THE DEATH AND BIRTH OF A HERO:

The Search for Heroism in British World War One Literature

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Formatting and Illustrations

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Introduction

In these days I was very happy. This was *Life*, and if one was occasionally frightened out of one's wits, a sudden fright never did a young man any harm [...]. To lie breathless in the German wire with a storming party of volunteers, armed with clubs and made invisible in the darkness by having our faces blacked was a splendid adventure [...]. (Carrington, *A Subaltern's War* 26)

The grossly mismanaged First World War, into which I plunged as soon as I left school, gave us infantryman so convenient a measuring-stick for discomfort, grief, pain, fear and horror, that nothing since has greatly daunted us. But it also brought new meanings of courage, patience, loyalty and greatness of spirit; incommunicable, we found, to later times. (Introduction, Graves 1)

He closed his eyes and had a vision of men advancing under a rain of shells. They had seemed so toy-like, so trivial and ineffective when opposed to that overwhelming wrath, and yet they had moved mechanically as though they were hypnotized or fascinated by some superior will [...]. It had seemed impossible to relate that petty, commonplace, unheroic figure, in ill fitting khaki and a helmet like the barber's basin with which Don Quixote made shift on his adventure, to the moral and spiritual conflict, almost superhuman in its agony, within him. (Manning 10)[1]

My thesis focuses on the representation of heroic masculinity in the literature of the Great War. In this introduction first I will present my research questions, methodology and approach; then I will describe the chapters that structure the thesis. In order to develop my arguments I examine the narratives written by British soldiers who served in the Great War. Among those who were in the trenches, I have only selected the writings of the group of men whose voices are still heard today. They are regarded as the canonical 'war poets' and they wrote the story of the Great War that came to be known as the 'truth.' Most of them came from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds; many had been to public schools and served as officers at the front. They are Richard Aldington, Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, Ivor Gurney, David Jones, Wilfred Owen, Herbert Read, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley and Edward Thomas. Because of their social and cultural similarities and their comparable

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[1]   The quotations above are a sample of the complicated and contradictory nature of soldiers' responses to the Great War and illustrate the core of my thesis.

approach to war and heroism, I have also included the writings of C.E. Montague, Charles Carrington, Ford Madox Ford, A.P. Herbert, Max Plowman, Guy Chapman, Gerard Brenan, Frederic Manning, Wyndham Lewis and Henry Williamson.[2]

Taking as a point of departure Marcus' notion of autobiography as "a site of struggle" (9), I examine the autobiographical narratives written by the war poets as essentially unstable, hybrid and transgressive texts, "on the borders between art and life, inner self and outer world, fiction and history" (Marcus 12). By focusing on the narration of real war experiences, it is possible to explore the peculiarly rich texture that flows when representations of heroic masculinity relate with their lived forms. Because of the overlapping of genres occurring in some texts and because of the difficulty of using a definite categorisation, I have included several genres under the umbrella term of the autobiographical: war diaries and letters, Sassoon's *Diaries 1915-1918* (1983), and the selected letters of Owen (*Selected Letters*, 1967), Gurney (*War Letters: A Selection,* 1983), Plowman (*Bridge into the Future: Letters of Max Plowman,* 1944), Rosenberg (*Selected Poems and Letters*, 2003), Sorley (*The Letters of Charles Sorley*, 1919) and Thomas (*Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*, 1995); war memoirs, Montague's *Disenchantment (*1922), Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928),

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[2]   Although the term 'war poets' was coined in the late 1920s as a result of the flood of autobiographical accounts about the Great War by the officer writers, there has not been an agreement on a specific definition for the label. In the first of the Great War anthologies, John Lane's *Songs and Sonnets for England in War Time* (1914), the term alluded to the patriotic writers who celebrated the deeds of heroes and "strengthen[ed], comfort[ed] and inspire[d]" the British nation (*Songs and Sonnets...* V). As to the names included within the category, Das suggests: "While early anthologies like E. B. Osborn's *The Muse in Arms* (1917) and Robert Nichols's *Anthology of War Poetry, 1914–1918* (1943) focused largely on the work of soldier-poets, Brian Gardner's *Up the Line to Death: the War Poets, 1914–1918* (1967) also included poems by non-combatant writers, although it too was a collection of male authors. More recent anthologists have questioned limiting the definition of war poetry to the work of a group of predominantly well-educated, largely middle-class soldier–poets. Catherine Reilly's anthology *Scars upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse* (1981), for example, opened up a new and important area of experience and expression" as she included women poets under the label (Das "War poets"). My use of the expression 'war poets,' however, only applies to the men examined here and not only draws on their similar social and cultural backgrounds, but on the fact that theirs were the voices that told the story of the Great War which have carried the most weight and which are still heard today.

Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (1928), Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (1928), *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), *Sherston's Progress* (1936) and *Siegfried's Journey* (1945), Graves' *Goodbye to All That (*1929), Chapman's *A Passionate Prodigality: Fragments of Autobiography* (1933), Lewis' *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography 1914-1926 (*1937), Brenan's *A Life of One's Own: Childhood and Youth* (1962), Carrington's *A Subaltern's War (*1929) and *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965) and Read's *In Retreat* (1925) and *The Contrary Experience*(1963); autobiographical novels, Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928), Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930) and Williamson's *The Patriot's Progress* (1930); and finally, an epic poem, Jones' *In Parenthesis* (1937). These texts share certain characteristics that make them comparable and legitimate as autobiographical war texts: firstly, they were written by men of similar cultural and social background who fought in the trenches of the Western Front; secondly, their intention was to tell the truth, to set the record straight; and thirdly, war affected them similarly, yet personal reactions were, at times, changeable and potentially contradictory.

I have also examined some poems by these authors, such as Sassoon's "In the Pink" (1916) and "Last Meeting" (1916) Graves' "The Dead Boche" (1916), Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump" (1917) and Owen's "Greater Love" (1920) to discuss specific issues, support certain arguments and give a clearer overview of the whole debate.

Research Questions

Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* is the most significant voice in literary criticism addressing the issue of the 'Ghost myth,' that is the idea that the Great War destroyed the representation of the soldier and war itself as heroic. Fussell claims "that there seems to be one dominating form of modern understanding; that it is essentially ironic; and that it originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (*The Great War* 35). My thesis argues that such a view is too limited and simplistic as regards the representation of war and, most essentially, of the figure of the soldier, taking insufficiently into account the complexity of response to a diverse and multifaceted experience. Drawing on the criticism of a number of scholars (Rutherford, 1978; Onions, 1990; Bracco, 1993; Dawson, 1994; Jay Winter,

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1995; and Bond, 1996, 2002, 2008), I put forward the view that there is a need to challenge the preconceived idea and inadequate evidence that depict soldiers as, first of all, triumphant, aggressive and physically strong heroes, and then, after the shock of the Western Front experience, as overwhelmingly disillusioned, passive and helpless victims. Even if the general view is that the myth of the Great War as a bloody and futile conflict was constructed largely by the canonical war poets, a close and detailed analysis of the selected texts shows that much of the finest literature of the Great War refuses single-minded interpretations. Moreover, the narratives examined here expose a diversity of positions that defy easy characterisation and transcend the conventional patriotic-heroic and protest-anti-heroic readings to explore the ambiguities, to put opposing ideas into dialectic proximity and to eventually acknowledge and reshape the masculine heroic ideal.

The position presented here, in contrast to both the modern Ghost myth and the traditional 'Victorian hero myth' – promoted by imperial propaganda and the public-school ethos through the effective merging of a single standard of heroic manhood and the understanding of war as adventure– is that the narratives of the Great War escape the imposition of one or the other narrative. Yet, even among those critics who have disagreed with Fussell for drawing a "too precise dichotomy between old and new ways of addressing the question of war, between traditional perceptions and modern ones" (Bracco 3), no critical focus has yet attempted, in a sustained and contrastively analysed manner, to explore the continued existence of traditional heroism in the canonical war texts. While the notion that the Victorian Hero Myth resisted World War One has been considered elsewhere, the prevailing view – mainly expressed by Bracco (1993) and supported with some differences by Dawson (1994) and Paris (2000) – is that war has always been understood in the light of the 'big words,' particularly in middlebrow war literature.

This thesis challenges such views not only exploring the implicit persistence of traditional heroism in most World War One literature, but also suggesting the uncomfortable proximity of both the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth in the selected texts. Bearing in mind the significant role literature plays in initiating, spreading and keeping war myths alive, I tentatively explore the ways in which these two myths are set forth in a dialectical relationship in the war

poets' writings. Through the analysis of autobiographical war narratives rather than literary works of fiction I intend to prove that even if myths are used as frameworks within which to narrate personal experience, the war poets' writings do account for subjective experiences through their status as self-reflective texts. Indeed, the texts offer particularly interesting possibilities for exploring the interaction between the personal and cultural images and ideals around the representation of heroic masculinity.

Most importantly, the narratives examined here testify to the need to move towards a redefinition of heroic masculinity from a new perspective. Such redefinition implies a new approach to the recurring tension between heroic and anti-heroic narratives. The contradictions embedded within the texts, then, will be studied in the context of a crisis of masculine identity reflected in the articulation of male bonding as a site of contest between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. Ultimately, I wish to expand on the work done on war literature so far, by proving that there are war narratives that challenge the dominant cultural conditions in which they were produced and that even the texts that have been widely regarded as the dominant anti-heroic narrative may subvert myths and express contesting discourses.

Methodology and Approach

To accomplish my research project, I explore several areas of knowledge. The selected primary sources are, therefore, studied from different – yet complementary – levels of analysis: first, the contextualisation of the war poets narratives within the literary and historical background of the Victorian hero myth; second, a detailed analysis of the representation of the soldier-hero through a thorough reading and understanding of the Ghost myth; and third, the analysis of the heroic-anti-heroic paradox in the soldiers' writings reflected in the male-male relationships established at the front.

In methodological terms, I make use of categories from masculinity studies and anthropology. The application of specific concepts, particularly Collini's idea of "character" (1991) and Michael Roper's distinction between "manliness" and "masculinity" (2005) help me explore both gender and identity. Theoretical readings and discussions of masculinity studies (Mosse 1990, 1996;

Dawson1994; Tosh 2005 and Roper 2005) are used in order to focus on the central debates around men, masculinities and the transformation of male narratives under certain cultural conditions. The application of specific concepts, particularly Arnold Van Gennep's "rites of passage" (1909) – separation, margin and aggregation – and Victor Turner's "liminality" (1969) help me explore gender and identity to approximate a redefinition of heroic masculinity.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis consists of four chapters. In the interest of clarifying the literary-historical context in which the war poets examined here regarded heroism at the front, the first chapter contextualises the thesis by examining the representation of heroic masculinity that prevailed in Victorian Britain prior to the outset of the Great War. I endorse the view that the complexity of the selected texts can be best understood through the reconsideration of the tropes, discourses and myths that characterised British imperialism in the late Victorian era particularly in relation to the public-school ethos and the Boer War experience, as they prompted the ideals but also the ambiguities and tensions that led to the growth, dissemination and decline of the Victorian hero myth.

The first chapter is structured in three sections. The first is devoted to the examination of the essentialist view of manhood characteristic of the Victorian hero myth. I trace the heroic ideal back to the legendary heroes of the epic and romance tradition and connect it with the figure of the Victorian warrior, as bearer and embodiment of imperial values, whose centrality in popular imagination grew with the military demands and the need to perpetuate the status quo. I also explore the propagandistic means, particularly literature, through which imperialism, its heroes and the idea of war as adventure became the point of origin from which the Victorian hero myth sprang. I pay particular attention to the genre of adventure romance, popularised by Haggard, Henty, Kipling, Stevenson and Doyle, among others.

The second section examines the public-school ethos. It was through the moral reform introduced by Dr. Thomas Arnold and through the idealisation of "muscular Christianity" encouraged by his disciples Hughes and Kingsley that the formation of the "character" of the subaltern in the making was made possible

within the public-school system. I explore the notions of "militarism" and "militarisation" and the aspects through which they were made evident – favourable admission terms for the sons of the High Command, training for service admission, cadet forces and the military celebratory culture, including the cult of sports and the public-school story – as they directly and significantly affected the lives of the men studied here. Moreover, by tracing some of the references to the public-school experience in the war poets' narratives it is possible to observe that although the stereotype of the imperial hero was the standard by which men measured themselves, within the normative framework, men's subjectivities were changeable and contradictory.

The chapter closes with the representation of heroic masculinity in the narratives of the Boer War, the longest, the bloodiest and the most expensive war fought by the British army before World War One. While most critical studies have resorted to the First World War as the main agent of radical change in British consciousness, the power of the Boer War to shape popular imagination and counter inherited stereotypes has been somewhat neglected. First-hand accounts are centred on battles and generals, rarely evaluating the complexity of a war that not only embodied tragedy, heroism and military and political inefficiency on a large scale, but marked the end of an era. Beginning in 1899 and finishing in 1902, the Boer War connected two centuries. This position in time makes it highly symbolic for being both traditional and modern in terms of both military strategies and its impact on literature and the arts. Bearing this in mind, I examine the literature and the journalism of the period to trace the confrontation between heroic and anti-heroic approaches and the anticipation of some of the contradictions that would characterise the attitudes towards the heroic in the literature of the Great War. The poetry of protest and the liberal press receive particular attention as they effectively ensured the erosion of the Victorian hero myth through their struggle against the loud voice of imperial propaganda. As in the previous section, I also examine some significant examples from the war poets' narratives to illustrate both the impact of the memory of the Boer War and the anxieties emerging around the perpetuation of its traditional heroic patterns.

If the nineteenth-century ideal of heroism is to be analysed as the immediate predecessor of the beliefs in the nobility and glory of war prior to the Great War,

its anti-heroic counterpart should also be brought to light. Chapter two is structured into five sections and explores how the anti-heroic impulse emerging from the literature and journalism of the Boer War developed until it reached the status of Ghost myth. Although the anti-heroic may be traced back to classical literature, my aim is to discuss the progressive decline of the traditional heroic ideal in Victorian literature and stress the presence of a countertype threatening to weaken and destabilise it. This anti-heroic countertype became an essential element in the representation of heroic masculinities, assuming greater protagonism as Victorianism gave way to modernity.

Among the anti-heroic traits leading to the emergence of a new myth and the devaluation of an old one, the second section highlights the different forms of conscientious objection to the coming war: the officially recognised opposition – religious, moral and political conscientious objectors – as well as those who were not formally recognised – the Bloomsbury group, some intellectuals at Cambridge and the humanitarian pacifists. Special attention is given to the Bloomsbury group, particularly to three of the most emblematic reactions to war – Russell, Keynes and Strachey's – as certain themes of humanistic and aesthetic response to war and heroism may connect them to the war poets studied here. Without disregarding the ambivalence of some of Bloomsbury reactions, or precisely because of these contradictions, I contend that Bloomsbury was a significant influence on the war poets' writings, not only in its potential to undermine the ideals proposed by the Victorian hero myth but in the development of alternatives to the group's conviction that war only brought the destruction of art and intellect.

The third section looks at the essential connection between the destructive nature of modern warfare and the anti-heroic. I contend that the new military technology, the metaphor of the 'war machine' and the encounter with mass death called into question a wide range of assumptions on which art, particularly literature, and civilisation had been based. Moreover, these three aspects paved the way for some of the anti-heroic ideas generated then and reinforced after the war. Bearing in mind that the old modes of imagining the world at war required revision and interpretation, the fourth section looks at the representational crisis that resulted from the experience of modern warfare. The claim for new narrative forms was a direct consequence of the war poets' need

to set the record straight and to reflect what was seen as a radical sense of discontinuity with the literary past. While the chief motivation was less to produce literature than to provide an alternative history of the Great War that was meticulously truthful in its depiction of reality, the imaginative character of this war cannot be ignored as literature played the important role of writing the story and keeping it alive.

Continuing the idea of the imaginative character of war, the fifth and last section assesses the Ghost myth itself, which is presented as the story that can be remembered and perpetuated by the imagination of the war poets. War is portrayed as a tragedy and a disaster causing a profound alteration of masculine identity: from the naïve enthusiasm for the war in 1914 to the disillusionment, anger and pity after the shock of the Western front. I draw particular attention to the figure of the soldier-ghost, the physically and mentally wounded soldier, the veteran as the victim – who not only had the ability to unsettle and refuse reassurance but became a counter-model and destabiliser of the dominant discourse. As a literary trope, the ghost is analysed in its three key interrelated aspects: the ghost as the shadow of the hero, the ghost as a vehicle between life and death and the ghost as haunting memory. Moreover, the war poets are seen as protagonists of a journey from the heroic to the ghostly and, after the shock of the war experience, as witnesses with the moral responsibility of atoning for their traumatic past.

The third chapter addresses the literature and literary criticism written during and after the Great War. This allows for the exploration of the ways in which the war was turned into history, as well as being aestheticised. Most importantly, by going through the literature of the period, it is possible to represent the broad range of responses to bring to light the finest examples of the two dominant myths, which not only followed each other chronologically but coexisted in dialectical tension in many texts. My argument is that the quest for meaning is not yet at an end and that the story of the Great War has the capacity not just to be recycled, but to be found anew.

In the first section, I examine the enduring legacy of the Victorian hero myth, which survived the impact of modern warfare thanks to the efforts of the soldiers and civilians who kept on writing patriotic poetry and fiction. This section thus

focuses on the other story, the heroic version of the Great War, with particular attention given to both propagandistic and pro-war poetry and fiction. It may be argued that the pieces written as propaganda were inferior examples of literature; yet they frame helpful questions about the relationship between Great War, propaganda and the dominant myths. I also analyse the worship of Rupert Brook, an icon useful in ensuring the continuity of the Victorian hero myth, and the contradictions experienced by some patriotic writers later on in the war as their texts start reflecting some anti-heroic traits.

The second section is devoted to Ghost myth literature. I examine the Battle of the Somme as a turning point in people's attitudes towards the war, as a gap in the progression from the literature of the Victorian hero myth to literature of the Ghost myth, although the evidence shows that there was not a clear break between two. I study both Ghost myth poetry – the poems written during the war and the anthologies published during the 1960s revival – and Ghost myth prose, among them, the letters, war diaries, autobiographical novels and war memoirs examined in this thesis, focusing on their significance in relation to the emerging myth. I also draw attention to the implications of the imaginative silence of the 1920s, in which public, writers and publishers decided to forget war, and to the 'war-books boom' triggered by the success of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929. Having assessed how the Ghost myth was essentially constructed in its enduring literary form, the third section deals with those who rejected identification with the Ghost myth and initiated a bitter debate on the war-books boom. Jerrold's "The Lie about the War" (1930) and Falls' *War Books* (1930) are given particular attention as they were the main actors of 'the war-books controversy' as they attempted to show that this flood of anti-war books had falsified the true image of the Great War.[3]

I conclude the chapter by discussing the scholarly publications of the 1960s-1970s, among them Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* and Fussell's The *Great War and*

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[3]   The terms 'war books,' 'war-books boom' and 'war-books controversy' have been borrowed from Cyril Fall's *War Books* (1930) and Douglas Jerrold "The Lie about the War" (1930). They will be used throughout this thesis to refer to the new phenomenon of publication of war novels and memoirs taking place during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The "war-books controversy" was a counter-reaction that objected to this Ghost myth version of war and criticised "the idea of a domesticated (and therefore weak and unheroic) nation" (Watson 209).

Modern Memory. They both aimed at the establishment and defence of the Ghost myth literary canon, giving academic recognition to this disillusioned mode of writing. I then trace the various approaches through which a group of scholars (Rutherford, Bracco, Jay Winter, Dawson, Onions and Bond) have questioned Ghost myth literature by exposing a series of assumptions that tend to recover the hero myth as part of the Great War agenda.

The fourth chapter makes the strongest and most original contribution to my thesis. Taking as a point of departure the idea of male bonding as the cornerstone of war heroism, I attempt to frame not only the uniqueness of the male relational patterns emerging from the trenches but their significance as sites of contest between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. This chapter assesses the extent to which the different attitudes of the war poets about the other – the comrade, the friend, the lover, the coward and the enemy – differed from, or resembled, those of the Victorian heroic masculinity against which many of them seemed to be reacting. My contention is that the expressions of male bonding reflected in the texts redefine crucial aspects of Victorian hero myth masculinities and combine them with the seemingly anti-heroic ones characteristic of Ghost myth masculinities. As Bourke asserts, "fortitude and tenderness coexisted" (*Dismembering the male…* 126) and emotional intimacy was valued and celebrated as an important aspect to all male relationships. In other words, the war poets allowed themselves to be simultaneously fighters and friends. This combination of emotional and physical presence provides an interesting challenge to the conventional patriotic-heroic and protest-anti-heroic readings and escapes the imposition of one or the other. What I attempt to do here, then, is to examine the ability of the war poets to mediate and form relationships in contrast to the dominant myths in light of a possible redefinition of masculine heroism as a constructed form of unresolved desires, tensions and anxieties.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the hero-hero relationship, including the expressions of comradeship, friendship and homoeroticism. I begin by briefly outlining the terminology and research concepts used to describe the various practices of male bonding at the front. I particularly focus on the tension between comradeship and friendship as the embodiment of the tension between the two dominant myths. Next, I explore

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the most characteristic instances of male bonding from ancient to the late nineteenth century: the classical and medieval discourses of friendship, the homosociality of the British colonies, the cult of romantic friendship at the public school and the homoeroticism of Whitman, Hopkins, Housman and the Uranians. My aim is to trace how classical, medieval and Victorian discourses of friendship influenced the representation of male bonding at the front both in its public (comradeship) and private (friendship and homoeroticism) spheres.

After that, I assess the enduring power of the Victorian hero myth in the representation of institutionalised male comradeship. A series of strategies to reinforce military discipline – the cult of blind obedience, pride in the regiment, the cult of the fallen and the depersonalisation of the soldier –are traced in texts that, while characteristic of the Ghost myth, tend to encourage the glorification of the traditional discourse of war. The positive role of the regiment in the soldier's endurance could not prevent vulnerability and powerlessness before devastation and loss of life. Therefore, labels such as the "unknown warrior," "Tommy Atkins," "file friend" and "corpselessness" are not only seen as characteristic of the Ghost myth rhetoric of alienation and despair but of the need of more profound and intimate bonds that modern warfare, hegemonic masculinity and institutionalised comradeship seemed unwilling to allow.[4]

Then I examine the expression of friendship as an implicit, almost inherent need of the men at the front to escape from the alienation of institutionalised comradeship. My argument is that, despite the Ghost myth discourse, men were able to establish emotional bonds – based either on common artistic and personal interests or on sensibility and sympathy – and to recover their ideal of common humanity. Here I focus on several friendships built at the front to show that emotional expressiveness was not incompatible with war survival and that

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[4]   Connell defines "hegemonic masculinity" as "the maintenance of practices that institutionalise men's dominance over women" and how it is "constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities. These other masculinities need not be as clearly defined – indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness" (*Gender and Power…* 185-6).

men were indeed capable of disclosing emotions, getting a personal sense of worth from the friend and subverting dominant masculinities.

The first section concludes with the exploration of the homoerotic bonds among the war poets who were known to have been homosexual. Due to the widespread homophobia existing among soldiers at the front, homosexuality emerged as a grey area and an unstable category. Since it could not be overtly explicit and had to be disguised, it materialised as romantic friendships and infatuations with young men – similar to those of the public school – sentimentalised hero-worship, the homoerotic pastoral and the pastoral elegy. I highlight some of the contradictions implicit in the construction of male intimacy; on the one hand, the Victorian hero myth imperatives to define heroic masculinity in opposition to femininity and homosexuality and, on the other, the actual need to incorporate certain non-normative aspects into the soldier's experience. In other words, my study of homoeroticism at the front tries to put forward the possibility of removing the association traditionally maintained between heroic masculinity and heterosexuality.

The second section considers the hero-other relationship. While the idea of the other as the countertype of the hero is characteristic of the Victorian hero myth, the other as mirror-image and projection of the soldier's subjectivity and anxieties appears as distinctive of the Ghost myth. This section looks at male relationships from the perspective of the self-other distinction and highlights the tensions that the perception of the other generates in the definition of the heroic self. I assess how the texts seem to move away from the rigidly enclosed binary system and to allow some room for the thoughts and feelings by which the soldiers appropriated the image of the other. It is the way in which the other was like the self that haunts these men's writings. By focusing on the representation of the coward and the German enemy I explore the anxieties induced by the dissemination of the Victorian standard of heroic masculinity and the limited extent in which the latter could coexist with the man as an individual.

The third and final section traces a possible alternative approach to the two dominant myths emerging from the texts. What follows then explores the articulation of heroic masculinity as a complex and even controversial masculine subject. Having shared a social experience of powerlessness and common

suffering, the war poets lifted their emotional restraints and relied on their common humanity as men to sustain and reshape their self-images. Oscillating at times between dominant and oppositional discourses, they suggested, in a rather more explicit and realistic way, certain heroic traits that tended to challenge the dominant codes. This final section first explores this process of transition and becoming – the war poets' liminal oscillation between "manliness" and "masculinity" in the representation of heroic masculinity – and then focuses on two heroic alternatives to the dominant myths, the "self-reflective" and the "emotional" types, which gave in turn way to a more flexible and multifaceted construction that I call the "compassionate" hero. Admitting that the appearance of the self-reflective and the emotional are regarded as a post-Second World War phenomenon, the Great War marked the beginning of the transformation towards a more modern heroic self, characterised by an enhanced capacity for self-reflection and emotional self-expression. Based on simpler and more unified principles of masculine behaviour and morality, the compassionate hero emerges as the only possible solution to the need to sustain the devalued hero myth and as a significant preliminary stage in the development from the hero through the ghost to the construction of less aggressive and more flexible masculine identities.

The conclusions chapter completes the thesis with the presentation of the key ideas that I have put forward and of their implications, together with an outline of further research that, in my opinion, would contribute to an even fuller comprehension of the texts examined here.

Chapter I

Nineteenth-Century War Heroics: The Victorian Hero Myth

In order to understand the representation of heroism and the soldier-hero developed in the selected war texts, it is essential to analyse the notion of heroic masculinity that prevailed in mid-to late-nineteenth century Britain and in the years prior to the Great War. My aim is to explore the Victorian hero myth so as to assess the degree to which the war poets applied or transgressed its most significant constituents. I start by exploring the conditions that led to the dominance of a single standard of heroic manhood and the propagandist means through which the myth was enacted and passed on to Victorian society. Then I analyse the public-school ethos and the Boer War experience as two of the most significant stimuli on the budding forms of resistance through which the war poets sought to challenge modern warfare and traditional heroism. Whereas the issues discussed throughout this chapter may appear to depart far from the realm of the narratives examined here, this does not detract from their importance as indispensable sources by which soldier writers judged and defined their experiences at the front. Therefore, their influence on the views articulated during and after the Great War proves to be essential to my argument and will be commented throughout.

I.1. Imperialism, Propaganda and the Victorian Hero

"I want a hero," Byron famously advertises in the opening of *Don Juan* (1819), and he seems to express the shared concerns that gained increasing prominence as Victorianism made way for the twentieth century in Britain. It would be no exaggeration to say that hero-worship was an inherent disposition in Victorian times. Indeed, as Ousby observes, the term 'heroism' was used "with an almost obsessive frequency that no other age in English culture has ever come close to rivalling" (152-153). In face of the emerging bourgeois values and attitudes that were progressively threatening the traditional heroic ideal, the Victorians appeared to be stubbornly determined to continue celebrating their heroes and to define themselves in terms of higher values. In one of the works that would frame the discourse on heroism for the next century, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), Carlyle refers to its centrality in the popular

imagination: "Hero-worship is the deepest root of all; the tap-root, from which in a great degree all the rest were nourished and grown" (I 10). Indeed, Carlyle's remark gives a concise, although distinctive summary of the point from which my study on war heroism begins: Hero-worship was the outward manifestation of a set of received values and ideas that constituted the core identity of mid-to late-nineteenth-century Britain.

Having gone through the vicissitudes of life with somehow greater ease and valour, the figure of the hero became the projection of men's hopes and was elevated to deity, probably in response to the vital need to overcome human limitations. However, even if the hero's strength was beyond the normal reach of men, these traits did not interfere with the representation of their minds and passions as human beings. Victorian heroes were wholly human, even though they may have shown qualities that set them outside the ordinary run of mankind**.**

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) articulates the image of the hero as men's hope, as someone who has been there before and is capable of exhibiting physical prowess and the will for self-sacrifice for some greater benefit. The archetypal hero in Campbell's "monomyth" "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (28).[5] In effect, the hero's achievement lies mainly in his success in approaching the ultimate truth, which only he can possess. Yet, he must return from his trials to enlighten men; his deeds must be reflected in his worshipping audience. The hero-worshipper, in turn, was supposed to submit to the man who seemed to embody the qualities and vision more far-reaching than was normally realisable. This fact is, without doubt, disturbing as it implies that all men were not equal and that the hero would stand above the rest.[6]

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[5]   Although women are not explicitly excluded from Campbell's scheme, it is evident that the spirit of the journey allows only for male heroes (Segal 8).

[6]   The personal and abstract qualities of the hero are also systematised in other archetypal interpretations, such as Otto Rank's *The Myth and Birth of the Hero* (1909) and Lord Raglan's *The Hero* (1936).

Religious prophets and priests, men of letters, captains of industry, Prime Ministers and, as the demands of imperialism grew nationwide, fundamentally warriors, were regarded as the archetypal men of the Victorian era, the emblem of manhood and virtue: "They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain" (Carlyle I 2). Whether they were prophets, priests or poets, heroes were identified by their military strength. Indeed, courage was "the chief recognised virtue" (Carlyle III 87), the most consistent criterion for understanding nineteenth-century heroism.[7] As MacDonald puts it, "Carlyle provided a thesis of masculine strength […]: the hero must lead the weak, the stupid, and the inept, as the hero nation must lead the feeble" (*The Language of Empire* 54). In his essay "Heroism," Emerson also stresses the centrality of the heroic individual in nineteenth-century American society and recognises that the hero was primarily characterised by his "warlike attitude" which he defines as a "military attitude of the soul" asserted by the "ability to cope single-handed with the infinite army of enemies" (227).

Imperial propaganda and public-school education were credited with creating a favourable context for hero-worship in mid-to late-nineteenth-century Britain. By the end of the century British society was flooded with patriotic appeals and militarist ideas: "a cult of heroes and a heroic national history was celebrated in popular literature and had infiltrated school textbooks" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 2). This is certainly reflected in the most emblematic tales of public-school life of the time. Of Tom Brown, one of the characters who had most impact on the nineteenth-century national ethos, Thomas Hughes says, "he marched down to the School-house, a hero-worshipper, who would have satisfied the soul of Thomas Carlyle himself" (351).[8] The heroic was not only essential in

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[7]   Referring to the defining qualities of the hero, Lubin associates military courage with heroism: "Courage and nobility (or simply nobility, which can be taken to include courage) suggest, first of all, the warrior hero, since the physical test of the hero is the most dramatic and emphatic testimonial to heroism. Courage is the victory of will – of self-control – over the normal (or natural) responses, particularly the self-control of the hero when confronting dangers and, the ultimate danger, death" (10).

[8]   *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) is Thomas Hughes' best known literary work and the archetypical schoolboy novel. It is based on Hughes' days at Rugby School and portrays an ideal of

establishing the significance of the individual, but in encouraging the ruling elite to emulate and eventually become national heroes themselves.

Hero-worship and the heroic pervade nineteenth-century war literature and become the most distinctive aspect of what I call the 'Victorian hero myth' – that is, the effective merging of a single standard of heroic manhood, war as adventure, and imperialism in certain social constructions and their literary projections in mid-to late-nineteenth-century Britain.[9] I use the word myth in the Barthesian sense, as myth was charged with "the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 142). In this sense, the Victorian hero myth justified empire and "turned moral ambiguity into unquestioned certainty" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 89). The rather grandiloquent representation of military feats, helped both distinguish heroic standards of conduct and counter doubts arising from the unsavoury aspects of the imperial frame of mind. As MacDonald puts it, "in metaphorical terms, the life of the hero served its purpose: it was a distraction from the harsh facts; presenting a different and more dramatic reality, it shifted the argument around" (*The Language of Empire* 81). War heroes were not only superior beings but also the result of social needs, as their lives reinforced and legitimised British imperialism. The soldier who sacrificed his life for his country, then, became one of the clearest and most widely advertised images of the truly masculine man. Commenting on the dramatic meaning of an illustration in the boys' magazine *Chums* (see fig. 1), MacDonald says:

> Courage, loyalty, duty and patriotism are given iconographic form as the discourse of last stands is invoked in the magazine: a dusty spot in the desert, a unit ambushed on the frontier, the fortuitous but ironic meeting of old school friends – or enemies – water gone, ammunition expended, horses killed, the murderous natives closing in, the last thoughts of school, queen, and country as the assegais fall. ("Signs from the Imperial Quarter" 31)

masculinity based on muscular Christianity. The work will be quoted and discussed in more detail in successive chapters, particularly when considering the muscular Christian ideal.

[9] Even if the Victorian era coincided with Queen Victoria's reign and extended from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901, I use the term "Victorian hero myth" to refer to a longer period of time covering also the Edwardian period (1901 to 1910) and extending beyond Edward VII's death to include the years up to the start of World War I in 1914, the end of hostilities with Germany in 1918 and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

The trope of the test of manhood in exotic places abroad is systematically presented as a beneficial ordeal that would not only assert manly superiority but reaffirm social Darwinian theories in the imperial *milieu*: "War ensured that only the strong would survive and procreate" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 45). This way, combat and military life stand for the most traditionally masculine arenas, necessary to preserve the natural order of things, defeat the unfit and the inept, and reinforce the Victorian hero myth.

Fig. 1. "Chums." *Chums* 2 (1893-94). Frontispiece. Robert H. MacDonald, "Signs from the Imperial Quarter: Illustrations in Chums, 1892-1914." Children's Literature 16 (1988): 32. Print.

Although heroism as a historical concept is much too broad for the scope of this work, and to trace any significant path leading directly from Homer to the soldier

writers of World War One would be audacious indeed, there is evidence to show that the legendary heroes described in epic and romance traditions do form the basis upon which the image of the Victorian warrior was built. Fascinated by the deeds of Homer's Hector, Achilles and Odysseus, Virgil's Aeneas and, fundamentally, by the popular legend of St George and the chivalric code of behaviour of King Arthur and his knights, innumerable writers and poets were influenced by the heroic topic. Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1856-1885) is characteristic of what is regarded as an 'Arthurian revival' during the Victorian period. Still, as Bryden suggests, this was largely the work of canonical literary figures such as the already mentioned Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, William Morris, and Algernon Charles Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites who reworked the Arthurian stories; there is also a wide range of literary works – mostly poems – from different social and cultural backgrounds that were committed to the re-enactment of Arthurian romance in Victorian literature (1-6). In a bourgeois society which so proudly spoke of growth and improvement, "finding life models among the knights of the Round Table" (Braudy 289) was an interestingly noticeable fact that proved, once again, that hero-worshipping was an "innate tendency" (Ousby 153) deeply embedded in the social, political and cultural fabric of the Victorian era.

Even though militarism became most evident in Britain during the 1890s, the imperial idea had been clearly present throughout the whole of the nineteenth century.[10] Indeed, the image of war as a test of manhood and the admiration of the warrior hero had been progressively influential to both writers and readers from the early and mid 1800s. Great efforts had been made to bring the empire closer to people by means of propaganda and a profusion of adventure stories, plays, popular music, 'patriotic' newspapers, illustrations, photographs, war games and toys suggesting that war was a romantic and exciting adventure and that British soldiers embodied desirable masculinities.[11] One of the most symbolic

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[10]   See Anderson, Olive. "The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain." *The English Historical Review* 86. 338 (1971): 46-72. See also MacKenzie, John M. *Popular Militarism and The Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester UP 1992). Chapter I ("Introduction: Popular Imperialism and the Military") offers a detailed explanation of the reasons behind the rise of militarism between 1800 and 1900.

[11]   For other illustrative examples, particularly regarding the propagandistic strategies of the media, see Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000.*

icons of masculine heroism was the institution of the Victoria Cross in 1856. From the moment it came into existence, bravery began to be recognised in every rank of the armed forces. The award of "a medal which would, in the words of the original warrant, be 'highly prized and eagerly sought after' for its rarity and its connotations" (De la Billière 3) became centrally indicative of the qualities seen as defining heroism as it celebrated the suffering and striving of the empire's leading men.

As far as war literature is concerned, the Victorian hero myth was passed on by the telling and retelling of "history as romance" through "easily remembered characterisations and episodes with a simple, patriotic meaning" (*MacDonald, The Language of Empire* 58). The renewal of public interest in the Arthurian theme in mid-nineteenth century contributed to the reshaping of the chivalric ideal. With the image of the medieval knight in mind, the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott and the educational works of Kenholm Digby "provided guidance, through historical example, for the conduct of gentlemen" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 23).[12] The chivalric discourse became so embedded in Victorian life that, as MacKenzie writes, "it was automatic to see the gentleman, the hero and the soldier exclusively in terms of the medieval paladin" (87).[13] But the historical novel was not the only means used to inculcate boys with the war spirit. Poetry also had "the ability to dignify and make memorable the historical moment" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 59). Heroic poems were often anthologised and meant to have, as Dentith argues, "this explicitly inspiring and heroizing function" (139).[14]

(London: Reaktion Books, 2000): 49-82. Paris traces the development of what Dawson has identified as the "pleasure culture of war" (233) in British popular culture between 1850 and 2000.

[12]   Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819)*, Kenilworth* (1821)*, Quentin Durward* (1823) and *The Talisman* (1825) and Digby's *The Broad Stone of Honour* (1822) – subtitled 'Rules for the Gentlemen of England' – deserve special recognition for their contribution in the shaping of the heroic ideal.

[13]   Even the building of public schools, their shields, mottoes and game clothes were also "genuinely or pseudo-medieval [and] conducive to chivalric fantasies" (Parker 102). Moreover, the Boer War was also seen as a propitious arena in which to exploit chivalric ideals, though the outcome was not what had been hoped for. (See Section I.3 of this thesis: "The Boer War: Heroic Anxieties").

[14]   Among the patriotic anthologies written at the summit of imperial enthusiasm, Langbridge's *Ballads of the Brave* (1890), Bennet's *Contributions to a Ballad History of England* (1890), Henley's *Lyra Heroica: A Book of Verse for Boys* (1891), regarded as a pioneer in battle verse collections,

However, it is the genre of adventure romance that best channelled both "the feeling of excitement" about the British imperial myth and "the expression of that feeling in literature" (Green 5). Even if Green recognises a tradition of imperial adventure in popular narratives dating back to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (51), the genre attained its most genuine expression in its presentation to young boys as juvenile adventure fiction in the 1850s. As Paris suggests, "reading was one way in which the young were inculcated with the beliefs that society deemed worth promoting" (*Warrior Nation* 50).[15] Both the martial and the evangelical spirit of the age were set out as a lesson to be taught: "bravery in battle, gallant action, facing savages for Christ, emulating Gordon, the great Christian hero" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 62). Since young audiences were more impressionable and vulnerable than adults – so, of course, more easily influenced – from the 1850s onwards adventure fiction began to be written with the nation's youth in mind.[16] Yet, the genre was widely read by both youngsters and adults, although "abandoned to a sub-literature, often of best-sellers" (Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 16).[17]

Miles's *The Imperial Reciter* (1900) and Butler's *War Songs of Britain* (1903) deserve special recognition. Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), Tennyson's "The Revenge" (1878) and "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1880), Henry Newbolt's "Drake's Drum" (1897) and W.E. Henley's "England, my England" (1900) represented a particular view of war and portrayed, as MacDonald argues, "a handful of heroes fac[ing] fearful odds" (*The Language of Empire* 59). Of Newbolt and Henley, two of the most patriotic voices, Parker claims that "they sacrificed poetic imagination to a formula, and managed to forestall analysis of what (little) they were saying by taking refuge in lofty rhetoric. At the heart of their work was patriotism ossified by blind reverence, unchallenged and therefore uninspired" (Parker 139). What Parker claims of Newbolt and Henley may be applied to most heroic poetry of the period.

[15]   The popular hymns of the period – Moody and Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* sold over 80 million copies in fifty years – were the other means through which dominant beliefs were passed onto society. Hymns helped justify war as an essential element of God's plan and reflected the developing relationships between missionary and military.

[16]   The Education reforms of 1870 and the creation of the free Board Schools might have given further momentum to the development of the Victorian hero myth in juvenile literature and adventure fiction in general. The myth gained access to school texts, such as the standard readers, the collections of verse for boys – the 'reciters'– the boys' magazines and the public-school stories.

[17]   Among the most prominent titles were James Grant's *The Romance of War* (1845), Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1855), Charlotte Yonge's *A Book of Golden Deeds* (1864), Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), the great works of Captain Frederick Marryat and

Comfortably detached from war itself, Victorian readers felt a widespread interest in military combat and scenes of bloodshed and courage that kept on rising as the century progressed. While this interest was initially limited to the social elites, a growing curiosity for the topic was soon passed on to the middle class and its principles and ideals spread throughout society: "All classes were touched, one way or another, by this programme of conscious propaganda, as patriotic history became an accepted and familiar element of popular culture, an everyday feature of entertainment at both ends of the social scale" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 61).[18] The 1880s witnessed the peak of the adventure story: "for adults the imperial romances of Rider Haggard and for children the imperial adventure stories of G. A. Henty, Dr Gordon Stables and a host of others" (Eldridge 55). It was from the hand of these widely read authors – Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, R.L. Stevenson, Conan Doyle and the popular G.A Henty and W.E Johns – that, the genre of adventure romance "was raised to a higher literary status by the much acclaimed revival of Romance as a category of the Novel, in the 1880's" (Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 16).[19]

Interestingly, while the heroes of adult adventure stories were soldiers, pathfinders, missionaries or colonial settlers, the heroes of juvenile literature

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Charles James Lever, and the popular boys' magazines *The Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1967) and *Chums* (1892- 1941).

[18]   This process of massification of the heroic ideal originated what Dawson calls the "pleasure culture of war" (233) (see footnote 11) – that is to say the representation of war as an entertaining spectacle, deprived of any unjust or unpleasant consequences – as part of mass media propaganda. Dawson's "pleasure culture of war" should be necessarily connected with the rapid growth of the mass reading public from 1800 to 1900. For an expository and descriptive history of the British mass reading audience, see Altick's *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900.* Altick argues that it is in the Victorian period when the working class reader becomes the common reader for the first time and claims that "the history of the mass reading audience is, in fact, the history of English democracy seen from a new angle" (3).

[19]   The main reason behind the revival of adventure romance was attributed to "the economics of publishing, the material methods of book production and distribution" (Vaninskaya 58), which ensured "the triumph of the cheap one-volume first edition, aided by modern methods of advertising [...]" (58-59). The genre of adventure romance was also seen as a escape from the realist novel: "We are all homesick, in the dark days and black towns, for the land of blue skies and brave adventures in forests, and in lonely inns, on the battle-field, in the prison, on the desert isle" (Lang 4 qtd in Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 16).

were usually youngsters capable of heroism similar to that of adults, if on a limited scale. Referring to the representation of children in adventure stories, Reed claims: "it foreshadowed a society in which children would be moulded according to a single pattern, putting behind them a fallible waywardness in favour of a respectable, though monotonous maturity" (75-76). Indeed, juvenile literature portrayed "tiresome pre-adults" (Reed 75); the boy became a man through a rite of passage, which was usually war. The plots and the heroes were more or less interchangeable, with only the details of wars being different. C. A. Henty's hero, the role model for most British youth, was the perfect example of the hero of juvenile literature:

> … a sixteen-year-old boy who at the outset of the book loses his parents or his fortune or his place in society or all three and is thrown out into the wider world upon his own resources. He goes to India to seek his fortune and there his character and morale are tested in a sequence of special missions, adventures, battles, sieges, chases, captures, escapes and rescues" (MacKenzie 90).[20]

Popular biographers also did their part to sustain the Victorian hero myth, foster hero-worship and impress the impressionable with the deeds of the greatest British warriors. Sir Henry Havelock, Generals Gordon, Wolseley, Roberts, Kitchener and Col. R.S.S. Baden-Powell, among others, became the subject of the most widely read imperial biographies, being treated as moral characters, paradigms of the time, symbols of both military skill and decorum.[21] Since these publications contributed to the development and interpretation of the myth on a large scale, "the complications of biography and personality were pared down, so that the story of the hero was presented in its stereotypical form, in 'clear lines

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[20]   In *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling claims to have pursued Henty's same goal: "While we were at Torquay there came to me the idea of beginning some tracts or parables on the education of the young" (79). *Stalky and Co* (1899) and *Kim* (1901) show how influential Kipling was, both at a popular and governmental level. Although rebellious and unconventional, Stalky and Kim's actions are always channelled in a direction useful to the empire.

[21]   The following biographies were written within three years of Sir Havelock's death. Examples published in 1858 include W. H. Aylen's *The Soldier and the Saint: or, Two Heroes in One*, W. Downing Evans' *Ode on the Death of General Sir Henry Havelock*, Rvd W. Owen's *The Good Soldier, A Memoir of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock*, James P. Grant's, *The Christian Soldier, Memorials of Sir Henry Havelock*, and W. Brock's, *A Bio-graphical Sketch of Sir Henry Havel*. In 1860, John Clark Marshman published *Memoirs of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock, KCB*, by far the most substantial and interesting of all.

and hard concepts'" (MacKenzie 115). Dawson reviews what he calls the "hero industry," that is the "systematic organization of hero–worshipping in the publishing houses" (146). Eliza Looker's 'Live' (1885), F.M Holmes's *Four Heroes of India* (1892) and George Barnett Smith's *Heroes of the Nineteenth Century* (1901) were published in this way, "either [as] a series of 'famous lives' about imperial soldiers […]; or a collection of several, highly condensed lives within one volume" (Dawson 146). Each new hero seemed to repeat and validate the patriotic acts of his predecessors as they all "tended to merge into a single persona, reflecting the heroism of the nation" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 51).

Just as the figure of the hero was historicised and categorised by Carlyle, Mackenzie attempts to classify the Victorian hero in three categories: the hero of national defence, represented by Nelson; the romantic hero, Lord Byron being the most emblematic case; and the hero of empire, represented by Havelock, Livingstone, Gordon and Lawrence of Arabia (MacKenzie 113).[22] He argues that the category of the romantic hero "went out of fashion quite rapidly" probably because "the imperial state and its educational and cultural processes found these uncomfortable heroes for an expansionist age" (113). However, imperial heroes shared some of the characteristics of the Romantic archetype itself as they possessed "superhuman physical stamina and for contemporaries an almost miraculous courage. Following the Christian paradigm, [they] secured [their] ultimate conquest through martyrdom" (MacKenzie 113). Unlike romantic heroes, however, they operated "within strict moral bounds" (113), at least in theory. As "the embodiment of collective will, stereotypes of a shared culture and promoters of unity in the face of fragmentation" (MacKenzie 115), these one-dimensional figures were useful to explain and justify empire and offer didactic examples of self-sacrificing duty.

Faced with such constraining assumptions, writers of adventure fiction and imperial biographers made their heroes travel a circular journey. Provided with the qualities that enabled them to cope with any problem, Victorian heroes possessed exactly the same virtues at the end of their – always triumphant –

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[22]   MacKenzie's categorisation contributes significantly to my argument as it strengthens the view that the representation of the heroic in World War One memoirs is the result of the overlapping of various categories.

journeys. Thus, the heroic figure was presented as an absolute ideal, removed, when possible, of any shred of violence. However, when violence did take part in the imperial story, it was morally justified or paradoxically portrayed as harmless entertainment for boys. MacDonald makes this point when he discusses the visual representation of the hero in boys' magazines: "Glory, strength and violence are made dramatic and meaningful, yet rendered innocent by boyish high spirits" ("Signs from the Imperial Quarter" 33).

From this dual attitude towards violence emerged a hero with a two-fold personality, yet one-dimensionally perceived as an inviolable and harmonious whole of body and soul. He is made to act both as a tough and ruthless soldier on one hand, and as a devoted Christian, on the other. In order to better understand this double-edged appreciation of heroic masculinity, we need to analyse both aspects separately. As far as violence is concerned, Victorian heroes were made to appear as physically powerful and aggressive; they were expected to use violence in a single action to demonstrate their manliness and resolve their conflicts.[23] Indeed, physical prowess and courage were depicted as innate, masculine essences – unchanging and ahistorical – and became instrumental in the construction of desirable masculinities. The literary representation of heroism therefore produced male figures endorsing a gender essentialist model.[24] Due to the constant threats against the colonial frontiers, heroic masculinity embodied a fixed concept that demanded clear positioning: "men should be men and women should be women" (Braudy 349). Indeed, imperial wars required clean-cut masculinities as deviation could bring about military defeat. This dominant

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[23]   See Robert H., MacDonald. "Deeds of Glory" in *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918*. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994): 88-94, for what he calls "the signs of the hero."

[24]   Essentialist theories of gender – in opposition to what has been called "constructionism" or "social construction of masculine identity" (Gilmore 1; Connell, 1995 67-70; Kimmel 93-116) – assert that "masculine or feminine traits are innate (essences) in the individual" (Buchbinder 4). This essentialist approach to gender allowed for the construction of the binary oppositions that distinguished warrior-heroes from the others – females, cowards and enemies – and made them appear either as the protectors or seducers of women or as the feared enemies of other men (Buchbinder 3; Mosse, *The Image of Man* 9; Braudy 24). In the context of this Manichean confrontation, both Victorian writers and readers were encouraged to praise forms of heroism that not only excluded women but – because of their racial, class and ideological component— also excluded large numbers of men. See Chapter IV.2 of this thesis.

masculine ideal would force nineteenth-century men to measure up to it. Manhood was made by "proving oneself 'one of the lads,' by demonstrations of physical strength, sporting ability, sexual prowess, and so on" (Tosh 14). War and violence were nothing but chances to confirm or recreate the existence of these fixed characteristics or given attributes.

Added to violence, there was, as mentioned above, a moral or religious component that played a crucial role: the Victorian hero was a moral man, a Christian. Thus, the figure of the Christian soldier was deliberately promoted in order to contribute the necessary moral component to the ideal of the strong, aggressive hero and to provide military action with both social justification and a sacred face.[25] The acceptance of violence for the good of the nation – "war was clearly necessary to maintain the empire and allow God's work to take place" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 17) – helped to justify war and elevate soldiers to the embodiment of national masculine ideals. The logic was clear and appeared to be irrefutable: Christians were almost always being threatened by non-Christians; therefore, the resources that enabled the British to win were, inevitably, seen as uniquely Christian.[26] In fact, the introduction of the notion of Christian Militarism in late-Victorian literature provided a coherent explanation of why the British were exercising their power in such a range of remote places.[27] According to Anderson, this is not only due to the official moral framework that was given to the duty of soldiering, but also to nationalist Evangelical tendencies and the emergence of religious organisations – the Salvation Army, the Church Army and the Boy's Brigade– that imitated the "military discipline, titles, uniform and accoutrements" of the army (Olive Anderson 66). The essential quality of

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[25] Anderson identifies a period of change between 1854 and 1864 – caused both by the aftermath of the Crimean war and the early responses to the Indian Mutiny – in which Christian and military values began to be regarded as inseparable companions and "the gap between the 'thin red 'eores' of the end of the nineteenth century and the 'brutal and licentious soldier' of earlier generations" began to be satisfactorily bridged (Olive Anderson 46).

[26] The inseparability between religion and patriotism resulted in fantasies of violent revenge, which had been completed barred from Victorian consciousness, being widely accepted in the colonial setting – as happened during the Great Uprising of 1857. See Brantlinger's revision of the large number of literary responses to the events in India in *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (New York: Cornell UP, 1988).

[27] Besides, in a nation whose patron was a soldier – St George – the idea of 'fighting Christians' did not come as a surprise.

Victorian Christian militarism is that it seemed to offer an acceptable alternative for a society that had to come to terms with imperialist war, but yet exhibited clear traits of moral integrity and ethics. Opportunely, the rhetoric of a religious crusade coincides with the idea of an imperial mission and, as Peck writes, "the army rather than being seen as an instrument of the state, is reconceived as an expression of the moral character of the state" (74).[28]

Of the previously mentioned imperial warrior heroes, both Sir Henry Havelock and General Charles Gordon were portrayed as the most inspirational personifications of the figure of the Christian soldier and the religious crusade [29]. The qualities they shared had a profound religious dimension: As good Christians, they had devotedly accepted the missions assigned to them. They were conveniently presented as custodians of the British Empire; their sense of duty, responsibility and self-sacrifice towards the other was emphasised by those who believed they were defending important national values, values that were put to the test of suffering and death. In fact, General Gordon was represented as the Victorian Christ figure per excellence: "manly, chivalric, devoted to duty, misunderstood, betrayed and sacrificed" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 85).

Despite the absence of explicit evidence of the existence of the Victorian hero myth "in official documents or in the products of the 'official mind' of imperialism" (Mackenzie 109), it can be safely concluded from the issues discussed in this section that the hero myth drew faithfully and predictably on the existing imperial framework, the understanding of war as an adventure and

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[28]   But this is not only a British claim. Referring to the powerful religious element in France during the Great War, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker argue that "in all countries, the catchphrase was the same: 'God is with us,' 'Dieu est de notre côté,' 'Gott ist mit uns.'" (114). This goes back to the first religious crusade and the declaration by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095, *Deus vult* or *Deus lo vult* (Latin for "God wills it"), and remained in force "in the nineteenth century, when the religion of patriotism was born, [...] nations became sacred and religions became nationalised." In fact, when the Great War engulfed Europe in 1914, all nations believed themselves to be "'chosen peoples'" who "were now at war with one another" (115).

[29]   Major-General Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857) was a British general noted for his recapture of Cawnpore from rebels during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885), also known as Gordon of Khartoum, was a British army general remembered for his heroic campaigns in China and northern Africa.

the perception of a single standard of heroic manhood. Moreover, it is precisely the idea of a one-dimensional heroic figure that was continually and deliberately fostered by the media, the popular literature and the press, and systematically imprinted on the minds of British citizens. The representation of the soldier-hero, thus, became an abstraction rather than a reality, "an allegory about *ideas* of war" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 42) used in order to rationalise and keep the *status quo* alive. As will be seen in the following chapters, the use of the figure of the hero as an instrument of hegemony, property of Great Britain, gradually gave rise to a realm of subversion that would eventually undermine the apparently stable imperial discourse. The narratives examined here reflect a wide variety and complexity of responses to the hero myth: from celebration to condemnation, from patriotic compliance to ironic revolt. The Victorian hero myth, thus, can be valued less for the sake of the empire itself than for the qualities – and anxieties – it seemed to nurture both in its builders and victims.

I.2. Moulding the Subaltern Hero's Mind: The Public-school Ethos

Once the background to the Victorian hero myth has been established, it is necessary to study how this single standard of heroic manhood influenced and, somehow, conditioned the experience of the soldiers under study. The most obvious way through which this occurred was through the educational – and fundamentally the social and moral – training they received at school. The public-school system was not only aimed at forming the boys' "character" – an idea intimately connected to the equally central concept of "manliness" –[30] but most importantly, it provided boys with a sense of purpose and an institutional morality that translated into loyalty to the school and to the country (see fig. 2).[31]

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[30]   On the idea of "character" and "manliness" see Stefan Collini, "The Idea of Character" in *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: OUP, 1991: 91-118) and John Tosh, "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England" in *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005: 83-102).

[31]   The introjection – that is the unconscious incorporation – of this kind of morality into one's own psyche has been described by Freud in his concept of 'the superego.' The imperative to follow rules and the necessity to avoid harm are characteristics of the public-school boy's behaviour that go back to early childhood experiences. In fact, Sulloway argues that "Freud attributed two

This section will delineate the various ways in which public education became the engine of pre-war illusions, underlying the fact that the public-school ethos, while deemed responsible for the ambiguities that remained unresolved in the narratives under study, has nevertheless proved to be effective in the tracing of continuities between pre-war and post-war representations of the heroic and in placing the literature of the Great War in its historical, social and cultural perspective. Particular attention will be paid to the notions of "militarism" and "militarisation," and the aspects through which they were made evident, not only as phenomena occurring immediately before the Great War, but also because the men studied here were directly and significantly affected by them.

Fig. 2. British youth stands ready on the eve of the Great War. Michael Paris. *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000*. London: Reaktion Books, 2000: 108. Print.

complementary origins to it: one in childhood and one in the history of race. In childhood the superego arises from identification with parental authority [...]" (374)

The war poets I have selected to illustrate my argument shared a common social and cultural background that differentiated them from the rest of the British men who went to war: They were public-school-educated.[32] Some had just finished school, others had left college to see the action of war or had just graduated in time to do so, and others were Old Boys enlisting out of institutionally imposed duty. Yet, the public-school experience acted as a binding element to all of them, holding together the various particles of an ethos: "educated in a gentlemanly tradition of loyalty, honour, chivalry, Christianity, patriotism, sportsmanship and leadership, public-school boys could be regarded as suitable officer material in any war" (Parker 17). These apparently different components overlapped and supported one another in preparing these men for the routine of army training and providing them with a combination of idealism and intellectual arrogance that characterised their vision of war.

Unlike its common currency in literary studies nowadays, the inclusion of the term 'subaltern' in the title of this section has "a very specific history in relation to the British Army" (Barrett 456) as it was used to refer to a commissioned junior officer below the rank of captain. The ultimate goal of the British public school was, in effect, the education – and training – of young officers. Most of the war poets studied here were, or started off as, Second Lieutenants, as this was the standard junior rank. Nowadays, however, the Subaltern school of postcolonial studies has adopted Gramsci's non-military use of the word to refer to a mode of history writing 'from below,' interested in the voices of people who

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[32]   Rosenberg and Owen, however, did not have a public-school or even a grammar-school education. Yet they compensated for such loss by self-teaching and intensive reading. In Owen's case, he was educated at the Birkenhead Institute and at Shrewsbury Technical School (now The Wakeman School) because his family could not afford to send him to public school. Nor, when he failed to get a scholarship to the University of London in 1911, could they afford to pay for a college education. Owen thus had to find an occupation suitable to a young man of his class. He moved close to Reading, where he worked as an assistant to a clergyman until 1913. He attended classes part-time at the University of Reading and avidly read classical literature in the English translation to gain knowledge of the ancient authors. Rosenberg attended St. Paul's School until his family moved to Stepney in 1900 and he was able to have a Jewish schooling. However, he left school at the age of fourteen and became an apprentice engraver. Like Owen, he read Homer (and other classical authors) in translation, along with other texts that provided access to the ancient world to those who did not know classical languages.

are marginalised by dominant western culture: the new immigrant, the working class and women as opposed to the dominant institutionalised discourse.[33] Whereas it is clear that the British army considered their officers as one of a number of alternatives of subordinate rank, they were far from being a marginalised minority. As Barret argues, "these men were 'subalterns' in army speak rather than in Spivak speak: many were from a class background of considerable wealth and power, educated at the major private schools, then at Oxford or Cambridge" (456).[34] This is a detail to keep in mind later in this thesis, as the indiscrimination of modern warfare would not only kill hundreds of men at a time, but put the former privileged officer class in a position of subalternity in relation to the destructive force of war. Men would feel increasingly alienated from the institutions that were sending them to death and, without much room for heroism, would descend into anonymity.

Although many British public schools started as church or guild-financed institutions intended to educate deserving local boys who could not afford private education, they began admitting students whose parents could afford the boarding fees and thus became known as 'public' (in contrast to local schools). Being 'public,' thus, meant that they were open to boys from any part of the country as long as they paid the – rather high – tuition fees. The increasing demands for fees meant that the schools quickly became the only preserve of the well-to-do and attendance became a rite of passage for the elite of British society.[35] Despite the fact that only the sons of the aristocratic landed gentry

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[33]   The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci used the word subaltern as a synonym for proletariat with the intention of fooling the state's surveillance while he was writing from an Italian prison. Spivak's influential paper "Can a Subaltern Speak?" (1988) comes to both encourage and question the work done by Subaltern Studies arguing that any outside attempt to improve the Subaltern condition by conceding them collective speech would inevitably re-inscribe their subordinate position in society.

[34]   It is the British Indian Army, crucial to the allied cause in East African and the Western Front, "that provides an encounter between Spivakian subalternity that denies voice and agency and the definition in terms of British officer ranks" (Barrett 456). While Indian regiments were organised according to ethnic and caste lines, there was a superior hierarchy which denied them access, as officers were solely of European origin.

[35]   Today, the term 'public school' refers to fee-charging independent schools with an emphasis on a liberal curriculum and a student body that frequently boards at the school. British public schools are represented in the Headmasters' Conference, a coalition founded in 1869 under

could afford this type of education, industrial expansion led to an emergent plutocracy, which, in turn was gradually admitted to the public school "where it was hoped that they would become impregnated with the ethos of the English gentleman" (Parker 51).

In order to educate affluent middle-class and aristocratic boys as elite citizens, institutions had to establish a series of educational guidelines that were desirable for that particular social group. No one did more in the field of public education than Dr Thomas Arnold to consolidate this hierarchical social structure and to ensure the supremacy of both a useful aristocracy and a refined middle class.[36] Arnold pioneered what were regarded as 'modern' practices of education at the time and his ideas made a significant imprint on his disciples at Rugby and other British public schools. The Doctor's emphasis on the spiritual, moral and intellectual values of the students – "what we must look for here [at Rugby] is, first, religious and moral principle; secondly, gentlemanly conduct; thirdly intellectual ability" (Arnold qtd in Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* 116) – was the expression of a deeply embedded view of the qualities needed to cope with life.[37]

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the predominance of a group of prestigious institutions that make up the core of the public school system: Winchester (founded in 1382), Eton (1440), St. Paul's (1509), Shrewsbury (1552), Westminster (originally founded in 1179 and refounded in 1560), Merchant Taylors' (1561), Rugby (1567), Harrow (1572), and Charterhouse (1611). In Scotland and Northern Ireland there is a tendency to avoid the term 'public school' altogether, and to speak of 'private' or 'independent schools.'

[36]   Dr Thomas Arnold was the headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1841 and a major influence in the development of what Parker calls "the public-school ethos." In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Thomas Hughes, Arnold's former pupil, describes in detail the education imparted at Rugby and portrays 'the Doctor' as a leading character who turned the school into an educational paradigm.

[37]   It is important to point, however, that Strachey's 'homage' to Thomas Arnold stands as an ironic critique of the turn that the public-school system took under Arnold's influence. As Srinivasa explicitly argues: "To divert education from its snug medieval line of monasticism and mere classical scholarship into the fruitful fields of humanism and science – to do this were worth ambition; but Dr Arnold was totally blind to the need of reform in this direction […]. The public school tradition, its respectability, its worship of good forms and athletics, its curious intolerance, its manufacture of prigs, these somehow have had their obscure origin in both what Dr Arnold did and failed to do." (59). Strachey had already implied that by suggesting that Dr Arnold missed the opportunity to reorient education on the basis of humanism. See Chapter II.1 "Recognised and 'Unrecognised' Forms of Conscientious Objection" for a discussion of *Eminent Victorians* as an attempt to debunk the Victorian age and protest against the Great War.

Due to the work of Dr Arnold, Rugby led the way in raising the moral standards of public schools. Even the "gentlemanly conduct" highlighted second among Arnold's goals, which had been related to the "social virtue of politeness" (Tosh 83) and the "primacy of leisure" (Collini 105) of the eighteenth-century dandy, started to refer to a new idea of "manly simplicity" (Tosh 88). Manly simplicity was essentially connected to what Collini regards as "national character" (96) and displayed through striking moral qualities and remarkable discipline.[38] Arnold appealed to a unitary normative standard. As Mosse observes, manliness was "regarded as of one piece from its very beginning: body and soul, outward appearance and inward virtue were supposed to form one harmonious whole" (*The Image of Man* 5). Independence, self-restraint and work were socially and culturally exhibited as the most significant qualities of this new manly ideal.

Dr Arnold resorted to male-male identification to materialise his educational and moral reform. Faced with what he saw as the appalling morality of youth, Arnold aimed to instruct boys on generic character traits by identification with and emulation of others: "The educational scheme with which he furthered his aims involved motivating like-minded schoolboys from similar backgrounds by having them identify with one another and then by refocusing that identification on their exemplary, Christlike headmaster" (Weaver 457). Accounts of forms of group and leader recognition – the impact of collective worship and the conflicts and contradictions emerging from it – are in fact an essential part of the war poets' school experiences.[39] Rugby, Marlborough, Eton, Charterhouse and City of London, to mention just some of the most recurrent names in the soldiers'

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[38]   The idea of character is a recurring presence in the narratives examined here. Referring to one of his fellow officers, Plowman asserts the importance of Arnold's notion of character as a recognised value in the trenches: "'An officer and a gentleman.' It's a matter of character. Without character there can be neither. Men of mean spirit, bearable at other times, become unbearable in the trenches; for in the trenches, want of spirit stinks" (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 219).

[39]   Discipline was strict and required complete subordination to authority and the regulations. Boys were doubly supervised by their masters and older peers (sixth form boys) and if "Dr. Arnold considered that a flogging was necessary, he administered it with gravity. For he had no theoretical objection to corporal punishment" (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* 117). According to Tosh, male-male identification was not without its difficulties: "The schools were ruled by peer-group pressure with a vengeance. A boy's standing – often his access to food and whatever physical comforts the school provided – was at the mercy of his fellows" (112).

writings, underpin a collective mythology that holds an appeal difficult to dispel. In fact Parker argues that from the old school ties "grew up what amounted to a religion" (19). Likewise, Rich uses the term "ritualism" to refer to "the rich symbolism" (13), "the emotional undertones" (18) that became expression of this shared moral commitment and unique ideology.

This powerful sense of community somehow sought to mitigate the feelings of detachment and anonymity that newcomers may have experienced. The exclusiveness of this type of education had the effect of bringing students closer together and distancing them from the rest of society. Some students were able to embrace this seemingly elusive ideal, others made pathetic attempts to win stature in the eyes of their school fellows and the eventual acceptance of their alien condition. Significantly, most of the war poets under study, cannot remember the camaraderie of the group but rather the isolation of the boy who was different. Yet, the memory of the schooldays provided them with function, significance and a sense of immutability that was inevitably felt to be under threat during and after the Great War.

Identificatory bonds among schoolboys had a crucial impact on both the propagation of the Arnoldian ideology and the formation of character. Moral education would not only contribute to the growth of students as individuals, but also to their social cohesion as a community. This moralised view of education was shared by most English parents and reflected in a famous passage of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, in which Squire Brown muses on sending his son Tom to Rugby:

> Shall I tell him to mind his work, and say he's sent to school to make himself a good scholar? Well, but he isn't sent to school for that – at any rate not for that mainly. I don't care a straw for Greek particles, or the digamma; no more does his mother […]. If he'll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a Christian, that's all I want. (Hughes 68-69)

Squire Brown articulates not only the need for the public school to adapt to the new circumstances, but also the importance of aligning, in Arnoldian fashion, the moral element with the intellect. In fact the general expectations seemed to favour students' personal development over intellectual achievement. In that sense, Arnold did nothing more than echo the concerns of most parents.

An important influence on this development was the increasing predominance of the middle classes in the public-school system as the bourgeoisie may have prioritised moral excellence as an essential constituent of social mobility. Equally important was the British policy of expansionism. Character appeared to be, as Collini observes, "an ideal peculiarly suited to a future of unknown circumstances" (113) in the economic arena as well as in the many forms of colonial experience. The exercise of "well maintained habits and a breakdown-free will" (Collini 114) would provide the best chance to overcome *fin de siècle* challenges to Victorian institutions and values. In this context, thus, public-school education was to serve political needs and enable boys "to be 'leaders,' absorbing an ethos combining notions of command, duty and privilege via a modified classical curriculum and ordered corporate living" (Otley 321). Once they left school, they would be attracted to occupations suitable for the new gentlemen: mostly service careers, among them, of course, the armed forces.

Even if public-school education did instil patriotism and a sense of duty in its students – "its focus on classics, which instilled a romantic notion of war and sacrifice and […] the activities of cadet and rifle corps" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 76) clearly prove so – no particular technical or intellectual expertise was guaranteed to face the unknown circumstances of imperial expansion. The lack of emphasis on systematic and scientific knowledge in the imperial curriculum may have also responded to the strategic importance that sports and athletics were beginning to gain at the time. Ethical purposes were to be achieved through sports rather than through intellectual pursuits: "physical exercise, and team games in particular, were seen as an ideal means of producing physical and moral courage, loyalty, cooperation and the ability to both command and obey" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 77). These qualities were, indeed, thought to be suited for the service of the British Empire and its colonies abroad, as it was believed that the virtues that made the athletic hero were the same virtues that made the soldier.

Not particularly concerned about improving academic standards either, Old Boys like Hughes and Kingsley tried to incorporate Arnold's moral and religious beliefs into this new code of manly behaviour, which they labelled "muscular Christianity." As discussed in the previous section, muscular Christianity set a manly ideal that emphasised physical prowess, tempered by purity, gentleness

and concern for others. There is little doubt, however, that Kingsley and Hughes were more belligerent than their mentor; in Parker's words, "muscular Christianity may involve laying down one's life, but not before a good set-to" (101).[40] However, this curious alliance between the physical and the moral not only led to the "less tenable proposition that moral worth was a concomitant of athletic prowess" (Parker 81), but to certain institutional anti-intellectualism and the unfortunate emergence of the 'blood:' "The swaggering, vain, imperious young athletes who held sway in the schools, strutting about in variegated waistcoats, mistreating their fags, caning indiscriminately, a law unto themselves, were monsters of the schools' own creating" (Parker 81). The blood became "a moral icon demonstrating his taught talents, and transferring these talents from the gamesfield to the battlefield" (Mangan, Introduction XIVIII). Regarded as the apotheosis of manliness by peers and masters alike, the public-school blood set up the countertypes that, by implication, were considered physically limited – and therefore – morally weak. For outsiders then, the blood was both the most despised and admired public-school type.

So much so that boys made enormous efforts to shine in sports and athletics, not only to gain self-confidence and the respect of their peers and headmasters, but also to enjoy the privileges of being bloods, a privilege that would be held for life. While watching a former school friend's performance during a horse race, Sassoon-Sherston muses on the anxieties faced by a want-to-be hero:

> As I watched him now I felt almost as nervous as if I were about to ride the Colonel's horse myself. I assumed that it was the first race he had ever ridden in, and knew that he was feeling that if anything went wrong it would be entirely his own fault and that he would never be able to look the Colonel in the face again if he were to make a fool of himself. And he had probably been suffering from such apprehensions for several days beforehand. (*Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* 104)

Rather than defeating other men, Sassoon emphasises the importance of being willing to do what is most difficult to us: facing our fears. That is the key to

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[40]   The muscular Christian hero first made his appearance in Kingsley's novels, particularly in *Westward Ho!,* which proved to be a powerful propaganda agent in the recruitment of soldiers for the Crimean War: "Kingsley introduced into literature the huge British hero who always fought victoriously and who spread the doctrines of the English Church" (Winn 67).

being a good sportsman and, therefore, to being a hero: "He told me afterwards that there were two things which he wished at the moment: either that the race was all over, or that something would happen to prevent it taking place at all. It is sometimes forgotten that without such feelings heroism could not exist" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 104).

It would, of course, be unwise to contradict the fact that the majority of boys actually liked playing games. However, those who were more scholarly minded criticised the attention being paid to sports as they believed that games occupied time that would have been better spent studying or – as in Graves' case – in the edition of the school magazine (*Goodbye*...56). At pains to conform to school traditions and rules and satisfy general expectations, other boys were forced to live a lie:

> Long before he was fifteen George was living a double life – one life for school and home, another for himself. Consummate dissimulation of youth, fighting for the inner vitality and the mystery. How amusingly, but rather tragically he fooled them! How innocent-seemingly he played the fine, healthy, barbarian schoolboy, even to the slang and the hateful games! [...]. 'Rippin' game of rugger today, Mother. I scored two tries.' Upstairs was that volume of Keats artfully abstracted from the shelves. (Aldington, *Death of a Hero* 74-75)

Yet Aldington's Winterbourne was not the only one living a double existence; most boys knew that deviation from the dominant masculine ideal was subject to dismissal and strong sanctions. As a commentator wrote in 1872: "a nation of effeminate, enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation's liberties" (Turley qtd in Mangan, Introduction XXIV). It was in this dialectic interplay between bloods and non-bloods, between manliness and effeminacy, power and powerlessness that masculinities were constructed and constantly transformed. Unlike the "type of 'thoroughly manly fellow'" (Aldington, *Death of a Hero* 83) who possessed the virtues of physical strength and athletic talent, boys like Aldington's Winterbourne, who were poor at games and "sank absorbed in his books, his butterflies, his moths, his fossils" (73), appeared as counter-figures to public-school standards.

This educational focus on sports was not only concerned with the construction of normative masculinity but played a major role in military training for imperial

expansion. As Mangan stresses: "Whilst denying any overt military purpose in the name of 'fair play' and 'character-building,' the boys who played games most afternoons on the playing fields of the public schools were imbued with a fiercely patriotic and Darwinist ideology" (*Tribal Identities* 44). Without a doubt, the playing field was not just the site of moral or spiritual conflict: it meant training in the military spirit. This made possible the connection between the playing field and the battlefield and the understanding of games as the ideal training for war. It was thought that the playing fields would provide moral qualities such as leadership, obedience, endurance, self-sacrifice and fair play that were indispensable for war. By teaching boys how to 'play the game' they would be prepared for war, as games encouraged the essential skills and qualities required for soldiering.

Referring to the propagandistic use of the trope of war as sport, Macdonald states that it originated in "the late Victorian slogan from the cricket or rugby field to 'play the game,' an exhortation not so much to carry on playing, but more crucially, to conduct the game in its 'true' spirit […]. In his view, "'to play the game' in war was, in effect, to behave as though the battlefield was an extension of the playing field, requiring the same attitudes and spirit" (*The Language of Empire* 20). Besides, playing the game distinguished the behaviour of the Victorian hero from the other – the coward and the enemy – who lacked the virtues of the sportsman. Being a sportsman not only implied a spirit of selflessness and sacrifice, but also taking chances and treating life itself as if it was a game, that is to say, not too seriously. In this light, then, public-school boys would regard wars more or less as sporting events: "colonial battlefields," Mangan claims, "were exotic versions of the playing fields of Eton and elsewhere" (*Tribal Identities* 17).

Even if the Doctor may have been horrified at the way his followers turned away from his Christian ideal, it is this more aggressive archetype that was passed on from the Old Boys to the young: "After 1857 [schools] tended to model themselves after the version described by Hughes rather than the real Rugby under Arnold" (Winn 72). By the late-nineteenth century, Dr Arnold's public-school system had got lost in the fictional image created by the enormously popular *Tom Brown's School Days*.

In fact, the imperial agenda and the pre-eminence of the physical over the intellectual progressively turned the public school into a militaristic organisation, particularly after the Boer War, when images of military gallantry were more gladly welcomed by society.[41] The public-school ethos not only provided the formal channels with the possibility of imbuing the sons of the ruling elites with a positive attitude to war, it also cut across class boundaries, reaching less privileged youths. One of the channels through which this occurred was the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which introduced compulsory universal education for children aged five to thirteen and ensured the exposure of working-class boys to imperial propaganda as well.

The education of boys as subalterns in the making was made possible through both the "militarisation" and the "militarism" of the public-education system. As Otley observes, "militarisation" stood for "the encroaching of military forms, personnel and practices upon civilian institutions or social orders," while "militarism" involved "exalting war and the armed forces over other social functions and institutions" (322). Both concepts were displayed in the structure and culture of the public school in the form of favourable admission terms for the sons of the High Command, training for service admission, cadet forces and military celebratory culture. The first three would indicate militarisation, while the last one would be characteristic of the militarism of the public-school system.

The favourable admissions terms for sons of officers tended to guarantee the perpetuation of the military class in the classrooms through the award of scholarships, reduced school fees and reserved places. As regards military school personnel, there was a slight increase of military governors, headmasters, bursars, clerks and teachers from 1900 until 1950, which shows that the direction of school policy tended to become relatively more militarily run during and after the Great War. It is likely that with more military men in leadership positions within the school, the number of volunteers among public-school-leavers grew considerably.[42]

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[41]　See Chapter I.3 of this thesis, "The Boer War: Heroic Anxieties," for a detailed analysis on how the literature and the journalism of the period used the Boer War to vindicate the public-school system as a major source of military training and recruitment.

