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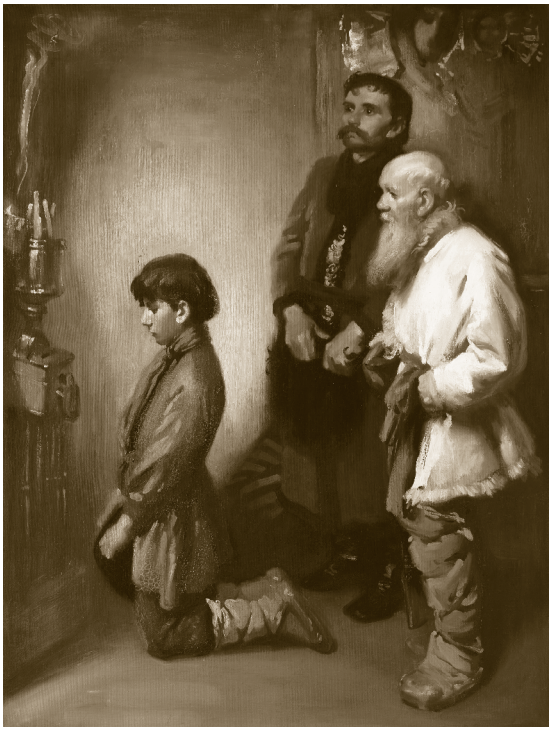
Strident Supermen? Constructions of British Masculinity and the Image of the Hero in the Second World War Portraiture of Eric Kennington (1888–1960)

Keywords: hero, masculinity, People's War, pilot, portraiture, Shakespeare, Socialist Realism, soldier, war art.

It is arguable that Eric Kennington (1888–1960) was unusually aware of a variety of masculinities and masculine types from early on in his career, indeed more than usual for someone from an upper-middle class British background. Between 1905 and 1906, Kennington spent 18 months in Russia, visiting relatives on his mother's side in St Petersburg and Moscow. His mother, Elise, was half-Swedish and some of her Swedish relations were timber merchants with estates in Finland and central Russia.[1] He witnessed something of the revolution of 1905–1906, and acquired an enduring love for certain 19th-century Russian novelists, such as Turgenev (particularly his *A Sportsman's Sketches* from 1852), Tolstoy (1828–1910) (particularly his *Sevastopol Sketches*, 1855–1856), the novel *The Cossacks* (1863) and *War and Peace* (1869), and the autobiographical writings of Maxim Gorky (1868–1936).

Returning to London in 1906, Kennington studied for two years at the Lambeth School of Art. Around 1910, he painted a series of works based on sketches he had made in Russia depicting common people at work and at worship, such as *Moscow Peasants at Worship* (1910) (Fig. 1). The manner in which the peasants are presented suggests he was very much aware of the work of the Peredviznikhi, or 'The Wanderers', group of Socialist Realism painters, in particular Ilya Repin (1844–1930) and the younger generation of painters Repin inspired, such as

[1] J. Black, *The Sculpture of Eric Kennington*, London, 2002, p. 2.



1. Eric Kennington. *Moscow Peasants at Worship*. Ca. 1910

Boris Kustodiev (1878–1927), Isaac Brodsky (1883–1939) and Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (1878–1939).[2]

Further evidence for Kennington's interest in other unorthodox forms of masculinity is provided by a series of images he painted between 1910 and 1914 celebrating the itinerant London 'costermonger': turbulent working class individuals infamous for fighting, feuding and using obscene language to customers as they sold fruit and vegetables, hot chestnuts and buns from barrows and makeshift stalls in the poorer streets of London. Indeed, he first came to approving critical and public attention in April 1914 when his oil *The Costermongers* (1914) was exhibited at the International Society in London.[3]

On 6 August 1914, just two days after Great Britain declared war on Imperial Germany, Kennington volunteered to serve as a private in the 13th Battalion of the London Regiment, a unit known as 'The Kensingtons'. Interestingly, he made no attempt to become an officer, an option certainly open to him with his public school and then art school education. He preferred to stay in the ranks, and accompanied the battalion to France in November 1914. He spent the best part of two months in

[2] J. Black, *The Face of Courage: Eric Kennington, Portraiture and the Second World War*, London, 2011, pp. 11-12.

[3] Ibid., p. 14.

2. Eric Kennington. *The Kensingtons at Laventie: Winter 1914*. 1915

front-line trenches in northeast France before he was wounded in the left foot and sent to recover in England. He lost the middle toe on his foot, and for a while it looked as though the entire foot might have to be amputated. He also suffered from a severe bout of dysentery. Accordingly, he was given an honourable discharge from the army on medical grounds in June 1915. He spent the rest of the year painstakingly painting in oil on glass his meticulous, jewel-like (even icon-like) commemoration to fellow members of Number 7 platoon, C Company, of his battalion. This was exhibited at the Goupil Gallery, London in April and May 1916 as *The Kensingtons at Laventie: Winter 1914* (Fig. 2) to rapturous reviews.[4]

[4] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

As a consequence of how he had presented himself and fellow British soldiers in the Kensingtons, as exhausted, battered and yet convincingly stoically indomitable warriors, Kennington was approached in the spring of 1917 by the Department of Information to work in France as an official war artist, with a brief to draw the ordinary British soldier from the ranks, known universally in Britain since the late 19th century as 'the Tommy'.[5] Kennington seized the offer and spent nearly eight months in France, producing many stunning images of 'the Tommy', such as *Eighth Queens Hero DCM, MM and Bar* (1917). The sitter was a farm labourer (and poacher) in pre-war civilian life, and an intrepid trench raider and patroller of 'no-man's-land' on his own. Kennington also produced a series of extremely moving portraits of men in a casualty clearing station who were clearly suffering from the effects of mustard gas poisoning which had made them temporarily blind.

