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War, War, War: Robert Service, Country Joe McDonald and the Intergenerational Relevance of Poetry

By Andrew Scragg

Robert Service (1874 – 1958), the so-called "Bard of the Yukon" is today probably most famous for his ballads of Northern gold seeking such as "The Shooting of Dan McGrew"; however, he was well known and popular in the early years of the Twentieth Century with his prolific output of writing reflecting his years travelling the world. These include a collection of poems, *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916)[1] that drew on his experiences as a war correspondent and ambulance driver on the Western Front during the First World War. In 1971 a number of the poems from *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* and three other Service collections were set to music and used by the American singer and anti-Vietnam War activist Country Joe McDonald (born 1942) on his album *War, War, War*.[2] This article will look at the poems used on this album and consider why the poems, many written during the First World War, maintained a significance and relevance to the discourse of anti-Vietnam War protest some half a century later and still resonate today.

Robert Service was born in Preston, Lancashire and moved to Canada in his early twenties. His poetic style has been compared to that of Rudyard Kipling in terms of the use of strongly descriptive narrative ballads echoing his adventures around the world, although Service's war poetry appears more critical and less patriotic than Kipling's. He served as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross during the First World War and then as a war correspondent for a number of Canadian publications (Mackay 233 - 250, Baetz 55). His verse was extremely popular at the time, but in the years following his death in 1958 his reputation declined and he is now rarely anthologised.[3] Country Joe McDonald was born in Washington, D.C. in 1942 and in the 1960s, while at school in Berkeley, California began performing and recording. His band Country Joe and the Fish was heavily involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement, recording the notable anti-war anthem "Fixing to Die Rag" in 1966. They performed at Wood-

stock in 1969 and alongside other activists, most notably Jane Fonda, McDonald took part in a series of coast to coast anti-war demonstrations in 1971, the same year he recorded *War, War, War* (Belmont), a powerful, dark and uncomfortable recording unlike anything else being recorded at the time.

In a 2015 article published in *Yukon News* that McDonald claimed that he first read Service's *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* in an illustrated collection he purchased in 1965 (Gates). In correspondence with the author, McDonald wrote that he put "Jean Desprez" to music and performed it at hootenannies, finding that his audience warmed to it despite its length. Some years later, he had a solo record contract and needed a theme for an album and thought about covering a collection of poems from *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, but couldn't find enough that he liked for a whole album, so he looked for other Service poems to go with those he liked. On *War, War, War* McDonald recorded 9 of Service's poems, six from *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, and one each from three other collections: *Rhymes of a Roughneck* (1950), *Songs for My Supper* (1953) and *Songs of a Sourdough* (U.S. title *Spell of the Yukon*) (1907). He recalls that the whole process happened very quickly—in just a month or so. While McDonald added the music Service's words remain unaltered, thus creating a new medium for Service's texts. McDonald is clear in his recollection that the idea of recording the poems had nothing to do with the Vietnam War. He knew he was doing First World War poems as well as some from the Boer War and Second World War, but all he wanted to do was "make a nice record and satisfy my contractual obligation" (McDonald).

While he was successful in those aims, the songs on the album are anti-war in nature and, however unintended at the time, can also be regarded as a direct, sustained critique of American's war in Vietnam. Service's poems are not widely read now, compared to the significant canon of First World War poems, mainly exemplified by the trench lyrics of (usually British) poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, Edward Thomas or Charles Hamilton Sorley who fought on the Western Front. Those poems are certainly more anthologised (and better recognised by a more modern audience). But Service's poems are more suited to McDonald's folk style and they allow for a greater range of interpretation and contextualization beyond the First World War than say, Owen's poems when set to music, as Benjamin Britten did in his *War Requiem* (1962). The question is why do Service's poems used on the record transcend the First World War where other more famous and critically valued poems might not?