[42]　Peter Parker's statistical samples of war casualties prove that the number of enrolments was higher in schools with a military tradition: "Wellington had an average of 500 pupils before the

As to military training, it had been provided in the public schools since the 1860s via the rifle corps units;" however, it was not until 1908 that it was imparted on a regular basis via the Officer's Training Corps (O.T.C.).[43] Military education became active then; schools offered physical instruction such as company drill, tactics and musketry, which not only provided healthy exercise, but infused order, responsibility and respect for authority. While joining the O.T.C. was not officially compulsory, it is open to doubt how free to choose students were, as membership reached virtually 100 percent in most schools and parents were strongly and continuously advised to persuade their sons to join any branch of the service. It may be well said that these patriotic exhortations were successful: "On the eve of the Great War, 79 per cent of all public schools had O.T.C units" (Otley 330). The O.T.C. appeared to be, then, as Blunden suggests, "an influence directing the world, in its limited way, out of the paths of peace" ("The Fighting Fronts" 25).

Regarding service entry preparation, there are plenty of references in the war poets' memoirs to the examinations for officer service entry, as well as the subsequent training at Sandhurst or Woolwich. In order to pass the examinations, students were supposed to sit for eight papers on various subjects, including science and language. Even if the proceedings were made to look strict and harsh, all students passed. Describing one of these tests in which he was assessed as O.T.C in December 1911, Sorley claims:

> We went there one after another alone, and an air of sanctity hang over the whole proceeding. I entered with fear and trembling. Twenty questions I was asked, and I looked sheepish and I said "Don't know" to each one. Then he said, "Is there anything you do know?" and I gave him the two pieces of knowledge I had come armed with – the weight of a rifle and episodes in the life of a bullet from the time it leaves the breech till it hits its man. (16)

War; 699 Old Boys were killed in action. At Haileybury one in three of the boys who entered the school between 1905 and 1912 died in the War" (Parker 16).

[43]   The Rifle Volunteer Movement (1859), considered the first attempt to prepare the youth of the nation for future wars, the Boys' Brigade (1883), which provided the model for this type of youth organisation and also inspired others with religious affiliations such as the Anglican Church Lads' Brigade (1891), the Jewish Lads' Brigade (1895) and the Catholic Lads' Brigade (1896) were among the most popular rifle units.

Regardless of his poor performance, Sorley is given a pass mark: "the gentleman gave me 60 out of a hundred" (16). Like Sorley, Brenan is also made to pass – "no one can fail for Sandhurst," he says (Brenan 126), despite "answering the papers as badly as possible in the hopes that I might fail" (126).

Other war poets felt they had received enough training and resented the endless drills, parades and mock battles (see fig. 3). While Wilfred Owen disapproved of the long training hours – "we work till 7p.m. instead of 4.30!" (180), Sassoon's George Sherston felt that "being in the army was very much like being back at school" (*Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* 229). Like them, almost every upper middle-class boy was being systematically prepared for military service; the predictable consequence was the total domination that public-school men had of officer entry during World War One.[44]

Fig. 3. Recruits of the Eton College Officers' Training Corps march on parade ground during the Recruit Week. Peter Parker. *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos.* London: Constable, 1987: Front Cover. Print.

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[44]   Statistics show that the 1914 response reaffirmed the joint work of public schools, O.T.C. and officer entry services: "Within the first fifteen months of the War ten times as many young gentlemen with O.T.C. experience had been granted commissions, enough to officer over 570 battalions" (Parker 34). Those who entered the war as educated volunteers, spent less than a year in the ranks, and then went to officers' training school to rejoin the ranks of their own class.

What is certainly arguable is whether these were the type of officers that were needed to fight a war like the Great War. In *The Contrary Experience,* Read explains how young men approached war in a playful way and seized the opportunity to transfer their military bonds to the corps not as a patriotic response, but rather as "a consequence of [their public-school] patriotic past" (Read, *The Contrary Experience* 209). In fact,

> … very few of those who joined the O.T.C. in those days had any serious motive. War was considered as a very remote contingency, and meanwhile here was an open-air club, with possibilities of friendship and youthful enterprise, and an annual camp which was in effect a free holiday for many who could not otherwise afford one. I was not interested in sport of any kind, and the O.T.C. provided me with my one physical diversion. I enjoyed the game very much.
> There, happily at play, I was caught by the war. (*The Contrary Experience* 209)

The idea of being caught by war while "happily at play" is also shared by Guy Chapman who, shocked by his first contact with the New Army in 1915, claims: "it was the obvious incapacity and amateurishness of the whole outfit which depressed" (Chapman 13). Blunden and Graves also hint at inefficiency and lack of expertise or account for stupid accidents involving explosives in which there were fatal victims.[45] Much as he had O.T.C experience and soon learnt to conform, Graves admits that "I knew nothing of Army tradition and made all the worst mistakes – saluting the bandmaster, failing to recognize the colonel when in mufti, walking in the street without a belt, talking shop in the mess" (71). Approaching matters in a more serious – or better said tragic – vain, Montague criticises the public school's inability to prepare young men for the harsh conditions at the front: "Small blame to [the Regular Army Officers] if in this season of liquidation they failed to produce assets which we had never equipped them to earn [...]. Being as we had moulded them, they had probably done pretty well in doing no worse" (Montague 164-65).

Even if subsequent experience may have proved that these young gentlemen had not been competently trained for war, they were aware of the honour that

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[45]   See Edmund, Blunden. *Undertones of War* 1928 (London: Penguin Classics, 2000: 5) and Graves' *Goodbye to All That* 1929 (London: Penguin Books, 1960: 158).

was being conferred upon them and acted in consequence, quickly filling the vacancies when national emergency was declared. In that sense, it may be argued that the public-school system functioned reasonably well: It encouraged boys towards military service and military careers, equipped them with some necessary skills, and instilled as many military habits of thought and action as possible. It also helped, of course, to promote militaristic and nationalistic sentiment. As said above, the outcome was a stream of young men prepared – for better or for worse – to rush into the officer corps.

As regards military celebration, public schools offered tireless enthusiasm for the military gallantry of the Old Boys. Students were inevitably lured by former pupil's war medals, high rank and, fundamentally, by the rituals around death in war.[46] Old Boys were always kept informed about each other's exploits through paintings, statues, altars and commemoratory buildings, but also through articles, poems, printed speeches, public-school magazines and stories, booklets, histories and biographies, all dealing with the military feats of both local and national heroes.

Among the various celebratory formats through which heroic feats were publicised, the school story should be given particular attention as it spread the public-school ethos beyond the school gates and moulded the thought of a whole generation regardless of their class. Paris claims that "even boys who had never seen a public school were, through their leisure reading, familiar with school life and the ideals they propagated, particularly through papers like *Gem* and *Magnet*" (*Warrior Nation* 75).

The plot and the hero of the school story were initially set by the aforementioned *Tom Brown's School Days*. Tom was "the very epitome of what a boy should be: honourable, brave, a born sportsman and never afraid to trade punches with a bully" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 57). Kipling's *Stalky & Co* (1899) is regarded by some critics as the legitimate successor of Hughes' great classic, but Talbot

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[46]   As Otley writes, "in the South African War, 62 per cent of the total of 9,180 Regular Army Officers were from public schools and of these 39 per cent were mentioned in despatches, and 23 per cent were awarded 'honours' (peerages, decorations, special appointments, and special promotions)" (332). Moreover, during the Great War, twenty-six public schools would claim two or more winners of the Victorian Cross among their serving Old Boys.

Baines Reed's stories – first published in the *Boy's Own Paper* (B.O.P.) – also appear to combine all the elements that were characteristic of Hughes': "games, inter-House rivalries, fagging, cribbing, mild rebellion, mild bullying and mild romantic friendships" (Parker 124).[47] Nevertheless, the school theme reaches a climax when it compares the school with the Empire and legitimates the exploits of the boy by linking them to the bravery of the soldier. In this regard, the school story fits in the same pattern as the rest of the imperial literature discussed in the previous section; it merely returns the patriotic theme to its perceived social matrix: the public school and its emphatic class values.

Another important commemorative event taking place at the public school was the visit of military celebrities. Old Boys were usual guests, coming generally for significant occurrences, such as prize-giving ceremonies or the inspections of corps. There was also "a constant stream of generals, admirals and spokesmen for militarist organizations [Lord Roberts kept touring schools] address[ing] pupils on speech days and other occasions, instilling ideas about duty and patriotism" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 103-104). Their lively sermons were seen as an essential part of the campaign to achieve army reform and to prepare the young for the Great War to come. Referring to these propagandistic efforts in Marlborough, Charles Sorley ironically states:

> He was not an O.M.,[48] so we got less superlatives than usual, and afterwards he made us an exceedingly sensible speech about the General Reserve. He had a charming Yorkshire accent, which greatly bamboozled his audience when he seemed to say that 'after the Boer War it was found that the British Army had four too few officers, four too few.' (53-54)

In fact the aftermath of the Boer War not only led to a sense of alarm and fear of a surprise invasion of the British Isles by an ambitious rival but also to the belief that only an army of huge proportions would protect British interests. This inevitably led to open debate about the introduction of compulsory military training into public schools. The project of school militarisation, "fanned by the

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[47]   Among Reed's most popular stories, *The Adventure of a Three Guinea Watch* (1883), "Follow my Leader" (1885), *The Master of the Shell* (1894), *Tom, Dick and Harry* (1894) and *Pakhurst Boys, and other Stories of School Life* (1905) deserve special attention.

[48]   'O.M' stands for Order of Merit.

scaremongering press" (Paris, *Warrior Nation* 86), brought heated controversy into a number of public schools – among them Graves' Charterhouse – but never became official policy.[49]

School songs, a "unique mixture of emotionalism, innocence, myopia and rigidity" (Mangan, *Athleticism* 181), were also part of the celebratory rituals. They were meant to celebrate the loyalty to the institution, which by then had become a major religion in itself.[50] Together with the songs, the school colours and uniforms conformed, in Mangan's words, "an elaborate, extensive and dominant symbol system in support of ideological fashion, which demonstrated success, moulded aspirations and inspired imitations" (*Athleticism* 177).

Before moving into the analysis of the bittersweet memories of school days in the war poets' narratives, I would like to make a few final observations on the process of militarisation and militarism in the public-school system. Despite the moderate level of militarisation, militarism was made much more noticeable, as discussed in this section, through the celebration of Old Boys' achievements, illustrious school visits, sport games, school stories, songs and uniforms. Therefore, it is not militarisation as such that we find in Victorian schools but rather a close alliance of values that endorsed local and national patriotism. With this, I am not arguing that militarisation was alien to British life but rather suggesting that, through this celebratory culture of patriotism, there was a linguistic dislocation between war and killing, as the facts of war were conveniently hidden behind the rituals, the jargon, the anthems and the uniforms. Military celebration, then, contributed to the preservation of a clear and distinctive ethos that seemed applicable to the world beyond the school walls and which influenced students for life.

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[49] Remembering the debate on the motion that 'the house is in favour of compulsory military service,' Graves explains that "only six votes out of one hundred and nineteen were noes," and adds: "I was the principal opposition speaker, having recently resigned from the Officers' Training Corps in revolt against the theory of implicit obedience to orders" (*Goodbye…* 59).

[50] Among the most celebrated songs are the ones written for Eton by William Johnson Cory and the ones written by E.E. Bowen for Harrow – Parker observes that 'Forty Years On' was purposely "calculated to reduce the singers to tears" (76).

This argument has a particular interest when the officer narratives are analysed. Most of texts examined here were constructed within the framework of a public-school ethos concerning what made the suitable martial male role. Yet, the morality imprinted by the public school took on strange colorations as it underlined, among other things, the profound contradictions that appeared when the years spent in the world of order of the Victorian and Edwardian public school were confronted with the reality of World War One.[51] The Great War was then understood as the end of the sheltered world in which the officers had been brought up, or as Lewis argues: "as such a tremendous landmark that […] we say 'pre-war' and 'post-war' rather as we say B.C. or A.D." (Lewis 1). These men had been raised in the hope that they would grow up in the same world as their fathers; there is little doubt then that remembering the school days they realised that the values inculcated in them did not match the reality encountered at the front. The reading of their school days, thus, was necessarily conditioned by their own attitudes to the past as it must have been impossible for them to escape the imposition of actual experience on past history.

Brenan and Graves were perhaps the most explicit about the contradictions inherent in their public-school education, as they found it difficult to combine their school image with their real selves. Of his split identity at the time, Brenan claims:

> Like all schoolboys I was one person at school and another in the holidays. At school a little herd animal, living in the outer compartments of my mind, straining to win the good opinion of my fellows: at home a human child, safe and emotionally dependent upon my family. (62)

Similarly, Graves "suffered an oppression of spirit that I hesitate to recall in its full intensity. Something like being in that chilly cellar at Laufzorn among the

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[51]   Eksteins calls attention to the rigidity of Victorian sensibilities clashing not only with the arrival of the Great War, which was unthinkable until the last moment, but with a previous "sense of crisis [...] fueled by suffragette activity, labor unrest, opposition to the role of aristocracy in the legislative process, and concern regarding the future of Ireland" and, of course, "the spate of invasion stories centering on the Germans" (130). He refers to the Victorian and Edwardian "belief that experience should be subservient to order" (*Rites of Spring* 128) and argues that "despite the premonition of doom and despite a measure of artistic and intellectual effervescence, conformity, complacency, and even smugness were […] firmly established in Britain" (130).

potatoes, but a potato out of a different sack from the rest" (*Goodbye…* 38). Regarding themselves as outcasts, these men felt alienated from a world they could not identify as theirs, from a world that branded them as mere numbers and forced them to develop a sense of corporate dependence.

Viewing the public school as antagonistic to his well-being because of the bullying he endured there, Brenan experienced the seclusion of the boy who was different: "One went there to be knocked into shape and stupefied, and if, by the end of his schooling, a boy had not set in the prescribed pattern, he left without confidence in himself or in the rest of the world" (80). Alhough Brenan abhorred Radley, he learnt to cope with "the misery I suffered there" (94) but he experienced recurring nightmares all of his life:

> The moment at last came to leave the detested place. How little I guessed that again and again, on hundreds upon hundreds of nights, I should be returning there! I have never once, I believe, dreamed of the war, though I was present at some of the worst battles, but I have dreamed continually, sometimes for years on end, of this school. Do many Englishmen, I wonder, have to suffer the absurdity of returning every night, up to the age of forty or fifty, to the place where they spent their horrible school-days?" (126).

Less melodramatically, Graves also describes his years of warfare against conventions in Charterhouse: "tradition was so strong that to break it one would have to dismiss the whole school and staff, and start all over again" (*Goodbye…* 36). Like Brenan, he praises himself for having escaped from a rarefied environment, "the school buildings being impregnated with what passed as the public school spirit, but what we felt as fundamental evil" (36).

Later on, however, and despite their rebellious attitude towards authority and institutions, both Brenan and Graves were able to look back without anger. Although Brenan feels that Radley had done "immense and permanent harm" (126) to him, he agrees that the school "shot me out into the world in a frame of mind to discover bearable conditions anywhere" (126).[52] Graves adopts a more

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[52]   When describing his running away to France with the eccentric John Hope-Johnstone, Brenan blames it on "my misery at Radley, which, by making me an outcast, had done more than anything else to drive me to this break" (131).

sympathetic attitude towards Charterhouse, recalling with fondness the togetherness of the past with a fellow Carthusian:

> We suddenly found ourselves singing the *Carmen Carthusianum* [Charterhouse's song] in unison, to the surprise of a crowded Palma restaurant. I felt a little surprised, too. And it certainly is strange to think that the best British caricaturist and essayist, and the best musician of my day, have also been products of that most Philistine school. (*Goodbye…* 359)

Indeed, while Graves regarded himself as one of the lucky few who were able to break the mould into which he was forced, he also appears as an example of devotion to school: "no doubt, I was unappreciative of the hard knocks and character-training that public schools are advertised as providing" (Graves, *Goodbye…* 37-38). In this regard, then, unlike Brenan who saw himself as a victim of the public-school system, the critique Graves offers remains to a large extent complicit with the traditions he exposes.

It is also curious that Wyndham Lewis, who was finally able to get a commission and enjoy the privileges of the officer class, also expresses some reluctance towards "the public-schoolboyish puppy-play of the lesser newcomers" (69). He calls them "arrogant and crafty sheep" (69) and blames Doctor Arnold's earnest Victorianism for a "soul-less nation" (70). Echoing Lewis' condemnation of Arnoldian education and feeling himself a victim of the system, Madox Ford argues that it was too high a cost in terms of moral values "to have taken one's public school's ethical system seriously. I am really, sir, the English public schoolboy […]. Other men get over their schooling. I never have […]. These things are obsessions with me. Complexes, sir!" (490). Tietjens's inability to break free from the public-school ethos and the relations predicated on it seems to be inseparable from the devastating consequences that would flow from his public and private life.

Charles Sorley's attitude towards Marlborough, although essentially loyal and filial – "he had a period of hero-worship, very little qualified by criticism, for its demigods among the boys and master" (5) – also developed in breadth and irony as he travelled to Germany and found freedom to read and think for himself about the competitiveness and hypocrisy in his public school:

It was wonderful how nice most people managed to be in spite of the horrible public school system that sets up rivalry between neighbours, not only in work and games but in daily intercourse, so that everyone is tempted to score points at others' expense. The acquaintance of German boys has shown me how [much] better their simple day-school system is… Yet there is something in Marlborough I would not have missed for worlds. (102-103)[53]

Despite this critique, his days at school, and particularly his walks in the Marlborough countryside, are one such memory that is always remembered with nostalgia in his letters. Sassoon also remembers Marlborough as a sentimentalised world in which he believed himself to be a hero on the side of honesty and virtue – "I had felt a hero when I was lying awake on the floor of the Town Hall on the first night of the war" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 235). In a sense, Sassoon's school memories represent a return to an idyllic world in which right could be easily distinguished from wrong, good behaviour was rewarded and troublemakers punished. A similar attitude, involving anxiety and delight at the prospect of war, is to be found in Carrington: "it was the same feeling that I had on my first day at school – blankness, a numbness of intellect. But for that curious hungry feeling, the coming battle seemed only like an adventure in a book" (*A Subaltern's War* 34). While Montague initially pays nostalgic tribute to the romantic illusions and decency of the volunteer armies (Montague 14), later on, he seems to have no doubts about his rejections – English conventions, class values, public-school orthodoxies and the like – as he reflects on the teachings of war compared to the teachings of the public school:

And the other is to accept, with all that it implies, the doctrine that there is one morality for peace and another morality for war; that just as in war you may with the clearest conscience stab a man in the back, or kick him in the bowels, in spite of all the sportsmanship you learnt at school, so you may stainlessly carry

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[53]   Sorley's opinion of the German public-school system contradicts that of Remarque, whose non-conformity with liberal education is reflected in the conversations and thoughts of his front-line soldiers. They remember their time together at school and the irrelevant questions that Kantorek, their schoolmaster, asked: "We remember mighty little of all rubbish. Anyway, it has never been the slightest use to us. At school nobody ever taught us how to light a cigarette in a storm of rain, nor how to fire could be made with wet wood – nor that it is best to stick a bayonet in the belly because there it doesn't get jammed, as it does in the ribs" (Remarque 85).

deception to lengths which in peace would get you blackballed at the club and cut by your friends. (117)

It is this combination, often troubled, of realism, irony and nostalgia towards a world that seems to have been lost with the war which provides one of the major sources of appeal in the narratives examined here. Bitter and cynical condemnations are woven with anecdotal episodes holding the pre-war public-school ethos, highlighting not only the conflicting emotions triggered by the memory of the school-days but also re-evaluating a set of ideas about tradition and heroic masculinity in the light of post-war circumstances. One cannot avoid being struck by the similarity between the ideals and values these writers appear to be in conflict with, and those that were promoted in the public schools at which they had been educated. In a very real – and dramatic – sense, the school experience permeates the war poets' writings more than in any other writing of the era and might ultimately have significant repercussions not only on the shaping and correspondence between the Victorian hero myth and the pre-war illusions but on the clash between the myth and the actual experience of war. Despite the scepticism reflected in some of the texts, the public-school ethos takes the shape of convictions that were not easily shaken throughout the war. As Jones argues in the introduction to his novel: "at no time did one live so much with a consciousness of the past" (XI).

I.3. The Boer War: Heroic Anxieties

Having reviewed imperial propaganda and the public-school ethos as the most powerful driving forces behind the growth of the Victorian hero myth in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to end this chapter with the analysis of the representation of the heroic in relation to the narratives of the Boer War, a war that not only raised questions about the validity of the Victorian ideal but seemed to foresee the beginning of modernity. Like the public-school experience, the South African War offers the opportunity to study the development of a change of attitudes towards the figure of the soldier prior to the onset of the Great War.

This section argues that the Boer War anticipated the Great War in the foreshadowing of some of the paradoxes that would characterise the attitudes

towards the heroic during and after World War One. In addressing the literature and the journalism of the period, I give particular consideration to the confrontation between heroic and anti-heroic approaches to war and the consolidation of a growing moral critique of the imperial ethos within the liberal press. Finally, the war poets' writings are discussed as a vehicle for illustrating both the impact of the memory of the Boer War – considered by many "as a vindication of the entire public-school system" (Parker 60) – and the anxieties emerging in relation to the perpetuation of traditional heroic patterns after the Boer War.

As discussed in the previous section, the 1890s had witnessed a rush of popular excitement for the British civilising mission and for the military heroism that made it possible. In fact, "the enthusiasm of the population for soldiering could be said to have come alive as the old century died" (Nash 42-43). Yet, these outbreaks of jingoism revealed a reasonable suspicion that the continuous military crises on the imperial frontier had somehow damaged British pre-eminence in the world. Discussing what he calls "the frontiers of fear," Eldridge claims that "the demonstrations of patriotic fervour were not simply outbursts of national pride and racial arrogance: they were as much the product of deep feelings of insecurity and uncertainty" (4). The urgent need for the defence of the imperial frontier based on the fear of invasion by a dangerous rival had become a national obsession and reflected a crisis of confidence in British military and naval strength.[54]

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[54] This national crisis of confidence would be portrayed in popular fiction as well. The tale of the great war of the future or the unexpected invasion of the homeland turned into a popular theme in the literature of the *fin de siècle.* Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George Chesney's "The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer" (1871), George Chetwynd Griffith Jones' *The World Peril of 1910* (1907) and Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) introduce the image of the merciless German enemy that permeated British fiction even after World War One (See Chapter IV.2.2, "The Enemy with a Thousand Faces" of this thesis). Indeed, "Germany represented the new, the different, the dangerous" (Eksteins, *Rites of Spring* 130), a new rival and a potential invader; the tale of the occupation of Britain by a superior German army was an appeal for military reform, particularly for the need of compulsory conscription, as the nation had to measure its strength with other European armies. Alfred Harmsworth's "The Poisoned Bullet" (1894), on the other hand, exposes the danger of another foreign invader in the developing friendship between Russia and France. Harmsworth's francophobia continued into the early twentieth century, with "a

The Boer War had almost every element necessary to be considered a romantic adventure within the rhetoric of the Victorian hero myth. It was a war that would restore public trust in the imperial order: "an epic in which a Goliath, in the form of the British Empire at the peak of its strength, fought a tiny David-like figure, in the form of the two Boer Republics" (Belfield, Introduction IX). The British Empire and the Afrikaaner republics made such uneven rivals that nobody doubted that, once the British troops arrived in South Africa, the unruly Boers would be easily defeated and the war would rapidly draw to a successful conclusion.

However, the Boer War emerged as an ambivalent military episode of tremendous contrasts that not only discredited British institutions but had long-lasting repercussions on popular perceptions and beliefs. In fact, there were certain events and attitudes that tended to disrupt expectations about what a military conflict should be and reshape the perception of war for future generations. These incidents made visible the contradictions at the heart of the British Empire, mingling, in Peck's words, "a sense of reassurance with a sense of anxiety, frequently combining an illustration of courage with questions about whether courage alone is sufficient" (164). It is not difficult to identify what the significant incidents of the Boer War were: The conflict opened with three highly publicised sieges – Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking – about which a lot has been written, said and assumed. However, before I move towards the analysis of the heroic anxieties connected with the narratives of the sieges, it is necessary to contextualise my argument with a selective description of the main facts surrounding the war.

Known nowadays as the South African War, historically regarded as the Boer War or Anglo-Boer War, or English War – *die Engelseoorlog* – or Second War of Freedom – *Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* – to the Afrikaaner, was a military conflict that took place between the British and the South African Boers between 1899 and 1902. The war was fought in parts of Cape Colony and Natal, both British colonies, and in the two independent Boer Republics, Orange Free State and

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series devoted to the thrilling exploits of 'Captain Strange' – a modern privateer who waged unceasing war against the French in the 'English' Channel" (Paris 89).

Transvaal, at that time called the South African Republic. There had been an earlier Boer War in 1881, but the Second Boer War lacked the unambiguousness of the 'little wars' of empire. For the first time, the British were not confronting ill-equipped and ill-trained 'native' armies but a white European opponent.[55]

Although it is true that the Crimean war had also been a significant engagement against a well-trained European enemy, technically and tactically, the Boer War appeared to be a different kind of dispute and a clear indicator that the era of cavalry had been left behind. The fact that the Boer War became widely known by the epithet 'Great' shows that it made such an impact on the consciousness of Western Europe that it erased the scars of former conflicts from popular imagination. The modernisation of the killing process was seen as one of the main reasons for the changes that were beginning to take place. The accurate smokeless rifles used by the combatants had changed the soldiers' power to cause injury and death. As Nash observes, "death could now be dealt out from a distance and unseen, thereby transforming war forever" (43). Apart from the arrival of technology, the central feature of military operations was the use of modern methods of combat that tended to make this war transitional and anticipatory of future patterns of combat. In effect, as Peck explains: "from the perspective of the First World War the Boer War might seem to make sense as the foreshadowing of a new and more dangerous level of conflict" (172).[56]

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[55] The First Boer War was a brief military conflict in 1881 consisting of just three major battles – Laing's Nek, Schuinshoogte, and Majuba – in which a small, but overconfident, British Army force was humiliated by small groups of Boer commandos. The war ended with a negotiated settlement in which the Transvaal was granted partial independence.

[56] Historians do not seem to agree about the rights and the wrongs of the events that led to the Boer War, but at risk of oversimplifying, three major causes appear to be recurrent. Firstly, bitterness and contempt for British rule. Secondly, the strong biblical belief in the righteousness of the Boer cause increased dramatically with the discovery of gold in unprecedented quantities near Johannesburg in 1886. The Boers did not exploit their gold; they had granted the exploitation to foreigners, known as Uitlanders, who complained of discrimination by the Boers as they did not have the right to vote and were forced to paying taxes. The Uitlanders – supported by the diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes – were convinced that unless the government of the republic was removed and a new regime installed that was more favourable to their economic interests, the gold mining activity in the region would be hampered in the future. The resentment between Paul Kruger, the President of the Transvaal Republic, and Sir Alfred Milner, High commissioner in South Africa emerges as the third main reason behind the conflict. A series of disagreements and failed

After the ultimatum issued by Kruger demanding the end of British rule, Boer troops invaded Cape Colony and Natal on October 11 laying siege simultaneously to Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith. The conviction that Britain was not going to achieve a quick victory – particularly after the series of defeats that characterised the "black week" – led the public to perceive the three sieges as the only way of providing an easily understandable explanation for what was happening in South Africa.[57] Even if the war itself had broken with earlier patterns, the 'siege' was a familiar situation, "a definition and defence of the social order in Britain" (Peck 165) in which the moral and political values of Britain were tested, and as such, it could still be interpreted with confidence within the framework of the Victorian hero myth. After the sieges of Lucknow, Cawnpore and Khartoum, most Victorians still refused to see them as a response to the greater violence of imperial domination and kept on damning the mutineers and praising the British martyrs and heroes. The chivalry of the British troops was brought to the spotlight once again and the three sieges – particularly Mafeking – tended to be idealised in romantic terms. However, although the British wished to frame the war within tradition – the common characterisation of the conflict as 'the last of the gentlemen's wars' illustrates this – there was a tension between such ideals and the inner contradictions growing at the heart of British expansion.[58]

Baden-Powell's seemingly heroic defence of Mafeking – he and 1000 men held out against 8000 Boers – led the Boers to believe there was a larger garrison than was the case and provided one of the few bright moments of the campaign and a useful distraction from the military setbacks suffered elsewhere. The relief of Mafeking, on May 17 1900, was celebrated with unprecedented fervour when the news arrived in London. In the frenzy of jingoistic celebration, the word

proposals over the Uitlander issue led to increasing hostility. By September 1899 war seemed inevitable.

[57]   In his thorough account of the Boer War, Conan Doyle refers to the week which extended from December 10 to December 17 1899 as "the blackest one known during our generation, and the most disastrous for British arms during the century" (197) as 5000 men were killed.

[58]   "The Last of the Gentlemen's War" was the phrase chosen by J.F.C Fuller as the title of his war memoir in 1937; it was often used to describe the Boer War as responding to "the idea that the opposing forces respected one another and followed some set rules for behaviour" (Van Hartesveldt 32).

"mafficking" entered the language to refer to this kind of patriotic – or better said 'wild' – national enthusiasm.[59] In fact, Baden-Powell, the commander of the besieged town, became an icon in the pantheon of heroes because of his image as the resourceful Boy Scout, "the hero of a G.D. Henty novel, endlessly contriving dodges to outwit the enemy" (Peck 166).

The siege of Mafeking quickly achieved a legendary status. Even liberals like John Morley talked of the "spectacle of British heroism" and of the "physical and moral pluck" (qtd in Willan 139) exhibited by the resistance. Yet, the sense of disproportion in the celebratory acts after the relief suggests that behind the relief at the happy resolution there was the consciousness that the events were threatening to defy the status quo.[60]

Even though the momentum of the war shifted in favour of the British at last, this conflict deeply marked the attitudes, morale, and experiences of both British soldiers and civilians. In the first place, there were clear indications that military strategies were changing. As Van Hartesveldt writes, Roberts "had driven the Boer forces away but not really defeated them, and isolated British units kept being picked off" (31). Small bands of mounted Boer forces could still wander at ease, attacking isolated targets and keeping the war alive. Such skirmishes

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[59]   According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "maffick" was "originally used to designate the behaviour of the crowds (in London and other towns) that celebrated with uproarious rejoicing the relief of the British garrison besieged in Mafeking (17 May 1900)." The word is now used to refer to "indulge[nce] in extravagant demonstrations of exultation on occasion of national rejoicing." (180)

[60]   A similar tension is present in the responses to the sieges of Kimberley and Ladysmith. Kimberley was relieved on February 15, 1900. The favourable outcome of the siege – thanks to the rapid and unexpected intervention of Lord Roberts of Kandahar – could not remove the knowledge that the attempts to relieve the town had brought heavy losses. Referring to the crushing defeats of Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen leading the initial relief columns to the besieged Kimberley, Conan Doyle says: "The victory was an expensive one, for fifty killed and two hundred wounded lay upon the hillside, and, like so many of our skirmishes with the Boers, it led to small material results" (135). The relief of Ladysmith was even bloodier in terms of the number of casualties. Sir Redvers Buller's setbacks at Colenso, Spion Kop and Val Krary and his questionable performance as overall commander led to his replacement by Lord Roberts, who paved the way for Buller's ultimate relief of Ladysmith on February 28, 1900. As was the case in Kimberley, despite ultimate victory, the Boer losses were considerably less – around 300 – when compared with the 1,750 men killed, wounded and captured in Buller's retreat.

foreshadowed a future pattern of combat – the guerrilla war – characterised by unconventional tactics often with the involvement of civilians. Secondly, this shift in the tactics of combat and the technical aspects of the weapons used anticipated a gradual change of attitudes towards heroic masculinity that would be more fully delineated during World War One. Yet, to make sense of its changing nature, old explanatory frameworks continued to be applied. While some people "saw the defeat as symptomatic of imperial decline and national disintegration," some others, encouraged by popular literature and the patriotic press, "chose to impose a more positive reading" (Peck 168).[61]

If measured up to any of its predecessors, the Boer War was "a remarkably literary war" (Van Wyk Smith, "The Poetry of the War" 292). As mentioned earlier, British society had witnessed a development of literacy – linked to the Education Act of 1870 – accompanied by a widespread and rising interest in militarism. The Boer War marked the zenith of the phenomenon of publication of poetry and a new style of journalism that could claim to be responsible for the formation of public opinion as much as for providing the news. This flood of literary and journalistic publications, together with the rapid increase of both literacy and interest in war literature, "ensured a mighty crop of soldierly comment" ("The Poetry of the War" 292). Most educated soldiers were now able to write about their war experiences, and evidently wanted to do so.

Yet, much like the patterns of combat or the attitudes towards the military conflict, the discourse of the Boer War was also characterised by paradoxes. War was viewed as either heroic or futile. While most of the war literature of the time subscribed to one or other of those views, these positions were not always mutually exclusive. On the contrary, I would emphasise that it was often possible to find heroism in the precise fact that the view of war had become anti-heroic: "The soldier had become more attractive, more of an object for compassionate admiration, as war itself had become less acceptable" (Van Wyk Smith, "The Poetry of the War" 293). The existence of this heroic-anti-heroic paradox allowed readers not only to go into the complex representation of war

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[61] The heated debate over the conduct of the generals during the war could be used as an example that the events in South Africa had somehow unsettled the imperial mindset. Lord Roberts and Sir Redvers Buller were both praised and attacked in equal measure (See Van Hartesveldt 42)

and the soldier in depth, but also to notice that this war had progressively disclosed a new political, social and cultural climate.

Still, at first reading, the sieges of Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith seemed to offer more than enough substance for imperial novelists to flesh out the Victorian hero myth: "here was a group of named characters, with identifiable leaders, in a named place, and moreover, with a clear purpose to their lives as they confronted an enemy that could be represented in equally unambiguous terms." It is not surprising then, that "despite the military setbacks [...] there were enough of the reassuring elements of a siege narrative present to construct a positive story (Peck 168). In fact, most of the popular contemporary histories surrounding the sieges written by official and non-official observers appeared to feed the myth; the majority being adventure romance stories. Adventure romance appeared as "the public face of imperialism" (Krebs 144) and as "a deeply conservative type of literature" (Dryden 63). Novelists like G.A. Henty and Rider Haggard had become straightforwardly propagandistic, appealing to popular imagination to tell their 'truth' about the empire.[62] Readers of Boer War fiction were provided with exotic settings, the prospect of a happy ending and the belief that war was always necessary, particularly this war.

Referring to the close connection between imperialism and popular imagination, Krebs claims that "perhaps more than any other imperial conflict, this war relied on an imperial imaginary – the myths of British imperialism as they interacted with their material conditions" (145). Since the Victorian hero myth tended to over-simplify the social, political and cultural background, the psychological realities and the morality involved in the war; the uncomfortable circumstances of the conflict were often overlooked, and even denied. Among these uncomfortable circumstances were the major military and technological

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[62]   Among the Boer War stories, Henty's *With Buller in Natal* (1901) and *With Roberts to Pretoria* (1902) and Haggard's *Jess* (1887) are the most popularly patriotic and display the standard pattern of the adventure romance. Brereton's, *One of the Fighting Scouts: A Tale of Guerrilla Warfare in South Africa* (1903), Harcourt Burrage's *Carbineer and Scout* (1901), Mitford's *Aletta: a Tale of the Boer Invasion* (1900), Hayens' *Scouting for Buller* (1902), Laycock's *Steve the Outlander: A Romance of South Africa* (1900), Hemyng's *Jack Harkaway in the Transvaal* (1902), Harkaway's *War Scouts Among Boer Guerrillas* (1902) and Douglas Blackburn's *A Burgher Quixote* (1903), are also recognised as openly propagandistic. (See Peck 168-9)

challenges that, for the first time, the power of the British hero was facing, including an enemy – the Afrikaaner – that appeared to be more resourceful than the British.

Despite its inability to respond to the collapse of an old order, the Victorian novel insisted on the essentially safe and efficient perspective of tradition to reply to it. Discussing the narrative framework to the Boer campaign, Reckwitz claims that the conflict was romanticised from the very beginning, explaining "new occurrences in terms of past experience […] by having recourse to the various presentational models traditionally available to a culture" (167). Attridge exemplifies this tendency by referring to the works of fiction that, instead of dealing straightforwardly with the problems caused by the Boer War, appealed to the earlier Indian Mutiny, "in which there were less obvious opportunities to valorise real or imagined individual heroics" (14). He calls them "disoriented fictions" (139).

Peck, on the other hand, opts for an alternative approach to the traditional discourse and refers to the literature of the period as going through "a crisis of confidence" (174), experiencing a feeling of unease and apprehension that could not be channelled in literary terms. In his view, Victorian writers "work[ed] hard to restore a sense of purpose and direction," but were unable to meet the challenges imposed by the new circumstances (Peck 174). Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War* (1900), Donald MacDonald's *How we Kept the Flag Flying* (1900) and G.W. Stevens' *From Cape Town to Ladysmith* (1900) illustrate these seemingly coherent and politically justified plots, that in the end do nothing but confirm, as Attridge suggests, that "behind and alongside the bluster of imperialist language, and sometimes pulsing at the heart of it, is anxiety and introspection" (3).

There were a few British novels, however, that seemed to offer a possible redefinition of the Victorian hero myth. Yet, they appeared to stop halfway without achieving the desired purpose. Published some time before the Boer War, George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) offers an illustration of such half-way approach as it attempts an attack against imperial militarism while falling into traditional ideas about nationhood, imperialism, and race. As Peck explains, "what *Arms and the Man* seems to indicate is that opponents to

militarism had, for the most part, no new view to offer; they were tied to the liberal assumptions of the mid-century" (175). In spite of current developments, it was imperialism that still seemed to be in command, functioning "as an ideology or political faith, […] as a partial substitute for declining or fallen Christianity and for declining faith in Britain's future" (Brantlinger 228). Such attitudes placed the literature of the period at odds with the unfolding of war events.

Although it may seem implausible to claim that Kipling shared Shaw's sense of restlessness – he had always been regarded as "the poet of the administrators" (Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* 19) – that is in fact the case. Indeed, Kipling's literature remains highly significant in its relationship to its age as it mirrors the evolution of British consciousness from the 'little' wars of empire to the First World War. Even if he did in fact go through an 'epic' stage in which he promoted a consistent philosophy of British imperial mission; that philosophy fell apart during the Boer War.[63] As Rutherford explains:

> He never questioned the necessity or justice of this war, but he was dismayed by the inefficiency displayed at so many levels throughout the Army; his stories at this period are cautionary tales; and his denunciation of incompetence in high and low places foreshadows some of the protest literature of the First World War. (Introduction XII) [64]

From the exaggerated praising of his schoolboy Stalky – the hero of *Stalky & Co* and archetype of the British officer – the pendulum swung away to the bitter contempt for British incompetence as shown in the following remark from "The Captive:" "they [Afrikaaners] fought to kill, and, by what I could make out, the

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[63]   Kipling experienced the Boer War at first hand. From 1886 to 1897, he became "the prophet of British imperialism in its expansionist phase" (Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling" 72) celebrating "the zest, the toughness, the wry stoicism and high morale" he found among the soldiers in India (Rutherford, Introduction XII). From 1898 until 1908, he spent his winter holidays in South Africa and witnessed the outbreak of the Boer War, the ensuing peace treaty and some of the most emblematic battles. He cultivated the friendship of Cecil Rhodes, Sir Alfred Milner, and Leander Starr Jameson, wrote poetry in support of the British cause and helped start a newspaper.

[64]   Some of Kipling's Boer War stories were published while the war was in progress: "The Way that he Took," "The Outsider," "A Sahibs' War." Some other stories were published after its conclusion, for example, "The Comprehension of Private Copper" and "The Captive."

British fought to be killed. So both parties were accommodated" (Kipling, *War Stories and Poems* 200). This not only expresses his concern for British national defence, but a turning point in his move away from earlier ideals towards a more critical attitude, or as Nash suggests, towards "the genre of 'military incompetence' literature" (48). Despite the irony of the remark, Kipling's critique of the high command's inefficiency was not intended ultimately to be derogatory but rather instructive on the military failures and the lessons to be learned from them. However, while Kipling's Boer War stories were, without exception, insufficient as sites of contestation, they certainly paved the way not only for his Boer War poetry – much angrier than his prose – but also for his post-World War One literature, which became, as Rutherford rightly claims, "elegiac" and permeated by loss (Introduction XIII).[65]

As to the poetry prompted by the Boer War, it seemed to go one step further than the novels in its mirroring the changing conditions of the times. This is perhaps because, as Jacobson observes, poetry lent itself better than fiction "to expressing political passions […] directly to the reader" (56). Indeed, more sensibly committed to questioning tradition, poetry became essentially didactic in purpose and presented "a cross-section of the whole contemporary literary scene in England and, to a significant extent, in Europe" (Van Wyk Smith, "The Poetry of the War" 293).

What is most interesting from the perspective of my argument is that Boer War verse shows a clearer outline of the gradual shift in poetic tone and subject matter: from the representation of the glory of war to a more austere realism and satire. Of course, a vast quantity of plainly nationalist verse, or as Van Wyk Smith calls it, "deplorable doggerel" ("The Poetry of the War" 293), continued to dominate the literary scene, but there was also a great deal of authentically new verse, which represented a gradual shift away from jingoism and toward a more personal reaction to the conflict.

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[65]   Kipling's only son was commissioned in the Irish Guards before he was eighteen, only to be killed the next year at Loos in his first action. His body was never found, and the writer endured many months of agonised uncertainty before he finally gave up all hope.

Among those who still wrote loyalist verse were poet Laureate Alfred Austin and Henry Newbolt.[66] According to Attridge, they both "championed the soldier as protector of the nation" (108) and shared some of the characteristics of the patriotic poetry of the period: "sing-song rhythmic patterns which could be set to march tunes and an adherence to imperial destiny and valour which the soldier ha[d] inherited and now embodie[d]" (112). Among their most popular Boer War poems are Newbolt's "Vitaï Lampada" and "Waggon Hill," and Austin's "Spartan Mothers." [67]

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[66]   Swinburne, W.E. Henley, Percy T. Ingram, Edward Tylee, Frederick Langbridge, Canon H.D. Rawnsley and Kipling – in his 'epic' stage – are also regarded as 'loyalist' poets.

[67]   "Vitaï Lampada" was written in 1892 and published in *Admirals All, and Other Verses* (1897). The title is taken from a quotation from Titus Lucretius Carus' *De Rerum Natura* (*The Nature of Things*) and means "the torch of life" (Book II, 67-72). Paying a debt to Matthew Arnold's "Rugby Chapel" (1867), Newbolt refers to how a future soldier learns endurance and fortitude in cricket matches in the famous Close at Clifton College. According to V. Cunningham, the poem stresses the importance of "playing the game" and the "emotional celebration of male bravery and individual staunchness" (1011). The expression "dust and smoke" (12) makes reference to the much publicised British Army battle fought in January 1885 at Abu Klea in the Sudan against Mahdist forces, a vain attempt to relieve general Charles Gordon at Khartoum. After the Great War, however, the poem became "a by-word for an outmoded Public School cult of male duty and unflinching imperial service, and for the badness of late Victorian verse which early modernism was setting his face against" (V. Cunningham 1011).

Like "Vitaï Lampada," "Waggon Hill" (1903) strives to capture the glowing heroics of an earlier tradition, praising the bravery of the Devonshires outside Ladysmith. Waggon Hill was a crucial position defended by the Devonshire Regiment during the siege of Ladysmith (Waggon Hill was named after a similar hill near Aldershot in Hampshire). For Newbolt, the valour and bravery of Captain Sir Frances Drake is the same as that shown by the Devonshires in their defence of Wagon Hill - all reflecting the spirit of Devon, Drake's former home. This is a poem about place which is not descriptive of the places mentioned – Waggon Hill, Devon or England – but of what the places symbolise.

In "Spartan Mothers," Alfred Austin's persistent theme is that England was as much of a worthy mission as the church: "Who dies for England, sleeps with God" (8). Austin's reference to the patriotism of the Spartan mother goes back to Plutarch's *On Sparta*. The Spartan mother never wavers or shows signs of indecision; she sends forth her son to war to return either 'with his shield or on it.' Indeed, Spartan women were educated to be the mothers of strong warriors. But they were also encouraged to speak in public and be assertive. This is the case of Damatria, who killed her son when he returned to Sparta because she was told he had been "a coward and unworthy of her" (Plutarch 159). This is the epigram on the warrior's grave: "'Damatrius who broke the laws was killed by his mother-She's a Spartan lady, he's a Spartan youth'" (Plutarch 159).

Interestingly, these poems use the word England as a synonym of 'patria' and of the government's imperial expansionism. 'Patria,' then, becomes a rather complicated concept that includes the notions of brotherhood and comradeship on one side, and of the institutions – whether represented by the authority of the monarchy, by illustrious military figures like Lord Roberts or by the church, on the other. It is certainly arguable whether "dying for England" could stand for "dying for the empire." In fact, the kind of 'critical' patriotism advocated by those opposed to imperialism could not possibly be extended to an expanding, and therefore, alien empire as South Africa was. Persuading British soldiers that they were fighting for their country in South Africa was to exacerbate the contradictions inherent in the qualities that defined the term 'patria' and in the theory of an expansionist British Empire.[68]

This and other concerns were addressed by the poetry of protest. Thomas Hardy's Boer War poems were emblematic of this new approach to war, not only based on the glory but also on the painful implications of the struggle. While Hardy admired the soldier, he also responded to the situation of the man caught up in a war beyond his understanding, a war that required a sacrifice not fully justified by the cause. Peck describes how Hardy's feelings were translated into verse:

> Rather than focusing on a hero who can turn the course of events, Hardy, as in his novels, focuses upon a small, powerless, defeated (or even dead) individual in an enormous universe. In doing this, Hardy overturns the chivalric tradition, but also challenges the liberal tradition which puts the individual at the centre, focusing upon the individual's ability to change the world through negotiation and compromise. (180)

Hardy responded to the Boer War in eleven "War Poems" that appeared in *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901).[69] The best-known of these was

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[68]   The concept of 'patria' and 'patriotism' divided the press and the political discourse of the late-nineteenth century between those who coupled it with jingoism and encouraged blind support to imperial expansion and those who put forward a critical ideal of patriotism and favoured public discussion. How this controversy developed over time will be discussed later on in this chapter.

[69]   Shortly before and during the Great War, Hardy wrote seventeen other poems as a second response to modern war. "Poems of War and Patriotism" was published in *Moments of Vision and*

"Drummer Hodge." The poem expresses Hardy's irony about British imperial ambitions and about how these ambitions affected the working classes. In fact the poem may be read as an elegy to "a representative soldier of the century's imperialist wars" (Ramazani 41).[70] The misery of Hodge's fate dismantles a Victorian sense of security and submerges readers in a foreign world of solitude and emptiness; the use of words from the Afrikaans, such as "kopje" and "veldt," and the strangeness of the soil and of the constellations that appear over Hodge's grave at night reinforce, in Peck's words, this "fragmented sense of loss, confusion, uncertainty and pain" (180). Yet, the poem's perennial appeal lies in "this unresolved tension between a sense of futile loss and a strong conviction of nameless yet worthy achievement" (Van Wyk Smith, "The Poetry of the War" 298). In effect, Hardy combines both the irony of the lack of mourning for Hodge, who will never become a hero to his country, and the traditional glorification of the war dead – Hodge is elevated to a mythic status through the image of the South African landscape sheltering him as a cherished son – to reflect a two-edged dimension of military heroism.

Like Hardy's, Kipling's poetry suggests a sense of doubt about the purpose of the imperial cause and a new mood that apparently his fiction was not capable of articulating in full. As mentioned above, although he started with a supportive

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Miscellaneous Verses (1917). Some of these poems will be discussed in Chapter III, "The Great War of Words."

[70]   "Drummer Hodge" was first published in *Literature* on 25 November, 1899 under the title "The Dead Drummer." Although the poem is not an explicit condemnation of the Boer War, implicit criticism is quite clear. Hodge, the boy protagonist, is made a victim of the imperial burden. He is a West Country boy killed in battle in South Africa, in the early part of the Boer War. Instead of helping transform the British colonies into Britain's own image, Hodge will become part of the South African "veldt" as his remains will feed the roots of "some Southern tree." And it is his youth and innocence that renders his death all the more wasteful. Hodge is a drummer boy. Drummers were usually the youngest soldiers, considered too young to fight. The dramatic appeal of the boy who is made to become a man and die in battle is an attempt to discredit the myth of war as a glorious enterprise and unveils Hardy's ambivalence towards it.

It may be said that "Drummer Hodge" is one of Hardy's "elegies for the passing of the nineteenth century" as it "mourns the passing of one era and anxiously anticipates the arrival of another" (Ramazani 36). In this sense, Hardy the poet may be viewed as "the last Victorian and the first modern: he writes in traditional stanzaic patterns but invents many of his own; he adheres to the metered line but roughs up prosodic and syntactic polish; he appropriates Romantic diction but fashions many jarring locutions" (Ramazani 36).

attitude towards Britain's imperial mission – this is clearly seen in "The Old Issue" for example – his ambiguities and doubts about imperial purpose increased, exposing a more critical attitude as the conflict developed.[71] Like Hardy's, then, Kipling's Boer War poems seem to be possessed by a sense of confusion and loss. An interesting evolution from the 'epic' to the 'satiric' could be seen in the comparison between *The Seven Seas* (1896) – full of a spirit of imperial activism – "Recessional" (1897) and "The White Man's Burden" (1899) – in which the poet calls for self-sacrifice in the service of the empire – and finally "Hymn before Action" (1914) – much darker and anxious. Perhaps it is *The Five Nations* (1903) the work that best expresses the poet's inner contradictions, presenting the Boer War "largely as toil and tears, a grim duty of empire in which England has to learn ("The Lesson," "The Islanders," "The Dykes") as much as teach" (Van Wyk Smith, "The Poetry of the War" 297). The two facets of Kipling's poetry – his faith in the imperial mission on one hand, and his sense of bewilderment on the other – can be best appreciated in "Bridge-Guard in the Karroo," which is not so much about the grandiloquent display of the power of the British army, but of a few soldiers guarding a bridge.[72] Contemporary critics held that the poem not only lacked "the dash and swing of his former martial ballads" but also the "elements which are capable of producing a fine patriotic enthusiasm" ("Latest Items about the Doings..." 10). Indeed, the choice of

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[71]   In this poem, Kipling justifies the conquest of new territories and people in the name of human rights and justice; in his view, Britain had no choice but to fight the dictatorship and racism of Kruger.

[72]   According to Hewison, Kipling writes "in the language of the men and in the rhythms of the day" to come closer to "the soldiers' feelings about the war, the country, everyday conditions of service, the waiting and watching, mass disaster and homecoming" (89). The poem suggests a double sense of solitude. The soldiers are "details" in military terms, as they have been assigned for a specific duty, but they are also details in the ordinary sense of the word. They are lost both in an almost immeasurable landscape and in the war machine in which they play just a small role. The arrival of "the north-bound train," however, brings them together as human beings for a moment, but its departure leaves them again to the mercy of their circumstances.

The poem first appeared in *The Times* on June 5, 1901, but was also published separately in *Literature* on June 8, 1901 and reprinted in *Songs for Youth from the Collected Verse* in 1924. While the title of the poem refers to the guard of one of the bridges in the Karroo region, a semi-desert plateau area of South Africa, it has classical connotations and may be associated with the legend of "Horatius at the Bridge." The story is retold in "Horatius" from Lord Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), a poem of great popularity in Victorian times: "Still is the story told,/ How well Horatius kept the bridge/ In the brave days of old" (70).

words may have evoked oppressive feelings; the soldiers seem to be forgotten in their lonely posts. Still, there is a sense of belonging, of connection to a larger whole that gives them purpose and meaning. As Peck observes, this may also be "Kipling's democratised version of the traditional chivalric code, in which the lowliest soldier shares the ideals of the elite" (185). However, the celebratory tone seems to be undercut by the subtle acknowledgment of anxiety and tension.

A similar concern can be drawn with respect to the new journalism of the period. As key shapers of public opinion, newspapers and periodicals could claim to be responsible for the perpetuation of the Victorian hero myth and the assertion of "a more rigid definition of patriotism […] associated with the right" (Hampton 178). They functioned as the strong arm of imperial propaganda through the constant dissemination of 'idealised' reports and images from the front.[73] Referring to the images that emerged as Boer War stereotypes, Stearn says:

> These were images of leading British commanders, of South African scenes, of marching columns and oxen-hauled guns, of favoured units – Highlanders, Bluejackets, City Imperial Volunteers and Imperial Yeomanry – and of combat: dramatic, heroic, close-quarter fighting, charges, last stands and noble deaths. While the actual images were specific to the Boer War, the types were repeated from previous colonial wars, and showed the essential continuity in the Victorian portrayal of war. (213-214)

Most of the circulating images were not concerned with "the real flesh and blood characters with names and addresses and graves" (Attridge 3), but with idealised representations of them based on widely held assumptions about imperialism, normative masculinities and the perception of war as heroic adventure and noble sacrifice.[74] By the end of the nineteenth century the efforts

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[73]   The most popular example of this new type of press was Alfred Harmworth's *Daily Mail*, published in 1886 at the cost of just one halfpenny. The *Daily Mail's* coverage of the South African conflict was immense, with a variety of war correspondents, among them the novelist Edgar Wallace and Lady Sarah Wilson, who sent regular dispatches from the conflict zone. The *Times* and *The Daily News*, although relatively more restrained than the *Daily Mail*, were also representative of this new journalism. Eventually, the imperialist *Times* came to adopt a more balanced view.

[74]   Probably the most influential in communicating images of the war were the weekly illustrated papers, especially the *Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic*. Like the *Daily Mail*,

of the new journalism were yielding good results: The Victorian hero myth had become a useful device that could effectively stifle any attempt of independent thinking.
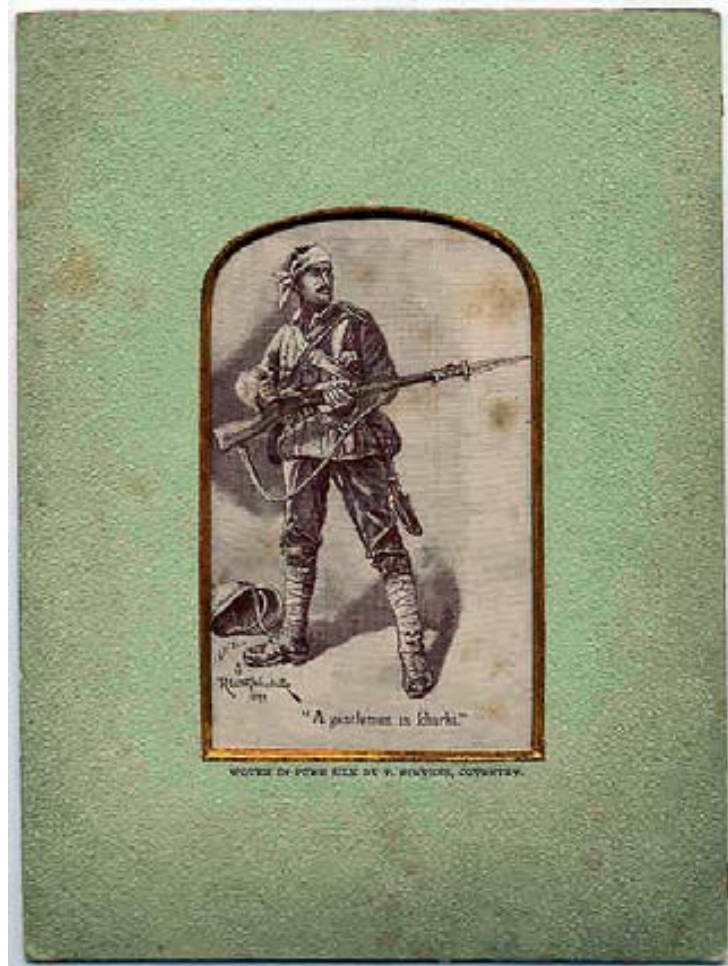
Fig. 4. "A Gentleman in Kharki." Illustration by Richard Caton Woodville (1899) to illustrate Kipling's poem "The Absent-Minded Beggar." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation*. 16 December 2010. Web. 20 January 2011.

However, this one-sided vision of the conflict did not go unchallenged as it posed questions for the liberal mind about the preservation of diversity and plurality in the media. [75] Alternative narratives and images of war were in fact possible, and

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they were also affordable to the masses and had an enormous circulation. Actually, they had no effective competition because newspapers did not include illustrations. Richard Caton Woodville was the most influential image maker to work for the *Illustrated London News*. He drew "The Absent-Minded Beggar" (*A Gentleman in Khaki,* see fig. 4) that would accompany Kipling's poem and would be much reproduced in different media as one of the most enduring images from the Boer War.

[75]   Referring to the biased accounts of the 'new journalism,' Morgan discusses the most usual enemy stereotypes: "London journalists invariably presented the Boers as primitive and

were articulated in left-wing and anti-war publications, but they were aimed at minorities and did not have much weight in the bulk of society. Among the liberal publications, C.P. Scott's *The Manchester Guardian* deserves special recognition. A strong advocate of free speech, J.A. Hobson, and most interestingly, C.E. Montague, Scott's son-in-law and later documentarist of the disillusionment on the Western Front, contributed to the newspaper as authors.[76] *The Daily Chronicle, The Morning Leader* and *The Morning Post* also deserve mentioning among the liberal newspapers.[77] Despite the obstacles of British censorship, they espoused the cause of liberalism and made gigantic efforts so that their vision of the war could reach their readers in the truest form possible. However, as Morgan argues, "until 1901 there was no 'pro-Boer' newspaper in London" as "the overwhelming majority of British newspapers were imperialist and pro-war to the very end" (5).

Most of the arguments put forward by the liberal press were rooted in their opposition to imperialist patriotism. In their view, imperialist "patriotism was firmly identified with Conservatism, militarism, royalism and racialism" (H. Cunningham 24).[78] An innate distrust of military adventure and its consequences led to resistance to the South African War that, in Nash's view, "ranged from mild misgivings to outright opposition, with individuals holding a number of

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backwards, isolated rural people. They were often described in animal terms as 'herds' or 'flocks,' whose defeat by the superior civilization of the British was an inevitable result of social Darwinism and the influence of the scientific principle of natural selection" (5)

[76] Montague was immensely loyal to *The Manchester Guardian*'s ideas and opposed the Boer War with conviction. However, his support for voluntary enlistment and commitment to Britain's involvement in the First World War brought disagreement with the sceptical C.P. Scott: "The outbreak of war highlighted a philosophical gulf between them which was never satisfactorily closed" (Grieves 39). After the war, though, Montague did return to *the Manchester Guardian*, but this time writing in a strong anti-war vein.

[77] As a reporter for *The Daily Chronicle*, Henry Nevinson provided his interesting account of the siege of Ladysmith. The literary critic J. M Robertson and the lesser E.W. Smith worked for *The Morning Leader,* while *The Morning Post* had one of the most celebrated journalists: twenty-six-year-old Winston Churchill.

[78] Historically, radicalism had advocated a notion of patriotism identified with the love for the nation rather than the love for the government; this notion of patriotism was related to the defence of justice and constitutional freedoms, not with authority. In fact, since the eighteenth century a radical notion of patriotism had been used "as a critical device for challenging corrupt governments." (Hampton 178)

overlapping views" (43). The loudest voices against Britain's position in the war were those of the 'Pro-Boers:' "whose positions varied between championing the rights of the Boer republics, to criticising Britain's methods of waging war – the so-called 'scorched earth' policy, and the internment of the civilian population in [...] 'concentration camps'" (Nash 43-44). Most concerns were focused on the particulars of the war and the political and military events surrounding it; being 'Pro-Boer' did not necessarily mean being anti-imperialist, in fact they opposed the government's policy of fighting the Boer but few of them actually sympathised with them.

From a more radical liberal and socialist wing came a more robust opposition that saw the war as indicative of the collapse of British society and of the possibility of conducting civilised relations with the rest of the world. In order to sustain this view, several arguments were used: from British 'selfish' capitalism to the growing cult of militarism right through to the militarisation of Christianity itself, which was blamed not only for the corruption of British civilisation and for the evil things that were done in the name of the British Empire, but also for the denigration of the missionary zeal of David Livingstone. It was the anxiety brought by this late-Victorian crisis of values that was believed to have precipitated the decline of the heroic ideal: "the benign and saintly figure of Gordon was replaced at the end of the century by that of the more morally ambivalent 'hero' Kitchener, who had desecrated the tomb of the Mahdi as his first act after his victory at the battle of Omdurman" (Nash 44). The more aggressive this late stage of imperialism became, the greater the antagonism between liberalism and conservatism. Despite the loud voice of imperial propaganda trying to perpetuate the Victorian hero myth, ruling masculinities were beginning to lose their moral appeal. Critical voices were growing louder, subverting not only the public-school ethos but the dominant myth.

In order to reinforce some of the issues raised in this chapter, I bring to the foreground a few references to the Boer War from some of the war poets' texts to discuss how the legacy of the military conflict conditioned their distinctive vision of the Great War. Although the Boer War campaign appears as a constant presence in the background of the narratives examined here, the conflict is represented as a distant memory. The story of the Boer War was one of the many these men were told as they were growing up. In the account of his early

years, Sassoon's Sherston refers to the Boer War as just as remote as a photograph on the calendar of his village grocer: "I inspected the village grocer's calendar which was hanging from a nail. On it there was a picture of "The Relief of Ladysmith" […] I never could make up my mind what it was all about, that Boer War, and it seemed such a long way off […]" (*Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* 53). Despite the physical, temporal and imaginative distance from the site of the real war, society was touched by the reality of the empire, even boys like Sherston, who seemed to have come in contact with it, in J.R. Seeley's words, "absent-mindedly" (qtd in Porter 18). Yet, while Sassoon-Sherston had only the foggiest idea of why the British fought in far-off South Africa or what the nature of the war really was, he was attracted by the romance of it. His emotional response to the image of the returned soldier is crucial to understand his underlying patriotism:

> Jack Barchard has recently returned from the Boer War where he served with the Yeomanry. The 'sentiment' is echoed from all parts of the table, and glasses are raised to him with a gruff 'Good 'ealth, sir,' or 'Right glad to see you back, Mr Barchard.' The returned warrior receives their congratulations with the utmost embarrassment. Taking a shy sip at my ginger-beer, I think how extraordinary it is to be sitting next to a man who has really been 'out in South Africa.' (*Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* 63)

A similar fascination with the stories of fighting men runs through Brenan's memoir. Even if limited to a coloured lithograph of the hero of Ladysmith, his recollections of imperial adventure in South Africa are also imbued by Sassoon's "sentiment:"

> The Boer War had broken out the previous autumn and Ladysmith had just been relieved after a four month's siege, during which the defenders had been reduced to eating rats. The hero of this siege, Sir George White, was an Ulsterman and a friend of my mother's family. In her enthusiasm she had hung a coloured lithograph of him, in full dress uniform with all his medals, over my bunk and one day she said to me: 'When you're grown up, you must try to be a great man like him.' I gazed at the red wooden face with its white bushy moustaches and wondered if I should ever look as great as that. (Brenan 18)

Not only is adventure an essential part of Sassoon and Brenan's boyhood; their identification with the adventure hero becomes a spontaneous form of self-

assertion. In the fascination that these stories held for boys far removed from the dangers faced by the Boer War heroes, there is a clear example of the symbolic value these distant stories had, as they furnished an ideal of masculinity that could be aspired to in everyday life.

Carrington takes this childhood identification with the heroes of the past to the front thereby striving in his efforts to become the man he wants to be. Once on the real war front, he experiences an intense wave of excitement to be reliving the heroic feats of his ancestors: "Fighting I knew, but it was fighting dream battles with visionary foes. That had been a favourite game since I had played at 'fighting the Boers' in the nursery. For the first time I thought what it meant, to struggle for life with a man of equal wit and training" (*A Subaltern's War* 63). Using a rather more ironic tone, Herbert Read also admits that the Boer War had fed both his soldierly fantasies during childhood and his real war experience; yet, he expresses uncertainty about the future; some sort of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety takes hold of his imagination:

> We had vague childish memories of the Boer War, and from these and from a general diffusion of Kiplingesque sentiments, we managed to infuse into war a decided element of adventure romance. War still appealed to the imagination. To this romantic illusion must be added, in my own case, a state of uncertainty about my future (*The Contrary Experience* 210).

Some other boys, however, rebel against the yoke of tradition inherited from the Boer War, and denounce the strain of the moral code transmitted through "the chickenshit" discipline, "the pleasure taken in rank for rank's sake" and "the practice of public verbal humiliation" (Fusell, *Wartime* 81).[79] Remembering his experience as an infantry subaltern in France, Blunden becomes increasingly

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[79] The term "chickenshit" is used by Fussell in relation to his study of the Second World War experience to refer to "the behavior that makes military life worse than it need be: petty harassment of the weak by the strong; open scrimmage for power and authority and prestige; sadism thinly disguised as necessary discipline; a constant 'paying off of old scores'; and insistence on the letter rather than the spirit of ordinances. Chickenshit is so called--instead of horse- or bull- or elephant shit--because it is small-minded and ignoble and takes the trivial seriously" (*Wartime* 80). Some of its characteristics, however, were already detectable in World War One, for instance the verbal abuse, while others would become more widespread in upcoming years.

upset by the medals and decorations of his instructor, which seem to play an essential role in his arbitrary exercise of power: "His Boer War experience, annotated in the ribbons which he wore, had given him a touch of overlordliness, which now tuned his irritable remarks" (*Undertones of War* 59). Apart from the chickenshit discipline, some war poets anticipate the wanton sacrifice of the First World War by highlighting the military incompetence of the Second Boer War. Montague is clear in this respect:

> After the Boer War, you remember, England, under the first shock of its blunders, had tried to find out why the Staff work was so bad. What it found, in the words of a famous Report, was that the fashion in sentiment in our Regular Army was to think hard work 'bad form;' a subaltern was felt to be a bit of a scrub if he worried too much about discovering how to support an attack when he might be more spiritedly employed in playing polo; "The nobleness of life," as Antony said, when he kissed Cleopatra, was to go racing or hunting, not to sit learning how to forecast the course of great battles and how to provide for answering their calls. (161)

Underestimating the warning signs given by the military failure in South Africa could only bring more chaos and destruction, even if masked by civilisation or progress. An awareness of this allows modernist Wyndham Lewis to refer to the Great War as a "great mistake – far greater of course than the Boer War" (18). A similar complexity of attitude, involving the acknowledgment of the forewarning of political change after the Boer campaign is to be found in Graves. War is no longer seen as a means of restoring justice; on the contrary, it is presented as a fact of dubious legitimacy generating bitter disagreement. The poet records how the Boer War "clouded" his "early childhood" and how his mother "kept off the subject of war as much as possible" because of the family's divided opinions: "Philip, my eldest brother (who called himself a Fenian), also called himself a pro-Boer, and I remember great tension at the breakfast-table between him and my father, whose political views were never extreme. (*Goodbye…* 30). Graves later draws a parallel between his brother's Pro-Boer radicalism and his post-war socialism as he quotes his father trying to talk him over and reminding him of his brother's "youthful revolutionary idealism and [how he had] come out all right in the end" (301).

To complete what seems to be a wide range of responses, it is worth recalling Jones' *In Parenthesis,* which insists on imposing a heroic dimension to the Great War by tracing similarities between the pre-Somme period and the martial legends of the Boer War: "The period of the individual rifle-man, of the 'old sweat' of the Boer campaign, the 'Bairnsfather' war, seemed to terminate with the Somme battle. There were, of course, glimpses of it long after – all through in fact – but it seemed never quite the same" (IX). Jones sees the actualities of the Great War against the background of the traditional narratives of the Boer War, trying to emphasise the underlying unity rather than the discontinuity of the experience. Aldington, on the other hand, is more interested in stressing a pre- and post-Great War fracture, finding ironic contrasts with a romantic past of "frontier and colonial skirmishes" (199). Surprisingly, he praises the "military organization and efficiency" during the Boer War as opposed to the devastating reality of the Great War.

The examples discussed in this section, in relation to the impact of the Boer War on the narratives under study, are meant to provide a starting point in the portrayal of the soldiers' ambiguous attitudes towards war and towards heroic masculinity, with on one side the celebration of patriotism, and on the other the message of condemnation of either military inefficiency or the alienation and waste of war. I have examined the mid-to late-nineteenth-century period to investigate the emergence and decadence of the Victorian hero myth, to consider the extent to which its forms survived the First World War and to trace its continuities and transformations into the twentieth century. By studying the heroic in relationship to the anti-heroic in the years prior and during the Great War, the next chapter will seek to deepen my understanding of the complexity of this thesis subject.

Chapter II

The Anti-heroic and the Ghost Myth

Regarded as the immediate predecessor of the Great War, the Boer War not only marked a consistent effort to sustain the Victorian hero myth but produced an equally plausible counter-position that, with specific characteristics and its own significance, became the dominant narrative after the Great War. I define this counter-narrative as the Ghost myth. Even though the Ghost myth will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, when a better appreciation of the literature and the historical, social and cultural context can be made, its connection to my argument makes it necessary to mention it at this early stage. My aim is to examine certain key aspects that contributed to the progressive demythologisation of traditional heroism into the form of the Ghost myth.

Firstly, I consider the presence of the anti-heroic as an essential element in the representation of heroic masculinities in the mid-to late-nineteenth century and largely responsible for the decline of the normative image of the soldier. As expressions of the anti-heroic leading to the Ghost myth, I focus on the recognised and unrecognised forms of conscientious objection under which opposition to war gained prominence before the Great War, depriving the Victorian hero myth of some of its glamour and rhetoric. Next I analyse how the new military technology, the metaphor of the 'war machine' and the encounter with mass death led to a representational crisis that demanded new narrative forms to reflect what was seen as a radical sense of discontinuity with the past. Finally, the Ghost myth is presented as the story of the Great War that came to be accepted as the truth. I draw attention to the split in the representation of heroic masculinities and to the central role of the figure of the soldier-ghost as a counter-model and destabiliser of the dominant discourse. The ghost trope is analysed in three key interrelated aspects: the ghost as the shadow of the hero, the ghost as a vehicle between life and death and the ghost as haunting memory. According to the Ghost myth, the war poets go through a journey from the heroic to the ghostly; and after the war, they become witnesses of their traumatic past.

II.1. The Eclipse of the Victorian Hero Myth

Many critics have attempted to explain what they see as the eclipse or decline of heroism in Victorian literature. By analysing in detail the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope and Eliot, Praz shows how Romantic heroics were progressively fading from Victorian literature to be replaced by a bourgeois domestic ideal. In Praz's view, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* emerges as the first Victorian novel without a hero that clearly represents a "negation of the epic spirit" or "the possibility of man being 'great' in any way or in any occasion" (Praz 228). The novel's anti-heroic point of view would be none other than the embodiment of, in Praz's words, "the ironical bourgeois common sense" (316). Similarly, Levin refers to the male characters in Thackeray's novel as purely nominal heroes arguing that their "bourgeois environment affords little scope for exploits and passions on the epic or romantic scale" (*The Gates of Horn* 58). As to the personification of the bourgeoisie, the Victorian hero seems to be incapable of true heroism: "Captain Dobbin and George Osborne are poor substitutes of Achilles and Tristan" (Levin, *The Gates of Horn* 58) not because they are evil, but because they are "flawed" (Levin, "Society as its own Historian" 176). Yet, not only does the bourgeois mentality deprive the Victorian male of heroic grandeur; Levin argues that Darwinism gives the hero a death blow for "by the end of the century the novel was more concerned with man's place in nature than with man's place in history, and no man could be a hero to the naturalist" (*The Gates of Horn* 59).

In a similar vein, Levine argues that heroism never really existed as such, that "it was a special Victorian naïveté that deluded people into belief" (47). In this view, hero-worship was motivated by a "very modern quality of desperation": "we won't so much find that belief in heroism we are seeking, as we will hear a counsel of desperation and evidence of the culture's most catastrophic imagination" (Levine 48). In fact, in Levine's opinion, it was the search for the self that undermined the traditional ideal: "self-consciousness caused the loss of faith for which heroism was to compensate" (48). Like Praz and Levin, Levine also mentions "the development of a bourgeois ethos and of the increasing threat of democracy, both of which tended to discourage belief in any authority beyond the household" (48).

Consistent though each scholar seems to be in developing his own argument, the panorama that emerges is one of contradiction. The obvious contrast between Carlyle's exaltation of the "Heroic warrior" (Carlyle 70) and Thackeray's "bourgeois attitude towards the military" (Praz 228) reveals an unresolved tension as regards the basic nature and embodiment of Victorian heroism. While Carlyle consigned himself to the role of advocate of a seemingly outdated ideal based on the rule of the great men, Thackeray, by his questioning of heroism through the portrayal of the weaknesses of the bourgeoisie, was paving the way for the representation of the modernist anti-hero. If at the beginning of the Victorian period all the proper conditions for hero-worship had been given – "the enthusiastic temper, the conception of the superior being, the revival of Homeric mythology and medieval ballad, the identification of great art with grand style, the popularity of Scott and Byron, and the living presence of Napoleonic soldiers and sailors" (Houghton 310) – by the late-nineteenth century, a breakdown of traditional certainties led to a crisis of representation that demanded the re-examination of the dominant myth. As Campbell claims, "the spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes" (Joseph Campbell 358).

The insistent advocacy of hero-worship was the only answer to what appeared to be a late-nineteenth century dilemma. As Levin writes, "it is the cry of a century which is often considered a century of hero-worship, the quest of an age forever seeking and never quite finding what Lermontov styled *A Hero of Our Time*" ("Society as its Own Historian" 176).[80] Somehow, the man at war became a figure in transition – oscillating between the aspiring hero and the anti-hero – and a signifier of the wide range of responses to the repercussions of late-nineteenth century imperialism in Victorian society.[81] Some of the contradictory attitudes towards the figure of soldier in late Victorian literature and journalism

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[80]   Levin's comment is interesting in its implications. Lermontov's hero, the Byronic Pechorin, subverts the pursuit of the traditional heroic ideal Levin attributes to late Victorianism. Perhaps Lermontov is implying that the Victorian literary attempts to revive the spirit of chivalry were irreversibly flawed and declining as a result of these flaws or he is paving the way for a new conception of the hero, one that comprehends the whole personality of the individual, connecting the public and the private.

[81]   See Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick. *The Hero in Transition* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983): 315.

were the consequence of the main social, cultural and intellectual developments of the period.[82] As Attridge argues: "the soldier is variously cast as a metaphor for the nation, as epitomising both the best and the worst of the nation, as Romantic hero, and as urban malcontent" (4-5).

Precisely because of this transitional quality of the heroic, it would not be appropriate to affirm that Victorianism set out to deliberately destroy the hero myth. In Ousby's words, "[Victorians] begin from the uneasy realization that social and cultural changes are estranging them from an ideal that served their forefathers long and faithfully, and they present their solutions to the dilemma as acts of repair or adaptation" (152). Some of the Boer War poets and novelists mentioned in the previous chapter did attempt a redefinition of heroism, but did not always succeed in finding alternatives to the values they wanted to abandon. The figure of the soldier, then, drew attention to these failures by repeating the instances that revealed the incongruity between the transcendence of heroic action and the actual reality of war.

The clash between the ideal and the real is of course not an exclusively Victorian motive either, however, as Furst puts it, "the anti-hero figures most prominently in western literature since the French Revolution, and especially since the late-nineteenth century" (V-VI) In fact, there is not a definitive moment in which the notion of the anti-hero came into existence. Although it is depicted as that "whose character is widely discrepant from that of the traditional protagonist, or hero" (Abrams 15), the concept is so elusive and complex that its characterisation would involve a detailed examination of "the whole milieu which produced it" (Furst V) and, unfortunately, such an undertaking would go beyond the objectives of the present study.

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[82]   Referring to the real causes behind Victorian anxieties, Houghton claims that "expanding business, scientific development, the growth of democracy and the decline of Christianity were sources of distress as well as of satisfaction" to the British (54). In the years immediately before the Great War, this sense of threat had greatly increased. Suffragists, Irish nationalist, Ulster loyalists and trade unionists were waging an internal war against the British Empire both in speech and action. In Hynes' words, "a civil war, a sex war, and a class war: in the spring of 1914 these were all foreseen in England's immediate future, and with a kind of relish" (*A War Imagined* 7). This is also suggested by Eksteins (see footnote 51).