Kennington returned to the UK in March 1918; three months later he held a very successful solo show as an officially sponsored war artist at the Leicester Galleries in central London. The catalogue foreword was written by no less than Robert Graves: the war poet and future author of the classic First World War memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929). Graves stated that Kennington possessed 'the trench point of view' more so than other official war artists, such as C.R.W. Nevinson (1889–1946), Paul Nash (1889–1946) or William Orpen (1878–1931). Graves also saw the British soldiers drawn by Kennington as reincarnations of the battle-scarred warriors who had given victory to Oliver Cromwell, the Duke of Marlborough and the Duke of Wellington in Britain's many wars of the past.[6]

[5] Ibid., p. 15. The 'Tommy' was named after Private Thomas Atkins, of the 6th Dragoons who had fought at the Battle of Waterloo, and whose name was chosen by the Duke of Wellington in 1815 as that of an archetypal soldier in the ranks of the British Army for a trial copy of the British Army's first mass-produced standard Pay Book. By the 1890s the British public had come to identify British soldiers in the ranks as 'Tommies' thanks to the poetry and short stories of Rudyard Kipling such as *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892 and 1896) and *Soldiers Three* (1899). See: R. Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*, 1914–1918, London, 2005, p. xv.

[6] R. Graves, 'The British Soldier', in *Eric Kennington*, Leicester Galleries Exhibition Catalogue, London, 1918, p. 4.

However patriotic he undoubtedly was, Kennington was also a confirmed individualist and often bridled against authority, especially authority he perceived as complacent, unimaginative and incompetent. In the autumn of 1918, he left the employ of the new Ministry of Information to work in France as an official war artist for the Canadian War Memorials Scheme. He attached himself to a battle-hardened battalion of Canadian-Scottish Highlanders as it marched into Germany to occupy Cologne. From the many sketches he made of them, he produced a monumental oil painting entitled *The Conquerors*. Painted in London during the summer of 1920, it was included in a solo show Kennington held in October and November of the same year at the Alpine Club Gallery. Here, one can see the extent to which his style of portraiture had changed, to become harsher, perhaps cruder, and even more forceful and quite comparable to the stylised realism of contemporary German artists, such as Otto Dix (1891–1969), George Grosz (1893–1959) and Rudolf Schlichter (1890–1955). Within a few years, this formulation of an unflinching, even intentionally 'ugly' realism would be labelled as 'Neue Sachlichkeit' by museum curator Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884–1963).[7]

As a consequence of his 1920 solo exhibition, Kennington met an extraordinary man who would have a huge impact on the rest of the artist's life and also exerted considerable influence on shaping his understanding of the existence of more unorthodox and unconventional masculinities among Englishmen: archaeologist, explorer, leader of Arab irregular forces against the Ottoman Turks during the First World War, T.E. Lawrence. It was through Lawrence that Kennington came to travel across the Middle East in the spring of 1921 (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan). Kennington drew a series of portraits of Arabs who had fought alongside Lawrence in the deserts of northern Arabia in 1917–1918. These were reproduced in a luxury illustrated edition of Lawrence's masterpiece *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (published in December 1926).[8]

[7] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, pp. 16-17.
[8] Ibid., p. 16.

Kennington's splendid examples of these fearsome Arab warriors, many of whom were still earning a living as brigands, were exhibited to great acclaim in London in October 1921. Men such as Auda Abu Tayi of the Howeitat, southern Jordan, and Mahmas of the Horani, Hejaz, appealed to the artist as heroic 'primitives' from the desert who used the weaponry of the 20th century with enthusiasm and panache. They were also individualists, only loosely part of any larger organisation or social grouping such as a tribe or a clan.

The enigmatic Lawrence (who later changed his name to T.E. Shaw) remained a hero to millions, but he could not have been farther removed from more conventional models of British masculinity, for example Richard Hannay in the novels of John Buchan. Kennington remained close to Lawrence until the latter's sudden death in a motorcycle accident in May 1935. As a striking tribute to his friend, Kennington carved a portrait of Lawrence in the form of a medieval tomb effigy of an English crusader knight but wearing the Arab robes he had adopted while fighting the Ottoman Turks in 1917–1918. This was installed inside the small Anglo-Saxon Anglican Church of St Martin's at Wareham in Dorset in September 1939.[9]

In November 1939 the War Artist Advisory Committee (WAAC) of the Ministry of Information held its first meeting.[10] The chairman was Sir Kenneth Clark (1903–1983), director of the National Gallery since 1933, and surveyor of the king's pictures since 1934, and, it would appear, an admirer of Kennington's recently unveiled Lawrence effigy. Sir Kenneth suggested Kennington be approached as an artist who was both a 'realist' and 'emotional' to produce pastel portraits of senior military officers which could be easily reproduced in the press, in illustrated magazines such as the *Illustrated London News*, the *Sphere* and the *Graphic*, and as postcards for sale at the ministry and from the National Gallery.[11]

[9] Ibid., p. 19.

[10] For more detailed information on the creation of the War Artists Advisory Committee, see: B. Foss, *War Paint: Art, War State and Identity in Britain, 1939–1945*, New Haven and London, 2007, pp. 17-31.

[11] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, p. 20.

