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Post-War Recovery and Women

Mountaineers

Nameless Women in C. E. Montague's "Action"

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Introduction

C. E. Montague's short story "Action" (1928) is an unusual blend of war literature and mountaineering literature.¹ It seems a simple story: a veteran of the First World War suffers a minor stroke and consequently attempts suicide by a reckless ice climbing expedition in the Alps. He then decides to continue living after helping rescue a couple involved in a mountain climbing accident.

The story is, however, more complicated than it appears. This essay considers three themes which underlie the otherwise straightforward plot of "Action." Firstly, it is a story of veterans with invisible wounds from the war. The male protagonist suffers a severe psychological trauma, of which he is ignorant. Although it is seemingly a male-centred story that is narrated entirely from the male perspective, a woman character plays a significant role in the process of the protagonist's recovery from his invisible wounds. Secondly, it is a story of the women who contributed to the Great War effort and proved that they could do the work of men. Thirdly, it is also a story of the women mountaineers who made a historical breakthrough for women's climbing in Britain during the interwar period. Throughout the tale, the war and women are important elements. In relation to the first theme, a woman awakens a veteran from his mental paralysis, while the two latter themes have a deep connection to each other. Women's experiences of war work and the acquisition of their suffrage in 1918

evoked in women mountaineers a strong desire to climb independently of men, in order to try their own skills and leadership.² As it turned out, a female climbing club was founded by women in 1921: the Pinnacle Club. Women such as these provided inspiration for Montague's "Action"; however, its women characters, all of whom are mountaineers, are nameless and seemingly peripheral. Even so, it is these unnamed women characters that give this story subtlety and depth. This essay pays attention to them and argues that their anonymity provides us with a new lens through which to view post-war British society, and in particular, the women's mountaineering community in Britain.

Montague (1867-1928), a journalist, critic, and writer, is perhaps best known for *Disenchantment* (1922), the recollections of his war experiences and one of the early critical responses to the First World War. He questioned the meaning of the war and the methods of post-war recovery in Britain for the rest of his life. Moreover, he was also a keen and experienced mountaineer. He was elected to the Alpine Club—founded in 1857 and one of the most authoritative climbing clubs in Britain—and later served on its committee. Montague's thirty-seven-year experience of climbing enabled him to write essays, novels and short stories of mountaineering, which are now recognized as prominent mountaineering literature. For instance, Robert Bates, an American mountaineer and the author of *Mystery, Beauty, and Danger: The Literature of the Mountains and Mountain Climbing Published in English before 1946* (2000), remarks that Montague was "in many ways the most brilliant mountain writer of the period" (159); in addition, the obituary of Montague in the *Alpine Journal*, the oldest mountaineering journal published by the Alpine Club, says that he was among the Club's eminent writers, along with Leslie Stephen (369-70). As to his works, Audrey Salkeld and Rosie Smith point out that mountain climbing plays an important role, especially in "Action"

(1056). This short story, however, has attracted little serious literary attention, except Paul Gilchrist's essay, in which he analyzes it from the viewpoint of a veteran's attempt through mountaineering to redefine and reassert masculine ideals, such as "the values of chivalry, comradeship and endurance" (4). In contrast, *Disenchantment* has been so well discussed that its title has been frequently quoted to express the condition of post-war society in Britain (Korte xvi), and his other novels, such as *Rough Justice* (1926) and *Right off the Map* (1927), have had more critical attention than "Action."³ Even Keith Grieves and Andrew Frayn, who have analyzed Montague's work in detail, do not discuss it. However, this unfairly overlooked story deserves scrutiny as it touches on a number of themes concerning the aftermath of the war, as mentioned above. This essay also argues that writing about women mountaineers in "Action" allows Montague to respond to the questions about post-war recovery he raised in *Disenchantment*.