However, of the many books and articles devoted to the subject,[83] the description of the anti-hero as the countertype of the hero allows for the literary trope to go back in time to Plautus' comedy *Miles Gloriosus* in 205 BC, in which the character of the 'braggart soldier' is first introduced.[84] Indeed, essential to all humour is the merging of an ideal with the reality of life as, in Rubin's words, "the essence of comedy is incongruity" (109). And the fact that most mock-heroic narratives – from Plautus to Cervantes to Byron – have been "torn between strong sympathy and identification with the spirit and values of heroic adventure and comic awareness of its ludicrousness as much as its futility" (Salomon 75) makes it possible to argue that perhaps the anti-hero was twinborn with the hero, that inherent to the classical heroic ideals was the human failure to achieve or at least to sustain those ideals. As Lamont puts it: "Paradoxically, the hero IS only as he IS NOT" ("From Hero to Anti-Hero 4).

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[83]   Among them, see Victor, Brombert, *In Praise of Anti-heroes: Figures and Themes in Modern European Literature 1830-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Harold, Lubin. *Heroes and Anti-heroes: A Reader in Depth* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968); Rosette, Lamont. "From Hero to Anti-hero" in *The Anti-Hero: His Emergence and Transformations. Studies in the Literary Imagination.* 9.1. (1976): 1-22; Edith, Kern. "The Modern Hero: Phoenix or Ashes." *Comparative Literature*. 10. 4 (1958): 325-334; Roger B. Rollin. *Hero/Anti-Hero* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973).

[84]   In 1553, Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* emerges as the immediate anti-heroic successor of the classical models. Like Miles Gloriosus, Ralph Roister Doister is boastful both in terms of his abilities in the field of war and in love and also portrayed as a wooer. Roister Doister's image is that of the mock-hero of chivalric romances who is contrasted with the folk heroes from Arthurian legends as well as with classical and biblical heroes. Udall's adoption of the burlesque model in his combination of native elements with classical models anticipates the major traditions of Elizabethan comedy. The picaresque genre also deserves particular attention among the anti-heroic texts. *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) can be considered one of the most significant antecedents of the genre. Published anonymously in Spain, it tells the story of the *pícaro* Lazarillo, a roguish hero of low social class, who lives as an outsider and whose ability to expose and ridicule corrupt individuals gives him a revolutionary stance. The representation of character traits that contest heroism can also be seen in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* in the persona of Falstaff, the antithesis of Prince Hal the future King Henry V. It is important to note, however, that, much like the Machiavellian Prince, Prince Hal unites the ruthlessness and consecrated authority that a good ruler must possess. He is addressed as "the pleasant Prince" (Act I Scene II 286) and "the Christian King" (Act I Scene II 244) throughout the play and maintains the image of astute decision-maker and good military strategist he had moulded for himself in *Henry IV.*

Brombert's *In Praise of Anti-heroes* acknowledges the complexity of the so-called "unheroic modes" (1) and links the anti-heroic to the paradoxical.[85] In Brombert's view, the anti-heroic emerges from the heroic to subvert it as it "implies the negative presence of the subverted or negative model" (1-2). In this view, then, the anti-hero emerges as "a special category of heroes" (Lubin 3). So much so that the boundaries between the heroic and the anti-heroic become blurred and more open to discussion. Brombert uses the term anti-hero in the plural, not as "a single type" but rather as a "widespread and complex trend" (1). His efforts to highlight the paradoxical relationship between the hero and the anti-hero for the purpose of textual analysis are crucial to my thesis and central to the novels, poems – and even the journalism – examined here. The significance of the anti-heroic in the late-nineteenth century not only lies in its opposition to the heroic but rather in the depiction of a tension between the two and perhaps of a longing for traditional heroic values no longer found meaningful.

Referring to the literary works that challenge the Victorian hero myth, Brombert claims that they "may well reflect a moral and spiritual thrust, as well as an attempt to adjust responsibly to new contexts" (6). The need simultaneously to embrace and reject heroic conventions is a paradox that war literature wrestled with throughout the Victorian age but never with more intensity than in the years preceding World War One. As Furst observes: "Typically,[the anti-hero] crops up at times of profound cultural crisis, when the civilization as a whole is uncertain of its values or direction – Athens at the close of the close of the Peloponnesian war, for example, or Europe after the French Revolution and the First World War" (IX). Besides generating intense conflict within popular imagination, this type of cultural crisis is linked in most texts with a more pervasive crisis of traditional masculine authority and identity. The following sections deal with some of the heroic-anti-heroic tensions and paradoxes discussed so far – as Brombert observes, "survival and renewal, at times in a conflicting manner, are at the heart of [this process]" (6) – and with certain specific viewpoints, which are not only critical of the traditional conception of

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[85]   In fact, it is Dostoevsky who first comes up with the notion of paradox: The subversion of the heroic ideal is associated with "the voice from the underground challenging accepted opinions" (Brombert 1). See Fyodor, Dostoyevsky. *Notes from the Underground*. 1864 (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1992): 90.

masculine heroism but which search, by opposing dominant forces, a redefinition of its meaning.

I.2. Recognised and Unrecognised Forms of Conscientious Objection

This section focuses on some of the forms of conscientious objection that gained prominence prior to the Great War. Even though each particular position deserves special attention, there were several lines of agreement over the wrongness of the War, some were officially recognised – religious, moral and political conscientious objectors – some were unrecognised – the Bloomsbury group, some intellectuals at Cambridge and the humanitarian pacifists. These oppositional attitudes were at the time viewed as anti-heroic, yet some of them may have had anti-heroic potential at one level, but not at another. This section, then, is devoted to the voices whose motivation for opposition in thought – and often in action – was grounded upon moral, humanistic, aesthetic, social or political reasons. Attention is paid to the continuities that may be found in the comparison between some of these anti-heroic ideas and those of the war poets under study.

With public and political opposition to compulsory enlistment, Britain was the only great European power not to have introduced a policy of conscription at the outbreak of the Great War.[86] In 1914 Kitchener was faced with the necessity of making a direct public appeal to encourage men to volunteer as he was one of the few who assumed that this war, unlike the previous ones, would be costly in manpower. The appeal was made through newspapers, but most successfully through the use of posters that were displayed in public places. The most famous was the image by Alfred Leete of the head and pointing finger of Field Marshall Earl Kitchener of Khartoum that was first published as a cover of the magazine *London Opinion* in September 1914, and used subsequently in a variety of posters with the slogan 'Your Country Needs you.' Other posters attacked the conscience of the average man: 'Are you in This?,' 'Be Honest with

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[86]   It is clear that the idea of introducing conscription was met with considerable resistance. (See footnote 49). Yet, the nation was being forced to recruit men on a large scale and create a new army out of nothing: "At the outbreak of the war the British Army was a small, professional force of 247,000 soldiers [the British Expeditionary Force], of which half was serving overseas in the British Empire. This army was supported by 224,000 recruits and 269,000 Territorials [the terriers]" (Arthur 23). Certainly not enough men to fight the Great War.

yourself,' 'Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War?,' among others (see fig. 5).

Fig. 5. "Kitchener World War I Recruitment Posters." Alfred Leete, 1914. *Imperial War Museum Collection Search*. Web. 10 December 2010. < http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>

As expected, Kitchener's public appeal boosted recruitment and the British were, at least for the first year and a half of the First World War, able to rely on volunteers. Indeed, the war began with an unparalleled wave of enthusiasm. The number of recruits in the early days was overwhelming, leading to "one of the most extraordinary mass movements in history" (Reader VIII). It seemed, as Robbins ironically suggests, that "the 'instincts of the herd' asserted themselves"

(692); the call to fight "the war to end all wars" provoked a huge revival of patriotism. However, as was argued in Chapter I.2, "the nation's general tone of opinion, its system of values and its conventional attitudes were set very largely by members of the upper middle class" and accepted by the grammar schools as well as by those who read the popular literature of the time, especially the books for boys (Reader 15).[87] So much so that "from July to November 1914, 253,195 men voluntarily enlisted in Great Britain" (Pegler 6); by January 1915, a million had enlisted. The Great War was the first military conflict to recruit such a vast amount of manpower. In effect, "every continental power mobilized millions of men. In all, six million went into the first battles – men doing their active service or recently sent to the reserve" (A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War* 22-23).

However, the flow of volunteers started to decrease after the initial outburst, and the War Cabinet became increasingly concerned that the British Army by itself would no longer be able to make up for the losses at the Western front. The social and institutional pressure on the men who had not volunteered from the very beginning started to be increasingly felt, to the point that, as Robbins writes, it "became necessary for them, in their own minds and in a social context, to clarify the nature of their objections" (693). While it was initially legal not to fight, those who chose not to do it faced social condemnation and received unambiguous euphemisms, being often regarded as 'the worms' or 'the white-feathered crew.' (John Rae 86) [88]

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[87] It is important to point, however, that not all the men who enlisted felt patriotic about the war. As Arthur puts it, "Some genuinely felt the patriotic urge to do their bit for king and country, others sought the excitement of the army as a change from the daily routine of dull, poorly paid jobs" (37).

[88] Discussing the public mood against war objectors, Kennedy draws attention to DH Lawrence's *Kangaroo*. The character of Richard Lovatt discusses the period between 1916 and 1919 when "a wave of criminal lust rose a possessed England [...] under a set of indecent bullies" (*Kangaroo* 212) and "the world lost its real manhood. Not for lack of courage to face death. Plenty of superb courage to face death. But no courage in any man to face his own isolated soul, and abide by its decision" (*Kangaroo* 213). This may not only be autobiographically true but it gives an idea of the general mood at the time. As Kennedy explains, "during this period Lawrence was threatened with conscription, humiliated by two army medical examinations [and] hounded by police and local patriots" (108).

Several legislative attempts were made to persuade unwilling men to enlist.[89] However, the failure to attain the "prescribed minimum" (John Rae 15) of recruits and the urgent need to deploy national resources led to the introduction of the first of a series of Military Service Acts that set out call-up regulations. The Military Service Act of January 1916 announced "the introduction of conscription for all fit single men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, the first of five such acts through the war" (Doyle 24). In Atkin's words, "for the first time, everyone – from humble clerks to country squires – was forced to bear arms from 1916" (10). Such measure brought new recruits indeed, but also discontent and active resistance. For war enthusiasts like C.E. Montague, conscription epitomised the loss of individual commitment and probably, the admission of the first anti-heroic attitudes into the army. In his words, "conscription, in any case, must be dilution. You may get your water more quickly by throwing the filter away, but don't hope to keep the quality what it was" (136).

The introduction of conscription caused widespread confusion; the government did not know how to implement the new system or how to handle objectors. While the Military Service Bill provided for certain grounds of exemption "on the ground of a conscientious objection to bearing arms" (John Rae 27), there did not exist a clearly distinct group of men to whom the term 'conscientious objectors' – or 'conchies' – could be applied. Indeed, the label was used as an umbrella term to refer to the people who opposed war or, in Robbins' words, "set themselves against 'experiencing' war" (691), but in fact included many different and conflicting voices.[90] It was precisely this diversity of voices that made it difficult to provide an adequate definition for the men comprised under this designation. Yet, diversity should cause no surprise as individual thoughts

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[89]   The National Registration Act (1915) allowed the Local Government Board to compile a detailed register of all the persons between fifteen and sixty five. "The Register showed that 2,179,241 single men of military age were not in the forces" (John Rae 14). In order to attain voluntary recruiting, a final effort was launched in October: the Derby Scheme, which used door-to-door visits to gather men or 'persuade' them to enlist.

[90]   Robbins speculates whether the first oppositional reactions to British intervention in the war among the radical-liberal-labour opinion can be regarded as 'conscientious" or rather as 'prudential, pragmatic or, as it were, methodological' (692), as they were mostly based on what was Britain's best interest. Indeed, the philosophical complexity of the concept of 'conscience' must be acknowledged as one of the drawbacks of the legislation.

and feelings were at the heart of the conscientious objector's argument. Each conscientious objection was a personal matter. Nevertheless, it was necessary to somehow unify basic common criteria to integrate conscientious objectors within a single category.

Of all the men recruited voluntarily or compulsorily during the war, 0,33% – 16,500 men – were conscientious objectors.[91] Their main effort centred on resistance "to have anything whatever to do with any obligation or condition originating in conscription" (Graham 16). The majority – and the most easily recognised by the government– of those who resisted compulsory military service did so in the name of their religious opinions about bearing arms.[92]

But as the workings of the Conscription Act revealed themselves, objectors came to realise that the defeat of conscription had to be the result of a wider struggle against warfare. Therefore, religious objectors started to work in cooperation with other organised groups who opposed conscription not so much for pacifist reasons as for political reasons. In many cases, however, it was difficult to

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[91]   Referring to their social background, Robbins claims that it "was mixed but skilled workers or lower middle-class clerical or professional workers probably predominated" (696). Most of them had had previous participation in Nonconformist chapel life or in ILP politics.

[92]   The most practical definition was the one that came to be used by the tribunals in the execution of the government's policy of conscience. It basically distinguished two large sources of religious objection:

> The first contained those religious bodies in whose teaching refusal of military service was explicit or implicit, and which were therefore predictable sources of conscientious objection in any human situation. When an applicant was a member of one of these bodies there was prima facie evidence for believing him to be a conscientious objector. (John Rae 72)

The most popular sources of predictable objectors were the Young Men's Service Committee of the Society of Friends – an organisation of Christian pacifists which grouped the Quakers of military age who rejected military service – and the Fellowship of Reconciliation which united Christian pacifists from many denominations. The Quakers were actively involved alongside other smaller denominations – the Christadelphians, the Plymouth Brethren, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Pentecostal Churches – in the organisation of a peace movement in Britain.

As to the second group of sources,

> … [they] provided no prima facie evidence of conscientious objection. These sources were the broad areas of religious, moral, and political belief, from which were drawn large or small numbers of conscientious objectors (or no conscientious objectors at all) according to the nature of the war or the character of the government. In this sense they were unpredictable sources of conscientious objection. (John Rae 72)

This group included those Christian pacifists that were unsupported by a specific teaching of their Church, for example the Methodists, among the Anglican Church and the Free Churches, and the Guild of the Pope's Peace, among Roman Catholics.

distinguish between religious-moral objection to war in all circumstances and the political objection to participating in this particular conflict. Anti-war reactions manifested themselves in such variety of forms that, as Robbins puts it, in many cases "Socialists became Quakers and Quakers became Socialists. There was, thus, a unitary vision in which religious language and political programme fused" (698).

Although the official view was that exemption should only be restricted to religious objectors, the wording of the conscience clause was vague and political objectors were not explicitly excluded from it. Not only was the provision of the law too ambiguous, its implementation also brought complications because it was the responsibility of "local tribunals [...] chiefly composed of unpaid, middle-aged patriots without legal training who had previously been prominent in recruiting activities" (Kennedy 108).[93]

However, despite the difficulties in applying the law to political objectors, "it was rare to find an objection that came within this definition of 'political'" (John Rae 82). Many of the moral objections had indeed been inspired by socialist views, which reflected a fusion of the political and the moral. Referring to socialists, John Rae claims that "it was characteristic of the majority of these men [...] that their socialist views were inseparable form a belief in the brotherhood of man and a rejection of war as a means of settling international disputes" (82).[94]

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[93]   There was further confusion when a new phrase was added to provide for the exemption of conscientious objectors; the paragraph read: "'Any certificate of exemption may be absolute, conditional, or temporary, as the Military Service Tribunal think best suited to the case, and in the case of an application on conscientious grounds may take the form of an exemption from combatant duties only" (John Rae 30-31). In fact, it was believed that the formation of a Non-Combatant Corps, whose members would supply combatants instead of performing combat duties, would satisfy most conscientious objectors. Although most agreed to this, there were those who consistently refused to agree to anything except absolute exemption. In fact, the weight of the law fell heavily on those who were the most zealous advocates of conscientious objection.

[94]   The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was the best organised and most active group for political objection. Among other socialist and radical organisations was the Union of Democratic Control and many radicals who had fought unsuccessfully against war joined it. The British Socialist Party was also a prominent source of conscientious objection, although here there was a bitter conflict between opponents and supporters of war.

So far, I have discussed the 'officially recognised' forms of conscientious objection.[95] But objection took many forms, and, "in many cases the boundaries between 'recognized' opposition and humanistic anti-war reaction could become blurred" (Atkin 11).[96] Outside organised religious or political protest groups, anti-war feelings were chiefly expressed through a group of intellectuals known as Bloomsbury. The Bloomsbury group began to meet about 1906 and included, among others, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Duncan Grant, E.M. Forster, and Roger Fry. While they regarded themselves fundamentally as "a group of friends" (Woolf, *Beginning*... 23), they shared a common "body of practice and a distinguishable ethos" that allowed for their growth and development as a "social and cultural group" (Williams 40). It was a group "from which civilization has spread outwards" (J. Johnstone X) and the most creative influence between the two wars. The possibility of freedom from the past was, indeed, the realisation of a common ethos: "the construction of a new society which should be free, rational, civilized, pursuing truth and beauty." (Woolf, *Sowing...* 160)

It is of course clear that the group's struggle for social, political, moral, intellectual and artistic change became a much wider movement than Bloomsbury itself. To their shared values of personal affection and aesthetic enjoyment, they provided the grounds for later and often broader rejections of traditional, hegemonic masculinities. As Hynes argues, "what they cared most about, whether it was art, or religion, or the intellectual life, or the working

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[95]   For more on the "officially recognised" conscientious objection in Britain see Cyril Pearce's *Comrades in Conscience: The Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001); David Boulton's *Objection Overruled* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1967); Lois Bibbings' *Telling Tales about Men* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 2009); Brock Millman's *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Gerda Richards Crosby's *Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957); Ewing, K.D. and C.A. Gearty's *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Sylvia E. Pankhurst's *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the First World War.* 1932 (London: Cresset Library, 1987).

[96]   This is because "a humanistic approach to the war sometimes involved a person affiliating him or herself to a political or religious group" (Atkin 6), and this caused opposition areas to overlap, particularly if that person also maintained a strong personal opinion that somehow distinguished him from the rest – as was the case of the intellectual Bertrand Russell, for instance.

class, was not a national but an international principle, and therefore a contradiction of the principle on which war – any war – is fought" (*A War Imagined* 86). That particular sense of universal consciousness translated into hostility to what they perceived as "that vast system of cant and hypocrisy" (Woolf, *Sowing...* 164). It is precisely this interest in social action against normative masculinities that contributed directly not only to their formation and distinction as a group, but also to their attitudes to the First World War and its consequences. In Williams' words, "Nothing more easily contradicts the received image of Bloomsbury as withdrawn and languid aesthetes than the remarkable record of political and organizational involvement" (49). It can be argued, however, that, like the war poets examined here, they all enjoyed the privileges of coming from 'good families;' yet, "this was the background from which Bloomsbury drew its strength and against which it rebelled" (Spalding 12). Indeed, "they were at once against its dominant ideas and values and still willingly, in all immediate ways, part of it" (Williams 51).[97]

Despite their sustained identity as a group, they reacted to the Great War in many different ways.[98] Each one of them had a more engaged and certainly more individual response and, in many cases, as Atkin suggests, "the edges of the fields of response and reaction were blurred [...]; hardly surprising when a

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[97]   Bloomsbury was not the first group to react against the dominant class from within the dominant class itself. Raymond Williams mentions William Goldwin and his circle (in the 1780s and 1790s) and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (in the mid-nineteenth century) as the immediate predecessors of Bloomsbury (See Williams pages 52-54). In "Bloomsbury: and After?," Davis examines Bloomsbury's heritage and discusses the novelists of the 30s – Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Anthony Powell and even Henry Green – as possible successors of the group because of their similar ideas, backgrounds and actions (70).

[98]   Indeed, political beliefs ranged from Liberal on the Bloomsbury right to Socialist on the Bloomsbury left. In "Bloomsbury and the 'Vulgar Passions,'" Quentin Bell stresses the difficulty of considering Bloomsbury as a whole to come to a description of their politics before 1914; however, he argues that they shared the following propositions: "They would have rejected the idea that the capitalist system was sacred. They were opposed to what they would have called 'jingoism,' that is, extreme nationalism and imperialism. On the whole they welcomed the social reforms of the then Liberal government. On the whole they felt that woman should have the vote. They had no particular affection for the hereditary Upper House or the union with Ireland. In all this they might be classed as liberal or radical, but they were also libertarian in that they felt that government had no right to punish immorality when it took a form which did not injure others, as for instance in the case of homosexuals" (Q. Bell 241).

conflict on such an unprecedented scale as the Great War presented such 'myriad faces' to the individual" (6). Yet, although each individual took their own interpretation, they all considered war to be a mortal blow against art and civilisation. There was thus a common humanistic-aesthetic reaction to war that, with its variants, valued the supremacy of the individual, the principle that human beings were an end in themselves, and that the main quest of life was self-realisation. In the matter of war objection, individuals should be allowed to decide independently, respecting nothing more than the sovereignty of their minds.

In *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945*, Ceadel accounts for what he calls a "humanitarian inspiration for pacifism" that comprised "all absolute objections to war based on its consequences for human existence" (14). Although it had not been officially recognised, humanitarian pacifism was, in Ceadel's opinion, "no less a dogma than religious or political pacifism" (14); yet he argues that it did not gain pre-eminence until after World War One, becoming only then "the major pacifist innovation of the inter-war period" (81). Evincing a condemnatory spirit, Ceadel grants quasi-humanitarian pacifist status to Bloomsbury as, in his view, they did not constitute a "pure form" (44) of pacifism. He argues that they objected to military service "for reasons which are not *pacifist* but which fall short, nevertheless, of a universalizeable, principled objection to all war" (9).[99] Moreover, he classes Bloomsbury as an "elitist" group emerging as a direct consequence of conscription and their belief that certain gifted individuals were more obliged to Beauty and Truth than to war. Despite their being "numerically insignificant" (44) – although "highly articulate and [prominent] on account of their artistic reputations" (44) – Ceadel condemns Bloomsbury's "connections and influence," their "facetiousness," and precisely what he regards as "elitist" attitudes. (45)[100]

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[99]   Moreover, Ceadel argues that some members of Bloomsbury, for example the celebrated philosopher Bertrand Russell, were opposed to this particular war but not to war in general. See page 93.

[100]   See Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980: 44-45) for the bizarre anecdotes of the conscientious objection trials of Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey and David Garnett. In Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, and in Lewis' *Blasting and Bombardiering* there are also references – and explicit condemnation – of the attitudes of those involved in the trials.

Contrasting Ceadel's view, Atkin argues that from the moment the Great War began and during the war itself, Bloomsbury did in fact profess a true humanitarian anti-war feeling "in all its humanistic, aesthetic and moral contexts" (3), both in Ceadel's "pure form" and combined with other anti-war motivations, "such as the war's perceived threat to individual liberty; its threat to personal and collective morals; its coarsening effect upon personality and on the capacity to appreciate ideals of beauty and art; and its detrimental effect upon the linear progression of civilisation [...]" (Atkin 5). Of Bloomsbury attitudes, Atkin claims:

> 'Humanistic' here not only stands for kindliness and a belief in mercy and friendship over difference but also in its more formal meaning, that of Classical studies and literary culture and an intellectual order that placed the mind of man and human interests first. It was a fear for the survival of this culture and of aestheticism, seen as a linear progression from the ancient Greeks and Romans via the Renaissance, that inspired many to oppose the destructive forces of the war. (4)

The humanistic-aesthetic fear that war would destroy civilisation was common to all those individuals who felt that their ideals of truth and beauty had been curtailed by the war.[101] In fact, one of Atkin's arguments is that anti-war reactions resembling those of Bloomsbury existed through a variety of individual experiences and in different forms, among which he includes the thoughts and feelings of the men examined in this thesis, who experienced the war at first hand and wrote about it.[102]

The significance of Bloomsbury to my thesis, thus, lies not only in the fact that they provided the conditions for the development of an ethos of individual objection into different backgrounds and contexts, but also in their symbolic value as a joint driving oppositional force and the possible continuities of thought

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[101]   The publication of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergag des Abendlandes*) in 1918, just as his homeland Germany had lost the war, gave expression to these fears, putting forward a cyclical theory of the rise and decline of civilisations which not only rationalised Germany's downfall as part of larger world-historical processes but played a significant role in orienting humanistic responses to war.

[102]   Atkin draws a parallel between Bloomsbury's attitudes and the representation of the experience of who he calls the "writers in uniform" (102), among them Aldington, Brenan, Plowman, Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Rosenberg, Blunden, Lawrence and Gurney.

that may be found in the comparison between Bloomsbury philosophy-aesthetics and the narratives under study. What also remains to be answered, as Caine observes, is "the extent to which the codes of behaviour and the assumptions of the men connected to Bloomsbury differed from – or resembled – the Victorian masculinity against which so many members of Bloomsbury seemed to be reacting" (272). Indeed, some strong continuity with Victorian values appeared to underlie Bloomsbury philosophy and aesthetics and permeate the writings of the war poets studied here as well.

With this in mind, I try to trace some of humanistic and aesthetic responses to war and heroism that may connect but also separate the individuals involved in Bloomsbury to the war poets studied here. In other words, I am interested in observing how these anti-heroic feelings spread from the civilian to the military world. Since the group assigned fundamental importance to "the notion of a person standing apart from the war and feeling aesthetic or humanistic reaction against it" (Atkin 4), I begin by briefly outlining Bloomsbury's ideas and then I focus on three of the most emblematic individual reactions to war – Russell's, Keynes' and Strachey's – highlighting their relationship to some of the war poets'.[103] I put forward the view that any serious analysis of the representation of war and the heroic during and after World War One must consider Bloomsbury as a significant influence without disregarding the ambivalence of some of their reactions, and their importance both in their own right and in the development of alternatives to the group's conviction that war only brought the destruction of art and intellect.

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[103]   Although Virginia Woolf is an undeniably essential part of Bloomsbury, it was mainly Strachey and Keynes' ideas which anticipate a new form of masculinity – they were homosexual, highly intelligent and literate and lacked the expected sporting abilities – which distinguished them from other men of their class and allowed them to jealously preserve the exclusive masculine prerogative of close emotional and spiritual relationship which they had enjoyed at Cambridge as members of the Society of Apostles. It is important to note, however, that there was little change from Victorian masculinities in Bloomsbury's attitudes toward women: "They took absolutely for granted their superiority to women and their entitlement to both social and sexual privilege. Like earlier generations of Cambridge students, they lived in a particularly privileged masculine world in which women were rarely known or thought about – and when they were, it was inevitably as inferiors" (Caine 276).

When Atkin claims that Bloomsbury reflected in their work "the moral and aesthetic core for some of the most significant humanistic reactions to the war" (Atkin 17), he is in fact stressing that the group's philosophic and aesthetic responses to war challenged previous convictions, beliefs and ideas. Bloomsbury voiced the sentiments of the civilisation to which they belonged opposing, as Bell suggests, "the dark side of the religion of nationalism" (Q. Bell 243) and, most importantly, "those unreasoning emotions which [Keynes] was later to call 'the vulgar passions'" (Q. Bell 245), which seemed to have taken possession of the British at the beginning of war. The driving force behind the group's philosophy was G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903). Moore's influential work became, in Johnstone's words, "Bloomsbury's Bible" (20), particularly to those who had attended Cambridge and were part of the Cambridge Apostles and its circle of friends. *Principia Ethica* marked for them, as Keynes puts it, "the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth, we were the forerunners of a new dispensation, we were not afraid of anything" (82). There is a central passage in *Principia Ethica* from which the whole of Bloomsbury's philosophy and action appears to have developed:

> By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects [...] it is only for the sake of these things – in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist – that anyone can be justified in performing any public or private duty; [...]they are the *raison d'étre* of virtue; [...] it is they [...] that form the rational ultimate end of human action and the sole criterion of social progress [...] (qtd in Johnstone 41).

Yet, apart from the pleasures of friendship and love and the just appreciation of beautiful objects, there were also other goods that Bloomsbury regarded as essential and came, in turn, to be raised to a similar status. For example the pursuit of knowledge and social and political action, both central to the group and overlooked by Moore.[104]

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[104]   On the other hand, Moore's conviction that there were certain rules of conduct that the individual should follow was disregarded, as Bloomsbury repudiated any responsibility to obey moral obligations or inner sanctions. The morals contained in the chapter "Ethics in Relation to Conduct" were therefore ignored. As Keynes puts it, "we accepted Moore's religion, so to speak, and discarded his morals. Indeed, in our opinion, one of the greatest advantages of his religion,

However, except for the few changes introduced to *Principia Ethica* to adapt it to Bloomsbury's needs, the philosophical system as a whole remained unaltered. Bloomsbury distrusted convention, tradition and authority so the idea of having a scientific basis for an idealistic philosophy was more than welcome. In their view, it was the civilised man who had to decide what was good: "The civilized man […] trusts reason, and has a sound sense of values that is cultivated by, and evidenced in, a fine appreciation of works of art" (Johnstone 39).

Together with G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, the thinking of Cambridge mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell also acted as a philosophical guiding light in many of Bloomsbury's discussions before 1914. Although he opposed this war, Russell was not a total pacifist: "On this question I find myself in the somewhat painful position of holding that no single one of the combatants is justified in the present war, while not taking the extreme Tolstoyan view that war is under all circumstances a crime" (Russell, "The Ethics of War" 127). Indeed, Russell was what Ceadel regards as a "utilitarian" pacifist (81). To him, any action towards the promotion of the greater good of humanity was justified, even war itself in some cases. Yet, his opposition to this particular war stemmed fundamentally from personal belief. The conviction that reason, civilisation, the power of negotiation over force and the freedom of the individual should guide our beliefs and actions was the bedrock of his creed.

Bloomsbury's reaction to war was firstly associated with Russell's beliefs, particularly the search for a negotiated peace and opposition to militarism. However, the group adopted a diversity of standpoints "ranging from that of Leonard Woolf and of Maynard himself who were ready to shoulder what we may figuratively call 'a musket' to that of Duncan Grant and Gerald Shove who attempted as far as possible to avoid any kind of aggressive action" (Q. Bell 245).

Such differences of temperament and opinion made Russell isolated not only from Bloomsbury but from other Cambridge academics and anti-war organisations in which he had taken part. Having a strong individual position,

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was that it made morals unnecessary – meaning by 'religion' one's attitude towards oneself and the ultimate and by 'morals' one's attitude towards the outside world and the intermediate" (82).

taking full charge of his own destiny and putting his beliefs into action made Russell feel, at times, a man truly alone with his cause.[105] He became so immersed in the Great War – both mentally and physically – that at times he was brought near total despair and internally divided, as if living on two different levels

> one superficial, in which I have plenty of life and good spirits, and another underneath, where I feel lost and worn out and isolated and rather hopeless – that is the deeper feeling but I keep on fighting it off with an effort of will. Nothing can be done for it while the war lasts. (Griffin 96)

But Russell was not alone. The poets in the trenches faced similar contradictions: "lots of fellows who *feel* things far more than most of us, sensitive, imaginative fellows" (Herbert 126) who, despite their experiencing war firsthand and dealing with its consequences, tried "to keep alive a spirit of artistic insight" (Blunden, *Undertones of War* 23). For these men war represented a clash between duty and individual conscience, between art and reality. Yet, they tried to build a learning experience from it. In a letter to H.D., Richard Aldington recognises that "I have lost a great deal, I am handicapped in ways you cannot imagine, but this abrupt withdrawal from the rapid current of my life into something alien & painful may, perhaps, be as salutary for me as prison for the author of *De Profundis*!" (Zilboorg 28). Gerald Brenan also sees war "as wicked and senseless" and complains about "the boredom which went on and on" (213). Yet, he recognises that "in the contact with the war itself I do find something" and that "the blood and the bodies, the grass and birds and flowers, and the continual expectations of death , which sometimes I think of as though it were a relief – all this is more or less life-bringing" (223).

Like Russell, these men were passionate about their ideas and sought meaning and purpose in their actions. Perhaps the experience of war helped them reach a

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[105]   Those opposed to the possibility of war gathered at Lady Ottoline Morrell's house in what was known as the Union of Democratic Control. Even if Russell acknowledged the individual talents and intelligence of the Bloomsbury acolytes, he grew increasingly disgusted with the UDC by what he considered a defeatist attitude and the inability to persevere with the cause of pacifism. Indeed, as Atkin puts it, "although Russell enjoyed personal involvement with Bloomsbury (prompted by their Cambridge links and common aesthetics) he was able and willing to strike out intellectually and practically where most others faltered" (52).

new level of understanding in which intellectual freedom and the necessity of experience became reconciled. If, as Brenan observes, "the medicine [they] needed was reality" (223), then, the reality of war gave them a reason for living. In a letter to Laurence Binyon, Rosenberg also claims:

> I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on. (Rosenberg 37)[106]

Despite his loss of faith in a world that he considered to be at war with itself, Russell also believed that aggression could be channelled into more constructive endeavours. He trusted that the creative energies of men could become an antidote to violence even if the potential for good within them was being suffocated by war. He articulated, thus, the importance "to keep what is creative in vital impulses, and at the same time to turn into other channels the part which is at present destructive" (Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* 161). An avid reader of Russell's work, Read validates this when he asserts the importance of "trying to maintain an abstract aesthetic ideal in the midst of terrorful and inhuman events" (Read, *The Contrary Experience* 176).

Despite the wavering over whether the experience of war would enlighten or damage creativity, the figure of the poet as "prophet [...] champion and consoler" (Hibberd, *Poetry...* 31) was always rescued from what was regarded as an emotional and reflective impasse. In the attempt to contain the suffering of the present, the status of man and artist achieves a superior hierarchy. Observing the many wounded soldiers arriving in Bagnères, Owen echoes Russell as he writes to his mother: "I feel my own life all the more precious and more

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[106]   Rosenberg's Jewishness and working-class background made him an exception among the war poets: "Being a private meant Rosenberg led a harder life than the officer-poets while not having to suffer their strong sense of responsibility and […] guilt" (Wilson, "Visions from the Trenches"). This allowed him to focus on his art while performing his duties and to see war from a more visceral and realistic point of view. Rosenberg wrote and sent poems off to journals during the three years he was at the front. His only reason to live was the pursuit of poetry. He hoped it would improve in times of peace, as he would be able to understand war and himself more completely.

dear" (119). Not only does he assert his poetic fight but he also laments that "the Minds which were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years, are being annihilated" (119). In such circumstances, Montague vindicates poetic contemplation: "the power of taking delight in a thing" (Montague 213), while Sorley chooses to escape war through spiritual freedom– he claims that "Sorley is the Gaelic for wanderer" (275) – over "the tyranny of discipline, and the undisguised boredom we feel toward one another" (265).

In common with Russell and the war poets discussed above, John Maynard Keynes was also engaged in a process of self-discovery that involved negotiating, grasping and even undermining the Victorian hero myth. When war began in 1914 Keynes was working as a consultant to the Treasury. Although his work for the government indicated a moral commitment to the war, war pressure began to affect his sense of self, particularly after the death of some of his King's College's friends at the front. Within this context, a complex relation between public duty and private experience and feelings began to develop: He was "one of the first of Bloomsbury to find their initial view of the war altered but who, due to his association with the government via his work for the Treasure, was viewed by his friends as perhaps not sufficiently anti-war" (Atkin 21). However, he had the chance to show a public commitment to pacifism as he was able to use his position in the government to help his friends with their applications for military exemption; later on he applied for it himself.[107]

This anti-war sentiment reached its peak after the war, particularly in his attack on the harsh terms imposed on Germany by the "Big Four" at the Treaty of Versailles, contained within *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). In his view, the peace settlement had to be founded upon a respect for values: "The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation, of degrading the lives of millions of human beings, and of depriving a whole nation of happiness

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[107]   He did not use his right to be exempted on grounds of work of national importance but submitted an application as a conscientious objector. Such an act shows the intensity of Keynes' anti-war beliefs, which he expressed regardless of the consequences. Working on Keynes' *Collected Writin*gs, Elizabeth Johnstone discovered a letter which, in her view, demonstrated that Keynes' conscientious objection was *bona fide*: "his attitude was that of many of the most honest and sincere liberals of the day and reflects a liberal view of the rights of the individual that is almost forgotten to-day (E. Johnson 165).

should be abhorrent and detestable – abhorrent and detestable [...]" (Keynes qtd in Q. Bell, 244). Instead of earning him the label 'pro-English' or 'pro-Europe,' his sarcastic portrait of the Allies was severely criticised and turned him into a 'pro-German' intellectual in the eyes of the British public.[108]

Like Keynes, Sassoon also felt the need to make a public protest. Albeit a decorated warrior – he had been the 'mad Jack' who stormed a German trench single-handedly – he turned into a conscientious objector facing a potential court martial for his famous 'Soldier's Declaration.' The account of Sherston's "wilful defiance of military authority" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 224) may well correspond exactly to Sassoon's own behaviour in May 1917, when he decided to make his celebrated anti-war statement with the help of Bertrand Russell.[109] The protest criticises the political decisions behind the war, which in Sherston's view, had become a war of "aggression and conquest;" the suffering of combatants was being "deliberately prolonged" for "evil and unjust" ends (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 224-225). Sherston-Sassoon was to be court-martialled for this, but his friend "David Cromlech" (modelled on Robert Graves), managed to arrange a medical board that conveniently labelled his defiance as "shell-shock."[110] However, during his confinement in "Slateford" (Craiglockhart War Hospital), Sassoon felt, like Keynes, a social responsibility that went beyond his personal motivations (*Sherston's Progress* 21). Overwhelmed by the need to validate the nobility of his conscientious objection and his poetry, Sassoon felt he should share the sufferings of the individuals on whose behalf he had made the protest: "going back to the War as soon as possible was my only chance of

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[108]   This is what *The Times* had to say about his reaction:

> How came it, they may ask, that the man who could write the pages of incisive portraiture, not to say caricature, that fill the chapter on 'The Conference,' came to hold the position of technical adviser to one of the most technical Departments of State? How, unless his bias had been throughout akin to that of the conscientious objector, could he place the Allies persistently on the same moral level as Germany in regard to the war? [...]. Mr. Keynes may be a 'clever' economist. He may have been a useful Treasury official. But in writing this book, he has rendered the Allies a disservice for which their enemies will, doubtless, be grateful. (*The Times* qtd in Robinson 21)

[109]   The loss of his brother Hamo and his friend David Thomas, as well as his involvement with Bloomsbury – Lady Ottoline Morrell and the pacifists – may have also contributed to his anti-war declaration. Sassoon vividly describes the encounter with Lady Ottoline in *Siegfried's Journey* (7-11) and Hart-Davis includes Lady Ottoline's diary entry in Sassoon's *Diaries* (103).

[110]   See chapter 24 of Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All that* for his version of this episode. Graves regarded Sassoon as one of the bravest men he knew but he also acknowledged Sassoon's profound rejection of war: "He varied between happy warrior and bitter pacifist" (286).

peace" (*Sherston's Progress* 35). He rejoined the Royal Welch Fusiliers in December 1917 and spent March and April in the Middle East with the 25th Battalion. Although he insisted on "the futility of war as much as ever," it was "the patience and simple decency" of the ordinary soldier that kept him at the front (*Sherston's Progress* 98). His friend Julian Dadd writes of him: "[He] had a bit of a Bertrand Russell in [him] as well as a V.C." (Dadd 119-124).

It is interesting to compare Keynes and Sassoon's story with that of Max Plowman's. Alhtough Plowman felt he was fighting for a right cause – "I still hope to 'do my bit in the Great War'" (*A Subaltern…* 199) – he nevertheless began to acknowledge the purposelessness of war and was gradually transformed by this realisation:

> Nevertheless, it seems to me that as imagination is the great distinguishing characteristic of man, to which he has attained late in his growth, it is not improbable that when this quality in him has grown a little stronger, not only will war be impossible to man, but he will find higher uses for his energies in peace than the blind and pitiless self-assertion which at present makes so many of his activities forms of war. (*A Subaltern…* 179-180)

Plowman's criticism, although often sharp, was always made in a quiet way. It was only at the war's end that he wrote to the adjutant of the 52nd Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, resigning his commission, with a request that his decision should be communicated to the commanding officer. In January 1917, he had been blown up by a shell and it had taken a year to recover completely – like Sassoon, he was in the care of Dr Rivers in Craiglockhart – and to be pronounced fit for general service. However, the CO's intention was to use Plowman's coming medical board to invalid him out of the army on mental health grounds. The attempt failed as no sign of mental illness could be discovered. At his court martial on 4 April, precipitated by his refusal to report to the Reserve Battalion of West Yorkshire Regiment at Whitley Bay, he gave these reasons for his resignation:

> I believe that if I now continued to act as a soldier I should be guilty of the greatest crime it is possible for a human being to commit. Murder done in the heat of passion: rape committed through uncontrollable lust: treachery due to moral weakness, are venial sins compared with the crime of calmly resolving to

destroy the lives of unknown persons whose individual characters – whether supremely good or evil – you have no means of knowing, but who, nevertheless, you must endeavour to kill for the solitary crime of being obedient to the laws of their own nation. (*Bridge into the Future* 772) [111]

While Keynes, Sassoon and Plowman restrained their personal feelings against this war until it was no longer possible to hide them, Lytton Strachey was known as "a strident antimilitarist and conscientious objector" (Avery 185), and, perhaps, "more responsive from the first to the changing circumstances of a nation at war and his part in it" (Atkin 25). So much so that he did not doubt in publicly appearing as pro-German, if that was what was required to be automatically exempted from war service.[112] He exposed his conscientious objection before a Local Advisory Committee, but his application for absolute exemption was postponed pending a medical examination.[113]

The audacity – and theatricality – of his public objection, was extended to his literary work. As Hynes argues, despite the lack of "war experience and unburdened by its history, [Strachey] became the first post-war historian, and the creator of a new, post-war literary kind – satiric history" (*A War Imagined* 244). Like Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* was at war with the forces of unreason: "nothing sweetens love – even love of one's country – so much as a little common sense" (Strachey "The Claims of Patriotism" 231). Yet, Strachey's work was forward-thinking in another sense: "it is anti-heroic and deflating in its treatment of its subjects" (Hynes *A War Imagined* 245). Not only did he rethink hero-worship and militarism from a

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[111]   Plowman was cashiered and dismissed from the army on 21 May 1918. See Malcolm Pittock, "Max Plowman and the Literature of the First World War" *The Cambridge Quarterly* 33.3 (2004), for a detailed analysis of Plowman's judicial process.

[112]   As Atkin observes, "on 2 March 1916, [...] [Strachey] stated [that] his conscientious objection was not based on religious grounds, but upon 'moral considerations' and although he could not say that *all* wars were wrong, his objection, he stated, was directed 'not simply against the present war.' He concluded that he would not act against his personal convictions, 'whatever the consequences may be'" (Strachey qtd in Atkin 28). Strachey's conscientious objection was his first public expression of humanitarian pacifism and opposition to international violence.

[113]   A few days later he was rejected as medically unfit. Apparently the Court was not utterly convinced of Strachey's conscientious plea: "Strachey himself may have been partly responsible for the tribunal's reluctance to accept his moral argument. His performance during his hearing was, by all accounts, deliberately mocking in tone" (Avery 188). See also footnote 100.

rational point of view, but also mocked the "exemplary exponents of what he believed to be the pernicious and hardly heroic, blessed, or merciful worldview that [...] had materialized itself in the unprecedented carnage of the Great War" (Avery 186). *Eminent Victorians* inflicts an unorthodox death blow to the Victorian hero-heroine – "the lady with the lamp, the hero of Khartoum, the great leaders of religion and public school education [bringing] a gentle power of ridicule which was, in its effect, political and which was enormously welcome to a nation which, in the summer of 1918, was sick and tired of heroics" (Q. Bell 246). Strachey makes no references to the Great War itself, but attacks, with his most eloquent and sarcastic rhetoric, the powerful shaping forces in English culture before the war, that is the Victorian hero myth, which he regards as directly accountable for it.

Despite his anti-war stand, Strachey nevertheless exposed a double-edged ethics involving the disapproval of Victorian moral conventions on one hand, and the construction of a worship of heroic friendship on the other. As Avery suggests, when "faced with the muddle and futility of the Great War, Strachey responds with a mixture of satirical bitterness and scorn, on the one hand, and unflagging hope and faith in humanity's capacity for ethical goodness, on the other" (190). It appears that these two opposite emotions are in conflict in his work as:

> One inspired some of the finest satirical biography in English literature and led to a transformation of the genre; the other fueled an equally passionate desire to theorize an ethics of friendship – the belief that, as Saint John writes, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' (Avery 190).

His preoccupation with personal affection as the only secure anchor in a world in crisis emerges as the most suitable alternative to the apparent failure of the Victorian heroic ideal. Strachey articulates the belief that male friendship could both subvert conformity to Victorian morality and challenge the imperial ethos that demanded such conformity.[114] This shift of values draws a close similarity of

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[114]   As Caine argues, friendship was a frequent topic of discussion at the Society or Apostles: "As one might expect from a group that had all shared a classical education, this discussion combined an ideal of intense brotherly love with a sense of the close connection to classical Greek

patterns between Bloomsbury and the war poets, most of whom imbued friendship with a heroic dimension.[115]

Russell, Keynes and Strachey's ideas – often in conflict with one another – are just examples of the many similarities and contradictions about the theme of war and the heroic that may be found in the narratives studied here. [116] The contradiction between ethics and war and the implicit recognition that war was so deeply embedded in human nature that it could not be eradicated permeate the text of most war poets. As Read argues:

> But war is a tragic paradox: it destroys that which it should preserve. To any right-minded person life is sacred: so that the question of war becomes a question of values: is such an ideal *which can only be attained by war*, of more value than life? Modern war is largely actuated by economic aggression. And that 'ideal' can hardly be compared with life. But a war for justice, for liberty, he who loses his life in such a war shall find it. (*The Contrary Experience* 81)[117]

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ideas about male intellectual companionship and about the importance of close emotional relationships between older and younger men" (275).

[115] The heroic connotations of male bonding will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this thesis.

[116] It was perfectly possible during the war, even normal, to experience dialectic views on it. A soldier in arms could indeed be a pacifist, as was the case of Rosenberg, who opposed war from the very beginning. While he was never outspoken about conscientious objection, five of his friends were objectors and two had been imprisoned for their beliefs. He wrote to Sydney Schiff in the autumn of 1915: "I feel about [joining the army] that more men means more war, – beside the immorality of joining without patriotic convictions" (Rosenberg 26). His Jewish education had imbued him with a strong conviction that war was evil, but being without work made him feel so powerless that he had no choice but to enlist: "I could not get the work I thought I might so I have joined this Bantam Battalion (as I was too short for any other) which seem to be the most rascally affair in the world" (Rosenberg 27). Once at the front and overwhelmed amidst an unprecedented number of volunteers he confesses:

> I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war. I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over … I thought if I'd join there would be the separation allowance for my mother. At Whitehall it was fixed up that 16/6 would be give including the 3/6 a week deducted from my 7/-. It's now between 2 and 3 months since I joined; my 3/6 is deducted right enough, but my mother hasn't received a farthing… [sic] (Rosenberg 27)

[117] Read supports the idea of "the just war," governed by the principles of legitimate authority, proportionality and necessity. His moral defence of war appears as an acceptable alternative to the fluctuation between pacifism and jingoism. See Thomas Aquinas, "War" in *The Summa Theologiae Volume 35 Consequences of Charity.* Trans. Thomas R. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006): 81-83.

Apart from the fact that opposition to war had different shadings and meanings, including Read's justification of war in the name of justice and liberty, it is important to note that pure pacifism was only an idealistic doctrine before the Great War. Even when the war broke out, pacifists were few in number compared with all the men who volunteered for the British Army. The anxieties and traumas induced by the war had not yet achieved the status of the Ghost myth and pacifism, such as the one professed by Bloomsbury in 1914, would only become a deep-rooted conviction after World War One.

As the figures discussed in this section show, it would be wrong to give the impression that the philosophical considerations of political and religious objectors, humanitarian pacifists, Cambridge and Bloomsbury intellectuals conditioned recruitment when the Great War broke out in August 1914. The little influence of these minority groups could not compare with the broad reach of imperial propaganda designed to shape the opinion of the majority. However, although disregarded at the time, and now almost forgotten, these early cases of opposition to war make an important point that the Ghost myth seemed to conceal. According to the Ghost myth, protest narratives did not emerge until approximately a decade after the war, and were the direct consequence of the military experience at the front. Certainly this may apply to most of the war poets examined here; but war had its opponents in the civilian world from the very beginning. As Hynes states:

> They have their place in the cultural history of the war years: from the beginning of the war they kept alive the spirit of opposition, until it could find imaginative expression in the works of the poets and painters of the later war years. It is important to recognize that opposition to the war did not begin over there at Ypres or the Somme or Passchendaele. Dissent had been thought in England before any of those battles were fought, though it was only after the battles that it could be given imaginative form. (*A War Imagined* 87)

Indeed, even if these feelings would become commonplace in time, turning into fundamental means by which post-war attitudes would examine the pre-war past, the moral basis had already been established here.

I.3. A World at War: "The War to End All Wars"

Among the reasons why the Ghost myth came about and remains so powerful today is the destructive nature of modern war. In this section, I draw attention to how the war's very nature – "its duration and intensity, its geographical extension, its effects on the state and its relationship with its citizens" (Strachan, *The First World War* 1137) – paved the way for the ideas generated then and reinforced after the war. Particular attention is paid to the impact of new technology on warfare and to the metaphor of the 'war machine,' which marked a new stage in military history characterised by the encounter with mass death.

Nobody doubts that the Great War has, as A.J.P. Taylor claims, "cut deep into the consciousness of modern man" (*The First World War* 11). The memories of the "war to end all wars" are still repeatedly thought over and transformed in the minds of those born long after the 1918 Armistice.[118] The guns fell silent on the Western Front ninety-two years ago, but the memories have neither died nor faded away. The Great War still "remains contested territory" and the subject of intense popular fascination (Jay Winter, Parker and Habeck 1). This is reflected in the massive range of responses in all media forms that have resulted from it. Indeed, the variety and number of reactions at the beginning of the twenty-first century seem to be increasingly on the rise: "scholarship has deepened, and often revised and transformed […]; it has also taken the history of the war in fresh directions, from campaigns and strategy to mentalities and culture" (Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History...* 1). The need to explain and articulate the meaning of a war – "at the same time familiar, unreachable, and terribly important" (Jay Winter, Parker and Habeck 1) – against which soldiers found themselves without words appears to justify such outpouring of print, television and film responses. [119]

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[118]   The phrase the 'war to end all wars' was popularised by H.G. Wells in 1914. For Wells, the Great War was also 'the last war.' From the perspective of the Second World War, both expressions may be regarded as semantically ambiguous: "Whilst the war was being fought it was the last war meaning 'final,' a war to end war itself. By the 1930s as the prospect of a Second World War loomed the idea of the 'last war' began to mutate into meaning the 'previous' war" (Gregory 5).

[119]   Popular fascination with the Great War assumes new urgency and greater clarity under the impact of more recent wars – the Malvinas, Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The persistence of what

Since my focus is not the Great War "as a narrative of military actions" but rather as an "agent of change" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* XI), I do not discuss the military-historical events themselves.[120] Instead, I analyse the three labels often used to describe the Great War's scale and effects – "'global,' `total' and 'modern'" (Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History...* 1) – to sustain the claim that the reality of World War One called into question a wide range of assumptions on which art, particularly literature, and civilisation had been based.

As the war implied the massive mobilisation of the population of most European countries to fight against the strength of a great rival on European land, the label 'global' seems to be justified. Although Europe was certainly not the world, its political and economic prominence brought both intercontinental involvement and global implications with it. Besides, the fighting was conducted in the Middle East and some regions of Africa, with short outbursts in Central Asia and the Far East. With such vast territories under war, as Lewis observes, "mobilization was everywhere" and neutrality became almost untenable (70).

The term 'total' is mainly used to refer to the devastating blow inflicted on manpower – "One in eight was killed. Over one in four was wounded" (Jay Winter, *The Great War* 72).[121] The Western Front was the scene of most of the

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Dawson regards as the "pleasure culture of war" (see footnotes 11 and 18 of this thesis) is still unequivocally demonstrated by current popular support to the figure of the soldier as bearer of British national values. Yet, idealised masculinities emerge as the result of a complex dialectical process involving both the divergence and convergence of views and beliefs.

[120]   Unlike the Boer War, the main events surrounding the Great War are widely known and have received due thought and research. Therefore, I just focus on the cultural and social contextual settings to the conflict.

[121]   The following figures and statistics can be used to measure the extent of the losses and the destruction caused by the Great War. Of the nearly 50% of men of military age sent to the front in Europe, more than 9 million were killed: 723,000 (Britain and Ireland), 1,327,000 (France) and 71,000 (French colonies), 1,811,000 (Russia), 578,000 (Italy), 114,000 (United States), 198,000 (Commonwealth), 2,037,000 (Germany) and 1,100,000 (Austria-Hungary). 280,000 of the wounded soldiers, were disfigured for life – having lost limbs, eyes or having irreversible facial wounds – not counting the thousands who fell stricken by the effect of the gas used in the battlefields. (See Winter, *The Great War* 65-98). Moreover, violence, both suffered and caused, led to irreparable psychological damage in many cases. The Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock, Cmd 1734 (London, 1922) gives the following statistics: "Two years after

fighting and the losses: "Conditions there – exhausting nerve-racking, nightmarish, loathsome, as well as dangerous – were experienced by a high proportion of combatants, since this was always the most important theatre of war" (Rutherford, *Literature of War* 67). Bearing in mind their involvement in the production of war-related goods and the material deprivation to which they were subjected, the consequences of war were total for civilians as well. As the war progressed, violence became part of the daily life of every citizen and soldier as more and more manpower and resources came to be devoted to it. The application of male universal conscription in 1916 and the mobilisation of men's minds through massive pro-war propaganda also had a totalising or, as Strachan observes, "totalitarian" effect (*The Oxford Illustrated History...* 3).

As to the 'modern' nature of war, battles were decided by a new kind of military confrontation characterised by the use of technology and more effective means of communication.[122] The vastly increased fire-power, together with the use of new weapons and the deployment of mass armies, put an end to the traditional war of movement and short sieges that had been expected for the Western Front. However, although it had been initially assumed that, as Taylor remarks, "it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided" (*The First World War* 22), mechanisation led to a deadly stalemate, the whole battle-area being dominated by artillery and No Man's Land being threatened by machine-gun fire. A static troglodyte world of trenches was dug to protect the soldiers' lives and grind down the attacking enemy: "Primitivism, not modernism, was the first reaction to industrialized war" (Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History...* 4). As it was hardly possible to attempt an attack on well-armed defenders without facing inevitable slaughter, soldiers just stayed in their trenches and, as Fussell writes, "hoped for something other than a direct hit or made [themselves] as small as possible in a funk-hole" (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 46), trying to keep their strength of mind and body while being

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the Armistice, some 65,000 ex-servicemen were drawing disability pensions for neurasthenia; of these, 9,000 were still undergoing treatment" (Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change..." 227).

[122]   Technological innovations included the smokeless gunpowder, the machine gun, TNT and other high explosives, heavy artillery, the quick-firing breech-loaded infantry rifle, the submarine, the airplane and later during the war, grenades, trench mortars, poison gases, flamethrowers and tanks were also added to the list (Habeck 99).

shelled. Firepower technology had gained the upper hand over *manoeuvre* tactics and this implied not only stagnation but the dehumanisation of warfare. However, until the Army's High Commanders realised how ineffectual it had been to pursue an armament race without adapting military tactics to the new conditions of industrialised warfare, the clash between modern technology and nineteenth-century warfare caused a large number of casualties on both sides without significant advances being made.

One of the defining characteristics of this war, thus, was "the encounter with mass death" (Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* 3). The unparalleled destruction caused by technology required a new understanding of death, which became, in Vickroy's words, "a universal/essential element of human experience that cannot be fully confronted" (224). Not only did soldiers suffer the long-lasting effects of the loss of the other but they had to face their own mortality as well and that "called for a much greater effort to mask and transcend death in war than had ever been made before" (Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* 4). In an environment in which death was omnipresent – soldiers "inhabited worlds constructed, literally, of corpses" (Booth 50) – and life hung by a tenuous thread, it was almost impossible to try to bolster some sense of control over experience. Soldiers used unburied bodies as cover, to lean their guns on, and as points of reference when going on night patrol. Their lives were bound with death to such an extent that it was almost as if death was part of the ground they stepped on: "In the earth here there are several layers of dead bodies and in places the pounding of the shells has brought up the oldest and placed them or scattered them across the newer ones" (Barbusse 248). Soldiers had been confined to a doomed and inevitable setting; in this "waste land," the future could only be imagined "as composed of survivors perched on a mountain of corpses" (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory…* 17).

The encounter with mass death propelled the metaphor of the 'war machine' or, as Habeck claims, "*l'imaginaire* of industrialized war" (101). Developing much faster than the human understanding of it, technology turned into an autonomous and sinister reality, "a unified system of force" (Leed 31), "the mechanical human beast" (Pick 3). Even if men could no longer see it as a means of progress and improvement of the human condition, they were forced to deal with it directly and to try to make sense of it. It is not surprising, then, to find in the war poets' texts both awe at the technological advancement and fear

that the machine had run out of control. Jones reproduces these "Manichaean views" (Pick 4), arguing "that our culture has accelerated every line of advance into the territory of physical science is well appreciated – but not so well understood are the unforeseen, subsidiary effects of this achievement…" (XIV). Machinery does not release soldiers from their duties; in fact it traps them into the immobility of trench warfare and forces them to adapt to technology in order to survive. As Jones writes, "must we do gas-drill, be attuned to many newfangled technicalities, respond to increasingly exacting mechanical devices; some fascinating and compelling, others sinister in the extreme; all requiring a new and strange direction of the mind, a new sensitivity certainly, but at a considerable cost" (XIV).

Like Jones, most war poets were haunted by the image of technology as a tool of destruction. The metaphors chosen to describe it – as either supernatural (monstrous or demonic) or subhuman (a force of nature) – show how they had to continually adjust to it. Even the Futurists, who had glorified the machine in their pre-war visions of a technological future, seemed to discover that industrialised combat was not as beautiful as they had suggested.[123] After working as a Red Cross ambulance driver, stretcher-bearer and private in the Medical Corps in France, the painter Christopher Nevinson returned to England and abandoned his previous celebration of brutal mechanistic imagery, believing that "war was now dominated by machines, and that men were mere cogs in the mechanism" (117). In *Returning to the Trenches* (1914) and *The Machine-Gun* (1915) Nevinson materialises his recent discoveries by using machinery, strong dynamism, hard lines and grim-faced, dehumanised soldiers (see figs. 6 and 7). As the *Westminster Gazette*'s art critic argues: "The soldiers themselves look as though they were the component parts of a formidable engine, drawn together by some irresistible force of attraction" (qtd in *A War Imagined* 164).[124]

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[123]   In his Futurist manifest, published in *Le Figaro* in 1909, Marinetti had made the new technology of the automobile and the rapid changes made possible by the motion pictures his artistic standard. However, his artistic romance with technology, which included the airplane, the car, the motorcycle and even the war machine, which he worshipped as a means of cleansing the modern world – "the world's only hygiene-militarism" of the moribund past – would be doomed to failure when World War One broke out.

[124]   Rosenberg's first war poem, "Marching (As Seen from the Left File)" (1915-16), recalls some of the Futurist elements in the work of Nevinson, his classmate at Slade School: "Like

Fig. 6. Nevinson, Christopher R.W. *La Mitrailleuse* (Machine-Gun), 1915. Tate Collection, London. Web. 20 Sept 2010. <http://www.tate.org.uk/>. Fig. 7. Nevinson, Christopher R.W. *Returning to the Trenches*, 1914. The National Gallery of Canada, Otawa. Web 20 Sept 2010. http://www.gallery.ca/

Wyndham Lewis was also very much concerned with portraying in his paintings a war where the machine was coming to dominate. His soldiers are also automaton-like human beings, reduced to "an ugly, anti-heroic geometry" and camouflaged with their artillery (Roche 198) (see figs. 8 and 9).

Fig. 8. Lewis, Percy Wyndham. *A Battery Shelled*, 1919. Imperial War Museum, London. Web 20 Sept 2010. <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>

flaming pendulums, hands/Swing across the khaki – /Mustard-coloured khaki – /to the automatic feet" (4-7).

Fig. 9. Lewis, Percy Wyndham. *A Canadian Gun-Pit*, 1918. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Web 20 Sept 2010. http://www.gallery.ca/

The description of technology as a supernatural force entailed the effort to come to grips with the idea of war as a demonic or monstrous machine: "Was the machine hostile to the human or a grandiose extension of it?" (Braudy 402). Likewise, imagining modern weapons as subhuman, that is as natural forces, reflected a desire to integrate technology to the soldiers' lives and to make it more manageable. Placing particular emphasis on its inescapable and fated quality, Aldington's Winterbourne refers to war as "a sort of impersonal, natural calamity, like a plague or an earthquake" (*Death of a Hero* 216). Using a similar image, Manning refers to "the blind forces of nature, which can neither be foreseen nor controlled" (108), comparing soldiers with peasants who accept these natural catastrophes with resignation – and even fatalism:

> There is nothing in war which is not in human nature; but the violence and passions of men become, in the aggregate, an impersonal and incalculable force, a blind and irrational movement of the collective will, which one cannot control, which one cannot understand, which one can only endure as these peasants, in their bitterness and resignation, endured it. *C'est la guerre*. (108-09)

Whereas men were no longer able to impose themselves over the blind and irrational war machine, war could still "be thought and written about definitively"

(Pick 165). Writing about it was not only a way to retain rational human control over this "unstoppable and all-consuming machine" (Pick 189); it may have also been the means through which destruction would turn into creation. As Brosman observes, "aesthetically speaking, creating literature from violence [was] already a reversal" (93).

II.4. The Vicissitudes of Representing Modern War: Myth as Reality

The confrontation of the reality of modern war, however, posed a problem of representation, precisely because of its different experiential dimension. The aim of this section is to address the Great War as a turning point in the distinction of a number of 'before and after' narratives. It is in the experience of the trenches and in the many retellings of the war years that a "sense of radical discontinuity of present from past" began to take form (Hynes, *A War Imagined* IX). The literariness and imaginative character of this war allowed for the reformulation of the experience, but at the same time challenged the established literary forms used to represent war until then and led to the emergence of a new myth.

Longing to make sense of their experience, the men examined here made efforts to reflect adequately what the war had meant to them. Yet, they also acknowledged considerable ambivalence towards the possibility, if not the actual appropriateness, of reproducing the reality of the Great War in its entirety. As Rawlinson observes, "war writing as documentary and as witness is qualified by acknowledgement of war's resistance to representation (Rawlinson, *British Writing...* 9). Despite the difficulties encountered, the main urge among those who had chosen to write about the Great War was to tell the truth, to set the record straight.[125] These voices spoke with what Scott calls "the authority of experience" (780) as, in Hynes' words, "they had arrived at the aesthetic of direct experience *through* experience" (*A War Imagined* 167). The re-writing of war, thus, pointed out the difficulty of describing the elusiveness of war but, at the same time, the imperative to do so based on the authority of experience:

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[125]   Referring to documentary photography and journalism, Rawlinson observes, "what can and cannot be shown oscillates throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries: what remains unchanged is the desire and urge to visualize all aspects of war" (*American Visual Culture* 96).

"Only experience can reinstate art's witness when war opens a gap between the world and representations of the world" (Rawlinson, *British Writing...* 10).

But not only was the war poet placed in a complex experiential and aesthetical position; because of its strategic placement within the shifting terms of what the modern age was, the Great War was seen as a beginning, yet in many ways it was also a departure, as it determined a discontinuous relationship with the past. Any attempt to represent it by traditional means without acknowledging, as Sherry suggests, "some record of disruption" (6), seemed, indeed, insufficient. In Rutherford's words, "a potentially more adequate, more inclusive, and more contemporary way of treating this material" was deemed necessary as "a corrective" to the unconvincing engagement with war and heroism of the epic and romance traditions ("Realism and the Heroic" 194). This new point of view not only seemed to provide a more realistic description of the Great War, faithful both to inner and outward experience, but it appeared to be a more appropriate mode to attempt an understanding of it.[126]

This leads to the main reason why World War One has had such an impact on British consciousness: the emergence of a new myth into which war was assimilated as it gradually retreated from memory to history. Unlike the Victorian hero myth, which had systematically denied the violent reality of war and portrayed death as "joyful exaltation" and "the cannon-fodder of victory sublime" (Shaw 21), the significance of this new myth lay precisely in its interpretation and expression of the direct and private experience of war. In effect, the myth was written, as Waugh observes, "not by lookers-on, but by the soldiers themselves" (42). This meant that the subject of such narratives was the soldiers' own stories. Soldiers could claim their authority for what they wrote because they had been there. Quoting the last lines from the story of the battle of Roncevaux from the *Chanson de Roland*, Jones asserts his role as the teller of his war experience: "The geste says this and the man who was on the field ... and who wrote the book ... the man who does not know this has not understood

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[126] However, there are earlier examples of realistic war literature using a similar point of view. Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869) render nineteenth-century wars "with the same technique of vivid description in which the protagonist's sense-perceptions precede understanding of the data they provide" (Rutherford, "Realism and the Heroic" 195).

anything" (*In Parenthesis* 187). Moreover, participating witnesses not only felt the need to say "I was there" but to retell both what they did at war and what the war did to them:

> The things that are done are of two kinds: there are the inflicted sufferings of war
> – the wounds, the fears, the hardships, the losses – which are in the nature of
> war and must be accepted.[...] But there is also something else that is done to
> men by wars: no man goes through a war without being changed by it, and in
> fundamental ways. And though that process will not be explicit in every narrative
> – not all men are self-conscious or reflective enough for that – it will be there.
> Change – *inner* change – is the other motive for war stories: not only what
> happened, but what happened to *me.* (Hynes, *The Soldiers Tale* 3)

In that sense, the endorsement of truth – the retelling of "the complex story of doing and being done to" (Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale* 3) – did not exclude imagination as the mediator between the seen and the unseen, shaping and moulding the reality of war into something new, examined from a spatial and temporal distance and from different angles. As Hynes argues, not only was the First World War "the great military and political event of its time;" it was also "the great *imaginative* event" (*A War Imagined* IX). The imaginative character of this war is crucial to my argument: Popular consciousness was altered by what happened between 1914 and 1918, and this process determined what is today recalled as the Ghost myth. In the attempt to reveal sights, feelings and actions quite beyond the normal experience of most people, the myth makes, as Rutherford observes, "unfamiliar things credible" ("Realism and the Heroic" 195) and presents them as images of truth. In this sense, the selected perceptions and beliefs embodied in the myth made war more understandable and credible: "Myths simplify, reducing the complex events of the past to an easily understood set of symbols" (Todman XIII). The myth of the Great War told a story; imagination became the means through which war was interpreted as a story.

The imaginative retelling of the war experience was possible because, in Fussell's words, "literature dominated the war from beginning to end" (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 158). Either as readers or writers, soldiers had a cherished relation with literature from the moment of enlistment. The fact that so many writers or want to be writers had fought in the trenches, led to the war being re-imagined, recast and reprocessed, and contributed to the creation of a

collective memory of the past that emerged, not only from history, but from shared beliefs and experiences. Writing about the war was the immediate response to it and literature played the important role of creating, disseminating and keeping these beliefs alive. In fact the Great War still exists today as an event because it has been mediated through the written word.

Literature assumed the status of a seemingly authentic source, produced by men who fought and suffered at the war front, and introducing readers to the seemingly dreadful, first-hand experience of seemingly straightforward but actually mediated experience. As Galer argues, literature became "a valid means, perhaps even more than history, of approaching the 'truth' of the past" (*The Mythical Organisation* 30). It provided a particular account of the truth, one that seemed to meet certain needs: "Fiction adds a different dimension that the purely documentary and historical cannot aspire to. As Hemingway said on another occasion: 'I make the truth as I invent it truer than it would be'" (Boyd, Introduction XV).[127] The fact that literature became less an end in itself than a means through which to interpret war raised another question, the literariness of war itself: "If the First World War is a phenomenon to be read, then, it is to be read as a specifically literary work" (James Campbell, "Interpreting the War" 268). In fact it is Fussell himself who advocates the literary nature of this war arguing that "sometimes it is really hard to shake off the conviction that this war has been written by someone" (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 241).

II.5. The Ghost Myth: The Death of the Hero?

The myth of the Great War may be regarded as "the story of war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* IX). It has become, as Motion argues when discussing First World War poetry, "a sacred national text" (XI). The myth entered the British educational system in the 1960s and still represents how the British think about the Great War in the

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[127]   Zola's naturalism makes perhaps a good parallel to the idea of the writer as an observer of reality. His literature, like the literature of the Ghost myth, has an underlying element of "scientific analysis" (26) and a fatalistic approach to the characters, which are depicted as the victims of circumstances. As Zola suggests, the writer uses "the modern method of universal inquiry" to pursue "the study of temperament, and of the profound modifications of an organism subjected to the pressure of environments and circumstances" (26).

first decade of the twenty-first century.[128] Its roots, however, stemmed from the events and opinions surrounding the war, but the story grew with time, incorporating throughout these years what was meaningful and functional to its beliefs, and discarding what was not. Some of the names used to refer to it are: "liberal experience of war" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 25), "the great casualty myth" (Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire* 35), the "Myth of the War" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* IX), "modern memory" (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 2), and the "loss, anger and futility myth" (Galer, "Myths of the Western Front" 180). Hynes describes it as follows:

> A generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance. (*A War Imagined* X) [129]

While Hynes depicts the British experience, which is the one I address in this thesis, some elements of the myth may also be traced in German and French works, such as Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Barbusse's *Under Fire* (1916), which shows that the same story was told from different points of view and different war fronts.

Seeking to capture the reality of the trenches, the story of the Great War gets rid of "the generals and the plumes, the high abstractions, the images of heroism and glory that made war itself a value-term" (Hynes, *A War Imagined*

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[128] See Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005): 166-172, for a detailed analysis on how the Ghost myth, particularly Owen's poems and the idea that the war had been muddy, bloody and wasteful, entered the British classroom.

[129] Leed emphasises the "loss of youth, the death, horror and pollution of war" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 25); Terraine's "great casualty myth" refers to the Great War as "the deadliest experience in human history" (35); and Winter alludes to the "new language of truth-telling" and to the "'aesthetics of direct experience'" that allowed soldiers "to bear on imagining the war in a way far removed from the 'lies' or 'Big Words' of the older generation" (*Sites of Memory* 2). Galer's approach is similar to that presented by Hynes. For another similar statement, see Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005): XI-XII.

166) and revolves around the ethos of Owen's *Dulce Et Decorum Est* and "the pity of War" (Owen Preface IX).[130] Cynicism and anger inexorably replace the patriotic fervour of the Victorian hero myth. The clear gap between past and present, between combatant and civilian, between the older generations and the youth that fought the war, reopens the debate around the representation of the figure of the British soldier. In this context, the trope of the Great War hero destabilises the dominant discourse and operates "as a counter-model and thereby centrifugal force" (Cooper and Hurcombe 103).

Placing a particular emphasis on this sense of discontinuity between pre-war and post-war constructions of heroic masculinity, especially on the idea that the nineteenth-century hero was replaced by a weak, vulnerable, maimed and emasculated human being, I have chosen the term Ghost myth to denote this story of the Great War. The Ghost myth was constructed on the idea of a split between "first of all a naïve enthusiasm for war and then, after the shock of battle experience, an overwhelming sense of disillusion, anger and pity, culminating in pacifism and protest" (Rutherford *The Literature of War* 65). What had been regarded as an opportunity to exhibit virtues like physical courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice in the Victorian and Edwardian war literature, after World War One tends to be portrayed – in a mood of bitterness – as futile and senseless.

As a trope of literary representation, the figure of the ghost has underpinned the literature of the Great War, sometimes reinforcing it, sometimes troubling it, but never completely absent from it. The term 'ghost,' however, has different,

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[130]   Owen's statement may be regarded as a synopsis of the myth of the Great War; yet, critics have tended to overlook its complexity. It is worth noticing that, as the Oxford English Dictionary points out, the term pity derives from the Latin *pietās, pietātem* (932) and refers to "the representation, in painting or sculpture, of the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of Christ on her lap" (803). The weeping Mary looks with sadness and love at the body of her dear son. Following this line of thought, Ramazani argues that "Owen states only half of his paradoxical aesthetic when he writes: 'My subject is war and the Pity of war. The Poetry is in the Pity.' 'Pity' is Owen's term for emotional identification with the victims of war. But Owen's poetry suggests that 'pity' cannot erase the boundary that separates victim from onlooker. […] His subject is also the incomprehensibility of war; the poetry is also in the alienation. Having roused pity, Owen forces the reader back, warning that pity cannot bridge the chasm separating spectator and victim" (80).

interrelated meanings that need some elaboration before using it.[131] The first meaning derives from the explicit connection between the soldier and the ghost, being the ghost the evidence of the dual nature of the hero or, in Jungian terms, the part of the projected image of the hero that becomes its shadow.[132] The soldier-ghost is personified in the physically and mentally wounded soldier, the veteran as the victim: "an embodiment of the disembodied, a re-membering of the dismembered, an articulation of the disarticulated and inarticulate" (Garber 15). The unsettling effect produced by the appearance of Sassoon's "army of ghosts" is related to the acknowledgement of the vanishing of the hero, of the loss of the belief in the worth of traditional heroism:

> Thus, with an almost spectral appearance, the lurching brown figures flitted past
> with slung rifles and heads bent forward under basin-helmets. [...] It was all in
> the day's work – an exhausted Division returning from the Somme offensive – but
> for me it was as though I had watched an army of ghosts. It was as though I had
> seen the War as it might be envisioned by the mind of some epic poet a hundred
> years hence. (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 83)[133]

Sassoon's "army of ghosts" is a copy of the original army, but not quite the same. As Garber writes, they are "somehow both nominally identical to and numinously different from a vanished or unavailable original" (Garber 16); the ghost acts as the hero's internal opponent, as a modern counter-desire, as the outcome of the "warfare between this body of sin and death, and the spiritual aspirations of the soul" (Stead 24).

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[131]   When discussing "ambiguity," Empson claims: "Thus a word may have several distinct meanings; several meanings connected with one another; several meanings which need one another to complete their meaning; or several meanings which unite together so that the word means one relation or one process. This is a scale which might be followed continuously." (5) That is how this thesis approaches the subject matter of ghosts in relation to the Ghost myth, bearing in mind that the notion of 'ghost' encloses a body of meanings interrelated at various levels.

[132]   See "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" (3-41) in Jung, Carl G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.

[133]   Like Sassoon, Blunden argues that his comrades were "white-faced as a ghost" (71), Herbert describes Harry Penrose as "the wan ghost of some forgotten soldier" (54), Barbusse refers to "the slender ghosts of the NCOs" (56) and Owen was nicknamed "the Ghost" by his comrades (350).

A second meaning may be traced in the correlation between the soldier, the ghost and death. One reason why Great War soldiers had access to the ghostly was their proximity to death. Previously in this chapter I have discussed the soldiers' encounter with mass death. The fact that they are placed in a liminal position between life and death allows them to have a view of both worlds. In this context, the figure of the soldier becomes a vehicle between the miseries of the battlefield and death, a soldier-ghost moving in a world that mixes reality and dream. It is not incidental that the soldier's strangeness is from the start connected with this liminal position. Giving way to a hope of alleviating the sorrow for the lost comrades, Sassoon suggests the destabilisation of any difference between the real and the imagined, the animate and the inanimate. The dream-like quality of the Concert Party given to his comrades speaks by itself: "Row beyond row, [...] it was as though these civilians were playing to an audience of the dead and the living – men and ghosts who had crowded in like moths to a lamp. One by one they had stolen back, till the crowd seemed limitlessly extended" (*Sherston's Progress* 99). The threshold between life and death seems to be mere illusion, Sassoon can see the souls of his dead peers in the audience and this make-believe world legitimates his fears and anxieties with respect to the unknown.