3. Eric Kennington. *Leading Stoker A. Martin*. 1940

It is interesting to note that much discussion within the WAAC in November and December 1939 was devoted to how best the committee might reach the nation's left-wing intellectuals; they were assumed to be particularly unreliable since the Soviet Union they so admired had become a close ally of Nazi Germany since the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939.[12] Morale amidst the majority of the population, on the other hand, was assumed to be good and likely to remain that way. Kennington was known to be openly patriotic, and Clark appears to have believed that his portraits would strike a direct chord with the masses.

The WAAC approached Kennington in December 1939, and he promptly agreed to draw a series of senior individuals within the British military such as the chief of the Imperial General Staff General Sir Edmund Ironside (January 1940). As time passed, the artist became increasingly irritated that the WAAC would not give him any support as he tried to change the Admiralty's mind about the ban, nor had it helped him to draw any younger servicemen who had seen combat. In the spring of 1940, he managed to persuade the WAAC to attach him to the Royal Navy to draw survivors from the heavy cruiser *HMS Exeter* which had narrowly avoided being sunk by the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee* in the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939.

Portraits such as *Leading Stoker A. Martin* (1940) (Fig. 3) proved extraordinarily popular with the general public when included in the first exhibition of Official War Art which the WAAC held inside the National Gallery in central London in July 1940. The artist, revealingly, was later to

[12] Foss, *War Paint*..., p. 25.

describe Martin as a 'man of action: instantaneous: 100 percent reliable: expert technician. Much humour under thorough camouflage. Very gentle, sensitive and great physical strength.'[13] Kennington evidently felt the true heroic masculine type could be composed from an amalgam of strength and sensitivity, the tenacious and the tender. *Martin* proved so popular with the public that the pastel was reproduced as a cheap postcard and as a poster to promote the heroism of the Royal Navy. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked for the pastel to hang in his private study at No 10 Downing Street. It remained there for the rest of the war.

By the time the first Official War Art Exhibition opened, early in July 1940, Kennington was no longer an employee of the WAAC. He had come to the conclusion that it was not truly committed to fully publicising and reproducing the work of its war artists to reach the mass of the population who were not accustomed to regularly attend art exhibitions. When the Home Guard was established in Britain in the middle of May 1940, Kennington promptly joined it as a better use of his time than being a war artist for an organisation he felt regarded publicity as 'vulgar' and was more interested in currying favour with left-wing intellectuals.[14]

What appears to have prompted Sir Kenneth Clark to ask Kennington if he would work for the WAAC again, in August 1940, was the overwhelmingly positive public and critical reaction to the Kennington portraits exhibited at the National Gallery. Douglas Cooper, in October 1940 in the *Burlington Magazine*, wrote for many when he stated that Kennington's portraits made 'all other portraits look characterless or like waxworks [...] Kennington alone manages to convey that his sitters are engaged in a grim struggle [...] They serve as a useful reminder that [...] even if this is a mechanised war, the machines are operated by human hands and, above all, human brains, courage and endurance.' Many of the other works on display had been 'painted without emotion and, therefore, arouse no emotion'.[15]

[13] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, p. 29.
[14] Ibid., p. 31.
[15] Ibid., p. 32.

From another perspective, in October 1940 an air raid warden in Hampstead, who had visited the National Gallery exhibition, felt he had to write to thank the artist:

> I wished to tell you how much I admire your portraits [...] They seem to me to express a combination of humanitarian sensibility with aesthetic strength which is to me stimulating and (to use a word not now popular) noble [...] just what I need to think about as at the moment the bombs are falling quite near.[16]

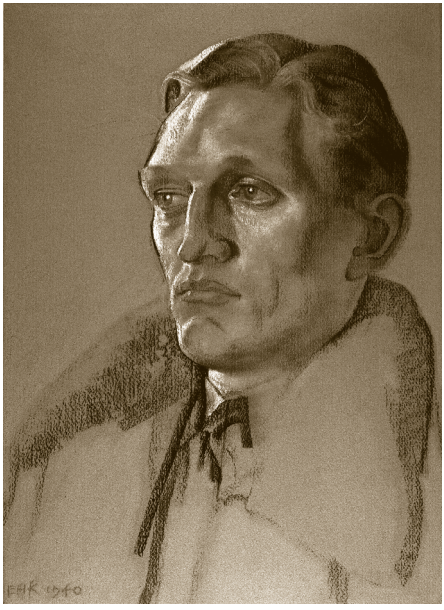
Early in September 1940, as the Battle of Britain was reaching a climax, Kennington agreed to return to work for the WAAC as an official artist attached to the Royal Air Force. He first drew a bomber pilot who had been recently awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration for bravery a British monarch can bestow on a serviceman. Squadron Leader Roderick Alastair Brook Learoyd VC (1913–1996) was aged 27 when Kennington drew him on 7 September 1940 sitting on the roof of the Air Ministry in London as a huge air raid took place. Such an image, when exhibited at the National Gallery later in 1940, readily invited comparison with Holbein's memorable drawings from the 1530s of members of the court of Henry VIII. Kennington was then asked to draw a succession of imposing-looking Battle of Britain fighter 'aces' such as the 22-year-old South African *Flying Officer Albert Gerald 'Zulu' Lewis DFC and Bar* (1940) (Fig. 4). Lewis was compared to celebrated images of swashbuckling 17th-century militarised masculinity in London galleries by William Dobson (1611–1646), court painter to Charles I during the English Civil War (1642–1645), and by his Dutch contemporary Frans Hals (c. 1580–1666) such as the latter's famous *The Laughing Cavalier* (1624) in the Wallace Collection.[17]

Another portrait he produced during this period which proved particularly popular with the British public was that of Squadron Leader Douglas Robert Stewart Bader DSO and Bar DFC (1910–1982), a charismatic, if slightly eccentric, individual who, having lost both legs in a plane

[16] Air Raid Warden J. Perrymead to Eric Kennington, 10 October 1940. Collection: family of the artist.