Montague and the First World War

Before taking up a deeper exploration of the three themes in "Action," I will discuss Montague's own war experience and *Disenchantment* to enhance the understanding of "Action," which has often been regarded as semi-autobiographical.⁴

Montague was on the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian* from 1890 to 1925, except for the years from 1914 to 1919 when he served in the war. He edited the literary and dramatic sections of the paper and wrote about all the major political issues of his day—the Boer War, protectionism, women suffrage, Home Rule, and so on—from a rather left-wing liberal perspective. Although Montague opposed the Boer War as the *Manchester Guardian* followed "the Liberal intellectual tradition of questioning warmongering" (Frayn 94), he changed his attitude in 1914: he readily decided to support the First World War and enlisted as a volunteer, even though he was three years

over the initial age limit of forty-four for volunteers. His enthusiasm for the war isolated him from his editorial colleagues of the paper, and the disharmony continued after he returned to the *Manchester Guardian* until his retirement in 1925. Montague is remembered for the manner of his enlistment: he attempted to conceal his age by dyeing his greying hair. He succeeded in becoming a private in the 24th (Sportsman's) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers in December 1914. This Battalion had many elderly volunteers; most of them were sportsmen,⁵ who had "an educational and social background which inculcated the ethos of bravery and chivalry" (Frayn 95). Although Montague relished the army life at first, the appeal of its simplicity and purity were short-lived. After being promoted to sergeant, he was hospitalized for an injury in a bomb-training accident and he later contracted trench fever. He was loath to spend the rest of the war in safety as a drill sergeant and managed to be transferred into the Intelligence Corps in June 1916. During 1917 and 1918 he censored press reports and accompanied war correspondents and distinguished visitors to the front, including H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, and Lloyd George. The diverse experiences of his military service gave him a wide range of material for his later writing. In particular, his work as an Intelligence Officer allowed him to converse with civilian visitors, which gave him "a rare insight into a variety of different viewpoints" (Frayn 95-96). According to Scott Russell, Montague grasped "every opportunity to be in the front-line" (189). His passion for combat is projected onto the protagonist in "Action."

After the war, in February 1922, when Britain was still unsettled, *Disenchantment* was published. It is Montague's severe criticism of the war, largely from the viewpoint of other ranks. Most of the essays originated as editorials about the war, published in the *Manchester Guardian* between October 1920 and November 1921. While Montague praises the bravery of common soldiers, he criticizes

military leadership and the British Press's coverage of the war. He emphasizes disillusionment with the conduct of the British war effort in particular, discussed through topics such as, "the Regular Army's antagonism to enlisted men, and the often-corresponding staff officers against the fighting troops; the iniquities of modern warfare; the public school ethos and sporting values" (Fraysn 99). In addition, he also expresses deep concern over the "general post-war condition of apathy, callousness, and lassitude" (Montague, *Disenchantment* 66). According to Montague, the interwar period betrayed the sacrifice of "the lost years, the broken youth, the dead friends, the women's overshadowed lives at home, the agony and bloody sweat" (189).

The readership of *Disenchantment* "was committed rather than extensive" (Grieves 55). It did not sell quite as well as his other fictional works.⁶ Its unremarkable sales could have been caused partly by his style, although Montague was often praised as a celebrated stylist. His literary form, as many have noted,⁷ is prolix, ornate, and overelaborate in contrast with the terse and simple style fashionable after the outbreak of the war. Grieves comments that "Montague's prose was steadfastly formal, often floridly elliptical, and contained references to distant prewar literary debates" (55). However, as Fraysn insists, the most important thing is the readers of *Disenchantment* included "opinion-formers, literary and public figures who shaped the development of post-war prose" (104);⁸ it is Montague's "enduring legacy" (Fraysn 94).

Obscured Characters in "Action"

"Action" is a story about Christopher Bell, a senior climber and archetypal veteran of the Great War, who lives in Manchester. At fifty-two, he has a minor stroke leaving him numb all down his right side. He fears becoming immobile and decides to end his life in a reckless attempt to climb the overhang of a huge ice bulge. For Bell, "No other

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sport had ever so wholly ravished his soul as mountaineering” (6); in particular, “on the high snows it seemed as if magical fires were lit in your blood,” and “the flame of life burned amazingly” (6-7). The steepest slope he can identify for his purpose is the west side of the Schallijoch (3,780m)⁹ in Switzerland.