One writer reusing or adapting the words of another is not new or unusual. Julia Kristeva suggests that a text belongs to both the writer and the reader, but it is also flexibly orientated within a literary corpus ("Word" 36 – 37). As well as acting as a regulator to control the structure of the text, the words of the text act as a mediator linking to the cultural environment of the writer and reader. This suggests that a reader's interpretation of that text can be based on both an understanding of the original text's status within the corpus at the time of writing but also of the reader's contemporary circumstances. Kristeva refers to the relationships between texts (and versions of texts) as "intertextuality." This builds on the earlier work of Bakhtin, although Kristeva prefers the term "transposition" as this suggests that the original cultural positioning of the text is abandoned ("Revolution" 112) and the cultural position of the reader of an appropriated or adapted text becomes the main source of interpretation. This may also be informed to some degree by the reader's awareness of the position of the original text within the literary corpus. In this way a text can have a number of intertextual relationships with another text—appropriation, parody, adaptation or imitation to name three.

Appropriation has been largely seen in terms of western literature taking cultural forms from other non-Western cultures (frequently African or Asian), but it is possible to see it as "the ongoing constitution of cultural goods as desirable objects and the actions of groups prepared to struggle for their ownership" (Buyukakutan 622).[4] It is within these contexts that we need to consider Country Joe McDonald's use of Robert Service's poems on his album *War, War, War*; not an inter-cultural, but an inter-generational transposition of texts.

Popular music was an important cultural weapon used by both sides in America's internal conflict over the Vietnam War. In 1966 Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler who had served and been wounded in Vietnam released the hawkish "Ballad of the Green Berets" and the American forces held "Electric Army" tours for rock bands that were more counter-cultural than the traditional United Services Organisation shows. The anti-war movement in the US crossed traditional musical culture lines using a range of styles including folk music by Joan Baez and Phil Ochs, more electronic folk rock from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young or soul music from Marvin Gaye and Edwin Starr to promote their agenda. In Vietnam, Sgt Clyde David Delay (aka Dave Rabbit) set up a pirate radio station playing counter-cultural rock and anti-Vietnam War music (Kodosky 70 – 84). It was into this context that McDonald released *War, War, War*.

McDonald appropriates the poems of Service, and by setting them to folk music adapts them into songs. While the words are not changed in the appropriation the medium is. Robert Albrecht has written that poetry, despite the oral tradition, has long been seen as words organised for reading, a solitary occupation. Music and singing on the other hand is more of a group endeavour, a shared experience. Music not only has the capacity to stay in our minds and alter our moods, but also to bring people together, create a cohesion among listeners motivating audiences to relate, think and conduct their behaviour in a co-ordinated way (179). Thierry Cote suggests that popular music, as well as creating an emotional force also creates a space for discussion, debate or opposition for people who feel that they have no other access to the political area (737), thus making musician and their music a powerful political force, particularly as technology (broadcasting, recording etc.) enables the message to reach a wider audience and acquire what Walter Benjamin calls a "mass existence" (735).

McDonald uses the unchanged words of Service, many published some half century before and referring to the First World War and other earlier conflicts. While, as he says, the record is not about Vietnam this transposition inevitably encourages his new, younger audience to hear these words and interpret the themes and emotions through the context of their experience of 1960s American society and the Vietnam War. His use of Service's original words (as opposed to a re-writing or parodying them) encouraged the retention of any cultural references that his audience might bring with them (including Service's authority within the discourse of war as a serving Red Cross man who had experienced war first-hand) and provided an opportunity for his audience to reflect on how little things may have changed, but McDonald did not necessarily require this interpretation, the record is a strong album in its own right. However, such a textual history does add an extra unique dimension to McDonald's anti-war album.

By turning the poems into songs and performance or the sales of records McDonald could extend access amongst a new generation to the poems and the anti-war messages they contain, no doubt encouraging his audience to go back to Service's original texts and (re)discover the original poems and others in his collections.

The transposition of Service's First World War poems into McDonald's songs works well for a number of reasons. Firstly, McDonald is very restrained musically, simple guitar and harmonica accompaniment allowing Service's words to be foregrounded. Perhaps most important was the form of the poems. Service wrote ballads, a (frequently deceptively) simple form, rhyming and with repetitions that are more suited to setting to

music than the more frequently anthologized trench lyric. Service's ballads tell a dramatic story that vividly engages the audience's imagination. The audience that Service wrote for would associate the events with the First World War, although he rarely mentions an exact location ("Jean Desprez" being a notable exception). The universality of many of the themes enables McDonald's audience to more easily abandon the First World War context and replace this with contemporary events of their own experience, allowing the album to stand as an effective artistic critique of the Vietnam War whatever McDonald's original intention.