Sleep and death are also brought together as unavoidable aspects of human life. The seeming proximity of sleeping and dying raises uncertainty and fear in the mind of Sassoon, who mistakes the comrades who sleep by his side with those who lie dead on the battlefield:

> Sometimes when I see my companions lying asleep or resting, rolled in their blankets, their faces turned to earth or hidden by the folds, for a moment I wonder whether they are alive or dead. For at any hour I may come upon them, and find that long silence descended over them, their faces grey and disfigured, dark stains of blood soaking through their torn garments, all their hope and merriment snuffed out for ever, and their voices fading on the winds of thought, from memory to memory, from hour to hour, until they are no more to be recalled. (*Diaries* 93)

It is not for nothing that 'eternal sleep' is a metaphor for death; sleep possesses Sassoon's comrades, much as death does. Blunden is equally ghostly. Overwhelmed by "the furious dance of high explosive" almost enclosing him, he

crosses the border between the real and the unreal: "At this minute, a man, or a ghost, went by, and I tried to follow his course down the next slope and long a desperate valley" (Blunden, *Undertones of War* 104). Although the soldier is dead, Blunden's imagination repeats his presence as a remembered living image. Yet he implies that mourning the dead soldier requires its materialisation first as a living man and then as text. That the solving of an enigma and the triumph over death are interconnected is metaphorically enacted in Blunden's repetition of the ghost.[134]

Instances mediating between life and death are recurrent in the narratives examined here, particularly those which link the openings to supernatural worlds to the return of the dead. Some of the men examined here survived death; yet, they faced the difficulty of comprehending a phenomenon that seemed to lie beyond consciousness. Not being able to retrieve any image of death, they allowed the ghostly to enter their texts "through allegory, metaphor, and allusion" (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory...* 22). This was the only way by which the living could deal with the unknown. For some, the figure of the ghost was a powerful means to express the survivor's guilt:

> Ghosts! Ghosts! they flit about the vacant rooms
>   Where Memory wanders, like an ancient crone,
> Telling the beads of many different dooms
>   In dreary wastes within Death's hungry zone.
> The best are dead; and we, who were the rest,
> Walk a strange world that is without the best. (Plowman, *A Subaltern...* 212)

The joy of having escaped death at the battlefield is permanently poisoned by guilt. The guilt of the survivor revolves around the question of presence, or, rather, the lack of it. Indeed, the twin features essential to understanding the

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134   Exile from the civilian world was also akin to death, particularly in the case of the soldier who might have died while being at the front. That is what happened to Graves, who was so badly wounded in the Somme that his family was told he was dead. Confusing messages reached them – Graves' death was even announced in the Times. From a dressing station near Mametz Woods, he wrote to his mother:

> 'I am wounded, but all right.' This was July 24th, my twenty-first birthday, and also the official date of my death. She got the letter two days after that written by the colonel; mine was dated `July 23rd,' because I had lost count of days; his, the 22nd. They could not decide whether my letter had been written just before I died and misdated, or whether I had died just after writing it. (*Goodbye to All That* 232)

See also Sassoon's *Diaries* for his reaction to Graves' 'death' (98).

guilt of the survivor are loss and return or rather absence and presence. In fact the apparition of ghosts denotes both something missing and something reappeared, and argue for another way of apprehending the past.

Some war poets, however, were rather more explicit about the nature of their ghostly encounters. Graves saw "the ghost of a man named Private Challoner" whom he knew had been killed several months before (*Goodbye to All That* 123). In his autobiography, *Journey from Obscurity*, Harold Owen, recalls that when he was a small boy his elder brother Wilfred disguised himself in a sheet and scared the younger children while holding a shaded candle and muttering incantations. This was frightening enough but was completely eclipsed by something which happened later. Harold was an officer on board the British cruiser HMS Astraea. A week after his brother died at the front, Owen fell ill with malaria; it was during this time that he claims he had "an extraordinary and inexplicable experience:"[135]

> I had gone down to my cabin thinking to write some letters. I drew aside the door curtain and stepped inside and to my amazement I saw Wilfred sitting in my chair. I felt shock run through me with appalling force and with it I could feel the blood draining away from my face. I did not rush towards him but walked jerkily into the cabin--all my limbs stiff and slow to respond. I did not sit down but looking at him I spoke quietly: "Wilfred, how did you get here?" He did not rise and I saw that he was involuntarily immobile, but his eyes which had never left mine were alive with the familiar look of trying to make me understand; when I spoke his whole face broke into his sweetest and most endearing dark smile [...]. I knew with absolute certainty that Wilfred was dead. (*Journey from Obscurity* 198)

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[135]   Yet, the vitality of ghosts in World War One was not only a literary affair; certain religious beliefs and practices like "spiritualism" were meaningful for the painful process of mass bereavement. See Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) for a detailed consideration of spiritualism in its historical context and its different forms. See also Graves' allusion to the séances taking place at a wounded friend's house in Kent. His friend's elder brother had been killed in the Dardanelles and their mother was trying to get in touch with him by various spiritualist means. This frightened Graves, who decided to leave the house. (*Goodbye to All That* 241-242). After the war, some artists portrayed in painting the haunting pain that the memory of the dead had left on the living. Spencer's *The Resurrection in Cookham* (1927), Longstaff's *Menin Gate at Midnight* (1927) and *Immortal Shrine* (1928) are regarded by many as spiritualist works (figs. 10, 11 and 12).

Fig. 10. Longstaff, Will. *Menin Gate at Midnight* (*Ghosts of Menin Gate*), 1927. Australian War Memorial. Web 3 Aug 2011. <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/ART14196> Fig. 11. Longstaff, Will. *Immortal Shrine* (*Eternal Silence*), 1928. Australian War Memorial. Web 3 Aug 2011. <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/ART09807>[136]

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[136]   The Australian artist and war veteran Will Longstaff painted *Menin Gate at Midnight (Ghosts of Menin Gate)* after he attended a ceremony at the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres on 24 July 1927, dedicated to the 350,000 men of the British and Empire forces who had died in the battles around Ypres. It is said that Longstaff was so moved by the ceremony that, during a night walk along the Menin Road, saw an army of ghostly British soldiers rising from the fields. After he returned to London, he painted the work in one session, while still under psychic influence. Following the success of *Menin Gate*, he painted several other works on a similar haunting theme. *Immortal shrine* (1928) also depicts ghostly soldiers marching past the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Day 1928. But Longstaff was not the first artist to have portrayed spiritualist ideas. Will Dyson's cartoon, *A voice from ANZAC,* depicting the spirits of two Australian soldiers seated on the shore at Gallipoli after bodily death, was published by the Melbourne Herald on ANZAC Day in 1927.

Fig. 12. Spencer, Stanley. *The Resurrection in Cookham*, 1924-1927. Tate Britain. Web 3 Aug 2011. <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=13675&tabview=image>[137]

The haunting pain left by the suffering that surviving war had required is blamed for the persistence of these ghostly visions. The guilt of the survivor involves the sin of having left a loved one behind, the remorse for an unjustified separation. The removal of that guilt depends on re-establishing the relationship broken by death. In this context, the return of the dead as ghosts is, as Gordon observes, "just a sign [...] that tells you a hunting is taking place" (8).

And here is the last meaning required to understand the ghosts within the Ghost myth: the idea of the ghost as haunting. As Gordon writes, "the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8).The ghost as haunting belongs to an uncertain space and has an elusive quality that seems to blend different worlds and realities in the disclosure of the past. The ghost establishes a relationship between fantasy and trauma and forces the soldiers to relive what had been silenced. Graves mentions ghosts more than once in his memoir; he describes what he regards as his "haunted condition" (*Goodbye to All That* 312): "Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight

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[137]   In February 1927, before either Dyson or Longstaff produced their ghostly images, Stanley Spencer revolutionised London with *The Resurrection in Cookham* (1924-1927). Although the painting was meant to suggest that paradise can be experienced on earth, to affirm life after the horrors of war, there were some intense spiritualist elements.

[...]; strangers in daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed" (298). Similar nightmarish images bring the dead far beyond the time and space of the actual fighting to haunt Sassoon at Craiglockhart:

> An army on the march moved across the darkness, its doom-destined columns backed by the pulsating glare of distant gunfire. Battle pictures emerged and melted from one to another. I saw the shapes of sentries, looming against the livid and sombre cloud-shoals of forlorn front-line daybreak [...]. These spectral images, seen from the borderland of sleep, brought me a delusive sense of power to put them into words. There was a haunting appeal, too, in the sad anonymous faces which emerged on that dream cinematograph, faces pale and passionless, as though from a sculptured frieze. (*Siegfried's Journey* 70)

Apart from the comparable social and cultural background, the most important similarity among the men examined here was war, "not merely as subject-matter" but rather "for the way in which they were themselves affected by war experience" (Hibberd, *Poetry*… 11-12). The damage that the conflict inflicted upon them as individuals turned them into a particular kind of eyewitnesses-storytellers: "They are individuals with a terrible tale to tell, people whose very lives are defined by that story" (Jay Winter, *Remembering War* 239). Indeed, the physical and psychological injuries suffered at war turned them into "moral witnesses" and conferred them "special standing as spokesmen for the injured and the dead" (Jay Winter, *Remembering War* 239). The haunting memory of war was their site of protest and struggle and their testimony was constructed against the conventional narratives of heroism: "What sets aside the narrative moral witnesses have to tell is that it is based on the individual's direct and personal experience of what Kant called 'radical evil'" (Jay Winter, *Remembering War* 239). Indeed, these men had witnessed what contributed to a serious loss in civilisation as they had known it. If, as A.J.P. Taylor argues, "idealism perished on the Somme" (*The First World War* 140), they would be in charge of setting the record straight or, in Jay Winter's words, "to stop others from lying about the past or from sanitizing it" (Winter, *Remembering War* 240).

Chapter III

The Great War in Words

This chapter first focuses on the persisting legitimacy of the Victorian hero myth, translated into an idealist outlook on the Great War, which survived the impact of modern warfare and was reflected in the literature of the period and in the attempts to revisit and redefine it since the 1930s onwards. I analyse poetry and fiction with particular attention to the Brookian myth and the contradictions experienced by some patriotic writers later on in the war.

I then examine Ghost myth literature. First I focus on the poetry – both the poems written during the war and the anthologies published during the 1960s revival: *Men Who March Away* (1965), *Up to the line of Death* (1965), Poetry *of the First World War* (1967) and *1914-18 in Poetry* (1970). The Battle of the Somme is treated as a turning point in the literary representation of the Great War, as a progression from the Victorian hero myth to the Ghost myth, although it is more than likely that there was not such clearly perceivable fracture. This then is followed by an assessment of Ghost myth prose, with particular emphasis on the imaginative silence of the 1920s and the 'war-books boom' triggered by the success of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929. I particularly focus on the significance that the war memoirs, autobiographical novels, letters and war diaries I have chosen for study have in relation to the emerging myth. Having assessed how the Ghost myth was essentially constructed in its enduring literary form, I then deal with the organised critical opposition constructed around the war-books boom in what was regarded as 'the war-books controversy.' Jerrold's "The Lie about the War" (1930) and Falls' *War Books* (1930) are given particular attention in their attempts to show that this flood of anti-war books had in fact falsified the true image of World War One.

The chapter concludes with the discussion of the scholarly publications of the 1960s-1970s, among them Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965) and Fussell's The *Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), which had, as their main purpose, the academic establishment and defence of the Ghost myth literary canon. I also outline the various approaches through which a group of scholars have questioned Ghost myth literature, underlining a series of issues – the revival of

the heroic ideal, the emphasis on the idea of pre-war and post-war continuity, the conflict between literature and history in the representation of war and the theme of mourning in the re-evaluation of the past – which prove to be effective in recovering the Hero myth as part of the Great War agenda.

III.1. The Victorian Hero Refuses to Die

Before discussing the literature of the Ghost myth, however, it would be helpful to place it in the context of the other literature written during the Great War. As Walter affirms, "the war actually acted as a stimulus to the nation's writers, who immediately rushed to satisfy the public's voracious appetite for imaginative treatments of contemporary events" (Introduction VIII-IX). However, since disappointment and disillusion set the criteria for what constituted war literature after the Great War, the enormous bulk of patriotic literature written during the war years has been ignored.

This section then focuses on the other story or, as Buitenhuis suggests, the "untold story, or one only partly told in scattered sources" (Preface XIII). This other story reflects the toils of a vast number of serving soldiers (and civilians) to sustain and promote the Victorian hero myth during and after World War One. Albeit almost completely forgotten nowadays, this type of literature was important

> …not simply because the exciting images of war it presented and the patriotic sentiment it aroused encouraged readers to enlist, but also because such heroic and romantic representations offered a patriotic interpretation of the war which endured until the Second World War, even withstanding the onslaught of post-1918 antiwar literature. (Paris, *Over the Top* XII-XIII)

The nineteenth-century militarist mystique had effectively lingered in the minds of many writers who felt that, as Hibberd observes, they "had to speak for the nation and steel its heart for battle" (*Poetry*… 12). The survival of certain forms of the Victorian hero myth suggests that idealism had not perished on the Somme and that there were men who still believed in the "Big Words." [138]

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[138]   The "Big Words" refer to the title of a poem by Robert Graves included in Osborn's *The Muse in Arms* (1917) in which the poet argues, in the voice of a soldier waiting 'to go over the top,' that the pre-war abstract nouns like Valour, Honour and Glory had died as tangible ideals:

Like the writers of the Ghost myth, however, there were differences among patriotic writers. Some remained enthusiastic about the allied cause and believed in the 'Big Words' right up until the end of war, some others, like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and Ford Madox Ford, experienced doubts as the war progressed. Popular writers like H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett hurried into writing pro-war literature without encouragement, but older writers of renown like Hardy, Kipling, Doyle, Galsworthy, Barrie and Chesterton were specifically recruited by the War Propaganda Bureau to promote Britain's interests at war.[139]

At this point, it is important to distinguish between "propaganda" and "pro-war" literature. Propaganda is the "particular type of speech or text which originates within the government" (Jain 164). The rest of the fictional and non-fictional literature created in support of the war without government solicitation should be labelled "pro-war." No doubt, however, even for those who wrote "propaganda" in the strict sense of the word, that the main motivation for the endorsement of the Victorian hero myth was patriotic fervour, strengthened by the admiration for the literature written by the men who had actually done the fighting, like Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell.[140]

"But on the firestep, waiting to attack, / He cursed, he prayed, sweated, wished the proud words back" (21-22). Darby argues that the "big words" questioned by Graves were what Fussell calls "high diction" (317-318). See footnote 143 of this thesis.

[139]   Buitenhuis describes in detail a secret meeting taking place in the afternoon of 2 September 1914 at Wellington House (Buckingham Gate) between C.F.G. Masterman, the chief of Britain's war propaganda bureau, and a number of prominent British writers "to discuss ways and means by which they could contribute to the Allied war effort" (Introduction XV). Masterman made a mistake of judgment: "Almost all of his chosen writers were too old for military service" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 26) and could not prove their patriotism on the front. As the war progressed, then, they were labelled "the Old men" and blamed for being "the makers of the war and the enemies of the young" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 26).

[140]   Despite his initial ambivalence to the war, the young poet Rupert Brooke became a member of the Royal Naval Division (RND) in 1914. While preparing in Egypt for the invasion of Gallipoli, Brooke was bitten by a mosquito and developed a blood infection. His health rapidly deteriorated and he died aboard a French hospital ship on 23 April 1915. The obituary published in *The Times* on April 26 already started to press the ideal of the hero, as Miller writes, "transcendent in life and in death through his ability to 'do justice to the nobility of our youth in arms' by expressing their 'thoughts of self-surrender'" (143).

Rupert Brooke's "War Sonnets" – particularly "The Soldier" and "The Dead" – appealed to society in general, despite political and social differences.[141] As Tylee suggests, Brooke's early death paved the way for "his idealisation as both mythical Greek hero and national Christian martyr" (78) and for the creation of "the genre of the idealised and, to an extent, untouchable national soldier-poet" whose success expressed "the glamour of war for the War Generation, summed up in the imperialist religion of self-sacrifice 'For God, King and Country'" (77).

The endurance of the Brookian myth shows that not all of those who "went to the war with Rupert Brooke came home with Siegfried Sassoon" (Cannan 113).[142] There is more than enough literary evidence to argue that there were English writers who used high diction to invest their literature with the rhetoric of romance and traditional masculinity.[143]

Much the same was true of the young Julian Grenfell. Seriously wounded while serving near Ypres, Grenfell was taken to hospital in Boulogne where he died on 26 May 1915. The announcement of his death in *The Times* three days later was accompanied by the publication of his most famous poem, "Into Battle," an anthem to British fighting spirit, which was widely anthologised.

Yet, it was Rupert Brooke who became the most valued of the early patriotic poets. The Brookian myth played on the image of the soldier poet as a "sanctified figure" (Miller 144), turning him into the ultimate representative of the Victorian hero myth. This, however, does not explain why a century after his death, the myth still pervades. Perhaps, as Field argues, "it is due […] to his continuing ability to tap deep wells of nostalgia within the English psyche, a nostalgia for the unspoiled, innocent[…] land that existed before 1914" (121-122).

[141] Despite its endurance, Brooke's poetry has been ridiculed by some Ghost myth advocates, among them Charles Sorley and Isaac Rosenberg, who regarded it as being too naïve in its mixture of patriotism and pastoralism: "He has clothed his attitude [his going to war] in fine words: but he has taken the sentimental attitude" (Sorley 263). However, Brooke's work is far from being straightforward sentimental verse: "There were also signs […] that he was moving towards a concern for others as well as for himself" anticipating "the later satirical mode of Sassoon and Owen" (Field 120). Had he survived and undergone the experiences of later war poets on the Western Front, it is very likely that he would have reacted as they did to those experiences.

[142] In fact Cannan admired Sassoon's poetry but disagreed with his anti-war stance. In her autobiographical work *Grey Ghosts and Voices*, she claims: "I had much admired some of Sassoon's verse but I was not coming home with him. Someone must go on writing for those who were still convinced of the right of the cause for which they had taken up arms" (114).

[143] Fussell argues that this type of high diction remained popular "as late as 1918" (22). He even writes a list of the most popular poetic words and phrases used to create more patriotic, elevating synonyms in the description of facts that were either ordinary or essentially negative. For

The commitment of writers to the war started early through the writing of novels and short stories. Albeit uneven in their literary quality, these war fictions were generally recognisable because of the similar fantasies, political admonitions and stereotypes. Great emphasis was placed on battles, anecdotes of heroic soldiers and the demonisation of the enemy.[144] The patriotic spirit of the writer prevented the expression of feelings about the self, and if it did allow for the manifestation of individuality, it did it in a highly conventionalised way. Because of its stereotypical simplicity, this type of literature may be found monotonous and uninteresting to contemporary readers as it restricted itself to celebrating the heroic actions of British soldiers and, in consequence, oversimplified the complexity of the experience at the front. As Buitenhuis suggests, "these fictions of war illustrate the non-fiction propaganda myths which the Wellington House writers were publishing in pamphlet and book form" (*The Great War of Words*, 116).[145]

The first major war-inspired story, "The Bowmen," was produced in September 1914 by Arthur Machen. It appeared in the *Evening News* and, unintentionally, created one of the most successful propaganda myths of the war: the legend of the 'Angel of Mons.'[146] As Fussell writes, the story was so moving and

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example: 'the dead' would be 'the fallen' and 'a soldier' would be 'a warrior' (*The Great War...* 22). As Darby argues, Fussell seems to be aware that "the old language was not 'supplanted by the new" (Darby 318). To prove that, he devotes a section of a chapter, "The progress of euphemism" (Fussell *The Great War...* 174-79) to illustrate its enduring legacy.

[144] While the relationship hero-enemy will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV; it is important to stress at this point that this type of literature was plagued by an anti-German sentiment. It began to be published in 1915 in the tradition of Henty's adventure stories (See pages 24 and 25 of the thesis): "They had titles like *With French at the Front*, *In Khaki for the King*, and *A Boy Scout with the Russians*, and illustrated covers, and many illustrations inside – but they were not reviewed as children's literature, but with books clearly intended for adults" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 43).

[145] In fact the pamphlet was being used as the main propagandistic tool by such prominent writers as Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle and Sir Gilbert Hope. Two of the earliest recruiting pamphlets are Conan Doyle's *To Arms* (1914) and Rudyard Kipling's *The New Army* (1914).

[146] The 'Angel of Mons' was supposed to have appeared in the sky during the British withdrawal from Mons in August 1914, and to have protected the retreating soldiers (See Fussell, *The Great War...* pages 115-116 for a detailed account of the legend). Machen reprinted the story in a book titled *The Bowmen and Other Legends of the War* (1915).

inspirational to the retreating troops and their families that "it became unpatriotic, almost treasonable, to doubt it" (*The Great War...* 116).

Those who had attended the meeting at Wellington House produced works with very unequal and varied literary value. Among the "second-rate romantic works" (Cecil, "British War Novelists" 801) with an evident patriotic message are Locke's *The Red Planet* (1917) and *The Rough Road* (1918). H. G. Wells, on the other hand, albeit an eager propagandist at the beginning of the war, began to reflect more deeply as the war progressed. *Mr Britling Sees it Through* (1916) was seen as one of the most interesting and complex works of the period. As Bergonzi observes: "The novel is a product of the reflective mood that succeeded Well's early optimism, when it became apparent that the war was certain to be prolonged and the toll of casualties grew continually higher" (136). While propagandistic in nature, the novel begins to abandon some of the clichés in an attempt to go beyond the perpetuation of war animosities.

Although Kipling was unable to attend the meeting at Wellington House, he sent messages offering his literary expertise to the Allied cause and threw himself into writing German-hating propaganda. Published in 1915, "Swept and Garnished" and "Mary Postgate" record the effects of war from a civilian perspective. Both can be read as playing an important role in channelling the anti-German hatred. "Mary Postgate," in particular, mirrors some of the complexities and ambiguities of Kipling's work.[147] "Sea Constables: A Tale of 15" and *The Fringes of the Fleet* (1915), on the other hand, were written from a military point of view and dealt mainly with soldiers and sailors on service.

It is said that Kipling not only recognised the figure of 'Tommy Atkins,' the regular working-class soldier whose heroism made up for his mediocrity, but invented it as a literary trope, together with "the style that would make it possible to write about common soldiers without glorifying them," yet "making

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[147] After hearing of the death in the Flying Corps of the boy she had helped to bring up, Mary Postgate discovers a wounded German airman lying in the near-by bushes. Not only does she refuse to help him but threatens him with a pistol and waits for his death. When he finally dies she experiences a clearly orgasmic satisfaction. The story has received different interpretations. While some have seen it as an illustration of the vilest kind of war anti-German propaganda, it has also been regarded as a psychological piece reporting the central character's twisted behaviour without necessarily endorsing it.

them simultaneously [...] brave, comical, devoted, prosaic, etc" (Hynes *A War Imagined* 50). Kipling had found the way to reconcile realism and romance:

> In his new synthesis he celebrated the romance of reality – the genuinely heroic qualities shown in the everyday […] but he also demonstrated the reality of romance, by showing that in an imperial setting heroic adventures were not anachronistic or fantastic inventions […] but facts of contemporary life" (Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 16).

Also summoned to the department offices at Wellington House, J. M. Barrie was responsible for writing propagandistic plays. *Der Tag* (1914) is full of the gross exaggerations associated with anti-German propaganda; Germany is a barbaric militarist power and the Allies are flawless in their nature and manners. *Echoes of War* (1919) collects the other war plays – *The Old Lady Shows her Medals*, *The New Word*, *Barbara's Wedding* and *A Well Remembered Voice*. Although much of what Barrie wrote seems to have been produced in a hurry and without due attention to literary value, the war plays raise, as Tate observes, "useful questions about the relationship between fiction and propaganda, and about what constitutes a propaganda story (The ways in which Barrie's stor[ies] [invoke] fantasies about masculinity is quite striking in this context)" (*Women, Men...* 1-2).

John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916) and *Mr Standfast* (1919) are not war novels but they revolve around the subject of war. Taking advantage of the spy scares, Buchan used adventure stories around basic pairs of actions such as chase and escape to introduce more subtle propaganda and his own view of the conduct of war as "the *personae* of his characters allowed him to evade responsibility for his critical remarks" (Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* 110). Conan Doyle also took advantage of the hate propaganda to bring Sherlock Holmes back and denounce German military methods in "His Last Bow" (1917), which, because of his propagandistic intentions is, as Buitenhuis asserts, "without the brilliance and skill of the classic Sherlock Holmes Tales" (*The Great War of Words* 111).

The pro-war novels of authors who actually served at the front belong to a different category. As Cecil observes, they had a clear function: "to foster a sense of national purpose and to inform the public through partly cheerful partly

harrowing detail, what the soldiers were going through, so as to lessen the gulf of understanding between combatant and non-combatant" ("British War Novelists" 802). From first-hand experience and with a fine war-record, Ian Hay wrote *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915), which, with its "*cheerful* reality, [...] humour and good-fellowship" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 49), became a "hymn to volunteerism" (Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* 115). Perhaps emulating Kipling, Hay gave soldiers a voice and found a means of romanticizing war in an apparently realistic light. In *Carrying On– After the First Hundred Thousand* (1917) he made the attempt to grasp victory from the defeat at Loos and romanticised the idea of the just war. Similarly, *Sergeant Michael Cassidy* (1915), written by Herman Cyril McNeile, the young officer who went by the pseudonym of 'Sapper,' is realistic in its depiction of war: "tough-minded and anti-sentimental, with knockabout comedy relief provided by drunken heroes like Sergeant Michael Cassidy" (Cecil, "British War Novelists" 802). Yet, it celebrates war as a uniting force that provided an opportunity to demonstrate aptitude and perform well even under difficult circumstances.

Among those for whom writing propaganda became a burden on their physical, intellectual and psychological energies, was Ford Madox Ford. He had not been at Wellington House, but he was one of Masterman's closest friends in the literary world and was recruited to write anti-German propaganda.[148] In 1915 he wrote the first two books for the War Propaganda Bureau, *When Blood is Their Argument* and *Between St Dennis and St George.* The books presented "a considerable rhetorical challenge" to him: "On one hand, he needed to encourage the English to feel sympathy for their traditional enemy, the French. On the other hand, he had to turn the English against Germany, a country whose ruling family was related to their own" (Wollaeger 145).[149] As the war

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[148]   There were enough reasons to believe that he was not the right person to do it. Half-German by birth, Ford Madox Hueffer was suspect in some circles of not being a true Englishman. Moreover, several weeks after the war broke out, he had written in his column in the *Outlook* that he condemned the violent language of nationalism in the British press. Whether he needed the money Masterman offered him or wanted to assert the English side of his heritage at the expense of the German side, Madox Hueffer's sudden change of views is difficult to understand. However, he was too proud to change his German name while he was at the front and did not become Madox Ford until 1919.

[149]   On 30 July 1915, Ford abandoned his career as a propagandist and joined the British Army at the age of forty one. As Buitenhuis writes: "His motives were mixed, but there can be no doubt

progressed, his fiction started sowing "the seeds of disillusion" offering, as Buitenhuis writes, "a shield for reflection, for question, for irony and debate, for the exploration of private problems instead of public issues, even for despair" (*The Great War of Words* 117). [150]

Arnold Bennett was also an ardent propagandist early in the war: "Between August 4 and the end of 1914 he published twenty-eight articles on aspects of the war" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 26). However, his later works – *The Lion's Share* (1916), *The Roll Call* (1918) and *The Pretty Lady* (1918) – reflect the writer's "own loss of purpose" (Lucas 171) and the anxieties of working under the stress of propaganda. Like Bennett, John Galsworthy was a man of contradictions, which were reflected in a novel he wrote later on the war, *The Saint's Progress* (1918). As discussed above, these later novels subvert some of the propagandistic ideas originally expressed by Ford, Bennett and Galsworthy. Rather than celebrating war and the soldier, these writings strip them of their romantic glamour and redefine them in terms of grim courage and endurance.

The outbreak of the Great War also witnessed an unparalleled outburst of patriotic verse. As Hynes writes, "it was clear by the end of 1914 that this war would be different – it would be the most literary and the most poetical war in English history, before or since" (*A War Imagined* 28). Well-known poets as well as amateurs 'did their bit' for the national effort by writing patriotic verse for the newspapers across the country. The British public were able to read war poetry from the moment the war began. *Poems of the Great War* (1914) collected poems by Newbolt, Binyon, Hewlett and Chesterton that had already been published in British newspapers "during the few days immediately following the declaration of war" (*Poems of the Great War* 4) and *Songs and Sonnets for England in War Time* (1914) praised itself of being "formed during the conflict itself" (*Songs and Sonnets*... VIII). Anthologies of war poetry appeared with

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that he felt a strong obligation to his country and to the young men fighting and dying in France. He really believed, too, in his own oft-repeated phrase: 'Men have no rights: only duties.'" (*The Great War of Words* 119).

[150]   Written after the war, *Parade's End* materialises Ford's contradictions and, as Gasiorek argues: "[His] struggle with and scrutiny of the cultural and political beliefs he himself espoused, and it does so by questioning the legitimacy of the very tradition in which those beliefs were formed and articulated. The result is a deeply ambivalent text […]" (Gasiorek 53). Madox Ford's war tetralogy will be studied in more detail in the following section.

increasing frequency in bookshops around Britain: "three in September 1914, another in November, twelve in 1915, six more in 1916" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 28).[151]

The propagandistic poetry written by the established poets recruited by Masterman – Bridges, Hardy, Chesterton, Hewlett and Kipling – was not considered as noteworthy as the rest of their verses: "Critics were not slow to remark […] that the leading poets of the day had not outshone themselves in their war verses" (Hibberd, *Poetry*... 13). In Bergonzi's words, these poems were "impeccably patriotic in sentiment and thoroughly wretched as literary art" (32). Albeit typical of much simple patriotism, the following extract from Hardy's "Men Who March Away" (Song of the Soldiers) (1914) emerges as an expression of popular spirit:

> What of the faith and fire within us
> >   Men who march away
> >   Ere the barn-cocks say
> >   Night is growing gray,
> Leaving all that here can win us;
> What of the faith and fire within us
> >   Men who march away? (1-7)

Despite his later doubts, Hardy seems to know the attitude with which men marched to the front, and although, as he shows later in the poem, there is more in it than faith and fire, his purpose is to humbly reflect the dominant pre-war enthusiasm, emphasising the soldiers' belief in what he regards as a battle for moral justice.

Among the women poets who were writing patriotic verse at the time, none was more popular than Jessie Pope. She published three volumes of war verse: *War Poems* and *More War Poems* (1915) and *Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times* (1916). The first two contain all her poems published in the *Daily Mail* and in the

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[151]   Referring to the hundreds of thousands of poems published during the war, Hibberd and Onions quote an article from the *Daily Mail* in June 1915 which suggests that more poetry had "found its way into print in the last eleven months than in the eleven preceding years" (*Daily Mail* qtd in Hibberd and Onions 1).

last are collected poems that appeared in the *Daily Express*. The opening stanza of "The Call" reflects her jolly exhortations to fight:

> Who's for the trench –
> > Are you, my laddie?
> Who'll follow French –
> > Will you, my laddie?
>
> Who's fretting to begin,
> Who's going out to win?
> And who wants to save his skin –
> > Do you, my laddie? (1-8)

The veneration of combat in her doggerel rhyme not only eschews the horrors of the battlefield but shows little respect for the suffering of soldiers. Reading "The Call" it is not difficult to realise why Jessie Pope's work aroused particular interest as the specific target of Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est." [152]

Most patriotic verses, however, came from "the English amateur versifier, the gentleman poet" (Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words..." 647) who had found his muse for the first time, probably serving at the front line. Between 1915 and 1917, the admiration for poets who had seen active service was reflected in Galloway Kyle's *Soldier Poets: Songs of the Fighting Men* (1916-1917) and E.B. Osborn's *The Muse in Arms* (1917): "The tone was of heroic resistance in a just cause; some mention of horrors was allowed (Osborn included Sassoon) but only to increase respect for soldierly courage" (Hibberd and Onions 3). Yet, most of the thousands of soldier-poets writing at the time – among them Henry Chappell, Harold Begbie, Cope, Fagan, Grogan, Gyles, Moberley, Homes, Bliss and Oxenham – have been forgotten.[153] Even if none of them became as influential

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[152]   One draft of "Dulce et Decorum Est" bears the cancelled inscription "To Jessie Pope" and another "To a certain Poetess." Owen denounces those who preach "The old Lie: dulce et decorum est/Pro patria morie."

[153]   Now almost completely forgotten, William Arthur Dunkerley – who wrote under the pseudonym of John Oxenham – was the most successful poet of the war years, "his slim collections of cheaply priced verse selling by the hundred thousand" (Bourne 225). Even if Oxenham's view of war may seem sentimental and artificial to the modern reader, he "offers a consolatory explanation of the suffering, which he himself clearly felt, within the prevailing Christian vision of the war, dominated by Christ's 'sacrifice' on the cross" (Bourne 225).

as the poets of the Ghost myth, their absence from most modern anthologies has prevented full appreciation of both the scope and impact of Great War poetry.

At its best, this type of poetry could give rise to a tolerable homage to the warrior, such as Touchstone's "The Game" (1916), in which soldiers are compared to classical heroes and medieval knights; at its worst the harassing persuasiveness of Harold Begbie's "Fall in" (1914). The following extract from one of these "amateur effusions in verse" (Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words..." 647), Stanley S. Young's "Boundless Love," shows that despite lacking literary value, the poem fully reinforces the Victorian hero myth:

> Not dead! They *never* die who life lay
> > down
> That their dear Land may live. Death
> > less renown
> Awaits the patriot soul that gives itself,
> Not asking laurel wreath or sordid pelf,
> Who fight because they answer duty's
> > call,
> And hazard each his life for life of all. (1-9)

As these were patriots speaking for a nation they loved and trusted, this type of verses were generally forgiven of their sentimentalities and literary flaws. By the end of the war, there were numerous specimens of this sort of poetry, akin in form, in rhetoric, and in sentiment. So much so, that poets like Monro, the editor of *Poetry and Drama*, started questioning publishers' low expectations as regards literary creation. Whereas Monro demanded an "exalted" form of patriotism, what was being questioned at the time was not the patriotic content of the verses but their lack of literary achievement: "The general conclusion was that nothing good had yet appeared, but that a new age of poetry was surely coming" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 30). The thousands of poems that still greeted the war in patriotic and quasi-religious terms seemed no longer able to grasp the experience of industrialised warfare and make it understood. A new rhetoric was required, a new poetic language different from the old language of glorious battle and noble sacrifice.

III.2. Ghost Myth Literature

III.2.1. Ghost Myth Poetry

In its attempt to provide the possibility of confronting the new reality of war and the uncertainty that followed it, the Ghost myth took many forms, including private letters, journalistic accounts, plays, diaries, memoirs, novels, paintings and films. However, the contention that the writers spoke directly from the trenches, directly from the experience itself owes much to the poetry written by the soldier poets – among them Richard Aldington, Edmund Blunden, Charles Sorley, Ivor Gurney, Edward Thomas, Herbert Read, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen – of whom Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen are probably the two who have attracted most critical attention.[154]

Based on "the evidence of experience" (Scott 777) and on the idea of writing as the "communication of knowledge gained through […] experience" (Scott 776), Ghost myth poetry was realistic in its desire to show things as they were without any trace of patriotic sentiment. It was more direct and truthful and attempted to avoid, as Ferguson observes, "the traditional romantic, elevated diction of the Victorians, Edwardians and 'Georgians' – though not always their structural conventions" (XXVI), as it was in fact the Georgian poetry which provided the intelligibility, the avoidance of archaism and the traditional form within which most of the war poets defined themselves artistically. As Bergonzi suggests, Ghost myth poetry was nothing but "a continuation of the Georgian movement by poets who, volunteering in defence of the England they had written about so lovingly, found themselves thrust into the melting pot which Forster had envisaged at the conclusion of *Howards End*" (40). It is important to note, however, that while some of the poets mentioned above remained more pastoral in their orientations, confronting war from the perspective of an unchanging rural society, others – Read, Aldington, Sassoon, Owen and Rosenberg – were more radical in their protests and chose to approach it from a more raw and crude perspective.

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[154] As Hibberd and Onions claim, "modern readers tend to assume that Owen and Sassoon can be treated as norms by which to read other poets of the war, or as typical or ordinary soldiers" (2). Yet, they remained a small minority who, as A.J.P Taylor argues, "spoke only for a minority" (*English History* 61).

Much of the bitter truthfulness of ghost myth poetry, however, is associated with one of the most tragic events in the war. Because of the number of victims on a single day, the Battle of the Somme is regarded as a turning point in people's attitudes towards the Great War. As Hynes remarks, "it was the middle year of the war, and at the exact middle of the year the crucial battle began that changed British fortunes – it's almost *too* symmetrical" (*A War Imagined* 99).[155] It is argued that after the Battle of the Somme the mood of much of the war poetry changed as poets began to see that some of the ideas repeated at the beginning of the war were mistaken. In the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, David Jones explains the reasons why the idea of a turning point applies to his literature:

> This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was part of. The period covered begins early in December 1915 and ends early in July 1916. The first date corresponds to my going to France. The latter roughly marks a change in the character of our lives in the Infantry on the West Front. From then onward things hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect. […] In the earlier months there was a certain attractive amateurishness, and elbow-room for idiosyncrasy that connected one with a less exacting past. […] So did we in 1916 sense a change. How impersonal did each new draft seem arriving each month, and all these new-fangled gadgets to master. (IX)

By 1916 it was clear that none of the earlier expectations would be fulfilled: The war would be longer than expected and it showed no signs of being heroic. The war spirit was running down and that inevitably showed in the writing.

Yet, even as the poems for which most war poets are best remembered date from after this period, particularly Owen's and Sassoon's, it would not be appropriate to attribute all patriotic verse to 1914 or all disillusioned-realistic work to the post-Somme period. It is in fact possible to find Ghost myth elements in some of the poetry written before the Somme and traces of the heroic after the 1918 Armistice. An illustration of this is given in "In the Pink," Sassoon's first disillusioned poem, written in February 1916 and in Herbert

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[155]   The battle of the Somme began on 1 July 1916 and dragged into a stalemate in November. See Samuel Hynes. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture.* 1990. (London: Pimlico, 1992) for more on the social and cultural reasons why the belief in the Battle of the Somme as a watershed is shared by so many people.

Read's "To a Conscript of 1940," written in 1945 and still maintaining faith in the warrior spirit.[156]

While the traditional language of war continued as the war went on, disenchantment had already set in before the Somme and its expressions were being read and published. Graves' *Over the Brazier* appeared in May 1916, Sassoon's poems began to be published in the *Cambridge Magazine* at about the same time and two poems by Isaac Rosenberg appeared in *Poetry* in December 1916. Charles Sorley's "All the Hills and Vales Along," published *In Marlborough and Other Poems* in January 1916 after his death in the Battle of Loos, gives his patriotic song an ironic twist when he abruptly ends the poem with "So be merry, so be dead" (44).[157] Similarly, Edward Thomas' "This is No Case of Petty

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[156]   Even if written before the Somme, Sassoon's "In the Pink" was stepping beyond what was familiar ground by then:

> And then he thought: to-morrow night we trudge
> Up to the trenches, and my boots are rotten.
> Five miles of stodgy clay and freezing sludge,
> And everything but wretchedness forgotten.
> To-night he's in the pink; but soon he'll die.
> And still the war goes on; *he* don't know why. (13-18)

Particularly if it is compared with his previous poem, "To Victory:"

> Return, musical, gay with blossom and fleetness,
> Days when my sight shall be clear and my heart rejoice;
> Come from the sea with breadth of approaching brightness,
> When the blithe wind laughs on the hills with uplifted voice. (13-16)

As Patrick Campbell suggests, "it is surprising that they come from the same pen; that they were written only five weeks apart" (*Siegfried Sassoon* 94). A look at the two versions shows Sassoon attempting to develop his critique of the war by adopting a language more suitable to what he had witnessed as a soldier in the trenches. Yet, the language is carefully used in "In the Pink" so as "not to sail too close to the actual circumstances" (Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon* 94). At this point, Sassoon had already met Graves, "the most significant flesh and blood artistic influence on him at the front" (Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon* 94); his change may have been the direct result of Graves' criticism or it may have been caused by what Fussell calls Sassoon's "binary vision" (90) between "the 'nice' unquestioning youth of good family, alternately athlete and dreamer, and the fierce moralist of 1917, surging with outrage and disdain" (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 90).

[157]   Although Sorley did not live to experience the post-Somme disenchantment – he died in October 1915 – his poetry not only shows a continuous exploration of war as a tragic paradox but a reluctance to endorse traditional heroic values. "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead," which alludes directly to Brooke's jingoism in "The Dead," and "To Germany" illustrates the complexity of his response to war.

Right or Wrong," written on 26 December 1915, insists that his reasons for fighting have nothing to do with the hatred propaganda: "I hate no Germans, nor grow hot/ With Love of Englishmen, to please newspapers" (3-4).[158]

But it is Robert Graves' "A Dead Boche," written in 1916 and published in *Fairies and Fusiliers* in 1917, which can be accurately identified as one of the founding poems both in its denial of the Victorian hero myth and in its reaffirmation of the new realism of the trenches. What Graves does in "A Dead Boche" is "to take Romantic convention and thrust war into it, turning landscape into landscape-with-corpse, and making the plain words of war do the work of the coloured words of Romantic poetry" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 192-193). The dead Boche is the title and the centre of the poem:

> To-day I found in Mametz Wood
> > A certain cure for lust of blood:
> Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
> > In a great mess of things unclean,
> Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
> > With clothes and face a sodden green,
> Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
> > Dribbling black blood from nose and beard. (5-12)

The poem subverts Romantic nature in the confrontation of imaginary and external reality. The man is alone in the woods; he is leaning against a tree. But this scenery cannot be Romantic because he has been killed and his corpse has been obscenely exposed. As part of a deliberate break with the past, Graves subverts traditional conceptions of time and space and shows the reality of war, with its dead men and nature.[159]

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[158]   However, it is important to note that very few of the poems written by Thomas address the subject of war directly. In "A Private," for instance, "the stress is on the continuity of natural processes rather than in making any assertion about the fact of war itself" (Bergonzi 86). The poet confronts war in the images of rural England. In this sense, he may be compared with Blunden and Gurney in their poetic orientations, "neither traditionally heroic nor radically anti-heroic [but] the products of a gentle mind intent upon preserving its defences" (Bergonzi 72).

[159]   Similarly, Rosenberg's "Returning, we hear the larks," written in 1917, uses Shelley's skylark, a Romantic symbol for the creative imagination in Nature, to make the contrast with the reality of war.

In 1917, more poetry books were published: Sassoon's *The Old Huntsman* in May, Robert Nichols' *Ardours and Endurances* in July and Ivor Gurney's *Severn and Somme* in October.[160] Of the four, *The Old Huntsman* made a particular impact because of its originality and authenticity, but continued to use archaic language and "happy warrior" associations. It is not until his next volume, *Counter-Attack* (1918), that Sassoon acquired his acid, satirical voice. So much so that Woolf suggests that the poems are "too fiercely suspicious of any comfort or compromise, to be read as poetry" (Woolf qtd in Hibberd, *Poetry…* 46). Sassoon seemed to have been so immersed in his war experience that he was not able to respond poetically to it. In fact, from the "war has made us wise" (3) of his poem "Absolution" (*The Old Huntsman* 13) to the "O Jesu, make it stop!" (14) of "Attack" (*Counter-Attack* 18), it is possible to trace the transformation of Sassoon's tone and sentiment from his early idealism to the severe realism of the later works.

It was not until July 1918, however, that an anthology of poetry, Bertram Lloyd's *Poems Written during the Great War*, showed that there definitely was a group of poets who had not shared the patriotic commitment. A year later, Lloyd's *The Paths of Glory* was even more precise and stated in the preface that

> The writers whose poems are included in this collection [among them, Aldington, Read and Sassoon] may hold very diverse views on war. But they are nevertheless all agreed in believing that however much individual gallantry and self-sacrifice it may incidentally call forth, war must be regarded to-day as an execrable blot upon civilization. (Lloyd, *The Paths of Glory* 10)

Wilfred Owen's poetry was not included in *The Paths of Glory*. Unfortunately, he lived to see only four of his poems published before he died on 4 November

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[160]   Gurney's wartime poems were published in two collections, the already mentioned *Severn and the Somme* (1917) and *War's Embers* (1919). A selection of Gurney's later work, written after he got mentally ill, was edited by Blunden and published as *Poems* in 1954. Like Blunden and Thomas, Gurney deals with the nostalgia he felt for his homeland in contrast with his tragic present in the trenches. These poems are not essentially anti-heroic but rather puzzled by experiences the poet could not fully understand.

1918, a week before the Armistice.[161] It was thanks to the efforts of Edith Sitwell and Siegfried Sassoon that a larger selection of his work, *Poems of Wilfred Owen*, was edited two years later. The poems were carefully selected and arranged so that Owen was presented as "a tragic, selfless, talented young man whose humanism in the face of wartime atrocity spoke out from every poem" (Walter, Introduction XXV). The Preface reinforces this picture, asserting that Owen's concern is with "pity" rather than "poetry" and underlining the realism of his work. The aesthetics of the Ghost myth are clearly drafted; in fact the phrase "the Poetry is in the Pity" would become the standard for this new war poetry: "that it would not be about heroes, that it would not use the big abstractions, that it would not be 'literary,' that it would be elegiac" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 437).[162]

However, although the book was favourably received, its success was not great (Walter, Introduction XXVi). The subsequent edition, Edmund Blunden's in 1931, revised and enlarged the first and even if it was not a best-seller either, it placed Owen in the position he deserved: "as the best of the British war poets, and the model to whom later poets turned when war was their subject" (Hynes *A War Imagined*, 437). Indeed, Blunden's edition was essential in the Ghost myth-making process, as was C. Day Lewis' complete and definite text of the poems, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1963), because it turned Owen into what he represents today: "neither a hero nor a coward, but a sacrifice" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 437).

While Owen's reputation grew rapidly after the war, Rosenberg remained fairly unknown. His collected poems, together with some prose pieces and extracts from his letters were not published until 1937.[163] Yet, he is regarded by critics as one of the greatest war poets. Speaking of Thomas, Owen and Rosenberg's poetic achievement, Philip Hobsbaum suggested in 1961 that "if they had

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[161]   "Song of Songs" was published anonymously in *The Hydra*, Craiglockhart Hospital's magazine, on 1 September 1917; "Miners" was published in *The Nation* on 26 January 1918, "Hospital Barge" and "Futility" were also published in *The Nation* on 15 June 1918.

[162]   See footnote 130 for a discussion on the use of the word "pity."

[163]   The Georgian poet Gordon Bottomley selected and edited the first posthumous collection of Rosenberg's work, *Poems by Issac Rosenberg* (1922) and collaborated with the critic D.W. Harding on the preparation of the *Collected Works* in 1937. See Bottomley, G and D Harding's *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937).

survived, would surely have constituted a big challenge to the prevailing standards in poetry: as big challenge, perhaps, as in their own time was presented by the Romantics" (Hobsbaum qtd in Hibberd, *Poetry*… 101). What most distinguishes Rosenberg from the other war poets is his impersonal treatment of war experience and his experimentation with language. "Dead Man's Dump," probably Rosenberg's finest trench poem, is a crystallisation of both:

> The plunging limbers over the shattered track
> Racketed with their rusty freight,
> Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
> And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
> To stay the flood of brutish men
> Upon our brothers dear (1-6)

Language fuses realism and symbolism (Bergonzi 117) and war is seen, as Harding suggests, not as "an incident of his life, to be seen from without, but instead, one kind of life, as unquestionable as any life" (qtd in Hibberd, *Poetry*… 91).[164] Although very different, Owen and Rosenberg's poems can be regarded as complementary: "Rosenberg treating [war] intensely but impersonally as a complex manifestation of values: Owen, with greater personal engagement, in which compassion, anger and a desire to inform all played a part […]" (Bergonzi 121).

Since the 1960s there has been a major revival of interest in Ghost myth poetry: This revival "told a story of idealism turning to realism, satire, protest and pity" (Hibberd and Onions 3). Without a doubt, the 1960s were a crucial moment in the creation of the canon of war poetry. The publication of anthologies to meet the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War involved a process of selection and organisation that prioritised the work of some poets while disregarding others. Ian Parson's *Men Who March Away* (1965), Brian Gardner's *Up to the line of Death* (1965), Maurice Hussey's Poetry *of the First World War* (1967) and E.L.

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[164]   In a letter written to Edward Marsh on 8 May 1917, Rosenberg describes the circumstances that inspired the poem: "I've written some lines suggested by going out wiring, or rather carrying wire up the line on limbers and running over dead bodies lying about. I don't think what I've written is very good but I think the substance is…" (Rosenberg 164).

Black's *1914-18 in Poetry* (1970) have made extensive appeal to the Ghost myth, grouping the material thematically in an attempt to offer a larger meaning, a more complete interpretation:

> Although none of the compilers makes any serious attempt to date poems or to supply information which might illuminate poets' intentions, they organise their material to fit an assumed progression from idealism to bitterness. Much misrepresentation results. Readers of these anthologies could be forgiven for supposing that satirists such as G.K. Chesterton, A.P. Herbert and Rudyard Kipling turned against the war, or that soldier-poets after 1916 all believed the war to be pointless. (Hibberd and Onions 4)

In recent years a number of anthologies have been published which seem to challenge this assumption. Among them, Katherine Reilly's *Scars Upon my Heart* (1981), Dominic Hibberd and John Onions' *Poetry of the Great War* (1986), Martin Stephen's *Never Such Innocence Again* (1988) and Walter's *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (2006). These works offer a rather more varied range of poems than their predecessors. Yet, it is the poems of Owen and Sassoon that are still central to the study of the Great War as the clearest illustrations of the Ghost myth.

III.2.2. Ghost Myth Prose

The immediate response coming from the poets who fought the war was the private letter, the diary or journal and, as discussed above, the poetry. Some of the letters, journals and diaries written while at the front were later turned into memoirs by the survivors. However, the letters written by Wilfred Owen, Charles Sorley, Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and Isaac Rosenberg – four of them killed in action and one sent to a mental hospital after the war – were collected by relatives, friends or biographers and published posthumously.[165]

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[165]   Wilfred Owen died while in service on 4 November 1918, one day before his promotion to full Lieutenant came through and just seven days before the end of the war. After being promoted to the rank of Captain in August 1915, Charles Sorley took part in the Battle of Loos. He was shot in the head by a sniper and killed instantly on the 13 October. Edward Thomas, aged 39, was killed by the blast of a shell during the Arras offensive on Easter Day, 1917. Detailed for a wiring patrol on 31 March 1918, Isaac Rosenberg failed to return. His remains were later found with those of his comrades. Ivor Gurney, on the other hand, survived the war but a physical and

Owen's *Collected Letters* were published in 1967 by his brother Harold Owen and John Bell. In 1982 came Hibberd's *Wilfred Owen's Letters: Some Additions, Amendments, and Notes,* which led to a significant increase in the knowledge and understanding of Owen and his work. Also with the help of Harold Owen, John Bell published *Selected Letters* in 1985, a deeply accurate and informed edition of the letters written between 1907 and 1918. Whereas the volume of 673 letters was reduced to 326, the *Selected Letters* "take into account as much as possible of the new background knowledge that has accumulated over the eighteen years" (John Bell, Introduction VIII). In 2007, Jeremy Hooker edited *Wilfred Owen, Mapping Golgotha: Letters & Poems.* It is not surprising that ninety years after Owen's death, publications still reflect the dominant myth. As Morris argues of Hooker's collection:

> This sombre and sumptuous collection of writing by Wilfred Owen possesses multiple symbolisms. Its title is symbolic of its matter - the pathos and pity of war. It appears almost 90 years after the battle in France in which Owen was killed, at 25 years of age. Its format is allegorically sad in colour and in texture - colours that might suggest mud or mustard gas, illustrations to wrench the heart. (Morris "The Greatest Voice…")

Although it cannot be said that the letters of Charles Sorley also condemn the pity of war, they maintain Owen's detached and ironic manner. Published by his father in 1919 and including letters written from Germany and from the Western Front, *The Letters of Charles Sorley, With A Chapter of Biography* were edited as they had been written, except perhaps for a few explanations and references. As W.R. Sorley argues in the Preface, "[Charles Sorley] speaks for himself in these letters; and they have been selected so as to let him be seen as he truly was" (VI).

Similarly, Edward Thomas' *Selected Letters* (1995) present a vivid portrayal of Thomas' life, from his time as an undergraduate at Oxford through to his final days at the front. Although others have edited his letters to single correspondents, the purpose of R. George Thomas' collection was to cover the

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emotional crisis ended in his attempted suicide in 1918. In 1922, he was sent to the City of London mental hospital where he died in 1937.

entire range of Edward Thomas's writing life with letters largely unpublished before: "These letters allow us to overhear, if not fully understand, his abundant reflections upon his life's experience" (Introduction XX).[166]

Edited by R.K.R. Thornton in 1983 and 1991 respectively, Ivor Gurney's *War Letters* and *Collected Letters* also focus on "[Gurney's] career from enlistment in February 1915, through his […] service at the Front from May 1916 to September 1917, to his stay in various hospitals in Scotland and England and his return home towards the end of the war" (Introduction 10). Gurney wrote hundreds of letters, but Thornton argues that "by concentrating on this limited period of Gurney's life, it is possible to give fuller representation of his ideas and experiences in that period" (Thornton, Introduction 10).

Like the others, Isaac Rosenberg kept up a regular correspondence with friends, poets and artists back home. His letters are useful to the understanding of his work, his contemporaries, and above all his doubts about the conflict. They were first published in 1979 as *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Painting and Drawings* by Ian Parsons; but this edition is now out of print. In 2003, Jean Liddiard, made a considerable selection of his finest poems and most revealing letters, providing also an authoritative introduction and a detailed chronology, and published them as *Selected Poems and Letters*. During the removal of the British Library from the British Museum in 1995, 34 letters and several draft poems were discovered in the misplaced files of Laurence Binyon, Rosenberg's mentor and poet. Liddiard edited them as *Poetry out of my Head and Heart: Unpublished letters & Poem Versions* (2007) and included letters to Binyon, to the poet Gordon Bottomley, and various family members and friends. There is also a brief biography and chronology. [167]

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[166] But R. George Thomas not only edited Edward Thomas' letters and war diary; he also published the *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley* (1968) and wrote the most recent biography, *Edward Thomas: A Portrait* (1985). There are also over a thousand reviews and essays published in journals and literary magazines between 1897 and 1917, several biographies, among them John Moore's *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas* (1939); Henry Coombes' *Edward Thomas: A Critical Study* (1953); Vernon Scannell's *Edward Thomas* (1963); William Cooke's *Edward Thomas: A Critical Biography* (1970); Jan Marsh's *Edward Thomas: A Poet for his Country* (1978).

[167] Liddiard had also published Rosenberg's biography in 1975: *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half Used Life.*

Despite the obvious importance of letter writing to those who took part in the war, it may be arguable whether the epistolary form is a reliable source not only of factual testimony but of more vague aspects of mood. Letters were often either officially censored or self-censored or, as Fussell argues, "composed largely to sustain the morale of the folks at home, to hint as little as possible at the real, worrisome circumstance of the writer. No one wrote: 'Dear Mother, I am scared to death'" (Fussell, *Wartime* 145). However, and despite their limitations, the letters written by the war poets tend to show a heightened awareness of the therapeutic function of writing in such a situation. Ivor Gurney, for instance, describes his letters to Marion Scott, his "patient correspondent," as a "continual self-analysis" and "the safety-valves of my discomfort" (145).

Together with letter writing, several prose endeavours were undertaken with the view of setting the record straight as soon as the Great War ended. A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922) and Herbert Read's *In Retreat* (1925) were the three early war books trying to shape the 1914-1918 experience into fictional, semi-fictional or autobiographical form.[168] Hynes describes them as "anti-monuments" as they were

> …monuments of loss: loss of values, loss of a sense of order, loss of belief in the words and images that the past had transmitted as valid. They testify to disconnection from the past, and from consequent dislocation, and to a sense of impoverishment. And they speak – even the paintings speak [see figs 13 and 14] – the language of disillusionment and rejection. (*A War Imagined* 307)[169]

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[168]   Two French war books, however, Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1916), translated into English and published as *Under Fire* (1918), and George Duhamel's *Vie des Martyrs* (1917), published in England as *The New Book of Martyrs* (1918), had already reached both the British public and the soldiers at the front with a disillusioned perspective of the war. These were in fact the first two war novels which started the wave of war books that would follow.

[169]   The German artist Otto Dix, who volunteered in 1914 and shared the naïve view of many young soldiers at the time, dropped all the elements of celebration of the warrior hero and the nobility of the call to arms in his post-war meditations of trench warfare. In 1924, he created a cycle of fifty etchings entitled *Der Krieg* (see fig. 13): "They are among the most searing works on war in any artistic tradition. To depict the dehumanisation of soldiers in war, Dix went back to photographs of the devastations of the trenches. We know of his interest in Goya in this period, but there is also much here to indicate his growing exploration of the hideous images of Grünewald and Cranach" (Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 161).

Fig. 13. Dix, Otto. *Triptychon Der Krieg - War Triptych The Death*, 1929-32 (detail of middle panel). Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Dresden. Web. 11 October 2010. <http://www.memorial-caen.fr/> Fig. 14. Spencer, Stanley. *The Resurrection of the Soldiers, 1928-29.* Sandham Memorial Chapel, Burghclere*.* Web. 11 October 2010. <http://www.memorial-caen.fr/>

Published as early as 1919, A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* is the first prose fiction that 'courageously' denied the traditional conception of the hero. Based on the case of Edwin Dyett, the naval sub-lieutenant shot for cowardice, the novel tries to make the point that "Harry Penrose" was in fact a brave officer whose nerves were shattered by overexposure to combat: "He had much to give. He gave it all. But a blind Fate declared it was not enough" (Churchill, Preface VIII). Herbert rejects the "big words" that sent men to war, but finds a way not to upset a readership used to the heroic rhetoric by portraying Harry

In 1927, the English painter Stanley Spencer was commissioned a war-memorial – a series of paintings that would cover the walls of the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, Berkshire (see fig. 14). As Hynes states, Spencer "drew on his own experiences of the war, and the pictures taken together constitute a kind of autobiography, 'a sort of Odyssey' as he said, like the war memoirs of Graves and Sassoon" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 460).

Penrose as a sympathetic, understandable figure. In Hynes' words, "Herbert succeeded in constructing a new kind of war novel, and a new kind of memorial – an anti-monument to a condemned coward. Harry Penrose is not a hero in the traditional sense, but [...] the victim-as-hero" (*A War Imagined* 306).

It was not until 1922 that another prominent example of the Ghost myth was published. C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* is, in Onions' words, "the book which made the ironic journey the central *motif* of the literary Englishmen's war" (56).[170] The Great War is portrayed as a costly and ghastly mistake, vividly drawing the vast gap between Tommy Atkins and the Brass Hats in a war in which "the lions felt they had found out the asses" (Montague 49).[171] Even if the explicit attack against the High Command, the Church and the aristocracy positioned *Disenchantment* in a marginal position when it was published, the text is not always discontented and alienated. On the contrary, Montague believes there is hope for the British after the war, but hope is based on individual struggle: "This is an individual's job, and a somewhat lonely one, though a nation has to be saved by it" (211).

Written also in 1919, Herbert Read's *In Retreat* describes the withdrawal of the British Army from St. Quentin due to the German attack in March 1918. Because of the publishers' refusal to print "'anything bleak' in 1919" (Edwards 15), this brief war diary remained unpublished until 1925, which is curious because the text is not openly pessimistic about war:

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[170]   *Disenchantment* was first published at seven shillings in a series of articles in *The Manchester Guardian* between October 1920 and November 1921 (See Grieves' "C.E. Montague and the Making of *Disenchantment* 1914-1921" pages 37-38). However, the novel did not sell well; by 1927 it had sold just over 9000 copies in Britain.

[171]   A "brass hat" was a high ranking officer. The expression "Lions led by donkeys" has been widely used to compare the bravery of the British soldiers with the incompetence of their commanders. Although Evelyn Blücher had attributed it to the German GHQ in her memoir *An English Wife in Berlin* (1921), the expression came to be popularly known as the title of Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961). Clark was unable to specify the exact origin of the expression and credited it to a conversation between two generals in the memoirs of Falkenhayn: "Ludendorff: 'The English soldiers fight like lions.' Hoffman: 'True. But don't we know that they are lions led by donkeys'" (Clark, Epigraph). In the post Second World War period, Philip Larkin uses another cliché in his poem "This Be the Verse:" The "fools in old style coats and hats" (6) represent the old generations who sent young men to war.

> While [Read] remained convinced of the utter evil of war, his description of his adventures in *Retreat* and "The Raid" are dispassionate and calmly analytical and they convey, in a self-effacing manner, the fact that he was very proud of what he had achieved – proud of having come through without cracking, or coarsening and with exceptional distinction. (Cecil, "Damned proud…" 294)

In Retreat not only suppresses the writer's feelings and emotions but it has, in Bergonzi's words, "the simple and unadorned manner of an official report" (148). Both *In Retreat* and "The Raid" have been reprinted several times, the most recent is *The Contrary Experience* (1963), which also contains Read's war diary. Although neither Herbert nor Montague, or Read belonged to the school of Ghost myth writers appearing later, their voices anticipate the anger expressed by them.

Yet, as said above, these three books were coldly received by critics. Still devastated by the scale of the loss and suffering, neither publishers nor the reading public were much interested in this type of literature.[172] The prose that would come to terms with the realities of war and would be widely read by the British public had yet to be written. Except for these three books, "there was a curious imaginative silence" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 423). As Read observes, "it took a few years for a new generation to grow up and become war-conscious" (Read, *A Coat of Many Colours* 47).

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[172]   The only British war novels which succeeded with the public between 1920 and 1928 were those regarded as "middlebrow," a term coined in the 1920s to refer to "those novels and plays which made no attempt to go beyond or […] deviate from comfortably familiar presentations" (Bracco, 10). These included three best-sellers: Wilfred Ewart's *The Way of Revelation* (1921), meant to be an English *War and Peace* which included all the traditional war themes, Robert Keable's *Simon Called Peter* (1921), a trivial novel about the illegitimate liaisons of a Baptist preacher, and Ernest Raymond's *Tell Englan*d (1922), "half a war novel and half a school story in the English tradition that runs from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *Stalky & Co* and *The Loom of Youth*" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 332). All of them were much more acclaimed than any of their contemporary disenchanted war novels. Other best-sellers were the so-called escapist books like A.S.M. Hutchinson's *If Winter Comes* (1921), a love story of disillusionment in post-war England and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914), about the efforts of one lost little boy to survive in the forbidding wilds of Africa. Detective stories were also popular (see page 129 of this thesis).

Several explanations have been given to account for the silence of the 1920s. Hynes argues that that was "the necessary gestation period" for the war to be exorcised both in narrative and in life and that perhaps the imminence of a future war at the end of the decade "made the telling of the past war's story both possible and imperative" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 425). Watson, on the other hand, asserts that "it was only the difficulties of the 1920s and after that created the disillusioned look back at war; it was not, for most people, a product of the war years themselves" (186). The bureaucratic demobilisation, the difficulty to re-establish pre-war social bonds and the rising unemployment rates may have not only transformed the return home into a painful journey but caused a disappointed look back into the war years.

Speculating on the effects that the Great War would have on literature, in 1915 Ervine predicted that "the poet who will write superbly of this war will not begin to do so until the war has been at an end for a long time" (92-93). It was not until the late 1920s and 1930s that Ervine's prophetic words were confirmed and that 'the war-books boom' began. As Eksteins argues, "what some felt to have been a 'conspiracy of silence' was shattered with a vengeance" ("All Quiet…" 345). This period witnessed the publication of a flood of war novels and memoirs that fixed and defined the Ghost myth in the version that is still current. It is important to stress, however, that it was the enormous success of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929 that turned war into "a saleable subject" (Eksteins "All Quiet…" 345). [173] Whereas several war books were published immediately before Remarque's novel, *All Quiet* "stood at the centre […] in popularity, in spirit, and as a source of controversy" (Eksteins "All Quiet…" 345) causing "the explosion of war material in 1929" and "a bitter and acrimonious debate on the essence of the war experience" (346).

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[173]   *All Quiet on the Western Front* was the single work that presented the most moving expression of the Ghost myth and probably exercised the widest influence on British war poets. The novel was received in Germany and in other countries, including Britain and the United States, with enormous enthusiasm and rapidly became one of the best-sellers of all time. It sold 250,000 copies in the first year. Even if regarded as "the Bible of the common soldier" (Read qtd in Eksteins 354), doubts were raised over its authenticity. As Eksteins argues: "*All Quiet* was not 'the truth about the war'; it was, first and foremost, the truth about Erich Maria Remarque in 1928" (*All Quiet…* 362). Indeed, Remarque's book may be regarded as a valuable reflection of the post-war mind rather than as a reflection of the war experience.

Prose dethroned poetry as the predominant literary form. The war books were survival accounts mostly written by the war poets or with their work at their foundation. They can be classified according to two parameters: the author and the narrative form. Eric Partridge distinguishes three types of authors of war books:

> First, there were 'the optimists (very few, these optimists)' who 'are inclined to be idealistic.' There were also 'the pessimists,' who were 'naturalist – even brutal.' Finally, he discussed 'the impartialists,' who were 'realistic in the best sense of the word […] it is these last who have produced the best work.' (Partridge qtd in Watson 210).

As to the narrative form, while Hynes distinguishes between "the autobiographical and the historical, or the personal and the general, or the Small Picture and the Large" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 425), Bergonzi differentiates those which are subjective in their approach, "offering the author's own reflections and showing the war as it affected his own development" (147) from those which are objective, that is those "suppressing the author's direct feelings and allowing emotion to be expressed only by implication in the descriptive process" (147). In Hynes' view, Blunden's *Undertones of War* would be an example of the autobiographical mode, while Graves' *Goodbye to All That* and Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* would be examples of the historical or general narrative of war. According to Bergonzi's classification, Montague's *Disenchantment* would represent subjective narratives while Herbert Read's *In Retreat* and Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* would have been narrated from an objective point of view.

The process of emergence and growth of Ghost myth prose can be traced in the chronological description of the war books that were produced from the mid-twenties onwards, having, as said before, the publication of Remarque's *All Quiet* as "the centre of the war boom" (Eksteins, *All Quiet* 346). Among the war books published before Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* are Max Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy – *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), and *The Last Post* (1928) –and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928).

Max Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme* was published in 1928. [174] Although it was well received by critics and had a moderate success among the reading public, it went out of print until 1996, when it was reissued by the Imperial War Museum. Even if Plowman's purpose was to criticise war, as Pittock observes, "there is […] no attempt to shock, to stir indignation or solicit pity […]. This results in a memoir which gains authenticity through emotional restraint" (218). Like Sassoon before him, Plowman publicly declared his anti-war position; yet, unlike Sassoon he was the only soldier in active service to oppose fighting and to be court-martialled as a result. Edited posthumously by his widow Dorothy, *Bridge into the Future* was published in 1944 and contains the letters written from Plowman's thirtieth year until a few days before his death in 1941. Its purpose was to turn the sacrifice of those who had died at the front into a means of deepening consciousness. As Plowman observes, "the best men went to the Front & died. Now the job is to build their bridge into the future – to give a mark to their idealism" (*Bridge into the Future* 261).

Like Plowman's memoir and letters, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928) is a good example of Bergonzi's "consciously objective" mode (150): "we are given very little of the substance of the young Blunden's personality, merely a pronounced flavour of his mind and sensibility" (Bergonzi 151). Such flavour is that of his "act of Romantic recollection of an 'unfallen' state" (Edwards 18). Blunden portrays the destruction of war through the poetic language of Romanticism, blending a sense of chaos and disorder with a feeling of continuity of what has been. His memoir was highly acclaimed for its new autobiographical perspective; it is a limited piece of autobiography that records Blunden's active service only, beginning with the author's departure for France in 1916 and ending with his return early in 1918.

Ford Madox Ford gave his war tetralogy, *Parade's End*, the form of a long historical narrative embodying the pre-war world, the war itself and its aftermath. Indeed, *Some Do Not* begins in "the ostensible security of pre-war England," *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up* "[move] through the dispersals and destructions of the war" and *The Last Post* ends "in the

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[174]   The book was published under the pseudonym of "Mark VII" which was "the official designation of the .303 cartridge of the standard British Lee Enfield rifle used in the war" (Pittock 217).

fragmented and disoriented post-war world" (Hynes *A War Imagined* 431-32).[175] It is the feelings in *Parade's End* which are important: a contradictory attitude towards the pre-war world; and the belief that between the pre-war world and the world at war there was a gap, a discontinuity in history that could not be bridged. And yet, at the same time, Madox Ford hopes for an escape from the unfriendly environment and a return to some of the characteristic Victorian themes: the affection for pastoral England and the despair at the loss of a tangible heroic ideal. However, it is this identifiable sense of history that becomes the central theme in the novel, "a conception of history as discontinuous, fragmented, and subjective" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 433).

The first volume of Siegfried Sassoon's semi-fictionalised autobiography, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*, appeared anonymously as *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* in 1928. The novel ends with Sherston's arrival at the front. *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* was published in 1930 and recounts Sassoon's war experiences up to his act of defiance to military authority. *Sherston's Progress*, which appeared in 1936, deals with his arrival in Craiglockhart mental hospital and his encounter with doctor W.H. R. Rivers. Since Sassoon's identity as a poet is left out of the story, Fussell has argued that the trilogy should be regarded as fiction (*The Great War...* 104). Yet it is clear that Sassoon's own experience is the main protagonist throughout the trilogy. His story is a record of truth, and as such has been included in this thesis.

The persona of George Sherston may have been used as a distancing mechanism – "a simplified version of my outdoor self" who was "denied the complex advantage of being a soldier poet" (Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey* 69). Yet this mechanism becomes useless as the story unfolds: Sherston is so evidently Sassoon that readers become aware of the additional poetic dimension to the soldier's reaction to war that is not acknowledged in the text. The trilogy evidently revolves around psychology and the Sherston-Sassoon doubling may

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[175]   It seems that Madox Ford wrote *The Last Post* at the request of a female friend who wanted to know what happened with the characters at the end of the story. However, as Bergonzi observes, "a few years later he virtually disowned it, saying that if the work was ever to appear in a single volume he would like it to do so as a trilogy" (175). This is probably why the last novel is quite different in tone and technique from the previous three.

be seen as a mirror for Sassoon's fragmented identity. This type of uncensored – and contradictory – narrative may have had, as Edwards argues, "a purgative function" (23) or perhaps the acknowledgement of "the distorting power of memory" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 436). Either way, Sassoon's trilogy remains at the heart of the modern British mythology of the First World War.

In 1945, Sassoon managed to complete his third autobiographical work, *Siegfried's Journey 1916-1920*, on which he had been working for two years.[176] Since he had already dealt with most of the war events in his works of fiction, he focused on his friendships and on the exploration of his true self, particularly in relation to his protest. The publication of Sassoon's *Diaries 1915-1918* in 1983, edited and introduced by Hart-Davis, came to fill the gaps left by the trilogy.[177] The diaries deserve the greatest attention, not only because these years were crucial to Sassoon's search for a specific identity both as a man and as a poet, but because his approach to his development from naive enthusiasm through disillusionment to dissent, and finally to alienation is less self-conscious than in his fiction.

Among the books whose publication was sparked by Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* are Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Aldington's *Death of a Hero*. (1929), Carrington' *A Subaltern's War* (1929), Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930), Williamson's *The Patriot's Progress* (1930), Chapman's *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933) and Wyndham Lewis' *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography 1914-1926* (1937). Published the same year as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Goodbye to All That* seems to outdo the aggressive realism of Remarque's novel. The type of language used in the description of No Man's Land and trench life points to a Ghost myth approach to war. However, the reception of the book was not that intended by Robert Graves, who was surprised to find that what he regarded as a highly fictionalised memoir had been labelled anti-war.

Although Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) is generally studied as a war memoir, it may also be considered a comprehensive autobiography,

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[176]   He had already written *The Old Century and Seven More Years* (1938) and *The Weald of Youth* (1942).

[177]   This volume was preceded in 1981 by a volume covering the years 1920-2.

covering from his childhood and public-school days through to his period as a professor in Egypt in the 1920s or, as Hynes observes, "[as] a record of historical change in England during the first three decades of this century" with the war acting as "the transforming force" (*A War Imagined*, 427). However, I have kept the label war memoir because the central chapters of the book revolve around his war experience, his alleged death in the Battle of the Somme and his participation in the Sassoon affair. These two episodes not only mark Graves' life as a soldier, but further reinforce the Ghost myth: "a man died and yet survived, another man was sane and yet mad" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 429). The idea that there was a before and after Graves' war experience is brought to attention in the 1929 edition in which the memoir itself is described as "a story of what I was, not what I am" (Graves qtd in Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 97).

Published by C.E. Carrington under the pseudonym of Charles Edmonds in 1929, *A Subaltern's War* is a straightforward and objective account of his experience as a junior officer in the war. Unlike other war books, *A Subaltern's War* remained a relatively minor classic of the Great War*,* probably because it was critical of the self-pitying and gloomy tone popularised by Remarque's novel and Sassoon's and Graves' memoirs: "In this story of the war there will be no disenchantment" (Carrington, *A Subaltern's War* 17). Carrington's oppositional voice became louder in his later book *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965) in which he maintained his defence of the purpose, heroic beliefs and positive experience of the soldiers of the Great War. He remained pro-war for the rest of his life and critical of Ghost myth writers.

Like Carrington's memoir, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930) is a graphic account of soldiering, but there is no military zeal or patriotic fervour in Manning's approach to war. Despite being written by somebody from an educated, upper-middle class background, the novel was meant to record the lives of the ranks. Therefore, its verbal honesty had to be somewhat bowdlerised to conform to the publishing conventions of the time. As Bergonzi observes, "there was nothing about the elegant aestheticism of Manning's earlier literary career that might have prepared one for the unrestrained realism of this, his

single novel" (190).[178] While the enigmatic "Bourne" is indeed endowed with most of the author's own qualities, artistic detachment was achieved by describing the experience of the ranks on the Western Front. Such a viewpoint put the author at a unique position in relation to his contemporaries as he had the chance of giving more prominence to the hitherto largely neglected Tommy.

Unlike Carrington's memoir, it is problematic to try to place *Her Privates We* (1930) in the pro-war or anti-war type. As Parfitt argues, "for [Manning] the war is organic and morally almost neutral, and although he renders the filth, pettiness and horror he also sees the war as providing the chance for Man to show his finest qualities" (Parfitt 80). The problem confronted by Manning's men was not only the futility of war but the affirmation of their own will in the face of death.

This last remark takes us on to consider a very different novel. Also published in 1929, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* is basically the account of how George Winterbourne was progressively and inevitably forced to commit suicide at the war's end. Like Herbert's Harry Penrose or Manning's Bourne, Winterbourne exhibits the type of stoic resistance that may win him a Victoria Cross, yet, his power of action is driven too far to resist the weight of war and he is turned into a victim rather than a hero. The result is a pessimistic, cynical, and disillusioned

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[178]   Manning's characters are, as Boyd claims "real men, real soldiers – and all soldiers swear, vilely, constantly" (Introduction X). So much so, that there was an expensive unexpurgated edition of about 600 copies entitled *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, typographically identical to *Her Privates We*, except that it preserved the common obscenities of soldiers' speech. The following is a passage from *Her Privates We*, the bowdlerised, public version. A corporal addresses one of his men: "'An' you let me 'ear you talkin' on parade again with an officer present and you'll be on the bloody mat quick, See? You miserable begger, you! A bloody cow like you's sufficient to demoralise a hole muckin' Army Corps. Got it? Get those buzzers out, and do some bloody work for a change.'" (Manning qtd in Boyd, Introduction IX). And here is the same passage from the 1929 version, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, as it was originally written: "'An' you let me'ear you talkin' on parade again with an officer present and you'll be on the bloody mat, quick. See? You miserable bugger you! A bloody cunt like you's sufficient to demoralise a whole fuckin' Army Corps. Got it? Get those buzzers out, and do some bloody work, for a change." (Manning qtd in Boyd, Introduction IX-X). The words "bugger," "cunt" and "fuckin'" turn the situation into something fully human – into real life. As Boyd claims, "Suddenly, a veil is stripped away. These are real men, real soldiers" (X). However, the novel's popularity has always been associated to *Her Privates We*, which became a great success from the moment of its publication in 1930.

book constructed along the lines of the movements of a symphony: from *allegretto* to *adagio*, and then to a coda of lament (Ridgway, Introduction X). Moreover, by revealing Winterbourne's tragic outcome at the beginning of the novel, Aldington follows the structure of Greek tragedy "to avoid any cheap effects of surprise" and "give free expression to the feelings and ideas of one very minor actor in that great tragedy" (Aldington, *Life for Life's Sake*, 302).