The ascent is carried out as planned, but when he gets to the most difficult point, he reaches the limit of his physical strength. At the very moment when he is about to give up, he hears a woman’s cry for help and feels an ice axe fall past the back of his head. As soon as he perceives someone is exposed to great danger above him, he resumes going up “like a flame,” propelled by an amazing power (28), which is called “action” later in the story. He sees a woman dangling in the air at the end of a rope. The young woman asks her husband eighty feet above her, who cannot move without letting go of the rope, to cut the rope and save himself for the sake of their children. When Bell manages to secure her safety, she, in turn, tries to help him: she tries to unrope and give Bell her rope. They eventually join her husband safely, and walk in the bright moonlight towards the old Weisshorn hut to pass the night. The woman’s husband, Gollen, is a doctor—“the Harley Street species of doctor” (27)—who is considerably younger than Bell. While Gollen’s wife falls asleep soon after their arrival, Bell feels some kind of comradeship towards Gollen, and they talk over the day’s events. Bell confesses what he had planned to do and explains a “revelatory trance” at the time when he came to their rescue (27). Later, after Bell is awed by the majestic night view of the high mountain range, he decides to tackle life again.

“Action” consists of description by a non-omniscient narrator and dialogue by the characters, but there are hardly any interior monologues. While it conveys an authentic atmosphere of mountaineering, its narrative leaves an odd impression about the characters. Firstly, it is difficult to grasp what the characters are

thinking, even the protagonist Bell. His feelings are never completely portrayed to the reader. For instance, the narrator “fancies” how Bell feels when he receives the news of his wife’s death (2). In most cases, Bell’s emotions are narrated not through his own words but through the narrator’s subjective perspective. This tendency is especially noticeable before he meets the couple on the mountain. Regarding the female characters, their inner thoughts are entirely absent. Secondly, none of the three women in “Action” (Bell’s deceased wife, an elderly maid who is the widow of his old mountain guide whom he has known for thirty years, and Gollen’s wife) are named, despite their important roles. In contrast, all the male characters, whether major or minor ones, are given names. Women characters are merely referred to as “wife,” “woman,” “widow,” “lady,” and “Madame.” The portrayals of the female characters remain on a superficial level. What readers know are their class, their family roles (such as wife or mother), and the fact that all of them are mountaineers. Nevertheless, they display their individuality and shed light on the male characters, even though this story is narrated only from the male perspective.

Who are these obscured characters? The following sections examine the stories behind these veiled identities.

Trauma, Recovery, and Nameless Women

For about eight years after the war, Bell has carried out his duty solemnly and silently as a “respectable” businessman in accordance with his high moral standards (Montague, “Action” 1). He has not had bad dreams nor suffered mental anguish due to his memories of the war or of his wife’s death, until his first stroke. Nevertheless he “had had his losses” (3), and seems to have been ignorant of his own suffering, or, in Cathy Caruth’s words, he has “missed” his trauma (41). The truth of trauma is characterized by “its delayed appearance and its belated address” (Caruth 4). In Bell’s case, after his first stroke, the memories

of the war come back and never leave him. The narrator emphasizes the cruelty of Bell's war experience by giving a detailed account of his injury: he is "well flayed and charred by chemical warfare" (2), and when he "had just begun to grow a new skin on a face and hands" in hospital (2), the news of his wife's death comes to him. His emotional response to the news remains unrevealed, for "his face was buried deep in a canary-coloured mask of wadding stained with picric acid" (2).

Furthermore, Caruth, drawing on Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, explains that "the traumatic accident—the confrontation with death—takes place too soon, too suddenly, too unexpectedly, to be fully grasped by consciousness" (101). Bell is abruptly separated from the battlefield by his injury, and all of a sudden, he loses his wife whom "he had loved in every tissue of body and soul" (Montague, "Action" 2). As Caruth asserts, "the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it" (64). Bell is a survivor and not conscious of his trauma. However, after he suffers from physical numbness, he has recurring flashbacks to the memories of the war. On the one hand, his reminiscing brings "a second boyhood of happy absorption in efforts merely physical" (2),¹⁰ but on the other hand, he longs for "violent deaths" and imagines the end of his own life when he sees autumn leaves blown-up by a gale and shed "lustrously" (8), reminding him of the deaths of his fellow soldiers on the battlefields of the Western Front. The story informs the readers at the very beginning that Bell suffers from physical numbness due to a mild stroke. However, they subsequently realize that he suffers from emotional numbness, too. The wounds to his mind appear in the form of physical numbness long after the war, as Caruth insists, "the return of the traumatizing event . . . can only occur in the mode of a symptom or a dream" (60). The absence of a portrayal of his emotions suggests his mental paralysis caused by his trauma.

