

British Literature of World War I

Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Good Old Anna* (1915)

Edited by
Jane Potter



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BRITISH LITERATURE OF WORLD WAR I

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General Editors

Andrew Maunder and Angela K. Smith

Volume 3

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INTRODUCTION

I recall the winter and spring of 1914 has having been the happiest of the first eighteen years of my married life. From early childhood I had longed to write stories, and I was now becoming in a modest way established as a novelist.

Marie Belloc Lowndes, *A Passing World* (1948)¹

On the eve of World War I, Marie Adelaide Elizabeth Renée Julia Belloc Lowndes (1868–1947), the daughter of the prominent British feminist Elizabeth (Bessie) Rayner Parkes (1829–1925) and the French barrister Louis Marie Belloc (1830–72), was realizing her ambitions. Married to *The Times* staff writer Frederick Sawney Archibald Lowndes (1867–1940) and the mother of three children, Marie Belloc Lowndes was the elder sister of Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953), who had already made his name in the literary world as a poet, novelist and polemicist. (Unlike his mother and his sister, Hilaire Belloc was a determined anti-suffragist.) She grew up in Paris and in London, but her formal education was limited to two years at a convent school in Sussex. Her professional writing career began in the winter of 1888 when she went to work as a journalist for W. T. Stead at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The year is significant for it was in the late summer and autumn of 1888 that Jack the Ripper brutally murdered five prostitutes in Whitechapel in the East End of London.² These crimes would form the basis of Belloc Lowndes's most famous novel, *The Lodger*. While she was a prolific journalist of French life and literary goings-on in Paris, and wrote over seventy books from romantic novels to royal biographies as well as several plays and a series of autobiographical works, her lasting reputation rests on the fictional tale of the owners of a boarding house who suspect one of their lodgers is Jack the Ripper. The sense of intrigue, sinister figures and questions of identity resurface in *Good Old Anna*.

While *The Lodger*'s sales far surpassed those of any of her other books, its popularity took time to catch on. Serialized first in the *Daily Telegraph*,³ Belloc Lowndes's story garnered 'letters from all parts of the world, from people who kept lodgings or had kept lodgings', for whom the tale touched a nerve, yet when it was published in book form by Methuen, the novel 'did not received a single

favourable review'. She found that 'when it came to sending a quotation for an advertisement for the American edition, I was not able to find even one sentence of tepid approval'.⁴ The likely reason for such a lukewarm critical response was probably that it was so radically differently from her first two novels, *The Heart of Penelope* (1904) and *Barbara Rebell* (1905), which took their influence from Belloc Lowndes's schooling in and love of the Victorian novel in the tradition of Mrs Gaskell. Yet within a couple of years, *The Lodger* became a bestseller and 'reviewers began to rebuke me for not writing another *Lodger*'.⁵ By 1923, the cheap six-penny edition in the Reader's Library had sold around half a million copies.⁶ Gertrude Stein recommended Belloc Lowndes's books to Ernest Hemingway, who wrote in *A Moveable Feast* that Stein told him:

If you don't want to read what is bad, and want to read something that will hold your interest and is marvelous in its own way, you should read Marie Belloc Lowndes.

Miss Stein loaned me THE LODGER, that marvelous story of Jack the Ripper, and another book about murder at a place outside Paris ... They were both splendid after-work books, the people credible and the action and the terror never false. They were perfect for reading after you had worked, and I read all the Mrs Belloc Lowndes that there was.⁷

Berta Ruck once enquired of Hugh Walpole why such 'a creature as adorably gentle as Marie, who would not hurt a fly or jar the feelings of a human being, should write as she could of violent crime'. Walpole pointed out to Ruck that Belloc Lowndes was a 'plot-novelist' and that the most successful plots involve murder.⁸ Alfred Hitchcock directed the first film version starring Ivor Novello in 1926 and later celluloid adaptations followed, with the most recent being 2009, with the scene of the crimes moved from Victorian London to early twenty-first century Los Angeles.

Reading and Publishing in the War

By August 1914, Mrs Belloc Lowndes was a well-known name in the literary world and a popular writer. Described by Berta Ruck as warm-hearted, unpretentious and welcoming, Belloc Lowndes had a warm, 'enchanted French voice, with its note of bubbling laughter and its purred "R"s'. She enjoyed the company of writers, 'whether they were successful Names or earned a bare living by the pen': 'Just as some people collect stamps, Marie Belloc Lowndes collected writers, and how she loved to entertain them!'⁹ She was also credited with never writing a bad word about anyone: 'I cannot imagine anything more stupid and more unkind than to put on record for ever what ought to be kept to oneself'.¹⁰ Although she was beginning to earn half her income from fiction, she continued to work extremely hard writing articles, wary about giving up the steady work offered by journalism. Nevertheless, she 'was leading a most interesting, indeed a

delightful, life' and as she approached her 46th birthday (on 8 August), she 'still felt a young woman'.¹¹

