Looking back to earlier conflicts as a means of understanding the current one is a strategy that functioned in different ways at different stages of the Second World War. Writers could draw on their own personal experiences of combat as a means of endorsing their predictions about the future, or they could appeal to cultural memory, reference points that the reader might be presumed to share. Both individual and collective remembrance could be used to ratify a particular vision of the present and immediate future. Prior to the outbreak of war, predictions about the methods by which a new conflict would be prosecuted were based on the analysis of earlier developments. The pacifist Bertrand Russell, writing in 1936, attempted to raise awareness of the potential horrors on the horizon by reminding readers that during the 1917 air raids on London, ‘there were times [...] when large parts of the population [...] were terror-stricken. A bombardment from the air will be a far more appalling experience in the next war’ (Russell 44). Although, as Tom Harrisson argues, the potential impact of an air war was often overestimated in the interwar period (Living Through 19–30), the effects of aerial bombardment during the Spanish Civil War provided an illustration of what could be to come. The grounds for comparisons with other wars shifted once the conflict against Nazi Germany was in train. J. B. Priestley, writing in June 1940, saw a parallel with the threatened Napoleonic invasion of 1805 (Postscripts 12), whilst invasion fears led other writers to look to the guerrilla fighting of the Spanish war as a potential model.

Whether influenced by personal experiences or not, such analogies as these have particular ideological sources and effects, which can be compounded by the manner in which the processes of recalling are depicted. In many cases, I will argue, an unresolved personal conflict comes to
stand for the damage wrought on the nation by war; what is more difficult for these writers is how such conflicts might be resolved. Beginning with an examination of texts that use memories of the war in Spain as a means of establishing the particular political beliefs or aspirations of their protagonists, I will move on to examine novels including James Hilton’s *Random Harvest* (1941) and Vera Brittain’s *Account Rendered* (1945), in which memories damaged in the Great War feature as both subject matter and structural device. Both broadly speaking pacifist in intent, Hilton and Brittain attempt to illustrate the negative impact of war on their protagonists and to show that a positive outcome can result from the working-through of these experiences. This balancing act between personal and political, and between condemning war, whilst not condemning, as such, the war effort, is one that is both fascinating and precarious. Attempting to encompass the memory of one war and the experience of another also has an impact on narrative form, with the protagonists’ memory loss producing disjunctions in the narrative that prove difficult to smooth over.

**Remembering the Great War, remembering Spain**

In his essay ‘Looking Back on the Spanish War’, written in 1942 and first published in 1943, George Orwell not only reminisces about his own experiences in Spain, but also identifies a series of striking continuities between the kinds of rhetoric used to describe both the Spanish conflict and the 1914–18 war. Whilst the ideological stakes were very different, the same ‘romantic warmongering muck’ (Orwell, ‘Looking Back’ 250) is found in each case.

[H]ere [during the Spanish Civil War] were the very people who for twenty years had hooted and jeered at the ‘glory’ of war, at atrocity stories, at patriotism, even at physical courage, coming out with stuff that with the alteration of a few names would have fitted into the *Daily Mail* of 1918. (251)

The war in Spain was the point at which many who had previously espoused a pacifist position moved to one of pacifism, which, according to Martin Ceadel, ‘sees the prevention of war as its main duty and accepts that [...] the controlled use of armed force may be necessary to achieve this’ (*Pacifism* 5); but not all were as cynically motivated as Orwell might imply. Sardonically, Orwell ascribes the lack of recognition of the type of *volte face* he identifies to the fact that ‘[o]ur memories are