Given this perspective, Bell's attempt at suicide can be interpreted as a way of unconscious coping with his trauma. However, the woman's cry for help in a mountain accident inspires his life to go into "action" again. This "action" functions as a stimulant for him, in which "every bit of soreness and worry and funk was taken right off me" (28), as he decides to stay alive. Although in the lexis of war literature the title word "action" evokes a military engagement, it has an opposite sense here as it results in life, not death. Gilchrist insists that the yell of Gollen's wife is merely a "call to men to reawaken heroic virtue" (21), and that she is "helpless," "out of depth, out of place, and dependent upon male fortitude and resilience" (20-21). However, he completely overlooks her own heroism and her significance as a mountaineer. She intends to help her husband by sacrificing her own life; once she is secured, she tries to give priority to Bell's life. She is compared in the story with Joan of Arc, and even makes a chivalrous gesture: she "raised his [Bell's] disengaged hand to her lips" (25). Heroism and chivalry no longer belong to only men; they apply to both genders in this story. Moreover, she has a keen insight into his reckless attempt:

"I know that I've done a dud thing and can't preach. But what about you? Climbing alone! coming up out of nowhere, almost at night. Up a worse slope than this beast! Think it bears looking into? Eh? Well, do you mean to rope up, or shall both of us climb in this way that you seem to think right?" (24)

"[T]he scrutiny of the young woman's spirited simplicity," which Bell "funks" (24), makes him come to his senses completely: "In two or three minutes, at most, the man who would have shuffled off the mortal coil was securely girt with the most delectable of its loops, the cheerfulest symbol of human determination not to withdraw from the

banquet of life” (24). The doctor’s unnamed wife plays a vital role in awaking a man from mental paralysis.

Another nameless woman character, Bell’s wife, who dies of “something brought on by too passionate overwork for the cause” (2), is apparently one of women war workers such as volunteer nurses, ambulance drivers, munitions workers, and so on. Women wartime workers made considerable contributions to the Great War effort not only on the so-called “home front” but also on the battlefields of the conflict. Before the war, women’s lives in Britain were mainly tied to domesticity, their places largely in the home. They did not have the right to vote. The police, judiciary, politicians, and clerics were all the preserve of men. However, millions of ordinary women worked across almost the entire economy in place of Britain’s men who headed abroad to fight: they made shells and bullets in munitions factories, drove trams, heaved coke and coal, and went on police patrol, all of which had previously been thought to be out of a women’s reach. Although women were not supposed to work in men’s jobs before the war, they proved that they could do the work of men just as well. Equally, a lot of women workers lost their lives like Bell’s wife. Not only volunteer nurses or ambulance drivers on the front, but munitions workers in the home country were always cheek by jowl with danger: accidents were common and dangerous chemicals in the production of explosives often caused health problems.¹¹

Fictional and autobiographical narratives in the post-war period, as Barbara Korte states, “played a substantial role in the nation’s coping with trauma, bereavement, and the reconstruction of private and public lives” (viii). Indeed, like many of today’s classic war memoirs and fictions published in the late 1920s and 1930s,¹² “Action,” which appeared in 1928, is war-literature in many aspects. Not only is the story full of direct or indirect references to the war, but it also has many features related to the war: battle and death, the fear of disability,

comradeship, bravery, chivalry, heroism, and endurance—all of which correspond to many recurring themes of First World War literature (Frayn 99).¹³

Montague, who ends *Disenchantment* with his vision of a cure for “five or six million ex-soldiers” (228) injured in the war, revisits in “Action” the issues which he discussed in *Disenchantment*: “apathy, callousness, and lassitude” (66), which prevailed in British interwar society. Accordingly, “Action” is not only Bell’s own story but the story of all war veterans. Also, the nameless women in this story represent women wartime workers who made significant contributions to the war effort, and the women who helped ex-soldiers recover from physical or mental paralysis after the war.

