

Halton Hills Outlook

Their Outlook

"OUTLOOK" is published each Saturday by the HALTON HILLS HERALD, Home Newspaper of Halton Hills, A Division of Canadian Newspapers Company Limited, at 45 Guelph Street, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 3Z6. Second Class Mail - Registered Number 8943.

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The War Poets

By FRASER SUTHERLAND
Nothing at public schools or Oxford - or anywhere else - could have prepared young Englishmen for the trenches of the First World War. And for poets, no precedent in a pastoral lyric or patriotic ode could have helped them to write about a comrade shot in the scrotum or drowned in mud.

The war poets had to find new ways of seeing and saying. The best of them did, and Robert Giddings, in *The War Poets* (Crown, 192 pages, \$34.95), is right to call "pernicious nonsense" the theory "that there was a long lull during which little of value was created in English poetry, while the world waited for the revival of our genius in Modernism."

Yet, in providing copiously illustrated samples of work by soldier-poets such as Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, and Siegfried Sassoon, Giddings has given us an uneasy blend of coffee-table book and annotated anthology. Force-marching the reader through the war year by year, his patchy, repetitive, and sometimes gauche glosses are little rival to a study he credits in passing, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

The smarmy rhetoric Giddings employs - "immortalize" is his favorite verb - is precisely that which repelled men such as Sassoon. The old romantic tags were meaningless to men who underwent the mingled horror, terror, and aching boredom of fighting at the front, and who watched thousands die to gain a few yards of quagmire.

Nor is the content of Giddings' prose adequate to these doomed occasions. He includes a few poems by German, French, and Italian poets, but touches little on their warfront experience. German "atrocities" are described, but English ones ignored. Nor does he mention the intense homosexual feeling that pervades much war-time poetry.

Despite contextual shortcomings, Giddings does include enough poems - and a useful index - so the reader can judge the complex moods of the time. Here are the familiar Remembrance Day texts: Canadian John McCrae's *In Flanders Fields* ("the poppies blow/ Between the crosses, row on row"), Laurence Binyon's

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For the Fallen ("At the going down of the sun and in the morning/ We will remember them") and Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* ("If I should die, think only this of me: that there's some corner of a foreign field/ that is forever England"). The emblem of glorious fallen youth, Brooke likely never fired a shot in anger. (Part of the Dardanelles expedition, he died of blood poisoning on the Greek island of Scyros).

Against this mellifluous patriotism is the savagery of Sassoon's *Base Details* ("If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath, I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base, / And speed glum heroes up the line to death"). Or Graves' sardonic retelling of the David-and-Goliath story - with Goliath the victor. Or the sweet-natured Owen's recognizing that the enemy is war itself, not the antagonist in the trench opposite: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now..."

