to sort out the modern industrial charnel house of artillery and machine-gun in 1914.

Some historians, such as Jay Winter, appear to counsel caution in too readily assigning media texts a cultural significance in being the expression of socio-psychological enthusiasm for spiritualism. Winter states that the purpose of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European cultural history* was “to go beyond the so-called modernist/traditionalist divide to a more sophisticated appreciation of the way Europeans imagined the war and its terrible consequences. I do so by concentrating primarily on aspects of one particular theme in the cultural history of the war: the theme of mourning and its private and public expression” [81] (p. 5). Winter devotes an entire chapter to the subject of “Spiritualism and the ‘Lost Generation’”, and a section of analysis “Legends divine and demonic” discusses “the most celebrated of these tales [...] the appearance of angelic figures over British soldiers at Mons” [81] (p. 67). He observes that the “emotional mood of the first months of the war created the perfect atmosphere for such eschatological images, which were incorporated into sermons and religious publications in 1915” [81] (p. 68). Winter concludes that “the appeal of spiritualism, alongside many other traditional motifs, was related directly to the universality of bereavement in the Europe of the Great War and its aftermath” [81] (p. 77).

Winter also discusses the dramatic use of ghosts in Abel Gance’s film *J’Accuse*, filmed in the last years of the Great War (1917–1919): “...sequence of the dead rising from their graves is one of the great scenes of the early cinema. Its force is made even more poignant when we realize that most of the men we see on the screen were actual French soldiers lent to Gance by the French army to play in this film. [...] Gance himself noted that some of those playing the dead in his film soon became the dead. Representation and reality had become one” [81] (p. 15). Gance’s first edit in 1919 had the ghosts of fallen soldiers haunting the lives of their communities to remind them of the sacrifice they had made and a later edit of 1937 appears to transform their purpose into an anti-war theme: “In effect, Diaz rises from the dead to be their spokesman, their emissary to those who don’t know what war is” [81] (p. 17). *J’Accuse* [82] has attracted considerable critical attention and a recent DVD booklet contains an essay

by Leslie K. Hankins “Abel Gance’s *J’Accuse* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*: Re-reading a Modernist Novel by the Light of the Silver Screen” [83]. In this article Hankins articulates modernist links between Woolf’s seminal novel and the creative communication of the Great War ghosts and supernatural phenomena in Gance’s media text. Hankins acknowledges that it is impossible to be certain that Virginia Woolf saw *J’Accuse* when it reached London in 1920. However, it is possible to speculate that Woolf had been exposed or had access to the discussion about the film along with the publication of Abel Gance’s book *J’Accuse: Apres le Film* in 1922. As Hankins observes: “Abel Gance and Virginia Woolf were both experimental artists; Gance worked with the new medium of cinema, using visual poetry, superimposition, cross-cutting and other innovations in film, as Woolf invented narrative designs and lyrical language to map consciousness in new ways in writing” [83].

It is, therefore, perfectly valid to explore whether the use of the supernatural presence of Angels in the phonograph version of “The Angels of Mons” links spiritualism with modernism. I think it does. The ghosts in the 1915 audio-drama represent supernatural representations of deist intervention in a shocking and growing scale of military conflict and casualty. This inevitably accelerated and widened the private and public experience of mourning at a time when social communication was being accentuated and experienced by modern mechanical media. The supernatural intervention of Christian Angels does not occur in any previously produced phonograph “Descriptive Sketch”, that dramatizes an actual battle of the contemporary age. Of course, the phonograph does not cross-cut narrative and reinvent consciousness as an expression in dramatic writing. However, it does experiment with the new medium of sound recording and push the boundaries of what can be achieved in foreground and background performance in front of a mechanically powered horn microphone. In addition, a modern medium of sonic reproduction attempts to blend a representation of a real event with a performance of the Christian supernatural.

Modernism is now a more widely drawn academic doctrine that does not confine itself to an elitist and avant-garde sensibility that lays waste to all the traditions, cultural beliefs and values of “pre-modernism”. A London County Council quantity surveyor invalidated from the front line through dysentery such as Major Alfred Edward Rees, and phonograph recording pioneer from New York City with a dodgy penchant for peddling sonic pornography such as Russell Hunting are entitled to be identified as contributing to modernist expression in sound communication. This is also the case with Wilvir and the unknown performers in Regal’s 1915 recording of “The Angels of Mons”. It should be acceptable to argue that modernist and traditional motifs are mixed and paralleled in a negotiation of past, present and future techniques of storytelling.