[17] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, pp. 41-42.

4. Eric Kennington. *Flying Officer Albert Gerald 'Zulu' Lewis, DFC and Bar*. 1940



5. Eric Kennington. *Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey 'Sammy' Allard, DFC, DFM and Bar*. 1940

crash in 1931, taught himself how to fly an aircraft with artificial 'tin' legs. During the Battle of Britain he commanded 242 Fighter Squadron, and then a Fighter Wing. By the time he was shot down over northern France in August 1941 and captured, Bader had 20 confirmed kills. The artist was evidently very impressed with Bader's charisma, writing to his elder brother while visiting 242 Squadron:

> The OC [Officer Commanding] here [Bader] has no legs and has been passed 100% unfit. But he is back and tears up into the sky like a hawk and nearly pulls the Germans out of their planes with his teeth and all his squadron have about a dozen each to their credit. I had forgotten we could produce such tigers.[18]

Kennington's portrait of 28-year-old fighter ace *Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey 'Sammy' Allard DFC, DFM and Bar* (1912–1941) (Fig. 5) also

[18] Ibid., p. 50.

impressed the public on being exhibited at the National Gallery. Allard came from a working class background, and joined the ranks of the RAF in 1929. He became something of a celebrity for the many German aircraft he shot down during the battles of France and of Britain. Kennington drew him in December 1940. Three months later Allard was dead, killed in an accident during a routine flight in March 1941. The following month, Kennington's portrait of a brooding, exhausted Allard was exhibited at the National Gallery. A viewing of the portrait prompted a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, one Dorothy Showbridge, to write an extraordinary letter to the artist stating that she had been 'tremendously impressed by [his portrait of] Allard [...] Time and again it drew me back to the haunting sadness of his eyes and mouth. What was the reason for the tragedy behind the eyes – personal or the realisation of the stupidity and senseless destruction of war ... you know how to say things few people do.' Allard's death had hit her 'as if I had known him personally which shows the effect your picture creates'.[19]

It is indeed revealing to compare Kennington's portrait of Allard with a more overtly 'romantic' interpretation of the same sitter created two months earlier by another war artist, Cuthbert Orde (1888–1968). Kennington's image is stronger, harsher, more emphatic and much more dramatic. When a group of Kennington's portraits of fighter pilots were exhibited early in 1941 at the National Gallery, they provoked the first note of doubt about his presentation of the British male at war from within a minority of influential critics. The progressive Eric Newton, who had close links with the Surrealists as well as members of the left-liberal Bloomsbury group, wrote in the *Sunday Times*: 'Kennington goes on and on with his over life-size portraits of supermen. They are strident things whose assertiveness almost hurts the eyes [...] Some are positively frightening.' He did acknowledge that 'they do look like men who are going to win the war [...] Dropped as leaflets over enemy country I can imagine them being effective as a bomb.'[20]

[19] Letter from Dorothy Showbridge, WAAF, RAF Kenley, to Eric Kennington, 3 April 1941. Collection: family of the artist.

[20] E. Newton, 'More War Art at the National Gallery', *Sunday Times*, 5 January 1941, p. 12.

6. Eric Kennington. *Flight Sergeant H.D. Parker*. 1941

Kennington did try to vary his portraits of pilots, such as in the case of *At Readiness*, the haunting image of night fighter pilot Richard Playne Stephens DSO, DFC and Bar waiting in his Hurricane fighter for the signal to take off. Destined to be one of the RAF's most deadly night fighters, with 14 kills, Stephens shot down his victims with relish owing to the fact that the Germans had killed his wife and one of his two children during a bombing raid on Manchester. Stephens took one chance too many, and was shot down and killed over the Netherlands in December 1941, eight months after Kennington drew him.[21]

It would seem that Kennington was largely attracted to drawing bomber pilot and strafer of German ships *Flight Sergeant H.D. Parker* (Fig. 6) because of the aura he projected of an Elizabethan buccaneer in the mould of Sir Francis Drake, Sir Richard Grenville or Sir Walter Raleigh. In April 1941 the artist would describe Parker as 'the sort of man who must have jumped off an Elizabethan frigate to board a Spanish galleon'.[22] The portraits of Parker and Stephens were both reproduced in an illustrated booklet entitled *Pilots, Workers, Machines* Kennington published on his own initiative (with help from Vauxhall Motors) in October 1941. The artist asked popular novelist J.B. Priestley to write an introduction to the booklet, in which Priestley described Kennington's pilot-sitters as exemplars of youthful militarised British masculinity. Priestley initially stated that 'the essential character

[21] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, pp. 57-58.
[22] Ibid., p. 62.

of Kennington's portraits is at once strong, very masculine, and yet at the same time, nervous [...] as a racehorse is nervous [before a big race] and not as the term is applied to some pampered and neurotic woman [...] strong and nervous masculinity [...] thrown into relief by war.' He further believed that many of Kennington's young RAF sitters possessed 'a kind of Elizabethan dash and superb impudence, as if they were all descendents of Drake and Hawkins and their men'.[23]

Finally, Priestley felt he should point out how many of the pilots and aircrew Kennington had drawn came from:

> the great middle section of British society, from those British middle classes that have been so often attacked. Their parents have rarely been either very rich or very poor. They have mostly not known either great mansions or slums. They are, of course, carefully hand-picked in some respects, chiefly in the matter of physical condition, quick reaction and general intelligence but [...] I think it can be said that they truly represent the middle classes from which they are drawn [...] These are some of the young men who are not only battling in the skies to preserve our present freedom but will also, with any luck, be among those who will help to build the future Britain.[24]

It is as though Priestley is already looking forward to a postwar world and anticipates the categorical result of the General Election of July 1945 in which many servicemen from middle-class backgrounds voted for the first time for the Labour Party and the promise of social change and a 'New Jerusalem'.[25]

However, the perception was growing in some quarters that Kennington's portraits were overly idealised and all too glamorous, in a sinister manner which recalled portraiture encouraged by the Third Reich. In August 1941, for example, Raymond Mortimer, an art critic associated with the Bloomsbury group, complained that Kennington's latest portraits on display at the National Gallery were as 'hysterical as the eloquence of Hitler'.[26] Towards the end of that year Sir Kenneth Clark

[23] Ibid., p. 63.
[24] Ibid.
[25] J. Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939–1945*, London, 2005, p. 678.
[26] R. Mortimer, 'War Art at the National Gallery', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 8 August

wrote an article on the official war art programme to be published in the January 1942 issue of *Studio* magazine. Clark described Kennington as possessing 'an extraordinary power of combining resemblance with heroic idealisation'. However, he stated that Kennington's best work was achieved 'when idealisation is not pressed too far [...] as it is a fallacy to make all heroes look so very heroic.'[27]

Kennington was, by now, rather unhappy with the WAAC for failing to help him with the publication of *Pilots, Workers, Machines* which he funded to reach the 1,500 workers in two factories managed in Luton by his elder brother William. Such workers were, he argued, vital to the war effort but they did not have the time, nor inclination, to visit a WAAC art exhibition. They had the radio for entertainment but were 'starved' of morale-boosting imagery. One of the two factories made parts for Wellington and Halifax bombers: why, Kennington asked, could not the WAAC publish a booklet of his portraits of bomber pilots and aircrew with accompanying biographical details, so the workers on the production line could feel closer to the men who flew the aircraft they were helping to construct?[28] The other factory made tanks for service in the Western Desert. Kennington had the idea to spend time with the 11th Armoured Division, commanded by a close friend of his, Major-General Sir Percy Hobart. The artist would draw men of Hobart's division and these portraits would then be reproduced in a book to be given to the workers in his brother's tank factory and marketed to other munition workers for a small sum.[29]

Tanks and Tank Folk was published after many delays, late in December 1942. Six of the original pastel portraits Kennington drew were selected by the then Soviet ambassador to London Ivan Maisky (1884–1975, ambassador to London 1932–1943) and despatched to Murmansk on an Arctic convoy, but the ship carrying them was bombed by the Germans and sunk. One of the works lost depicted *Trooper Lewis*, *Royal*

1941, p. 21.

[27] K. Clark, 'Official War Art', *The Studio*, January 1942, p. 8.

[28] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, pp. 71-72.

[29] Ibid., p. 80.

7. Eric Kennington. *Trooper Lewis, Royal Tank Regiment, 11th Armoured Division*. 1941

8. Eric Kennington. *Squadron Leader Wojciech Kolaczkowski, DFC, VM*. 1942

Tank Regiment, 11th Armoured Division (1941) (Fig. 7). Kennington was later to describe him as 'blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon, a bit ferocious'.[30]

By the spring of 1942, Kennington was looking to leave the WAAC's employ and work instead for the War Office, which was unhappy with how its soldiers were being presented by the official war artists the WAAC had sent them, such as Anthony Gross (1895–1984) and Edward Bawden (1903–1989).[31] It did not help that the battle performance of the British Army had been markedly less impressive than either the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force. It had suffered defeat after defeat during 1941 and the first half of 1942: in Greece and Crete in 1941, in

[30] Ibid., 2011, p. 78.
[31] Foss, *War Paint...*, p. 125.

Malaya, Singapore and Burma in 1942, and then in June 1942, as Tobruk in Libya fell to Rommel.

Meanwhile, Kennington had noticed that the WAAC had made relatively little of the presence in the RAF of many men from countries in Europe occupied by the Germans. Indeed, during the Second World War, Polish volunteers provided sufficient men to man 13 RAF squadrons.[32] In April 1942, he suggested drawing a series of Allied Airmen which the US Embassy was keen to have toured in the USA. He admired these pilots, especially those from Eastern Europe, for the passion with which they hated the enemy; they approached shooting down Germans in large numbers very seriously indeed. An example of a series of Polish pilots Kennington drew during April 1942 is *Squadron Leader Wojciech Kolaczkowski DFC, VM* (1942) (Fig. 8). The sitter (1908–2001) was aged 34 when drawn. He had qualified as a pilot in 1931, but had established a career as an international rally driver by the time of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. At the time Kennington drew him Kolaczkowski had four confirmed kills and was in command of 303 (Kosciuszko) Squadron, hence the prominent badge in the top right-hand corner of the composition. After the war Kolaczkowski felt he could not return to Poland and live under communist rule. He moved to the United States to sell British-made Jaguar cars and eventually became a US citizen. However, he insisted that after his death his ashes be scattered on the site of the family manor house in eastern Poland, near Lublin.[33]

Kennington's portraits of Allied pilots received mixed reviews when exhibited at the National Gallery or reproduced in the officially sponsored publication *Drawing the RAF: A Book of Portraits*. The art critic of the *Scotsman*, for example, writing in August 1942, felt 'it seems almost too good to be possible that [Kennington's] heroes should look so heroic [...] scepticism is stirred simply because these young knights of the air look so knightly.' The critic did concede that looking 'at these faces [does] make one feel sorry for the enemy [and] makes one proud to be

[32] J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939–1945*, London, 1985, p. 301.