Because of their familiarity through anthologies, academic study as "First World War verse" and use in commemorations the "classic" war poems such as Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est", "Strange Meeting", "Futility" or Sassoon's "The General" or "Counter-Attack" and many others have become firmly associated in readers' minds as poems of the First World War. As a result of this and the "literary", trench lyric style adopted in them they have acquired an aura, almost as hymns to the sacrifice and suffering of the men of the Western Front, and to consider them in any other context would be considered by some almost a sacrilege. This strong association could be said to limit somewhat the universality of their anti-war messages.

The Vietnam War was probably the first war to be heavily televised and to have the physical reality of conflict delivered to American homes every evening on the news. This meant that the audience was no longer as shocked by the "truisms of passive suffering" (Fox 405) and graphic descriptions of physical suffering and carnage as were that readers of Owen or Rosenberg.[5] Because Service's verses are less well known they have a freshness and lack the aura of canonical First World War poetry, meaning a new audience may be more open to reinterpreting and re-contextualising the narratives within them. Unlike many of the First World War poets, Service (reflecting his experience as a war correspondent) wrote for an audience at home (many of the poems were originally published in the very popular Canadian magazine *MacLean's*) as well as for soldiers fighting. His audience is different so is the style of his writing and the language he uses; Service is not writing for academics or posterity but for an audience of the common man and woman, the same audience McDonald sought, so he is happy to use the popular ballad format and more vernacular language and to write about their experiences. This allows Service to extend the range of topics he treats in his verse beyond the traditional depictions of battles and death found in war poetry to include the social and emotional impacts of the First World War. They are not neces-

sarily patriotic poems, but reflect the ambivalence between the motives of men volunteering and the reality they found and the sentiments that made them enlist against the treatment of themselves and their loved ones by an indifferent state and society (Baetz 66). These themes had the same relevance to the audience that McDonald found for his album—a mix, primarily of civilians but also some combatants - and the nature of these poems allowed for an intertextual reinterpretation to critique contemporary attitudes and actions.

One of the weaknesses of many of the more vocal counter-culture opponents of the Vietnam War such as McDonald and Fonda was their lack of military experience that gave their opponents the opportunity to question the validity of their statements (unlike, say Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler), McDonald's use of Service's words side steps this issue. Like Service he was a popularist writer, in his case of folk and rock songs. By using the poet's words he gives his album a greater sense of truth, as the words are written by someone who actually experienced the war and fighting he wrote about, something a collection of songs written by McDonald himself could not achieve. This cultural appropriation adds discursive weight to the arguments and questions raised by the album.

Both Service and McDonald were seen as outsider figures (Service the Bohemian drifter poet equally at home in the Yukon goldfields or the garrets of Paris, McDonald the politically radical folk singer) more popular with "ordinary people" than with an establishment. Service's lines:

> And if at times I curse a bit
> You needn't read that part of it;
> For through it all like horror runs
> The red resentment of the guns . . .
> ("Foreword" 29 – 32)

fit McDonald as well as they do Service. One of the signature songs of Country Joe and the Fish was so-called the "Fish Cheer" performed at Woodstock where the audience was encouraged to shout out "F**k". This outraged many conservative Americans, yet Service and McDonald highlight the use of what was considered cursing to counterpoint society's acceptance of the far greater obscenity of the war and its consequences while being shocked by mere words.

The poems selected for the album start with "Forward", Service's introduction to *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* in which he makes his apology for the verse. Service does not set himself up as a literary man, referring to his

"bits of rhymes"(1) but explains his qualification for writing the verse—the fact that he has experienced the war and written the verse

> In lousy barns by Candle-light
> In dug-outs, sagging and aflood,
> On stretchers stiff and bleared with blood . . .
> (25 – 30)

And he sets out his basic subject, not Owen's "pity of war", but "... if in God's sight / War ever, ever can be right?"(38).