The Rise of Women Mountaineering in Britain in the Interwar Years

As Frayn points out, women’s wartime work and the suffrage movement resulted in the overall improvement of women’s right (77). The franchise was extended to women in March 1918. However, it was a partial victory, for the new law, the 1918 Representation of the People Act, only allowed women over thirty who occupied a house or married someone who did, to vote, and thus excluded most working-class women. Furthermore, demobilization caused tensions in the labour market between war veterans and women workers. Eventually, thousands of women were dismissed from their jobs and went back into domestic life despite their invaluable contribution during the war. The percentage of women in work was lower in 1921 than in 1911 (Frayn 78). Frayn regards the women’s retreat into domesticity in the interwar period as “a patriarchal reimposition of the values to which wartime conditions permitted a challenge” (84). Given this perspective, the progress of women’s rights after the war seems to have been limited, but women’s participation in the war helped politicians and the public

recognize their suitability for full citizenship, which had a considerable influence upon full enfranchisement in 1928. What is important is that many women “tasted” independence through their wartime work (Adie), and developed self-confidence and a consciousness of gender equality through the acquisition of the franchise. After the war, conventional gender norms were certainly changing; there was no going back, even though women’s retreat to the home was a salient feature of interwar British society (Frayn 84).

The changes in women’s attitudes after the war had a fairly positive effect on the women’s climbing community. If we know about the background of British mountaineering culture, we can understand that Gollen’s wife in “Action” is representative of women climbers in interwar Britain; in particular, she is reminiscent of members of the Pinnacle Club.

Modern mountaineering, so-called alpinism, is mountaineering as a sport which started in the Alps in the nineteenth century and its development has been deeply related to the British mountaineers. During the “Golden Age” of mountaineering (1850-1864) alone, British climbers made thirty-one first ascents of the main thirty-nine summits in the Alps. In the late nineteenth century, mountaineering caught on with British middle-class people regardless of gender.¹⁴ However, the traditional British climbing community continued to be characterized by exclusivity and elitism. This was partly because mountaineering in Britain was developed not by individuals but by systematic climbing organizations.¹⁵ Established mountain clubs were invariably highly elitist in their selections of, mostly male, membership. For instance, the Alpine Club, which was founded in 1857 as the world’s first mountaineering club, restricted its membership to privileged male elites and did not admit women members until 1974.¹⁶ Before the foundation of the Pinnacle Club, the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, established in 1906 for exploring and rock climbing in

the Lake District, was a mixed club which welcomed women members from the beginning. However, Emily Kelly, a member of the club and one of the founders of the Pinnacle Club, found it “very male orientated” (qtd. in Angell xiv). There are plenty of other similar examples of gender bias in favour of men in mountaineering. According to David Mazel, the reactions of Alpine Club members to women climbers’ accomplishments were “typically ranged from cool acceptance to outright hostility” (9). The former President of the Alpine Club, J. P. Farrer, confesses in the *Alpine Journal* in 1925 that “it is possible that some unconscious feeling, let us say of the novelty of a woman’s intrusion into the domain of exploration so long reserved to man, may in some quarters have existed . . . there tended to arise . . . an atmosphere, shall we say, of aloofness” (qtd. in Mazel 10). In the early twentieth century, women climbers were considered to be secondary and sidelined. Kelly describes how women climbers of that period felt:

Perhaps we got tired of being taken in hand by men climbers. . . .
As in other walks of life, women wanted to find their own feet:
it was very splendid for some women to be always able to
borrow crutches in the form of a man’s help, and a man’s rope,
but it is even better to find that we have feet of our own. (qtd.
in Mazel 3)

In addition, the opposition to women climbers was not confined to the established male climbing clubs; they had encountered resistance even from their own families or acquaintances. Practical and durable trousers for climbing were objects of curiosity. For instance, Dorothy Pilley, who was a member of the Pinnacle Club and one of the leading climbers in the interwar period, looks back in *Journal of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club* in 1956 on her younger days: “a girl couldn’t walk about a village in climbing clothes without hard stares from the women

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and sniggers from the louts” (qtd. in Richards 67). However, the war changed how women looked: “trousers appeared for the first time, corsets declined in popularity” (Kadie) and “bobbed hair has been immensely popular” (“The Woman’s View”). These new fashions for women also encouraged the development of women’s mountaineering.