### 3.5. *The Relevance of Modernism*

The presence of ghosts and myths of the past in juxtaposition with the reality of the present is the modernist literary style present in T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* [84] and Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* [85]. Sound production in “The Angels of Mons” and other descriptive sketches of the Great War is reproducing the modern industrialized sonic environment of mechanized war. This is part of a propagandist operation that is greater in scale and magnitude than any military conflict of the past. The process of persuasion in phonographs mixed fiction and non-fiction and used a new medium of audio drama to conjure a variety of illusions. This includes the myth of the Angels of Mons.

The First World War of 1914–1918 was the first mass media war [86] (p. 212). As the Great War became industrialized and “modernist”, the media propaganda dimension or “battle by communication” harnessed the cutting edge technology of sound play between four to eight years before the BBC began broadcasting radio plays. The scale of destruction represented by the vista of No Man’s Land in Figure 10 was matched by the modern and technological power of media. I argue that the bands of performers/artists responsible, who are likely to have included soldiers with experience of active service, pioneered audio drama techniques of performance and sound design in an attempt to boost morale and support Lord Kitchener’s command: “Your Country Needs You”.

However, the use of the critical concepts modernism and modernity is an intellectually contested debate substantially engaged in by the disciplines of English literatures studies and media arts. Modernism in literature, particularly critical observations about the audiogenic, or radiophonic in poetry prose, and “the auditory imagination,” have been heavily referenced to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) [84], James Joyce’s *Ulysses* [87], and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) [85]. There has been some analysis on the significance and influence of modernists and futurists in relation to sound and noise utterance. However, the literary phonetics of Filippo Marinetti’s poem “Zang Tumb Tumb Tumb Tuuumb Tuuum Tuuum Tuuum” (1914) [88], to which should be added Luigi Russolo’s 1913 *The Art of Noises* [89] and the subsequent Futurist Radio Manifesto by Marinetti and Pino Masnata in 1933 [90,91], T.S. Eliot’s play *Sweeney Agonistes: Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama* (1926) [92] and Ezra Pound’s radio operas broadcast by the BBC between 1931 and 1933 [93] are not present in the surviving texts identified in this research. As with spiritualism they are background and peripheral.

“The Angels of Mons” and other audio drama texts imagined and represented the war and this was a development of modern media for its time. The phonograph mini-dramas were not being produced outside a modernist context. They were the foundation stones for what was to follow with audio and radio drama. An iconoclastic attack against prevalent aesthetic traditions would happen on the radio during the 1920s, when modernism was more clearly and self-consciously stated and could be experimented within the BBC—a media institution that had cultural status, power and hierarchy.

The cultural links between BBC radio, sound drama and modernism can be tangibly explored through textual and contextual analysis and have already led to considerable academic attention from what might be considered the first sociological study of radio by Hilda Matheson in *Broadcasting* (1933) [94], herself an associate of “the Bloomsbury set,” to more recent attention in Cardiff and Scannell’s *A Social History of Broadcasting: 1922–1939—Serving the Nation v. 1*, (1991) [95], Avery’s *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922–1938*, (2006) [96], Cohen, Coyle and Lewty’s *Broadcasting Modernism*, (2009) [97] and journal articles such as Frattorola’s “The Modernist ‘Microphone Play’: Listening in the dark to the BBC.” (2009) [98] and Hendy’s “Painting with sound: The Kaleidoscopic World of Lance Sieveking, a British Radio Modernist.” (2012) [99]. The development of early BBC radio drama during the 1920s, in the context of modernism, has also received authoritative academic analysis in the research of Alan Beck (2000) [100] and Tina Pepler (1988) [101].