What Service did was to engage with the families, friends and lovers of those engaged in war in the language that they used, to use the poems / songs as a social, economic and personal critique of war. There are verses that deal directly to the experience of women on the home front—"The Call" speaks directly to wives, girlfriends and mothers at home:

> Women all, hear the call,
> The pitiless call of War!
> Look your last on your dearest ones
> Brothers and husbands, fathers and sons
> Swift they go to the ravenous guns,
> The gluttonous guns of War.
> (25 – 30)

Women, and their experience of war had traditionally been side-lined from the canon of war poetry, yet this poem reaches to the heart of their pain, the constant fear that they will have seen the last of their loved one. In the 1970s the poem speaks to concepts of feminism and liberation that were developing across parts of America, recognising that the soldier was not the only one engaged in the war, that the call to war has consequences for all of society.

"The War Widow" (from *Songs for My Supper*) develops this theme further, reflecting on the post-war life of a young woman whose volunteer husband is killed in the war. She and many others have lost their husbands to the war and thus the hopes for children and a family to comfort her in old age. Rather than being succoured by the community that their husband died to protect, they are ostracised and trapped within a cruel benefits systems that were frequently based on the productivity value of the deceased and the economic loss to the family:

Marie was free if she would fain
Another spouse to choose;
But is she dared to wed again
Her pension she would lose.
(9 – 12)

She lives in near poverty on a pension that she will lose if she remarries and so has lost not only a husband but also any future chance of a happy relationship and family. The poem broadens out the attack on society's callous penny pinching attitudes - ironically reflecting that death in war is an economic necessity, otherwise "The ranks of unemployment swell, / And flats are hard to find" but it is the weakest who pay. McDonald's use of a jaunty harmonica tune with this poem counterpoints the grim emotional power of Service's words.

"Young Fellow My Lad" deals with the complex emotions of a parent's reaction to a son going off to war—a mix of worry and pride, which ends with a combination of impotent fear for the safety of a loved one and distress for the loss of life and promise for the future when the postman delivers the news of the son's death:

I hear them tell that we've gained new ground,
But a terrible price we've paid.
God grant, my boy, that you're safe and sound
But oh, I'm afraid, afraid!
(29 – 32)

mixed with pride at the sacrifice:

For you passed in the night, Young Fellow My Lad,
And you proved in the cruel test
Of the screaming shell and the battle hell
That my boy was one of the best .
(37 – 40)

619,636 Canadians served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, with close to 61,000 Canadians killed in the war (Canadian War Museum), so the poem represent situations and emotions recognisable not only to Service's 1916 audience but also to McDonald's in 1971. Particularly poignant is the parent's question in "Young Fellow My Lad": "Why did the postman look so sad / And sigh as he turned away?" – the answer was well known to McDonald's generation as the death toll from Vietnam steadily grew: 6350 in 1963, 11,363 in 1967, 16,988 in 1968, 11,780 in 1969 (US

National Archives) each letter informing a family representing the lost hopes and dreams of generations.

In "The Call" Service reflects on the rush to fight in August 1914 where men idealistically saw the war as a break from boring normal life in the office or on the farm and a freeing from the constraints of work, class and responsibility, offering the hope of permanent social change. Service used his poetry to praise the men who volunteered and the range of men who felt it was their duty to fight. He avoids the absurd optimism of Newbolt's "Vitai Lampada," reflecting more on the fact that many simply felt it right to fight, yet Service questions the naïve romantic notions that many held.[6] He highlights that this call to war was heeded across social backgrounds:

> Prince and page, sot and sage
> Hark to the roar of War!
> Poet, professor and circus clown,
> Chimney sweeper and fop o' the town
> Into the pot to be melted down
> Into the pot of War!!
> (19 – 24)

yet death treated all alike.

While there was such a diverse rush to volunteer in 1914, this was not the case for later wars. The experience of the First World War created a greater cynicism amongst society as to the causes of the war, and less hope for positive social change in America after the war for both those who fought and their families. In America by the 1970s volunteering was replaced by the draft and on *War, War, War* "The Call" can serve to critique the Vietnam War draft, where neither enthusiasm to fight nor equality of service existed. Until the institution of the "Draft Lottery" there was a hierarchy of army induction: 1. Delinquents; 2. Volunteers and 3 Non-volunteers aged between 19 and 25. In 1969 the draft lottery assigned numbers for men born between 1944 and 1950, priority for induction being based on a random sequence of numbers. Educational deferments could be issued until 1971 allowing for deferment until the age of 24. As each cohort was at risk during their 20th year college was seen as a good way to increase the chance of avoiding the draft (Card and Lemieux 97 – 98). Naturally this had an adverse effect on the economically disadvantaged who could not afford college, meaning African-Americans and poor whites were less likely to be able to make use of this deferment. Service's list of professions and honours would have rung hollow indeed.