Under these circumstances, the Pinnacle Club was established in 1921 by Kelly, Pilley, and Eleanor Winthrop Young, who was the first President of the club. Pilley writes about the original idea of the Pinnacle Club in her *Climbing Days* (1932):

It had been a long conspiracy, prompted by the feeling we many of us shared that a rock-climbing club for women would give us a better chance of climbing independently of men, both as to leadership and general mountaineering. (84)

Carol Osborne emphasizes that “the foundation of this all-female climbing club was particularly important in not only further consolidating the existing feminine climbing culture that emerged through the Ladies Alpine Club and the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club before 1914, but enhancing it, so as to improve the status of women climbers” (244-45).¹⁷ The Pinnacle Club differed from the previous two women’s climbing clubs in that it was “a club for women first and foremost rather than a later annex of an already established men’s organisation” (Richards 66). The Pinnacle Club’s members climbed actively not only at home but also abroad and had been doing guideless climbing well before it became a usual practice. Mazel describes Britain’s women mountaineering culture in the interwar years as follows: “More and more women carried out their own climbs, improving their skills dramatically and creating an international network of highly competent climbers” (12).

Not to be overlooked, however, as Dan Richards notes, is that

the Pinnacle Club “was not formed in desperation, retaliation or last resort but rather a start-up rooted in youthful optimism and sincere love of mountaineering” (68). It had a clear purpose and “an idealistic youthful venture shorn of convention,” and this was “no mere feminist gesture” (Richards 69). In this respect, the members of the club were in contrast to American women climbers of the same time. For instance, Fanny Bullock Workman, who was an ardent suffragist, displayed a “Votes for Women” banner on the summit of a mountain in the Karakoram range in the early twentieth century, defying the “climbing patriarchy” (Richards 68).¹⁸ The members of the Pinnacle Club never refused to climb with men. In fact, they used to climb with their families or husbands, as all the women characters in “Action” also do with their husbands: Pilley, with her husband, I. A. Richards; Young, with her husband, Geoffrey Winthrop Young, an enthusiastic supporter of the Pinnacle Club and future President of the Alpine Club; and also Madeline Montague, with her husband C. E. Montague, the author of “Action.” As Ann C. Colley points out in *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*, “if they [women climbers] chose, they could be just as sportsmanlike or competitive as the men” (136). However, they did not choose to, because “[a]way from such petty opinion emanating from societal pressures, up high, above the snow line or in distant regions, women climbers could more fully experience equality and power, and be rid of such intrusive nonsense” (Colley 136).

To sum up, as discussed here, the interwar period is highly significant for the history of women’s climbing in Britain. Gollen’s wife in “Action” can be regarded as one of such women climbers, although the climbing plan of her and her husband is too rash. She has a fair number of climbing skills and experiences: she can cut new steps with Bell’s ice axe on the smooth surface of an ice wall, she does not panic in the face of danger, and she never falls behind Bell and Gollen on the high snow paths. She shows that she can climb mountains on

equal terms with the male climbers. She even takes a risk to try to help Bell by unroping and giving him her rope. When Bell rejects her offer, “her eyes broke out in a quick sparkle of anger” (24). She agrees with his suggestion that she should tie herself on the rope in the middle and he himself at the end: “That’s fair” (24). She asks for equality in mountaineering. These descriptions exhibit the features of Britain’s women climbing culture in the interwar period, and Gollen’s nameless wife symbolizes women climbers of the time.

Montague, who had concerned over “women’s overshadowed lives at home” in the interwar period (Montague, *Disenchantment* 189), found new hope for the post-war society in the great passion of women climbers. Gollen’s wife in a deep sleep, described as “a prosperous babe” (Montague, “Action” 27), signifies not a vulnerable infant as Gilchrist insists but a symbol of women’s potential for growth in the British post-war society. In fact, Montague was the very person who boosted the enterprise of the Pinnacle Club: as an editor of *Manchester Guardian*, he “benevolently” approved Kelly’s letter which made a declaration “to form a club for women rock climbers” (Angell 3), and published it in an editorial in the paper in 1920.