The outbreak of war put a hold on such optimism. Like others in the country, Belloc Lowndes was faced with practical, personal and professional worries. Food and supplies quickly became difficult to obtain ('Germany intended to starve England out') and '[w]hat was happening in Flanders filled every one's mind to the exclusion of all else, and very soon long lists of casualties were being published in every newspaper'.¹² Her son Charles, only recently recovered from a grave illness, began training at Sandhurst Military Academy, and was eventually sent to Flanders, aged 18, in 1916, as a lieutenant with the 52nd Regiment of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He was awarded the Military Cross after his first battle at Beaumont Hamel, in which he had been wounded and survived three days in No Man's Land. In her diary and letters, Belloc Lowndes vividly portrays a society at war, from news of the wounding and death of friends and loved ones – her nephew Louis, son of Hilaire Belloc, was shot down over Cambrai in 1918¹³ – to Zeppelin raids. One such 'Raid night was horrid'. Having removed her two daughters to a shelter, she returned to her home at 9 Barton Street, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey, to be with her husband who refused to abandon the house. For two hours they withstood 'the awful gunfire': 'Every moment we expected to hear the bombs drop close by or on us, for the machines sounded overhead'.¹⁴

Belloc Lowndes's place in the literary world, both through her own society connections as well as that of her journalist husband, meant that she had many friends 'in high places', who gave her news of the latest developments. She regularly recorded in her diary and letters conversations with military men, including Sir Ian Hamilton, and those in government, such as Lord Haldane. She was also 'in constant correspondence with three men at the Front, a general, a major, and a captain. I used to send them books and newspapers'.¹⁵ Her charitable work also gives a sense of the cultural milieu in which she moved. In November 1917 the *Observer* announced the 'Petticoat Lane' sale that was to take place on 3, 4 and 5 December at the Albert Hall in aid of 'Concerts at the Front'. While the flower stall was going to be taken by the Hon. Mrs Craven, Princess Marie Louise of Bourbon, the Duchess of Seville, and Lady Grace, Mrs Belloc Lowndes would join Lady Glenconner, Mrs Alice Perrin, and Miss Marie Corelli (another hugely popular novelist of the early twentieth century) in overseeing the book stall.

Although there seemed to be a never-ending demand for reading material especially from those serving in the forces, the wartime market for books remained a cause of concern for authors and their publishers. F. A. Mumby commented that World War I 'shook the book trade, like everything else, to its foundations'.¹⁶ In addition to the loss of staff to the armed forces and the rise in the cost of paper and production, publishers were faced with the possibility

that readers would not spend their hard-earned and hard-pressed cash supply on books. At the beginning of 1915, Belloc Lowndes met with Mr Webster, a partner in the publishing firm of Methuen, who had published her early novels:

He is most unhappy with the literary outlook. He told me the slump continues, the cheap edition of my book *Barbara Rebell* was put off and nothing was moving at all. I did not tell him that Methuen were not going to have my next book. Their offer was incredibly less good than that of Hutchinson and that though they admitted that *The End of Her Honeymoon* had paid off its advance. I said what seemed to distress him very much, that I thought all fiction would be profoundly altered by the War, and I could not see writers going back to the kind of stories which, if not exactly popular, were highly praised before the War. He seemed to think that if a casual allusion to the War were thrown in, it would make them sell. He could not see that England and English life would be deeply affected if not completely changed.¹⁷

Like others, she noticed how, at the beginning of the war, it seemed that all people wanted to read was war news, and confided her anxieties in a letter to her mother:

No one is now reading fiction, and my literary agent warns me that he doubts whether my publisher will be able to carry out the contract he made with me. Thus I am far more anxious about money than I am about the War. I also feel that when England begins paying for victory, all those who have money, or who earn money, will be in a very bad way, and no one will think of buying books.¹⁸

While she recorded that for a time 'the whole of my working income stopped', Belloc Lowndes did receive £55 for a short biography of Kitchener and an advance of £150 for her war book for children, *Told in Gallant Deeds*, in which she describes not only the heroic actions of the Allies, but some performed by Germans – a theme of fairness that would later feature in *Good Old Anna*. The *Bookman* called her book 'timely and interesting' and while 'there are things in the chronicle that are for tears', these tears are 'of pride and admiration for the high courage and gallant deeds of such men as our children would do well to take as examples for their own lives'. The *Bookman* predicted that the book would 'have a much longer life than is allotted to most of our Christmas volumes'.¹⁹ Indeed, Belloc Lowndes 'went on receiving letters about [*Told in Gallant Deeds*] for years, and from all over the world'.²⁰

That it was difficult for a popular novelist to satisfy the demands of all markets is evidenced by the fact that novel *The Red Cross Barge* (1916) was rejected in America 'by one set of publishers as pro-German – by another as pro-Ally'. While she considered it to be 'a very bad time for writers',²¹ she admits in her autobiography of 1948, *A Passing World*, that in hindsight she could claim: 'How amaze'd, and oh, how relieved I should have been, to learn that fairly soon reading would become the principal diversion of the British public, and that my war

novels would do well.²² The *Times Literary Supplement's* editorial for December backs up her confident assertion. After three months of war, the bleakest predictions for the trade had not in fact materialized. Rather, the recovery in the sale of books after August and September, 'the critical months of suspense', was 'remarkable'.²³ By the first anniversary of the outbreak in August 1915, the *Times Literary Supplement* was able to report that fiction continued 'to hold its own surprisingly well', mainly because in the wake of twelve months of fighting and grief, 'people are turning with relief from the war news to fiction especially to the more popular novelists'.²⁴ Belloc Lowndes was a beneficiary of this upsurge in demand for the popular novel.