Henry Williamson's *The Patriot's Progress* (1930) is another potent anti-war fiction of the time with, in Wohl's words, "a blunt, tough, machine-gun prose" illustrated with linocuts by Australian artist William Kermode (108). Like Aldington's, Williamson's text attacks the system that allowed and then furthered the war. Even the title's allusion to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is ironic. Rather than reaching the celestial city as Bunyan's Christian, Private John Bullock, a London clerk who enthusiastically enters the war, endures four years in the trenches, only to end up invalided, patronised by civilians and stripped of every illusion. Williamson seems to make no distinction between industrialised peace and industrialised war; war is presented as the product of industrial societies. The fact that Bullock is represented as serving the machine of industrialised Europe before 1914 makes him apt to become a cog in the mass of draftees marching to mechanised destruction. In Williamson's view, the technologically efficient carnage of the Great War only reflects the monotonous tedium of pre-war civilian life. The most dramatic irony of *The Patriot's Progress* is that after the war John Bullock is simply sent back into the system. The final lino-cut entitled "Epilogue" (see fig. 15 right) shows Bullock seated at a typewriter with a supervisor checking up on his work. It is virtually identical to the illustration appearing at the beginning of the book when, after leaving the Council School, Bullock starts working as a junior clerk in London (see fig. 15 left); the only difference between the pictures is that now one of the clerk's legs has been amputated.

While its literary merit makes it comparable with Blunden's in that it is "a work of pondered maturity" (Bergonzi 9), Guy Chapman's *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933) has remained outside the Ghost myth canon. The text acknowledges the influence of Blunden from the very beginning when Chapman admits that "I was loath to go" (Chapman 13), echoing Blunden's "I was not anxious to go"

(*Undertones of War* 3), and reflects the powerfully literary way in which most war poets reacted to the Great War. An illustration of this is the acknowledgement of Browne's literary influence in the title and the crowd of allusions and obscure epigraphs in the different chapters of the book, which are also prefaced with quotations by Shakespeare, Dryden, Arnold Bennett and Pound.[179] Like Blunden, Chapman depicts the war as an unfolding experience that builds up in power and gains authenticity as it climaxes in the account of the Third Battle of Ypres. Even if the encounter with war is presented as a disillusioning experience, Chapman's attitude is ambivalent: He hates war, but also feels a strange affection for it, "a subtler, even a vile, attraction" (Chapman 226).[180]

Fig. 15. Two of the lino-cuts by William Kermode, 1928. Henry Williamson. *The Patriot's Progress*. 1930. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004: pages 4 (left) and 195 (right). Print.

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[179]   The title of the memoir is taken from a book Chapman carried in his knapsack, Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial, Religio medici and Hydriotaphia*: "to drink of the ashes of dead relations, a passionate prodigality. He that hath the ashes of his friend, hath an everlasting treasure" (Browne 165).

[180]   In his autobiography, *A Kind of Survivor* (1975), Chapman admits that, apart from meeting his wife (the novelist Storm Jameson), his battalion was the only wholly fulfilling experience in his life: "To the years between 1914 and 1918 I owe everything of lasting value in my make-up. For any cost I paid in physical and mental vigour they gave me back a supreme fulfilment I should never otherwise have had" (Chapman qtd in Bond, "British 'Anti-War' Writers and their Critics,' 826).

While Chapman met Blunden near Ypres, Wyndham Lewis was not far serving as a second-lieutenant in charge of a "'six-inch How' battery" (Lewis 117). *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography 1914-1926* appeared in 1937 as the account of Lewis' life from before the war until almost a decade afterwards. However, it is his experience in the Royal Garrison Artillery as a heavy-gunner and its impact on his art, writings and personality which is central throughout.[181] Although the memoir expresses clear opposition to war and dissatisfaction with governmental institutions, Lewis' tone was different from the other writers examined here. As Bergonzi suggests, he is "dryly contemptuous rather than angry or hysterical" (164). Lewis' willingness to be controversial in relation to war worked perfectly well in his art, but it somehow undermined his literary credibility. This is probably because the portrait of his war experience, however reflective, is inscribed in a commitment to the primacy of irony over reflection.[182]

Together with Madox Ford, Sassoon and Graves, however, Lewis shares a common subject: the power of war to change individuals radically. Each offers an earlier self, seen from a distant time, and seen primarily in one intense relationship to war. It is not simply that Lewis' memoir is retrospective; it is that it looks back across a gap in which extreme changes have occurred: "My book is about a little group of people crossing a bridge. […] Of course the bridge is symbolic. The bridge *stands* for something else. The bridge, you, see is *the war*" (Lewis 2). The Lewis that remembers is not merely older, he is fundamentally

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[181]   Lewis was not only a novelist; he was also the founder of the Vorticist movement, a reputed painter and amateur of philosophy and politics. In fact the title of his memoir alludes to his pre-war career as an art activist and editor of *Blast* and to his involvement in the war as a bombardier, an artillery man. His most powerful and complex explorations of the war experience are probably in art. While at the front, he was commissioned by Lord Beaverbrook and the Canadian War Memorials Fund to paint *A Canadian Gun-Pit* (1918). However, his most famous war painting is *A Battery Shelled* (1919). See page 108 and 109 of this thesis for these paintings.

[182]   His post-war political stance was also controversial: He was determined to oppose the prevailing political and sexual paradigms, particularly communism and homosexuality. His book on *Hitler* (1931) – Hitler is presented as a "man of peace" (*Hitler* 32) – and his association to the British Fascist Party turned Lewis into an unpopular figure among intellectual and literary circles. So much so that, in part V of "Letter to Lord Byron" (1937), Auden calls him "that lonely old volcano of the Right" (Auden qtd in Haffenden 199). Although he later wrote *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and revoked his earlier admiration for Hitler and fascism, Lewis remained an isolated figure in the 1930s.

different. War acts as an education: "I started the war a different man to what I ended it" (Lewis 186).

New war memoirs continued to appear in the 1960s and beyond. Gerald Brenan's *A Life of One's Own: Childhood and Youth* appeared in 1962 and has unfortunately slipped into literary oblivion.[183] Brenan, a member of Bloomsbury, witnessed the Somme, was wounded just before Passchendaele and won the Military Cross and the *Croix de Guerre*. His autobiography covers the period 1894 to 1920, and deals with his childhood, adolescence and public-school education and early manhood, including his military service during the First World War. Despite his initial doubts about the purpose of war, Brenan actively sought the experience, which he saw as an adventure of self-discovery and a release from traditional values: "I could only burn up the impurities in my nature and become a real and authentic person if I sought them ["poverty, hunger, doss-houses, deserts and mountains"]. Now, in the middle of the war, a life in the infantry offered me much the same opportunities" (223).

First published in 1937, David Jones' *In Parenthesis* was reedited in 1961 with a note of introduction by T.S. Eliot. Unlike Brenan's, Jones' writing was indeed regarded as "a work of genius" (Eliot, Introduction VII). While not strictly a memoir, *In Parenthesis* cannot be attributed any other descriptive label either, as, in Jones' words, it concerns the "things I saw, felt, & was part of" (Jones IX). In effect, based on Jones' own experience as an infantryman, it narrates the story of Private John Ball in a mixed English-Welsh regiment starting with embarkation from England and ending months later with the attack on Mametz Wood during the Battle of the Somme. As Edwards asserts, Jones uses a combination of "military jargon, music-hall song, jingoistic newspaper talk, soldiers' profane slang, and the heroic phraseology of *chansons de geste*" in an attempt "to accommodate the modern soldier's experience to a sacral, timeless history that stretches back to Celtic Arthurian legend and beyond" (29). *In Parenthesis* may be seen as an attempt to revive traditional discourses and, as

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[183]   Perhaps a collected edition of his writings would have secured Brenan a better place in literary history as the values behind his work seem to be more inspiring than his private life. However, Brenan provided his readers with another ample account of his life, *A Personal Record* (1974), which depicts his arrival in Spain as a young man of twenty-six. This he also treats in detail in his classic travel book *South from Granada* (1957).

Bergonzi suggests, "to place the experience of war in a fresh mythic perspective" (200). Instead of marking the discontinuities with the heroic past, like Madox Ford, Sassoon or Graves, Jones finds the parallels.[184]

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a new wave of ghost myth prose fiction was published, this time set during the Great War but written by those who had not been there. Among them, William Boyd's *The New Confessions* (1987), Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy – Regeneration* (1991)*, The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995) – and Sebastian Faulk's *Birdsong* (1993)*.* These novels shared, in Todman's words: "a set of recurrent themes and images which summed up the First World War for writers and readers: poets, men shot at dawn, horror, death, waste" (160). By doing this, they all claimed the same familiar setting in the past which allowed them to reinforce the myth by repeating it.

III.3. The War-Books Controversy

Before I focus on the literary criticism written in the 1960s and 1970s with the purpose of establishing and reinforcing the Ghost myth, I will discuss what became known as 'the war-books controversy.' As some of the war books examined in the previous section have shown – Chapman's and Carrington's were perhaps the most eloquent – not everybody endorsed the artistic expression and meaning assigned to the emerging version of the war. This was noticed by several figures from inside and outside the military and the press who started to react against the Ghost myth literature boom, arguing that the disillusionment that had become inseparable from the trenches had distorted the perception of the war. The historians Douglas Jerrold and Cyril Falls were the most popularly known in this crusade against what was regarded as a pacifist conspiracy.[185]

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[184]   This attitude, however, was not easy to sustain. Jones' work was dismissed by Fussell as "an honourable miscarriage" (*The Great War…* 144), although he argues that the fact that the Great War "resists being subsumed into the heroic myth, is less Jones's fault than the war's" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 153).

[185]   Douglas Jerrold and Cyril Falls were both military historians who had served at the front. A veteran of Gallipoli and France and the author of the *Royal Naval Division* and *The War on Land, 1914-1918*, Jerrold was, in Bergonzi's words, "a right-wing journalist with romantic inclinations" (195). Falls had spent much of his war service behind the front lines with the General Staff or as

In February 1930, Jerrold published a polemic pamphlet entitled "The Lie about the War" and a few months later Falls published *War Books: A Critical Guide*. Jerrold's pamphlet reviewed sixteen war books that had been recently published and used a star system to rate them according to their literary merits. He did not criticise all the writers he mentioned: "of the books to which I am going to refer, none is indifferent and many are extremely fine" (Jerrold 9). Among them, he recognised the merits of *Undertones of War* and, with some objections, those of *Goodbye to All That*. On the whole, however, his main interest was not to discuss the literary value of the works in question but the story itself: "this obsession of futility" gave a false picture of the war; even when these books presented a relatively truthful picture of it, they distorted the core motivation of the conflict (Jerrold 18). Jerrold made the effort to convince readers that the war books told a consistent 'lie' and offered instead his version of the 'truth':

> The war of 1914-18 was a great tragedy because it was a great historical event. It was a great drama, because neither in its origins, its actions or its results was there any element fundamentally accidental or ultimately without meaning. It can only be right, or even useful, to deny the element of greatness to the struggle of 1914-18 if that element was absent. To deny the dignity of tragic drama to the war in the interests of propaganda is not only unworthy but damnably silly and incredibly dangerous. My case is that this is what we are doing to-day, and that it is time to make an end of it. (Jerrold 10)

In Jerrold's view, the 'lie' of the disenchantment school did not distinguish between hero and coward; all alike were brutalised and slaughtered. Brave men were shot for cowardice and the number of casualties was always disproportionately high: "every ration party runs into an intensive bombardment and every shell finds its mark" (Jerrold 21). Moreover, the war was "unnecessarily prolonged [...] out of mere callousness or for the personal gain of politicians, contractors and generals" (Jerrold 22). The lie about the war was

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liaison to the French. He had written The *History of the 36ᵗʰ (Ulster) Division* and *The History of the Royal Ulster Rifles*, and worked for the History Section (Military Branch) of the Committee on Imperial Defence. He had also reviewed war books throughout the 1920s – among them, Blunden's, Hemingway's, Graves' and Remarque's. In his view, Remarque's novel, the initiator of the boom, was "a good novel of the more brutal naturalistic school, and at times reaches considerable heights," but "unnecessarily coarse" and "frank propaganda" (Falls 294).

"always and continuously" told "from the standpoint of the individual," without allowing for a broader view (Jerrold 22).

Although he was a more insightful critic than Jerrold, Falls wrote from the same point of view. His annotated bibliography of war books, and particularly his preface, loudly condemned the literature of the Ghost myth, which he saw as the main cause of the debasing of patriotic values. Although he had already made his point in his literary reviews of preceding years, he stressed his belief that the success of Remarque's *All Quiet* had conditioned the issues and ideas discussed in the war books of the period and that

> The writers have set themselves, not to strip war of its romance – for that was pretty well gone already – but to prove that the Great War was engineered by knaves or fools on both sides, that the men who died in it were driven like beasts to the slaughter, and died like beasts, without their deaths helping any cause or doing any good […]. Every sector becomes a bad one, every working-party is shot to pieces; if a man is killed or wounded his brains or his entrails always protrude from his body; no one ever seems to have a rest. Hundreds of games of football were played every day on the Western Front […] but how often does one hear of a game in a 'War Book'? Attacks succeed one another with lightning rapidity. The soldier is represented as a depressed and mournful spectre helplessly wandering about until death brought his miseries to an end. (Falls X-XI)

As if this was not enough, Falls condemned the use of only a limited number of experiences – only the voices of the officers were being heard – and the "appeal to emotions rather than to reason" (XII) in the representation of the 'truth' of war. There was also the negative effects that this type of literature was exerting on readers: "a lust for horror, brutality, and filth, which is in itself disquieting and dangerous" and "the constant belittlement of motives, of intelligence, of zeal" (XII), which in the end was doing nothing but turning victory into defeat: "The fruits of victory may taste to us as bitter as the fruits of defeat to our late enemies. But how would the fruits of defeat have tasted to us and our Allies?" (XII).

It is difficult to say how representative of the British population Jerrold and Falls were, but both pamphlet and book were favourably reviewed in various journals. Of "The Lie about the War" Eric Partridge wrote that it was a "notable brochure,

refreshing in its sanity, decency, and penetration," which made it "just what is needed by the general public to enable it to distinguish the genuine from the spurious, the normal from the abnormal" (Partridge 63). The main problem with this type of resistance to the Ghost myth was that it polarised interpretations of war. As Watson argues, "all accounts were read as either supporting or opposing this view of trench life, with little room left for narratives of anything else" (307).

III.4. Establishing the Ghost-Myth Canon

During the 1960s and 1970s, probably as a consequence of the revival of interest in Ghost myth poetry to meet the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War and of its arrival in the British school curriculum, Ghost myth literature became more relevant to the academy. Scholarly publications both reflected and reinforced the Ghost myth by giving it academic approval. The Ghost myth canon was primarily based on the lyric poetry of the British officers; autobiography was relegated as a secondary genre, while fiction occupied the third place, again with the predominance of officer voices.

The Ghost myth canon was a key constituent for the opening text of this wave of literary criticism: Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* was published in 1965. It includes poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose, yet Ghost myth poetry is given a privileged position.[186] There is also a brief chapter devoted to civilian responses to war but it seemed clear that the literature of the Great War was mainly represented by combatants' poetry. Bergonzi also addresses the heroic-anti-heroic paradox by comparing Shakespeare's Hotspur and Falstaff in *Henry IV*. The death of Hotspur and the survival of Falstaff represent the death of traditional heroic ideals in the face of the reality of the trenches: "[The Great War] meant that the traditional mythology of heroism and the hero, the Hotspurian mode of self-assertion, had

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[186]   Before Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight*, however, John H. Johnston had published what is considered the first academic study of the war poets, *English Poetry of the First World War* (1964). While the book regards the war poets as the Great War canon, Johnston argues that "the only fit medium for poetry about war is the epic" (Hibberd, *Poetry...* 18). With the exception of Jones' *In Parenthesis,* Johnston criticises the war poets for not achieving an epic vision: "Johnston seems to require a Homer of the trenches, and Owen and Sassoon do not meet the need" (James Campbell, "Interpreting the War" 265).

ceased to be viable; even though heroic *deeds* could be, and were, performed in abundance" (Bergonzi 17).[187]

Regarded by Bergonzi himself as "a subtle, sophisticated and highly illuminating combination of literary criticism and cultural history" (7), Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) not only reinforces Bergonzi's view but moves forward, setting the agenda for most of the criticism that followed it. Fussell's work has become a signpost in Great War criticism as, from *The Great War and Modern Memory* onwards, "criticism largely becomes divided between questions of gender and sexuality and questions of the war relationship to modernist culture" (James Campbell, "Interpreting the War" 267).[188]

On one hand Fussell suggests that from the Great War resulted modern modes of expression that could not be contained within the existing approaches. The argument that the Great War brought about a total shift in the ethos of the modern world, implies that war forced poets to devise new literary means to deal with it as there was nothing in traditional poetry to allow them to express the violence and destruction of the first modern war. However, this assertion can be easily refuted by analysing the war poets' writings:

> the 'new' style of the most lauded and seemingly successful war poets amounts to little more than a combination of directness, simple and colloquial language, and occasionally half-rhymes and irregular rhythms. Only the last two qualities point toward modernists' experiments of the 1920s, and are foreshadowed by formal slackness and imprecision in much nineteenth-century verse. (Hoffpauir 93)

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[187] In the same vein, other critical works were published after Bergonzi's. Among them, Silkin's *Out of Battle* (1972), even more explicit in its anti-war bias; and Arthur Lane's *An Adequate Response: The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon* (1972), claims to be a book about Owen and Sassoon and stresses the importance of the soldiers' direct experience of battle. Other worthy successors are John Lehman's *English Poets of the First World War* (1982) and Fred D. Crawford's *British Poets of the Great War* (1988).

[188] From the very beginning *The Great War and Modern Memory* stands as an original piece of academic writing. Unlike its predecessors, the book is organised on thematic structures rather than by authors. For example, Sassoon is studied within the context of "Adversary Proceedings," that is the war's imposition of a binary vision on its participants, while Owen is studied within the chapter on homoeroticism, "Soldier Boys."

What may be argued is that, while the texts do not represent a literary departure from the past, they all share a profound sense of irony as the way of expressing how the war had altered the war poets' lives.[189] Irony, together with the moral responsibility to set the record straight, drew these men together. Their ironic detachment rests mainly in the fact that they tried to act as heroes at the front while their narratives attacked the idea, and even the possibility, of heroism.

Fussell also discusses the literary status of Ghost myth narratives. To do so, he makes reference to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), which categorises fictional narratives according to the protagonist's power of action. According to Frye, the mode is "high-mimetic" when the hero's power of action is perceived as greater than human; "low-mimetic" when the hero's experience is similar to that of the reader; and "ironic" when his power of action is less (Frye 52-67). Frye associates these three modes with the history of literature and relates them with epic and tragedy, the bourgeois novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and modern literature respectively. Fussell argues that the Great War produced narratives that venture into the "ironic" mode because of the soldier-hero's limited scope of action. However, he also contends that the texts have a "transitional" status as they contain low-mimetic emphasis and resort to "stylistic traditionalism" (Fussell 312-13).

Apart from the criticism relating both to the excessive literariness of the war poets' writings, "in the high culture, aesthetic sense" (James Campbell, "Interpreting the War" 268), which emerges as a contradiction if it is compared to irony as a specific literary mode, Fussell has also been criticised for its lack of knowledge in military history. According to Todman, "as a work of literary theory *The Great War and Modern Memory*, may be judged a success […]. As a work of history – cultural, social or military – it is seriously flawed" (158). Although it is true that Fussell wrote his work as a literary professor not as a historian, the conflictive relationship between literature and history in the representation of war has generated controversy and led into many negative assumptions about the war which were predominant in the 1970s.

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[189]   See page 4 of this thesis (Research Questions).

Perhaps the major merit of Fussell's work is the assessment of the impact of war on gender conventions and relations. Only after Fussell's introduction of the concept of homoeroticism into the discourse of war, gender and sexuality became academic concerns. Moreover, neither the war poets nor Ghost myth literature would be seen in the same light as before. Fussell has exerted such a profound influence on research into the First World War that a shift in academic interest has been observed from that moment onwards: "from the old military history (battles, strategy and diplomacy) to a new sort of history which focuses on culture, psychology and social transformation" (Darby 307).[190]

III.5. Reasserting the Heroic Ideal

Fifty years after the war-books controversy, the resurgence of interest in the Great War by new scholarship demonstrates that the process of interpretation continues. As Hibberd suggests, "no sooner has one critical approach to it become established than revisions, refutations and new information start to appear and another cycle begins" ("Making Amends to the Dead"). In one fashion or another, Andrew Rutherford, Rosa Maria Bracco, Graham Dawson, Jay Winter, John Onions and Brian Bond question Ghost myth interpretations in an attempt to come to terms with the multi-layered impact of the Great War. Some of the overlapping issues addressed by these scholars include the quest to redefine heroism, assuming that the concept itself still has meaning, the emphasis on an underlying unity rather than the discontinuity between pre-war and post-war experience, the conflictive relationship between literature and history in the representation of war, the idea that war has always been understood in the light of the "big words" and the theme of bereavement and mourning in the assessment of the past.

Rutherford's *The Literature of War, Five Studies in Heroic Virtue* (1978) examines a number of war literary works, exploring the heroic-anti-heroic paradox. Not only does Rutherford re-open the question of what makes a hero

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[190]   Fussell's work has allowed a feminist revision of gender with the publication of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "Soldier's Heart" (1983) and Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1990). Moreover, Fussell's emphasis on homoeroticism was followed by Eric Leed's *No Man's Land* (1981) and Adrian Caesar's *Taking it Like a Man* (1993), while Joana Bourke's *Dismembering the Male* (1996) provides an in-depth analysis of the effects of war on the construction of British masculinity.

but he ultimately aims to prove that heroism and anti-heroism coexist in the most complex and interesting works of war fiction, no matter what aspect of British national experience they are based on. Adopting a suitable middle ground between the literature of heroism and more realistic accounts, Rutherford claims that it is possible to redefine and reshape heroic values, even in Ghost myth literature. Rutherford is concerned with those authors "who at their best take full account of the complicated, contradictory nature of adult experience – who eschew ethical and psychological simplicities – but who none the less choose to treat heroic themes and reinvestigate heroic values" (Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 10).

John Onions' *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War* (1990) traces the literary representation of three heroic categories: the cultural hero, the social hero and the existential hero through the analysis of the *Iliad,* Shakespeare's *Henry* plays, Kipling and Conrad. Onions argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, social heroism had firmly established itself. He observes, however, that the literature of the Great War tended to undermine and deny the social hero to affirm an existential heroism. Instead of viewing the literature of the Great War as Ghost myth literature, Onions concludes that war "dismantled the social hero and left intact the existential one" (6). The literature of the war, "having destroyed the myth of conventional and social heroism, continues to affirm some sort of belief in heroic action" (10). Onions argues convincingly that "the soldier-writer is thus the new social hero" (9).

Bracco's *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War 1919-1939* (1993) questions conventional approaches to war at the crucial moment of transition of real war to history. In fact Bracco challenges the extended reputation of Paul Fussell's thesis about irony being the dominating literary mode after the Great War. She studies "middlebrow" fiction and argues that, rather than representing the Great War in Fussell's ironic mood, these minor narratives tend to find continuities with the pre-war world and to reassert the persistence of the traditional hero and of England as a great nation through the reverence for the sacrifice and suffering undergone by their men.

Similarly, Dawson's *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994) explores the continuities in the literary representation of

heroic masculinities from the point of view of Cultural Studies. In fact the author refers to the British Empire as a "popular masculine pleasure-culture of war" [in which] "fantasies of boyhood, the reproduction of idealised forms of masculinity and the purchase of nationalist politics" (Dawson 4) are eclectically combined. The cases of Sir Henry Havelock of Lucknow, T.E. Lawrence and the author's own childhood experience are analysed in detail to illustrate not only that the popular imaginings of the soldier-hero are a point of departure in the theorisation of British national identity, but also that war appears to have continued to be a popular subject for entertainment even after the Great War, particularly the aspects of it which could be romanticised in the true conventions of the Victorian hero myth. In this view, then, World War One would be clear evidence of "an ongoing tension between adventurous and 'anti-adventurous' modes of narrative" (Dawson 171).

Placing a particular emphasis on the memory of Great War and public and private mourning, Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) not only challenges the understanding of the war as a chasm in European history but studies the ongoing persistence of traditional expressions of culture in the post-war years. In Winter's opinion, there was not such a turning point – neither at the Somme nor at the Armistice – when traditional ways of imagining the war were no longer understandable. For many, the "big words" never lost currency. Winter argues that in their search for consolation bereaved mourners prompted a revival of traditional modes of aesthetic expression that had been prematurely buried by the war: "'seeing' the war meant more a return to older patterns and themes than the creation of new ones" (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory* 7). Far from underestimating the classical, romantic and religious themes of the past, the traumatic experience of the war and the need to preserve the memory of those whom it had taken away reconnected the mournful post-war generation with the familiar, comforting cultural imagery of the past.

From a historian's standpoint, Brian Bond's "British 'Anti-War' Writers and their Critics" (1996), *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (2002) and *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (2008) are concerned with overturning the Ghost myth by filling the gaps, correcting errors and overcoming prejudices and historical misinterpretations:

> While the best of these imaginative literary and personal interpretations have deservedly remained popular and influential they ignored or failed to answer convincingly, the larger historical questions about political and strategic issues: what was the war 'about'? how was it fought? and why did Britain and her allies eventually emerge victorious? (*The Unquiet Western Front* Viii)

In the end, Bond illustrates a dilemma that is presented to most historians: to what extent can literary representation enter the realm of history if most responses to the Great War prove to be more a product of the time in which they were written than an accurate reflection of the times they claim to record. Bond's position seems clear. He is not only interested in rectifying discrepancies, but in eradicating the Ghost myth.

The work of these scholars has shown that there is still ample research material available for examining the questions raised by this conflict. In tackling the Great War, however, they have found themselves up against the Ghost myth, which still persists and dominates contemporary literature and other media responsible for moulding public opinion. Yet, they have suggested that the idea of the heroic soldier is still ideally powerful, functioning as a positive image to set against the fragmenting and undermining effects of Great War anxieties. They have traced the subsequent transformations of the Victorian hero myth and sought to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the many shifts in the significance of the figure of the soldier and heroism, there are fundamental conditions of existence that have remained in place to determine its continuity.

Their work, however, has not been intended as a finishing post. On the contrary, it has emerged as a starting line in literary, cultural and historical scholarship and has paved the way for a look at "the myriad faces of war" with the desire to cross the ever-widening divide between the Great War and the present, expanding the understanding of what it was like to go through it and preventing the reality of the Great War from being swamped by the distortions of the dominant myths.

Chapter IV

Searching for the Heroic Self in Times of Crisis

In writing their war experience, either fictionally or autobiographically, the men studied in this thesis tried to describe and re-create the reality they believed they had known, putting together an image of their true selves: who they were and what their military service on the Western Front meant. They wrote about a masculine world of violence and death, marked more by defeat than victory but, most importantly, they wrote about compensatory moments of fraternity: "the young boy entranced by the older man's skill; the stronger man cradling the weaker; two men smiling at each other" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 126). Despite the particularities of each individual narrative, the Great War was something more important and meaningful to these men than the chance to prove themselves as heroes: They learnt about being men through the relationship with other men.

Having identified male bonding as the main source of war heroism, chapter four explores the male relationships emerging at the front and their significance as sites of contest between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. I focus on the binaries hero-hero (comrade, friend and lover) and hero-other (coward and enemy), to assess how these expressions of bonding redefine crucial aspects of Ghost myth masculinities and combine these traits with the seemingly antithetic heroic ones most obviously typified by the Victorian hero myth. My contention is that the exploration of male relationships at the front demands a reconceptualisation of the concept of heroic masculinity and male roles in more significant and subtle ways than have been acknowledged by the two dominant myths. Starting from the assessment of the literary representation of male bonding in the texts, this chapter poses a possible redefinition of heroism as a complex and even controversial masculine subject.

IV.1. Male Bonding as Heroic Virtue: Comrades, Friends and Lovers

This section examines the war poets' attitudes towards comrade, friend and lover. After briefly outlining the terminology used to describe the different shadings of the male bonds emerging from the trenches, particularly the tension between comradeship and friendship as "the central problem or crux in the war

texts" (Cole, *Modernism...* 144), I outline the development of male bonding as a complex phenomenon, tracing the ways in which hegemonic masculinity governed and restricted male relationships from ancient to late Victorian literature. Then, I assess the permanence of the Victorian hero myth in the representation of institutionalised male comradeship. By looking at military expressions of blind obedience, pride in the regiment, the cult of the fallen and the depersonalisation of the soldier in the texts, I approach the idea that comradeship not only acted as a blessing but also as a moral burden, challenging the soldiers' spirits and the foundations of the hero myth itself. The analysis of the texts shows that comradeship ceased to be real and became an abstract ideal which could not prevent the powerlessness of the individual and the increasing difficulty to keep a heroic outlook within the war machine. Expressions such as the "unknown warrior," "Tommy Atkins," "file friend" and "corpselessness" are not only studied as characteristic of the Ghost myth rhetoric but of the need of more profound and intimate bonds.

The concept of friendship is introduced next. It is presented in opposition to comradeship and connected with the need for soldiers to recover their common humanity and subvert normative masculinity. Contrary to the Ghost myth however, my contention is that the Great War did not destroy emotional intimacy or the attempts to forge more profound bonds between men. On the contrary, the expression of male friendship marks the conclusion of a process beginning with a national ideal of military comradeship and gradually fracturing into to smaller and smaller spaces of bonding in the search of a sense of belonging and individual worth. By looking closely at several examples of friendships built at the front, I try to show that the men examined here established non-normative relationships in which emotional expressiveness was not incompatible with war survival.

Finally I explore homoerotic relationships, encounters and feelings of the war poets who were known to have homosexual inclinations at the front. Due to a series of institutional strategies to construct homosocial bonds among soldiers, homoeroticism is presented as both unstable category and subverting agent tending to contest the institutionalisation of male bonding and the contempt for homosexuality. Although most of the male bonds that are studied in this section may not have been explicitly homosexual, I address the instances in which

military life did prompt homoerotic closeness between men. This then is followed by an assessment of the homoerotic pastoral and the pastoral elegy.

The strong and exclusive bond between war comrades has historically received many different names: from the classic terms traditionally used to describe it – "friendship," "comradeship," "fraternity" or "*ésprit de corps*" – to more elaborate and wide-ranging notions like "homosociality" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 1),[191] "homoaffectionalism" (Hardman 1)[192] and "male bonding" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male…* 127).[193] From the abovementioned, however, I wish to focus on Cole's more recent distinction between "friendship" and "comradeship" as I think it is crucial in the representation of male bonding during the Great War.[194] Cole uses the word "friendship" to refer to "individualized relations of

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[191]   Sedgwick uses the word "homosocial" to describe the "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (*Between Men…* 1). She actually covers the whole spectrum of male bonds (including everyone from overt heterosexuals to overt homosexuals) to analyse its representation in nineteenth-century English literature. However, the analogy between the terms "homosocial" and "homosexual" stresses both the distinction and conceptual continuity between the two. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick clarifies the use of the term:

> [*Between Men*...] attempted to demonstrate the immanence of men's same-sex bonds, and their prohibitive structuration, to male-female bonds in the nineteenth-century English literature. […] [Moreover, *Between Men*...] focused on the oppressive effects on women and men of a cultural system in which male-male desire became widely intelligible primarily by being routed through triangular relations involving a woman. (*Epistemology…* 15)

[192]   Hardman's "homoaffectionalism" refers to "same-sex relationships which do not necessarily involve homosexual sex acts, but do involve strong emotional bonding, which may or may not include sexual conduct. The emphasis is on affection and bonding regardless of any carnal involvement" (V).

[193]   Bourke refers to "male bonding" to mean

> …intimate, emotional interaction between men in which the individual identifies himself as an integral part of an all-male group. It implies a consciousness of masculinity as gender and although distinctions such as those based on class or ethnicity may be recognized; these distinctions are subordinated to the gender identity. (*Dismembering the Male*, 127)

Bourke argues, however, that the degree of male bonding allowed in the trenches was low and perfunctory as it was the experience of combat and military culture; the regimental demarcations between volunteers and conscripts, the different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds divided men. In her words, "relationships between servicemen during the war failed to result in any true reconstruction of masculine intimacy" (128). Homosociality, in her view, was fragile and contingent.

[194]   Reorienting the discussions initiated by Fussell and Bourke, Cole argues that the "organization of [male] intimacy" (*Modernism…* 20) played a key role in the development of modernism itself. However, she distinguishes between comradeship and friendship to address

amity or love between men" and "comradeship" to describe "a corporate or group commitment, a relation particular to war and typically described in elevated language" (*Modernism…* 145). In this view, comrades seek to lose their identities in the relationship; friends do not. Comrades establish impersonal relationships; they are attached to the individual's loss of power over his environment; friends, on the other hand, establish more personal relationships. In friendship there is a deepening of the masculine sense of self. Through friends, men become more aware of who they are and what they are about; they find themselves in the eyes of their friends. Male friends question and challenge each other to make each of them more complete. Gray had already framed the concepts in a very insightful way: "The essential difference between comradeship and friendship consists […] in a heightened awareness of the self in friendship and in the suppression of self-awareness in comradeship" (90).

Male bonding has played an important role in the construction of both the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. The understanding of male relationships as comradeship can be clearly associated with the rhetoric of the Victorian hero myth. Comradeship was made to fit into a clean, coherent and self-explanatory narrative with images of patriotic duty and sacrificing comrades. It was "organised" as a "bridging structure between individuals and institutions" and meant to reinforce and consolidate the heroic myth by imbuing "the often shaky relation between man and man with the sanctity of larger, more powerful and sustainable institutions" (Cole, *Modernism…* 4). Comradeship at war functioned as an alternative for the corporate male identity of the public school, the church and the family. The privileging of the group over the individual, of collective affiliation over personal comfort or desire responded to the ideology

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public and private bonds respectively. In her view, friendship was under threat during the Great War because of its attempts to disengage from the institutions in which it had emerged. The disorienting effects resulting from the crisis of these foundational institutions cause the failure of intimacy and the disempowerment and isolation of individuals. In Cole's view, "friendship exists in war only to be destroyed" (*Modernism…* 168). She also claims that the "patchwork of narrative fragments known as modernism" (*Modernism…* 183) may be seen as a reflection of the loss and fragmentation of male intimacy. For a discussion of the arguments in favour of an understanding of the Great War in terms of the failure to construct masculine intimacy, see Bourke's "Bonding" (124-170) in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* and Cole's "'My Killed Friends Are with Me Where I Go:' Friendship and Comradeship at War" (138-184) in *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War.*

originally spread by some of the institutions discussed in previous chapters. There is little doubt that this blend of manliness and loyalty to impersonal institutions found its corollary in imperialism and colonial wars.

On the other hand, the strong desire to assert some private experience of friendship, either sexual or non-sexual, and its perceived failure, emerged as a result of the Ghost myth. Friendship reconfigured the impersonal logic of male-male relationships in the Victorian era and strove for a more meaningful bond. Male intimacy became the redeemer of the folly of war and the only alternative to the perceived failure of traditional heroism. Perhaps most important for my argument is that the Ghost myth revived late-nineteenth century models of thinking about male intimacy, echoing the Platonic homosexuality that had emerged in the works of late Victorians such as Whitman, Hopkins, Housman and the Uranians.[195] In the myth, however, modern war destroyed male intimacy and the attempts to establish more profound bonds between men. The image of "the bereaved male friend – whose persona is, in a sense, constituted by the loss of war mates," (Cole, *Modernism…* 139) became an iconic figure of the war "in terms of the creation and loss of powerful friendships" in the literature of the Ghost myth (139).

Fussell uses the term "homoerotic" (*The Great War…* 279) to describe certain male relational patterns revealed in war poetry and closely connected with the romantic friendships that will be studied in relation to the public-school ethos in the next section. In Fussell's view, the homoerotic implied "a sublimated (i.e. chaste) form of temporary homosexuality […] like the 'idealistic,' passionate but non-physical 'crushes' which most of the officers had experienced at public school" (*Great War…* 272). Fussell also discusses the disturbing relationship between sexuality and war in general, and argues that wartime experiences stimulated "the unique physical tenderness, the readiness to admire openly the bodily beauty of young men, the unapologetic recognition that men may be in love with each other" (*The Great War…* 279-280). To some extent, Fussell may be right: "Homosexuality and homoeroticism were present among soldiers in the Great War, just as among any other section of society" (Tate, *Modernism, History and The First World War* 81). The war seemed to be a more propitious

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[195] See the following section (IV.1.1. "From Gilgamesh to the Great War") for a detailed discussion of these poets.

environment for homosexual friendships as it relieved homosexuality of some of the old anxieties surrounding it. Those who have reasserted the Ghost myth canon, like Fussell himself, suggest a very close connection between the Great War and homosexuality, but opinions on the subject diverge widely.

While it may indeed be possible to read the memoirs, autobiographical novels, letters and war diaries I have chosen for study in terms of the release of homoerotic tensions and desires, confining male intimacy within the realm of homosexuality offers little challenge to the dominant myths. The expressions of male bonding studied in this thesis neither exclude homosexuality nor limit it. Some male bonds can be interpreted as non-erotic friendships, others as eroticised and even homosexual bonds, and yet others, as emotionally intense relationships involving homoerotic traits. This clarification, thus, does not rule homosexuality out of the literature of the Great War but simply alerts to the fact that, as Das argues, "pity, thrill, affection and eroticism are fused and confused depending on the circumstances, degrees of knowledge, normative practices and sexual orientations, as well as the available models of male-male relationships" (*Touch and Intimacy*... 114). Indeed, homoeroticism "has to be understood within new conceptual parameters and a different economy of emotions" (*Touch and Intimacy...* 118), as the extreme circumstances of war changed the context in which men met.

A similar objection is made against the Ghost myth claim that male friendship was a vehicle for isolation and bereavement and that the figure of the soldier was turned into the "scarred friend" (Cole, *Modernism…* 14). Not only do the complexity and diversity of male bonds defy such generalisation, but the narratives examined here testify to the survival of the emotional ties forged in the trenches and to the capacity of men to resist and subvert the attempts to fix dominant masculinities. The texts contradict "the prevailing view that modernity drained intimacy and trust" (Oliker 18) and act as mediators between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth in the war poets' attitudes towards the heroic.

IV. Searching for the Heroic Self in Times of Crisis
Male Bonding as Heroic Virtue
From Gilgamesh to the Great War

IV.1.1. From Gilgamesh to the Great War

This section will trace the literary representation of male bonding from ancient to the late-nineteenth century, placing particular emphasis on three significant aspects of Victorian literature: firstly, the homosociality of the British colonies; secondly, the cult of Romantic friendship and finally, a new approach towards homosexuality, associated with the emergence of the Uranians as a literary group. My aim is to review some classic patterns of male bonding and certain stereotypes of heroic masculinities related to those patterns as the most critical influences on the literary representation of male bonding in the Great War.

The notion of friendship has been discussed by many authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Epicurus, Seneca, Montaigne and Bacon either to refer to the act of remembrance of the departure of a loved one, or as a celebration of the bonding of two great friends – always virtuous men – who provide the model for the heroic tradition of male friendship.[196] However, the classic assumption that

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[196]   Taking Socrates as his mouthpiece, Plato discusses love (*erôs*) and friendship (*philia*) both in *The Phaedrus* and in *The Symposium.* He has Phaedrus observe that "Love is a great god, who amazes both human beings and gods for many reasons" (19). However, the term *erôs* was primarily used to describe sexual desire (which was almost always homosexual among Athenian aristocrats). The term *philia,* on the other hand, was used to describe brotherly love and comprehended relationships of mutuality and sharing between friends but also between members of the family. As Godbeer clearly points out, there was an "overlapping terminology" between the designations of family and friendship "which captured the multilayered and multivalent nature of their commitment to one another" (8).

In Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also uses the term "philia" to refer to "friendship" and enumerates three main reasons why one person might befriend someone else: utility, pleasure or virtue. A friendship of virtue would be regarded as perfect and ideal.

In *Laelius de Amicitia* (On Friendship), Cicero resorts to the relationship between Scipio Africanus and Laelius*,* to describe his own experience with friendship. Laelius' speech is triggered by the death of his best friend Scipio and his failed attempts to overcome the loss. Like Plato-Socrates, Cicero stresses the importance of virtue and reciprocity in friendship and provides examples from his personal life.

From the few fragments and letters that remain of Epicurus' written works, it is possible to distinguish between the intrinsic and the instrumental value of friendship. In his view, friendship emerges from the expectation of mutual benefit which, with deeper contact and understanding, grows into a genuine affection.

As to Seneca's vision of friendship, in three of the *Moral Epistles to Lucilius* (*Letters* 3, 9 and 19), he exhorts him not to cultivate friendships on utilitarian grounds and attempts a redefinition of the

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men bond with other men to form friendships derives less from the work of philosophers than from a large body of literature going back to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the biblical works of Samuel and Homer's *Iliad*. Any reader of these narratives will notice patterns of male bonding like that between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, David and Jonathan and Achilles and Patroclus. These representations of friendship repeat, in Brod's words, "an elaborate stereotype of men and a related stereotype of friendship as the special proclivity and province of men" (Brod 241). Male bonding is seen as most evident in an agonistic setting – "warfare is the prime setting for the drama of male friendship" (246) – where a couple of friends fight side by side to protect each other. The death of one friend and the devastating sorrow of the survivor is also a recurrent theme.[197]

While most accounts of medieval warfare concern themes of romantic love and religion, there are two important narratives which revolve around devotional friendship and heroic self-sacrifice: the story of Roland and Oliver in the *Song of*

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concept of Roman friendship, separating it from conventional social practices (the *convivium* and *salutation*) and from the external evaluation of social performance.

Montaigne's twenty-eighth essay "Of Friendship" is plagued with sexually biased opinions. His main contributions are the necessity of communication in the development of the perfect friendship, which will always take place between men as, in his view, women lack the ability required for reasonable discussion. He also makes a clear distinction between friendship, homosexuality and kinship.

The most important contribution of Bacon's essay "Of Friendship" is the therapeutic use for friendship. In Bacon's view, friendship is necessary for maintaining good mental health and regulating the passions of the mind. For more on the philosophers' views on friendship see Chapter 2 "Friendship through the Ages" in John M. Reisman's *Anatomy of Friendship* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1979).

[197]   Gilgamesh is left heartbroken after a final adventure in which the gods, offended by their heroic defiance, cause Enkidu's death. After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh "weeps bitterly and roams the desert" (Heidel 64). Similarly, when Patroclus is killed by Hector in the *Iliad*, Achilles, in an agony of grief, laments: "My dearest friend is dead, Patroclus, who was more to me than any other of my men, whom I loved as much as my own life? I have lost Patroclus… I have no wish to live and linger in the world of men, unless before all else, Hector is felled by my spear and dies, paying the price for slaughtering Patroclus…" (Homer 339). David and Jonathan's friendship also ends tragically. Jonathan is slain on Mt. Gilboa along with his two brothers, and there his father, King Saul, commits suicide. When David learns of Saul and Jonathan's death, he says: "I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan, exceeding beautiful, and amiable to me above the love of women. As the mother loveth her only son, so did I love thee" (*The Holy Bible,* 2 Sam. 1-26).

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Roland and the tale of Amis and Amile.[198] Unlike the classical heroes, who are not paradigms of moral virtue other than for their devotion to one another, medieval heroes "epitomize Christian virtues of piety, charity and humility" (Brod 250). The most characteristic friendship tales of the medieval period are those in which a hero like Richard the Lionheart, El Cid or Don Quixote is aided by a loyal vassal upon whom he can rely throughout his life. The hero is a figure of such heroic dimension that the vassal only plays a supporting role at his side. Even if these stories refer to values closely associated with friendship, they basically imply military values – competent military service, valuable advice and reliability – that are more associated with the loyalty of the vassal than with emotional relationships. The stories about groups of brave and intrepid men usually led by a great leader, like the tales of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table or Robin Hood and His Merry Men, are also typically medieval. The loyalties of the friends, however, have an emotional quality and a mutual reciprocity that exceeds the *ésprit de corps* as each one of this elite group has a special friend within the group.

Even if Victorian literature has been dealt with in detail in previous sections, it is important to stress here three significant aspects in the literary representation of male relationships in the late-nineteenth century: firstly, the traditional image of the colonies as a homosocial world, secondly, the exaltation of the Romantic friendship – the "passionate but sexless liaisons between boys became a staple of public-school fiction and illuminate the memoirs of public-school men" (Parker 105) and finally, the new approach towards homosexuality associated with the

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[198]   *The Song of Roland*, dated to the mid twelfth century, is the oldest major work in French literature. Roland and Oliver were two of the twelve feudal knights defending their emperor Charlemagne and their God against the infidel Saracens. They became close friends fighting side by side: "Their deep love, expressed particularly in Roland's mourning for his fallen comrade, echoes the paradigmatic bond of the Homeric heroes Achilles and Patroclus" (Schweitzer 45). They both died in the fight against the Muslims Saracens of Spain in 778.

Amis and Amile were also knights in Charlemagne's elite band. Their mutual affinity was so strong that "they resembled each other in every particular, including physical appearance, to the extent that Amis could stand in for Amile at a tournament to free him from suspicion of treachery and win for him the hand of a princess" (Boswell 239). Indeed, this intense emotional bond led Amile to behead his own children and use their blood to restore the health of his friend Amis who had become a leper. When they died in battle, their ashes were joined in the same burial urn (Brod 251).

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literary emergence of the Uranians. Considering that the hegemonic ordering system revolved around binary oppositions (male-female, public-private and world-home), male relationships occupied a complex position between the publicly condemned homosexuality and the exclusively masculine sites of interaction and bonding. There was a disturbing double message at work in nineteenth-century venues and institutions: They functioned simultaneously as propellers of masculine loyalty but also as strongholds of resistance and prohibition against male intimacy. These included the colonies, the public school and the rise of homosociality as convention.

As discussed in previous sections, life in the colonies was presented as a "flight from domesticity" (Tosh 206) and as a "homosocial paradise, governed by clear-cut masculine values" (Tosh 208).[199] In the narration of war as adventure, heroes "hunted, plundered or conquered, shored up by the silent bonds of men's friendship" (Tosh 206). An illustration of this is Allan Quartermain, the hero of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). When introducing the story he is about to share, he boastfully exclaims: "At any rate, I can safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history" (5). Indeed, the colonies not only emerged as markers of manhood but offered the prospect of a much more relaxed sexual regime and a release from the boredom of female domesticity.[200] The attractions of the overseas world generally appealed to young men, especially to those who had just left public school and "embraced the opportunity to continue living in the homosocial culture they knew so well" (Tosh 200). [201]

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[199] While Tosh sets out to discover the other side of Victorian masculinity, that is to say, the presence and significance of men in the domestic space, he admits that from the 1870s onwards there was a "flight from domesticity" caused by the great imperial expansion. See John Tosh's "Manliness, Masculinities and the New Imperialism, 1880-1900" in *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005).

[200] Feminine representations are seldom included in the adventure tale and when they are, they are made to play passive roles. The women in the colonies are represented not only as the "angels of the house" – the sympathetic, utterly unselfish "saints" who sacrifice themselves daily for their husbands and children – but also as men's most precious possession: "Their roles are circumscribed and used to help to define the hero as bold, honourable and considerate of those weaker than himself – all qualities considered worth of emulation" (Kanitkar 185).

[201] And certainly Haggard was not alone in the recreation of the homosocial dream of brotherhood where men could live with men and be free of domestic constraints. Fiedler's *Love*

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The homosocial world developed at the regiment and the colony was a direct continuation of the male-male relationships encouraged at the boys' public schools.[202] One of the most significant consequences of the public-school ethos was, however, what came to be known as Romantic friendship, a "term used by many critics in their discussions of such same-sex intimacy where the erotic element is either confused, unknown, or unconscious" (Das, "Kiss me Hardy…" 54). The heavy emphasis on individual submission to group loyalty, on playing the game under the sign of *ésprit de corps* had not been able to prevent the emergence of intimacy between the boys.[203] Yet the language used in public-school fiction is not always that clear in distinguishing male friendship from love, sometimes blurring the two or disguising homoerotic expression. The teaching of classical literature and the cult of sports and sporting gods contributed to a view of male relations oriented around classicism and the idealisation of the greater love of biblical friendships, like that of David and Jonathan, yet it plagued the language of friendship with tensions and ambiguities.

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and Death in the American Novel (1960) recognises the existence of such male utopias in American literature as well. In two of the novels by Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) "there is an escape to an island [...] on which the refugee lives, for a little while, with his good companions and in the bosom of nature, fishing, swimming, smoking the pipe forbidden by mothers" (Fiedler 280).

[202]   Referring to male relational patterns during the Great War, Bourke claims that "love between men was [also] expressed by those outside an élite literati" and that "male intimacy was not primarily a legacy of the public-school tradition: men who had little education drew from other pre-war traditions (such as body-building clubs and the scouts) to express similar sentiments" (24). Among the attempts to stimulate male comradeship among the working classes, Bourke mentions the League of Health and Strength, "an organization within the narcissistic tradition that attempted to bind young men together in loyalty and masculine love through competition centred on the physique" and the Boy Scouts, which "stressed male bonding much more overtly, but did so through emphasizing co-operation and community" (*Dismembering the Male…* 138).

[203]   *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is probably one of the most significant expressions of male friendship in this context. The story depicts the close bond between two boys, the main character Tom Brown and a pale and delicate lad, George Arthur, whose father is dead and has nobody to teach him manliness. Friendship will help both shape their character. It is interesting to note that the Victorian mentality was not able to conceive an affectionate encounter between equals. There was always a feminised-virile, master–disciple or active-passive relationship. Hughes makes clear, however, that the friendship between the two boys is, as Hammond claims, "free from the dangers of some schoolboy relationships, particularly those between older and younger boys" (128).

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H.O. Sturgis' *Tim* (1891) mirrors the effect that David's lament, usually read in chapel, had on Eton students. Like *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the two main protagonists of Sturgis' novel are the "puny and effeminate" Tim, who becomes close friends with the local squire's grandson, Carol, "older than himself and a model of traditional masculine hardiness" (Holt 182). The implicit invocation to the biblical pair – Tim argues that no woman could ever love Carol more than he does (Sturgis 158-159) – gives an aura of sanctity to the relationship which continues, in Parker's words, "passionate yet chaste, until its fatal and lachrymose conclusion" (108).[204]

It is significant that what can clearly be described as homoerotic stories were an identifiable sub-genre of the public-school story. The nature of such relationships between men whose mutual love was so passionate that it was in effect "greater than the love of women" (*The Holy Bible,* 2 Sam. 1-26) has been the subject of debate. Due to the sexual anxieties involved, Romantic friendships oscillated between being regarded as "the highest of all affections, which led to panegyrics in the chapel" and the "beastliness, which generally led to expulsion" (Parker 107).[205] Such contradictions could only lead to sexual confusion, double talk,

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[204]   At the end of the novel Carol gets engaged and Tim dies. Among the stories exploring these "romantically charged, but rigorously chaste" (Parker 106) relationships, H.A. Vachell's *The Hill: A Romance of Friendship* (1905), Rev. Welldon's *Gerald Eversley's Friendship* (1895), A.W. Clarke's *Jaspar Tristram* (1899) and E.F. Benson's *David Blaize* (1916) deserve particular recognition. Even if presented as the most chaste of the biblical couples in the public-school context, it cannot have passed unnoticed that at his 1895 trial, Oscar Wilde cited David and Jonathan's friendship as part of his homosexual apologia: "The love that dare not speak its name in this century is such a great affection of an older for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep spiritual affection that is pure as it is perfect" (Wilde qtd in Nunokawa 91). A number of poems of the Great War also make reference to David and Jonathan. Harold Monro's "Youth in Arms" (1917) and Robert Graves' "Goliath and David" (1917) are clear examples: "The young shepherd, an amateur soldier who marched out against the Philistine army, was an obvious icon with similarities to the young public-school subaltern" (Parker 188). The biblical lament of David also provided the model for the war poet writing elegies for friends killed in action. Nichols' "Fulfilment" (1917) and Owen's "Greater Love" (1920) seem to suggest a bond between soldiers modelled upon David and Jonathan.

[205]   Headmasters kept a complacent distance from such relationships. So much so, that when being asked on the subject, G.H. Rendall, Headmaster of Charterhouse from 1897 to 1911 claimed: "My boys are amorous, but seldom erotic" (Rendall qtd in Graves 40). Describing a

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silencing, repression and, eventually, traumatic situations. Referring to the lasting effect that such an upbringing had on him personally, Graves claims:

> In English preparatory and public schools romance is necessarily homosexual. The opposite sex is despised and treated as something obscene. Many boys never recover from this perversion. For every one born homosexual, at least ten permanent pseudo-homosexuals are made by the public school system: nine of these ten as honourably chaste and sentimental as I was. (*Goodbye…* 19)[206]

Sexes were segregated to such an extent that it was possible for a boy like Graves to have virtually no contact with women unless they were members of his own family. In an all-male group, hero-worship and male affections were as strong as romance. Brenan's account of his days at Radley best exemplifies this cult of romantic friendships. The description of the "mothing excursions" to which the homosexual headmaster, Mr Johns, took his pet students has clear homoerotic overtones:

> This – the long moonlight drive followed by the restaurant meal – was for me a new and wonderful experience. Lying back in the smooth darkness of the car, watching the antennae of light that stroked the edges of the road, smelling the brilliantine from le beau Burnside's hair as he leaned upon my shoulder seemed to hold out promises of new pleasures waiting me when I grew up. (Brenan 59)

The seemingly laissez-faire attitude of school authorities sometimes hid their own pederastic practices. Yet if homosexuals were caught in the act, the public-school moralizing rage would reach its peak. Brenan relates the outcome of a scandal in which he was indirectly involved:

> This triple Alliance – Cooke, Mackenzie and myself – was broken by a cruel event that took place just before the end of my term. Cooke and Mackenzie were

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meeting taking place at Charterhouse to discuss the problem of certain 'cases,' Graves states: "I remember no more than five or six big rows during my time at Charterhouse, and expulsions were rare. The housemasters knew little about what went on in their houses, their living quarters being removed from the boys" (40).

[206] The expression "pseudo-homosexuality" in relation to Graves' public-school sexuality is, in Caesar's view, problematic. On one hand, it implies that there was a "real-homosexuality" and, on the other, it marks a clear contradiction with "Graves' own admission that he 'felt difficulty in adjusting himself to the experience of woman love'" (Caesar, 178).

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caught in some sexual misdemeanour and the whole school, which was very strait-laced in these matters, turned against them. (Brenan 60-61)

Yet, forbidding romantic friendships only made them more appealing. This was exacerbated by ignorance and by the fact that homosexual desires were never openly discussed. Infatuated with a classmate at the time – "Poetry and Dick were still all that really mattered" (Graves, *Goodbye…* 56) – Graves had difficulties to reconcile love with sexuality.[207] He distinguishes between "'amorousness' (by which he meant a sentimental falling in love with younger boys) and eroticism, or adolescent lust" (40) and dissociates sexual needs from romantic desires:

> The intimacy that frequently took place was very seldom between an elder boy and the object of his affection – that would have spoiled the romantic illusion – but almost always between boys of the same age who were not in love, and used each other as convenient sex-instruments. So the atmosphere was always heavy with romance of a conventional early-Victorian type, complicated by cynicism and foulness. (*Goodbye….* 40-41)

Graves was not unaware that his was a difficult attitude towards sexuality, nor less conscious of his language difficulty to categorise the subtle differences in male relationships. He may have felt excluded by the narrow definitions of masculinity of his time and anxious for the validation of a more intimate type of bonding; yet his traditional upbringing and strong social constraints always lurked in the background preventing him from acting according to his true feelings.

The need to open up new spaces in which non-normative relationships could be explored was channelled through the homoerotic poetry written before the Great War by Whitman, the less respectable Uranians, Hopkins and Housman. It was the intense comradeship, sometimes with sexual overtones, displayed during the

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[207] Graves fell in love with a boy three years younger than himself. He argued that he was not aware of any sexual desire for the boy but the age difference called the attention of one of the masters who warned him to end the relationship. Graves "lectured him loftily on the advantage of friendship between elder and younger boys, citing Plato, the Greek poets, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, and others, who had felt as I did" (Graves, *Goodbye…* 49). The master let him go "without taking any action" (49).

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American Civil War which fuelled Whitman's ideas about the convergence of homosexuality and democracy. He used the terms "adhesiveness" and "comradeship" indistinctly in both the "Calamus" poems in *The Leaves of Grass* (1860) and *Democratic Vistas* (1871) to refer to a two-sided image that denoted both a model of democracy and same-sex sexual relationships.[208] A close friend of Whitman and open homosexual, Edward Carpenter not only introduced Whitman's language of male desire into English poetry but published a long prose poem, *Towards Democracy* (1883)*,* which reflected a Whitmanesque "celebration of 'comradeship' among pastoral youths uncorrupted by industrialism and undeformed by 'education'" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 281).[209]

Hopkins' poetry also identified with Whitman's in his concern for both the social conditions of his time and homoeroticism: "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living" (Hopkins qtd in Kaylor 119). But Hopkins was a Jesuit priest and the sexual orientation of his writing was firmly rooted in the Bible and in the welfare of the working class. Perhaps what is most remarkable about his work is the translation of an aesthetic of homoerotic desire into the religious context and his "unswerving attention to the embodiment of divine power in different types of labouring men" (Bristow 694). Even if his sexual impulses were largely restrained, "Felix Randal" (1880), "Harry Ploughman" and "Tom's Garland" (the last two written in 1887),

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[208]   In the "Calamus" poems Whitman uses the terms "adhesiveness" to describe "the brotherhood of man, a love sometimes physical (which may be, though not necessarily, sexual) but most often spiritual, a love […] as a metaphor for democracy" and "one of the essential ingredients for the America he envisioned" (Oliver 54). Although several poems are overtly sexual, the overall idea is "the need in a democratic society for love among the people – perhaps the single most important theme in *Leaves of Grass*" (Oliver 54). *Democratic Vistas,* probably Whitman's clearest statement about his theory of democracy, takes the same idea as far as the social need for adhesiveness is concerned. Whitman's work was admired by such war poets as Sassoon, Gurney, Monro, Thomas and Rosenberg.

[209]   His image of the ideal comrade "the thick-thighed hot coarse-fleshed young bricklayer with the strap around his waist" (Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* 69), was the archetype of many characters in the literature of the Great War, including Jim Linthwaite, a young army private with whom Sassoon became emotionally involved.

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are probably the poems that best reflect this admiration for the beauty of simple, healthy working men.[210]

Although Hopkins' poetry was not published until the end of the Great War, Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) became quite popular as soon as the war began because of the recurring "theme of the beautiful suffering lads" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 282). As Taylor observes, Housman "provided the poets of the First World War with a complete register of emotions about young soldiers, their friendships, their injuries, their bravery, and their deaths" (Martin Taylor 40). But his greatest contribution is his particular use of the word "lad" – "lads like me," the "luckless lads," the "ill-treated fellows" – which his poems qualify as "the handsome of face and the handsome of heart […] that will carry their looks or their truth to the grave" (Housman 29). Fussell suggests that the word "lad" has homoerotic connotations and that "the lads who populate the poems and memoirs of the Great War have about them […] the doom of Housman's lads," even in their sudden deaths at the front (*The Great War…* 283).[211]

While none of the Uranian poets ever rose to the level of Housman, their poetry shares his unique approach towards sexuality. The Uranians were a small group of male poets whose main theme was the erotic admiration of attractive young men. Inspired by the *paiderasteia* of the ancient Greeks, their poetry was rather clandestine because of the repression and criminalisation of homosexuality at the time. The Uranians were not only a "minority writing within a masculinist, heterosexual field" (Das, *Touch and Intimacy* 118), but "a distinctly subversive

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[210]   In Hopkins' poetry, as Bristow writes, "Christ's magisterial strength repeatedly manifests itself in the 'bugler,' the 'tar,' the 'navvy,' and lowly 'churl' – whose 'grace' would most vividly emerge in one of the indecorous compound words he invented for 'Harry Ploughman.' This 'child of Amansstrength,' he says, possesses 'Churlsgrace too'" (Bristow 697).

[211]   In Fussell's opinion, "in Great War diction there are three degrees of erotic heat attaching to three words: *men* is largely neutral, *boys* is a little warmer, *lads* is very warm" (*The Great War…* 282). As to the sudden deaths of the lads in Great War literature, Fussell states that "the theme of the sacrificial martyrdom of lads (largely naked)" was an established motif for Uranians twenty years before the Great War elegies were written (*The Great War* 285). Interesting illustrations of the Uranian homoerotic elegy are G.G. Gillet's "In Memorian, E.B.F" (1893) and Rennell Rodd's "Requiescat" (1881), which, with little adjustment, could have turned into Great War poems.

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'subculture' within Victorian society" (Kaylor VII). The group developed around the contradiction between the idealisation of male intimacy at the public schools and the reality of homophobic punishment of the times, represented in the prosecution of Oscar Wilde. They were, therefore, condemned to a short-lived existence: from the late 1880s until Oscar Wilde's trial, which acted as a deterrent to their succeeding activities and meetings. As Edsall observes, "they did not resurface until more than a decade later, and then more cautiously and largely shorn of the 'sensuous, dreamy, Greece-haunted and luxurious ideas of the Aesthetic school, and the over-handled images of Antinous and Ganymede, seen through a Renaissance gauze'" (Edsall 158).[212]

Although they had little influence on English literature – their poems were printed in small editions meant only for a small group of critics and initiated readers – they are, in Fussell's words, "an indication of what was in the air" in the years prior to the Great War (*The Great War...* 284).

IV.1.2. The Happy Battalion

This section will explore the continuity of the Victorian hero myth in the literary representation of comradeship. A series of strategies to reinforce military discipline – the cult of blind obedience, pride in the regiment, the cult of the fallen and the depersonalisation of the soldier – can be traced in texts which, although characteristic of the Ghost myth, tend to exalt the traditional discourse of war. But the study of the narratives show that comradeship ceased to be realand became an abstract ideal, "the happy battalion," as the positive familial role of the regiment in the soldier's endurance of war could not prevent the vulnerability and powerlessness of the individual before modern warfare and the increasing difficulty in keeping a heroic outlook despite the overwhelming odds.[213]

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[212]   The most renowned are William Johnson, Symonds, Carpenter, Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), Wilde, Lord Alfred Douglas, Aleister Crowley, Montague Summers, Leonard Green, Beverley Nichols, Sholto Douglas, and Gerard Hamilton. The group's name derives from Plato's *Symposium*, in which Pausanias distinguishes between Common Aphrodite and Heavenly Aphrodite or Aphrodite Urania; the latter would refer to Uranian pederasty.

[213]   The expression "happy battalion" appears in Liddell Hart's Foreword to Rogerson's *Twelve Days* to refer to this privileging of corporate identity over individuality: "Now, the war, at any rate on the Western Front, was waged by Battalions, not by individuals, by bands o men who, if the

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A first approach to the texts, however, indicates that the Victorian ideal of homosociality was still valid in the trenches of World War One. The powerful and deep comradeship among those who lived through the war together emerges as a recurring theme in the narratives examined here. There seemed to be no tension between friendship and comradeship, for the simple reason that group solidarity appeared to take precedence over individual friendships. Soldiers shared the same food and accommodation, adapted to the same strict codes of conduct and trained for war, the ultimate test for manhood. It was the authoritarian nature of their public-school upbringing that was imposed on them all over again. In such a context, military discipline played a crucial role: firstly, it would equip men with the physical fitness and military skills necessary for their life as soldiers; secondly, it would instil in men the values and attitudes of the soldier, that is to say, it would transform civilians into soldiers; and finally, it would teach them to rely on themselves and each other and to distrust those who were different: civilians, cowards or enemies. From the perspective of the military, comradeship emerged as a viable and powerful institution. Group solidarity and the merging of the individual into the battalion was the basis of military discipline. Operating on a wider basis, comradeship appealed to the whole manly nation as a collective of comrades in arms, providing a national bond of attachment and a sense of purpose, albeit only a momentary one (see figs 16, 17 and 18).

There were two military strategies deliberately aimed at reinforcing the *ésprit de corps*: military uniforms and public nudity. The important point about uniforms is that it was implicitly accepted that soldierly masculinity was in some respects performative, and that the military played a central role in producing performances of masculinity.[214] Indeed, the uniform was a potent symbol. As

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spirit were right, lived in such intimacy that they became part of one another. The familiar phrase, 'a happy Battalion,' has a deep meaning, for it symbolises that fellowship of the trenches which was such a unique and unforgettable experience for all who ever shared in it, redeeming the sordidness and stupidity of war by a quickening of the sense of interdependence and sympathy" (Hart XX).

[214]   Any performance of masculinity must have distinctive ways of constructing itself. In his formulation of the concept of identity as a means to "the presentation of self," Goffman uses the term "front," which includes the concepts of "setting," "personal front" and "sign-equipment," to

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Bourke observes, "uniforms enhanced men's masculine appearance: a well designed headdress made them look taller, stripes and trousers gave the illusion of length and stocky legs, epaulettes exaggerated the width of the shoulders" Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 128). Only men wearing military uniform could credibly perform wartime masculinity. But what was also important, uniforms depersonalised, institutionalised and bound men together, separating them from the civilians and the enemy. Longing for the privacy and the career as an artist and writer he had before enlisting, Lewis observes: "I had said 'good-bye to all that,' when I first put the uniform on" (Lewis 24). To Williamson's John Bullock, on the other hand, the uniform is the most visible way to respond to the anxiety generated by military life:

> They still awaited uniforms. […] The rifle made his shoulders ache, and the blisters broke inside his thin socks. His boots recently issued, were too big. [...] John Bullock had been a soldier two months when, one morning, all his room were stirred by the rumour that uniforms were being dished out – khaki uniforms, too, not the blue that many battalions of Kitchener's Army were wearing. [...]Yet it was so; and eagerly they waited before the Quarter's Bloke's store, for tunics, trousers, puttees, and service caps. The regimental badges and shoulder-titles were much admired. Several attempted to pinch an extra badge; some succeeded. (Williamson, *The Patriot's Progress* 18-19)

Williamson regards Bullock's "dressing up for war" as a matter of immersion into the military institution, "the anthropological need for uniform in the performance of certain rituals" (Usandizaga and Monnickendam, *Preface* IX). As Bullock becomes immersed in the army, the army becomes a part of him and he grows away from his civilian persona to become 'Tommy Atkins.'[215]

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describe the furniture, dress, posture, gestures, facial expressions and speech patterns used in the performance of masculine identity (Goffman 19-26).

[215]   It is important to mention that the Tommy Atkins of the Great War was more "domesticated and refined" (Gullace 36) than Kipling's representation of the character (See page 128 of this thesis). The image of the working-class Tommy embodied the moral values that defined the British society and the ideal of masculinity war propagandists wished to promote: "at once manly and gentle, sexually attractive and morally restrained, militarized and domesticated" (Gullace 49). The figure of the Tommy was not only used to regulate military behaviour but to constrain the actions of young men in general.

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Fig. 16. "All Together!" Henry Reuterdahl, 1917. Fig. 17. "Halt! Who Goes There?" Unknown, 1915.
Fig. 18. "Join the Brave Throng" Gerald Wood, 1915. *Imperial War Museum Collection Search*. Web.
11 March 2011. < http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/> [216]

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[216]   Relying on messages of comradeship, patriotism and manliness, these recruitment posters are, as Sontag observes, "visually aggressive" (Sontag 196) in their appeal. "All Together!" "depicts sailors from all over the world enlisting to fight as friends against oppression and fear (see fig. 16). In "Halt! Who goes there?" the invocation of the collective of comrades is replaced by the invocation of the friend himself. The British infantry man uses the word "friend" to mean a more impersonal form of identification than that of "the greatest love" and a clear binary distinction from the enemy (see fig. 17). "Join the Brave Throng" portrays six grinning British servicemen wearing different regimental badges on their caps (including badges of the Irish Guards, Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery) and exhorting men not to miss their chance to take their proper place alongside these robust and uniformed countrymen (see fig. 18). The national ideal of comradeship that accompanied massive voluntary enlistment in 1914 "appealed to the manly traditions of romance based on fictions about 'old seafaring.' It appealed to those brought up on romantic swashbuckler adventure stories in which men fought and boozed together" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*... 131). At a political level, the British Empire was "imagined as a *community* [...]

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As to public nudity, "this was simply a technique of humiliation" which began as soon as men were recruited (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 129). The awkwardness of stripping down in front of other soldiers – "some of the men had hearts and anchors and ships and dancing-girls tattooed in blue on their chests and arms. Some were skinny and others too fat. Very few looked fit" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 129) – suggests an uncomfortable complicity. After rubbing their feet with whale oil, their box–respirators and rifles would be inspected and then soldiers would march into the bath:

> They marched along, whistling and singing, to the brasserie, and undressed in a hop loft. Each man carrying his underclothes under an arm, they hopped, naked and crooked and tense in the cold air, playing jokes on one another, to the shed where they handed over the smelly woollen bundles. Then clutching their grey, soiled little towels, they loped with exaggerated shivering into the cavernous room where stood the mash tubs, around which mounting forms had been erected by the Royal Engineers. Six men to a steaming tub which looked like a swan-off base of a big cask. The two inevitable jokes – (I) Blimey, boys, I've always dreamed of *swimming* in a brewery… and, (2) the joke about the French beer, which was generally reckoned to be what it resembled, having some body in it at last… Pass the soap, Ginger, 'strewth, never knew you was so fond of it. Look at Nosey Bullock, crikey what a pair, 'is name shouldn't have been Bullock, but…. (See figs. 19 and 20) (Williamson, *The Patriot's Progress* 77-79)

The use of uniforms and public nudity as part of a ritual of humiliation and powerlessness not only encouraged institutionalised male bonding but an essentialist masculine identity which stood for the group as a whole. The soldiers' strength and emotional detachment were identified as part of the collective body of the army and the army's strength and unity were explained as soldiers' virtues: "The division [was] imagined as an individual (with a soul, a spirit, its own personality), its corporate nature rendering it superior to any human individual" (Cole, *Modernism…* 147).

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conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship." (Benedict Anderson 7). As Anderson argues, it was "this fraternity that [made] it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (Benedict Anderson 7).

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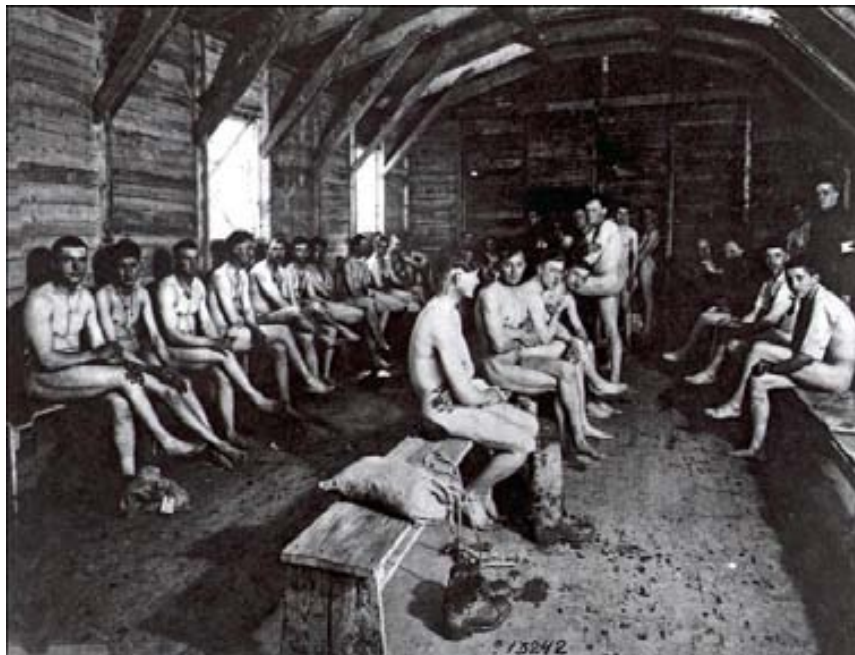
Fig. 19. Brooks, Ernest. "Soldiers bathing near Aveluy Wood," August 1916. *The Battle of the Somme 1 July-18 November 1916*. Fig. 20. "Interior of Undressing Room." *Imperial War Museum Collection Search*. Web. 11 March 2011.<http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>

Chapman's description of the battalion parade depicts the group as a person: "the column acquires a rhythm of its own, an intrinsic life, so that each man shares the emotions of the whole" (275). The activities of individual men cannot be separately captured as distinct from the activities and perceptions of the group itself. Soldiers' lives are moulded by the group as they adopt the life of the group as their own. In a similar collective expression of feeling, Graves

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writes: "Arms-drill […] is beautiful especially when the company feels itself a single being, and each movement is not a synchronized movement of every man together, but the single movement of one large creature" (*Goodbye...*194-95).

Even if the assimilation of the individual into the group would reach its peak during the Second World War, what Cocteau has called "the conspiracy of the plural against the singular" (qtd in Fussell, *Wartime…*69) had already been recognised as a World War One phenomenon even by those who did not regard its effects as adverse.[217] In Herbert's novel, for instance, the individual and the group are perceived as conflating categories; the latter does not seem to usurp the former. Rather the two exist in a balanced relation to each other: "None of us were like each other. It would have been strange if we had been. War-chroniclers have noted […] the strange diversity of persons to be found in units of the New Army, and the essential sameness of their attitude to the war (Herbert 15). Although in a much more obvious manner, the same is the case of Chapman; only rarely does the individual appear fully in control in his memoir. It took him more than a decade after leaving the army to start thinking separately from the battalion:

> For a long time I used to think of myself as part of a battalion, and not as an individual. During all that time the war, the forms and colours of that experience, possessed a part of my senses. My life was involved with the lives of other men, a few living, some dead.
> It is only now that I can separate myself from them. (Chapman 13)

What is curious about Chapman's regimental anecdotes is that they do not belie the Ghost myth view of war; yet they harbour a profound fascination and identification with the group of men who waged it. Likewise, for Carrington modern war could be appalling, but he emphasises the sustaining force of the

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[217]   Referring to the causes of the anonymity of the Second World War soldier, Fussell states: "Uniform and anonymous, undifferentiated in essentials whether Marine replacements or aerial gunners, these boys turned by training into quasi-mechanical interchangeable parts reflect the success of human mass-production between the two world wars, a process fueled by dramatic increases in population and assisted by the rapid rise of 'media culture,' with its power to impose national uniformities. A result was that servicemen in the Second World War seemed even more anonymous and bereft of significant individual personality that their counterparts in the Great War" (Fussell, *Wartime* 66).

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army as a collective body and feels a proud member of what he regards as a highly valued group: "Never again have I been so immersed in the life of a group, so convinced that everyone was as ready to conform as I was – and indeed most of them were" (Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars…* 73).

Both Chapman and Carrington's memoirs are more about the battalions than about themselves; they seemed to be aware of the meaning and implications of group pride to their strength of personality, in particular to their sense of oneness as individuals. Chapman admits "that this body of men had become so much part of me that its disintegration would tear away something I cared for more dearly than I could have believed. I was it, and it was I" (Chapman 276). These feelings are also expressed by Carrington, who had to struggle to detach himself from the group that had sustained him during the war:

> The 1916 fixation had caught me and stunted my mental growth, so that even ten years later I was retarded and adolescent. I could not escape from the comradeship of the trenches which had become a mental internment camp, or should I say a soldiers' home. I might as well have been in Chelsea Hospital. (*A Soldier from the Wars Returning* 252-53)[218]

The idea that the bond among soldiers who served in the trenches was, as Carrington suggests, "richer, stronger in war than we have ever known since" (*A Subaltern's War* 195) was shared by other more ardent advocates of the Ghost myth who idealised comradeship despite the bitterness conveyed in their narratives. Among the compensations of war, Read refers to the "delightful camaraderie" as "something finer and manlier than anything I experienced either at School or College" (Read, *The Contrary Experience* 72). Likewise, Blunden remembers the filth, mud, boredom and shells; "yet when I think of the 11th

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[218]   In 1918 neither Chapman nor Carrington returned home but chose to remain attached to the army. Chapman volunteered for the Army of Occupation and Carrington masqueraded as a private soldier and spent his time in the East End with friends of his platoon. Their way of handling the strain of war was to form strongly dependent – and sometimes pathological – relationships with their men. The comradeship that kept Carrington going during the war incapacitated him in the years that followed. His "sense of comradeship," as well as his sense of himself as veteran, "was rooted," in Leed's words, "in a complex pathology" (113). Some soldiers, like Gurney for example, never recovered. Haunted by the camaraderie of the trenches and those lovely lost unhappy days, he moved inexorably towards madness (see footnote 165).