The focus of aesthetic production in sound during the Great War was as much orientated to the microphone as it was at the BBC during the 1920s and 30s. Frattarola can assert on the basis of her study of the plays of Tyrone Guthrie, Val Gielgud, Lawrence du Garde Peach, D.G. Bridson and Louis Macneice that “...the technology of the radio presented a model for modernist writers, showing them

how noises, voices, and music could be juxtaposed in new ways and exposing them to new forms, while modernist writers influenced how radio programs were shaped and what aesthetic possibilities were available to the writer of radio drama” [98] (pp. 464–465). Hendy can declare on the basis of studying Lance Sieveking’s *The Stuff of Radio* (published in 1934), his papers at the Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington, a wide portfolio of published prose, poetry and illustration, and a focus on a 90-minute auteured montage feature broadcast by the BBC in 1928: “The ‘synthesis’ of forms and sounds that lay at the heart of *The Kaleidoscope*, drawing as it did on both his own life and the very latest ideas in art and cinema, was symbolic of Sieveking’s larger achievement. It was vivid proof that his chosen medium, radio, and his chosen institution, the BBC, were far from being the closed and insular worlds that some assumed. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, largely through Sieveking’s efforts, both were woven a little more closely into the rich fabric of British modernist culture” [99] (p. 200). Margaret Fisher’s study of Ezra Pound’s BBC experiments between 1931–1933 would lead to the realization that “...between the first experiments and the early years of institutional broadcasting, the collective imagination was exposed to a surrealist world of noise fragments, a chansonnier of angels singing and reading on the air. Pound’s radio dramas would resuscitate some of the flavor of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century chansonnier, a compilation of poems, with biographies and anecdotes related to the poets” [93] (p. 42).

“The Angels of Mons” 1915 phonograph represented reality and myth in a modern medium on the subject of modern war, in a cultural context of “modernism” being discussed and debated. Its intrinsic qualities bear up well to the critical values defined as qualitative through published radio drama criticism of the 1920s and 1930s. There is more to modernism than poets, artists, and writers who were educated at Oxford and Cambridge and hung out with the Bloomsbury group. “The Angels of Mons” is dramatic storytelling engaging with present realism and past mythology. In this case, it is dramatizing the retreat of the BEF from Mons, and this was a reality present in the minds of 1915 British society as a catastrophic event with heavy casualties that had occurred less than a year before the release of the record. There is also the presence of the Christian myth or miracle of angels imagined by two soldiers at least intervening in the materialist present by literary juxtaposition, and performed dramatically in the new modernist medium of recording and distributed sound technology- the phonograph. There is, therefore, a valid argument that this production is at least proto-modernist and could be defined as modernist expression. It was pioneering and an originating form of what would later become known as the broadcast “microphone play”.

### 3.6. *Are the Sound Drama Phonographs Examples of “Modernist’ Propaganda”?*

The sound phonograph clearly had a role as a new medium of propagandist sound entertainment and communication. As illustrated propaganda travelled beyond traditional photographs to “Lantern slides, picture postcards, cigarette cards [...] posters [...] maps and diagrams, pictures, cartoons and drawings” [102] (p. 121), so sound messaging was no longer confined to an orchestral score or concert hall.

The scale of the Great War was accompanied by a similar scale of media publication. The media was as intense as the military conflict itself: “ashtrays in the shape of British tanks, gramophone recordings of political speeches and popular songs such as “Keep the Home Fires Burning”, and a wide range of

ephemera” [102] (p. 131). The 78 rpm discs would be spun on turntables at the front and combined with live rhetoric in siren calls “relayed across No Man’s Land with musical interludes” [102] (p. 135). The imaginative absurdity of such stunts in some ways seems like a burlesque disc-jockeying of hate hypnotism that would not be effectively represented until the surreal theatricality of Richard Attenborough’s film of “Oh What A Lovely War in 1969” [103]. This film was derived from a Theatre Workshop musical inspired by Charles Chilton’s dramatized 1961 BBC radio feature “The Long Long Trail”. This was itself derived and inspired by the creative tension between phonograph popular musical culture of the Great War and the soldiers’ morphing of the lyrics to construct their own ironic messages [104].

Great War propaganda established a political strategy in creatively disconnecting language and communication from truth, reality and rational meaning. Lying is surely the ultimate form of counter-realism and false-consciousness. What sound and propaganda have in common is the treatment and exploitation of human emotion. Montage is a more emotional form of communication and can deploy creative, disruptive and sometimes irrational manipulation of the narrative of pre-existing media forms. It is a modernist form of propaganda. Yet there is no evidence in sound phonographs published before 1918 of such modernist style collages of sound being made for propagandist purposes. “The Departure of a Troopship” is in fact sound montage though not modernist in style. What it does do though is generate an atmosphere of sentimental patriotism. The emotion of the goodbyes at the quayside followed by the cross-fading of steamship whistle and the play of the national anthem is certainly propagandist in so far as it evokes patriotism.