Good Old Anna

Like numerous other novels set during World War I, including such titles as *His German Wife* (Douglas Sladen, 1915), *The Spy in Black* (J. Storer Clouston, 1917) and *Before the Wind* (Janet Laing, 1918), *Good Old Anna* combines romance with intrigue and espionage. It is a window on the world of the war, its preoccupations, fears and hopes, but its themes have resonance in the early twenty-first century. In its focus on the ways in which first impressions and prejudices can be deceiving, and in its plea for tolerance even in the face of external threats to local and national security, Belloc Lowndes's 1915 novel touches on moral dilemmas of wartime that are timeless and universal. Just as *The Lodger* may be adapted to a contemporary metropolis to strike a chord with a modern fascination with serial killing, so *Good Old Anna* echoes fears about foreign and enemy infiltration, invasion and indeed perceived domination.

The vogue for spy fiction was at its height in the years preceding World War I. It and its sister genre, invasion literature, had its origins in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1. Germany's victory over France shocked many and created a powerful new nation-state that seemed bent on world conquest. Belloc Lowndes was a child when the Franco-Prussian war was fought but, having been brought up in France, 'most of my childhood and girlhood ... had been overshadowed by the memories of those about me concerning what had happened there during 1870–1871'. Thus, on the outbreak of World War I in 1914, she was able to claim that it was 'not only war, but war with Germany, [which] was to me a frightful reality'.²⁵ Hilaire Belloc always maintained a distrust, indeed a hatred of the Germans, and became known for his right-wing, anti-German, anti-Semitic views. As military correspondent for the journal *Land and Water*, he wrote reports that maximized German casualties and minimized the scale of the disasters for the British.²⁶ His sister was more tempered in her opinions, although the German victory of 1871 is a recurring theme in *Good Old Anna*.

George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) ushered in the new genre of invasion literature which grew in popularity as British society and its relationship to the rest of the world began to change. As Britain's powers appeared to be declining in comparison to those of other nations, especially Germany, 'The new genre reflected the growing uncertainty of the British middle classes in particular, and projected their fears on to both the nation's European rivals and foreigners in the United Kingdom.'²⁷ The war to come, facilitated by spies who had infiltrated British society, was the direct result of Britain's unpreparedness for war, and the literature that depicted it was a 'purposive fiction [designed to] terrify the reader' with the disastrous consequences of a 'country's shortcomings.'²⁸

The German waiter was especially suspect, possibly because such large numbers were employed in London in the early 1900s. In 1911, for instance, when Germans made up 0.25 per cent of the total population of England and Wales, approximately 10 per cent of all waiters in the capital were German.²⁹ Mrs C. S. Peel recalled that 'some newspapers implored their readers to refuse to be served by Germans and Austrians, and if the waiter professed to be Swiss to demand to see his passport.'³⁰ It was not only the opportunity for overhearing potentially useful conversations that might assist the Fatherland in launching an invasion that worried citizens: 'Stories circulated about German waiters and butchers poisoning food, German watchmakers constructing bombs, German barbers cutting customers.'³¹ The unease with hysterical Germanophobia that is evident in *Good Old Anna* may, again, be traced to Belloc Lowndes's work with W. T. Stead. Stead employed her at the *Review of Reviews*, which he launched in 1890 after leaving the *Pall Mall Gazette*. A frequent theme of his leader columns in the *Review* was the escalating xenophobia and scaremongering against Germans and Germany. In an issue of August 1905, for instance, Stead drew attention to an article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled 'The Anti-Jehad and its Alternative' (a title that resonates today in a different political context).

Among those who whipped up hysteria, paranoia and Germanophobia in the years leading up to World War I was William Le Queux, perhaps the premier spy-story writer of his day. He was commissioned in 1894 by the press baron Alfred Harmsworth (later Viscount Northcliffe, proprietor of *The Times*, which he purchased in 1908, and head of the British propaganda bureau from February 1918), to write *The Great War in England* as a serial for his then-flagship periodical, the *Daily Mail*. By 1897 the book version had gone into fourteen editions. His later novel, *The Invasion of 1910* (1906), continued in the same vein with themes that would recur in numerous novels between 1914 and 1918. Le Queux also produced many 'non-fiction' titles warning of the German threat and menace, including *German Spies in England* (1915), in which he declares that 'The truth must be told. The peril must be faced.' German espionage was an

‘ever-spreading canker-worm in the nation’s heart’.³² He claims that ‘In silence and in sorrow I have watched the proceedings of many a German spy in this country’ including two Germans at Queensferry, Rosyth: ‘unsuspicious-looking professors with gold-rimmed spectacles, were making elaborate maps ... maps of our weaknesses’.³³

In response to the growing public fear, the government convened a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1909, which concluded that ‘an extensive network’ did indeed exist, and set up a Secret Service Bureau to counteract it. Two sections, the precursors of MI5 and MI6, were established, the counterespionage section being headed by Captain Vernon Kell. Kell believed wholeheartedly in the claims that Britain was riddled with German spies, and was obsessed with ‘far-fetched German plots’ to such an extent that he convinced the government to intern ‘much of the sizeable and thriving German colony’.³⁴ Thomas Boghardt argues that ‘The history of German espionage in Great Britain in the early twentieth century ... provides important lessons for a world in which real and chimerical threats are, once again, difficult to distinguish from one another’.³⁵

The Secret Service Bureau (SSB), therefore, ‘had been established to counter a perceived German threat, not a real one. Kell never endeavoured to investigate what German intelligence was really up to, but rather looked for evidence to confirm his *idée fixe* of large-scale German conspiracies’.³⁶ Belloc Lowndes was well aware of perceived German espionage and recalled in her autobiography how

One heard queer stories of German submarines brought into British ports with certain of their crews alive. The story that a German officer landed, made friends with a lady and gave her dinner at one of the big seaside hotels, is, I believe, quite true.