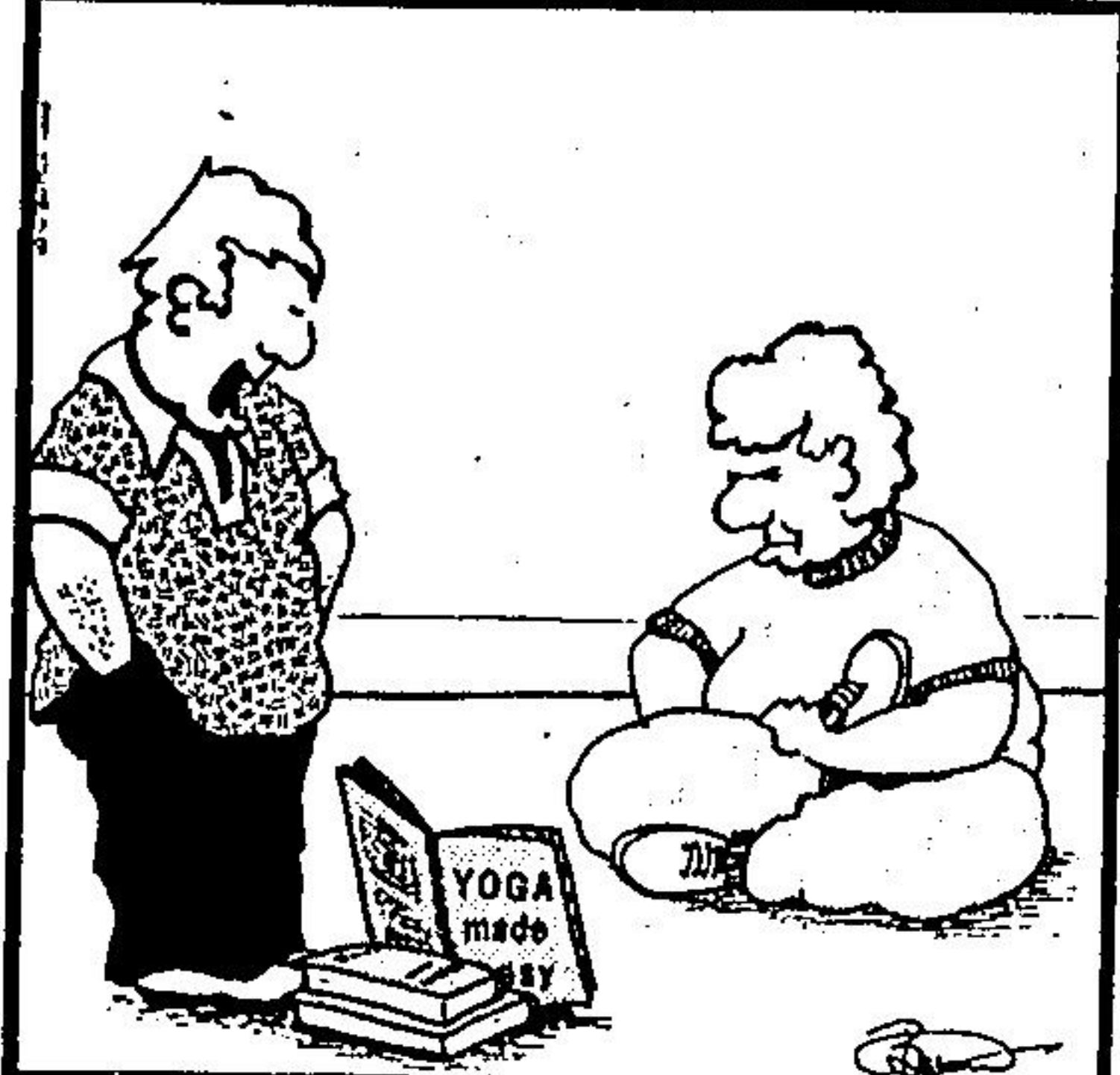
Not only did the First World War invoke a new era of mass destruction, it revolutionized language. A new vocabulary of killing and life under fire entered English poetry: "traversing", "fire-step", "sand-bag", "mess-tin", "Lewis gun" and "five-nine", and the more enduring "dud" and "dug-out". The old sedate world was under siege.

A book such as *The War Poets* also powerfully reminds one of the personalities who were poets. Some gladly went to battle or simply relished male bonding. As the same time, soldiers such as Graves, Sassoon, Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg grew to despise the war and its leadership. For them, however disgusting or perilous the front may have been, it was preferable to ignorant and fatuous jingoism at home.

-Fraser Sutherland is a writer living in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



I Thought You Were Supposed To Say "OMMM", Not "UNNNH!"

Bourassa bides his time



Ottawa
Stewart MacLeod
Thomson News Service

Incredibly, a little announcement by Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa made it to the front pages of certain newspapers in the province. What he declared - surprise, surprise - was that he would remain neutral in the next federal election campaign.

Now, even in normal times, this shouldn't rate a mention, simply because there has never been a Quebec premier who took any other position. And considering the current situation - which is far from normal - Premier Bourassa would be absolutely idiotic to take sides.

Good Lord, the man can sit there like a sultan and have Brian Mulroney and John Turner practically plead with him to be their best friend. And for all we know, Ed Broadbent may be trying to figure a way to have his head patted in public by the highly courted Quebec leader.

Furthermore, the suitors come bearing gifts, the most generous obviously being from Mr. Mulroney. As prime minister, he has, by far, the most to give. When you can offer things such as \$1-billion aluminum smelters even before an election has been called, the mind boggles at things to come.

It makes Mr. Turner, the Liberal leader, look like a bit of a pauper, but, nonetheless, he nuzzled up to Mr. Bourassa a few days after Mr. Mulroney's proposed payout and said Montreal, not Ottawa, should get Canada's new space agency.