The more explicit word based descriptive sketches certainly set out to combine the emotional medium of sound with texts that demonized the Hun as spies and brutes on the war front, and the coward and slacker in civilian clothes on the Home Front. Heroism, gallantry and valor by “our boys” is also the essential message of the vast majority of the sound dramas; horror, gore, and the demonic nightmare of actual fighting minimized, trivialized or kept silent. Even the 1918 recording by Will Gaisberg of “Gas Shells Bombardment” sounds like an assemblage of polite commands from soldiers at a village military tattoo using pop guns and fireworks rather than real artillery and poison gas.

### 3.7. Great War Phonograph Dramas as Part of the Propagandist Silo

The Great War had been a creative propagandist silo for journalism and the arts. At least 12 national newspaper editors received knighthoods for marshalling their communication skills for mass media munitions of the mind [86] (p. 214). As Sanders and Taylor observed Charles Masterman convened academic conferences within days of war being declared in 1914 and the first was “attended by a galaxy of literary figures and critics including J. M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, Gilbert Murray, G.M. Trevelyan and H.G. Wells” [102] (p. 39). The more identifiably modernist author and poet Ford Maddox Ford was in attendance and penned two pamphlets before going on to serve in the trenches in France. Masterman’s conference of writers was followed by a manifesto of fifty-two “well-known men of letters” published in the correspondence column of the *Times* on 18th September 1914 [86,105]. *The Times* announced on 22nd September that a further 21 named authors “who have interested themselves more especially

in the history and progress of democratic ideas” had sent letters and desired to “associate themselves with the declaration” previously headlined “Britain’s Destiny and Duty [...] A Righteous War” [106].

**Figure 10.** “No Mans Land, Flanders Field, France, 1919”, Library of Congress. Photo by W. L. King, Millersberg, Ohio; by courtesy of Military Intelligence Div., General Staff, U.S. Army.



The seminal author and celebrant of propaganda as public relations, Edward Bernays, would quote H.G. Wells in 1928: “Ideas and phrases can now be given an effectiveness greater than the effectiveness of any personality and stronger than any sectional interest” [107] (p. 40). The War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House employed the novelist Anthony Hope Hawkins as literary advisor to Masterman and A.S. Watt as literary agent [102] (pp. 40–41). “Galsworthy and Wells both bashed out their Wellington House articles for nothing, to the alarm of their literary agent” [86] (p. 229). The dons of Oxford University’s History faculty mobilized their intellect and their overwhelming presence at Wellington House meant that the propagandist media war was also a media dons’ war [86] (p. 228).

Wellington House managed the authorization and accreditation of “war artists” beginning with Muirhead Bone followed by his brother-in-law, the portraitist Francis Dodd and by the end of the war a cadre of nearly 90 including establishment figures such as Sir John Lavery, Sir William Orpen, C.R.W. Nevison, Eric Kennington, and the more modernist and avant-garde Paul Nash and Wyndham Lewis [102] (pp. 122–123). David Hendy has explored the creative, aesthetic and psychological *convivencia* resonating from Paul Nash’s friendship and collaboration with the British radio modernist Lance Sieveking [99] (p. 181).

The novelist John Buchan was appointed director of the Department of Information in 1917 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He had been an active propagandist previously at Wellington House and through the deployment of his publishing house, Nelson. This was symptomatic of what Niall Ferguson describes as autonomy of private media institutional leadership: “not produced by governmental agencies at all, but by autonomous organizations or private individuals” [86] (p. 226). Government bodies simply coordinated and this would appear to have been the structure and method of sound propaganda production by the 78 rpm recording companies such as HMV, Columbia and Regal. This was how the Dutch artist and cartoonist Louis Raemakers had his critical depiction of German stereotypes distributed across the United States in some 2255 newspapers by November 1917 [102] (p. 177).

I argue there is a consensus of First World War historians that the modern nature of propagandist mobilization in the context of a modernized war was a significant event in military, social and cultural history. Richard S. Lambert in the discussion book series on *Propaganda* in 1938 wrote: “In Britain,

above all, propaganda was necessary for the stimulation of recruiting- a motive which rapidly impaired standards of truth and impartiality” [108] (p. 24). There has been considerable theoretical discussion of propaganda’s performance in the context of “the first total war” [8] (p. 2) in modern history, since it was waged on all fronts against civilian populations as much as in the military and economic dimensions. The fashioning of modern memory in terms of the ritual of mourning has been strongly discussed in terms of literature and media [52,81]. The social and cultural dimensions of propaganda development in scale and content have been rigorously and comprehensively analyzed [33] but the role and extent of media content and institutional analysis of electronic and recorded sound communication in terms of dramatic and documentary speech has not been emphasized.