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Royal Sussex on a winter evening, under all its ordeals or in any of its recreations, bare winter suddenly is changed to spring" (Blunden, *The Mind's Eye* 85). Such idealisation was the subject of Owen's last letter home, four days before his death. The comradeship of his smoky dug-out was so positive an element that the miseries of war seemed to be just reduced to the background, the stark contrast to the compensatory effects of bonding: "It is a great life," he declares, despite "the ghastly glimmering of the guns outside, & the hollow crashing of the shells. […] Of this I am certain you could not be visited by a band of friends half so fine as surround me here" (362).

Even if read as one of the bitterest critiques of Victorian and Edwardian values, Graves' memoir is also marked by an unmistakable pride in his regiment (*Goodbye….* 230-31). To Graves, however, regimental pride not only compensated for the miseries of war, but for what he saw as the failure of patriotism and nationalism. Graves underestimated the significance of patriotic fervour – like Sassoon at the time – but asserted a different hierarchy of loyalties centred on regimental pride and tradition. In his view, it was "the regimental spirit [that] persistently survived all catastrophes" (91). Indeed, the bonds between the men in the regiment were stronger than any other because their prime attachment was to one another not to the country. As Arendt observes, "…no ism, not nationalism and not even patriotism, no emotions in which men can be indoctrinated and then manipulated, but only comradeship, the 'loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale'" (Introduction IX).

Manning also sees comradeship as a life value dissociated from all forms of patriotic and idealistic exhortation and intimately attached to the self: "Each was what every private soldier is, a man in arms against a world, a man fighting desperately for himself, and conscious that, in the last resort, he stood alone; for such self-reliance lies at the very heart of comradeship" (Manning 149). The 'isms' for which Manning's Bourne is fighting become less important than himself and the men next to whom he fights. With total disregard for the wider issues of the war other than its conclusion, Montague also asserts that "all that mattered much to [the soldier] was the one little boatload of castaways with whom he was marooned on a desert island and making shift to keep off the weather and any sudden attack of wild beasts" (*Disenchantment* 36-37). For all its impersonality, trench warfare, while isolating soldiers from all who had not shared their

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experience, actually strengthened their awareness of themselves and their own companions.

The quality of the ties emerging from the common experience favoured a secret bond among soldiers, "a sense of having a collective, 'clandestine' self, which could not be made visible to those 'outside' the war" (Leed 113). Of this secret bond, Carrington writes: "We are still an initiate generation, possessing a secret that can never be communicated. […] Twenty million of us […] shared the experience with one another but with no one else, and are what we are because, in that war, we were soldiers" ("Some Soldiers" 157). Most of the men who went through the experience of war together had never met before; yet, they would become as brothers to each other. Fighting together was a fulfilling bonding experience that brought them closer because of the support they gave each other as they tackled war. Sassoon endorses a similar view arguing that those who had fought together were "carrying something in our heads that belongs to us alone, and to those we left behind in battle" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 175). This sort of conspiracy of silence between the guardians of a knowledge that could not be communicated is essentially reflected in Owen's "truth untold" and Sassoon's "proud-surging melodies of joy."[219]

This sense of belonging to a "secret army" continued after the war ended and contributed to the emergence and stability of veterans' groups.[220] Men who had gone through similar sufferings carried their wartime experience of comradeship back into civilian society. They felt a wall of incomprehension between life at the front and life behind the lines, "a barrier of indescribable experience" (Brittain qtd in Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart" 425). Sassoon spoke for many when he claimed that "the man who really had endured the War at its worst was everlastingly

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[219] See Owen's "Strange Meeting" and Sassoon's "Secret Music." The existence of this secret bond in the literature of the Great War may also be connected with the jealous secrecy maintained by Uranian poets. As Taylor observes, they used "a special vocabulary of words like 'exquisite,' 'secret,' 'strange,' 'sin,' 'smile' and 'mystery,' which helped to produce and aura of exclusivity and the concept of a secret knowledge only to be understood by the initiated" (Martin Taylor 49).

[220] However, not all critics agree with this. Bourke argues that post-war attempts to reconstruct wartime male bonding failed because veteran associations were modelled on "a militaristic rhetoric of male mateship" (*Dismembering the Male…* 155), which, in her view, had already been undermined by war experience.

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differentiated from everyone except his fellow soldiers" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 211).[221]

It is precisely because of this secret pact among comrades that, faced with the death or physical injury of a fellow, men chose to sacrifice their lives for one another. Without the ties that bound them to both living and fallen comrades, they would have succumbed to cowardice. Mutual love and loyalty helped them find the strength to overcome the fear of death and prevail on the battlefield. In this context, "the fallen became a part of the comradeship of the living [not] as individuals but as a community" (Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* 79); they were the force that gave soldiers meaning and a useful means to keep the *status quo* alive. Together with comradeship, moral outrage and a desire for retribution also spurred men on to heroic actions. As Chapman writes: "The sight of the rigid bodies of men I had known quivering with vitality […] stirred in me a hatred of existence. […] I began to hope for some accident to befall our adjutant which would send me up to his place" (Chapman 107). Convinced that the harm inflicted on his brothers in arms deserved the punishment of the offenders, Chapman praises the heroic deeds of the men who fought bravely and unselfishly and endured perils beyond imagination to avenge their comrades (Chapman 236).

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[221]   A similar thing happened to soldiers on home leave. As Martin Taylor observes, "the soldiers' much cherished dreams of home were often soured when men on leave found an England ignorant of the conditions in France and oblivious of their true feelings" (*Lads* 54). Coming from "the all-male society of the regiment," Carrington found himself "leading a double life" in "the quiet respectability of [his] family with its unaltered moral standards" (*Soldier from the Wars Returning* 168). Chapman, on the other hand, felt "as foreign as a Chinese" (138) and Graves thought that "the civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language" (*Goodbye*...237).

Because of the perceived insensitiveness and contentment of their family and friends, soldiers felt not only "disinclined to talk about the trenches" but relieved to go back to the front (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 31). While at Craiglockhart, Sassoon realises that the soldiers at the front are the only men who he can relate with: "Those men, so strangely isolated from ordinary comforts in the dark desolation of murderously –disputed trench-sectors, were more to me than all the despairing and war-weary civilians" (*Sherston's Progress* 21). Moreover, he feels guilty for leaving his comrades behind: "And still the memory of the Company haunts me and wrings my heart and I hear them saying, 'When's the Captain coming back?' It seems as if there's nothing to go back to in England as long as the War goes on" (*Sherston's Progress* 146).

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Nothing seemed to undercut the admiration of the military virtues of individual members of the battalion and the need to prove their courage before their comrades: "The ideal of camaraderie had provided many soldiers with the noblest expression of their manliness" (Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* 167) and had also "placed an immense burden on [them] to express martial values" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*… 151). Dependence on the group, thus, not only involved the appreciation of one's companions but an understanding of comradeship as heroism. The comradeship described in the texts not only fits into a model which integrated male bonding into the dominant discourse, but emphasises essential continuities between Victorian and Great War literature which are likely to subvert the before-and-after model. The use of the curiously ambivalent language of the Ghost myth, however, exposes a central question: How was it possible to glorify those who fought in the war without glorifying the war itself? The question remains unanswered and is framed in the language of ambivalence. The idealisation of comradeship suggests that a rejection of the Victorian hero myth did not, in and of itself, disrupt the continuity of the traditional values and ideas that lay behind male-male relationships.

With subtle differences, it may be argued that most of the war poets did expose their determination to 'do their bit' and 'stick it out' to the end. They all wanted to become warrior heroes, although secretly many knew that they could never match the ideal held before them. The virulently anti-war Aldington, for instance, articulates Winterbourne's yearning for heroic achievement:

> For the first time since the declaration of War, Winterbourne felt almost happy. These men were men. There was something intensely masculine about them, something very pure and immensely friendly and stimulating. They had been where no woman and no half-man had ever been, could endure to be. There was something timeless and remote about them, as if […] they had been Roman legionaries or the men of Austerlitz or even the invaders of the Empire. They looked barbaric, but not brutal; determined, but not cruel. Under their grotesque wrappings, their bodies looked lean and hard and tireless. They were Men. With a start Winterbourne realized that in two or three months, if he were not hit, he would be one of them, indistinguishable from them, whereas now, in the ridiculous jackanapes get-up of the peace-time soldier, he felt humiliated and ashamed beside them. (*Death of a Hero* 253)

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Although the novel offers few opportunities for traditional forms of military heroism – Winterbourne himself is made into a more or less helpless victim who deliberately exposes to death – the admiration for the fortitude and stoical endurance of the more experienced comrades constitutes a source of both attraction and distress for Winterbourne, who relishes – and fears – the chance to do his bit and prove himself to them.

Having been moved to an observation post two miles away from Ypres, Brenan entertains similar doubts when he is assigned the commandment of a company in the line: "though I enjoyed taking moderate risks, I lacked that capacity for headstrong aggressive action that, I imagined, lives somewhere at the bottom of every good soldier" (Brenan 233). Sorley also confesses to a non-combatant friend his dread of not living up to his own heroic expectations on the eve of battle: "To be able to prove oneself no coward to oneself, will be great, if it comes off: but suppose one finds oneself fail in the test? I dread my own censorious self in the coming conflict – I also have great physical dread of pain" (Sorley 312). A week later Sorley would be killed while leading his company at Loos. Such expressions of doubt about heroic self-sacrifice placed these men at a distance from the ruling masculinities. Yet these differences of perspective were not an insuperable barrier but a challenge to their masculine identities, as they were still afraid of not measuring up to the manly standards they had set to themselves.

In a less dramatic and more sarcastic vein, Lewis feels inadequate and overwhelmed by the presence of the tough, strong, tall men of the Anzac troops, famous for their being reckless and courageous in battle (Lewis 148-49). Unlike the "brass hats" who Lewis despises, these soldiers represent a different kind of heroism: "with their open-air habits and free and easy ways" (149), they seem to defy the "soul-less machine" (108). Similar anxieties are highlighted by the anti-war Montague in his description of younger soldiers worshipping their officers, just like boys idolizing sportsmen or popular masters at the public school: "Any old Regular sergeant [...] was a vessel full of the grace by which everything was to be saved; like a king, he could 'touch for' the malady of unsoldierliness" (14). The respect, trust and affection of the men had to be earned though: Men "only respect those in command over them who are themselves willing to hazard their lives" (Plowman, *A Subaltern…* 55). An officer

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was always judged by the way he conducted himself in the trench; if he showed courage, the rest would respect him.

Being accepted as part of the 'brothers in arms' not only ensured the realisation of manly aspirations but also allowed for the "fulfilment of 'positive' desires, such as the need to love and to be loved, and to experience one's own life as meaningful" (Kivimäki and Tepora 285). In fact, most combatants confess that "a positive force – love more than hate" (Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* 142) made them fight. In that sense, the regiment acted as an extension or substitute for the family: "sergeant-majors and captains were the mothers and fathers of the company, while soldiers were brothers among each other" (Kivimäki and Tepora 286). Alluding to the family ideal as a model for men to endure war, Blunden writes: "we suffered much from death and wounds, but still there existed a warm fraternity, a family understanding" (*Undertones of War*, 130). In the same vein, Jones shows a longing for the security of the domestic ritual: "the homing perfume of wood burned, at the termination of ways; and sense here near habitation, a folk-life here, a people, a culture already developed, already venerable and rooted" (*In Parenthesis* 49). It is with this longing in mind that Williamson finds an imperfect substitute to domestic intimacy: "John Bullock felt that he loved the Captain" as he "tried not to imagine never, never seeing his mother again" (Williamson, *The Patriot's Progress* 65).

Most soldiers experienced this family of brothers in arms as the most fulfilling attachment of their lives. Unlike the family, however, it was in the collective appeal of comradeship that soldiers found the impulse to kill and the resignation to die together. Because of solidarity with his comrades in arms, Captain Mackenzie rejects a 'cushy job' in the Foreign Office and stays with the battalion at risk of his own life. He tells his friend Tietjens: "The C.O. wasn't up to much. *Someone* had to stay with the battalion. I was not going to do the dirty on it, taking any soft job" (Madox Ford, 307). That soldiers would rise in waves to go over the top, with only the promise of death, on occasions like the battle of the Somme for instance, is evidence of both the intensity of the relationship that developed between the men and the central role of violence at the heart of it. Referring to the steadfast support and untiring devotion of his men, Plowman writes: "I should like to have shaken hands with those fellows, for they knew

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what they were letting themselves in for, and they went, almost shyly, without a semblance of heroics or thought of recognition" (Plowman, *A Subaltern…* 145).

In this context, "the presence of danger is distinctive and important" for comradeship "develops through the consciousness of an obstacle to be overcome through common effort" (Gray 43). The need to go out and fight, to risk life and take joy from comradeship and danger, these are deep feelings, so deep that all men seem to surrender to them: "I longed to lose myself in the little group," writes Brenan, "bound together by their duties and their mutual obligations and by their ever present awareness of danger, and slough off my sick and feeble individuality in a sense of responsibility for others" (214). It seemed implausible to fear death if men were part of something larger than themselves. Disturbingly, the shared experience of killing and mortal danger offered a very different exercise field for brotherly love, as love performed the perverted role of both bearing and stimulating violence.

This type of comradeship had a wider and more abstract level of attachment: "there remains a strong impression that there was much more during the Great War to unite men than to divide them" (Denis Winter, *Death's Men*… 20). Mutual affection itself did not appear to account for the astonishing ability of the British regiment to avoid moral disintegration, even in the years after the Somme. Although the British army tried to uphold the continuity of its regimental recruits, the increasing losses and redeployments were threatening the possibility of male bonding: "By September 1917, none except perhaps the very young joined the infantry without knowing that his chance of life was at best about 4 to 1 on" (Chapman 176). The concern over the losses was, no doubt, common to most soldiers. Montague describes the contradiction faced by his regiment after the battle of Ypres, its apparent stability but permanent devastation: "The evolution of the war was now calling on all ranks of troops in the actual line to put up with a much diminished chance of survival, only the barest off-chance if they stayed there year after year" (32).

Facing the fact that nearly all the men in the old battalions were being killed, it was only what may be regarded as an internalised ideal of comradeship that enabled soldiers to re-establish new ties over and over again within short

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periods of time and not to be devastated by the losses. As Kivimäki and Tuomas observe:

> In risking their lives to save a wounded comrade, and even more in lethal attacks, soldiers were not only concerned with the physical survival of a fellow soldier. They were actualizing the ideal of comradeship, and preserving 'something greater' than one's own life, or the life of one's comrade. In chaotic and hopeless circumstances, 'the front' was upheld by this abstract, yet intensely lived-through attachment to the ideal of brotherhood–in-arms, which was crystallized by loss and violence. […] Ultimately and momentarily, the whole constellation could turn upside down: the unity among comrades was no longer the prerequisite for combat motivation; the combat itself – the sacrifice and the violence – became the requirement for social life among soldiers. (288)

The heroic qualities that shaped the identity of the group, therefore, had little to do with freedom of choice. On the contrary, these qualities were a function, on the one hand, of subordination to military discipline, and, on the other, of "an invisible moral force" that sustained men as a group (Madox Ford qtd in Hynes, *A War Imagined* 106).[222] For some soldiers, this invisible moral force had to do with duty and "a kind of stoicism […] a gradual acceptance of the inevitable" (Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* 163). For others, it was "an heroic ideal, stripped of romantic glamour certainly, but redefined convincingly in terms of grim courage an endurance in the face of almost unbearable suffering and horror" (Rutherford, *The Literature of War* 65). Either way, to subscribe to this abstract ideal of comradeship, to this impersonal form of identification, was in a way to accept isolation as an individual and, in Manning's words, an "extreme of heroism" which was "indistinguishable from despair" (Manning 8).

IV.1.3. The Alienation of Institutionalised Comradeship

Despite the efforts to preserve the courage and spirit of self-sacrifice, these qualities began to lose their value under the collective sense of oppression and

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[222]   Although "3,080 British soldiers were sentenced to death for desertion, cowardice, mutiny or other offences," the number of soldiers shot for cowardice was "a minute percentage of the total number (5,7 million) who served in the British Army during the war" (Ferguson 347.

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futility that permeated the Western Front after the Somme.[223] The need to project affection on this abstract ideal of comradeship and not on the real friend inevitably led to distress for those who experienced the vulnerability of male relationships at the front. Sassoon passed his last year at the front in a constant and painful struggle to maintain comradeship ties which had grown to be increasingly ephemeral:

> All I knew was that I'd lost my faith in [the war and the people at home] and there was nothing left to believe in except 'the Battalion spirit.' The Battalion spirit meant living oneself into comfortable companionship with the officers and N.C.O.s around one […]. But while exploring my way into the War I had discovered the impermanence of its humanities. One evening we could be all together in a cosy room […]. A single machine-gun or a few shells might wipe out the whole picture within a week. Last summer the First Battalion had been part of my life; by the middle of September it had been almost obliterated. (Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 145).

The 'happy battalion' had become a paradox in itself as comradeship entailed, in Leed's words, "a sense of sharing, in common, the status and powerlessness of victims" (see fig. 21) (*No Man's Land* 210). The organisation of male intimacy had subverted itself: To identify with the comrades was to start a never-ending process of suffering and loss. Manning's Marlow seems to know the feeling: "'That's the worst o' the bloody army: as soon as you get a bit pally with a chap summat' happens'" (133). Emotional dependence on the men of the battalion suggested that any loss on the part of the group was felt as a loss to their own self. Yet, such loss was supposed to be atoned for by identifying with those that remained. Yet this could not prevent the next loss which would bring even more suffering. In the end, comradeship would be turned into "a seemingly endless process of mourning" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 210).

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[223]   It is of interest here to note that there may be other reasons why institutionalised comradeship was difficult to sustain. Apart from the analysis of the broad institutional level, Bourke refers to a series of interactional problems between men sharing life in the armed forces. Among them: the resentment between the different ranks (and its associations with class and political identity), marital status, religions, ethnicities. See Bourke, *Dismembering the Male,* (146-149).

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To make matters worse, men were being instructed not to help the wounded in the battlefield and protect their lives first. The justification for this was that every fighting man was needed and that the pity they might feel for the men dying next to them could not be sustained if they too were wounded. For Bourne's comrades, the words of Captain Thompson requesting them not to give first aid if any of their men got shot or wounded was unacceptable: "A don't mind tellin' thee, that if a see a chum o' mine down, an' a can do aught to 'elp 'im, all the brass-'ats in the British Army […] aren't goin' to stop me" (Manning 154).

Fig. 21. Smith, Percy Delf, 1919. A column of British infantrymen march along a road in rows of four, seen from a slightly elevated angle. Marching alongside them is Death, personified as a skeleton wrapped in a cloak. Web. 2 April 2011. <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>

Moreover, acting on the maxim that men at war were forced to inflict some evil to avoid greater evil or attain greater good could no longer be justified either, as battalions were being literally swept away. In the end, the only way out of this process of incessant bereavement would be one's own death or, less tragically, 'a blighty one.' 'Blighty' was a slang term deriving from the Hindustani to refer to 'home.' A 'blighty wound' or a 'cushy wound' was a wound serious enough to require recovery away from the trenches but not serious enough to kill or mutilate the victim. That is all Williamson's Bullock seems to have in mind, "the hope of getting a wound which would put him out of war" (125). Similarly, for

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Gurney, "the full joy of leave in Blighty" represents the dream of escape from the drudgery and unreality of his war existence: "hot baths – breakfast in bed – tablecloths – books – late reading – Bach – Great walks – Renewing friendships – Talks of books – hunting second hand bookstalls – a sight of St Pauls again and to lose oneself in being in London…" (123)[224]

The perception that the old comradeship ties were no longer possible – "two million men can never be a happy few" (Montague 31) – added to this growing sense of smallness and widened the distance separating officers from men. As Pegler observes, "without the ordinary soldier, there could have been no war, but rarely is the infantry looked at as an individual. Armies, corps and divisions comprised thousands of these individuals" (3). Owen conveys what life at the anonymous frontline was like for the ordinary infantry man – and the officer as well: "And now I am among the herds again, a Herdsman; and a Shepherd of sheep that do not know my voice" (Owen, 342). Perhaps feeling remorseful for not having got to know the men behind the "three pages of names, numbers, trades, next-of-kin, religions, rifle numbers, and so forth" (Chapman 56). He is equally revealing about the precariousness of the ties and the feeling of isolation, of not being individually accountable: "Did any of us know you? Ever pierce your disguise of goose-turd green, penetrate your young skin and look through you to learn the secret which is the essential spirit, the talisman against the worst that fate can offer? No" (Chapman 57). Similar examples crowd the texts, the Victorian heroes had turned into the anonymous and muddy "line of bowed heads, of humped shoulders, sitting wearily in the rain by a roadside, waiting, hoping, waiting – but unknown (Chapman 57).

The tension existing between being acknowledged as individuals and being submerged into the group probably held the key to the failure of the idea of comradeship as an institution. Not feeling valued in their own right, soldiers started to lose the sense of safety that formed the basis of organised male bonding. The lack of opportunities and reward for their individual qualities meant

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[224]   Graves convincingly suggests that this kind of wound was self-inflicted or propitiated in most cases: "[The old men] look forward to a battle because that gives them more chances of a cushy one in the legs or arms than trench warfare. In trench warfare the proportion of head wounds is much greater" (Graves, *Goodbye…*114).

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alienation. No longer satisfied to be a number, Madox Ford strips the regiment of its last romantic aura:

> All these men toys, all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians' speeches without heart or even intelligence. Hundreds of thousands of men tossed here and there in that sordid and gigantic mud-brownness of midwinter… by God, exactly as if they were nuts wilfully picked up and thrown over the shoulder by magpies… But men. Not just populations. Men you worried over there. Each man a man with backbone, knees, breeches, braces, a rifle, a home, passions, fornications, drunks, pals, some scheme of the universe, corns, inherited diseases, a greengrocer's business, a milk walk, a paper stall, brats, a slut of a wife. … The Men: the Other Ranks! And the poor – little officers. God help them. (Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades* 296-297)

Trying to survive among the desolation of a theatre of war in which decisions literally passed over their heads in the form of shells, officers and men alike felt that the group acted beyond, over and through them as individuals. With a growing feeling of irrelevancy and a sense of themselves as the anonymous workforce, "the uniformed working proletariat" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 199), men found themselves performing "a job of routine work to be filled day in, day out" (Chapman 224) and, most notoriously, they felt they had been pushed into "slavery" (Williamson, *The Patriot's Progress* 152), into the "endless hideous life of the automaton" (Plowman, *A Subaltern…* 115). The collective man forced into alienation was turned into an endlessly replaceable cog in the war machine, providing, in Cole's words, "a form of ready-made identity that in the Great War is both necessary and troubling" (*Modernism…* 157).

Unlike the cheering Tommy Atkins discussed in the previous section, this "ready-made identity" allowed for the possibility of individual experience running parallel to the experience of the group and brought another, much grimmer, dimension that implied that the reassuring portrayal of what the war had done to men might all along have been simplified. As Manning observes:

> Actually, though the pressure of external circumstances seemed to wipe our individuality, leaving little if any distinction between men and man, in himself each man became conscious of his own personality as of something very hard, and sharply defined against a background of other men, who remained merely generalized as 'the others.' (183).

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Bourne cannot stand for the 'comrade' in the manner of Williamson's Bullock: "Bourne is not truly representative of anything but himself – nor could he be" (Parfitt 89). The shifting identity of men on the front, in which the spirit of the group intersected with the individual voice, is stressed not only by Manning, but also by Herbert Read who, discussing his change of attitude towards the regiment, which he now saw as alienating masses of anonymous people, claims:

> It is a revolt of the individual against the association [...] 'A beautiful anarchy' – that is my cry. I hate mobs – they fight and kill, build filthy cities and make horrid dins. And I begin to think that their salvation and re-recreation is none of my concern, but the concern of each individual. Only so can these associations be broken – cell by cell, segment by segment. (*The Contrary Experience* 124)

A heightened awareness of himself as an individual, coupled with this sense of uncertainty of adjustment to what he calls "the association", leads Read to a kind of rebellious introspection that not only makes him aware of the implications of his new situation but drives him towards "a beautiful anarchy." Instead of focusing on this introspective awareness that pervades the soldiers' minds in the midst of the vast, impersonal organisation, Jones attempts to reconcile the unwanted sense of insignificance with the imperative to evolve an individual identity:

> Feet plodding in each other's unseen tread. They said no word but to direct their immediate next coming, so close behind to blunder, toe by heel tripping, file-mates; blind on-following, moving with a singular identity.
> Half-minds, far away, divergent, own-thought thinking, tucked away unknown thoughts; feet following file friends, each his own thought-maze alone treading; intricate; twist about, own thoughts, all unknown thoughts, to the next so close following on. (Jones 37)

Not only does the text show the gulf between traditional and more modern narratives of war but also a struggle to deflect the overwhelming effect of the group on the individual. The soldier is presented as "a collective being, both individual and abstract" (Cole, *Modernism*… 156). He is made to use his capacity of thought to compensate for the comradeship that limits him into being a passive, alienated subject: "it is a man's thoughts that are "own" and "unknown," even as the endless file of bodies seems almost to dominate and

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appropriate the self" (Cole, *Modernism…* 152). The same happens with the use of the essentially contradictory labels "file-mate" and "file-friend" to describe impersonal relationships. The binaries reflect a conflict between the personal and impersonal dimensions of bonding and the emotional estrangement that necessarily results from such dualism.

Jones' notion of the "file-friend" appears as a disturbing response to the dilemma of establishing short, non-committal bonds in an increasingly atomised world. There may be a correlation between Manning's "file-friend" and the shadowy figure of the Unknown Warrior, repeatedly used as a symbol of the anonymity and homogeneity of death, as "an emblem of 'the plain man,' of the masses of the people" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 250). The presence of "a forage-cap hung on a stick: A rough wooden cross bearing the pencilled inscription, 'To an Unknown British Soldier'" in Plowman's memoir (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 42), works as a reminder of the fragility of humankind and "as a touchstone for public mourning, […] where universal loss could be engaged as both a personal and a shared experience" (Cole, *Modernism…* 152). Resembling the impersonality of the file-friend and the Unknown Warrior, the notion of "corpselessness" alludes to "the empty spaces created by absent bodies, both in England – where governmental policy dictated that corpses would not be shipped home for burial […] – and at the front, where shell explosions could disintegrate a human being" beyond recognition (Booth 11).[225]

All three cases stress the destruction of the individual in the name of the group. The idea of the "file-friend," the "absent" or the "unknown" marks the point at which converge the individual and the enormity of the phenomenon of war. It is at the sight of the dead lying unburied in the mud that Plowman observes this struggle between the personal and the anonymous dimensions: "Yet looking on

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[225]   With just some exceptions, it was impossible to arrange for the proper burial of thousands of dead soldiers, both identified and unknown, scattered in ad hoc cemeteries in northern France and Flanders. Therefore, it was decided that none would return home. For symbolic reasons, however, it was decided that an unknown soldier would be brought home from the battlefield to bury him in a tomb that would be constructed for that purpose. For further comment on the notion of "the unknown soldier" see Winter ("Homecomings: The Return of the Dead" in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 15-28), Mosse ("The Cult of the Fallen Soldier" in *Fallen Soldiers* 94-106) and Booth ("Corpselessness" 21-49 in *Postcards from the Trenches*).

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them now I reflect how each one had his own life, his individual hopes and fears. Individually each one was born: dead, they come back to individuality" (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 137). While Plowman asserts that only death can restore men to their primordial condition, Lewis sees death only as "a form of Crowd" (Lewis 80). In his view, surrendering to the crowd is like surrendering to death: "Does not the Crowd in life spell death, when most intensely marshalled? The Crowd is an immense anaesthetic towards death, such is its immemorial function" (Lewis 80). Perhaps the dilemma which faced all men equally, although some were unwilling to cope with it, did not concern death so much as the affirmation of their own individuality in the face of death.

It is clear that behind the unknown numbers, behind the faceless masses of troublesome transients, there were individuals with souls. The presence of men in permanent tension with the anonymity of the group permeates most of the texts and has a profound effect on the meaning of the experience of the man at war and on the development of friendship as an escape from the elusiveness and uncertainty of comradeship.

IV.1.4. Recovering Humanity through Friendship

The present section overviews the concept of friendship in opposition to the institution of comradeship. My thesis is that friendship helped war poets recover their common humanity, challenge the dominant discourse and change towards emotional disclosure. I examine the essential themes around the representation of friendship, focusing on the common interests, backgrounds and values that got men together in their search for a sense of belonging and individual worth.

The only way out of the alienation resulting from the alliance between comradeship and the Victorian hero myth was to turn to the open expression of thought, emotion and affection. As Bourke writes, "the need for emotion was never so intense as when faced with mortality" (*Dismembering the Male...* 25).

Apart from the many instances of personal introspection discussed in the previous section, soldiers felt the need to connect with other men, the need to access the others' individuality and discover, as Oliker observes, "new makings of feeling, trust and commitment" (20). It was only through the dynamics of

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friendship as a personal and a private relationship that an exchange of companionship and mutual self-exploration could be achieved. In this sense, the concept of friendship in the trenches was closely connected with that of "male intimacy" as "close association, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and some form of love" (Jamieson 13). Through intimacy, men shared "personal feelings with each other" in such a way that self-disclosure had a value in itself (Sandell 29).[226]

Despite the collective and organised character of war and comradeship and their potential to destroy, through death, the possibility of long term friendship, individual friendships, some short-termed and fluctuating others more stable and meaningful, were in fact built at the front. In such context, the emphasis on the individual's experience opened a gap between friendship and the collective tough masculinity that characterised comradeship as an institution. With its unique roles, rituals and type of communication, friendship emerged as a voluntary relationship, "a kind of institutionalised non-institution" (Paine 514).

Since the type of emotional intimacy encouraged by friendship did not conform to the exalted version of comradeship, the struggle to remain friends appeared as a threat to the very core of the military establishment. Yet men were determined to forge some form of intimate bonding, "some impalpable tie" (Manning 161) which, in the circumstances of war, emerged as a unique relational model with no parallel in civilian life.[227]

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[226] The terms "personal" and "private" in relation to friendship stand as opposites of the terms "group" and "public" respectively. As to the implications of the term "personal" in relation to friendship, Paine writes: "The opposite of a personal relationship is a *group relationship* […] The probability of a high affective content in a personal relationship is apparent […] A personal relationship is between particular individuals. A group relationship is between mutually substitutable persons, as members of a group" (Paine 513). The privacy of friendship means that "the relationship may be established and maintained independent of reference to the various group-derived statuses of the individuals. It also means that particular individuals may choose whether or not they will communicate to others the content and norms of conduct of the relations between them" (Paine 513).

[227] For recent arguments against this, see Cole (145-46). In her view, Manning's novel boycotts the ideal of the "impalpable tie." Cole argues that the impersonality of war and of institutionalised comradeship in *Her Privates We* alienate the possibility of friendship between men and lead to "a disjunction among different forms of male bonds," being "this rupture […] responsible, at least in part, for the bereavement and alienation that so powerfully characterises

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Vastly more complex than comradeship, friendship was not the product of the army's overt values but something implicit, almost inherent in men, "the spiritual thing […] which lived and seemed even to grow stronger, in the mist of beastliness" (Manning 141). This "spiritual thing" had nothing to do with religion or faith in the Christian sense.[228] It was not a matter of losing the self in a greater whole; on the contrary, it was rather a matter of recovering the small-scale humanity necessary to cope with the surroundings: "*a triumph over death* […] a celebration of life" (Das, *Touch and Intimacy*... 118) Carrington favours this idea when he claims: "In its moral aspect, war resembles other great tragedies: the greater the horror, the nobler the triumph of the man who is not ruined by it" (*A Subaltern's War* 200) Similarly, Read resorts to Dostoevsky's humanistic viewpoints to compare his war experience with the writer's prison years in Siberia and present war as a chance for men to show their finest qualities:

> 'My brother, I am not dejected, I have not lost courage. Life is life everywhere; life is in ourselves, not in the world that surrounds us. There will be people around me, and to be a *man* among men, and to remain a man forever, under whatever circumstances, not to weaken, not to fall, that is what life is, that is the real meaning of life […].' Dostoevsky had reserves of spiritual energy which the diarist was never to possess, but his reaction explains this paradox of hope in the midst of despair. It also explains his turning to the people around him, his desire to be a man among men. (Read, *The Contrary Experience* 64-65)

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the soldier figure, both during and after the war" (146). On the contrary, I argue that Manning's response to the conflict between friendship and comradeship is the vindication of the capacity of men to retain their faith in humanity. This comprehends both the triumph of the individual over the impersonality of war and a commitment to humane relationships. Manning's novel is about men finding themselves and each other. As Bourne tells Clinton: "Don't talk so bloody wet […] You'll never break" (Manning 4). Manning's novel is about not breaking, about enduring awful pressures, about facing death and still live. Such an attitude to the war can be reasonably called heroic.

[228]   In fact, "this war [was] a bit too serious" (Montague 74) for religion to be able to explain it or justify it. Although "a lot of raw material for making some sort of religion was lying about, […] war also made some of the finished doctrinal products now extant look pretty poor" (Montague 76).

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Like Dostoevsky, Read turns to those nearest to him for reassurance as to his own plight and of the continued existence of common humanity in a war seen as "an 'outrage on humanity'" (Plowman, *Bridge into the Future* 96). His faith in the individual helps Read create a sense of belonging to resist a sense of failure: "I don't mean to pin my faith in life upon any person. But in the social relations of individuals I know that there can be bonds which strengthen one's mental fibre. And I have a craving for such a bond" (*The Contrary Experience* 76).

Kant had already defined friendship as an ideal of what he called "humanity" in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Sullivan, Introduction XXVI). The image of men creating human relationships in a destructive and meaningless world has a universal quality about it that goes beyond the immediacy of the relationship. As Gray claims: "Friends can indeed close themselves without hatred from the world and draw from the labyrinth of each other's beings inexhaustible wealth. They can thus endure much of war's horror without losing the zest for life" (Gray 92-93).

That is the case of Sassoon and Owen's friendship, a relationship which not only strove to preserve its humanity but which can be defined as "symbiotic" both in artistic and in personal terms (Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon* 70).[229] Because there was "no destructive dynamic […] no love of death or sacrifice," their mutual influence did indeed "[make] life "doubly dear" (Gray 93), helping them endure the hardships of war, refine their anti-war stances and develop their poetical output.

Although Owen had been reading Sassoon before they met in the flesh, and felt "at a very high pitch of emotion" about his poetry, it was at Craiglockhart that they became close (Owen, *Selected Letters* 269). Their first encounter is regarded by Owen as a momentous event: "at last […] an event worth a letter" (Owen, *Selected Letters* 270). After getting to know Sassoon, he liked him "as a man, as a friend, as a poet" (277) and in the first letter he writes to him after leaving Craiglockhart, he expresses this admiration: "Know that since mid-September, when you still regarded me as a tiresome little knocker on your

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[229]   Madox Ford's Tietjens had a similar approach to friendship: "Your friends are your friends because they look at situations automatically as you look at them" (497).

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door, I held you as Keats + Christ + Elijah+ my Colonel + my father-confessor + Amenophis IV in profile" (Owen, *Selected Letters* 289).[230] Apart from the homoerotic undertones of the relationship, Sassoon was a significant artistic influence on Owen's work: "It was during and after his treatment at Craiglockhart and the commencement of his friendship with Sassoon that Owen began to produce his most celebrated poetry of war" (Atkin 117). [231] Moreover, Sassoon was fundamental to Owen's recovery from shell-shock and to his return to war; his friendship served the protective role that compensated for Owen's negative war experiences.[232]

The friendship between Aldington's narrator and Winterbourne in *Death of a Hero* also has this double focus: the common interests shared and the regard for each other: "I liked George. […] We lent each other books from our scanty store […] I talked to him about modern poetry, and he talked to me about modern painting; and I think we helped to keep each other's 'souls' alive" (Aldington 32).

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[230]   Among the various reasons that drove Owen towards Sassoon may have been homoerotic desire, which will be discussed in the following section, and the need to rise above his class: "[I] have been working for money, since I was sixteen, disguised as the fact is!" (Owen 100). In his letters, Owen embraces Craiglockhart and his friendship with Sassoon almost as if they were a replacement for the public-school education and social development opportunities he had desired but could not afford to get.

[231]   Owen returned to service with a new self-assurance of his role as communicator of the true nature of war and wrote the poems for which he is most remembered such as "Dulce Et Decorum Est," "Insensibility" and "Strange Meeting." In 1917 he writes to his mother telling her that he is not dissatisfied with the past year because "I go out of this year a Poet, […] as which I did not enter it" (306). For a detailed discussion of Sassoon's literary influence on Owen's poetry see Patrick Campbell (*Siegfried Sassoon* 70-73).

[232]   Despite being the older and the more experienced in terms of military action and poetical expression, Sassoon also felt artistically and personally affected by Owen, who became of "high significance for me both as poet and friend" (Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey* 63). As a poet, "Wilfred's praises heartened and helped me" (*Siegfried's Journey* 64), and he was essential in his decision to give voice to the truth untold: "It was then that we vowed our confederacy to unmask the ugly face of Mars and – in the words of Thomas Hardy – 'war's apology wholly stultify'" (*Siegfried's Journey* 64). As a friend, Owen provided "much comfort in his companionship" while Sassoon was "enduring the difficult and distressing experience of making up my mind to withdraw my 'stop the war' attitude and get myself passed for service abroad" (*Siegfried's Journey* 63-64). Like Sassoon, Owen became a close, supportive and collaborative presence that could compensate for the negative experiences (*Siegfried's Journey* 64). See Patrick Campbell (*Siegfried Sassoon* 73) for a discussion of Owen's poetic influence on Sassoon.

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It was their humanity that these men put forward when they decided to invest in friendship. And it was through friendship that they were offered the opportunity to recover themselves as individuals and to find peace. That is what Winterbourne values about his friends at the front: "they had retained and developed a certain essential humanity and manhood" (258). It is this "intense and essential humanity" the only thing Sassoon finds worth staying at the front (*Siegfried's Journey* 53), the same humanity Gurney finds in his roommate in hospital, "a man of the 7th Gloucesters who was wounded [...] at Gallipoli" and who was to become an "influence to fulfill [his] music" (149).

The chief attributes of friendship as a humane relationship are, as Godbeer writes, "*sensibility,* a capacity for refined and yet profound emotional feeling, […] and *sympathy,* a compatibility in temperament combined with a commitment to empathetic feeling that enabled supportive companionship" (70). As part of this cult of sensibility, the war poets sought, in Godbeer's words, the mutual cultivation of minds and souls" (70). For these men, the affective meaning of friendship had to do with the sense of worth they could get from the friend. Spending thought-provoking time together and sharing common interests lay at the foundation of Owen-Sassoon friendship: "We have followed parallel trenches all our lives, and have more friends in common, authors I mean, than most people can boast of in a lifetime" (Owen, *Selected Letters* 278).[233] What was special about their relationship was that they could understand each other, they could explain themselves to each other and, alternatively; they were able to see themselves in each other. Godbeer testifies to the connection between affection and genuine personal fulfilment: "It was a man's capacity for emotion, nurtured in the context of loving friendships with other men, that would open the channels of communication and support through which he would grow both rationally and spiritually" (Godbeer 70).

Speaking of his contemporary Robert Graves, who appears in his memoir as David Cromlech, Sassoon also refers to him as "an ideal companion," someone who he enjoyed talking to and discussing literature with: "We had so much to

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[233]   The word "trenches" is used as a pun and refers both to the excavations used for the protection of troops at the front line and to the similar interests and ideas shared by Owen and Sassoon.

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tell one another" (*Memoirs of an Infantry* Officer 75-76). Indeed, their time together was organised around the discussion of books, music and writing. A common love of books also brought Sassoon and David Thomas together:

> In our hut, however, we sought fresher subjects than bygone battles and obliterated trenches. I enjoyed talking about English literature, and listened to him as to an oracle which I could, now and then, venture to contradict. Although he was nine years younger than I was, I often found myself reversing our ages, since he knew so much more than I did about almost everything except fox-hunting (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 106).

But these relationships not only developed around common interests. Common background and values played an important role as well. For many officers, the war provided an arena for the continuation of the all-male environment of the public school and Oxbridge. The "absence" of women was in fact part of the motivation for the development of friendships between men (Bourke *Dismembering the Male* 133). Being women the prime targets of men's intimate revelations, it is reasonable to think that they would create dependency on other men in their absence. However, some refuse to see male relationships as a substitute for the intimacy between men and women. In this view, male intimacy was "normal behaviour that women 'disrupted'" (Gameson qtd in Bourke 133). In any case, some of the patterns of mutual respect and tolerance displayed at the warfront rose on occasion, as Manning's Bourne asserts, "to an intensity of feeling which [more stable] friendship never touches" (Manning 79).

However, other war poets, particularly Thomas and Rosenberg, lamented the lack of meaningful relationships and found in their writing correspondents a substitute for friendship. This is what Thomas writes to his mother:

> I cannot talk about books. […] I never see anybody I know. The only man here I can really talk to is most of the time a most confounded nuisance, because he can never play the part of an Artillery Officer but is always a melancholy Scotch Philosopher bred mostly in solitude under his mother's roof. (Edward Thomas 156-57)

His failure to converse honestly and sincerely with men is a recurrent concern in his epistolary confessions and "a reflection perhaps of his persistent search for a

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close friend with whom to share his innermost thoughts" (R. George Thomas, Introduction XVI). In a letter to his admired Robert Frost, Thomas expresses these anxieties, "his craving for a few passionate friendships" (32), but at the same time makes visible his own lifelong desire to be disguised:

> This should only improve what you condemn as my fastidious taste in souls [...]. Anyhow here I have to like people because they are more my sort than the others, although I realise at certain times they are not my sort at all and will vanish away after the war. What almost completes the illusion is that I can't help talking to them as if they were friends. (Thomas 121)[234]

Intensely shy from an early age, Rosenberg was also a solitary man. Like Thomas, "the fuller attention and sympathy he received from his older and perhaps less glamorous poet correspondents gave him the sustained emotional and intellectual support he desperately needed in his isolation, especially in the trenches" (Liddiard, Introduction 22-23).[235] Regardless of his rank – he was a working-class Jew fighting as a private in "this Bantam Battalion," the 11th Battalion of The King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment – his artistic education had made him different from the men in his regiment and placed him at a distance:

> I have to eat out of a basin together with some horribly smelling scavenger who spits and sneezes into it etc. It is most revolting, at least up to now – I don't

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[234]   Eventually, Thomas made a close friend, the Futurist artist Paul Nash, who became a map-reading instructor with the Artists' Rifles. Thomas had just been promoted to full corporal and wrote to Robert Frost in May 1916: "Nobody recognises me now. Sturge Moore, E. Marsh, and R. C. Trevelyan stood a yard off and I didn't trouble to awake them to stupid recognition. Bottomley and his wife I just had a word with. I was with a young artist named Paul Nash who has just joined us as a map reader. He is a change from the 2 schoolmasters I see most of... He is wonderful at finding birds' nests" (Thomas 126). Thomas also appears in Nash's letters to their mutual friend, Gordon Bottomley: "Do you know what is become of Thomas, as he has passed from my ken - dear old Thomas. I was sorry to part from him, he was a great companion" (Bottomley and Nash, 82).

[235]   Probably writing letters was Rosenberg's way not only to console himself but to recover his individuality. Pen friendships tend to be one-dimensional and an idealised retreat when things got tough at the front. Rosenberg wrote letters because they may have provided him with an emotional and ethical safe writing space. He needed this safe space to deal with problematic issues related to war.

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mind the hard sleeping the stiff marches etc but this is unbearable. Besides my being a Jew makes it bad amongst these wretches (Rosenberg 141).

In this uncomfortable situation, "he seems to have found more comfort in his poetry than in his comrades" (Martin Taylor 47). If, as Plowman argues, "writing books [was] an act of friendship" (*Bridge into the Future* 586), Rosenberg feasted himself with hopes of realising it through imagination. Describing "Sunfire," the third part of *Youth*, he writes:" "life itself becomes transfigured through Imagination, that is, real intimacy – love" (Rosenberg 136).[236]

Although some of the encounters between men of different social backgrounds were painful, as was Rosenberg's case, some others worked deeply upon the officer's sympathies for the ranks. Within the boundaries of the carefully preserved and visible class differences, there also developed relationships of great emotional intensity. For many upper-middle class officers coming from the public-school system the ranks were a revelation of humanity.[237] Most officers repeatedly paid homage to the values of the soldiers under their command. Referring to his orderly and friend Castlereagh, Plowman shows an honest appreciation for his generous friendship: "a queer self-contained bit of old humanity, I like him, and believe he likes me" (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 35). Flourishing in the hostile environment of war, this friendship requires no complex learning, no high imagination to appreciate it. With rather more tenderness than Plowman, Blunden writes about his second, Sergeant Worley: "A kinder heart there never was; a gentler spirit never" (*Undertones of War* 45). And adds: "I

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[236]   The same detachment Rosenberg had shown about men, he exhibited in relation to the subject of war. As Bergonzi writes, "one might go further and say that there was always an element of aestheticism in Rosenberg's vision; whereas Owen aimed at fusing the poetry and the pity, Rosenberg kept them separate" (113).

[237]   Some critics argue that friendship overcame all social barriers at the front. Keegan claims that "in this process of discovery many of the amateur officers were to conceive an affection for the disadvantaged which would eventually fuel that transformation of middle-class attitudes to the poor which has been the most important social trend in Twentieth Century Britain" (*The Face of Battle* 221). Those who endorse the Ghost myth view of war are more reluctant. Referring specifically to comradeship rather than friendship, Leed argues that the socialisation between the upper-middle and lower classes was only temporary: "This equality of condition, which became the fondest memory of veterans after the war, had nothing to do with freedom of choice. It was equality under compulsion of authority and material realities" ("Class and Disillusionment*"* 698).

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loved him for this new expression of a simple but profound trust. The bond between us had been swiftly struck at Cambrin a year and a half before. It holds, it holds to-day" (*Undertones of War* 179).

Unlike the previous cases, Manning's Bourne was not an officer but "a man from the formally educated classes who […] decided to enlist as a ranker" (Parfitt 85). Yet, as Parfitt observes, rather than "some kind of spy, sent to observe the characteristics of the workers," Bourne "operates as a link […] for a link is part of what it unites, even while it and those things are not the same" (87). Despite his sounding a little distant and patronizing to the men, probably because of his social and cultural superiority, Bourne develops a genuine affection for two of his "chums," Martlow and Shem. Shem, the Jew with the eyes "like the fish-pools of Heshbon" (Manning 14), is introduced as a "tough, sturdy and generous" companion (40). "Little" Martlow, on the other hand, appears as "a schoolboy, jealous, obstinate in all resentments, but full of generous impulses, distrusting the whole world, and yet open and impressionable when one had gained his confidence" (232). Bourne can "never offer any serious resistance to Martlow's rosy-cheeked impudence" (38) or to his "cheerful philosophy" (114). So much so that after the three separate – Shem is wounded and sent back home and Martlow is killed in battle – Bourne feels he has lost a part of himself: "They had been three people without a single thing in common; and yet there was a bond stronger than that necessity which had bound them together" (Manning 232).

The sensibility and sympathy emerging from the texts seem to contradict the normative image of the extremely independent and self-contained man reputed to avoid emotional intimacy. The war poets had been educated to always remain in control; the disclosure of emotions was regarded as "inappropriate and highly suspect – they were unmanly" (R.R. Bell 75). The modern experience of combat, however, replicated for many what may be regarded as a non-normative experience, as a move beyond the male-female binary. As Showalter suggests, "it is not to be wondered at that the conditions of war should have inspired identification with the female role in men who had to endure them" (Showalter 173). Yet, the use of female norms to categorise male experience has been strongly criticised from the perspective of men's studies, "a critique analogous to the women's studies critique of the generic use of male norms" (Brod,

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Introduction 6), arguing that "men communicate intimacy in different ways than women" (Sherrod 220).[238]

Speaking of the absence of clear boundaries in the territorial, representational and relational dimensions of war, Leed captures the non-normative essence of the experience, which he sees as "a transgression of categories" (21). Among the traditionally masculine categories that were subverted and reshaped, he refers to the passive role of soldiers, opposing "the aggressive, offensive image that had traditionally defined the soldierly role" (101), the entrapment within enclosed space due to the "immobility enforced by technological domination of defensive power" (101), the idea of war as "an experience of marginality" (15) and the rejection of hierarchy.

The expression of feelings of ambiguity, conflict, impulsiveness, sadness and fear led to situations of vulnerability, exposure, and dependence which continued to haunt men long after the war ended. Phrases like "to his surprise he felt a lump in his throat and tears coming to his eyes" (Aldington 347); or "curiosity had forced him up. And no doubt FEAR. The large battle fear" (Madox Ford 556); or "the effort and rage in him […] made him pant and sob" (Manning 215); or "well enough I know that I shall never be the real soldier" (Plowman 7) are recurrent in the texts. Whether or not is there a conscious or unconscious abandonment of the hegemonic masculine ideal, these moments indicate a clear change towards emotional disclosure.

Male friendship and the free expression of feelings tend to question gender norms. The description of men engaging closely in each other's lives conveys an effort to explore different discourses for displaying emotions among men, encouraging "certain crossing of generic borders" and challenging the strict "borders" of sexualities that tend to structure much of men's relationships (Johnson 3).

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[238] Pollack has argued that "to fully appreciate male friendships, we must put aside traditionally female standards of intimacy and attachment" and that "perhaps beyond what we have realized close friendships are of paramount importance to boys" (181). Similarly, Brod agrees that the same criteria should not always be used to evaluate men's and women's friendships, observing that "men are not quantitatively less intimate but qualitatively differently intimate, in non verbal ways" (Brod, Introduction 6).

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Greater Love: Homophobia, Homoeroticism and Desire

IV.1.5. Greater Love

IV.1.5.1. Homophobia, Homoeroticism and Desire

Together with the "'domestication' of male friendship" (Wellman qtd in Walker 223), with soldiers relying on other soldiers for emotional support and intimacy, there emerged certain homoerotic feelings and experiences at the front. This section will study the bonds established among the war poets who were known to be homosexuals. Since homophobia was still a reality in the trenches and was often blamed for creating difficulties to open homosexual relationships, homoeroticism was to be channelled and represented through different disguises. I will particularly focus on the romantic friendships, the sentimentalised hero-worship and infatuation with young soldiers, the homoerotic pastoral and the emotionally charged love elegies to dead comrades.[239]

Even if the fear of homosexuality is regarded as one of the main factors responsible for keeping men emotionally apart from one another (Lehne 246; Fasteau 204; Goldberg 49; Pollack 184), soldiering embodied such highly masculine images that men were sometimes allowed to get away with behaviour – for instance being in close, intimate companionship with other men – that would have been 'suspect' under any other conditions. Homosexuality, however, remained constantly present as a potential threat because of the insoluble dilemma it entailed: "The war hero, and wartime bonding, informed by 'manly' sentiments and noble ends, were honourably exempt from such charges and yet […] not without a trace of anxiety" (*Touch and Intimacy...* 110). Regardless of his fascination with the performance of military masculinity, Aldington expresses

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[239] The Victorian definition of male-male relationships excludes homosexuality and consequently becomes restricted to a heterosexual and homophobic norm. According to Sedgwick, one of the central issues in homosocial relationships becomes paradoxical as men's relationships must simultaneously deny and fulfil what Sedgwick regards as the "oxymoron" of "male homosocial desire," that is to say, a "continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 1) or "from homosexuality to homophobia and back again" (Fuchs 195). What is more, Sedgwick maintains that in the armed forces, "where men's manipulability and their potential for violence are at the highest possible premium, the *pres*cription of the most intimate male bonding and the *pros*cription of (the remarkably cognate) 'homosexuality' are both stronger than in civilian society – are, in fact, close to absolute" (*Epistemology* 186).

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some of these homophobic anxieties when he explains how friendships at the front might be interpreted:

> Let me at once disabuse the eager-eyed Sodomites among my readers by stating emphatically once and for all that there was nothing sodomitical in these friendships. I have lived and slept for months, indeed years, with 'the troops,' and had several such companionships. But no vaguest proposal was ever made to me; I never saw any signs of sodomy, and never heard anything to make me suppose it existed. (Aldington, *Death of a Hero* 30-31) [240]

The intransigence of his denial is not only a reassertion of normative masculinity, but the expression of profound contradictions. As Tate observes, "masculinity takes many forms in the novel, even as Aldington tries to formulate a single model of real manhood" (Tate, *Modernism, History…* 83).[241] Writing in 1965, but

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[240]   The idea of homosexuality is also resisted by Winterbourne, Aldington's central character. After reading a book "on the woes of the Uranians," Winterbourne's wife Elizabeth, wants to start "a crusade" against the persecution of homosexuals. Winterbourne refuses to support her, arguing that "ordinary" relations need to be put "on a decent basis first" (*Death of a Hero* 197). Moreover, he says he is afraid that publicly supporting the rights of homosexuals would make him "suspect." "It's a damned dangerous thing to do in England; in most cases the suspicion is far too likely to be true!" (198). Winterbourne is prepared to tolerate homosexual men only if they "keep jolly quiet about it, and [do] not try to make themselves martyrs, and flaunt themselves publicly" (198). Interestingly, he contradicts himself by saying: "I respect their freedom, of course, but I don't like them. As a matter of fact, I don't know any, at least so far as I am aware. No doubt some of our friends are homosexual; but as I'm not personally interested in it, I never notice it" (198). Homosexuality as an unresolved issue in Aldington's novel, something the writer is still uncertain about, particularly if contrasted with his admiration of the bodies of the "real men" (254).

[241]   Aldington's contradictions represent "a late phase in 'the war of discourses' about male homosexuality" (Collecott 56) and a subtle indication that alternative masculinities might have also stood for "pacifism, anti-nationalism and/or aestheticism" (63). Still recovering from the Oscar Wilde trials, the Victorian perception of homosexuality was not only associated with non-hegemonic masculinities –the dandy and the coward. It was believed that pacifists, like homosexuals, had a 'natural bent' that would not be corrected or erased by imprisonment. At the end of the war, the court case against A.T Fitzroy, the author and publisher of the novel *Despised and Rejected* (1918), who was in fact a woman, Rose Allatini, brought together, in Hynes' words, "these two home-front wars – the war against pacifists and the war against homosexuals" (*A War Imagined* 232). The novel, accused of making "statements 'likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, and discipline of persons in His Majesty's forces'" (232) is "the story of a young man, Dennis Blackwood, who as he grows to manhood learns that he is a) an artist, b) a homosexual, and c) a pacifist, and sees these three conditions as somehow related: he will not destroy because

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still with some shyness and reserve over the issue, Carrington persists in upholding heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of relationship in his regiment: "In such circumstances we might have expected one of those emotional upsurges of homosexual conduct that occur in boarding schools and, I'm told, in ships (see fig. 22). I remember no such thing" (*Soldier from the Wars Returning* 167).

Fig. 22. Snapshot, 2 ½" X 4 ¼". Two sailors, 1915. Ibson, John. *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.[242]

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he is an artist, and he will not kill other young men because he is homosexual. He is put into prison with other conscientious objectors, and mistreated there, as COs indeed were" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 233).

[242]   Ibson argues that "the closeness experienced in the army may have been exceeded by that found in the navy, where long and isolated absences from civilian society were commonplace" (84). Quoting the memoir of a young marine, Van Buskirk, Ibson shows that "highly romantic and usually sexual attachments were definitely the rule in the navy, not the exception" (87).

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However, while he believes that "hardships shared by men with a common purpose sublimate the sex-instinct" and that "*esprit de corps* provides a temporary substitute for a sexual urge which may reappear later," he wonders "whether there is a homosexual element in *esprit de corps*? Was there a tendency to reject the notion of women's society, to derive an emotional satisfaction from a world of men only?" (*Soldier from the Wars Returning* 167).

Too many contradictions and ambiguities have been exposed to maintain that homosexual desires were non-existent at the warfront, particularly when there is a wealth of literary evidence that the experience of combat awoke many soldiers to homoerotic inclinations, often only for the duration of war, sometimes for life. Some of the war's most distinctive authors – Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Gurney and Manning – had, in Das' words, "homoerotic encounters, inclinations or relationships" while being in the trenches (*Touch and Intimacy...* 117).[243] Although nowadays homosexuality is mentioned in more or less detail and from different points of view by most of the scholarship on these war poets, their writings were originally edited to conceal this:

> Wilfred Owen's brother Harold destroyed some letters and censored others, while some of Owen's more obviously homoerotic poems were not printed until 1983; Sassoon contributed to the burning of Owen's letters, and his own homosexuality was carefully excluded from his extensive published memoirs; Graves' autobiography *Goodbye to All That* (1929) is similarly disingenuous. (Hammond 204).

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[243]   Although there is no evidence of this in the texts examined here, there are speculations that both Sorley and Thomas may have had homoerotic inclinations at some point of their lives. After reading *Marlborough and Other Poem*s, Graves wrote to his friend Edward Marsh on 24 Feb 1916: "It seems ridiculous to fall in love with a dead man as I have found myself doing but [Sorley] seems to have been one so entirely after my own heart in his loves and hates, besides having been just my own age and having spent just the same years at Marlboro' as I spent at Ch'house" (Graves, *In Broken Images* 40). In May 1916, he reiterates his admiration for Sorley in a letter to Sassoon: "What did your Marlburian say about Sorley, and was he 'so'? As his book contains no conventional love-lyrics and as he'd reached the age of 20, I conclude he was" (Graves, *In Broken Images* 48). Evidently Sassoon was also interested in both Sorley's poetry and sexual orientation.

As to Edward Thomas' sexuality, Helen Thomas seemed to be the centre of his life, although "when away from [her] he occasionally had homosexual crushes, which he confessed to her in his letters" (Newlyn, Introduction XXVII).

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It may be argued that such reserve was justifiable at the time, but it is not worth perpetuating the silence, particularly because their homosexuality has affected our reading of the texts. As Das argues, "in so far as World War I has become a literary-historical phenomenon, it is perhaps possible to 'queer' it" (*Touch and Intimacy...* 117). In fact the homosexual-homoerotic bonds established at the front, in their different shades and degrees, may have strengthened and accelerated the possibility for men to destabilise the rigid homosocial environment and open up to broader gender relations.

Like Fussell, I use the term "homoerotic" rather than "homosexual" to refer to the experiences described in the texts so as to "imply a subliminated (i.e. 'chaste') form of temporary homosexuality (*The Great War…* 272).[244] Apart from homophobic denial, evidence discloses sufficient motive for sexual clandestinity: first, the crowded and static trench life and the hardships of military discipline were not propitious for overt sexual activity; secondly, the ideal of traditional manliness was still too firmly maintained as to leave room for anything that threatened or tainted it; and finally, as Taylor observes, "the suggestion of such a motivation was highly offensive to many men of Aldington's generation" (Martin Taylor 29).

Homoeroticism, then, emerged as "a gray area" (Das, "Kiss me Hardy" 53) in which the boundaries between friendship, comradeship and eroticism were blurred, but also as "a battleground" (James Campbell, "For You May Touch Them Not" 827), as a disrupting tool against the tradition of reading men's interactions just from the institutionalised point of view. Describing the assorted crew that marched forward into German machine-gun fire at the Battle of the Somme, Jones attempts to rationalise the ambiguity of feelings, with a portrayal of two different relationships: the "two lovers from Ebury Bridge, Bates and

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[244] The word "homosexual," on the other hand, refers to "same-sex erotic behaviour" (Hardman V) and was coined in 1869 by Kertbeny. The word may have originated as a substitute for the word "Uranian" coined by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and it was used in the Prussian anti-sodomy law to refer to "unnatural indecencies." Other pejorative words used to refer to homosexuals at the time were 'sodomite' or 'pederast.' In Germany, the word 'Knabenschaender' (boy lover) was in vogue. Later on, Charles Darwin introduced the concept of the "natural order;" the perversion of that nature produced a "pervert."

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Coldpepper that men called the Lily-white boys" and "Dynamite Dawes the old 'un and Diamond Phelps his batty" (*In Parenthesis* 161).[245] There is not much difference in the intensity of both relationships, even though the connection between the former couple is a sexual one. Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld writes of the conflicting zone of the homoerotic in *The Sexual History of the First World War* (1941):

> The comradeship which developed between the soldiers who shared all the trials and dangers of war, this splendid fruit of the war so much praised by Remarque, must have been especially pleasing to the homosexuals for obvious reasons…. Very frequently, even among normal people, it penetrated beyond the outer limits of the homoerotic and was thus, to speak the language of psychoanalysis, characterised by libidinous components. (Hirschfeld qtd in Das, "Kiss me Hardy" 54)[246]

Based on the homosociality within Victorian masculine hegemony, Hirschfield defines homoeroticism, that is to say, an interest in each other that exceeds friendship, as "normal" behaviour. Most of the homoerotic relationships in the narratives examined here are also presented as "normal," or rather as heterosexually identified.[247] Even if there often seemed to be sexual desire

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[245] Jones also hints at the homoeroticism implicit in heroic friendship when he talks of "the intimate, continuing life of small contingents of men, within whose structure Roland could find, and, for a reasonable while, enjoy, his Oliver" (IX). This echoes the story of Oliver and Roland in the *Song of Roland* (See footnote 198).

[246] Hirschfeld's *The Sexual History of the First World War* focuses on the sexual behaviour of soldiers and sailors, both officers and those in the ranks. It covers such material as "sex lives of warring nations;" "at the battle fronts;" "behind the lines;" "in military hospitals;" and "in enemy prisons." The approach of the book follows the pattern of the late 19th century, and without naming names, declares that the work was complied "in collaboration with world-famous physicians, scientists and historians." In keeping with the times, there was a warning on the opening page to tell the public that it was "intended for circulation among mature educated persons only" (Hirschfeld qtd in Hardman 205).

[247] However, and despite severe penalties and social condemnation, homosexuality occurred in the trenches: "In the course of the war and the year following (the period covered by official statistics), twenty-two officers and 270 other ranks were court-martialled for indecency" (Hynes, A War Imagined 225). 'Sexual deviance,' the term "homosexuality" was not used at the time, was regarded as unsoldierly, as a crime against the army. The Manual of Military Law, under "Acts of Indecency," provides severe punishments for homosexuality: "It is a misdemeanour punishable with two years' imprisonment for any male person, *either in public or in private*, to commit or be a

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involved, male-male relationships were almost always idealised and spiritual, taking silent pleasure in male physical attributes that evoked youth and purity, but never appearing as overtly sexual.[248] Like the experience of war itself, homoeroticism seemed to have an indefinable quality. The type of homoerotic relationship taking place at the front resembled the ambiguity of the romantic friendships or infatuations of the public school: intense emotional relationships between equals, protective relationships between older and younger soldiers and between officers and the men under their command. Referring to Graves and Sassoon's homoerotic feelings, Fussell writes: "The object was mutual affection, protection, and admiration. In war as at school, such passions were antidotes against loneliness and terror" (*The Great War…* 272).

Knowing that his feelings would be placed outside the law, Sassoon was forced to channel his sexuality, as Patrick Campbell observes, "in platonic friendships, in sentimentalized hero-worship, by writing pastoral elegies to dead comrades or

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party of the commission of any act of gross indecency with another male person, or to procure or to attempt to procure the commission by any male person of any such act; and it is also a misdemeanour to do any grossly indecent act in a public place in the presence of more persons than one, or to publicly expose the person, or exhibit any disgusting object" (Hynes, *A War Imagined* 224-5).

[248]   This is curious, considering that homosexuality had already been dealt with from a psychological perspective by Ellis, Symonds and Freud, and that the Uranians had introduced homoerotic desire into literature. As to the psychological approach to homosexuality, Ellis and Symonds published *Sexual Inversion* in 1896, the first medical textbook on homosexuality. It was the first objective study, as they did not characterise it as a disease. In their view, homosexuality was inborn and therefore not immoral. Freud's views on homosexuality were different from those of Ellis and Symonds, although he agreed that a homosexual orientation should not be viewed as a pathology. Freud's articles were written between 1905, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, and 1922, "Certain Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality." He believed that all human beings were innately bisexual, and that they became heterosexual or homosexual as a result of their experiences. Later psychoanalysts did not follow this view and went back to treating homosexuality as a disease. It was not until the aftermath of war that homosexuality was eventually declassified as a psychological disorder. The image of the returned soldier was reshaped, acknowledging that war had produced a new individual, with particular allegiances and attachments, and that such a figure had to be re-absorbed into society. It was psychologist Evelyn Hooker who carried out the first studies that revealed the misconceptions regarding homosexuality on the part of the psychological community.

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[…] by adopting a puritanical, even misogynistic stance" ("Thoughts…" 226).[249] While these emotional responses never overshadowed the true force of his homosexuality, they were a source of anxiety, as much as his oscillation between "happy warrior and bitter pacifist" (Graves, *Goodbye…* 286). Except for his *Diaries*, there are no published references to Sassoon's homosexuality. Such emotions, then, should be traced in Sherston's romantic friendships, particularly in his dependency on a succession of male bonds.[250]

Despite the palpable homoerotic connotations, all the friendships in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* are platonic. The men described as dear memories of childhood and adolescence seem to be sexually unattainable and this appears to elevate them even higher in their masculine status. Sassoon's masculine ideal may have coincided with Carpenter's notion of the "intermediate man" – also "Uranian" or "Urning," after the heavenly spiritual nature of such love: "a man who, while possessing thoroughly masculine powers of mind and body, combines with them the tenderer and more emotional soul-nature of the woman" (Carpenter 90). As may have been expected of one so endowed, Carpenter's "intermediate man" contained within himself "the artist-nature, with the artist's sensibility and perception" (90).[251] Sassoon might have felt that the actual consummation of

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[249]   Until Sassoon came to terms with his homosexuality, which he did through reading -- Edward Carpenter's "The Intermediate Sex" was influential on his thinking – and letter-diary writing, life was for him "an empty thing" (Roberts 44).

[250]   In his Introduction to *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918,* Hart-Davis stresses the autobiographical nature of Sassoon's memoirs, remarking that "his first three prose works […] were autobiography disguised as fiction, by changing the names of everyone he met […] and by making no reference to his being a poet" (Introduction 9) Despite Fussell's reluctance to treat Sassoon's work as autobiographical (see page 152 of this thesis), a close comparison of the memoirs with the diaries shows that "they are faithful records of his experiences, based on his contemporary descriptions, occasionally heightened but never distorted" (Hart-Davis, Introduction 9). Interestingly, Taylor's *Lads* suggests a comparison between certain passages from *Sherston's Progress* and the *Diaries* to see exactly what was omitted in the process (16-17).

[251]   Sedgwick reinforces Carpenter's view in her approach to what she regards as two different and contradictory ways in which homosexuality can mean and argues that: "Enduringly since at least the turn of the century, there have presided two contradictory tropes of gender through which same-sex desire could be understood" (*Epistemology* 86). One trope, that of "inversion," identifies the homosexual of either gender as a borderline subject who has all the characteristics associated with the opposite. The other trope, that of "gender separatism" (86) assigns to the homosexual the role of archetype of his or her own particular gender. The homosexual male is

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sexual desire tainted his masculine ideal. Therefore, his attachments, like those of Carpenter's intermediate men, were often more spiritual than sensual, representative of "the love sentiment in one of its most perfect forms" (91).

The first significant man in Sherston's life was Dixon, the "perfect gentleman's servant" who taught him to ride, kept him company in his solitary childhood and inspired "unqualified" admiration (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 13).[252] Then came Denis Milden, a fanatical foxhunter, the epitome of the young sporting gentleman, "the first time that [Sassoon] experienced a feeling of wistfulness for someone [he] wanted to be with (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 39). Stephen Colwood, an old school fellow passionate about horses, hunting and racing, also became one of Sassoon's closest friends. With him, Sassoon "matured a specialized jargon drawn almost exclusively from the characters in the novels of Surtees" which would fill them with notions about the kind of noble gentlemen they were eager to imitate (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 127-8).

Later in the army, these platonic friendships were replaced by others less spiritual: Dick Tiltwood, David Cromlech, Wilfred Owen and Dr Rivers. Sherston feels a strong affection for Dick Tiltwood, in whom he sees the embodiment of heroic manhood: "he had arrived at manhood in the nick of time to serve his country in what he naturally assumed to be a just and glorious war" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 250). "Dick" or "Dickie," with their clearly erotic associations, is represented as the knight in shining armour: "I glanced at Dick and thought what a young Galahad he looked" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 268). Apart from hero-worship, Sassoon becomes more sexually responsive to Dick than to his previous friends. The physical description of Tiltwood – Dick's beauty is made

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thus the most masculine of men, without the desire to cross the boundaries of gender that the competing trope assumes. The homosexual war poets examined here – Sassoon, Owen, Graves, Manning and Gurney – seem to be caught within these contradictory tropes.

[252]   Young Sassoon was so much in need of a friend, or an elder brother, that he created "an ideal companion" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 14) who "made my childhood unexpectedly clear, and brought me close to a number of things which, I should have thought, would have faded for ever" (15). Even if he was not the orphaned child brought up by an unmarried aunt that he describes in the memoir, he probably wanted "to get round the disagreeable fact that [his] own father left home before he was five." His solitary childhood and his need of a friend may be "partly a reflection of his feelings of isolation from his two brothers after the age of ten and partly because he needed to keep his mother 'separate' from his emotions" (Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon* 191).

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out to resemble an angel – is surrounded by hints of homoerotic subtext: "his face surprised me by its candour and freshness. He had the obvious good looks which go with fair hair and firm features, but it was the radiant integrity of his expression which astonished me" (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 250). Moreover, his "fresh, happy and brave" companionship sustained Sassoon through the dreariness of army life (Sassoon, *Diaries* 45). Together the pair rode through the French woods when they could, like the fox-hunters of peacetime England (Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* 276). When Tiltwood died, this happy and innocent way of life seemed to come to an end.

The deep affection he developed for David Cromlech though, reconciled him with his pre-war idyllic existence. In *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Sassoon describes the relationship as if falling under the banner of fraternal – or non-sexual – concern. This "indefinite pang of affection" (74) would be largely seen as ambiguous and non-exclusive. Yet their attachment was not ideal but entirely real; it allowed them to go through the war together and dream about their continued intimacy after it: "We talked of the wonderful things we'd do after the war; for me David had often seemed to belong less to my war experience than to the freedom which would come after it" (75).[253] Cromlech occupied in Sassoon's real life the place of his missing halves, that of the absent father and the much needed friend. Not only did he fulfil Sassoon's childhood dream of the "ideal companion" but became the father who saved him from being court-martialled. [254]

Sassoon also reported to have a great admiration for the Freudian psychologist Rivers, his doctor at Craiglockhart. The two men became close friends: "their relationship [was] coloured by Rivers' repressed homosexuality and Sassoon's increasingly confident avowal of his own" (Shephard, 89). Despite his reluctance

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[253]   In the first draft of Graves' "Letter to S.S. from Mametz Woods," which he sent to Sassoon in June 1916, he suggested that "the great, greasy Caucasus" should be visited by them after the war. In the published version in *Fairies and Fusiliers* this became "the great hills of Caucasus" (Sassoon *Diaries* 98).

[254]   For more on Sassoon's conscientious objection and Graves' intervention, see pages 97 and 98, Chapter II.2 of this thesis. Apart from a common sexuality, there were also common interests, background and values. See pages 213 and 214 of this thesis, Chapter IV.1.5 for more on the Sassoon-Graves friendship.

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to be treated by Rivers at the beginning, his later memories of the doctor tend towards hero-worship at times. Sassoon was grateful for the impact Rivers had made in his life as he helped reconcile his crisis concerning the war and, in a larger sense, increase his self-knowledge as a war poet and homosexual: "with his gentle assurance of helpfulness," Rivers became Sassoon's "father-confessor" (*Sherston's Progress* 35). Although the doctor persuaded Sassoon to return to war despite his famous anti-war denunciation, it was also Rivers who helped him out of it: "I knew then that I had been very lonely while I was at the War; I knew that I had a lot to learn, and that he was the only man who could help me" (*Sherston's Progress* 149). [255]

Like Sassoon's, Owen's homosexuality was also sublimated into ardent, yet platonic, relationships. While working as a lay assistant in Rev. Wigan's Evangelical parish near Reading, he took what the vicar regarded as too close an interest in some of his young students. In a letter Owen writes to his mother, he refers to one of his favourite boys, Vivian Rampton, a thirteen-year-old with whom he secretly met: "He read to me, and I told him tales. I took some figs of Mary's for him" (Owen, *Selected Letters* 43). Yet, unlike Sassoon, there is no evidence as yet to show that Owen ever actually had any sexual encounters. Probably because of his strict Evangelical education and "his indoctrination in the cult of 'cleanliness,'" it was "sexual repression rather than consummation" what gave Owen's poetry "its erotic pulse" (Das, *Touch and Intimacy…* 140). Even if, platonically, Owen seemed to have been rebelling against his religious upbringing; as Caesar observes, "he was sexually very confused" and "art was ranged with sensuality against religion in his mind" (123). Moreover, his encounters with boys preserve an air of secrecy and guilt, exhibiting all the characteristics of clandestine relationships:

> I got (or rather allowed) a favourite boy (Vivian) to help me with the slides; and
> on Thurs. managed to smuggle the same urchin to tea with me [...]. Such a tête-
> à-tête tea, by the open window of the Den, with the odour of the Currant-Shrubs

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[255]   But it was not only Sassoon who was influenced by Rivers. As Shephard argues, "Sassoon himself aroused mental conflicts in his doctor. River's discomfort at being professionally obliged, as a uniformed RAMC psychiatrist, to cure[Sassoon] of his pacifist errors and send him back to a war he was himself ceasing to believe in probably contributed to his decision to leave Craiglockhart and work in London on the physiological problems of flying." (Shephard 90)

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balmily wandering in and commingling with the essences in the solid-silver tea-pot – is a thing to enjoy. (Owen, *Selected Letters* 47)

Even if these insinuations were never brought coherently into action, it is sufficiently clear that they are images of desire breaking into Owen's isolation and carrying uncertain promise: perhaps the fantasy sexual intimacy or perhaps only the certainty of his continued loneliness. The unfulfilled longing for the ideal male friend-lover appears in many of Owen's early poems, "Lines to a Beauty seen in Limehouse," "How do I love Thee?" and "Storm" are interesting examples, and the recognition that such a sexual encounter would set free a world of danger and suffering.[256]

However, as discussed in the previous section, it was not until Owen met Sassoon at Craiglockhart in August 1917, that he would wholly fulfil the ideal of the male friend, satisfying both his homoerotic and spiritual expectations.[257] Sassoon is presented as the poet whom the reader should admire, guided by Owen's own admiration (Owen, *Selected Letters* 270). Sassoon was certainly instrumental in providing Owen with not only a poetic mentor but with someone understanding and perceptive of his concealed sexuality; Sassoon liberated Owen as a homosexual. In the first letter Owen writes to him after he leaves Craiglockhart, he seems to let down this protective armour and openly express his feelings:

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[256] The only element in "Lines to a Beauty seen in Limehouse" (first entitled "A Vision in Whitechapel") which indicates that the person addressed is a man is the word "god," but it is enough to suggest that the lines which imagine this dockland beauty (probably a foreigner, perhaps a sailor) "taking strange pleasures…/ Where love is easy, and no customs bind" involve casual sex between men or a sexual fantasy with a boy. The addressee of the poet's loving glances seems to ignore them and he wonders if "was there a watching in your eye's aversion?" Similarly, "How do I Love Thee" suggests that the poet cannot woo in the traditional ways used by other men – "I cannot woo thee as the lion his mate" – but instead he loves as Shakespeare loved, "most gently wild, and desperately for ever." Such courtship will only bring about suffering without the hope of happiness. "Storm," on the other hand, dwells on the exhilarating danger of the poet opening to another man: "His face was charged with beauty as a cloud/ With glimmering lighting," while the poet shakes like a tree which is about to draw down "the brilliant danger."

[257] Owen and Sassoon's Craiglockhart experiences are documented and dramatised in Stephen MacDonald's 1983 play, *Not about Heroes*, and are fictionalised in *Regeneration* (1991), the first volume of Pat Barker's World War I trilogy. Both texts note the homoerotic character of the relationship.