[33] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, p. 89.

British'. Other official war artists 'paint picturesque effects, camouflaged gun posts, surrealist machines and such-like. But Kennington sees courage, intensity, fighting spirit in the men behind the machines [...] these portraits are the best propaganda [...] other than Mr Churchill's speeches which take us back in spirit to the History Plays of Shakespeare.'[34]

Writing two months later, Bloomsbury critic Herbert Furst was more overtly hostile. Kennington's portraits in *Drawing the RAF* had made him feel distinctly 'uneasy [...] I feel as if I have awakened in Valhalla [...] There is a worrying lack of understatement and humility.'[35]

By the time this review was published, early in October 1942, Kennington had in fact already resigned from the WAAC and created a semi-official war artist position for himself within the War Office. A little later, he wrote in his own inimitable way to military historian Basil Liddell-Hart: 'I have violently sacked myself from all official status and am a pirate, favoured and spoilt by the newly awakened and alive WO.'[36] At first the War Office commissioned him to draw soldiers who had been awarded medals for the bravery they had displayed in France and Belgium in May and June 1940, and in North Africa in 1941 and 1942. Then, in the spring of 1943, Kennington was commissioned by the secretary of state for war to draw a series of portraits to help promote the reputation of the 'Home Guard'. This organisation had been established in July 1940 to help the regular armed forces defend British soil and was composed of volunteers aged between 17 and 65 years of age who were exempt from normal conscription on account of age and profession.[37]

By 1943 the force, sometimes derisively known as 'Dad's Army', was almost 1.5 million men strong, nearly a third of whom were veterans of the First World War with impressive military records. Kennington em-

[34] Ibid., p. 103. The writer probably had in mind Churchill's famous reference to the RAF fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain, in August 1940, as 'The Few'. He was quoting from Act IV, Scene III of Shakespeare's play *Henry V* in which the king addresses his troops on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt (1415) as 'We few. We happy few, we band of brothers ...'

[35] H. Furst, 'Mr. Kennington's Portraits', *Apollo*, October 1942, p. 97.

[36] Black, *The Face of Courage* ..., p. 110.

[37] Gardiner, 2005, pp. 224-225.

9. Eric Kennington. *Lance-Corporal Melvyn Jones, B Company, 9th Battalion Monmouthshire Home Guard*. 1943

barked on a lengthy tour of the UK, visiting areas of the country he had not been to before and meeting people he would have never normally encountered. Near Pontnewydd, in South Wales, he drew two portraits of a 36-year-old coal miner at nearby Blaensherchan Colliery; one in his immaculately pressed Home Guard uniform, the second in his 'daytime' role at the coal face deep beneath the ground: *Lance-Corporal Melvyn Jones, B Company, 9th Battalion Monmouthshire Home Guard* (July 1943, Pontypool Museum and Art Gallery) (Fig. 9), and *Melvyn Jones – Coal Miner* (July 1943, Pontypool Museum and Art Gallery). In the former, which he apparently preferred, Jones stands in the front room of his terraced house in the guise of a soldier; whereas, in the latter, he could almost be related to a Socialist Realism mid-1930s presentation of Alexei Stakhanov surpassing his production quota in the bowels of a Donbas coal mine. However, while mining for a Stakhanovite would have been depicted in Socialist Realism fashion as joyously accomplished without visible effort, Kennington unflinchingly conveys a powerful sense of the mental concentration and sheer physical strain Jones confronted daily within a chokingly dust-laden, confined, claustrophobic working space.[38]

Elsewhere, he sometimes selected Home Guard sitters because their physiognomy summoned thoughts of British warriors from the country's formidable military past. *Sergeant John 'Jack' Henry Stokes*, *2nd Battalion,*

[38] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, pp. 115-116.

10. Eric Kennington. *Sergeant John 'Jack' Henry Stokes, 2nd Battalion Huntingdonshire Home Guard*. 1943

Huntingdonshire Home Guard (drawn August 1943, Rochdale Art Gallery) (Fig. 10) caught Kennington's eye not just because of his marvellously craggy and granite features but also because the 52-year-old farmer, as he wrote at the time to his daughter, 'reminded me of one of old Cromwell's "Ironsides": a member of the formidable regiment of cavalry Roundhead General Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) had raised in the vicinity of St Ives in 1642–1643 during the first English Civil War to fight for Parliament against King Charles I'.[39] Similarly, Kennington selected police reservist and First World War veteran Sergeant Edgar Bluett, Cornish Home Guard (drawn November 1943, National Army Museum, London) because Bluett led the artist to think of the Cornish militia who had been mobilised to defend Penzance from the approaching Spanish Armada in 1588. Indeed, drawing Bluett and the sunlit coastline over which he stands guard with such grim resolve, Kennington brought to mind John of Gaunt's celebrated speech from Act II, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's play *Richard II* (first performed in 1595) in which the grizzled old soldier on his deathbed memorably describes England as:

> This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise, / This fortress built by Nature for herself / Against infection and the hand of war, / This happy breed of men, this

[39] Despite his dictatorial tendencies, Cromwell's reputation enjoyed a distinct revival during the Second World War as one of England's most effective military leaders. Indeed, in its early days, there was talk of turning the Home Guard into a successor to the volunteer citizen 'New Model Army' Cromwell had helped to establish in 1645. M. Connolly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, London, 2004, p. 13.