Haste stresses that First World War propaganda can be distinguished as “rationalized and modernized”, and was mobilized at the home front by a patriotic coalition of government, press and private media organizations, to which the leading record/phonograph production companies can be included [8] (p. 40). This partnership of private corporate press barons, cultural industries and government operated in a communications structure of distortion and exaggeration. It was also combined with subtle censorship in terms of patriotic consensus and self-restraint and a suspension of a level of freedom of information that was tolerated by the British democratic tradition.

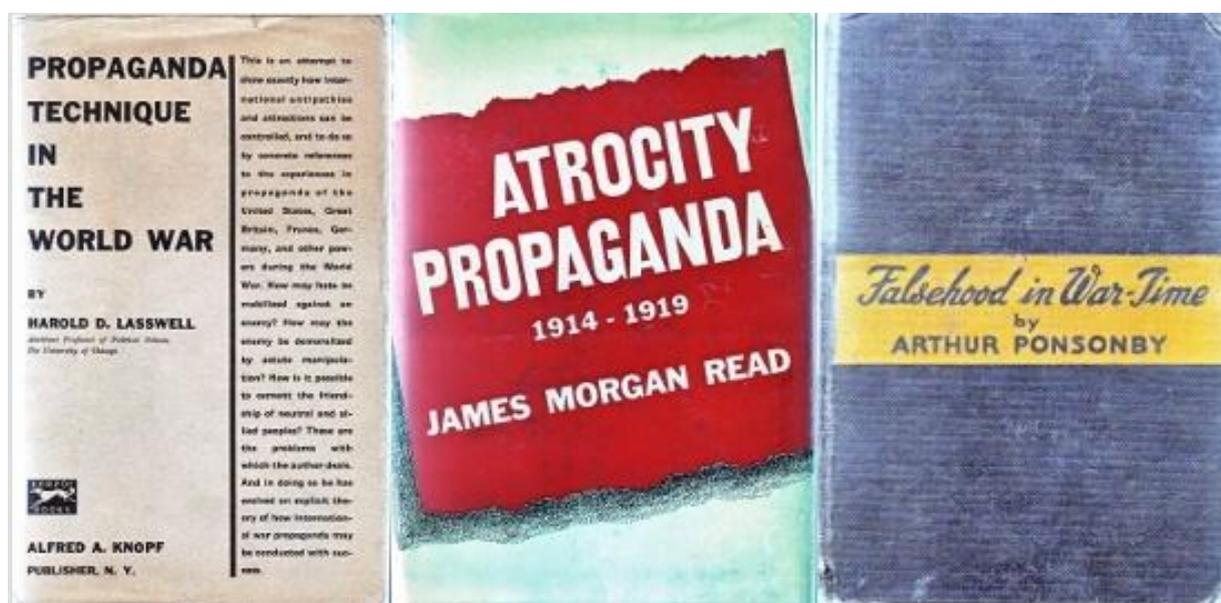
First World War propaganda did not necessarily wholly cover up or conceal from the Home Front the horrors of the conflict. Edward Dwyer in his phonograph performance was explicit about the nightmare of the retreat from Mons and the deprivations of soldiering. “The Angels of Mons” play depicted in dramatization the desperation of two soldiers who needed the help of God’s angels to survive. It can be argued that the allied propaganda strategy was successful not because there was repeated lying on a grand scale but because its effectiveness was based on truth. The sound plays represented dimensions of the reality. German soldiers did massacre civilians in Belgium. A German U-Boat did sink a civilian liner, the Lusitania in 1915, killing 1198 non-combatants and “no ships were sunk without warning and no citizens of neutral countries were deliberately killed by the Royal Navy” [86] (p. 247). When these events were dramatized by sound phonograph, this was a representation of reality.