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> In effect it is this: that I love you, dispassionately, so much, so <u>very</u> much, dear Fellow, that the blasting little smile you wear on reading this can't hurt me in the least. […] And you have <u>fixed</u> my Life – however short. You did not light me: I was always a mad comet; but you have fixed me. (Owen, *Selected Letters* 289)

A shy man not easily given to enthusiasm, Sassoon was initially less impressed by Owen, probably embarrassed by what was visibly hero-worship expressed in terms evocative of a schoolboy crush. But he later regrets having taking that long to value Owen's friendship:

> It is indeed sadly certain that only in those last few weeks I received his fullest confidences and realized that he could give me as much as I gave him. Circumstances made this easier, for by October I had a small room to myself, and our talks were no longer liable to be obstructed by the presence of a fellow patient. Almost every evening he would visit me and there was much comfort in his companionship. (*Siegfried's Journey* 63)

When Owen left Craiglockhart in early 1918, Sassoon gave him a letter of introduction to Robbie Ross, one of Oscar Wilde's most loyal supporters, which allowed Owen to experience a social circle in London where homosexuality was acceptable before returning to the war. While Hibberd argues that "it is undoubtedly true" that the poet was "gay" and suggests that he might have been "up secret stairs" in London and Edinburgh (*Wilfred Owen...* 302), there is no historical evidence to prove so.[258] Among Owen's homoerotic experiences, Hibberd discusses the friendship with Charles Scott Moncrieff which began when

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[258]   Owen's homosexuality had been early acknowledged by Robert Graves and later tackled by Fussell, but it was not until Hibberd's *Owen the Poet* (1986) that the poet's attraction to his own sex was convincingly asserted. Hibberd's assumption that Owen may have had encounters with rent boys in London and Edinburgh is based on some poems, including "Who is the God of Canongate?," which involve secrecy and ghosts. Hibberd however expresses some doubts about it, arguing that "perhaps he had just heard stories at Half Moon Street and from Bainbrigge" (*Wilfred Owen...* 302). Since Hibberd and until Caesar's *Taking it Like a Man*, criticism stressed Owen's repressed homosexuality as the main engine of his literary success. Caesar, on the other hand, demythifies this saintly image of Owen to equate his homosexuality with sadomasochism, with some sort of "morbid psycho-sexual predilection" emerging in close proximity to death (Caesar, "The Human Problem" 73). The connection between homoerotic desire and death will be discussed later in this section.

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the two met at Graves' wedding in 1918 and which led Moncrieff to write a series of love sonnets to the poet. Biographers differ over whether or not this relationship was sexual; some coded sonnets by Scott Moncrieff, addressed to a "Mr. W. O.," imply that his love for Owen was not returned.[259]

As to Graves' pre-war homosexual inclinations, they have been discussed in previous sections. However, it is interesting to note that, except for a few sexual allusions, Graves' account of the war experience seems to be devoid of homoeroticism. This would suggest that he survived the homosexual climate of the public school and overcame his fear of the opposite sex. Yet, there are several indications that suggest sexual unease in his memoir, both "a wilful *naïveté* and a parallel fear of sex" (Martin Taylor 32). Graves' reaction to the news that his public-school friend Dick (later identified as G.H. Johnstone) had been arrested for making "'a certain proposal' to a corporal in a Canadian regiment stationed near 'Charterhouse College'" reflects this confusion of sentiments: "This news nearly finished me. I decided that Dick had been driven out of his mind by the war. There was madness in the family, I knew [...]. Well, with so much slaughter about, it would be easy to think of him as dead" (*Goodbye…* 178).

This attitude not only brings to light the extreme puritanism of Graves' upbringing but a flagrant contradiction to the early sexual attraction he had felt towards Dick in Charterhouse.[260] It seems that the war experience had not only brought about a regression to the values embodied by the school and the regiment but also a change in Graves' attitudes towards homosexuality. His repudiation of the sexual contamination of his relationship with Dick, perhaps because Dick's sexuality was suddenly out in the open, left Graves with a

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[259]   After Owen's death, Moncrieff's failure to secure a "cushy posting" for Owen was condemned by his friends, including Osbert Sitwell and Sassoon. As a consequence, Moncrieff was left out from the attempt by Edith Sitwell and Sassoon to publish Owen's poetry, despite being in possession of some original drafts. In 1919, he published a translation of *The Song of Roland,* dedicating it to fallen friends. The poem addressed to Owen expresses a hope that their "two ghosts" will "together lie" in the next life.

[260]   After this, Graves completely abandoned his relationship with Dick, even refusing a legacy of books when he died in 1949. As Caesar writes, "the break with Johnstone is taken by Graves' biographers to indicate the end of Graves' 'pseudo-homosexuality'" (199). See footnote 206 of this thesis for further discussion on the notion of "pseudo-homosexuality."

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homophobic prejudice that made him write the following about his friend Owen: "Owen was a weakling, really; I liked him but there was that passive homosexual streak in him which is even more disgusting than the active one in Auden" (Seymour-Smith 63).[261]

Despite these post-war homophobic attitudes towards his war friends, Graves' homosexuality was an undisguised fact during the war. His play *But it Still Goes On* (1931) clearly illustrates so; although, as Fussell suggests, Graves had 'a special interest' in getting it removed from the list of works prefixed to Graves' *Collected Poems* of 1955 and from J.M. Cohen's critical study of his work. There was also "a sentence [in *Goodbye to All That*] indicating that he did not 'recover' from his school homosexuality until he was twenty-one" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 274), which was also carefully deleted from the text.[262] In the Graves-Sassoon friendship, it is possible to identify the homoerotic sensibilities and values that informed Graves' behaviour during the war. Even if the relationship does in fact receive more conscientious attention in Sassoon's memoirs than in

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[261]   Such struggle is translated into his early poetry; most of the poems published in his first volume of poetry, *Over the Brazier* (1916) reveal the tension between pro-war and anti-war sentiments and between sexual love and the blood-brotherhood to be found in Carpenter's writing, particularly the first four poems in the "La Basée" section of the book: "On Finding Myself a Soldier," "The Shadow of Death," "A Renascence" and "The Morning before Battle." The internal division between the "masculine" and "feminine" sides of the poet – represented by Dick and Sassoon – are fully articulated in this book.

[262]   The play *It still Goes On* is the story of David and Charlotte's post-war love relationship, however, it is eventually revealed that they are homosexuals secretly in love with other people. While David tells Charlotte that he had led a homosexually promiscuous life at public school and then at Cambridge, Charlotte curiously asks him:

> Well, then the War. Surely in the War --?
>
> David: That's another part of life that isn't generally known. Do you know how a platoon of men will absolutely worship a good-looking gallant young officer? If he's a bit shy of them and decent to them they get a crush on him. He's a being part: an officer's uniform is more attractive compared with the rough shapeless private's uniform. He becomes a sort of military queen-bee.
>
> Charlotte: And his drilling them encourages the feeling?
>
> David: (nods) Of course, they don't realize exactly what's happening, neither does he; but it's a very strong romantic link. (*But It Still Goes On* 244).

It is said that the character of David Cassilis was inspired by real life Siegfried Sassoon, "a vain, homosexual, pipe-smoking former war hero who is 'always under restraint' and in love with the Graves-like figure Dick Tompion" (Ward 40).

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Graves', it reveals that a more intimate bond, more likely to come up in a homosexual relationship, was established between the two.

Trying to assert his heterosexual manliness after the war, Graves sought the company of women, but not without difficulty: "My heart had remained whole, if numbed, since Dick's disappearance from it, yet I felt difficulty in adjusting myself to the experience of women love" (*Goodbye...*257). However, his marriage to the "boyish" Nancy Nicholson seemed to have made it easier for him to make the adjustment to heterosexuality.[263] Yet, the process caused considerable awkwardness among his friends and Graves felt he had to explain himself to them. Sassoon's diary entry for Christmas Day 1917 indicates the strength and intensity of his friendship with Graves as he makes suspect Graves' motives in marriage to Nancy Nicholson: "Last Friday went to Rhyl to see Robert Graves, and received his apologies for his engagement to Miss Nicholson" (*Diaries* 198). It may be argued, however, that the relationship between the two had already been soured by their different attitudes to war and by a conflict in their artistic pursuits. Yet, as Caesar observes, "at the heart of their problems was an inability to confront or discuss openly the place that sexuality had in their relationship and in relation to all the other issues" (207).

In the case of the emotionally disturbed Ivor Gurney, male intimacy at the front helped him find some stability and come away with his fragile mental and physical health restored.[264] Referring to the love and admiration Gurney professed for some of his fellow comrades, Thornton downplays his homosexuality: "Whether one calls it homoerotic or covertly homosexual is less

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[263]   Nancy was different from other girls. She wore her hair short, preferred trousers to skirts and was described by Graves as "an unusual person, young, kind, strong, nice-looking and a consummate painter as well as a capable farmer's boy" (*In Broken Images* 88). Certainly he admired her work in the Women's Land Army and the fact that she was aggressively feminist in her attitudes.

[264]   As Thornton writes, "it can no longer be argued that Gurney's madness was caused by the War; it is plain from the letters that he himself recognised the possibility of the War experience clearing both body and mind, which for a time it seemed to be doing" (Introduction 12). His illness predates the war and his experiences there (See Hipp, 7). Notably his injuries from gas might have worsened his condition to the point of attempting suicide in 1918. It has also been argued that this may relate to a failed relationship with the nurse Annie Drummond in 1918 (See footnote 218 and page 236 of this thesis).

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important than to recognise it as a strong innocent admiration, love and respect for the calm, strength, wholeness and nobility of his comrades" (Thornton, Introduction 13). Gurney's friend, Arthur Benjamin, himself a homosexual, believed that Gurney was also homosexual, whereas Gurney never recognised it. In that sense, his attitude towards sexuality may be compared to that of Owen, Sassoon or Graves: "Young men like Ivor Gurney and so many others were reared to believe that homosexual love was wrong, a sin that could only bring shame upon a man and his family" (Blevins 75). He had no choice, then, but to seek some expression for his feelings through letters and verse. Remembering his childhood friend, the poet Frederic William Harvey, who was captured by the Germans and remained a prisoner of war until the Armistice, he writes to Mary Scott:

> Though this Spring is cold and unclement, I cannot keep out of mind what April has meant for me in past years – Minsterworth, Framilode, and his companionship. And my sick mind holds desperately on to such memories for Beauty's sake; and the hope of Joy. (154)

These memories take Gurney back to his adolescence, when Will and he explored the countryside together, enjoying the Gloucestershire landscape and the River Severn, discussing poetry, books and music. Will was an imaginative mind and spirit equal to his own and he earned Gurney's lasting love. Knowing the his friend was isolated in prison and in need of affection and emotional support, Gurney does not hesitate to express his feelings in a letter written from the front: "if friendship is anything at all, you should be happy, for there cannot be one friend of all your many forgets or has forgotten you, who have the power of holding from a distance as only Great Lovers can – of increasing it, indeed" (244).

Gurney's letters show, however, that he longed to go beyond the expression of chaste and pure love. He could not refrain from feeling physically attracted to other men, although he might have believed it wrong to engage in sexual activity any more intimate than draping his arm around his friend's shoulder as they walked under the stars:

> Last night – O lucky me! – a Scottish Rifle sat up beside the stove with me, which glowed and made believe it was a fire. And he had travelled and could talk, and

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we had the same politics and the same tastes. His eyes were steady, his laugh open and easily provoked, and a smile that could not be long checked being chiefly an affair of the eyes. O well, it must have been 12.30 when we illicitly walked under the stars, watching Orion and hearing his huge sustained chord. (225-26)

The stars, the fire and the physical attraction contribute to the thrill of this clandestine meeting. Gurney's later involvement with nurse Annie Drummond, however, appears to detract from these early homoerotic feelings. It is possible that he viewed the relationship with Annie as an attempt to have a normal relationship with a woman and to prove to himself that he was not homosexual: "I forgot my body walking with her; a thing that has not happened since … when? I really don't know" (Gurney 241).[265] Gurney dreamed of settling down and making "a solid rock foundation for me to build on — a home and a tower of light" (Gurney 242). However, when the relationship failed, he was devastated. The situation drove him to desperation and to a severe episode of depression which found expression in the suicide note he wrote on 19 June 1918: "This is a good-bye letter, and written because I am afraid of slipping down and becoming a mere wreck – and I know you would rather know me dead than mad, and my only regret is my Father will lose my allotment" (Gurney 252).

Like Gurney, Manning was keen to enlist when the war broke out, possibly to escape from an oppressive environment, as he seems to have sought escape from his loneliness in alcoholism before the war. Some of the characteristics Manning shared with Bourne, his autobiographical protagonist, were a sense of privacy, and an enigmatic and detached personality. Unlike Bourne, Manning never married and, as biographers speculate, he may have been a homosexual. In the novel, however, Bourne appears to be married (Manning 126) and his attraction for a French girl he meets at a bar not only attests to his heterosexuality but reminds him of the love and humanity he has left behind when he enlisted (Manning 50). Manning explores the curious intercourse between war and desire and, in Smith's words, "the matter of sexual

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[265]   Ivor Gurney met the VAD nurse Annie Nelson Drummond in September 1917 at the Edinburgh War Hospital, where he was sent after having being gassed at Passchendaele. Their romance ended unexpectedly in March 1918. Gurney tried to contact Annie after the war when he was a patient at the City of London Mental Hospital, but she never responded.

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deprivation," which "is treated with such delicacy that it resembles a day dream" (181). What seems to become clear, however, is that war offers a completely different space for the exercise of love in all its forms. As Gray argues, "insofar as Eros is physical passion and sensual impulse, war has been from of old its true mate and bedfellow, as the ancient myth makes clear" (95). Moreover, the homoerotic side of Manning is reflected obliquely both in the field of allusion created by the Shakespearean quotation that gives the novel its title and in the private and secret character of the bond that emerges between Bourne and his chums.[266]

Yet Manning's idea of "privacy" may also be connected to other words like "personal," "intimate" and "secret," which are crucial in the novel although Manning never takes over any of them totally. Instead, he seems to be concerned with the borders between these various terrains, and the way they shift throughout the story. Secrecy is being forced to occur when insufficient privacy is afforded individuals. War may at once map out private and public spheres but at the same time produce institutions that violate them. Secrecy can be a mode of ensuring privacy (Manning 157, 247). In this context, homoeroticism surfaces in the encounter with the private person in the public place and particularly in the encounter with the private person capable of loving.[267] As Smith observes, "among Bourne and his chums something new is developing" (178): "the spiritual thing" (Manning 141), "the impalpable tie" (161) that makes itself visible in private moments, those honest times in which

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[266]   The original title of the novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* later changed to *Her Privates We,* revolves around "privacy" and alludes to an exchange between Guidenstern, Rosencrantz and Prince Hamlet in Act II, Scene II of Shakespeare's tragedy. Manning uses a quote from this scene as the first epigraph in his novel: "On Fortune's cap we are not the very button… Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours? … Faith, her privates we." The exchange draws attention to the role of luck and blind chance for men at war. The word "privates" refers either to Fortune's intimate friends or more blatantly, to her private parts, her sex. But ultimately "privates" makes reference to the private soldiers whose stories are being told. As Boyd suggests, "those at the bottom end of the army's food chain," although "the authorial brain informing it is rigorously intelligent and clear eyed" (Introduction, XI).

[267]   Sassoon also plays with the eroticism emerging from the privacy afforded to the man distinguished from the institution: "Strange to see, among those hundreds of faces I scanned, suddenly a vivid red-haired youth with green eyes looking far away, sidelong – one clean face, among all others brutalized." (Sassoon, *Diaries* 22)

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Bourne, Shem and Martlow face one another and express intense feelings. Love is often discussed in loosely veiled, homoerotic language, as when Martlow, afraid of being separated from Bourne tells him: "We're all right as we are, the three on us, aren't we?" (133). Less commonly, however, this love is explicitly physical: "[Bourne] was a reticent and undemonstrative man, but after a few more steps through the silent shadows he put his arm round Martlow's neck, his hand resting on his shoulder" (133). Such intimate bonds seem to be formed in what Manning suggests as a shared marginal identity in opposition to institutionalised forms of socialisation. As Nardi writes, "it is about identity: who one is rather than one's roles and statuses" within the group (251).

IV.1.5.2. All Men's Land: The Homoerotic Pastoral/Elegy

One of the principal impulses behind the homosexual writers under study was the celebration of male youth and beauty in opposition to the destruction and madness of war. The soldiers in the ranks were particularly appealing to the war poets: "What makes them so is their youth, their athleticism, their relative cleanliness, their uniforms, and their heroic readiness, like Adonis or St Sebastian, for 'sacrifice'" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 278). There are certain physical characteristics in men – for instance fair hair colour and a fair complexion – which are recurrent in the literature of the war poets. As Fussell observes: "To be fair-haired or (better) golden-haired is, in Victorian iconography, to be especially beautiful, brave, pure, and vulnerable" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 275). Tennyson's Galahad was blond. Therefore, most of the adored lads in the literature of the Great War are made to look like him.

Focusing on the physiques and feelings of the men around them, the war poets achieved an almost sensual identification with them and, in Das' words, "an array of emotional intensities and bodily sensations" (*Touch and Intimacy...* 119). The result was a very interesting and personal vision of masculine heroism, in which the pastoral was combined with the homoerotic. For the homosexual officers in search for both a validation of themselves and a possible realisation of their desires, the journey to a natural, and potentially erotic, masculine landscape offered the possibility of finding a place where there might be others like them, a place where homoerotic friendship might play a legitimate part in social life. The infusion of the homoerotic by the pastoral has a long

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history in literature. It is one of the main motifs in Whitman, Carpenter and Hopkins and is probably based on the sixth book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and on Virgil's *Second Eclogue*, both read enthusiastically at the public school (Fussell, The Great War... 278). In the pastoral world, "the archetype of erotic innocence is less commonly marriage than the kind of 'chaste' love that precedes marriage; the love of brother for sister, or of two boys for each other" (Frye 200).

In the context of war, the bathing scene held both the exotic and sensuous appeal that made it central to the war poets' writings, as it was to so many works of the homoerotic pastoral tradition. Although public nudity and its related anxieties have been discussed in previous sections, when dealing with the institutionalisation of intimacy,[268] the homosexual-homoerotic gaze of soldiers bathing added the new intensity and accuracy of all the erotic sensations, both pleasurable and painful, that men experienced being in close physical proximity. In a letter written to Sassoon in September 1918 from Folkestone, Owen describes one of these unusual idyllic moments in the midst of war when he went down to the beach to read Shelley's poetry and met a boy to whom he felt attracted: "a Harrow boy, of superb intellect & refinement: intellect because he hates war more than Germans; refinement because of the way he spoke of my Going, and of the Sun, and of the Sea there; and the way he spoke of Everything. In fact the way he spoke –" (Owen, *Selected Letters* 342). The fact that he has to go back to his men in France turns this half-dreamy state of mystical reverie into an inherently elegiac scene: the loss of this paradise is irreversible, like the loss of his beloved Harrow boy.

Like Owen, Blunden manages to elude the trenches and transports readers to another place and another time, alien to war's reality. This is what Guy-Bray calls "homoerotic space:" the "safe, because carefully demarcated, zone in which homoeroticism can appear" (Guy-Bray 15). Blunden's men bathe at Givenchy and the scene has, in his words, "an Arcadian quality" about it. There was "a heavy concrete lock, barring the canal" which "afforded protection on our side to bathing parties of our men, who were marched down in the afternoon, and chaffed and splashed and plunged, with the Germans probably aware but

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[268]   See Chapter IV.1.2. "The Happy Battalion" (pages 188-89).

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unobjecting a few hundred yards along" (*Undertones of War* 57). Blunden shows nature as a reminder of home and separates it from the urban, industrial, mechanistic and dangerous world on the outside, "the stopped electrical machinery" with the "old notice, 'Danger de Mort'," "the wires which generations of field telephonists had run through the bathing pool" and the potential threat of "sudden shelling" (*Undertones of War* 57). Side by side, these two antagonistic landscapes are particularly suitable for the appreciation of the "the relation of the landscape from which we are presumed to have come to the landscape in which we now find ourselves" (Guy-Bray 16). Despite the erotic connotations which remind readers of the pederastic bathing of Victorian homosexual writing, painting and photography (see fig. 23), the scene is threatened by tragedy reflected in the "stark contrast between beautiful frail flesh and the alien metal that waits to violate it" (Fussell, *The Great War…* 299). The idea of the pastoral-homoerotic landscape being threatened by war or external aggression turns this space into a liminal zone between the living and the dead, a liminal zone filled with nostalgia for a pre-war idyllic England and regret for the loss of so many young and beautiful men.

A similar point is made by Sassoon; the bathing scene takes place outside war, yet it is closely connected to it. The men are swimming in a tributary of the Ancre at Bussy in the days before the Somme attack:

> A few of our men were bathing, and I thought how young and light-hearted they looked, splashing one another and shouting as they rocked a crazy boat under some lofty poplars that shivered in a sunset breeze. How different to the trudging figures in full marching order; and how difficult to embody them in the crouching imprisonment of trench warfare! (see fig. 24) (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 37)

Sassoon portrays loss, yet he seems to compensate for it. By implying that what he is describing has to come to an end, Sassoon can claim a distance from the potentially tragic story he is telling, while in substituting war for homoerotic attachment he grants this attachment a survival.

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Fig. 23. "Summer Scene." Jean Frédericm Bazille, 1869. *Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.* Web 2 June 2011 <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org>[269]

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[269]   Quite modern in its spatial organisation and the beholder's relation to it, Bazille's painting can be compared with the photograph-postcard portraying the four young men in towels in fig 23. Hammond's commentary of the painting describes to perfection Guy-Bray's homoerotic space: "Bazille's figures inhabit two enclosed spaces, the pool and the sunlit patch of grass surrounded by trees. In contrast to many nineteenth-century poems which focus on bathing scenes, there is no excluded, desiring outsider; the youth leaning against the tree on the left (in a pose suggesting a languid St Sebastian) seems to invite attention, but the other boys are absorbed in their activity. The gaze of the youth resting on his elbow is directed towards the pair in the centre, but it is the gaze of an equal. The two adults are out on the margins: one, stripped to the waist, is helping a lad out of the pool, while the other is taking his clothes off, looking down at the ground; they are not observers, but neither are they quite participants. Right at the centre of the painting are the bright red drawers of the youth with his back to us, who is grasping another youth from behind. It is an embrace which is evidently uninhibited within this setting; perhaps it is a wrestling hold, but it is left to the viewer to define the feelings of the two lads as they hold each other half-naked in the middle of this enclosed, self-sufficient male space. This picture occurs in a period when poetry and painting are offering acute voyeuristic pleasures, and in such conditions 'innocence' is constructed as part of the work of the voyeuristic gaze; innocence is attributed to characters in order to feed the viewer's pleasure" (Hammond XIV)

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Fig. 24. Real Photo Postcard. Snapshot. Four young men in towels wrestle, 1910. Ibson, John. *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.

However, in so far as they all lament loss, these homoerotic-pastoral scenes have many similarities with the pastoral elegy, particularly in that they all take the opportunity to announce publicly the writer's love for other men to an unsuspecting public. Perhaps more than the pastoral romance, the pastoral elegy, as Guy-Bray observes, lends itself "to expressions of the love of one man for another, or at least to celebrations of the youth and beauty of a dead or dying man" (18). In effect, many of the memorial poems written in response to the Great War allow for the emergence of this homoerotic space. As Guy-Bray suggests, "the separation inherent in the setting and the separation caused by the fact that the man who was beloved is now dead – gives the poet the space and the freedom to expatiate on the love of one man for another" (Guy-Bray 18). In such expression of homoeroticism, war poets were not only safeguarded by the patriotic need to celebrate the fallen, but also by the elegiac tradition of Milton's "Lycidas," Shelley's "Adonaïs" and Tennyson's "In Memoriam."[270]

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[270]   The most influential of the great elegiac poems was Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1850). Not only did it influence many Great War poems, particularly Owen's "Futility," even Eliot's "The

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Since much of the poetry of the Great War is more or less consciously elegiac, it may be regarded as "a collective elegiac enterprise" (Sherry 78); yet, what is boldest in it is the admission of homoerotic loss into the elegiac tradition.[271] Owen's "Greater Love" and "Futility," Gurney's "Dicky" and "To his Love," Graves' "Not Dead" and Sassoon's "The Last Meeting" (written after the death of David Thomas) are some of the most significant examples. Whether the expression of the loss of the friend in these poems is meant to be platonic or erotic, it is, nevertheless, the expression of love; and the intensity of emotion involved brings it under the sign of the homoerotic. Despite the suggestion that the soldier-hero could be identified with Christ, both as a sacrificial victim and as a redeemer, the display of the male body in these poems is both aestheticised and eroticised and becomes not only the site of suffering and fragility, but an object of the homoerotic gaze. Indeed, as Das suggests: "Sensuousness mixed with pathos as the wistfulness of *l'amour impossible* was deflected onto the early death of the boy" (*Touch and Intimacy...* 131).

Waste Land" was inspired by his elegiac tone. "In Memoriam" was cautiously received by critics, as the undertones of the poem were rather unconventional. Indeed, dedicated to Tennyson's friend Arthur Hallam, the poem has emotional phrases like "loved deeplier, darklier understood" and the passionate refrain "mine, mine forever, ever mine" that have clear homoerotic undertones. As Das affirms, "In his frequent and fluid shift of registers from classical models of 'manly love' to those of heterosexual romance, [Tennyson] compares Arthur to an absent fiancée, a deceased wife and a bride leaving her parent's house" ("Kiss me Hardy" 60-61).

[271] Arguing that the war poets produced only elegiac accounts of the war would lead to a single reading of their work by assuming their allegiance to the Ghost myth and ignoring that, even when they did write elegiac poetry, they gave quite separate but thoughtful perspectives of what death and the homoerotic meant. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between two distinct strains of pastoral elegies written during and after the Great War: The conventional pastoral elegy inherited from Milton, Shelley and Tennyson represented "the 'push towards transcendence' characterizing mourning in the Platonic and Christian tradition […] minimizing the importance of the mortal body and redirecting attention towards what is abstract and eternal" (Patricia Rae 308-309). Brooke's self-elegy "The Soldier" and Graves' "Not Dead," reflecting on the death of David Thomas, belong to this tradition. However, the consolations of the traditional elegy, the notion that the dead "are safe and happy now" (Sassoon 6), or the "old lie" of the "Dulce et Decorum est/Pro patria mori" (Owen 14-15) started to be subverted by some war poets. For them, as Patricia Rae asserts, "elegizing ethically meant smashing abstractions, deflating euphemisms […] speaking plainly about the costs of war" and bringing "the focus back onto the material body" (310). However, these two strains were not always distinct in the texts and they sometimes even overlapped.

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The ambiguity pervading the representation of the homoerotic in the Great War comes to light as a visible product of the officers' "unresolved sexual desire" (Najarian 21): on the one hand, the Victorian affirmation of war as a traditionally masculine experience and on the other, the need to incorporate non-normative aspects to masculine heroism. Despite these obvious contradictions, the threat of the homoerotic gaze in the pastoral elegy tends to be counteracted by the absence of the desired man and the conception of the male body as a seat of pain.

But not only was the poetry of the Great War elegiac, the pastoral elegy permeated war narratives as well. While slightly different in their expression of experience, the lament for young warriors that form a large part of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may be connected to the laments for the loss of the soldier friend in the narratives of the homosexual officers. An illustration of this is the love and sorrow for the death of David Thomas expressed in Sassoon's diary:

> But they came afterwards and told that my little Tommy had been hit by a stray bullet and died last night. When last I saw him, two nights ago, he had his notebook in his hand, reading my last poem. And I said good night to him, in the moonlight trenches. Had I but known! – the old, human-weak cry. Now he comes back to me in memories, like an angel, with the light in his yellow hair, and I think of him at Cambridge late August when we lived together four weeks in Pembroke College in rooms where the previous occupant's name, Paradise, was written above the door. (*Diaries,* 44-45)

Although young Thomas is presented as a ghostly saint, his fair hair treated as a golden halo, it is obvious that the close bonding between Sassoon and Thomas was homoerotic. Yet, homosexuality is not presented as the deliberate consummation of sexual desire, but sublimated into an excessively sentimental demonstration of pathos, compassion and aestheticism and the clear visual connection between the uncelebrated death of the young soldier and the death of Christ.[272]

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[272] Dick Tiltwood was not only the embodiment of Sassoon's homoerotic hero-worship but, as many critics suggest, of a real flesh-and-blood person: the young Sandhurst subaltern David Cuthbert Thomas (although Wilson suggests Tiltwood was a "composite" of David Thomas and another young Welch Fusilier, Robert Hammer) (Wilson 192). See pages 227 and 228 (Chapter IV.

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Sassoon's immediate response to Thomas' death kept with the traditional pastoral elegy of his early poems: "Grief can be beautiful, when we find something worthy to be mourned. To-day I knew what it means to find the soul washed pure with tears, and the load of death was lifted from my heart" (*Diaries* 45). Throughout the diary entries of the following days Sassoon's words were those of "restorative nostalgia" (Boym 41), the high diction of the conventional elegy. Yet as time passed, he found that his suffering over Tommy's death would not bring consolation or justification. He hoped to redeem that which was impossible for him to be redeemed. Therefore, as Caesar observes, he began to "articulate an increasingly complex response in which […] anger and sado-masochism […] are elaborated, together with other, somewhat gentler, more compassionate utterances" (79).[273] This achieved the most poignant expression in the words, "my killed friends are with me where I go." The image of Sassoon as "the bereaved male friend" (Cole, *Modernism…* 139), the avenger, enraged like Achilles after the death of Patroclus illustrates this: "I used to say I couldn't kill anyone in this war; but since they shot Tommy I would gladly stick a bayonet into a German by daylight" (Sassoon, *Diaries* 52). As part of this angry and violent reaction he was to take on dangerous duties, especially in patrol work, sometimes going on missions into No Man's Land. The battalion called him 'Mad Jack.' He came to know "the lust to kill" (52) and the desire to "smash someone's skull" (53).

Yet, in "The Last Meeting," written in May 1916 while Sassoon was at Flixécourt, he goes back to a more compassionate tone. The poem is a lengthy pastoral elegy saturated with romantic-elegiac emotion. In part its length is a

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1.6.1) of this thesis. Sassoon fell deeply in love with Thomas-Hammer and he suffered greatly when he was hit by a stray bullet on the throat and killed in action a few months later.

[273]   Something similar happened to Sassoon when Wilfred Owen died. He went through a situation of emotional turmoil and increasing anxiety: "I have never been able to accept that disappearance philosophically. A blank miserable sense of deprivation has dulled my mind whenever I have thought of him, and even now it has needed an effort of will to describe our friendship. Recognition of his poetry has steadily increased; but the chasm in my private existence remains. I am unable to believe that 'whom the gods love die young'" (*Siegfried's Journey* 72). Sassoon implies that the death of his friend had a transformative effect in his way of approaching the elegiac and ultimately war itself. He appears to reject the archetypal tale of sacrifice and to question the Victorian hero myth justification of war.

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consequence of the narrative composition: The poet has left the front and seeks the ghost of his friend – "To find the face of him that I have lost" ("The Last Meeting" 4) – in an empty house but only finds the spirit once he leaves civilisation altogether and enters the nearby woods. Being away from the front, in pastoral surroundings, Sassoon felt emotionally renewed. So much so that he managed to reach a sense of resignation to Thomas's death: "So he will never come but in delight, /And, as it was in life, his name shall be/ Wonder awaking in a summer dawn" ("The Last Meeting" 128-130).[274] Given the emotional chaos Sassoon had been going through, this change of attitude was surprising, as it was the story of the kiss behind the poem:

> In the poem where the male body is consistently woven into a fantasy of space, purity, and disembodiedness, Sassoon concludes with a surprisingly intimate detail of personal history: "And lips that touched me once in Paradise." […] But in stunning example of how gay history is erased through homosexual panic, either personal or institutional, these lines are found only in the original draft sent to Edward Dent. The 1919 collection of *War Poems* (and all subsequent editions) changes the paradisal kiss into a dying one: "And youth, that dying, touched my lips to song." ("Kiss me Hardy" 65)

This final version, however, is still ambiguous as "touched" may be read as "inspired" but also hints at intimate physical contact.

Owen's approach to the pastoral elegiac was more religiously and spiritually oriented. Perhaps because there were differences between Owen's spiritual homoeroticism and the more conscious homosexuality of Sassoon, their attitudes to the loss of the male friend were different. A traditional reading of one of Owen's most evocative homoerotic elegies, "Greater Love," would claim that military sacrifice was "greater" than sanctioned notions of affection, that the male bonds of war produced a love surpassing all others, including heterosexual love. Owen explores the ultimate manly sacrifice and to do so he "rejects each element of female beauty in favour of the eroticised description of the dying

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[274]   This emotional change is also reflected in a "A Letter Home," written at about the same time to his friend Graves, who was also mourning Thomas' death: "Now he's here again; I've seen/ Soldier David dressed in green, / Standing in a wood that swings / To the madrigal he sings" ("A Letter Home" 37-40).

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soldier" (Najarian 33): "Your slender attitude/trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed" ("Greater Love" 7-8).

Male bonding and self-sacrifice are presented as supreme values and the poet celebrates them in a manner that fuses the religious with the erotic. As Caesar observes, "the love of the dying soldiers is described as 'pure' and above erotic passion, yet the language in which their dying is described is nothing if not sensual" (153). Like Sassoon, Owen seems to be attracted by the soldiers' lips: "Red lips are not so red/As the stained stones kissed by the English dead" ("Greater Love" 1-2) and uses these "tortured sadomasochistic images" to reflect "a rigorous Protestant ethic mingled with feelings of guilty eroticism and a hatred of warfare" (Das, "Kiss me Hardy" 65). The impossibility to kiss-touch those lips can only lead to death: "Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not" ("Greater Love" 24).

Owen's attitude to the "boys" or "lads" destined for sacrifice is very similar to that of Housman's. In that sense, the identification of the sufferings of his own men with the passion of Christ is inevitable. In a letter Owen writes to his mother in 1917, he says:

> Already I have comprehended a light which never will filter into the dogma of any national church: namely that one of Christ's essential command was: Passivity at any price! Suffer dishonour and disgrace; but never resort to arms. Be bullied, be outraged, be killed; but do not kill. It may be a chimerical and an ignominious principle, but there it is. […] And am I not myself a conscientious objector with a very seared conscience? [...] Christ is literally in no man's land. There men often hear His voice. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life – for a friend. (Owen, *Selected Letters* 246-247)

This rereading from the gospel of John advocates the purity of the passive love of those who lay down their lives for their friends and leaves women outside of such love, relegated to a secondary role. For Owen, heterosexuality had lost its sympathetic potential by being institutionalised; "greater love," thus, helped men both legitimise homoeroticism and form a poetics of same-sex attraction. Suffering the burden of being "a closeted gay male" (Najarian 21), Owen deals with the war and his sexuality and explores "the ways in which same-sex desire can engender sympathy" (28).

IV.2. The Hero and the Other

This section will focus on the literary representation of the coward (deserters, malingerers, physically and psychologically injured soldiers) and the different faces of the German enemy (the Teutonic beast, the invisible soldier, the human being and the friend). The image that the war poets have with respect to the other not only conditions and distinguishes their relationships with other men but also contributes to the inclusion of certain aspects of the experience in their self-definition. As Barkan argues, "by not being Others we define ourselves" (180). Steedman makes this connection clearly visible:

> Though it is rarely spelled out by those who use the construct, the notion of the Other assumes that there is a This (a human subject), who encounters That (something which is not like itself, usually another person or group of people) and who thereby comes to a self-conscious understanding of the ties that bind those on this side of the border together. (Steedman 60)

Ever since Plato, the concept of the other has been used in accounts of masculine heroism with a largely negative connotation. The Victorian ideal of heroic masculinity has been reinforced "by the existence of a negative stereotype of men" which has "failed to measure up to the ideal […] projecting the exact opposite of true masculinity" (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 6). This type of distinction, which Thompson calls "bonding-by-exclusion" (176), served the purpose of creating not only images of the other but also images of the self in mid-to late-nineteenth-century Britain.[275] When the Great War began, the self-other distinction was essential to justify war and exalt British national identity, personified, of course, in the white, male, upper-middle class British officer. The depiction of masculine traits as innate essences, unchanging and ahistorical, was a clear response to war demands. Strong lines of separation between genders were considered necessary: "Men should be men and women should be women" (Braudy 349). Blurring the distinction between them seemed to invoke chaos and defeat.

Yet the binary system established through hegemonic masculinity, whereby men must fit into a specific category, raised questions and concerns about the rule

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[275]   For a detailed analysis of the Victorian ideal of manliness, see Chapter I.1 of this thesis.

making process. The right of soldiers to assume superiority over the other – women, homosexuals, cowards and enemies – started to be questioned, while it was still promoted through institutionalised comradeship. As mentioned previously, the use of uniforms, the ritualised humiliation, the rites of powerlessness and the cult of the dead were assumed not only as symbols of brotherhood, but also as the means through which group identity could be identified and distinguished from the other: "Rather than a hand across national boundaries, comradeship would turn out to be for many a weapon against all who were different" (Braudy 444). Referring to these recurring patterns in the self-other distinction, Carrington focuses on distrust, fear and resentment as the dominant messages:

> Without doubt an infantry section thought of itself as 'we,' but who are 'they'? In a manner of speaking, all the rest of the human race could be so classified: the mysterious unknown enemy across the wire, the bloody munition-makers at home who were earning high wages and seducing your girl-friend; number four platoon in the next trench who made such a noise that they woke up the enemy gunners; the trench-mortar section that came up from its 'cushy' billets, fired a few rounds, and went away leaving us to take the retaliation; the Fifth Loamshires that we relieved last week and hadn't done their share of strengthening the wire; and, of course, the staff who could conveniently be blamed for anything. (*Soldier from the Wars Returning* 99)

In the context of modern warfare, in which a symbiotic, quasi-natural relationship was posited between the machine and the soldier, the borderlines between 'us' and 'them' became blurred; the meaning of 'them' started to be seen as a variation of the meaning of 'us' and the alterity of the other could not be always secured. As Barrell suggests, "what at first is seen as the other – utterly foreign, repugnant, disgusting – is 'made over the side of the self'" (qtd in Steedman 72).

While the war poets still kept a strong component of their own class and patriotic identity in their attitudes towards the other, war took them away from the enclosures of the binary system; the ability to put themselves in the place of those who were different made them experience their own masculinity in a new way.

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IV.2.1 Deserters, Malingerers and Cowards

The countertype of the coward represented all that the soldier was not supposed to be according to the Victorian hero myth. Being a coward was like being morally effeminate. Those who, because of their unmanly behaviour, were regarded as cowards could not align with the genuine men and were marginalised by the group. Of Lance-Corporal Miller, a deserter on the Somme who was now under arrest, Manning's Bourne feels "a wave of pity and repulsion" (Manning 122). Miller is deemed to be inadequately masculine: "after one glance at that weak mouth and the furtive cunning of those eyes, Bourne distrusted him […] he had the look of a Hun" (Manning 123).[276] Either because he is physically weak or because he was suspected of avoiding suffering, the spectacle or even the very idea of pain, Miller fails to measure up to proper male behaviour. Bourne's judgment is maintained even after Miller's death sentence is commuted to penal servitude and he returns to duty: "'They ought to 'ave shot that bugger,' said Minton, indifferently; ''e's either a bloody spy or a bloody coward, an' 'e's no good to us either way'" (Manning 193). Miller's role as countertype becomes even clear when he deserts again on the eve of the next attack. He becomes the direct opposite to the code Bourne and his chums live and die for; so much so that Bourne compares Miller with the grim courage and endurance embodied in the figure of one of his chums:

> Bourne found himself contrasting Miller with Weeper Smart, for no one could have had a greater horror and dread of war than Weeper had. It was a continuous misery to him, and yet he endured it. Living with him, one felt instinctively that in any emergency he would not let one down, that he had in him, curiously enough, an heroic strain. (193-194)

Indeed, when Private Bourne is hit by a bullet at the very end of the book, it is Weeper who – saying "A'll not leave thee'" (Manning 246) – carries him back to the trenches.

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[276]   Ugliness served to characterise the countertype of the hero. The bodily structure of the coward differed from that of the hero. However, as Mosse argues, "ugliness referred not only to bodily but also to mental characteristics, and here, once more, the outward symbolized inward man. A person's disordered outward appearance signalled a mind that lacked control over the passions, where male honor had become cowardice, honesty was unknown, and lustfulness had taken the place of sexual purity" (*The Image of Man* 59).

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Another case of cowardice is mentioned in Plowman's memoir. Referring to sergeant Griffen, who deserted his men on a mission near Mametz, Plowman complains: "Quite obviously he is asking to be shot if he is caught, and I would not stir a finger to save him; for if he is skunk enough to want to dodge these trenches himself, that doesn't excuse him for very nearly having half a dozen men court-martialled for desertion" (see fig. 25) (*A Subaltern…*153). [277] Like Manning's, Plowman's life would have been unimaginable if that had meant betraying his comrades. He cannot imagine that Griffen's desertion could be anything other than repugnant to others, but more deeply to himself. Were he to imagine himself surviving after desertion, he could not identify that image with the one in the deepest core of himself. The existence of a test that men had to pass is also suggested, as well as the fact that manliness had to be denied to those who, because of their softness and delicacy, were only destined to be the negative countertype. Describing the Baron, one of his military superiors, Chapman says:

> He was, now I come to think of it, a Bonapartist, which permitted him to serve as a decoration of the Quai d'Orsay – I can never imagine him to have been useful. Nor do I think he had ever before the war lived in an unheated room or existed except in a capital city. With his tiny feet, encased in peculiarly national boots, his gloves, his small very silken moustache, his ungainly seat on the horse – he spent his days trying to find an animal which would suit him – his scent, his love of Biedermeier music, he was a touchingly maidenly figure. The staff made a pet of him. The infantry spoke of him in derogatory terms. (Chapman 130)[278]

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[277]   It is important to mention that desertion was rare; only "21 soldiers deserted out of every 10000" during the first year of the war and "the rate fluctuated around 6 and 9 for the rest of the war" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male,* 80). However, Bourke adds that "forging signatures to ensure that they were miles away at zero-hour, getting another man to answer their names at roll call, dodging parades and slipping out of camp were habitual activities for many servicemen" (*Dismembering the Male,* 80).

[278]   Chapman's ironic and mocking observations to the Baron may be also in consonance with the "lions led by donkeys" attitude towards military command, characteristic of the Ghost myth view that, as Clark asserts, "British commanders had acquired reputations that were greatly out of proportion to their achievements [and that] a popular tradition of heroic infallibility had been established which was to mate disastrously with the amateurish good humour and ignorance of contemporary military theory that was reality" (19-20) (See footnote 171 of this thesis). In
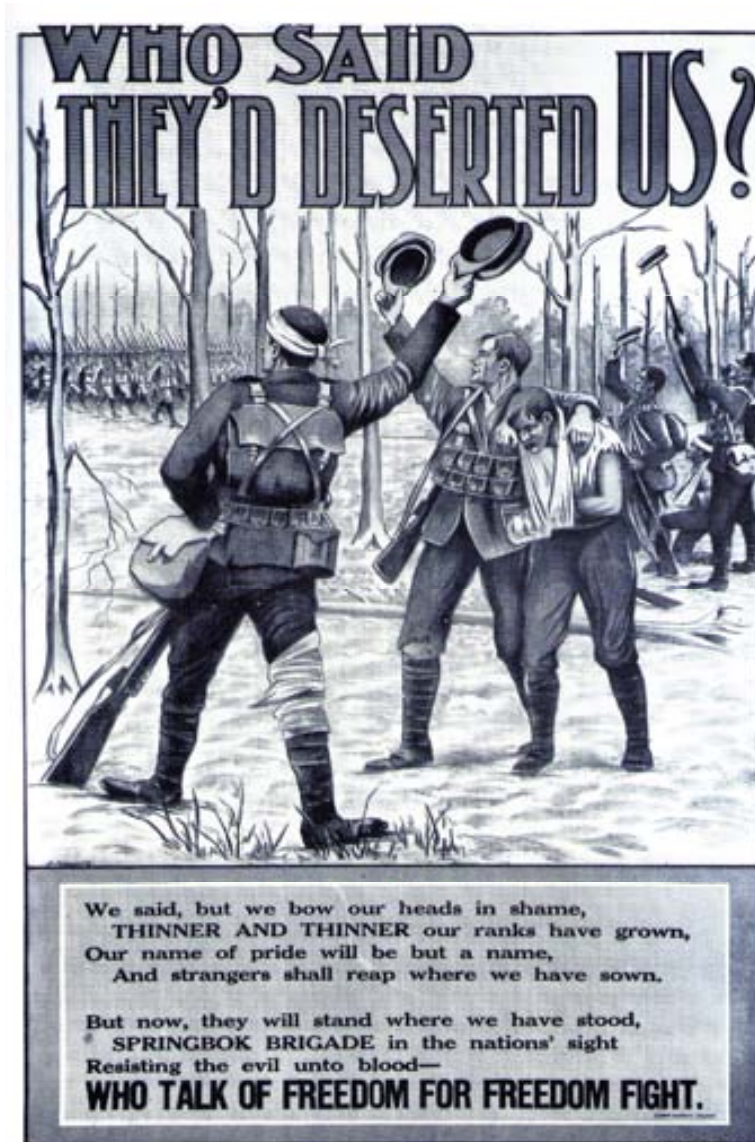
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Fig. 25. Holland, A. "Who said they'd deserted us?" 1914. Recruitment Poster. Digital Media Repository. Ball State University. Web <http://libx.bsu.edu/collection.php?CISOROOT=/WWIPosters>

The Baron was the embodiment of the 'effeminate coward,' the very thing a man had to avoid. Chapman's disdain inspires a superiority attitude which is responsible for the 'manly' man's confidence over those who are not. As Manning suggests, when comparing Miller and Weeper Smart, the true nature of the countertype could only be seen in its proper dimension if both the ideal and its antithesis were put side by side. The contrast between the two would come alive in the trenches.

Chapman's view, the Baron's position in the army had been awarded by privilege not merit, having being spoiled by upper-class luxury and alleged effeminacy.

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Yet, what the Great War taught, a lesson that hit the heart of the Victorian Hero myth, was that neither the public school nor the strict military training or the institutionalisation of comradeship could suppress fear. Not all men could bear the threat of physical and mental devastation for long periods of time. Those who could not maintain the zest for warfare and did not manage to desert used their bodies to protest against dominant norms of masculinity. Malingering, "the wilful fabrication of physical or emotional symptoms to avoid an unwanted duty" (Lande 131), became one of the responses to the failure of becoming a war hero (see fig. 26).[279] It originated in the most basic human emotions such as exhaustion, desperation, resentment and fear. Montague expresses his profound rejection of this phenomenon when he writes:

> To all the divisional base depots and into the ultimate dust-hole or sink that was called "Base Details," there gravitated most of the walking wreckage and wastage, physical and moral, of active warfare: convalescent, sick and wounded from hospital, men found too old or too young for trench work, broken-nerved men smuggled out of the way before disaster should come, and malingerers triumphant and chuckling, or only semi-successful, suspect, and tediously over-acting. (57)

Malingering affected the unity of the regiment as well and Montague reveals the lack of sympathy that soldiers felt towards malingerers in the early years of the conflict (See also Read, *The Contrary Experience* 65-66). Even if it was almost impossible to trace this type of scam, when the pretence was discovered, the malingerer was morally condemned by the group.[280] The harsh treatment given to them might be attributed to the fact that the victim was, in reality, only expressing the war poets' own impulses. Like Montague and Read, Herbert's

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[279] The introduction of compulsory military service brought new recruits indeed, but also discontent and the predominance of malingering. As Bourke writes, "this inflation may be represented in Sir John Collie's book on *Malingering and Feigning Sickness*, first published in 1913. When a revised edition was released during the war, the book was nearly twice the size: most sections had been extended and new chapters had been added on self-inflicted injuries and neurasthenia (or shell-shock)" (*Dismembering the Male* 85).

[280] As the moral of the group depended on a precise detection of this type of scam, both commanders, doctors and surgeons remained vigilant to detecting such abuse. However, the situation inevitably led to injustice as "the malingerer stole social benefits that should have been reserved for the truly disabled" and sometimes "legitimate illness" was mislabelled "as fakery" (Lande 132-133).

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Penrose also despises men with self-inflicted wounds. His scorn, Herbert writes, "was a kind of instinctive self-defence – put on to assure himself, to assure the world, that there was no connection – none at all," between himself and the malingerer (Herbert 96).

Fig. 26. Hassall, John. "Bones Broken while you Wait." Cartoon in Walter Emanuel and John Hassall, *Keep Smiling: More News by Liarless for German Homes*. London: Nash, 1914. [281]

However, and despite the risks of public humiliation and disgrace, malingering remained both an option for those willing to escape war and a reaction to the dominance of the traditional masculine ideal. Desperation was the driving force behind most of the malingering cases and, although suicidal impulses were uncommon, sometimes suicide was regarded as the only possible alternative between cowardice and war. Hinting that Winterbourne's death by enemy fire

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[281]   The cartoon illustrates the vast underground network that supported malingering. The caption below reads: "'Almost the only persons making a respectable income in London now are the bone-breakers. Young men are flocking in their thousands to doctors who make a speciality of breaking a leg, or an arm or even a neck, in order to make them of no use to the press gang'" (Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* 82).

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might be considered suicide, Aldington's narrator assumes his "blood-guiltiness" (35) for his friend's death:

> I told him then that he ought to apply for a rest, but he was in agony of feeling that he was disgraced and a coward, and wouldn't listen to me. [...] George was killed soon after dawn on the 4th November, 1918 [...]. He was the only officer in his battalion killed in that action, for the Germans surrendered or ran away in less than an hour. [...] I heard from George's Colonel that he had got enfiladed by a machine-gun. The whole of his company were lying down, waiting for the flying trench-mortar squad to deal with the machine gun, when for some unexplained reason George had stood up, and a dozen bullets had gone through him. 'Silly ass,' was the Colonel's comment, as he nodded and left me. (Aldington 33-34)

Aldington's representation of the death of his hero is deeply ironic, yet it expresses the need to atone for the death of traditional male roles and to highlight men's vulnerability rather than strength. The management of weakness, fear and helplessness is a recurrent subject in Aldington's novel and in the texts under study. Just like in the case of Penrose's intolerance towards malingering, the narrator's guilt over Winterbourne's death suggests that it was the men who did not conform to hegemonic masculinity who provoked the deepest anxiety among those who were still part of the norm.

Speaking of Harry Penrose's death at the hands of his own men of D Company, Herbert's narrator, Benson, also articulates the ambiguities behind the word cowardice: "My friend Harry was shot for cowardice – and he was one of the bravest men I ever knew" (Herbert 130).[282] Indeed, "like many another undergraduate officer of those days" (5), Penrose was "all eagerness to reach the firing-line" (15). And despite his suffering from shell-shock, he did his best

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[282]   To the High Command, soldiers' executions served a twofold purpose: deserters would be punished and similar ideas would be dispelled in their comrades. The Court was anxious to make an example "for they were just men [...]. They would do the thing conscientiously" (Herbert 117). However, "as judges they held the fatal military heresy, that the forms and procedure of Military Law [were] the best conceivable machinery for the discovery of truth. It was not their fault; they had lived with it from their youth" (117). Those who were condemned to death usually had their sentences confirmed by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig on the evening following their court-martial. A chaplain was dispatched to spend the night in the cell with the condemned man and execution took place the following dawn.

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not to surrender to mental disease by acting courageously until he could not bear it any longer. While shell-shock was essentially related to cowardice at that time, the traumatic emotional experiences suffered by Penrose at the front open traditional notions of manly character to scrutiny.[283] Of Penrose's military heroism, Herbert says:

> On the fifth day in the line he did a very brave thing – brave, at least, in the popular sense, which means that many another man would not have done that thing. To my mind, a man is brave only in proportion to his knowledge and his susceptibility to fear; the standard of the mob, the standard of the official military mind, is absolute; there are no fine shades – no account of circumstance and temperament is allowed – and perhaps this is inevitable. (Herbert 36)

According to the dominant discourse, those who, like Penrose, were executed at dawn would bring shame on their families and country. Yet Penrose's case proves that some of these men were undoubtedly blameless for they were suffering from psychological injury.[284] It was severe trauma, not cowardice, that rendered Penrose physically and mentally unable to keep on fighting against the mounting toll of battle, the physical illness, the stress of responsibility for other men's lives, and the unjust treatment he received from his superiors. Herbert's novel is the story of a breakdown, in which the major theme is the extraordinary perseverance of Penrose in his "secret battle" to fulfil the role of the hero. The use of the term shell-shock not only describes trauma but frames, as Winter suggests, "the war's scale, its character, its haunting legacy" (Jay Winter, "Shell-Shock..." 7). Discussing Penrose's feelings previous to the death sentence, Benson claims:

> There are, of course, lots of fellows who *feel* things far more than most of us, sensitive, imaginative fellows, like poor Penrose – and it must be hell for them. Of

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[283]   See Bogacz, Ted. "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock.'" *Journal of Contemporary History*. 24.2, Studies on War (1989): 227-256, for a carefully argued essay on how the War Office Committee of Enquire into Shell-Shock accommodated traditional notions of manly character with a recognition that shell-shock should not be seen simply as cowardice.

[284]   The number of men diagnosed and treated as suffering from shell-shock, some 80,000 during the war itself, amounted to one-third of the army discharges during the war (Bourke 109). The fact that the majority of victims were officers, and many had been awarded medals for bravery, stressed the difficulty of living up to male standards.

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course there are some men like that with enormously strong wills who manage to stick it out as well as anybody, and do awfully well – I should think young Aston, for instance – and those I call the *really* brave men. Anyhow, if a man like that really does stick it as long as he can, I think something ought to be done for him, though I'm damned if I know what. He oughtn't… (126-127)[285]

Although opinions continued to be divided, more and more men started to ask for justice for those soldiers who were shot for insubordination either because they dodged parades, or slipped out of camp or fell asleep at their post, or were just so terrified they simply could not cope. As Terraine writes, the coward became "the symbol of all the uncivilized procedures – all the stupidities, the lack of perception and imagination, the wanton cruelty – which had blighted A.P. Herbert's war, and many others" (Introduction XII).[286]

Instead of being on the offensive against the challenges that questioned some of the most important assumptions on which the image they had of themselves was based, the war poets tended to defend the men who could not measure up to the set standards of physical and moral fitness. This seemed to narrow the gap between the hero and the ghost. Therefore, while a single standard of manliness had encouraged most volunteers of the generation of 1914, the growing awareness of the existence of men who could not be labelled heroes or cowards in the traditional sense became an important concern. Of an Irish sergeant who "maddened by an intense bombardment had thrown away his rifle and run with the rest of his platoon," Graves says: "I could not sign a death-

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[285] In the introduction to Herbert's *The Secret Battle*, Terraine summarises Penrose's story as that of a 1914 volunteer, "full of gallant intention but also full of searching self-doubt, who stage by stage loses his nerve, until, pushed by a stupid and coarse-fibred commanding officer, he cracks and runs away. He is tried by court-martial, found guilty on the plain evidence, and condemned to death with a recommendation of mercy. But mercy is withheld; he is 'made an example' and shot 'by his own men, by men of D Company'" (XII).

[286] Nearly 90 years after their deaths, 306 soldiers who were shot at dawn between 1914 and 1918 were granted posthumous pardons from the British Ministry of Defence. The pardon recognises that the men were not 'cowards' or 'deserters' and should not have been executed for military offences. They were upgraded to being 'Victims of War.' Among them was Private Farr, shot for cowardice in 1916. His family had been campaigning for years for him to be pardoned, arguing that he was suffering from shell-shock and should not have been sent back to the trenches. Not one of the executed soldiers would have been executed today, since the British military death penalty was outlawed on 29 April 1930.

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verdict for an offence which I might have committed myself in similar circumstances" (*Goodbye…*249-250). Overwhelmed by war destruction and losses, Plowman contradicts his previous manly statements: "My God! I understand desertion. A man distraught determines that the last act of his life shall at least be one of his own volition; and who can say that what is commonly regarded as the limit of cowardice is not then heroic?" (Plowman, *A Subaltern…* 115). Such openness challenged the norm, as did to an even greater extent the ever more visible masculine countertype.

IV.2.2. The Enemy with a Thousand Faces

As happened with the figure of the deserter, the malingerer and the coward, the construction of the British soldier-hero also required an enemy against which it could define itself. The German, the "Hun," the "Boche" provided the countertype that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the national heroic ideal.[287] Killing the enemy was understood as a military necessity; those who took the lives of German soldiers in battle were given the highest awards for valour. As Gray writes: "The basic aim of a nation at war in establishing an image of the enemy is to distinguish as sharply as possible the act of killing from the act of murder by making the former into one deserving of all honor and praise" (131-132). The representation of the enemy in the Victorian myth was conditioned by the need to hate him. Therefore, the enemy was considered to practise evil the Allies could never attempt; his actions and the Allies' belonged to different moral orders. The so-called evil of the German enemy was firmly ascertained in works of propaganda which imposed no limits on the use of brutal language and images. Support for the war and hatred towards the German were accomplished by abstracting the image of the German into the Teutonic beast (see fig. 27).

The consequences for attitudes towards the enemy were critical. Most soldiers were able to kill and be killed more easily because they had an image of the German sufficiently evil and brutal to inspire hatred and abhorrence. As Mosse

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[287] Hutter studies enmity in relation to friendship and argues that while "friendship implies mutual and shared responsibility for Self and Other […] in enmity the aim of Self is the diminution of Other and an increase of the power of Self over Other" (11). In Hutter's view, then, "enmity implies the negation of Other; Friendship implies his affirmation" (12).

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argues, "the dehumanization of the enemy was one of the most fateful consequences of this process of brutalization. […] the enemy massacred, mutilated, and tortured the defenseless. He also subverted supposedly sacred values" (*Fallen Soldiers* 172). Referring to the stories of viciousness of German soldiers spread by the propaganda press, Williamson claims:

> 'To hell with Germany!' Soon the extent of Germany's behaviour became known through the newspapers: the Germans were burning the Belgian villages, shooting old people and sticking bayonets through Belgian babies, raping the women during drunken orgies, and cutting off the limbs of children. (*The Patriot's Progress* 7)
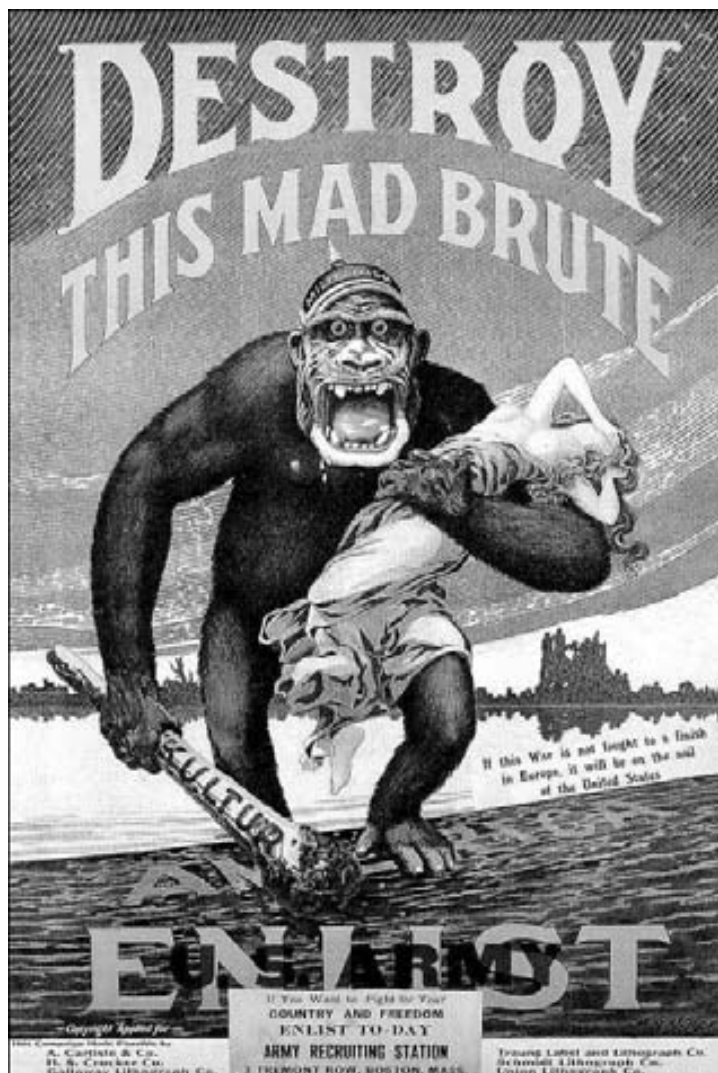

Fig. 27. Hopps, H. R. "Destroy This Mad Brute" Lithographs on Paper. *Harry Ransom Center Collection Search.* Web. 3 June 2011. <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/art/holdings/poster/images/enlarged1.html>[288]

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[288]   The success of the stereotype of the Teutonic Beast was significantly increased by the use of atrocity illustrations, which were always more effective than the printed word in influencing

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In the eyes of press propaganda, the Germans were no longer 'playing the game' and, therefore, in Hynes' words, "it became quite acceptable to express a desire for the annihilation of Germans, the bombing of German civilians, the gassing of German troops. 'The game' was over" (*A War Imagined* 54). The accusations against the enemy of "boiling down the fat of their own dead" were just an example of the flood of anti-German propaganda (Montague 97). The German invasion of Belgium – referred to by the British as the 'Rape of Belgium' – also provided the wildest rumours and reports of atrocities. As Buitenhuis argues, the nation and its people had been victimised: "In poster and report and appeal, Belgium is the raped and mutilated maiden, left to die" (*The Great War of Words* 12).[289]

The anti-Germany campaign was also supported by some of the war poets. This is what Graves thought before enlisting: "I was outraged to read of the Germans' cynical violation of Belgian neutrality. Though I discounted perhaps twenty per cent of atrocity details as wartime exaggeration, that was not, of course, sufficient (*Goodbye...*68). Once at the front, however, he would change his opinion on the issue: "Propaganda reports of atrocities were, it was agreed, ridiculous" (*Goodbye...*190). The difference of opinion between those with no personal experience of the enemy and those who had already been at the front was striking: "the farther from the firing line, the stronger the animosity" (Reed qtd in Wachtell 78).

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public opinion. As the poster above shows, the most graphic and horrific accounts concerned German's sexual depravity.

[289]   The rumours were given credibility by the Bryce Report, a study commissioned by the British government to investigate the alleged German brutality towards the civilian population of occupied Belgium: "Drawing upon some 1,200 eye-witness accounts, the report officially titled, *The Evidence and Documents Laid before the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, was published in London in May 1915, shortly after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Immediately translated into thirty languages, it presented and ostensibly verified a wide range of German acts of brutality. James Bryce, the official author, had been a highly regarded ambassador to America, and the report that bore his name, although discredited after the war, was highly influential during the war years" (Wachtell 65). However, as Buitenhuis observes, the report was a piece of anti-German hatred propaganda, "a tissue of invention, unsubstantiated observations by unnamed witnesses, and second-hand eyewitness reports, depending far more on imagination than any other factor" (*The Great War of Words* 27).

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However, tales of what Toynbee entitled *The German Terror in France* (1917) continued to be backed by some of the fighting officers as well, particularly by those who supported the Allied cause until the end. When the British argued that they were at war to defend their wives and children from the predatory hand of the German it was these shocking stories that they were referring to:

> As [the German] retired they laid waste the counter. To break down bridges, to blow up the cross-roads with mines, to drive off the cattle and burn the crops, was legal by the barbarous code of war. […] In sheer malice to France they also looted the countryside, destroyed and defiled churches and ancient monuments, cut down the cider orchards on which the peasants lived, and carried away men, women and children into slavery. (Carrington *A Subaltern's War* 124-25)

Despite this deep rooted stereotype, the true nature of the German enemy became a disputed issue as the war developed. Not only was the image of the Teutonic beast challenged, but the German emerged as an enemy of many faces. Each different face brought about a certain reading of the war which, at the same time, was closely connected to a certain understanding of the heroic ideal.

For some men, the sense of being passive recipients, prevented by the nature of mechanised warfare from functioning as soldiers in the traditional sense, brought about the uncomfortable feeling of seeing no enemy at all: "The outstanding feature of this kind of warfare is that, practically speaking, one never sees the enemy. We know by his effect that he is there, but during more than half the day, if his trenches were empty and he himself a myth, 'twould be all the same" (Plowman, *A Subaltern on the Somme* 85). The invisibility of the enemy was one of the most tragic conditions of the Great War. Being shorn of the human element, men mechanically loaded their guns and fired, even without knowledge of the results, at other men who would die without knowing where the fatal shots came from. Like Plowman, Sassoon reacted to the impossibility of seeing his opponent, of fighting back: "The next night our Company was in the front line and I recovered three hatchets and a knobkerrie from no-man's land. Curiously enough, I hadn't yet seen a German. I had seen dim figures on my dark patrols; but no human faces" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 25).

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Given the anxiety of fighting an invisible foe, the recognition of the enemies as men, like the British were, was essential to humanise war. As Hall observes: "One imagines all sorts of monstrous things about an unseen enemy […]. I for one welcomed any evidence that our opponents were fathers and husbands and brothers just as we were" (111-112). The association of the image of the German with that of a human being had the potential to deprive war of some of its horror and anonymity. Sassoon is revealing when he describes his astonishment at the glimpse of the men in an enemy machine-gun team: "I had come from Edinburgh via Limerick and Jerusalem, drawing full pay for seven months, and I could now say that I had seen some of the people I was fighting against. And what I saw was four harmless young Germans who were staring up a distant aeroplane" (*Sherston's Progress* 137). Knowing that the enemy was like them, merely human, men began to wonder about their enemies' lives, their families and what they did for a living. They realised that when they killed a German they were not just killing the enemy, they were killing a man who had a wife and children, who had a life and a mother who worried about him.

The humanisation of the enemy made the encounter with the enemy corpse all the more difficult.[290] The soldier was forced to face "the abject," which Kristeva defines as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules, the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). At the sight of the dead body of a German soldier, Sassoon feels the shrinking of personal borders and boundaries. His life becomes frailer, suspect, ephemeral:[291]

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[290]   Scarry expands upon this question by stressing that corpses bore no relation to the issues that were being contested in war: "Does this dead boy's body 'belong' to his side, the side 'for which' he died, or does it 'belong' to the side 'for which' someone killed him, the side that 'took' him? That it belongs to both or neither makes manifest the nonreferential character of the dead body" (119). Manning's response to enemy corpses confirms this notion of non-referentiality. Bourne cannot distinguish between British and German corpses, their bodies jumbled together and locked in fighting embraces, all equally devoured by anonymity: "Suddenly he remembered the dead in Trones Wood, […] Briton and Hun impartially confounded, festering, fly-blown corruption" (Manning 11).

[291]   The sight of the dead German soldier probably began Sassoon's change of attitude towards the enemy. When on sick-leave in England, he developed a "secret antagonism to all uncomplimentary references to the German army" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 177) and decided on his return to France in 1918 that his purpose was no longer to kill Germans but only to

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> As I stepped over one of the Germans an impulse made me lift him up from the miserable ditch. Propped against the bank, his blond face was undisfigured, except by the mud which I wiped from his eyes and mouth with my coat sleeve. He'd evidently been killed while digging, for his tunic was knotted loosely about his shoulders. He didn't look to be more than eighteen. Hoisting him a little higher, I thought what a gentle face he had, and remembered this was the first time I'd ever touched one of our enemies with my hands. Perhaps I had some dim sense of the futility which had put an end to this good-looking youth. (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 62)[292]

The encounter with the enemy was even more problematical for those who had come into contact with the enemy and had learnt to appreciate them before the war. With the idea of spending sometime abroad as a break between public school and university, Sorley had travelled to Schwerin to study German at the University of Jena. He stayed in the house of a lawyer and his wife, made friends there and came to describe the German culture as "the nicest in the world" (183). Soon after his arrival he wrote about hearing German soldiers singing while marching: "Then I understood what a glorious country it is: and who would win, if war came" (93). Referring to the same event, he later observes: "And when I got home, I felt I was a German, and proud to be a German: when the tempest of the singing was at its loudest, I felt that perhaps I could die for Deutschland – and I have never had an inkling of that feeling about England, and never shall" (97).

Yet, when the war began he voluntarily returned home to fight against the German. He never hesitated as to his own duty in that matter, but he was deeply aware of the enemy's point of view and was intensely affected by their

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look after his men (Page 245 of this thesis describes the stage in Sassoon's war experience in which all he wanted was to kill Germans to avenge his dead friends).

[292] There is also a strong homoerotic element in Sassoon's description of the German enemy. While Fussell argues that Sassoon's elegiac words only respond to a sudden sexual attraction for the young blonde German, Das claims that "sexual orientation, though a very important factor, should not always be highlighted at the cost of other nuances of feeling" ("Kiss me Hardy" 55). Sassoon's reaction to the sight of the German corpse seems to have gone beyond sexuality, including, in Das' words, "recognition of human dignity and waste, a deep feeling of *caritas* and a sudden rush of empathy for the enemy" ("Kiss me Hardy" 56). For a further discussion of the homoerotic elegy, see pages 242-247 of this thesis.

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losses. In his poem "Such, such is Death" he exposes the absolute otherness of death, a totally unknown experience which destroys all the categories that had been so important to the living: "Victor and vanquished are a-one in death:/Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say" (7-8).When hatred towards the enemy vanishes, as Sorley suggests, the figure of the enemy does not make sense as such, as the major motive for its existence is removed. Learning to respect the enemy, then, becomes a quest to rediscover and embrace what these men had evidently suppressed or ignored: "the intrinsic similarity of men" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 20).

By approaching the enemy, the war poets moved closer to finding their own selves; their capacity for tolerance, compassion, and friendship grew as they gained greater emotional awareness of the other. So much so that some were able to leave their anti-German hatred behind and radically changed their attitudes towards the enemy, treating them as human beings worthy of concern. As Williamson claims,

> The grey-clad German prisoners at the base had been treated exactly as other soldiers were treated: the enemy had become Fritz or Jerry to John Bullock and his truck, who had readily absorbed the attitude of the old soldiers they had met. To the officers he had become tolerantly the old Hun and the Boche, nicknames which, for them at least, had lost the contempt and hatred of their inception. (*The Patriot's Progress* 49-50)[293]

Gurney further insists on what seems to be the idea that all soldiers were really brothers in arms: "In the mind of all the English soldiers I have met there is absolutely no hate for the Germans, but a kind of brotherly though slightly contemptuous kindness – as to men who are going through a bad time as well as themselves" (136). In such context, the binary self-enemy becomes, in Carpentier's words, "a floating signifier" that is, a dichotomy with "no fixed meaning" (12) which forms "both negative and positive aspects, in their attempt to destabilise the 'other' identity but desperately need that very 'other' as a

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[293] The intensity of Williamson's sympathy for the German soldier at the front, whose cries "Mutter, Mutter, Mutter" (*The Wet Flanders Plain* 12) could be heard coming from the enemy trenches, led him to embrace Fascism in the post-war years and to allude to Hitler as "the great man across the Rhine" (*Goodbye, West Country* 23).

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constitutive outside to stabilise the proper identity" (15). This is what Sorley feels towards the German enemy. He not only rejects the abuse and hatred of the country where he had felt at home; in his view, Germany and Britain were not supposed to fight; in fact, they should have been responsible for one another's good behaviour:

> I regard the war as one between sisters, between Martha and Mary, the efficient and intolerant against the casual and sympathetic. Each side has a virtue for which it is fighting, and each that virtue's supplementary vice. And I hope that whatever the material result of the conflict, it will purge these two virtues of their vices, and efficiency and tolerance will no longer be incompatible. (232)

The conscious transformation of the enemy into a human being deserving of respect allowed for the displacement of hatred onto other more threatening enemies: By redefining the enemy it was possible to redefine the conflict and to suggest the idea that whether a man was your friend or your enemy was only a matter of circumstances. Blunden is emphatic on this point:

> First I began to air my convictions that the war was useless and inhuman, even inflicting these on a highly conservative General (an unnaturally fearless man) who dined with us one evening, and who asked me, 'why I wasn't fighting for the Germans? To which I answered with all too triumphant a simplicity that it was only due to my having been born in England, not Germany. (*Undertones of War* 144)

To Blunden, the real enemy was war, not Germany. War was the absolute evil, with a will of its own, from which nothing good could result.[294] By excluding war as a necessary construct, the humanisation of the enemy may have appeared to endanger the morale, the will to fight, of the British soldier, perhaps, at times, even his ability to defend himself and defeat the enemy. There were no personal motivations that led British and German soldiers to fight. Had they met in any other circumstances they would have probably been friends, as Read observes:

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[294] Plowman also feels that way. That is why he complains against the poor conditions German soldiers suffered when captured as they were herded together in "prisoners' cages" and then moved to prison camps: "We should show more natural feeling if we lined these poor devils up in a row and shot them. That at least would acknowledge their manhood. I should like to be allowed to go inside and apologise, explaining that the beastly necessities of the times have driven us to means we abhor" (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 26).

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Apart from uniforms, German and English are as like as two peas: beautiful fresh children. And they are massacred in inconceivable torment. This is the irony of this war: individually we are as good as the other: you can't hate these innocent children simply because they dress in grey uniform. And they are all magnificently brave, English and German alike (*The Contrary Experience* 128).

Read actually became friends with a German prisoner, a schoolmaster who had won the Iron Cross at Verdun and spoke little French. He played both the violin and the piano and admired Nietzsche. Read wrote his name and address in his pocket book and promised to visit him after the war if he ever went to Germany. His empathy towards the German friend results in the acknowledgment of their common interests and the other's role as a source of personal fulfilment. Read was sorry to part from him and observed with irony that "… a few hours previously we had done our best to kill each other*. C'est la guerre* – and what a damnable irony of existence… at any rate a curious revelation of common humanity" (*The Contrary Experience* 102).

However, all the attempts for the German and the British to fraternise were deterred by authorities, who would punish the men involved or lob artillery shells into No Man's Land to make them desist (see fig. 28). Yet, many soldiers, particularly during the first year of the conflict, insisted in breaking from the constant fighting and seeing the enemy up close. Referring to one of these incidents, Blunden writes:

Had I come on trench watch two hours later, not young C. but myself would have been puzzled by the appearance of a German officer and perhaps twenty of his men, who, with friendly cries of 'Good morning, Tommy, have you any biscuits?' and the like, got out of their trench and invited our men to do the same. What their object was, beyond simple fraternizing, I cannot guess; […] In any case, our men were told not to fire upon them, both by C. and the other company's officer on watch; there was some exchange of shouted remarks, and after a time both sides returned to the secrecy of their parapets. When this affair was reported to more senior members of the battalion, it took on rather a gloomy aspect; it appeared that the bounden duty of C. and R. had been to open fire on the enemy, and one hoped that the business might be kept from the ears of the Brigade Commander. Such hopes were, of course, nothing to the purpose; the story was

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out and growing, the unfortunate subalterns were reproved, and, what is more, placed under arrest. (*Undertones of War* 57-58)
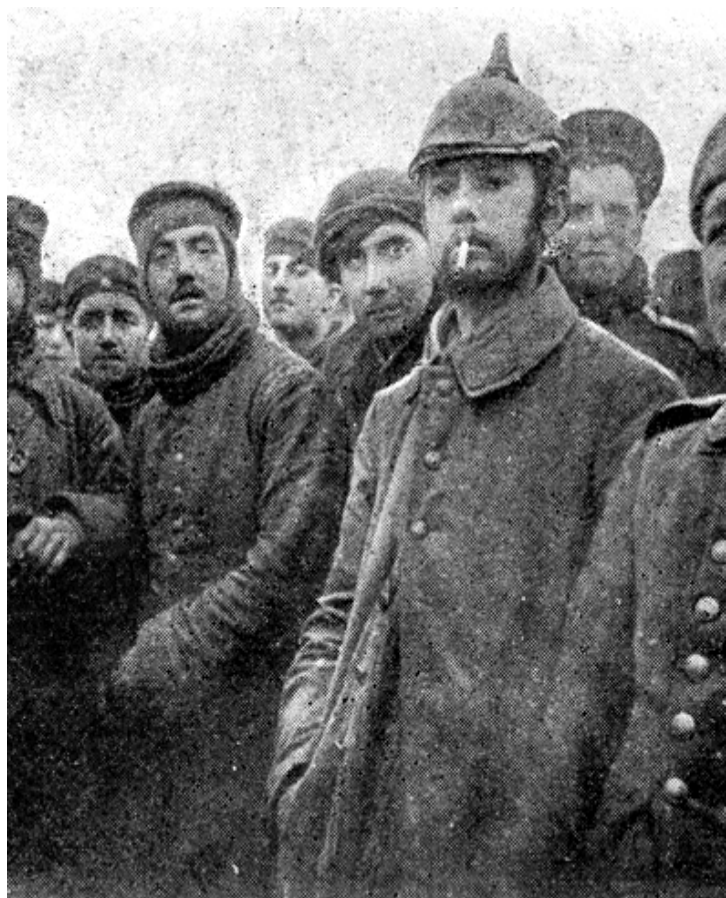

Fig. 28. A snapshot taken by a British officer showing German and British troops fraternising on the Western Front during the Christmas truce of 1914. *Imperial War Museum Collection Search*. Web. 2 June 2011<http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>[295]

The war was indeed on and these friendly approaches between Tommy and Fritz had no hopes of being maintained. Despite being widely reported in Britain and to a lesser extent in Germany, troops and civilians in both countries were still keen to prosecute the conflict. Yet, men had shown, perhaps unconsciously, a desire to put an end to the slaughter.

