

History



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In order to understand the Age of Anxiety, it is necessary to examine the events of World War One. This war began in June, 1914, with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the Archduke of Austria, by Serbian nationalists. The conflict ended on November 11, 1918, two days after the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm 2nd. Russia, Britain, France, Japan, Italy and the U. S. were allied against Germany and Turkey. This was the first time that a war raged in some form across the entire globe. New technologies of war, including the German U-boat, the airplane and the zeppelin (used by the Germans to attack Britain) were introduced. Trench warfare was the norm, and soldiers were pitted against one another in horrible conditions. The use of mustard gas by the Germans against the British in the Second Battle of Ypres increased the horror of this war. (WW1 timeline). Valery wrote from a position of intellectual and emotional shell-shock. The scope and terror of the war left him questioning everything, and he was afraid: “ We modern civilizations have learned to recognize that we are mortal like the others.” He was no longer complacent about the death of past cultures: “...through the misty bulk of history, huge vessels once laden with riches and learning... were no concern of ours.” The mind, Valery wrote, is deeply injured and may not recover from the shock of its realization that there is no longer the buffer of time. Civilization could end at any moment. The Lost Generation epitomizes the feelings of British intellectuals in WW One’s aftermath. Hugh Dalton writes of his friend Rupert Brooke “ with his passing, a bright light seemed to go out of my life, and a bright hope of the future” (The Lost Generation). The article discusses the disillusionment and loss of idealism that occurred after WW1: “ The real truth was that many soldiers were killed because they were too tired to take cover or too wet and miserable to care

whether they lived or died.” Glorious victories in battle were a far cry from the reality of this war. An entire generation of future leaders was destroyed. It is this loss that Valery refers to: “ There is no thinking man...who can hope to dominate this anxiety, to escape from this impression of darkness...” The possible loss of western civilization for this intellectual heralds a coming age of darkness. References: The Lost Generation. Web Site: [www. aftermatww1. com](http://www.aftermatww1.com) Valery, P. (1922). On European Civilization On the European Mind World War One Timeline. Web Site: [http://www. historyonthenet. co](http://www.historyonthenet.co)