### 3.8. *Are the Descriptive Sketch Sound Dramas Culpable for “Atrocity Propaganda”?*

It has been argued that the Allied success in winning the propaganda war between 1914–1918 subsequently attracted the admiration of Adolf Hitler and Dr. Josef Goebbels [109] (pp. 12, 104). The Nazis appreciated that propaganda should tell big lies that were simple, empowered by repetition and would also match the techniques of mass media advertising narrative and texture. During the war the Allied directors of government propaganda policy were anxious to conceal the extent of state manipulation. However, afterwards, some of the authors wanted to take credit for their patriotic contribution to the war that was intended to end all wars. Two publications in 1920, *The Secrets of Crewe House* [25] and *How We Advertised America* [26], unfurled the sophistication and deliberation of British Imperial and American propaganda operations. These were challenged by an ethical backlash, perhaps best represented by Liberal MP Arthur Ponsonby’s 1928 exposé *Falsehood in War-time* [27]. He purported to outline an assortment of lies circulated throughout the nations during the Great War. The ethical revisionism included academic scholarship and Harold Lasswell’s 1927 text *Propaganda Technique In The World War* [28] can be regarded as a foundation text for propaganda

studies at American and British universities. These two texts along with James Morgan Read's similarly critical *Atrocity Propaganda 1914–1919* [109] are shown in Figure 11. The propagandist content of the First World War mini-dramas can be analyzed not only as a textual method of persuasion, but for their culpability in disseminating deliberate untruths or dimensions of false consciousness. The dramatized descriptive sketches yield no evidence of communicating examples of what Ponsonby and Lasswell complained about as “atrocity propaganda”. The short sound plays primarily celebrate patriotism, courage, heroism, and highlight comradeship. Apart from the ruthless summary execution of German spies operating behind British lines, they exclude any pre-occupation with the horrors of war in all its demonic pity as later expressed by the anti-war novelists and poets such as Sassoon, Graves and Owen. To that extent the Great War sound dramas are culpable only for the propagation of false-consciousness.

**Figure 11.** Three influential books written between the First and Second World Wars that analyzed the techniques and challenged the ethics of Great War propaganda: “Propaganda Technique In The World War” by Harold D. Lasswell (1928), “Atrocity Propaganda 1914–1919” by James Morgan Read (1941) and “Falsehood in War-Time” by Arthur Ponsonby.



Historians have long argued that Great War propaganda engaged the structured distortion and exaggeration of information through new and old media, exponentially operating as mass media in a developing mass democracy invested by widening education and literacy [34,36,109–114]. This was also combined with direct state censorship and indirect privatized self-censorship. Media communications became subject to the Official Secret Acts (1911), the Defence of the Realm Act, known by its acronym DORA (1914) and the establishment of bodies not gestated or circumscribed by statutory power, but voluntarily negotiated by the Executive and media industries. They were the D-Notice Committee (1912) and British Board of Film Censors, also known by its acronym BBFC (1912) which was established by the British film industry following the passing of the Cinematograph Act 1909 that required cinemas to obtain licenses for the showing of films from local authorities [115].

It is difficult to locate surviving media institutional archives for the private record companies producing the phonograph mini-dramas that can throw any light on how the productions operated within this nexus of censorship and ideological control. All the texts located and analyzed appear to comply with prevailing state body and delegated organizational policy.

There is no evidence during the Great War that phonograph producers of descriptive sketches succeeded in performing “agitational contemporaneity”, as defined by the Canadian television drama producer Sydney Newman. Newman pursued a policy of provocative and socially challenging commissioning during the late 1950s and early 1960s on British television. There is no evidence that the Great War sound dramas met the forces of “institutional containment” a counter-phrase conceptualized by the academic Madeleine Macmurrough-Kavanagh [116,117] who analyzed the cultural impact of Sydney Newman’s work. Equally there are archives or texts in other media identifying issues and events of dramatic censorship as investigated by Tony Aldgate and James Crichton Robertson [118]. It can only be assumed that the producers and record companies were fully aware of Press Bureau/Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee directives.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Great War audio dramas represent a continuation of the genre of descriptive sketches that originated in the early phonograph industry at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. They represent a period of experimentation in writing and performing in front of early horn microphone and mechanical recording technology. It would seem that the Boer War and other pre-1914 conflicts inspired the early audio-dramas and sound montages. In the First World War listening to phonographs increased substantially. The descriptive sketch sought to represent realities, events, and mythologies from the home and war fronts.