Considering he didn't have to say anything on the subject - which Ottawa-area Grit candidates would have clearly preferred - it was a nice gesture. Not like an aluminum smelter, mind you, but modestly nice.

VERY CLOSE
It's little offerings like this that permit Mr. Turner to claim such a close proximity to the premier, relative to the prime minister's proximity. "I don't know how I could be

any closer to the premier without being indecent," he said.

Top that, Mr. Mulroney! When the campaign officially begins for those 75 federal seats in Quebec, the courtship of Mr. Bourassa should become positively steamy. As we have observed over the last four years, and particularly during recent Quebec byelections, the premier's definition of neutrality can differ sharply from, say, the Pope's.

It might be just a handshake, a smile or an officially non-partisan introduction, and the premier can turn thousands of voters loose. We'll never know how many provincial Liberals worked for Tory candidates in 1984, but we're talking big numbers. When federal Tories win 58 of 75 seats in a province where provincial Liberals reign supreme, it gets you thinking, doesn't it?

Anyway, it's no secret that the prime minister and premier are very close friends. Have been for years.

But there is no point in Mr. Bourassa coming out openly for the Tories until he sees what his close-to-indecency friend, John Turner, can come up with in the heat of the courtship.

In a simple byelection campaign, you may recall, Mr. Mulroney proposed paving a road to James Bay, normally a provincial responsibility. Perhaps the Liberals might want to widen it to four lanes. After all, what are best friends for?

FREE-TRADE PROBLEM
The Liberals will have to come up with something innovative to offset their problems with free trade in Quebec. Mr. Mulroney's free-trade initiative is stoutly supported by the premier and this creates an obvious handicap for Mr. Turner.

He certainly did his best to sell his alternative - broader international trade initiatives - but all he got was a Bourassa comment that this would complement, but not replace, the free-trade deal. Not much help there.

"Turner strikes out in attempt to woo Bourassa," declared the *Montreal Gazette*. The newspaper was obviously not impressed by the Liberal leader's claim of closeness to the premier.

Quixote quips



Your Business
Diane Malley
Thomson News Service

So, the provincial premiers are telling Ottawa to lower interest rates, eh? That's a good sign that they are about to ease soon anyway. After all, why make demands that can't be met?

The premiers would love to take credit for putting an end to rising rates. With an election nearing, NDP Leader Ed Broadbent has climbed on the bandwagon, too.

No one knows how long the economy will keep steaming along the way it has been for the past six years. Exports are booming and capacity is tight.

But south of the border, a worrisome sign has come. All across the United States, newspaper advertising revenue is down; business people are cutting back on their spending.

In Quebec, the *Montreal Gazette* has warned employees that some of them may be laid off because of a drop in ad revenue, although the newspaper may be suffering from increased competition.

The slowdown could simply be a brief dip, not uncommon in the current expansion. In the past, though, newspaper ads have been a sensitive barometer of economic health and an early warning of what lay ahead.

DON QUIXOTE
Meanwhile, John Crow, governor of the Bank of Canada, keeps fighting the phantom inflation, currently running at a modest 3.8 per cent. What the premiers object to is the wide spread between interest rates in Canada and the United States.

Based on historical differences, our rates could be a full percentage point lower, they estimate. While historical comparisons can be simplistic, the premiers have a point. That they have no business telling the federal government how to run the country is a fact they choose to ignore.

They argue that the country is suffering from high rates, with the exception of southern Ontario, where the economy is seemingly ir-repressible. No matter what they say, interest rates are made in the U.S.A.

Mr. Crow can ease the spreads, but he can't change the direction. Is the health of the American economy an illusion? Not likely, but the belief that it is overheating may be. The same applies to Canada, as Premier Robert Bourassa points out on behalf of the 10 premiers.

"We consider that the threat of an economic slowdown is" presently stronger than the threat of inflation," he told reporters.

THICK OR THIN
With other economic indicators so uncertain, we might as well watch the thickness or thinness of our newspapers, or the number of cars in shopping-mall parking lots.

If the expansion is to continue, it will be without the consumer's help, I suspect. Exports and business investment will have to carry the day.

Unfortunately, Canada's exports are being hurt by the high Canadian-U.S. exchange rate, while business investment will be inhibited by high interest rates. A slowdown appears imminent.

SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



"I'm setting this off to protest all the senseless violence in the world..."