The storyteller that she was, she ‘used this story in a novel which I called *The Gentleman Anonymous*’,³⁷ and *Good Old Anna* picks up on such rumours.

The climate of fear encouraged suspicion, not just about those considered ‘aliens’ (the Alien Registration Act of 1914 required enemy aliens – 70,000–75,000 of whom were Germans – to register with the police, and compelled men of military age to be interned),³⁸ but ‘respectable persons of British nationality’ who may have looked ‘odd’, spoke as if they had a German accent, or were found whispering.³⁹ Governesses and housekeepers, like ‘Good Old Anna’, were particularly vulnerable to suspicion:

Even before the war was actually declared, this burst out and gave rise to absurd and some cruel occurrences. In some cases the lives of foreign governesses and maids who had grown old in the service of British families were made a burden to them. It became necessary to obtain a permit for an alien member of any household. A child,

hearing some discussion on the subject, asked anxiously, 'Oh, mummie, *must* we kill poor Fräulein?'⁴⁰

Apocryphal stories circulated, including that of a governess who hid a store of high explosives under a false bottom in her steamer trunk:

Everyone who told his story knew the woman's employer; some had even seen the governess herself in happier days: 'Such a nice, quiet person, so fond of the children; but now one comes to think of it, there was something in her face, impossible to describe, but a something.'⁴¹

It is against this backdrop that *Good Old Anna* emerges and resonates.

On the issue of propaganda, Belloc Lowndes is censorious. Atrocity stories, whether published in German newspapers indicting the Belgians ('the women of Belgium had put out the eyes of wounded German soldiers', below, p. 127) or the alleged German atrocities against 'little Belgium', are meant to be scrutinized. Belloc Lowndes seems to be suggesting that propaganda from either side is not entirely to be trusted, as Rose and her mother find it hard to believe the hyperbolic tales coming out of Belgium. Wartime 'urban myths', such as that of a 'mysterious passage of Russians through the country', 20,000–100,000 men 'being swiftly, secretly transferred *via* Archangel and Scotland, to the Continent' (below, p. 94) are also suspect, if not entirely discounted.

The novel taps into other contemporary wartime concerns: the notion that Major Guthrie has left a 'steeplechase will' in naming Mary Otway as his beneficiary even before he has proposed to her; the unsatisfactory communication conveyed by censored and Field Service postcards to Rose and Mary; the business-as-usual attitude that was meant to cheer and maintain a semblance of normalcy that could equally appear callous and frivolous; prejudices that Germans took jobs from the English; permits for German resident aliens; and promises made by employers to keep the jobs of those who enlisted. The references to actual events resonate a sense of reality with the reader from the siege at Liège to the sinking of the battle cruiser *Amphion* (below, p. 98).

The original dust jacket of *Good Old Anna* conveys nothing of these highly charged elements: a young, beautiful woman in a flowing white bridal gown and veil clasps in one hand a large bouquet of flowers and in the other the hand of a man propped up in a hospital bed. The two gaze lovingly and intently into each other's eyes, observed by a benevolent-looking cleric. Despite this outward foregrounding of romance, Belloc Lowndes's novel is, above all, a spy thriller.

The eponymous character, Anna Bauer, is the German housekeeper of Mary Otway, a widow in her forties. Set in the fictional cathedral city of Witanbury, emphasizing the genteel, middle-Englishness and thus 'civility' of the world por-

trayed, the novel opens on 5 August 1914, the day after the declaration of war. Mrs Otway is characteristic of those

thousands such, living in serene girlhood, wifehood, or widowhood, to be found in the villages and country towns of dear old England. With but very few exceptions, they are kindly-natured, unimaginative, imbued with a shrinking dislike of any exaggerated display of emotion; in some ways amazingly broad-minded, in others curiously limited in their outlook on life. Such women, as a rule, present few points of interest to students of human nature, for they are almost invariably true to type, their virtues and their defects being cast in the same moulds. (below, p. 7)

Yet Belloc Lowndes elevates such women to a level of interest. She explores their responses and foregrounds their concerns, and of course at the same time valorizing a particular feminine outlook, one which allows for steadfastness in a time of crisis, such as the war.⁴² When the novel opens, the elderly Miss Forsyth enquires of her friend Mrs Otway, ‘and now, my dear Mary, what, may I ask, are you going to do about your good old Anna?’ (below, p. 3). Miss Forsyth is only one among a number of residents in Witanbury who believe that Anna should be sent back to Germany. Although gossip has it that the town is ‘a spy centre for this part of England’ (below, p. 162), Mrs Otway remains staunchly loyal to her housekeeper, who has been with her for eighteen years and been nurse to her daughter Rose, now a grown-up woman:

Why, because the powers of evil have conquered – I mean by that dreadful German military party – should I behave unjustly to a faithful old German woman ... Her whole life is centred in me – or perhaps I ought to say in Rose. (below, p. 3)