I believe the sound dramas played a large role in the propaganda of the Great War despite the fact that in their marketing in catalogues and lists as “patriotic records” they were a minority strand of entertainment generally dominated by music. The commercial record companies did not produce them unless they were viable sellers and there was a demand for them. This was propaganda for the spoken word and the presence of Major A E Rees’ three record set “On Active Service” in the Columbia Record catalogue for 1922 suggests the demand continued long after the Armistice. The records could convey the sound of rhetoric, prejudice and a sanitized bonhomie of dramatized soldiering in France. They could dramatize significant events and blend that with mythology and legend as is the case with “The Angels of Mons”. This could also be combined with the small shoots of documentary journalism and interview where eye witnesses such as Sergeant Edward Dwyer and the actor Kenneth Douglas could talk about the nightmare of marching in retreat, battle in the trenches, and the U-boat sinking of passenger liners on the high seas.

“The Angels of Mons” in 1915 succeeds in dramatizing a supernatural legend arising from the first year of the conflict. Christian Angels intervene to help two members of the BEF retreating from the Kaiser’s invasion of Belgium. All the evidence suggests this is a manifestation of Christian religiosity. There was a social and cultural background of spiritualism that was popular during the Great War because of the unprecedented scale of death and mourning. However, the mini-play does not use the legend of the Angels in a script and production that is identifiably modernist in style and genre. Nor

does it represent the phantoms of human beings recently killed or long dead. The record is only modern in terms of its use of technology and the newness of dramatizing a war event in this way. However, it is important not to invest the play and others like them with an imagined meaning that belongs more to the present than the past. As Jay Winter has argued the traditions and motifs of the past were not scorch-earthed and supplanted by modernity. The scale of grief and loss in the Great War was unprecedented and the social and cultural experience of mourning would manifest expression informed by the past and present. However, the sound dramas of the Great War were not purely media artifacts expressing anxiety and mourning. They were intended to entertain, mobilize opinion and attitudes and catalyze social action.

“The Angels of Mons” sound drama is certainly not as sophisticated and modernist as French film-maker Abel Gance’s *J’Accuse*. The sound play does not question or criticize the war and people involved in it. It does not summon the ghosts of previous mortal beings to challenge, condemn, or criticize. It patriotically symbolizes the idea that a Christian God and his angels are there to protect and comfort “our boys over there.” The hero in Gance’s film witnesses dead soldiers rising from their graves not to comfort or save, but to pass judgement on the living by marching through villages, towns and cities. The soldiers depicted in the film were described by Gance as “The Dead on Leave”. The Angels in the Regal sound drama are agents of God in action aimed at representing war as more survivable and bearable than it was.

“The Angels of Mons” sound dramatization, along with the other jaunty and vaudeville depictions of the war such as Major Alfred Rees’ “On Active Service” serial, were part of a technique of communicative deception industrialized and modernized in the Great War. It could be argued that propagandist deceit became an aesthetic conceit of modernism. However, there is little evidence of sound propaganda produced in Britain replicating the atrocity propaganda stories condemned as the media of hate and fabrication in the post war backlash of critical propaganda theorists and politicians such as Harold Lasswell and Arthur Ponsonby. The nearest we get to any atrocity is the summary killing of German spies who have infiltrated British trenches on the Western Front.

The argument linking propaganda with modernism is dependent on recognizing that the scale and complexity of media production is equal to that of the munitions in a mega-industrial killing war. To say that dislocating truth in media communication is an aesthetic technique of modernism is an interesting argument. Gance would trick the French Army into thinking he was making a patriotic film. A general observing thousands of French servicemen forming up in a field to create the title *J’accuse* would be fooled and confused. Dramatic devices and new technology were being manipulated to conjure and delude. Gance was responsible for this double irony while producing a palpably modernist text. Does the deception make the modernism, or the modernist texture and style of media production make the deception? Is it propagandist or counter-propagandist? Modernism cannot make a claim to using media expression for the purposes of persuasion even when it involves the communication of deliberate untruths. However, perhaps the modernist claim gains legitimacy when there is a dimension of irony, or a juxtaposition of realism with mythology; an interpolation of fact and fiction or even fantasy.

“The Angels of Mons” was one of a portfolio of mini-dramas that imagined the sound of U-Boat attacks, German air raids on British cities and seaside towns, soldiers traveling by boat to France, drills and marches, speeches by generals, heroic battles in the trenches, and authentic songs sung by the

soldiers of the Great War. They still emotionally resonate with a sense of nostalgic poignancy more than one hundred years after they were made. The language in part represents the detail and knowledge of the experiences of the ordinary soldier in battle, but primarily they are cheerful and fictional fantasies and they perform their role in sound, believed to be the more emotional medium of communication.