The economic causes and implications of the First World War were not usually the subject of contemporary First World War poetry that took as its focus the experiences of the fighting man, and certainly such direct criticism of the industrialists who were helping the Allies to win was largely avoided. "The Munitions Maker" (from *Rhymes of a Roughneck*) is narrated by an outwardly civilized and considerate industrialist who has inherited a munitions company and has grown rich from the slaughter of war:

> Renowned and Rajah rich am I
> My father was and his before
> With wealth we owe to war and war.
> (4 – 6)

However, nearing (a natural) death he questions the value and morality of his wealth and its source, hauntingly repeating the refrain "There are no pockets in a shroud". Service in "The Munitions Maker" attacks those who made massive profits from selling armaments before and during the First World War - firms like Krupps in Germany or Armstrongs in Britain. Service uses the reflections of the dying head of such a company to question the morality of his trade who cannot shoot the birds on his estate, but allows the honest, idealistic soldiers to pay the ultimate price for his life of luxury. On *War War War* Service's poem brings to mind the uneasy relationship between State, defence contractors and academia. It is not individual industrialists but the Military Industrial Complex—the US armed forces and industry combined. Although initially lauded by President Franklin Roosevelt, by the time of Vietnam defence contractors were seen as a powerful vested interest that unduly influenced governments – using industrial might and secret contributions to support electoral campaigns and promote their financial interests and sustain an unpopular war (Higgs 305 – 309). US universities formed a focal point for anti-War demonstrations, frequently violently put down by US State Troopers. Key areas of protest were around the activities of University Officer Training Corps and demanding a greater scrutiny (or complete banning of) military research (such as developing chemical weapons like napalm) being undertaken at US universities (Connery 90). The words are starkly relevant in both wars—Service targeted industrialists, in 1971 it is the shareholders and academics; they may not be personally bellicose or hawkish by nature, but they remain complicit in their respective wars.

In the early years of the First World War propaganda stories about German war crime atrocities abounded. Paul Fussell writes about one such story that Service's readers would have been aware of, the story of the

"Crucified Canadian." This was said to have happened at Maple Copse near Sanctuary Wood near Ypres, where a captured Canadian solider was spread eagled on a cross, dying slowly in front of his comrades. The truth of this is unverifiable; indeed, Fussell reports that there were several different versions of the story circulating, changing times and places and numbers of crucified soldiers (115 – 6). The truth of the story is immaterial, the objective was to make the German aggressors appear brutal and to promote support for the war. Service uses the language of such stories in "Jean Desprez", the wounded Zouave is crucified to the church door, Christ-like—by German bayonets, the Prussian Major's teeth are "wolfishly agleam," while little Jean has in his eyes

> . . . the glory of his race
> The glory of a million men who for fair France have died
> The splendour of self-sacrifice that will not be denied.
> (80 – 82)

This is a long, emotional ballad (McDonald has written that he would always start to cry at the climactic end), developing characters and allowing a real empathy to develop between the reader / hearer and Jean, the Zouave and the Germans. It is also propaganda: the weak are mercilessly attacked by brutal invaders, which proves counter-productive as the action creates martyrs and encourages others to join the cause.

Service created a strong powerful ballad designed to highlight the futile, self-defeating brutality of the Prussian aggressors; in the context of *War War War* it can be interpreted as a mirror of the conduct of the American war in Vietnam. On 16 March 1968 at My Lai a number of Vietnamese men women and children were massacred by American soldiers. This was covered up by the military and only came to light in 1969 following a letter to a senior officer from a serving soldier and an investigation by the journalist Seymour Hirsch. In March 1971 Platoon Leader William Calley Jnr was convicted but was paroled in 1974. The inclusion of "Jean Desprez" on the album can be seen to counterpoint the two war crimes, one fictional one real, the Americans are now the brutal aggressors and the Vietnamese the plucky oppressed, the American actions actually encouraging further resistance—not the image of the war the US government of the day wanted to promote.

