

Hardcover: UK

The chilling and thrilling allure of war

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Make no mistake about this book. It's magnificently readable, simultaneously literary and racy, youthfully engaging yet with innumerable smart aphorisms, and honest almost to a fault. It's been called the finest writing to come out of the British army in 50 years. At the same time it displays attitudes of mind that are profoundly disturbing. It's due out in paperback in the UK next week, so now's a good time to assess its merits, and its demerits as well.

It's the memoir of a young officer from the UK's elite Grenadier Guards, covering years spent in the British army in the UK, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. After reading English Literature at Oxford, Patrick Hennessey went into the army, possibly with writing a book about his experiences also in mind, one with a title that would lead you to expect a modern descendent of the 1914-1918 English war poets.

The *Junior Officers' Reading Club* has been compared to Michael Herr's *Dispatches on the Vietnam War* — high praise indeed given the near-classic status of that book. But Herr witnessed war as a correspondent for the *New Yorker*, whereas Hennessey was a participant. The viewpoint is consequently very different.

The book's title is something of a misnomer. Some books are mentioned, and there's an appendix that lists others — Von Clausewitz's *On War*, *Catch 22*, Hunter S. Thompson's anti-war *Kingdom of Fear*, *Day of the Locust* and some Brett Easton Ellis. The author is unusually well-read for a professional soldier, but there's not much evidence that his colleagues shared his tastes.

What's striking about Hennessey, however, isn't his reading but his honesty. He has his share of the charm all the young possess, but it remains unusual to read about hand-to-hand fighting from someone who also writes about Facebook, ringtones, *Grey's Anatomy* and gansta-rap, who makes jokes about drugs, and sends text-messages home whenever he's allowed to. Most important of all, though, he's honest about the pleasure of fighting.

"Eight dead Taliban today so we celebrate with a precious tin of hot dog sausages", "an uneventful clearance, during which all we've done is shoot a local through the leg with a 'warning shot'", "... a grenade for good measure through every door and window, and it's sheer exhilaration."

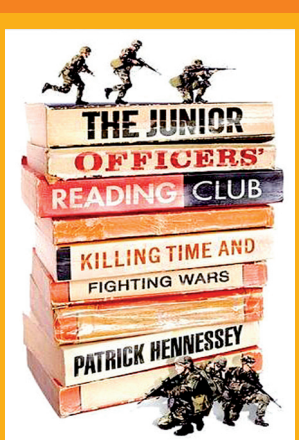
In a crucial passage he asks what it is about the contact battle that "ramps the heartbeat up so high and pumps adrenaline and euphoria through the veins in such a heady rapid mix." On a training exercise he suddenly understands police brutality, and sympathizes with it "entirely." As for battle itself, it's "the ultimate affirmation of being alive."

Earlier we've read about "wet dream verbs like DESTROY and HOLD." So is the allure of war sexual, he asks, comparable to the "triumphant moment" of peeling off a girl's underwear? His implicit answer is clearly in the affirmative.

Anticipation of exactly this, you realize, is why both he and his fellow servicemen were disappointed by Bosnia and southern Iraq, in both of which the Grenadier Guards arrived too late to fire a shot. Afghanistan was another matter, though, and the fighting, ambushes and attempts to win ground resulted in extensive casualties.

All this makes for vivid reading. If you want to know what fighting in Afghanistan is like here and now, this book certainly tells you. Reviewers are right to dub it a modern classic, but looked at from a broader perspective it's a

PUBLICATION NOTES



THE JUNIOR OFFICERS' READING CLUB

BY PATRICK HENNESSEY

336 PAGES

PENGUIN

classical out of hell.

Modern warfare should be considered in the context of the phenomenon known as militarism — the gradual taking over of the state by the demands of its military or, to use a phrase rightly popular until recently, the "military-industrial complex" (the military plus the industries that depend on it for contracts). Hennessey refers to a book, Norman Dixon's *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, that argues that most men aren't by nature aggressive, and have to be made so by armies, with the aggression then contained by routines such as drill and the cult of smartness.

And it's arguable, too, that the existence of standing armies itself ensures that wars will happen. To maintain a professional army without its ever having any wars to fight is like maintaining an opera company but never allowing it to perform any operas. No professional singers would put up with such a situation, and no professional soldiers will either.

Yet almost all modern states maintain such armies. In places like Taiwan, where there's a clear and real threat, such recourse is understandable. But for countries like the UK, facing no perceivable enemy, to maintain large and very expensive fighting forces is unsupportable in terms of "defense." (As for the UK's nuclear weapons, do Spaniards, Swedes or Brazilians quake in fear of imminent attack because of their lack of them? Of course they don't.)