> little world, / This precious stone set in the silver sea / Which serves it in the office of a wall, / Or as a moat defensive to a house / Against the envy of less happier lands, / This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

However, when Kennington exhibited many of his Home Guard portraits in London in September 1943, some critics found this highly emotive, even melodramatic, presentation of relatively humble sitters as rather preposterous. The critic of the *Times*, for example, felt that Kennington had been 'too vividly conscious' of Shakespeare's sentiments in plays such as *Richard II* and *Henry V* and he had 'over-dramatised his subjects'. On the other hand, with regard to older sitters, such as Stokes and Jones, the artist gave 'a vivid impression of the manhood and strength of our race'.[40]

The correspondent for the politically left-liberal newspaper the *Manchester Guardian* was even more scathing in his criticism: Kennington's Home Guard portraits left the spectator,

> with an uncomfortable doubt as to where art leaves off and propaganda begins [...] each one of them has been dipped, as it were, into a bath of heroism and emerged dripping with starry-eyed glory. Patriotism on this unashamed scale is not fashionable in England today. Kennington's private soldiers are all gazing into space and murmuring to themselves: 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.' Today, when glamour is the prerogative of film stars, it is a little odd to find an artist spreading it so thickly on mere sergeant majors and members of the Home Guard and leaving out the [...] humour and understatement which we like to think distinguish us from our enemies.[41]

Evidently, Kennington had actually transgressed against the dominant discourse of the 'People's War' by presenting ordinary citizen soldiers as too physically formidable and as too overtly patriotic.[42]

[40] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, p. 120.

[41] Anon., 'The Kennington Exhibition', *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1943, p. 4.

[42] The term 'People's War' was used internally by the Ministry of Information as early as September 1939. However, the ministry appears to have disseminated the term for widest possible public consumption shortly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union late in June 1941. R. Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War*, Manchester, 2002, p. 145.

Elsewhere, the emphatic nature of Kennington's realism was interpreted in a positive rather than a negative light. Jan Gordon, for example, in the *Studio* wrote in November 1943 that Kennington's exhibition served to underline what a loss he was to the ranks of the Ministry of Information's official war artists. A veteran of the First World War, Gordon felt that for all his 'exaggeration', Kennington at least presented images of British servicemen who offered some reassurance to the British public that they belonged to a country that would emerge victorious from the war. Gordon concluded: 'However much you like or dislike a Kennington heroic portrait [...] they are unmistakably virile studies of men, striking in force of character.'[43]

Among admirers of Kennington's series of Home Guard portraits were members of the London Passenger Transport Board. Early in 1944, the board's Publicity Committee invited Kennington to draw a series of six of its employees who had displayed incredible courage and initiative under pressure during the London Blitz of September 1940 to May 1941. The series, entitled Seeing it Through, was issued as posters on the Underground network in April 1944. It is almost as if Kennington seized this opportunity to prove to those critics who had disparaged his portraits of RAF pilots in 1940–1942 that he was more than able to convincingly celebrate the courage of British civilians; those who did not take life but triumphed by stoically coping with punishment meted upon them by a ruthless enemy. It is perhaps in these portraits, and in a series of portraits commissioned later in 1944 as part of a project jointly managed by ICI (Imperial Chemicals Industry) and the Ministry of Supply entitled Portraits of an Industry, that thoughts of and comparisons with the portraiture of contemporary Soviet Socialist Realism become irresistible. London Underground train driver Frank Clarke (drawn January 1944, lithograph issued April 1944, London Transport Museum) had displayed great coolness and presence of mind in October 1940 when Sloane Square Underground Station was hit by a bomb as his train en-

[43] J. Gordon, 'Around the Galleries', *The Studio*, vol. 126, no. 608, p. 163.

11. Eric Kennington. *William Pickford, Quarryman, Buxton, Derbyshire*. 1944

tered it. He rallied the shaken passengers and led them down the track to safety at the next station of South Kensington.

From the slightly later Portraits of an Industry series for ICI and the Ministry of Labour, *William Pickford, Quarryman, Buxton, Derbyshire* (Fig. 11), a dynamite expert in a limestone quarry on the outskirts of Buxton in Derbyshire, stands out as a 'humanised' example of Kennington's British Socialist Realism. Pickford could easily be interpreted as a near relation of Alexei Stakhanov, and yet Kennington succeeded in presenting him as a credible human subject by some deft and subtle details: Pickford's homely, slightly frayed at the edges cardigan and the safety helmet which does not quite fit and on which Pickford has drawn doodles with flints uncovered by his many years of dynamiting in the quarry. Kennington rarely wrote about what motivated him and what was going through his mind as he drew portraits, but in April 1944 he wrote to his daughter that what so appealed to him about Portraits of an Industry was that it allowed him to

> concentrate on the job with the sitter in front of me [...] and a bunch of workers behind watching. I know they are there, but [I] don't let them take my attention and they get a great kick out of it for they have not seen a picture-portrait done and mine are so like the person that they think it the very best sort of picture [...] I love people and people and more people [...] You see, I'm really learning something about my own country and my own race.[44]

Thus, his duties as an official and semi-official war artist helped him to a deeper understanding of his own people.

However, Kennington could not bring himself to forget the combatant for long, those who had been called upon to take life for their

[44] Black, *The Face of Courage...*, p. 135.