Conclusion

This essay has considered three themes which underlie the straightforward plot of “Action.” Although the readers of this story tend to focus on the mind of the male protagonist Bell, it is not only his own story but also a story of all war veterans. This seemingly male-centred narrative is also the story of nameless women who help to propel the plot and expand its themes by representing the women wartime workers and the women mountaineers in the interwar years. The former gained a new confidence in their ability through their experiences of wartime work, the acquisition of women’s suffrage and the efforts made towards increased gender equality. Not only did

women make significant contributions to the Great War effort, but they also helped ex-soldiers recover from physical or mental injury after the war. The changes in women's attitudes had a profound effect on the latter, especially on the founder members of the Pinnacle Club. Women mountaineers desired to climb on equal terms with the male climbers by climbing on their own; they consequently found their identity as mountaineers, instead of merely being daughters, wives, and mothers, as they would have been before the war.

Montague does not efface the women characters in this story by taking away their names. Rather, he succeeds in accentuating their presence by their anonymity. Even after the publication of *Disenchantment*, he continued to consider questions about post-war recovery in Britain. Given this perspective, the short story "Action" is Montague's attempt to respond to these questions.

Notes

1. "Action" was published in 1928 in a collection of his thirteen short stories, *Action and Other Stories*, which was advertised as the "stories of heroic people" by Chatto & Windus (Beresford 778). Although this anthology came out in Britain in 1928, shortly after Montague's death, "Action" first appeared in the US popular magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, in June 1927 (Gilchrist 10).
2. See Richards, especially 68.
3. As to *Rough Justice*, see Frayn; and as to *Right off the Map*, see Russell.
4. For the parallel between the protagonist of "Action" and Montague, see, for example, Russell, especially 192.
5. Montague wrote to Allan Monkhouse on 29 December 1914 about the reason why the Battalion was called "Sportsman's":

- “because everybody in it has great tales of what he used to do at some game or other, years ago” (Elton 107).
6. Sales of *Disenchantment* reached only around 6,500 by the end of March 1925; on the other hand, his collection of short stories *Fiery Particles* (1923) sold 7,089 by the same year, and his novel *Rough Justice* (1925) sold 6,629 by the end of March 1926 (Grieves 55-56).
 7. For Montague’s style, see Frayn, especially 94.
 8. Frayn names John Masefield, Arnold Bennett, H. W. Nevinson, George Bernard Shaw and H. M. Tomlinson. They all wrote to Montague offering high praise (104).
 9. The Schallijoch is a dip in the ridge that lies between the Weisshorn (4,506m) and the Schallihorn (3,975m).
 10. Montague refers to his early army life both in *Disenchantment* and his own diary in 1917: “It seems hardly credible now, in this soured and quarrelsome country and time, that so many men of different classes and kinds, thrown together at random, should ever have been so simply and happily friendly, trustful, and keen” (*Disenchantment* 12); and “[t]hat old time seems like one’s youth; it was merry and friendly and full of the vague thrill of greater experiences lying ahead” (qtd. in Russell 189).
 11. For more details, see Adie and Robert.
 12. For the war books boom, see, for example, Korte and Meyer.
 13. For the relation between chivalry and the First World War, see Frantzen and Girouard.
 14. Osborne calls this enthusiasm “a product of Victorian culture” (14).
 15. For this process, see Osborne.
 16. According to Ring, the qualification of the Alpine Club was limited to men who completed “some of the more difficult ascents” or contributed to “alpine literature, science or art” (63). The

original two hundred and eighty-one members from 1857 to 1863 consisted of “genteel upper-middle-class professions,” especially the law, clergymen, and university teachers and senior members of colleges at Oxford or Cambridge (Schama 502).

17. The Ladies’ Alpine Club was established in 1907 and the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club in 1908.
18. For Fanny Bullock Workman, see Mazel and Middleton.

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