Hennessey is also of the generation brought up on computer games, many of which were developed with the cooperation of the military, arguably with the aim of de-sensitizing youth via online killing so that they would feel less compunction when the time came to do it for real. The youthful anti-war protests in the US of the 1960s are not something the authorities want repeated — nor, indeed, have they been.

The fact of the matter is that wars are the worst thing human beings inflict on each other. Even the repercussions — in Hennessey's case randomly wanting to pick a fight in side streets, not to mention "sullen orgies of destruction" on army mess nights — are bitter indeed to contemplate.

In this context, then, a book about the thrills of fighting the Taliban, brilliant, funny and even poetic though much of it is, quickly comes to feel at best dubiously attractive.

those biographers have had either the will or the wherewithal to concentrate as closely on Forster's sexuality as Wendy Moffat, an impressive first-time biographer who teaches at Dickinson College. In *A Great Unrecorded History*, she offers an insightful, revelatory portrait of a man who deeply resented having to hide such an important side of himself but who deemed *Maurice* to be "unpublishable until my death and England's."

Moffat, who refers to Forster as Morgan the way his friends did, casts intensive new light on what she calls "the mystery of Morgan's strange broken-backed career." She does so by drawing on Forster's idiosyncratic diaries and letters, some of which remained unpublished until 2008, and by piecing together letters and biographies that reflect the wide range of Forster's acquaintances. She is able to place him within a few degrees of separation from figures as diverse as T.E. Lawrence, D.H. Lawrence, Constantine Cavafy, Pete Townshend, Robert Mapplethorpe, Lincoln Kirstein and Gypsy Rose

Lee. It was in the files of Alfred Kinsey, the sex researcher, that the odd and unguarded George Platt Lynes cover photograph of Forster was found.

Moffat, a vigorous storyteller, begins *A Great Unrecorded History* at a moment of high drama: when the *Maurice* manuscript arrived at the home of Christopher Isherwood in Santa Monica five months after Forster's death. Isherwood had long known of the book and of Forster's reluctance to let it see the light of day. Part of that reluctance was rooted in good reason: The Stonewall riots in New York were recent, and lingering Comstock laws made it potentially illegal to send a manuscript about homosexuality via the US Postal Service.

As Isherwood showed *Maurice* to John Lehmann, the poet and publisher, Moffat writes, "the Bride of Frankenstein appeared." "Elsa Lanchester, who played Frankenstein's bride on-screen, happened to live next door, and she had an 'unnerving habit of appearing uninvited through hedges.'" She may have had nothing



SUGAR PLUM FERRY

(甜梅號)

Islands on the Ocean of the Mind (腦海群島)

Avant Garden Records (前衛花園唱片)



Go Chic

I Am Confused! Self-released



YEN-J (嚴爵)

Thanks Your Greatness (謝謝你的美好)

B'in MUSIC



TOGETHER (在一起)

Rene Liu (劉若英)

B'in MUSIC

BY DAVID CHEN AND ANDREW C.C. HUANG
STAFF REPORTER AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

It's easy to get lost in Sugar Plum Ferry's third and latest release, *Islands on the Ocean of the Mind* (腦海群島), the title of which suits their post-rock sound. The album's six tracks blend into one another through droning rhythms, melodic themes that ebb and flow and recurring waves of electric guitar distortion and crashing drums that wash the melodies away.

The four-piece band, which formed in Taipei in the late 1990s, makes instrumental rock with a cinematic flavor. On *Islands*, they pick up where they left off from 2007's *Thank You for Reminding Me*, in which the CD cover suggested a theme in a snippet of text that read "There'll be one day we human beings can fly, one day we wear out our shadows."

That day arrives on *Islands*. The liner notes consist of more cryptic prose describing how "we got rid of our shadows" and experienced "the joy of freedom." Along with the album art — graphic novel-like illustrations of an oceanside city seen from a bird-eye's view and towering buildings that look like concrete forests — this is perhaps one way to make sense of the urgent tempo of the first track, *False Awakening* (清醒夢).

But true to post-rock form, Sugar Plum Ferry is all about soundscapes rather than words. *Deerfield at Dusk* (黃昏鹿場) begins with a quiet, lulling melody on an electric guitar, and builds layer by layer into a dramatic chorus voiced by a horn ensemble. The song shifts back and forth between quiet and loud and sparse and lush.