Furthermore, because Mrs Otway ‘As a girl ... had spent two very happy years in Germany, at Weimar’, she finds she can love both countries: ‘after all, you may hate the sin and love the sinner!’ (below, pp. 7, 72). Mary Otway was not alone among women and men of her class and generation who went to Germany to ‘be finished’ or to study. Belloc Lowndes explains that

Before the summer of 1914, few Englishwomen went to France except to buy clothes in Paris, or to escape from the cold to the Riviera, but a great number of people – in fact all those who could afford to do so – sent their young daughters to be what was called ‘finished’ in Germany. This not only led in some cases to Anglo-German marriages, which were on the whole happy and successful, it also created many young people in this country to have a most affectionate feeling for Germany. This being so, the outbreak of war in 1914 seemed to stun many of my friends.⁴³

Bessie Rayner Parkes, Belloc Lowndes’s mother, too, ‘had adored – the right word – the Germany of her youth, and in the drawing-room of my French home was a small bookcase filled with German books.’⁴⁴ The poets Rupert Brooke and Charles Hamilton Sorley – who both spent time in Germany – at once admired

the culture and hated the turn of events brought on by militarism. The distinction between martial Germany and 'civilized' Germany, a theme that runs throughout *Good Old Anna*, is one linked to class. Those that admired Germany and German culture, hating the sin and loving the sinner, as it were, were of a class and background well-off enough to be 'finished' or further educated. Their view of the forward march of civilization was linked to the cultural heritage of an enlightened society, one that was brought about not by arms but by the life of the mind. It is no surprise, then, that like Mrs Otway, the Dean of Witanbury Cathedral, Dr Haworth, takes every opportunity, in high-minded language, to discourage bigotry. In sermons he stresses the need for 'a generous broad-mindedness in their attitude towards the foe: England was a great civilised nation, and so was Germany. The war would be fought in an honourable, straightforward manner, as between high-souled enemies' (below, p. 13). The Dean particularly urges a Christian kindness to the naturalized Germans lived in the town itself. The barber, Herr Fröhling, for instance, has lived in England for forty years, has a son in the British Army, and 'was a German of the good old sort ... he did not share Anna's enthusiasm for the Kaiser, the Kaiserin, and their stalwart sons' (below, p. 18). A Socialist, he is distraught over 'what a few people have made of my beloved country' (below, p. 43). One character in the novel that does not share the Dean's liberal sentiment is Major Guthrie. Although he too 'spent quite a long time in Stuttgart', he makes a distinction between the 'Germans of to-day' and those of the past: 'He honestly believed them to be unprincipled, untrustworthy, and unscrupulous; and ... he had long been convinced that they intended to conquer Europe by force of arms' (below, p. 12).

Anna is at first outwardly suspect, and not a sympathetic a figure like Herr Fröhling. Although Mrs Otway insists that 'Anna has all the virtues of the German woman; she is faithful, kindly, industrious, and thrifty' (below, p. 3), sometimes she exhibits what Miss Forsyth calls 'typically German' vices: arrogance, stinginess, bigotry (below, p. 3). She is also fat. Moreover, unlike Herr Fröhling, Anna is not reserved about her admiration for and allegiance to the Fatherland. In her 'cosy bedroom' she keeps a pair of white china busts of Bismarck and von Moltke, 'her heroes' on her dresser (below, p. 133). Her prejudice is also undisguised. She 'hated Belgium and the Belgians', and sneers at 'terrible, barbarous' Russia and 'prosperous, perfidious' France (below, p. 15). Her affection for the British is mixed with 'kindly contempt' and disdain, mainly as a result of England's lack of martial power (below, p. 15). The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1 is uppermost in Anna's mind as she compares Witanbury's reaction to the declaration of war in 1914 with that of her 'beloved Fatherland' decades earlier: 'Every street of the little town in which she had lived [in Germany] had become full of soldiers – splendid, lion-hearted soldiers going off to fight', whereas '[n]othing of the sort had taken place here, though Witanbury was a

garrison town' (below, p. 15). Echoing Belloc Lowndes's sentiments 'during that strange summer and autumn of 1914, when it appeared to me as if I alone realized what war meant',⁴⁵ Anna laments how no one in Witanbury 'seemed aware his country was at war' (below, p. 15). When she learns of German advances, she takes delight in them. On hearing the Germans have sunk an English war vessel, 'Good Old Anna's face beamed. It was not that she disliked England – indeed, she was very fond of England. But she naturally felt that ... it was only right and fair that the Fatherland should win' (below, p. 79). Her 'hatred' for the war, and how it might bring grief to her beloved Rose and Mary Otway, is sincere, but it is tempered with concerns that seem trivial and unworthy of her 'warm, sentimental German heart' (below, p. 102). Her hope that Rose's love interest Jervis Blake might return home safe and sound is aligned to the fact that 'he was a rich, generous young gentleman' (below, p. 102). Her views of Englishwomen also do not endear her to the reader. She is scathing about their interest in politics, especially 'the antics of the Suffragettes'. Such women should, in her view, be committed to the 'idiot asylum'. According to Anna, every 'true' woman should be occupied with 'Church, Kitchen, and Children', not the world of political action (below, p. 17). She is disappointed that her 'Miss Rose' supports the suffrage. Of greater disappointment is that her own daughter Louisa is married to an Englishman, though in George Pollit her dislike is rightfully placed. This ne'er-do-well, 'worthless London tradesman', is 'always getting into scrapes, and having to be got out of them' (below, p. 5). His role in the spy ring is of little surprise to the reader.