Although poems selected for the album can be considered a criticism of war (in France and Vietnam or elsewhere) the reaction to the common soldier fighting the war is generally sympathetic and the debt owed to them by society is acknowledged. "The Man from Athabaska" is narrated by a

grizzled trapper from the far North who leaves his idyllic life to volunteer to fight in the war (as he has several times before) but now, eighteen months on, he is disillusioned and dreams (along with his Poilu comrades in arms) dreams of returning to his home on Lac Fontaine that he will never leave again. The poem reflects the disillusion and nostalgia of many men who were drafted or volunteered and find themselves fighting a kind of war they did not expect many miles from home:

> For I've had my fill of fighting and I've seen nation scattered
> And an army swing to slaughter and a river red with gore
> And a city all asmoulder, and … as if it really mattered
> For the lake is yonder dreaming, and my cabin's on the shore
> And the dogs are leaping madly, and I'll leave it nevermore.
> (56 – 60)

Just as soldiers, like the experienced fighter in "The Man from Athabaska," were shocked by the mechanised death and horrific scenes they experienced in the trenches of the First World War, so many young Americans were unprepared for the realities of guerrilla warfare in the jungles of Vietnam. Such disillusion ("…as if it really mattered") is a theme reflected in the works of other war poets, but few make the point so poignantly.

While he questions the idealism of many volunteers Service also considers the debt that is owed by society to soldiers both in going to and returning from the war. As we have already seen he critiques attitudes to widows in "The War Widow"; in "The Twins" he presents another recognisable scenario for many men returning from Vietnam: narrating how John, the "noble fool" volunteers to fight and returns home wounded to find that his brother James has stolen his girl and his job and is now grown rich on government contracts leaving the disabled veteran with nothing:

> Today James owns half the town;
> His army contracts riches yield;
> And John? *Well search the Potter's Field.*
> (14 – 16)

"The Twins," a brief but powerfully tragic poem, expands the concepts of war profiteering to include the personal. There is no social or familial support for the returning man, he has been exploited and abandoned not only by his country, his employer and his girlfriend but also by the person he should trust most, his brother. All that is left is the Potter's field—the tra-

ditional graveyard for suicides. On *War, War, War* Service's words ring just as true for the returning Vietnam soldier—like John's brother the US Government used and abandoned many thousands of traumatised and vulnerable young men who had fought in Vietnam. Research in the 1970s showed that many soldiers in Vietnam faced a new problem, fighting a war that the majority of the people at home were ambivalent to—demanding his service, but rejecting him because he served when he returned to the US. This, linked to the culture shock of coming home from a jungle guerrilla war lead to deep feelings of social isolation and a withdrawal from society, a sense often exacerbated amongst veterans from deprived socio-economic groups (Rosenthal 86). For McDonald and Service this abandonment was the government's ultimate insult to the fighting men.

This duty to remember to those who have fought is shown clearly and extends to both those who come back from the war and those who die in it. The question may be whether war (Vietnam or otherwise) ever can be right, but regardless of the answer neither Service nor McDonald are blaming the combatants. In "Young Fellow My Lad" the father says:

> And you'll never die, my lovely boy,
> While life is noble and true
> For all our beauty and hope and joy
> We will owe to lads like you.
> (45 – 48)

this is the reaction of most families who will always remember children and siblings who have died in war, but society and the state can be less caring. Remembrance is often just a home-coming parade for the living and a once a year ceremony for the dead.

This is seen in the much starker "The March of the Dead" (from *Songs of a Sourdough*) with which the album ends. In correspondence with the author McDonald considers that this is, for him, the most important poem and a natural ending piece (McDonald). This describes the homecoming parades for soldiers from the Boer War and imagines that one parade is interrupted by a second parade of the dead left on the veldt and thus excluded celebrations and from the comfortable thoughts of the cheering bystanders. They have paid the ultimate price and as they say "You owe us"—they have returned to claim their cheers. When the war is over everyone is happy to see the soldiers return, but the dead are excluded from the celebration. For those who have paid the price this is unfair and their sense of outrage is bluntly stated:

> We're the men who paid the blood price. Shall the grave be all our gain?
> You owe us. Long and heavy is the score
> Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us for our pain
> And cheer us as ye never cheered before.
>
> (29 – 31)

The message is clear, society needs to not only celebrate the end of the war and the safe return of soldiers, but also to properly take care of those who return injured in body or mind, not just packing them off the Veteran's hospitals, out of sight. There is a duty also to remember the courage and suffering of those who died—a constant memorial, not wheeling out the image of the glorious dead once a year for remembrance—and learn from the cost and mistakes of one war, not to repeat them in the future.