There is a sad undertone to the entire album, which gets massaged by steady, deliberate grooves from the band's two guitarists, who switch between slow and dreamy melodic lines and metronome-like strumming. The effect is emotionally numbing

on *People, People* (人兒呀).

The album's best track, *Night Celestials* (夜星子), flirts with black metal and grunge and is one instance where the band's normally measured temperament threatens to explode.

— DAVID CHEN

Taiwan's indie scene hasn't seen this much fun from a "Girl-power" band in a long time. Go Chic's *I Am Confused!* is an energetic electro-rock romp that sounds anything but confused. This debut album, from a Taipei group formed in 2007 by high school classmates Ariel Zheng (鄭思齊), Sarah Wen (溫一珊) and Sonia Lai (賴思勻), is full of catchy beats, punk verve and a sassy, irreverent wit.

Zheng, the band's 22-year-old vocalist, sings about dancing, partying and boys — some of them cute, some of them repulsive. On the anthemic *This is Go Chic*, which celebrates "party party people" on the dance floor, she is both flirtatious and taunting: "You're looking pretty fit/Doesn't mean I'll take your shit."

Beneath the disco revelry, Go Chic also sneaks in some commentary about pop culture and the influence of the West. *Culture Supervisor*, which has a line that inspired the album title, is about a "culture vulture" who is an "East-West mixture."

On *P.O.D.*, Zheng rants about a self-righteous, sleazy foreigner in Taipei: "What's your job, no wait let me guess, must be an English teacher/You go to clubs every night hitting on hot chicks 'cause damn you're a player/Keep pimping pumping pompous loser I'll teach you some manners."

Above all, though, these songs are designed to get your body moving — and they do. Go Chic are great at balancing synth-noise and guitar jams with catchy pop hooks on songs like *Hard Date*

and *24hr Party Pooper*. *Clap It for the Heartbreakers* is another anthemic dance tune and the perfect antidote for those tired of mindlessly stale nightclub music.

Go Chic landed a performance slot at the South By Southwest Festival in the US earlier this year, and this party-on-a-disc testifies to their notable talent and confidence as a band.

— DAVID CHEN

Classically trained jazz musician Yen-J (嚴爵) has established himself as one of the most polished newcomers in Mando-pop this year with the brilliant, eye-raising jazz-pop fusion of his debut album *Thanks Your Greatness* (謝謝你的美好).

The album, for which for which Yen-J served as producer, singer, songwriter and musician, kicks off with the jazz-pop *Love is Curry* (愛就是咖哩), a classic that adroitly blends energetic b-bop grooves, a Mando-pop melody and Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) lyrics into an ebullient elixir of pop brilliance.

Lifesaver (救命恩人), a track that features the rapping of singer Delia (丁噶) and indie group Cosmic Man (宇宙人), is an electrifying hip-hop rouser that rages against the clichés of conventional pop. *Need Time to Cool Off* (需要點時間沉澱), a rocker driven by hypnotic electric guitar chords, is an inspirational anthem that advises people to be patient for change. *I Didn't Give Enough* (1 給得不够) is a hugely infectious tribute to Stevie Wonder with soulful falsetto and ad-libbing that offers the singer's apology for not devoting enough love.

Other songs that stretch the borders of Mando-pop include the hip-hop inspired title track *Thanks Your Greatness* (謝謝你的美好), *Summer Romance* (夏日羅曼史), a romantic tune layered over a big

band sound, and *My Love 438* (我的愛438), in Yen-J uses a lengthy jamming session recorded in Los Angeles on which to build an ode to unconditional love.

All in all, *Thanks Your Greatness* is among the most ambitious Mando-pop albums of this year. With photogenic looks and talent to burn, Yen-J is definitely a star in the making.

— ANDREW C.C. HUANG

award-winning actress Rene Liu (劉若英) is so candid as a singer that sometimes it seems there's no difference between her public persona from her private life. Her latest outing, *Together* (在一起), is a splendidly executed concept album whose tracks read almost like chapters from a diary.

The album opens with a troika of brilliant singles. In the opening track *Continue—For the 15-Year-Old Self* (繼續 — 給15歲的自己), the 39-year-old entertainer engages her younger self in a dialogue about failed dreams and why one must remain optimistic to continue on. "There is no map/We simply must follow these dreams on our palms," she croons. "People must dream/They must dream bravely and dream wildly." *With We Are Not Together* (我們沒有在一起), a bittersweet ballad that laments the development of a friendship instead of a romance, she sings, "We are not together, but your caring lasts longer."