'Good Old Anna' is not the easiest character to like, but she is not a villain. That distinction is reserved for Manfred Hegner. In him, the Dean's confidence and generosity are utterly misplaced. Anna's misfortunes – and her ultimate downfall – are the result of her involvement with Hegner, who on the outbreak of war, anglicizes his name to 'Alfred Head'. The act is in keeping with the times. Mrs C. S. Peel remarks that

By the autumn of 1914 about 500 of those who bore foreign names had changed them: Bernstein became Curzon, Steineke Stanley, Stohwasser Stowe – even British soldiers who were fighting but who had German names changed them. Business firms found it advisable to get rid of German partners and if the firm had a German name to change it. Later no unnaturalized foreigner was allowed to change his name. It was a popular act when in 1917 the King abolished German titles in his family and adopted the family name of Windsor.⁴⁶

One businessman who refused to adopt an anglicized name – and suffered the consequences – was the publisher William Heinemann. The windows and doors of 21 Bedford Street, where the firm had its offices, were not infrequently pelted with cabbage leaves and horse manure. Yet he stuck to his name, believing it to

be 'much respected in the world of letters' and that as the publisher of such texts as Philip Gibbs's *The Battle of the Somme*, 'his wartime lists also showed clearly where he stood'.⁴⁷ Indeed, Heinemann lent his imprint to the government propaganda bureau at Wellington House – although this was not public knowledge – for nine publications including Gibbs's *The Battle of Somme*.⁴⁸

The idea that outward changes do not necessarily constitute a true heart is reinforced throughout the novel. As the owner of the 'The Witanbury Stores', Manfred Hegner/Alfred Head is the biggest retail tradesman in the town. Married to an Englishwoman, Polly, he is an active member of the city council and respected by his customers, all in spite of 'certain facial and hirsute peculiarities' which lead him to be nicknamed 'The Kaiser' (below, p. 20). The reader sees the Head's true nature in his relationship with Polly, who bears the brunt of his 'Teutonic' duplicity. In front of customers he smiles and plays the loving husband. In private, he is cruel and miserly, berating his wife for her sloppiness, wilfulness and her tendency to speak to others of his dubious activities. He impresses Anna because he seems to have 'all sorts of profitable irons in the fire' (below, p. 20), something which appeals to her greedy nature. If not to Anna, it is certainly clear to the reader that the 'irons' are nefarious. What she believes to be a 'commission' for encouraging customers to patronize his store is, in reality, payment for information she gleans from Mrs Otway or Rose, both of whom are being courted by military men, Mrs Otway by Major Guthrie and Rose by Jervis Blake. The information is wheedled out of the unsuspecting Anna in the form of 'innocent' social conversation: 'the old woman thought [Head's] questions quite natural, for all Germans have an insatiable curiosity concerning what may be called the gossip side of life' (below, p. 81).

For all her faults, and especially in light of the oft-repeated epithets, 'good old Anna' or 'poor old Anna', the reader is meant to have sympathy for this naive German woman. (The phrase 'good old' is also used for Herr Fröhling.) Essentially, Anna's love for her homeland is continually exploited, and since treachery and espionage are not part of her allegiance, she fails to see it in others. She equates Head's secretiveness with the countenance of a wealthy businessman: 'it is always well to be in with such lucky folk' (below, p. 132). Even the mysterious visitors she observes in the shadows do not tip her off to any sinister goings-on.

The intrigue created by Alfred Head and his network of spies runs parallel with the romantic storyline of Rose and Jervis Blake and Mrs Otway and Major Guthrie. The complicated trajectory of their respective love affairs is in keeping with romance novels for, like other writers of love stories, Marie Belloc Lowndes had 'to manipulate her plot and her characters' desires so that the hero and heroine do not fall too fixedly into each other's arms until the closing paragraphs.⁴⁹ War, of course, provides a perfect vehicle for prolonging and heightening the

amorous tension. Both men are severely wounded, both their women stand staunchly by them.

But all the happiness of two nuptials, especially those of Jervis and Rose depicted on the dust jacket, is overshadowed by the troubles facing 'good old Anna'. She is arrested and incarcerated, for not only receiving a 'commission' from Alfred Head, but for storing parcels for her nephew Willi Warshauer, a police inspector in Berlin, which unbeknownst to her contain equipment for making bombs. Belloc Lowndes was rather too assiduous in her research for this part of the storyline, it seems, for while she was writing the novel, 'a strange misfortune' befell her:

I took considerable trouble to find out what a bomb was made of, and I described the process in my story. I was bringing the manuscript from Epsom to London, and because I was very tired, I left it on the rack of a railway carriage. There it had been found, and sent to Scotland Yard. An official called on me, and said that he did not think the book could be published until after the war, as I described the making of a bomb. When the war was over, the story would have been of little interest.