Fred Gaisberg and Russell Hunting's "The Departure of a Troopship" from the Boer War period seems to be a consecutive narrative sequence of sound effects, crowd improvisation and music. The Great War production of descriptive sketches would involve a much more sophisticated development of talking narrative, dramatic action, synthesized sound choreography and interplay with music. There must also have been more developed scripting. The performers succeed in making their words sound natural and "lifted off the page". The productions had to be produced as live. Editing was not possible. Timing and direction through rehearsal, attending to the dynamics and characteristics of the sound studio and the acoustic pick-up of the early horn microphones required the mastering and accomplishment of new techniques of production.

Record company catalogues continued to list the Great War descriptive sketches well into the 1920s including Columbia's "On Active Service" three disc and six part serial. The fact that they were created for a recording rather than broadcasting industry means that we have been able to appreciate their work and achievements on surviving 78 rpm records. They offered melodic propaganda to soldiers on the Western Front as well as their families on the Home Front. While the home fires were kept burning to the tune of 78 rpm playback, music was also a source of comfort or sensory anesthetic for the soldiers in the Armageddon of howitzer shattered villages, towns and cities.

The performers' voices warble, hiss, and crackle the sounds of a bygone age. The records provide audio textual evidence of a culture mobilized and emotionalized for total war. In addition, they also represent the foundations of broadcast radio drama and sound design for the talking film. Judged against the critical standards set out in Gordon Lea's 1926 text on how to write radio drama for the BBC, the early sound drama pioneers for the Great War phonographs were creative, innovative, and skillfully performing their art to supply a commercial demand for sound drama entertainment.

Sound drama during the Great War developed a wide portfolio of propagandist function that was instructive and persuasive. Audio performance was used to train and educate in the communicative rituals of war. This resulted in the production of records to teach military drill, Morse code and the languages of the allies such as French and Russian. Messages designed to persuade the home population to both mock and hate the Kaiser and the Germans were dramatized through mini play entertainments. The "descriptive sketch" was developed so as to inform, motivate, comfort and amuse. It became a sonic agency for recruitment, mourning, patriotism, religious observance, cultural anxiety as well as outrage. Outside the commercial market place of Great Britain's thriving war-time phonograph industry, the sound play also had a function in front-line psychological warfare. Gaisberg's recordings of POWs calling on their compatriots to surrender through song and invective at the Italian Front transformed 78 rpm discs into battlefield munitions albeit for the mind.

Sound drama, therefore, underwent a significant transformation during the First World War. It took on the form of a widely produced, distributed and received medium of entertainment, education, and propaganda. The Great War phonographs have fixed an aural record of the social, cultural, political and military imagination. This has been expressed through a new dramatic art for its time, which is

now recognized and appreciated as the well-established medium of radio drama with its dimensions in spoken word and digital online platforms.

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### Critical Terms

**Audiogenic:** Storytelling narrative with meaning that is determined or caused by sound alone.

**Modern:** unique to contemporary or current times, new and fashionable and not antiquated.

**Modernity:** a time when modern techniques, technologies, and ideas are being embraced and experienced.

**Modernism:** The application of modern ideas and methods in art, literature and communication. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, under its entry for “modernism” at page 756 states that it cannot be described as a “movement” or reliably characterized by a uniform style: “...it may be said to have embraced a wide range of artistic movements (including symbolism, impressionism, postimpressionism, futurism, constructivism, imagism, vorticism, expressionism, dada and surrealism.)”.

**Propaganda:** Entire books have been written that debate how to define and express the meaning of the word. For the purposes of this article I am settling on Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson’s definition “...the mass persuasion techniques that have come to characterize our postindustrial society,” from page 9 of their 1991 text *The Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, published in New York by W.H. Freeman and Company. The *Little Oxford Dictionary* definition (1986) “organized scheme for propagation of a doctrine *etc.*; ideas *etc.*” is also a reliable definition and close to how I wish to apply the term here.

**Radiophonic:** A preoccupation and interest in the creative production of sound for radio programs.

**Rpm:** Revolutions per minute- how many times a phonograph disc needed to revolve on a gramophone turntable to provide the reproductive playing back of the recording.

**Spiritualism:** A belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living. In this context, the concept is linked to new media technologies such as the phonograph as a medium of communication between mortal and celestial being. The study of spiritualism tends to make a distinction between religious and secular inspiration.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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