War War War represents a remarkable intertextual collaboration between a dead poet and a folk singer, using the poet's words written in outrage at the waste of the First World War to create a record that would be enjoyed by a new generation half a century later, but that can also be interpreted as directly critiquing and condemning actions in the Vietnam War. This tells us much about the enduring power of Service's words, the universality and common humanity of the themes he pursues and the accessibility of the emotive ballad format he used that is easily understood and remembered by the audience that Robert Service intended for his verses—both the soldiers and the ordinary people left at home while their young men fought. The form and the language create a savage denunciation of the First World War, but also to transcend their own time to be relevant to a war half a century later, and even today we can see the same narratives being repeated through recent wars in Iraq. Country Joe McDonald's recording also informs us of the different ways Robert Service's words can be used—as the personal reading of poetry to inspire, anger and challenge the individual. Through Country Joe McDonald's transformation of them into songs (helped by their format) they can also be seen to give voice to young people seen as a counter-cultural opposition to their generation's conflict who were excluded from political power. The universal nature of the words and the power of song transcend Robert Service's intention to critique his war, allowing them to be reframed in the context of the Vietnam War to show up the brutality and waste of that conflict, and through Country Joe McDonald's use of Robert Service's authentic words of experience to give an emotional and critical weight that may be lacking in some other 1970s anti-war songs.

Robert Service's war poems (those used on the album and others) achieve this in a way that other, more anthologised and critically respected

First World War poems are unable to do. What is demonstrated is that although Robert Service's verses have fallen from critical favour they are still important testaments to his experience of war. They may not have the literary sophistication of the frequently anthologised and lauded trench lyrics, but they contain a greater diversity of experiences and themes than many other First World War poets' output, echoing the experiences not only of combatants but also their families and loved ones left at home, exploring real emotions and reflecting on universal human themes and sensations that remain as relevant today as they were in 1916 and 1971. Perhaps now is the time for a re-evaluation?

Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the kind help, advice and support of Country Joe McDonald in the writing of this article.

1 Toronto: William Briggs, 1916.
2 Vanguard 79315.
3 See Edward Cowan: 'Service has been the victim of a strange conspiracy of silence. He is not anthologized in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (1979), while he is inexplicably excluded from Trevor Royle's *In Flanders Fields: Scottish Poetry and Prose of the First World War* (1990). He is completely ignored by both Bernard Bergonzi *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (1965) and John Lehman *The English Poets of the First World War* (1981))' Edward J Cowan, "The War Rhymes of Robert Service, Folk Poet" *Studies in Scottish Literature*: 1993 (28:1) 12 – 27, 13.
4 Buyukokutan is reflecting the work of Arnd Schneider ('On 'Appropriation': a critical reappraisal and the concept of its application in global art practices' *Social Anthropology*, 2003 (11) 215-29).
5 For example, Wilfred Owen "Dulce et Decorum Est":

> If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
> Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
> And watch the white eyes writhing in his face
> His hanging face like a devil's sick of sin,
> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gargling from the froth corrupted lungs.
> (17-22)

or Isaac Rosenberg: "Dead Man's Dump":

> A man's brains splattered on
> A stretcher bearer's face.
> (55-56)

6 Service captures a range of reasons men had to choose to fight: from patriotic idealism, as the young man in 'Young Fellow My Lad' says 'I'm awfully proud to go' (16) to the

older Man from Athabaska, who unquestioningly wants to be part of the fighting regardless of the cause '"But I haven't missed a scrap", says I, "since I was one and twenty"' (18), Service (and McDonald) recognises the popular sentiment, but questions in all the poems whether the price paid by the volunteer, their families and loved ones was worth it.

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