In this instance, Belloc Lowndes used her considerable connections to appeal against the decision: 'I went to see Sir Basil Thompson at Scotland Yard. He was very kind, and having read the passage in question, told me he thought it was of no consequence'.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, this storyline, of German agents hoarding explosives and money, falls in line with what war soothsayers had been claiming all along – saboteurs were at work in England preparing for 'the Day'. Although Head's schemes are uncovered and he is arrested, Anna is inconsolable for what she has come to believe is her role in the shelling that resulted in Jervis Blake's wounding. The description of her demise in the final pages of the novel is tense and shocking, and the romantic conclusion describing Rose and Jervis, their 'two figures seemed to become merged until they formed one, together' (below, p. 206), is overshadowed by Anna Bauer's tragic fate. Her final act is an indictment of innuendo, suspicion and prejudice, despite all the stereotypes Belloc Lowndes repeats about the Germans. The heroes of this novel are also not left unscathed by the war and it is the heroines who are left to care for them, just as countless women were in real life.

The war in the novel is never questioned in its totality, but neither is it celebrated. The losses it inflicts physically and psychically are used to justify Britain's successful defeat of Germany the aggressor, but Belloc Lowndes succeeds in raising questions about human character which are not easily answered and portraying the moral dilemmas that face us all.

The Critical Reception of *Good Old Anna*

Good Old Anna was ‘the first real success’ Belloc Lowndes had, given that *The Lodger* took such a long time to catch on. Like her novel *The Red Cross Barge*, it had its difficulties in America. For a time it was thought ‘un-neutral’, but ‘in the end it did appear there, and did very well’, presumably after America’s entry into the war in 1917.⁵¹ Belloc Lowndes herself asserted that she preferred her novel *Lilla: A Part of Her Life*, ‘in which the hero was drowned with Lord Kitchener in the Hampshire’, to *Good Old Anna*.⁵²

The *Times Literary Supplement* called the novel ‘credible from start to finish’, and praised the fact that it was ‘not Mrs. Lowndes’s way’ to follow in the path of ‘most authors of spy-stories’ who ‘lead their tales up with wild doings in which no one can believe, and which have the effect (if they had any effect) of persuading one that there are no German spies in England’. Her skill as a writer, the reviewer argues, allows her characters not only to seem ‘real’, but the novel to paint ‘a faithful picture of the general reluctance to face the truth, the bland assumption that the war would make no difference to life in English Cathedral cities and pretty little homes in the Close’.⁵³ The *Observer* argued that ‘no one can accuse [Mrs Belloc Lowndes] of unfairness in this treatment of the alien enemy.’ Referring erroneously to ‘Alfred Mead’/‘Alfred Megner’ instead of ‘Alfred Head’ or ‘Hegner’, the reviewer expresses pity for the ‘simple and poor’ ‘Good Old Anna’ who is ‘but a tool’ in his hands. It calls the novel ‘primarily a pamphlet, and a very sound one at that’, but ‘it will not rank with Mrs. Lowndes’ best work. There are signs of hurry in the characterization.’ The romance between Mrs Otway and Major Guthrie is admired for how it is ‘tenderly and delicately handled’, but that between Rose and Jervis Blake is ‘rather thin and uninteresting’. In ‘the fierce drawing of Alfred Mead, the villain of her fable, Mrs. Lowndes displays all her bitter and veracious power’.⁵⁴

The *Daily Telegraph* review, which features on much of the publicity for *Good Old Anna*, was the most laudatory:

That large public which has made ‘The Man Who Stayed at Home’ a popular success on the stage will assuredly read Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes’ new novel with unabating interest. She gives an air of plausibility to a very thrilling plot. We will not reveal more of the story. Its exciting development and the fidelity to truth in respect to the actual social upheaval following the outbreak of war make ‘Good Old Anna’ a striking and original novel.

Cultural periodicals of the day, such as the *Outlook*, praised the ‘moral writ large over Mrs. Lowndes’s pages, that of “Have no truck with Germans”’. It was scathing about Anna’s character, concluding that ‘If “good old Anna” had been the gentlewoman which the English faithful servant would assuredly have been for all her humble birth, she would not have done the things she did’. The reviewer

asserts that Anna is ‘that evil thing, the woman of modern Germany, cradled in the mischievous traditions of Prussian militarism until every right instinct in her had become warped’.⁵⁵ The novel showed ‘There is only one way to treat Germans as there is to treat snakes – to scotch them’ – an assessment that seems to fly in the face of the intention of the novel, which while not denying the presence of nefarious forces, nevertheless appeals for common sense based on shared humanity.

Such an intention is reinforced by Belloc Lowndes’s recounting of her journey to Cologne during the Allied Occupation:

I had brought with me a certain amount of money confided to my care by friends of mine who wished to help aged German governesses who had lived in England. I recall going to see one old lady from Bonn, and how the poor thing burst into tears when I handed to her a number of ten-pound notes, gifts from her old London pupils.