Lu has never been a powerhouse as a vocalist, but on *Together* she nevertheless croons in such an emotionally naked voice that she sounds as if she is confessing to friends. The album doesn't offer an eclectic array of styles, but it doesn't aspire to do so. Rather, it uses a variety of Mando-pop balladry techniques to weave together a dazzling tapestry of soul-searching.

— ANDREW C.C. HUANG

Hardcover: US

A writer's life and sexuality go under the microscope

None of E.M. Forster's biographers have had either the will or the wherewithal to concentrate as closely on his sexuality as Wendy Moffat

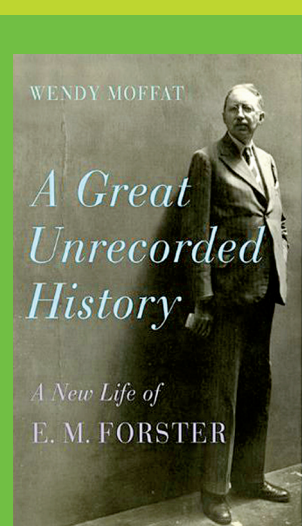
BY JANET MASLIN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

At the age of 4, Edward Morgan Forster learned etiquette from a book that was aptly titled *Don't!* He grew up to become a figure of such excessive caution that, when asked if it was raining, he once walked slowly toward a window and answered, "I will try to decide."

In 1911, when Forster was 32 and had lived barely a third of his life (he died in 1970, at 91), he was already experiencing "weariness of the only subject that I both can and may treat — the love of men for women & vice versa." Forster had already completed his greatest novels, *A Room With a View* (1908) and *Howards End* (1910), and would publish only one more during his lifetime. After 1924, when *A Passage to India* appeared, Forster seemingly abandoned the novel altogether.

Forster's biographers have always had to make sense of their subject's decision to withhold *Maurice*, his novel about homosexual lovers, for posthumous publication. (It appeared in 1971.) But none of

PUBLICATION NOTES



A GREAT UNRECORDED HISTORY: A NEW LIFE OF E.M. FORSTER

BY WENDY MOFFAT

404 PAGES

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

to do with Forster, but tangential figures are never unwelcome in this colorful book.

After that prologue, Moffat goes back to Forster's fraught childhood and his uncomfortable relationship with his mother.

"I wish he were more manly and did not cry so easily," she once said of her only son. For his part, Forster, when told that he ought to follow Andre Gide's example and publish openly gay writing, replied: "But Gide hasn't got a mother!"

By the time he attended King's College, Cambridge, and made his first contacts with what would become the Bloomsbury group, Forster was well aware of his own preferences. But he was incapable of physical involvement; his affection for one friend of that era would be expressed through "long, earnest, fully clothed embraces, chaste kisses and florid talk of the Hellenistic ideal of friendship." As that quote may indicate, *A Great Unrecorded History* sometimes veers close to violating the privacy that Forster guarded fiercely, though he made diary entries about his sexual experiences. This is no work of literary criticism,

but neither is it one of gratuitous voyeurism.

Moffat's overarching interests are in tracing Forster's attitudes about sex and hypocrisy and in placing this increasingly outspoken figure within the context of his changing times. Like characters about whom he would write so superbly, he experienced an Englishman's sensual delight in the discovery of Italian culture. But he traveled to Italy with his mother and did not experience real freedom until World War I, when he went to Alexandria, Egypt, with the Red Cross. It was in Alexandria that Forster achieved the physical breakthrough that he called "parting with Respectability" at the ripe old age of 37.

After that, he fell deeply in love with a young train conductor, experienced the breadth of gay life outside England's confines and became capable of the observation from which the book takes its name. "I see beyond my own happiness and intimacy," he wrote, "occasional glimpses of the happiness of 1000s of others whose names I shall never hear,

and I know that there is a great unrecorded history."

The older Forster, who wrote essays and assorted nonfiction and assumed the persona of a curmudgeonly literary eminence, became increasingly daring and sociable. His peculiar relationship with the younger, admiring T.E. Lawrence (Forster was en route to visit Lawrence on the day that Lawrence was fatally injured in a motorcycle accident) became the model for some of Forster's subsequent friendships, many of which managed both to warm his heart and to try his patience. His longtime intimacy with Bob Buckingham, a married policeman, gave him the domesticity he had yearned for as he wrote *Maurice*.

And he spoke his mind ever more clearly. At 84, he looked back angrily on a lifetime spent in hiding. "How annoyed I am with Society for wasting my time by making homosexuality criminal," he complained. "The subterfuges, the self-consciousness that might have been avoided." Moffat casts more light on those subterfuges than has any Forster biographer before her.