12. Eric Kennington. *1940*. 1944–1954

country and so often gave their own. Late in the summer of 1944, he began carving a very personal and unconventional tribute to the approximately 1,500 pilots and aircrew of RAF Fighter, Bomber and Coastal Commands who were killed in action during the Battle of Britain (July to October 1940).[45] *1940* (Fig. 12) is an extraordinary creation in Portland stone which he did not finish until 1954. Its symbolism harks back to Medieval Britain, to examples of ancient Indian sculpture in the British Museum, and even to interwar German Expressionism: the carvings of Ernst Barlach (1870–1938) and Bernard Hoetger (1874–1949) could have served as possible models. It is also possible to discern an intriguing resonance with a form of mystical Russian techno-primitivism from the early days of the First World War: Natalia Goncharova's (1881–1962) haunting lithographic series Mystical Images of War (first published in 1914).[46]

In *1940* a deliberately simplified head of an RAF pilot, wearing flying helmet and goggles, is topped by St Michael the Archangel vigorously killing the serpent of evil, and in the foreground a nude mother and child symbolic of the civilians protected by the heroism of the RAF day and night fighter pilots, though from 1942 onwards aircrew of Britain's Bomber Command would in turn kill hundreds of thousands of German

[45] P. Bishop, *Fighter Boys: Saving Britain 1940*, London, 2003, p. 421.

[46] Goncharova had been living in Paris since 1915, and it is likely mutual friend Ossip Zadkine introduced Kennington to her in the French capital at some point during the late 1920s. Black, *The Sculpture of Eric Kennington*, p. 10.

civilians.[47] *1940* was completed as the Second World War gave way to a new conflict, the Cold War, destined to divide Eastern from Western Europe for over 40 years. Kennington presents the British combatant both as specific to the world of 1940, in terms of uniform and equipment worn, and yet also as timeless: enigmatic and inscrutable in expression and far removed from the triumphalism of the Nietzschean superman. Simultaneously, the memorial's symbolism is deeply reassuring to a British viewer in presenting British airmen as literally on the side of the angels and offering protection to the most vulnerable among an imperilled civilian population.[48]

[47] A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, London, 1992, p. 43.
[48] Black, *The Sculpture of Eric Kennington*, p. 105.

Jonathan Black

Akinantis supermenas? Britiško vyriškumo konstravimas ir Antrojo pasaulinio karo herojaus atvaizdas Erico Kenningtono portretuose

Santrauka

Straipsnio tema – britų kariškių ir civilių karo tarnybos darbuotojų atvaizdai, sukurti britų dailininko Erico Kenningtono (1888–1960) 1940–1945 metų laikotarpiu.

Pirmiausia aptariama, kaip formavosi Kenningtono požiūris į portreto žanrą iki Pirmojo pasaulinio karo, ypač jam lankantis pas motinos gimines Sankt Peterburge ir Maskvoje. Toliau rašoma apie dailininko išgarsėjimą Didžiojoje Britanijoje britų eilinio, žinomo bendriniu Tommy vardu, atvaizdais, kuriuos Kenningtonas sukūrė kaip Informacijos ministerijos oficialus dailininkas. Pagrindinė straipsnio dalis skirta įspūdingiems britų kariškių portretams, Kenningtono nutapytiems 1940–1942 m., atliekant sero Kennetho Clarko vadovaujamos Karo dailininkų tarybos prie Informacijos ministerijos oficialius užsakymus. Taip pat analizuojami ir po 1942 m. rugsėjo sukurti portretai, kuriuos Kenningtonas nutapė būdamas pusiau oficialus karo dailininkas Karo departamento, Londono viešojo keleivinio transporto tarybos, Darbo ministerijos ir chemijos produktų kompanijos *Imperial Chemical Industries* užsakymu.

Viena iš straipsnio prielaidų ta, kad lyčių vaidmenis formuoja socialiniai prietarai ir elgesys. Ja remiantis parodoma, kaip tie patys Kenningtono karių (jūrininkų, lakūnų, pėstininkų ir tankistų) portretai, kurie džiugino ir įkvėpė didžiąją dalį eilinės britų publikos, piktino kai kuriuos šios šalies intelektualus tuo, kad britas juose pernelyg tiesmukai vaizduojamas, kaip bauginantis kovotojas. Kai kam šių portretų realizmas atrodė pernelyg niūrus ir negailestingas, interpretuotinas kaip britiškas vokiečių Naujojo daiktiškumo, ypač būdingo Otto Dixo (1891–1969) ir George'o Groszo (1893–1959) trečiojo dešimtmečio kūriniams, atitikmuo. Kenningtono idealizuotus portretus galima susieti ir su to paties laikotarpio sovietų socialistinio realizmo įvaizdžiais, kurių pavyzdžiai plakato forma buvo pristatyti Londone 1942 m. pradžioje.

Straipsnyje komentuojama ir eilinės karo metų britų publikos reakcija į Kenningtono kūrinius, ir tokių žinomų autorių kaip Johnas Boyntonas Priestley (1894–1984) bei Herbertas Ernestas Batesas (1905–1974) nuomonė. Atkreiptinas dėmesys į tai, kad sąryšyje su Kenningtono portretais ypač dažnai arba pats dailininkas, arba jo darbų komentuotojai minėjo garsius Britanijos istorijos veikėjus: karalienės Elžbietos I laikų korsarą serą Francisą Drake'ą (1540–1596) ir vienintelį Anglijos karinį diktatorių lordą protektorių Oliverį Cromwellį (1599–1658).

Apibendrinant straipsnio teiginius, daroma išvada, kad atsakant į totalinio karo iššūkius, buvo sąmoningai formuojama tradiciškesnė, agresyvesnė, mažiau mandagi angliškumo forma, skirta plačiajai visuomenei.