Yet like Anna, there is a certain glee attendant to the perceived transgression: ‘I presume there must be in my nature a lawless French streak, for I remember feeling amused at the horror which certain of my English friends expressed when I came home, at my conveying any money to German women.’⁵⁶ She was, it seems, a naturally and genuinely compassionate person, something she suggests in an anecdote is innate to her heritage. Visiting the town of Rouen, she noticed German prisoners at work and was impressed by how they were kindly treated by the French inhabitants. When she asks an old man whom she meets on a tram how the townsfolk can be so compassionate to their former enemies, he tells her

I was in Germany as a prisoner in 1870. I remember that time well, and if only for that reason I should always treat any prisoner as he should be treated – that is as an unfortunate man in need of pity.⁵⁷

A framed copy of the 1914 Mobilization Order of the French Army and Navy hung in Belloc Lowndes’s bedroom for the rest of her life, reminding her, as she would often say, ‘*Je suis toute française de cœur*’.⁵⁸

In January 1919, Belloc Lowndes heard some literary gossip: ‘publishers now reject anything to do with the war’. Yet just as her brother Hilaire ‘foresaw with startling clarity what was to happen in 1939–1945 ... convinced that Germany would fight in due course a war of revenge’,⁵⁹ Belloc Lowndes anticipated the second flowering of war literature in the late 1920s and early ’30s: ‘I feel sure that the most popular books in the next twenty years will be war novels and war books.’⁶⁰

During this period, however, her own writing returned to her fascination with crime in such books as *The Terriford Mystery* (1920), *What Really Happened* (1926) and *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* (1931). She wrote several successful plays in the inter-war period, while her series of memoirs

published during World War II chronicled the literary-social world in which she moved: *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt* (1942), *I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia: A Record of Love and Childhood* (1942) and *The Merry Wives of Westminster* (1946). The title of her final volume, *A Passing World* (1948), published posthumously, poignantly characterizes her reminiscences of family, friends and acquaintances. Marie Belloc Lowndes died at the Hampshire home of her elder daughter, Elizabeth, Lady Iddesleigh, on 14 November 1947. Her younger daughter, Susan Lowndes Marques, edited *The Diaries and Letters of Marie Belloc Lowndes 1911–1947* (1971).

In contrast to the war texts that came to dominate the canon of World War I literature, such as Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*, Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Evadne Price's 'woman's version' of Remarque's novel, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, there is little that is truly subversive in *Good Old Anna*. The romantic storyline is predicable, effusive and sentimental, the spy thriller element in keeping with the genre. Those who betray England are punished either by the state or their own consciences. Those who are steadfast in their belief in the cause and love with true hearts are rewarded. Yet the rewards are not without sacrifice and the neat ending to the espionage plot not without unease. There is no 'bliss of oblivion'⁶¹ in Belloc Lowndes's text. While she may have reiterated familiar tropes of romantic fiction and of propaganda polemics, she also questioned the routes individuals follow to be a 'civilized' nation. The success of this and her other novels indicates how her characters and the dilemmas they faced resonated with a reading public eager both to escape and to make sense of World War I – and their individual roles in it.

Note on the Text

This volume follows the third edition of 1916. It has been checked against the second edition of 1915, the earliest edition available of the novel, held by the Bodleian Library. No variations have been identified between these texts. The British Library holds the fourth edition (1916).

Notes

1. M. B. Lowndes, *A Passing World* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1948), p. 1.
2. Some 'Ripperologists' put the number of murders as high as eleven. The *Pall Mall Gazette* gave much coverage to the Ripper's crimes, 'turning the news accounts of the morning papers in to copy as commentary and, increasingly, using the murders to criticize the organization of the Metropolitan Police and to campaign for housing and other reforms in the East End.' L. Marcus, 'Introduction', in M. Belloc Lowndes, *The Lodger*, ed. L. Marcus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. ix–xxiii, on p. xiii. Stead also published a series of critical articles in September 1884 about the British Navy that questioned its

- preparedness and strength and which sparked off 'alarmist agitation [and] enjoyed the backing of senior naval officers on the Board of the Admiralty' (G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 243).
3. The *Daily Telegraph* also serialized Lowndes's novel of 1912, *A Chink in the Armour*.
 4. M. B. Lowndes, *Diaries and Letters of Marie Belloc Lowndes, 1911–1947*, ed. S. Lowndes (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 97.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
 7. E. Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Arrow, 1994), p. 29.
 8. B. Ruck, *A Smile for the Past* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 111.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
 10. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111.
 11. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 2.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 13. Lowndes, *Diaries and Letters*, pp. 84–5.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
 15. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 24.
 16. F. A. Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p. 370.
 17. Lowndes, *Diaries and Letters*, p. 49.
 18. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 22.
 19. *Bookman*, 47:249 (December 1914), p. 150.
 20. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 24.
 21. Lowndes, *Diaries and Letters*, p. 72.
 22. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 2.
 23. *Times Literary Supplement* (9 December 1914).
 24. *Times Literary Supplement* (5 August 1915).
 25. Lowndes, *A Passing World*, p. 11.
 26. Alongside G. K. Chesterton, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford), Belloc was recruited to the government's propaganda bureau at Wellington House. For a thorough discussion, see P. Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914–18 and After* (London: Batsford, 1989).
 27. T. Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser: German Covert Operations in Great Britain during the First World War Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 4.
 28. I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763–3749*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 33.
 29. P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Providence, RI, and Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 25.
 30. Mrs C. S. Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914–18: A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England during the War* (London: John Lane and Bodley Head, 1929), p. 39.
 31. G. J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 191.
 32. W. Le Queux, *German Spies in England* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1915), p. 7.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.
 34. Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, p. 4.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 144: 'Neither were the British secret services above bending or breaking the law, which they were supposed to protect, as evidenced by Kell's illegal handling of pre-war cases of Karl Armgard Graves and Karl Hentschel and the framing of Leon Francis van