In this the centenary year of what could reasonably be described as the twentieth century’s ‘original sin’ of 1914, I shall examine the reaction of some Bloomsbury writers – Lytton Strachey especially, but also E.M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell & Virginia Woolf – not so much to the experience of World War I (for none of them experienced the war first hand) as to what I have called ‘The Myth of the Great War’.

Using the writings of G.M. Trevelyan – a fairly typical progressive who became a liberal warrior in 1914 – as a template, I shall outline the nature of what became the prevailing myth. I shall then explore the ways in which Bloomsbury sought to puncture this myth, and to ‘make a protest’ against what one of them called ‘a whole set of vices and weaknesses which had come to treated as virtues’: myths (as they saw them) of patriotism, honour, duty, manliness, self-sacrifice, fortitude, atonement, conformity, comradeship, chivalry, philanthropy, good sportsmanship and missionary politics (to mention a few!) Bloomsbury, of course, created its own myth – but that is another story.

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