

War

Look at the following quotations which are all about the First World War:

'He had seemed a nice quiet man; a great friend of Septimus's, and he had been killed in the War. But such things happen to everyone. Everyone has friends who were killed in the War.' (p.66)

'It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand ... raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure ..., and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole –' (p.70)

'Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name.' (p.86)

"You served with great distinction in the War?"

...

"The War?" the patient asked. The European War – that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed.

...

He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature.' (p.96)

1. Decide who you think are the speakers or narrators in each of these extracts and the context in which these pieces take place.
2. What do you think these extracts suggest about the characters' attitudes towards the First World War?
3. Do you think the extracts suggest anything about Woolf's attitude to the War? What effect do you think it makes that Woolf lived through the First World War and was writing so soon after the event?