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[295]   During the first Christmas that British and German soldiers spent at the front, they took part in a series of spontaneous expressions of comradeship. During this unofficial 'truce,' they sang carols to each other, took photographs and fraternised openly in No-Man's Land. In some areas, the unofficial truce was maintained for days and even weeks. News of the 'Christmas Truce' reached Britain through letters written home by those who had taken part. Newspapers subsequently reported this extraordinary event in great detail . This was to be the only widespread unofficial truce of the war; the High Command forbade this ever to happen again.

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The different faces of the German enemy studied in this section – the Teutonic beast, the invisible enemy, the human being and the friend – can be seen as the differences in perspectives and experiences among the war poets and as the flowing and potentially contradictory subjectivities emerging from the confrontation between the two dominant narratives of war. The enemy seems to serve as a metonym for war anxieties onto which men could project their frustration, their anguish or show solidarity. The texts themselves offer interesting evidence of individuals moving through a set of ideas, reviewing them, changing their minds. Ultimately, the struggle to understand, humanise and include the enemy within the heroic self, seems to demand not only a move beyond selfhood to focus on the negotiation of difference, but the progressive abandonment of traditionally heroic patterns. As Bhabha observes, it is "these 'in between spaces'" that "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood" and "that initiate new signs of identity" (2). These men had proved their manly heroism at the front, yet they seemed to realise that they could only become 'whole' as men once they acknowledged the other.

IV.3. Death and Birth of the Hero: Reconstructing Heroic Masculinity

The hero and the ghost seem opposites who should not be forced to coexist in the same chapter of a thesis. Yet, the narratives I focus on here have elements of both. While they exhibit crucial aspects of the anti-heroic masculinity of the Ghost myth, for instance the opposition to war and normative institutions, the attempts to abandon emotional restraints and an understanding of human motivations that departed from pre-war tenets, they also combine these traits with the seemingly opposite heroic ones of the Victorian hero myth, most clearly exemplified by institutionalised male bonding, militarism and the pervasive ideals of courage and sacrifice. Most of the anti-war poets shared the awareness of their heroic masculinity with those who supported the continuity of the war. That is to say, they were willing to condemn "the reasons for fighting but not the fighting itself" (Caesar 155). While opposed to war, these disillusioned officers acted as ideal soldiers, brave and stern, proud of their military service. Indeed, as Mosse observes, "the ideal of masculinity so closely linked to war informed the attitudes of those who asserted their hatred of the military conflict" (*The*

Image of Man 108). The narratives under study throw new light over such struggle, proving that, despite the Ghost myth, the Victorian hero myth was still persistent and that heroic masculinity was consequently found itself in crisis throughout the Great War and its aftermath.

These last two sections focus on how the tension between the hero and the ghost kept the war poets on the edge, on a process of transition and becoming, which was unresolved but yet aimed at a redefinition. First I draw attention to the war poets' oscillation between "manliness" and "masculinity" in the representation of heroic masculinity. Then I focus on the emergence of two heroic alternatives to the dominant myths: the "self-reflective" and the "emotional" types which gave in turn way to a more flexible and multifaceted construction that I call the "compassionate" hero. It should be noted that, although the emergence of the self-reflective and the emotional may be regarded as a rather more long-drawn-out process – Mort and Francis argue that they appear in the 1950s (Mort 364; Francis 361) – the Great War marked the beginning of a crucial period of transformation towards a more modern heroic self, characterised by the abandonment of emotional restraint, and by an enhanced capacity for self-reflection and emotional conduct. The figure of the compassionate hero, thus, is thought as a prior stage leading from the hero through the ghost to the construction of other heroisms.

IV.3.1. The Liminal Hero: Between Manliness and Masculinity

Considering the crisis in which heroic masculinity found itself after the Great War, it may be argued that the war added no new traits to the dominant myths. Instead, it seems to have deepened certain aspects already discussed in detail, for instance the close connection between the military and hegemonic masculinity and the exaltation of traditional heroic qualities such as courage, stoicism and physical strength. The urge to do one's bit, to serve a cause higher than oneself, to put manliness into the service of an idea also appeared as essential to the definition of heroic masculinity. Yet it is undeniable that the Great War struck a blow at the traditional heroic ideal. The war itself changed the meaning and values that the men had gone to battle to protect. The permanence of certain categories of the Victorian hero myth did not indicate the

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triumph of the hero over the ghost but reflected the innumerable attempts to bolster the seriously injured traditional stereotype. The hero continued to be worshipped probably out of nostalgia, or because men were still unable to deal with memory; but the heroic self had been badly fragmented and that seemed to be an irreversible process.

Such fragmentation is plainly visible in the articulation of male relational patterns in the texts. While the insistence on the enforcement of hegemonic masculinity through organised male comradeship left hardly any room for self-reflection, sensibility, emotional intimacy or homoeroticism, the various voices heard in the texts confirm that experiences were not always equal to the generic 'he.' On the contrary, individual responses were not all the same and men reacted differently to relationships and events. Yet, the acceptance that heroic masculinity was not, as it had been learned at the public school, a single set of thinking and behaving implied too many risks for men to be tempted by it. Therefore, they hung on to what they knew because they were afraid that unknown feelings would come to the fore and they would be unable to control them. As Buchbinder suggests, men found it "difficult to dislodge the idol of traditional masculinity and topple if from its high place" (85). There is little doubt, then, that the experience lived at the front could only be compared to an experience of liminality.

Turner defines liminal individuals as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial [...] likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, todarkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness" (95).[296] The change of character undergone by men at the front can adequately be summarised as a betwixt and between experience and so can their relationship with war. Indeed, the term liminal can be used to refer to their hovering on the threshold of two worlds and

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[296]   Turner borrows and expands Van Gennep's concept of the "liminal period" from his *The Rites of Passage*(1909). Van Gennep defines rites of passages as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age [...] all rites of passage or 'transition' are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen, signifying 'threshold' in Latin) and aggregation" (Van Gennep qtd in Turner 94). During the second stage, the liminal period, the characteristics of the passenger cannot be clearly defined; he passes through a transitional stage that has few or none of the characteristics of either the past or the coming state.

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to describe their lives at these two different levels of experience: between the heroic and the ghostly, or between patriotism and protest, character and emotional expression, comradeship and friendship, selfhood and otherness. These men lived the crisis of their transforming identities and, whatever the particular details of each case, they became rather ambiguous, not completely or clearly one type or another, neither here nor there.

This transitional or liminal stage not only unveiled some of the war poets' views on the historical and social changes taking place at the war's turn, but also their thoughts and feelings about gender and heroism. In this uncomfortable position between two ways of life, between two belief-systems, they felt both the upholders of knowledge and the engines of transformation. If they were, as Carrington suggests, "an initiate generation" who shared a new, common identity ("Some Soldiers" 157), then their experience of war could be regarded as an initiatory experience as well, an experience which had to be told, constructed and reconstructed as a decisive moment in their lives. Their writings provided a means through which such construction-reconstruction could be undertaken; having been on the edge, these men had gained a certain freedom to observe and reappraise traditional heroic ideals and to develop a reflective understanding about the performance of masculinity aimed both at criticising and transforming it.

The problem with the war poets' writings, however, is that they start from a desire to recognise clear periods; the assumption is either one of change or continuity in the representation of war and heroic masculinity. Yet, what emerges from my analysis of the texts is, by contrast, a view of heroic masculinity as a process in which myths were negotiated in contradictory, and sometimes oppositional, ways within the self. The texts engage in a process of continuing identification with, as well as distancing from, the normative myths. Plowman's mixed emotions on his first day as an officer not only show his resistance to a male role which had become increasingly difficult to sustain, but a desire for an alternative to it:

> I am hideously self-conscious. One half of me is tunic, belt, puttees, badges, revolver – a figure hoping it presents an approved appearance in the public eye and faintly flattered by the sense of voluntary heroism; the other is a mind

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seething. This mind has become like a cloud brooding above my body, so full of violence and revolt that constant effort is required to keep it suppressed. Its impulses suggest the maddest actions. Now, as my young wife and I weave an outwardly nonchalant way through the crowd (she does not touch my arm: we know the etiquette), I am on the point of proposing that we walk straight out of the station, get into a taxi and drive and drive and drive till the car breaks down. (3-4).

Like Plowman, Gurney feels inadequate as a soldier and hence as a man: "I'm not a soldier," he says, "I'm a *dirty civilian*" (82). Together with the difficulty of internalising the soldier's role, most men experienced a conflict between their duty to obey and their individual conscience. Although he claims that he feels "armed with [his] uniform and the protective colouring of [his] Military Cross" (*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 100), Sassoon is not able to hide these feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction and armour his body all the time. He sees himself as "always acting a part – that of the cheery, reckless sportsman – out for a dip at the Bosches" (Diaries 94). Yet, "inwardly" he is "restless and overwrought" (*Sherston's Progess* 148). He keeps expressing the need to escape an uncertain present and comforts himself with the contemplation of the equally uncertain, but, nevertheless, idealised past: "Blighty! What a world of idle nothingness the name stands for; and what a world of familiar delightfulness! O God, when shall I get out of this limbo?" (*Diaries* 94).

Similar feelings are articulated by Lewis, who has no trouble adapting to the group standards but dislikes the institutional dimension of masculinity and the damage wrought by emotional repression. In his view, one of the entrapments of normative gender constructions is the obligation to conform to the impersonality of the military:

When I am dressed up in a military uniform I look like other people, though at other times I very easily depart from the canon, I find. One or two of my mess-mates sniffed at me suspiciously. But on the whole I was a masterpiece of conformity – I am physically robust. It is easy for me to go to sleep. And conformity is of course *a sleep*. (186).

Departures from the norm were likely to draw social sanctions. The pressure to conform to commonly accepted gender definitions worked against men and

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caused feelings of loss and even hostile behaviour to others. Brenan pushes his parents away in his double desire to become a man and escape from the norm:

> My real feelings at this time were simple. I wanted to make my life a thing of great importance. That is to say, I wanted to live every day, every hour, every moment with the greatest possible intensity, with the most complete awareness of being alive. But how could I do that unless I escaped from the middle-class environment that I lived in and which I saw stretching forward inexorably and with stifling dullness into the future?
> For these middle-class people, I said to myself, were dead. [...] I felt that I should never be able to be like them. (119)

There also existed an element of acceptance of normative male roles, even for men who sought to escape hegemonic militarism and other oppressive institutions. It was based upon norms which were both implicit and spontaneous. As Owen suggests, "I hate washy pacifists as temperamentally as I hate whiskied prussianists. Therefore I feel that I must first get some reputation of gallantry before I could successfully and usefully declare my principles" (282). Owen wants to challenge normative gender roles, yet he does not assert himself in his singularity but rather constructs himself by and through the norm.

Those who were against Owen's disenchanted form of writing and chose not to view war as slaughter could not function well within the normative narrative either. They had to concede the challenges to manliness that the war had posed, particularly in relation to the experience of combat. Carrington claims that the positive association of manliness and war suffered deeply with the Great War. He juggles old and new, fluctuating between romance and vivid descriptions of the anxieties caused by trench warfare:

> Outwardly I have rarely enjoyed such a happy time as the autumn of 1917, and inwardly have rarely been more miserable [...] We were fit and numerous, well housed and well amused [...] [but] I could not bring myself again to face the battlefield. Under the calm surface of our country life in this golden autumn weather, my mind (and, I suppose, not mine alone) was a turmoil of wild thoughts and fears from which the dreadful fancies of malingering, desertion, even suicide could not be altogether excluded. (*A Subaltern's War* 129-30)

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Like the men discussed above, most of the war poets were 'divided' men. Although the texts clearly prioritise a notion of heroism based on Victorian hero myth ideals, manliness is under enquiry in most texts, which contributes to a loss of its hegemonic status. Thinking of bravery and cowardice, Aldington realises that they both have the same root: "It is absurd to talk about men being brave or cowards. There were greater or less degrees of self-control needed. But this continual neurosis steadily became worse and required a greater effort of repression" (287).

The self-conscious effort to cultivate heroism and eradicate the seeds of cowardice and fear that inhibited its growth fell apart when the Great War turned all the conditions of the past topsy-turvy: Men "weren't the same as they used to be" (Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* 92); they were exposed to the anomalies of masculinity. This shock of reality was overwhelming and traumatic for the faithful advocate of fixed and stable gender norms. So much so that many faced desolation and hopelessness: "The extreme of heroism, alike in foe or friend, is indistinguishable from despair" (Manning 8).

While the Victorian hero myth was under threat by the diversity of reactions struggling for visibility, the texts leave unanswered questions about how the abandonment or recapturing of the norm relates to the individual man. The connection between the dominant myths and the war poets' thoughts and emotions only produces fragmented and overlapping identities, leading to complicity or ambiguity. The men under study seem to be willing to reflect the war's profound personal effects but fail in the search for new forms of self-expression.

In order to understand such fragmented selfhoods, half-free but still half-bound to the old beliefs and practices, it is important to make an observation about the term "masculinity" in opposition to "manliness." Roper, like the already mentioned Tosh, uses the term "manliness" to refer to a nineteenth-century single standard of manhood – closely connected to the Victorian hero myth representation of the soldier – and the word "masculinity" to connote the new significance that manhood acquired in the early twentieth century. Such new understanding departed significantly from the traditional concept of manliness due to the influence of new sciences such as sociology and psychology,

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particularly Freudian theories. Rather than being judged in terms of external qualities, the processes of formation of masculine identity began to be essentially associated with internal states and motives. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Freudian thought to the concept of masculinity lay in its emphasis on the deep instability of subjectivity. In fact Roper relates the term "masculinity" to the "complex and competing emotional impulses that together made up masculine subjectivity," that is a notion of the mind as composed both by the conscious and the unconscious (Roper 361).[297] However, and most interestingly, Roper also refers to a stage between "manliness" and "masculinity" which, in his view, had to do with "the emergence, born of violent events in wartime, of a form of subjectivity that predates 'masculinity' as a fully fledged psychological identity" (361). In Roper's opinion, this "in-between state" may be a consequence of war anxiety and the reason why most of the war poets can be positioned precisely between "manliness" and "masculinity."

Apart from the process of negotiation between these two opposed and self-interested binaries, the liminality that marked the lives of those who left the Victorian world of order to go to war was based on certain "images of 'something new'" (Leed, *No Man's Land* 15). In effect, the war poets appropriated certain images of renewal and infused them with new purposes to indicate the possibility of inclusion and expansion beyond the dominant myths. This suggested heroic alternatives which provided a bridge across the boundaries between the hero and the ghost and emerged as more complex and particularly flexible constructions associated with more humane and peaceful masculinities. The specific characteristics of these new heroes – based on self-reflection, solidarity and emotional intimacy – are not in themselves a first-time occurrence in the First World War. Some had been in existence since at least the mid-nineteenth century; and some had a much longer ancestry. Yet, their open recognition

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[297]   See Thomson, Matthew, "Psychology and the 'Consciousness of Modernity' in Early Twentieth Century Britain" in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War Two*, ed. Bernhard Rieger and M. J. (Oxford: Berg, 2001): 97-119. Although Thomson argues that psychology was important in the construction of the masculine self, contributing to a shift from identity based on national character to a notion of the mind as the union of the conscious and the unconscious, he underestimates the influence of Freudian thought. In his view, it was through society that the dissemination of psychological thought in magazine advice columns and self-improvement books that psychological ideas entered the wider culture.

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meant "a fracturing of 'masculinity' as an integrated concept," the acceptance that "there have always been many masculine *identities*" and "that individual men have always had different life-experiences *as men*" (Buchbinder 22).

Passing from the glorification of the warrior, to his victimisation and through to the acceptance of a more complex and nuanced representation brought a ray of light in the midst of darkness. The recognition of the existence of other heroisms has remained alive since the Great War, gaining importance in the post-World War One years. Yet it has engaged in unequal battle with the normative forms, in a society which, even at peace, has adopted an essentialist view of male roles and the stereotype of the warrior hero as a benchmark.

IV.3.1. Other Men, Other Heroisms

Challenging both the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth, there emerged two heroic alternatives struggling for recognition during and after the Great War: the "self-reflective" and the "emotional" types. Although, as said above, more complex patterns of response to selfhood and affective life were progressively incorporated into the representation of the masculine ideal in the 1950s, certain non-normative traits can already be detected in the texts examined here.[298] As Buchbinder writes, "the overriding cultural myth of a single masculinity" was progressively "cracking and splitting, allowing various *masculinities* to emerge" (22). Despite these budding signs of change though, the alleged integrity of the traditional warrior image did not seem to be jeopardised; indeed, the generally accepted standards of personal and sexual behaviour were still essential attributes of masculinity. Yet, the realities of modern warfare enabled men to

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[298]   The search for personal masculine identity was an important motivation for the American "Beat Generation" and for the British "Angry Young Men" in the 1950s. While approaching the issue from different critical perspectives, both the Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men heroes exhibit an acute awareness of the growing diversification of masculine forms of being and self-expression, and they similarly agree on the treatment of masculinity as a dynamic and multidimensional gender construct. See McNeil, Helen. "The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement" in Lee, A R. *The Beat Generation Writers* (London: Pluto Press, 1996) and Brook, Susan. "Engendering Rebellion: The Angry Young Man, Class and Masculinity" in Lea, Daniel and Berthold Schoene-Harwood*. Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

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timidly venture out beyond the serious, sober and self-restrained attitudes imposed by traditional definitions of masculinity.

As part of the adjustment to the new war reality, particularly to the invisibility of the enemy and the necessity of entrenchment, men confronted the task of critically examining themselves as men. In the course of permanent self-reflection, it became more and more unclear to them what it meant to be a man. This uncertainty led to strong ambivalences and various reactions. As Thomas writes: "The only thing is perhaps I didn't quite know what I was. This less active life you see gives me more time and inclination to ruminate" (121). Similarly, Manning warns about the risks of getting to know oneself: "The mystery of his own being increased for him enormously; and he had to explore that doubtful darkness alone [...] if a man could not be certain of himself, he could be certain of nothing" (184). And Sassoon wonders if his reflective self was not a burden in such difficult times: "Was it a mistake, I wondered, to try and keep intelligence alive when I could no longer call my life my own?" (*Memoirs of an Infantry officer* 78).

Indeed, self-reflection produced embattled positions on how manhood should be conceived and experienced. Insecurities went deeper as certainties around the traditional man's role were increasingly missing. Men realised their lives were governed by other principles, which involved not so much obedience to socially given norms, but the expression of their own thoughts and feelings. As Aldington suggests:

> You see, they cannot really kill the spark if it is there, not with all their bullyings and codes and prejudices and thorough manliness. For, of course they are not manly at all, they are merely puppets, the products of the system – if it may be dignified by that word. The truly manly codes are those who have the spark, and refuse to let it be extinguished; those who know that the true values are the vital values not the £ s.d. and falling-into-a-good-post and the kicked-backside-of-the-Empire values. (90-91)

But the escape from the world of conformity and self-restraint into the making of their own identities could only be achieved with the help of others, with the help of those who had "the spark." Self-reflection was not enough; by becoming "other," by taking some of the burden of the reflective self and setting out to

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create a different emotional environment, men could understand that something had to change.

Yet, this was a rite of passage that was always uneven, always in danger of reversal. As the different instances of male bonding examined here suggest, self-reflection and emotional self-expression might have provided a base for the development of heroic traits which departed from tradition. These traits brought men closer to the unrestrained otherness attributed to the heroic countertypes. Male-male relationships not only acted as sites in which to explore how emotional life was manifested but showed that the war landscape was stocked with a range of masculinities that were not only diverse, but often unstable within the same individual over time, and even internally contradictory within the same man in the same period of time. It took close observation to see this within the framework of male bonding, because toughness tended to be salient, and therefore visible, while non-normative traits were generally understated as soft, hysterical, childish or transgender. Of course, emotional life was more complex than a basic opposition between restraint and self-expression involving, as it did, more complex patterns of reflection and emotion. However, this simple binary distinction was recognised by, and influenced the attitudes of, the men examined here.

The need to recover other dimensions to emotional life – love, intimacy, desire, grief, fear, or pain – started the war poets on a quiet rebellion against dominant values. Although they were neither victims nor passive sufferers, on the contrary, their courage had been proven in the trenches; they were guided by the need to assert the soldier as a gendered being with an affective life and to change certain patterns of masculine thinking and behaving which had been damaging to them. Within the framework of male bonding then, there emerged the figure of the compassionate hero as a substitute of the ghost-hero representation of the soldier and as a combination of two signifiers – self-reflection and emotion – of a reaction against normative male roles. As Aldington suggests, the new hero believed "in men;" "in a certain fundamental integrity and comradeship, without which society could not endure" (Aldington 8), and advocated a notion of masculinity which, in Mosse's words, was "subsumed under mankind as a whole – a common humanity that drew masculinity's sting" (*The Image of Man* 119-20).

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The figure of the compassionate soldier was not new but, rather, a recycled version which merged heroic-anti-heroic codes, dressing them up in khaki to appeal to the readers of the time. Yet, this is all that could be done as far as the expansion of heroic ideals is concerned, as the construction of memory demanded the presence of a good hero to make things right, at least in the realm of imagination, and to soften the Victorian ideal so as to ensure its post-war continuity. Based on simpler and more unified principles of behaviour and morality, the compassionate hero emerged as the only possible solution to the need to sustain the devalued hero myth, overcame the ghost and, at the same time, adopted less aggressive and more flexible masculinities. Readers could recognise the qualities that the compassionate hero possessed as being what they were because of their similarities with those of the hero and the ghost and because they attempted to atone for both by humanising them. Of his compassionate hero, Corporal Jackson, Plowman writes:

> It is early morning before we find the camp on the hill. As we enter wearily, ominous shoutings and groaning come from all directions. These sounds tell the tale. The men are crying out with the pain in their feet. […] What can I do for them? [...] Wandering round alone I come on a coke-fire burning at the end of one of the shelters. A dark figure stands by tending it. It is Jackson.
> 'Hello! What are you doing?'
> 'Only looking to this fire, sir. I thought if I kept it going on this side, the wind'd blow the heat through.'
> 'Where are they?'
> 'They are all in there. There's only Collins and Roberts bad. The sergeant's pretty fair. He's inside. Shall I fetch him?'
> 'No. That's all right. How about yourself? Where are you going to sleep? Is there any room there?'
> 'No, sir, but I shall be all right. There's several of them want looking to. I'd as soon be here. I'm getting dry.'
> I bid him good night, and go back to the officer's shelter. Thinking of heroism and wherein it consists. This is the unostentatious kind. Here's a wisp of a man with a permanently troublesome knee. He has just come from trenches, said to be worse than Ypres in 1914, where he has done two men's work, besides helping crocks out of the mud, supporting them and carrying their rifles. Under the foulest conditions his spirits have never flagged. I have heard him whistling when no other bird on earth would sing; and now, when by all the laws of Nature he ought

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to have dropped half-dead, he has appointed himself to the role of Florence Nightingale, and has not even left himself room to lie down. I cannot sleep for thinking of him. The Lady of the Lamp. The Gentleman of the Brazier. (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 171-73).

It is the essential worth of Jackson, who plays "the Good Samaritan with all the good will of his prototype" (140) that seems to dawn upon Plowman, and with it, the ideal of a new masculine humanity. As in the parable told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, Corporal Jackson cares for the men in need, no matter the circumstances or who they were.[299] He becomes the Good Samaritan to them, an icon of goodness not because he is pious or austere; he is good because he is compassionate. His solidarity with men gives the idea that the survival of the hero relies on compassion. Moreover, the proximity between Jackson and the men in the regiment implies that heroism does not have to do with military fame and glory but rather with things that cannot be seen. As Hedges observes, these are "simple acts of kindness," "the tiny, flickering candles in a cavern of darkness that sustain our common humanity" (116).

These tales of everyday heroism led by humanity could never be quantified or measured by the size of the achievement and were generally awarded no medals of valour. Cynically disappointed with authorities for not recommending Jackson for "a ribbon," Plowman claims: "When I told Jackson this morning I had put his name up, but no recommendations were to be forwarded, he looked bored and unconcerned; rather as if I had betrayed his confidence to fools. I had" (*A Subaltern on the Somme* 186). Plowman is not the only one who suggests that Jackson's commitment to the other does not depend on medals of valour. Herbert also shows that the new heroes are not the ones with the more ribbons on their uniforms. This is what he writes about Harry Penrose:

> The barrage was worse than ever, all down the valley road, and, apparently, when they came near the most dangerous part, Harry's runner was hit by a big splinter and blown twenty yards. There were no stretchers unoccupied for five miles, and it was evident that the boy – he was only a kid – would die in a little time. He knew it himself, but he was very frightened in that hideous valley where the shells still fell, and he begged Harry not to leave him. And so we came upon them as we stumbled down, thanking our stars we were through the worst of it,

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[299] See Luke 10: 25-37.

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> Harry and the runner crouched together in a shell hole, with the heart of the barrage blazing and roaring sixty yards off, and stray shells all round.
>
> From a military or, indeed, a common-sense point of view, it was a futile performance – the needless risk of a valuable officer's life.
>
> They do not give decorations for that kind of thing. But I was glad he had stayed with that young runner. (Herbert 82-83)

Penrose's loyalty to the wounded soldier redefines the role of compassion not only in terms of expectations but also in terms of codes of behaviour. The figure of the compassionate soldier articulated in the texts, thus, functions as a metaphor. Without being a religious militant, the compassionate soldier offers possibilities for hope and transcendence through the release of emotions while at the same time keeping the façade of Victorian restraint. By covering emotion with the apparently rational and ethical nature of masculine compassion, the feminised traits of grief, longing or joy are transcendentalised by narratives of sacrifice. This way, the male-dominated world of war can still be seen as regulating, transcending, and thereby masculinising emotional expression, not as a sign of weakness or confusion, but in its accommodation in the sublime. Ford's Christopher Tietjens also belongs to this new, yet old, "moral frame of reference" (Macauley, Introduction XII). Like Herbert, he dramatises the devotion of Tietjens for his men:

> He knelt and felt the boy's back. His spine might have been damaged. The boy did not wince. […] He could not be left there. Bearers could be sent with a stretcher if one was to be found. But they might be sniped coming. Probably, he, Tietjens, could carry that boy, if his lungs held out. If not, he could drag him. He felt tender, like a mother, and enormous. […] He took the boy under his arm as you might do a roll of blankets. (*Parade's End* 639)

Protected by the compassionate fabric of humanity itself, Ford resorts to the image of the hero as the mother to provide Tietjens with the attributes of empathy, awareness of the needs of others and self-sacrifice. It is Tietjens' compassionate role which allows for the disclosure of essentially non-normative attributes, and which prevents heroism from becoming a feminised experience. In other words, Tietjens' heroic act may be permeated by emotional self-expression because it has been turned into transcendental love.

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But it is perhaps Williamson who best describes compassionate masculinity: so different, but at the same time familiar, to the dominant myths. The chaplain in Bullock's regiment is the *alma mater* of the regiment. He represents the transformation of the soldier into the new man who stands by those in trouble, who puts the other before the self. But most importantly he is made to shape his emotions into tranquil emotions, to the end of experiencing joy without pain and without the sense of selfhood that drives dominant masculinities:

> The regimental chaplain regarded [the company officers] with a cheerful smile hiding his sadness as they marched away to the long convoy of grey motor-buses drawn up along the Poperinghe road. He was going later with the medical officer to the battalion aid post, whence he would wander off to seek the wounded lying out, to comfort them, if he could, with his words. He was one of those rare men who carried the real War on their shoulders. He knew he could not say what he thought, so he did all he could to help the men, whom he understood, with his personal sympathy. And he went where they went. After the War it will be different, he used to think: out of this great agony will survive a new spirit… The soldiers liked him, and called him "Cheero Boys" (*The Patriot's Progress* 154-156).

Just as the Good Samaritan's greatness lies in his infinite compassion, so, too, the paradigm of self-sacrifice for Bullock is his disinterested love for men. Moreover, the chaplain's compassionate heroism hinges upon two factors. First, although he opposes war, he continues to fight in order to protect and sustain men. Secondly, as Featherstone observes, men like Jackson or "Cheero Boys" "articulate a utopian discourse in opposition to the dystopia of the war, and their utopianism is expressed in the transformation of the destructive organization of the army into a loving community of men." While "this is not necessarily homoerotic in expression or impulse," it certainly implies "a powerful redefinition of the heterosexual conventions of military heroism" (Featherstone 106).

Such ideal was indeed utopian in that it could only become reality at the time when masculinity was no longer anchored on essentialist values. And that had not yet occurred; at least not totally. Still, most of the men examined here were hopeful that such "miracle of recuperative force" (Montague 211) would take place.

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The questioning of dominant male values and the affirmation of other heroisms reflected a common desire to organise a new society whose values of self-reflection, emotional expression and humanity were celebrated. Yet, the form of masculinity that defined this post-war society was not a distinct category. Although it was envisioned in relation to the idea that difference from the other – comrades, friends, cowards or enemies – did not mean their superiority or inferiority as men, it still combined traits of the dominant myths. In other words, the representation of the soldier as the hero and the ghost was publicly proclaimed by the two dominant myths; yet, privately different interpretations of heroic masculinity existed – but the normative stereotypes undoubtedly played a part in most individual lives.

Conclusions

This final chapter restates the aims of my study, summarises the specific findings for each chapter, offers several overall conclusions and recommends further avenues for research.

My thesis has attempted to offer new insights into the representation of heroic masculinity in the literature of the Great War. I have examined autobiographical narratives written by canonical war poets and focused on the figure of the soldier as the point of origin from which both the heroic and the anti-heroic sprang. First, I have explored how the Victorian hero myth was shaped from mid-to late-nineteenth century until the beginning of the Great War. Then, I have analysed the background to the emergence of the Ghost myth and the persistence of traditional heroic forms after the war. After analysing and contextualising both myths, I have focused on the relationships between soldiers at the front. My aim has been to show that male bonding redefines essential aspects of Victorian hero myth masculinities and combines them with the seemingly anti-heroic ones of the Ghost myth. Ultimately, my study has set out to determine that the different male relationships described by the war poets exhibit the early development of alternative heroic traits and give way to the construction of more flexible and multifaceted heroisms.

Specific Findings for each Chapter

Chapter I. The Victorian hero myth has been outlined as a crucial mechanism in the construction of the heroic masculine ideal that prevailed in Britain prior to the Great War. I have analysed the myth in its three main aspects: firstly, essentialist manhood; secondly, war as adventure; and, thirdly, the imperialist framework. These three aspects have been considered in the context of propaganda, the public-school ethos and the Boer War, as they brought about the beliefs but also the ambiguities that led to the growth, dissemination and decline of the hero myth. The idea of the hero as an unchanging and ahistorical figure, whose essential traits were physical strength, courage and aggression, on the one hand, and a profound religious dimension to justify military action on the other, represents this essentialist view of manhood and has allowed me to trace

the figure of the Victorian warrior back to the legendary heroes of the epic and romance tradition.

Despite the common archetypal thread, the Victorian hero had a heightened imperial dimension, a trend that increased as the nineteenth century progressed together with military demands, colonial expansion and the need to perpetuate the status quo. The British Empire was not only a masculine affair but the arena in which traditional heroism would be tested and reinforced. No matter how much this ideal of manhood varied in detail, it served as a symbol for the hopes of the British Empire and society at large. Its enemies, then, were seen as the enemies of the British as well, as the Victorian hero myth was built in opposition to all that this single standard of manhood was not. Yet the myth often tended to undervalue its original perceptions by an over-emphasis on the beliefs and practices considered essentially masculine and a disregard of the ultimate aims of the heroic feats. As a result, the military and imperial realities of the time seemed to be detached from the heroic literature of the period, which looked as if it approved of empire-building not for the sake of empire so much as for the qualities developed in the empire builders. In this sense, I have attempted to recreate the Victorian version of the hero myth as an abstract and ahistorical construction that not only overcame the challenges of the Great War but was re-enacted with more or less the same characteristics in the representation of subsequent masculine ideals, for example "the hyper-masculine Nazi-like image" (Rose 177) built after World War One in Germany or the normative masculine ideal that still prevails.

For men to mould their character according to the Victorian hero myth, pass the test of war and defend their honour, this single ideal of manliness – as well as its countertype – had to be popularised. Imperial propaganda, particularly the literature of the widely read Haggard, Kipling, Stevenson, Doyle and Henty and their representation of war as adventure, reached all social levels to a similar degree. In the narration of war as adventure, heroic aspects were foregrounded at the expense of less exciting motives. Soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder and used their skills, courage and prudence to fight battles in exotic, faraway places. The absence of any details of combat gave the impression that battles were won easily and rapidly and that men died cleanly.

Drawing on this romantic ethos, public-school education played a crucial role in the successful penetration of normative masculinity in the lives and writings of the war poets examined here. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the public school was apt to provide an education for manliness and project it as necessary to the workings of Victorian society. I have studied the moral reform introduced by Dr. Thomas Arnold and the idealisation of "muscular Christianity" encouraged by Hughes and Kingsley as a vital part of the formation of the "character" of the war poets. The alliance between the moral – the attributes of self-restraint, independence and work – and the physical – sports were seen as sources of strength and courage – was embodied in the figure of the blood and served as inspiration for boys who transferred it from the games field to the battlefield. Moreover, militarism and militarisation, its norms and taboos and its definitions of what was possible or appropriate for subalterns in the making, triggered both anxieties about gender identity and, at the same time, a desire to be placed on the side of dominant masculinities. This was reinforced by a powerful sense of community and power: Boys were peculiarly dependent upon recognition and helpless to determine its conditions.

The most significant findings to emerge from the public-school section have been, firstly, that despite the critique of both the moral and military training received within the schools, most of the war poets were sustained by their belief in the ideals for which they imagined they were fighting; secondly, that the Victorian male stereotype grew up in close alliance with upper-middle-class sensibilities at the same time that it assumed its contradictions; thirdly, that the awareness of the war poets' precariousness as individuals in the war machine tended to reproduce this sense of Spivakian subalternity experienced when faced with the impersonality of the public-school institution; and, finally, although, as said above, the morality imprinted by the public-school ethos was not easily shaken throughout the Great War, particularly the cult of self-restraint and physical courage, there was a wide variety of experiences and reactions among the war poets.

Among the attempts to popularise the hero myth, I have also explored the powerful and extensive memory of the Boer War. Yet, as happened with the public-school experience, its legacy was an ambivalent one. Within the heroic responses to the Boer War, I have focused on the theme of the national epic as

a key motif for the continuity of the Victorian hero myth into the Great War. The fiction of Haggard and Henty, the loyalist verse of Austin and Newbolt and the patriotic press appeared to be once again capable of offering an effective orientation that gave the traditional hero a renewed lease of life. This provided the foundation stone that gave coherence to pre-Great War illusions and counter attacked budding anti-heroic anxieties. Versions of who the British hero essentially was and of common values and the sources from where these values were threatened were mobilised by the literature and the media so that the beginning of the First World War could be featured prominently as a truly heroic chapter in history.

Even if Britain won the Boer war and the British showed that they still possessed the essential manly qualities that had always defined who they were, both Britain and the British had changed. Unlike previous research (Bergonzi 1965; Fussell 1975), I have offered a number of reasons to indicate that the Boer War foreshadowed some of the anti-heroic responses to the Great War. On the one hand, the phenomenon of publication of popular war literature linked to the Education Act of 1870 turned the Boer War into the second most-written-about event in British history. This massive rise of both literacy and reading not only allowed soldiers to write about their experiences but was claimed to be responsible for the formation of an anti-war public opinion. On the other hand, the shift in the military strategies and in the technical features of the weapons used influenced literary responses and anticipated much of the feelings of alienation and futility that would become general in the trenches of the Western Front.

The protest poetry of Hardy and Kipling and the anti-patriotic war reports of the liberal press echoed these feelings and presented a nostalgic version of the empire, one that connected to loss and decline. In other words, the Boer War's profound impact on the Victorian hero myth told of national decline from previous greatness and of *fin de siècle* anxieties as a direct result of the changes brought about by the war. However, even if this anti-heroic development was not strong enough to transform these anxieties into a new literary form, the effect that the new circumstances of combat had on the arts and journalism of the period turned the Boer War into an agent of radical change before World War One.

Despite the temporal, spatial and imaginative distance, the men under study were also touched by the Boer War and showed intensely ambivalent views about it. I have suggested that both hero-worship and self-imagining constituted significant aspects of how the Boer War stories influenced the narratives examined here. The adventure story played free with historical facts and the heroes of the Boer War became a kind of public mirror to male self-imaginings. These legendary men impacted back on the ways the war poets saw themselves and on how they liked to be recognised by others. But this public fascination coexisted with a secretive rejection, a reluctance to recognise the Boer War hero as such. These contradictory responses underline the extent to which men were caught up in complicated ways in the Victorian hero myth prior to the Great War.

Chapter II. This chapter has traced how the anti-heroic impulse emerging from the literature and journalism of the Boer War changed and developed until it reached Ghost myth status. Certain crucial aspects – the appearance of the bourgeois hero, the conscientious objection to the coming war, the new military technology that led to the metaphor of the "war machine" and the representational crisis emerging from the soldiers' encounter with mass death – contributed to the continuous decline of traditional heroism and to a more visible presence of the anti-heroic in the British popular imagination. Although anti-heroism is a complex and elusive concept with a long history in war literature, my aim has been to highlight the existence of a countertype that not only threatened to weaken and destabilise the heroic ideal but was also used as its enemy to reaffirm it. The resulting panorama was one of contradiction: firstly, because the boundaries between the heroic and the anti-heroic were less clear and more questionable; and, secondly, because the figure of the soldier entered into a transitional space which drew attention to these ambiguities.

Among the conditions leading to the emergence of the Ghost myth, I have explored the introduction of the bourgeois ethos into Victorian literature. Based on the assumptions of Praz, Levin and Levine, particular attention has been paid to the emergence of a bourgeois domestic character, incapable of heroic achievement and motivated by incipient forms of self-reflection, *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and certain social, cultural and intellectual developments. Brombert and Lamont's claims have also added substantially to my understanding of the

anti-heroic, suggesting that heroism and anti-heroism have always gone hand in hand and that even if the heroic voices grew louder than the anti-heroic, heroism without anti-heroism would have been inconceivable in Victorian literature.

Compulsory military draft was also a key issue in the development of the Ghost myth. Although conscription did not occur until January 1916, there is consistent evidence of the great social pressure that was put on men of military age who had not yet enlisted. These public appeals to manhood made them feel guilty and threatened: They either enlisted or did anything in their power to exempt themselves from bearing arms. Evidence suggests that the image of voluntary enlistment as the most heroic and patriotic act was openly contradicted by the Military Service Act 1916: There was no heroism in compulsory draft. Even if thought to be unmanly, those who had been agitating for peace intensified their efforts after the law was passed.

Whereas the law contemplated conscientious objection, the diversity of positions made it difficult both to implement it and provide a satisfactory description for all the men included under the term. Due to the impossibility of focusing on each individual opinion over the wrongness of war, I have explored some general lines of agreement: the officially recognised opposition – religious, moral and political conscientious objectors – and those who were not formally recognised – the Bloomsbury group and certain intellectuals at Cambridge. Bloomsbury has been crucial to my thesis because of some aspects of their ethos that were passed into the military world, among them a rejection of the effects that militarism had on dominant images of embodied masculinities and the assertion of the supremacy of the individual over the rule of British institutions.

From the Bloomsbury acolytes, I have examined Russell, Keynes and Strachey because they represented a change in the normative masculine ideal and because they clearly exposed certain humanistic and aesthetic themes that set the tone for some of the issues raised in the texts under study. Because they lacked the familiar manly traits associated with other young men of their class, these men became a threat of a different order from that of the conscientious objector. They were considered outsiders and seen in much the same manner since they opposed the traditional manly ideal. Because this ideal was fixed, they

had no room for maneuver and neither could they change its character. The implications of the type of dialectic involved here have been of great importance to my study of the war poets: Men tried to become manly but eventually escaped and mocked all that the male ideal symbolised. The hero needed an anti-hero, and those stigmatised as such either attempted to imitate the ideal or defined themselves in opposition to it. Either way, breaking out was presented as a troublesome scenario.

As to the ideas Russell, Keynes and Strachey projected, individual freedom, autonomy and independence of action were the harbinger of the redefinition of the heroic in the texts under study. However, there were certain attitudes toward the Great War that were exclusive to each. Although Russell was not a total pacifist, he opposed this war. Yet, like many of the war poets – I have compared him with Aldington, Blunden, Brenan, Rosenberg and Read – Russell believed it was possible to learn from the experience, that violence could be channelled into more constructive ways and that war would raise the poet to a new level of intellectual freedom. Like Russell, Keynes also went through a process of self-discovery. While he was working for the government when the war began, his experience of war was marked by the tension between his public duty and his private anti-war feelings. With the publication of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), Keynes was able to make these feelings public, as Sassoon and Plowman did when they publicly expressed their conscientious objections.

Speaking of public protests, Strachey's voice was perhaps the loudest; *Eminent Victorians* (1918) became an influential work because it assessed the Victorian era from the perspective of the Great War. Strachey's ironic treatment of Victorian heroes revealed "a turn of mind," (Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*), which marked a distance from the past and anticipated similar uses of irony in Ghost myth literature. Like Russell and Keynes, Strachey also exposed clear contradictions between this irreverent view of Victorian heroism on one hand, and his faith in men's capacity for goodness and friendship on the other. I have argued that this belief in the redeeming quality of friendship drew him closer to the war poets, most of whom attributed war friendship with a heroic aura.

In general, therefore, evidence suggests that Bloomsbury exerted a strong influence on the war poets' imagination and constituted the moral-aesthetic basis on which the Ghost myth rested. Many themes, the war's apparent threat to freedom and autonomy, its harmful effects on the capacity to appreciate ideals of beauty and the pre-eminence of the individual over the hero, were passed on by Bloomsbury to the texts under study. Moreover, Bloomsbury's idea that individuals should be empowered to bring their personal responses to war anticipated the different meanings, shadings and anxieties reflected in the texts under study. As to Russell, Keynes and Strachey's responses to war, I have provided additional evidence with respect to certain common ambiguities in their attitudes toward war which I have connected with those of the war poets: The tension between the public and the private, the idea of war as a learning experience, the vindication of loss as the platform on which to build opposition and the celebration of sacrificial friendship are some of the examples worth mentioning.

The new circumstances and conditions of combat have also been regarded among the anti-heroic elements leading to the Ghost myth. The Great War represented a new kind of armed confrontation and a technological break with the past. The duration, intensity and geographical extension of the conflict and the use of new, deadly and sophisticated weapons allowed for the war to be described as "'global,' `total' and 'modern'" (Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History...* 1). For the soldier who had fought in the Boer War it was still possible to refer to the battlefield as the "field of glory;" but for those who fought in the fields of Verdun and the Somme it seemed impossible to combine the Victorian heroic ideal with the metaphor of the 'war machine.' I have used examples from Futurist art and the war poets' texts to show that what little chivalry may still have existed in the representations of battlefields of previous wars, vanished from the portraits of mass confusion and indiscriminate death of the Western front.

As to the representational crisis emerging from the soldiers' encounter with modern warfare and mass death, I have argued that soldiers felt the urge to narrate their experiences but also a lack of language to describe what they perceived as a new reality. I have thus asserted both the authority of the soldier as witness and teller of his own story and the documentary value of the

narratives written by those who were there. In this context, literature became history and the individual soldier's story played the important role of keeping history alive. Yet, it was impossible to separate personal experience from cultural images and ideals when analysing the texts: "What happen[ed] in combat [was] inseparable from these representations, for soldiers always [fought] with their whole selves" (as Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 17). Having said this, it may be argued that the 'truth' of the Great War was as much the result of experience as it was of the soldiers' rethinking of experience. While the reality of modern warfare was essential to these narratives, soldiers exposed the ways in which their own experiences were linked to their cultural and social ethos in their effort to write coherent and consistent narratives.

Lastly, chapter two has focused on the Ghost myth itself as the story of the Great War that is still remembered and believed to be true today. The Ghost myth championed Owen's idea of the "Pity of War" and depicted war as a tragedy and a disaster that caused a profound alteration of masculine identity. The soldier-hero was replaced by the soldier-ghost, a maimed and emasculated human being, passive, weak and vulnerable. What would have been regarded as an opportunity to exhibit virtues like courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice in the Victorian hero myth, tended to be portrayed by Ghost myth writers in a mood of bitterness, as futile and senseless. Death was always anonymously imposed and soldiers were victims of it as helpless pawns, unable to act on their own, shaped and determined by outside forces.

I have also focused on the figure of the ghost as a literary trope and illustrated its interrelated meanings: the ghost as the shadow of the hero, the ghost as a vehicle between life and death and the ghost as haunting memory. The ghost as the shadow of the hero is the most symbolic visual reminder of the Great War: it is the soldier as the victim, as the physically and mentally wounded man, somehow identical to the hero but a vanishing ideal on the verge of collapsing into dissolution. The ghost as a vehicle between life and death alludes to the soldier placed on a dream-like stage between the real and the supernatural, the man who knows death and whose knowledge of death shapes both his life and the lives of those around him. I have examined several instances in which this make-believe world enters the war poets' narratives, particularly in the case of the guilty survivors who revolved around the memories of their dead comrades.

They survived death; yet, they were faced with the difficulty of comprehending it. The impossibility of confronting death has led to the idea of the ghost as haunting memory, which addresses the issue of war trauma, the invisible scars that caused soldiers to expose themselves to situations evocative of death. By providing examples in which battle nightmares and flashbacks take the war poets back to the war front, I have shown that death permeates the texts in the form of a wound that cannot be fully healed.

This thesis has also suggested that with the Great War, the soldier-hero acquired a ghostly self that would always be waiting in the wings. By making a journey from the heroic to the ghostly these men emerged as moral witnesses with the responsibility of bringing their ghostly selves to light. Such position is potentially dangerous as the witness assumes priority over the hero-ghost binary and the text becomes a "ceaseless struggle" to atone for the past (Laub 75). Testifying to something that men saw with their own eyes was problematical because temporal distance, memory and myth interfered between seeing and saying and because the tragedy of the event often stood in the way of description altogether.

One of the major findings to emerge from this last section has been the articulation of the soldier-ghost as a central figure in the construction of the Ghost myth and in the expression of its changing narratives and identities. I have concluded that the victimisation of the soldier-hero not only served to undermine traditional heroism but to establish the figure of the soldier-ghost as a counter-model and destabiliser of the dominant discourse. In fact, the source of such subversion was the soldier himself, as he was able to articulate a sense of selfhood, but also of difference, based on his own experience. The other major finding has been the understanding of the figure of the ghost as a literary trope and multifaceted concept involving victimisation, death and trauma. The result of such complex interaction was the emergence of the war poet as a moral witness, as "an iconic figure in the memory boom" (Jay Winter, *Remembering War* 239). This has not only implied the moral condemnation of war by somebody who had been there but also a desire to atone for it. Struggling in a crisis of life and death, soldiers wrote about their experiences as an act of facing loss, but also as the means for reconciling two worlds: the one that was destroyed by the war and the one they returned to. Therefore, their narratives

implied a passage through the past to the future and, somehow, a repossession of the two.

Chapter III. I have focused on the literature and literary criticism written in response to World War One. So essential have they been to how the Great War has been interpreted that their existence has been absorbed into the Ghost myth. As Todman writes, in most cases "myth and means of transmission came together" (153). Instead of focusing only on the Ghost myth literature, however, I have examined both heroic and anti-heroic responses to the Great War. While the emphasis, by virtue of the greater protagonism of the ghost over the hero, has fallen on the Ghost myth, the constant tension between the heroic and the anti-heroic has made a major contribution to this thesis and to the complexity of the literature of the Great War. Focusing on the finest heroic and anti-heroic texts as sites of debate, I have attempted to illustrate not only the contradictions implicit in the heroic ideal but how the texts bring to the surface or symbolically address these shared anxieties and tensions. Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated that the heroic not only came to be subverted and challenged, but continued to be exalted in many texts. In either case, such underlying tensions required that the gap between the schoolboy and the disillusioned version of war should be bridged.

Within the heroic version of the Great War, I have examined the continuity of the Victorian hero myth in the poetry and fiction written by those soldiers and civilians who were determined to remember the happy times and forget the horrors of the Great War. Linking "personal honor to national interest" (Braudy 376), this heroic version of war showed consideration for post-war sensibilities and satisfied the public need to keep a sanitised masculine ideal in the forefront of popular imagination. This was achieved through the language of patriotism and the cult of the Big Words. Among those who wrote this light-hearted picture of war, however, I have distinguished between propagandists, pro-war writers and patriotic writers who experienced contradictions later on in the war and reflected them in their texts. Despite the differences, however, the worship of Rupert Brooke was a common theme. I have examined the Brooke myth, paying particular attention to his heroic archetypal role, as he was the perfect symbol of the diminishing aspirations of the Victorian hero myth. Evidence suggests that most of the pieces written as propaganda had no literary value and that those

which did have the literary value that genius could infuse into the work suffered by the intensity of those passions. Even if this type of literature was not always effective in imposing a rigid control over public perceptions of war, the themes and issues exploited in the texts were nevertheless illuminating, as they reflected the declining power of the old rhetoric and the progressive emergence of more ironic modes of writing.

This chapter has also explored the Ghost myth version of war. Within Ghost myth poetry I have first focused on the literary influence of the Georgians, as they provided the language and techniques through which war poets described the Great War. Despite the similar literary qualities, however, the truthfulness and realism that characterised Ghost myth poetry were more linked to the events that affected the war poets' lives at the front than to the influence of the earlier generation of poets. The Battle of the Somme was perhaps the most significant of these events. While it has been widely regarded as a turning point in the progression from the literature of the Victorian hero myth to the literature of the Ghost myth, I have provided some examples – from Sassoon's "In the Pink" and "To Victory" to Read's "To a Conscript" – to illustrate that there were Ghost myth elements in the poetry written before the Somme and traces of the heroic after the 1918 Armistice. The peculiarities of these poetic responses have suggested, firstly, that there existed other turnings – for instance the loss of public enthusiasm with the war, the advance of military technology and the passing of the conscription law – which may have changed British attitudes towards the war; secondly, that the Great War triggered more than a single response among the war poets; and, finally, that the hero myth and the Ghost myth did not follow each other chronologically.

While the section on heroic poetry has suggested a range of patriotic attitudes towards the Great War that had not been properly acknowledged, my analysis of the publication of war anthologies from 1918 onwards has traced the process through which these patriotic voices were silenced in favour of other more disillusioned. Most of the war poems and anthologies published after the Great War were part of a process attempting to reproduce a unique response to the realities of war and to create the impression that everyone in uniform shared it. In fact the great bulk of the material written by soldiers and civilians has not come down to readers; only a limited section of all the published work can still

be read today. It has mainly been through the poems written by the canonical poets –mostly Owen and Sassoon – that the Ghost myth has become known, popularised and taught in British classrooms from the 1960s onwards. In fact I have pointed to the 1960s as a key period in the selection and organisation of Ghost myth poetry, as the work of some poets began to be prioritised while others were neglected. Today it is assumed that Brooke represents the pre-war world of innocence and youth before the carnage of modern warfare caused the anger and cynicism that characterise the poetry of Owen and Sassoon.

Because of the literary merit of the selected works, they have become characteristic of broader experiences, when they are in fact representations of a minority's reaction to events. In general, therefore, Ghost myth poetry has spoken with the officers' voices and stood for the upper-middle classes that provided the men of the officer corps, not for the British nation or for the army as a whole. More recent anthologies have challenged the so-called "canon of First World War Poetry" (Walter, Introduction XXXI), questioning the extent and representativeness of the Ghost myth and claiming the existence of other voices, approaches and poetic styles that prove that the emotions expressed by Owen and Sassoon did not always mirror those felt by the majority of the soldiers. It may be concluded, then, that Ghost myth poetry has lasted because the other voices have not been widely heard or, as Jay Winter writes, because "individual memories fade away, but cultural representations endure" ("Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War," 10). Nonetheless, it is necessary to make clear that the soldier's story is not only the story of the war poets.

Within Ghost myth prose, I have contextualised the letters, war diaries, autobiographical novels and war memoirs under study and focused on their significance in relation to the emerging myth. Firstly, I have examined the letters written by Owen, Sorley, Thomas, Gurney and Rosenberg. Even if officially-censored or self-censored, these letters have been valued for their importance as testimony and for the complex feelings they unveil. Because of the impositions of the Victorian hero myth, most of the disturbing effects of war seem to be downplayed and the letters read at times as "pleasant travelogues of historic Europe" which "conform to expectations of masculine heroism" (Jolly 928). Yet, at other times they do expose fear, cowardice, inner conflict and an ironic detachment that is revealing in its own right because it demonstrates the

ways in which writing was a means of self-expression and even self-construction.

I have also examined the first three war books that were written as soon as the war ended and before the imaginative silence of the 1920s. A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (1922) and Herbert Read's *In Retreat* (1925) tried to shape the Great War into fictional, semi-fictional or autobiographical form and anticipated the direction that Ghost myth prose would take. In addition to bringing out facets of war that help explain its peculiar appeal, the three tend to call into question the whole conception of the Victorian hero and the narratives that shaped the actions of the soldier-hero. Together with the anti-heroic responses to the Boer War, these three books reaffirm that the figure of the soldier-ghost, the anti-hero, the victim – which had been mostly regarded as a trope of post-war writing – had a previous literary existence. Pointing to the same reality but with different nuances, these three writers use the same language and subject matter and pave the way for a new kind of narrative.

After the publication of these three books and what seemed to be the beginning of a clear trend towards the Ghost myth, there came a literary silence. It seemed that with the Armistice, public, writers and publishers had decided to put the war behind them. Ironically, while the greatest war poems had already been published, the most important Ghost myth prose had not been written yet. The implications of this imaginative silence have received particular attention in this thesis. Several explanations have been given to account for the silence, among them the post-war crisis, but evidence suggests that men needed time to cope with war. The act of retelling the war was consciously retrospective and ten years appears to be the necessary timeframe for the past to become literature. These texts, then, may be regarded not only as personal attempts to recreate the authors' wartime experiences but as acts of moral reparation or, as Jay Winter writes, as "exercises in aesthetic redemption, in their search for and retrieval of beauty from the carnage of war" (Winter, Introduction IX).

Even if for most of the 1920s Ghost myth prose was not written in any form, the publication of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) unleashed a flood of war books. In contrast to the war years, Ghost myth prose was the

predominant literary form from the late 1920s onwards. Despite the different narrative forms and authors – there were optimistic, pessimistic, autobiographical, historical, subjective and objective approaches – the Ghost myth prose published in the late 1920s and 1930s shared a common theme, language and sense of history. In this thesis I have examined chronologically the novels and memoirs that have remained at the core of the Ghost myth. Among the war books published before Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* I have studied Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928), Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Madox Ford's *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), and *The Last Post* (1928) and Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928). Among those whose publication was triggered by Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front,* I have analysed Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Carrington' *A Subaltern's War* (1929), Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930), Williamson's *The Patriot's Progress* (1930), Chapman's *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933) and Lewis' *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937). I have also examined the war memoirs appearing in the 1960s: Gerald Brenan's *A Life of One's Own* (1962) and Jones' *In Parenthesis*, first published in 1937, but reedited in 1961. Even if most critics agreed that all these texts portrayed war in negative terms, I have concluded that they all faced a similar dilemma: They inform people about the futility of war but they also attract them to its excitement and drama, harbouring a degree of fascination and affinity with the soldiers who fought it. In other words, disillusionment is manifest all throughout the texts, but war remains the arena in which men test their manhood. So much so, that all the anti-war poets examined here, without exception, construct themselves as determined, even heroic soldiers.

This thesis has also taken account of the new wave of prose fiction that was published in the late 1980s and early 1990s: among them, Boyd's *The New Confessions* (1987), Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991, 1993 and 1995) and Faulk's *Birdsong* (1993)*.* While these narratives were written by people who had not been at the front, they also reflect the Ghost myth and reinforce its recurrent themes and images. In this sense, I would argue that these works transmit a 'truth' about the Great War that conveys much more about the author and the readership than about the war itself.

Having assessed how the Ghost myth was essentially communicated in literature, I have also dealt with those critics who did not agree on how Ghost myth literature depicted the meaning of war. Jerrold's "The Lie about the War" (1930) and Falls' *War Books* (1930) were the main actors in the war-books controversy. Falls and Jerrold questioned who was in fact best qualified to recapture the experience of the Great War and attempted to show that this flood of anti-war books had falsified its true image. They agreed that the war had been tragic but argued that it had also brought in positive political results, while even its consequences for men were by no means all negative. They were appalled at the continuous denunciation of the high command's decisions and policies and defended against the idea of a weak and anti-heroic British nation. I have argued that they represented a new phenomenon; their arguments were more about looking forward than looking back and they made visible a tension that was already present in most war books but had not been acknowledged.

Then I have discussed the scholarly publications of the 1960s-1970s, among them Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight* (1965) and Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), which have taken their place next to the poems, memoirs and novels as necessary introductory texts on the Great War. Although Fussell's work surpassed that of Bergonzi, in that it has remained the single most important reading of the Great War and it has set the agenda for most of the criticism that followed it, they both aimed at giving academic recognition to the Ghost myth literary canon and tended to ignore the variety of literary responses ignited by the war. Moreover, Fussell's emphasis on irony as a controlling literary motif has been instrumental in the consolidation of the myth and remained an unavoidable point of reference throughout this thesis. Not only have I argued that the idea of war as an ironic confrontation between the Victorian hero and the reality of war does not apply to the experience of all the men at the front, I have claimed that many soldier writers, even some of the poets under study, fell back on what they knew well and emphasised the traditional version of war as an occasion of heroism. Moreover, I have also questioned Fussell's "homoerotic" approach to male bonding and the Ghost myth belief that the relationships forged at war had challenged the primacy of heterosexuality, but this is a theme to which I will turn later in the conclusions.

I have concluded chapter three by tracing the various approaches through which a group of scholars (Rutherford, Bracco, Jay Winter, Dawson, Onions and Bond) have questioned the Ghost myth canon. They have brought to the fore a series of assumptions that tend to recover the hero myth as part of the Great War agenda: a determination to take full account of the war experience and reinvestigate heroic masculinity, an emphasis on the continuities rather than the discontinuities between the pre-war and post-war worlds, the problem of using literature as the basis for historical understanding, the idea that the trope of the soldier-hero still functions as a positive image to set against the fragmenting and undermining effects of the Great War, and the theme of bereavement and mourning in the assessment of the past. Like Falls and Jerrold in the 30s, their works have stressed the need to re-examine the past and to return to the dominant myths in new ways if research on the Great War is to continue.

Contrary to the formulations of the two dominant myths, chapter three has argued that the heroic and the anti-heroic have been interwoven in the literature and literary criticism of the Great War, coexisting in dialectical tension in most of the texts examined here. Because of the changes in the representation of war introduced by this conflict, my argument has been that the quest for meaning has not yet produced final answers; on the contrary, it has betrayed the anxieties that lie at the heart of most Great War literature. In fact, it is the survival or renewal of heroic values which is at the heart of most of the texts studied here as they all challenge the relevance of handed-down assumptions and induce the reader to re-examine dominant myths.

Chapter IV. I have set out to determine that the war poets' narratives allow for the possibility of reconciling and thereby somehow overcoming the tensions between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. Central to the chapter has been the assumption that neither heroic nor anti-heroic narratives have been able to construct soldiers after their own image and that male bonding has been the site in which the confrontation between these two narratives becomes visible. Based on the connection between comradeship and war heroism as the core of the war experience, the chapter has explored how male relational patterns have shaped, intensified and transmitted cultural meanings and how the war poets used their experience at the front to define themselves as men in relation to other men.

The different attitudes and assumptions about the other – the comrade, the friend, the lover, the coward and the enemy – have informed an understanding of heroic masculinity that involves both strength and gentleness. This has transcended the binary system and strengthened the argument that both Victorian hero myth and Ghost myth masculinities have been mediated in the texts. The war poets had brought to the Great War an understanding of masculine heroism based on courage and aggression but also on the expression of affection towards other men that they had forged at the public school. These two aspects not only co-exist and nourish each other in the texts, but helped soldiers in their attempts to give meaning to their experience. I have concluded that the expression of emotion was not an end in itself. In the context of war – and with the support of other men experiencing similar feelings – it was a means to an end. It allowed for both the formation of non-normative bonds and a possible redefinition of the masculine hero as a more comprehensive, broadening construction of struggling desires and anxieties.

Most of the texts examined here contain anecdotes revealing affection between soldiers that went beyond the bounds of comradeship. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, men experienced relationships that were more emotional and complex than simple camaraderie. In order to avoid misunderstandings from the outset, I have drawn a careful outline of the terminology used to describe the various shadings of male bonding at the front – comradeship, friendship and homoeroticism – and have particularly focused on the tension between comradeship and friendship as the embodiment of the tension between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth. Such categorisation has contributed to an understanding of the complexities involved in the concept and prevented the adoption of an excessively unguarded approach. It has also been advantageous from the perspective of the narratives themselves, as they have often developed strategies for revealing and emphasising the overlapping, contesting and complementary character of such categories.

The history of male bonding has not been incidental to the dynamics I have described here; on the contrary, what made the tension surrounding male bonding during the Great War so vivid was precisely the fact that male relationships were interwoven into many rich traditions in the preceding

centuries. Thus, before analysing the different relational patterns, I have briefly traced the historical development of male bonding throughout its most characteristic instances. My aim has been to assess how attitudes and meanings around the other were constructed and reconstructed from ancient time to the late-nineteenth century: from the classical and medieval discourses of friendship, through the homosociality of the British colonies, to the cult of romantic friendship at the public school and the homoeroticism of Whitman, Hopkins, Housman and the Uranians. I have paid particular attention to the public-school homoerotic experiences of Graves and Brenan as they distanced themselves from authorised male bonds and opposed public-school oppressiveness. This review of male relationships throughout history has shown the importance of friendship in the construction of heroic masculinity; heroism is not only exhibited before male friends but formed through them, through loyalty in the face of adversity. The close connection between male friendship and heroism has also an impact on the rigid distinction between what was considered masculine and what was considered effeminate among Great War soldiers and, at the same time, on the ambiguity generated around the expression of tender feelings and fondness between men. In general, therefore, I have suggested that the representation of male bonding at the front, both in its public (comradeship) and private (friendship and homoeroticism) spheres has been closely influenced and affected by the dialectic between homoeroticism, homosociality and homophobia that characterised classical, medieval and Victorian discourses of friendship.

Within the hero-hero relationship, I have analysed the expressions of comradeship, friendship and homoeroticism in the texts. I have begun by assessing the continuing presence of the Victorian hero myth in the representation of comradeship. In order to describe the idea of "the happy battalion," I have quoted examples from Chapman, Carrington, Williamson, Graves, Blunden, Read and Owen's narratives. The most significant finding to emerge from the texts has been that war continued to be understood through the conventions and institutional affinities of male camaraderie. In fact institutional friendship was used to reinforce military discipline in its full force and vigour. The insistence on the cult of blind obedience, pride in the regiment, remembrance of the fallen and depersonalisation of the soldier have revealed that even texts characteristic of the Ghost myth continued to encourage the

glorification of the traditional discourse of war. Evidence from the texts has also suggested that traditional heroism became fused in an especially powerful configuration with representations of comradeship. Heroic deeds became myths of comradeship itself, providing a cultural focus around which comrades could develop group identification.

However, the idea that the love between the brothers in arms could encourage killing and justify death acquired a different meaning when faced with the tragedy that the reality of modern war entailed. The exploration of comradeship as group dependency had to be abandoned for a more abstract ideal; comradeship no longer responded to the group but to a sense of duty, stoicism and endurance. The endorsement of this abstract ideal, however, was often crystallised by loss and violence and could not prevent feelings of worthlessness and isolation among soldiers. The figure of the alienated soldier, whose individual experience and thoughts ran parallel to those of the group, has been offered as an emblem of the rupture with organised forms of male bonding in the texts. The hero could no longer be individualised, not even by referring to his group; he could only be valued as a symbol rather than as an individual. Labels such as the "Unknown Warrior," "Tommy Atkins," "file friend" and "corpselessness" have reflected a need to recover individuality, to live what was theirs, to have a rest from the collective present that had led them to anonymity.

Despite this Ghost myth imagery, my analysis of the texts has suggested more hopeful interpretations: the continuity of the individual despite the circumstances, the will to survive and a claim for more profound and intimate bonds that modern warfare, strict male roles and institutionalised comradeship seemed unwilling to provide.

While comradeship was a casualty of the declining Victorian hero myth, friendship was instead regarded as a desirable relationship. Yet, in the Ghost myth view, the pressure on friendship increased during the Great War, to the point that, not being able to overcome the alienation of modern warfare, it was doomed to bereavement and extinction. Contrary to Ghost myth interpretations, particularly to Cole's representation of "the alienated soldier as bereaved friend" (181), the texts have shown that men were indeed able to establish close male

relationships at the front and recover an ideal of common humanity that seemed to have been lost. Indeed, as larger group bonds failed, there developed more intimate friendships that, based either on common artistic and personal interests or sympathy, had no parallel in civilian life, precisely because they grew up against life and death. In effect, the analysis of autobiographical and semi-fictional friendships in the texts – Owen-Sassoon, Graves-Sassoon, Aldington's narrator-Winterbourne and Manning's Bourne-Martlow-Shem – has testified to a renewed assessment of male friendship as an ever-present feature of war, marking a combined sense of escape from the rigorous control of institutions and a triumph of life over death.

Although there sometimes existed cases of bereavement and the impossibility of establishing meaningful bonds – I have referred to the suffering around the deaths of David Thomas and Wilfred Owen and to the loneliness of Rosenberg and Edward Thomas – this thesis has shown that genuine affection was indeed possible and that emotional expressiveness was not incompatible with war survival. Soldiers were capable of disclosing emotions and getting a personal sense of worth from the friend even when they were being relentlessly threatened by death and destruction. The possibility of establishing close male friendships has pointed at patterns of disjunction that had as much to do with a struggle around emotional expression as with a redefinition of male roles based on a deepening of the sense of self. In this sense, friendship has been a metaphor for these processes and for the need of soldiers to transcend both Victorian and Ghost myth masculinities.

This thesis has also examined desire as an inspiration to the writings of the homosexual war poets: Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Gurney and Manning. Since I have focused both on friendship and homoeroticism in as much as they have paved the way for a redefinition of the masculine heroic ideal, the Ghost myth's approach to homoerotic relationships has been too selective and limited to my study. While some of the texts examined here have a strong homosexual element, not all the canonical war poets expressed an unembarrassed sexual attachment to their men. Fussell's sole focus on the homoerotic/homosexual aspects of comradeship has disregarded the significance of other nuances of feelings. Life in the trenches changed the forms of male attachment: Death, solitude, tediousness, fear and a sense of alienation led to a new level of

intimacy and emotional intensity under which the carefully constructed categories seem to have been jumbled and transgressed. Relegating male intimacy to the realm of homosexuality would have offered little challenge to the dominant myths. Unlike Fussell's interpretation, this thesis has claimed that the homoerotic relationships forged in the trenches not only questioned, implicitly or directly, the primacy of heterosexual desire but challenged stereotyped male behaviour. In other words, the war poets' need to focus their emotions on their comrades was an attempt to move beyond normative gender roles and to encourage alternative male behaviours.

Due to the widespread homophobia existing at the front, an arena in which the unusual closeness of men was allowed but kept under control, the writings and lives of the homosexual poets were edited to disguise this fact. Therefore "homoeroticism" – I have borrowed the use of the term from Fussell to refer to "subliminated" homosexual relationships – has emerged as a grey area and an unstable category in the texts. Precisely because of its concealed nature, my analysis has not focused on explicit sexual themes but on allusions and instances in which military life did prompt homoerotic closeness between men: romantic friendships and infatuations, sentimentalised hero-worship and the writing of homoerotic pastorals and elegies. I have thus examined Sassoon's relationships with Dick Tiltwood, David Cromlech, Wilfred Owen and Dr. Rivers, Owen's artistic and sexual worship of Sassoon, Graves' "pseudo-homosexuality," Gurney's idyllic friendship with Frederic William Harvey and Manning's homoerotisation of the private space as opposed to its institutionalisation. I have also analysed the expression of homoerotic desire in the pastoral and the elegiac text. Particular attention has been given to Graves, Blunden and Sassoon's bathing scenes, which address a threshold moment in which both desire and war anxieties are explored. The expression of homoerotic loss has taken a similar course within the elegiac tradition. The analysis of Owen's "Greater Love" and Sassoon's "The Last Meeting" has suggested the struggle embodied in the contemplation of the dead male body as a figure of desire and a symbol of masculine vulnerability and protest.

A striking feature of the examples examined here has been that homoeroticism emerges as a subverting agent, suggesting the possibility of removing the association traditionally maintained between heroism and normative masculinity.

Rather than being feminised, the homosexual war poets have been identified as non-hegemonic men. Moreover, they found friendship to be much more easily intimate and highlighted the contradictions implicit in its construction: the Victorian hero myth imperatives to define heroic masculinity in opposition to femininity and homosexuality and the actual need to incorporate certain non-normative aspects into the soldier's experience.

Within the hero-other relationship, I have studied the representation of the coward and the German enemy. Since the standards by which the other was judged were for the most part measured against a masculine ideal, I have argued that the construction of the other has conditioned and distinguished the construction of the self. In other words, the factors that went into the making of the other were identical to those that informed the creation of the hero. The idea of the other as the countertype to the normative manly ideal has been presented as characteristic of the Victorian hero myth. The countertype was an outsider that inspired distrust, fear, rejection and resentment and it was always stereotyped in much the same manner as it faced the accepted norm. Such outsider could never be a hero, as heroism was an essential part of normative masculinities. The idea of the other as providing an exact mirror of the anxieties and fears of the soldier has been portrayed as distinctive of the Ghost myth. It is the way in which the other was like the soldier-ghost, like the physically and mentally wounded soldier, like the veteran as the victim that haunted Ghost myth narratives.

By concentrating on the representation of the other in the texts, I have been able to explore how the self-other distinction induced by Victorian standards became blurred and blended together as the war poets started to move away from the rigidly enclosed binary system. Evidence from the texts has shown that the feminisation and emasculation of the figure of the coward, the deserter and the malingerer may have been attributed not only to the need to distinguish them from proper male behaviour but to the fact that they were the expression of male restrained impulses, as desperation was the driving force in most of these cases. Moreover, certain cases of desertion, for instance that of Herbert's Harry Penrose, which were essentially related to cowardice at the time, were in fact the result of severe war trauma. These cases brought the question of "shell-

shock" to the fore, not as physical or mental injury but as the indicator of a new kind of war and hero.

As to the representation of the enemy, in order for the British to stir up support for the war and encourage soldiers to kill and be killed more easily, the German was initially portrayed as the rapacious beast, the monstrous foe, the Hun, the Boche. Some of these allusions have been traced in the texts, particularly in the images men drew of the enemy before enlisting; yet, once the war experience was confronted the true nature of the German enemy became disputed territory. For some men, mechanised warfare 'invisibilised' the enemy, for others, it humanised him. Others like Sorley, Williamson Gurney and Blunden, came in contact with him. Read actually befriended a German prisoner at the front. This allowed them to realise that the real enemy was not the German but traditional assumptions about male roles, which were so widely shared that they had ceased to appear as assumptions.

Like the figures of the hero or the ghost, I have suggested that the idea of the other necessarily restricted individuality, as the countertype was always classified not individually but as part of a group. Othering meant giving each man all the traits of the group to which he was said to belong. In the context of the Great War, the figure of the other demonstrated the limited extent to which it could coexist with the autonomy of the individual. As men allowed themselves some room for thoughts and feelings so as to appropriate the image of the other, they could understand, humanise and even include the other within the heroic self. This not only narrowed the gap between the hero and the ghost but paved the way for a progressive abandonment of normative gender roles and for the adoption of more inclusive masculine behaviour. Moving away from the manly ideal as the norm resulted in an awareness of the individual and of the moments that were produced in the articulation of difference. Those in-between spaces became the site for the elaboration of strategies of selfhood that initiated new signs of heroic identity.

Since the different male relationships I have examined in this thesis have elements of both the Victorian hero and the Ghost myth, the last part of this chapter has traced a possible alternative approach to the two. I have explored the articulation of the representation of the soldier as the uneasy resolution of

the tension between the hero and the ghost, between, on the one hand, an attachment to institutionalised male bonding, strict militarism and the ideals of courage and sacrifice and, on the other, the opposition to war and normative institutions and the need to abandon emotional restraint. The elaboration of the heroic has been presented as a process of transition and becoming between patriotism and protest, character and emotional expression, comradeship and friendship, selfhood and otherness. I have quoted examples from Plowman, Gurney, Sassoon, Lewis, Brenan, Owen, Carrington, Aldington and Manning not only to illustrate this process of continuing identification with, as well as distancing from, the normative myths but to prove that the war poets were divided men, oscillating between "manliness" – the Victorian masculine ideal – and "masculinity" –the new significance that manhood acquires after the Great War.

All the texts examined here have pointed in the same direction; this liminal oscillation has progressed towards resolution through the suggestion of certain heroic alternatives based on breaking the bonds that confined men and rebuilding those that united them. Although, as suggested in this chapter, the appearance of self-reflective and emotional traits was a post-Second World War phenomenon, the new reality of modern warfare allowed the war poets not only to begin to critically examine themselves as men but to make themselves vulnerable and acknowledge their need for one another. This produced embattled positions on the nature of masculine selfhood, fracturing masculinity as a norm and redefining it as a more complex and broader construction whose implications will be discussed in the General Conclusions section.

General Conclusions

The first significant finding to emerge from my thesis has been that although the figure of the hero was irreversibly fragmented after the Great War, the ghost did not emerge triumphant. Even if the Ghost myth was shown to have played a significant role in the decline of the traditional values that manliness and society as a whole had required, it could not be considered as a unified, unproblematic whole. The Victorian hero myth continued to be reproduced in the texts in an attempt to restore the figure of the traditional hero to its pre-war glory. This suggests a misjudgement by Ghost myth writers and literary critics who denied

the continuing centrality of the hero myth and its versions of masculinity beyond the First World War. While the different interpretations of the heroic that have been traced in the texts may be changeable and sometimes contradictory, the existence of a culturally normative ideal of male behaviour has undoubtedly continued to play a major role.

This has allowed for some forms of masculinity to be installed as more appropriate and identifiable than others, exerting a pressure of conformity upon potential alternative narratives or rendering unspoken and invisible that about which these alternatives would speak. The figure of the soldier-hero may be understood as a hegemonic form of representation in this sense, even in anti-war texts. It had permeated society and its institutions, reflected its needs and hopes and become central to the patterns of behaviour that informed all aspects of the war poets' lives and writings. In fact, in varying degrees these men went to war wishing to become the heroes they had imagined themselves to be. Yet, being heroes at a time when the desired manly qualities associated with the Victorian hero myth were obviously in contradiction with the reality of war, appeared to be an impossibility. Their narratives, then, have been seen to express a desire for the reassertion of the Victorian hero to offset the destruction not only of life, but of meaning, values and beliefs.

It is not surprising, then, that the texts examined here have mirrored what may be regarded as "the masculine curse" (Lee 152), that is to say the anxiety resulting from the vanishing of the signposts and the blurring of the boundaries of the traditional masculine ideal and their substitution by values defined loosely as a personal choice. The insistence on attaching the connotations of traditional heroism to the war poets' narratives attempted to preserve the continuity with the older myth but inevitably deflected it in a new direction.

The second general finding, thus, has been that this perseverance in the representation of the Great War soldier as a Victorian hero and the implicit interrelation between this figure and the emerging ghost have complicated the search for the real Great War soldier in the war poets' writings. As a result of the complexity of the representations under study, I have concluded that there are in a sense two quite different Great War soldiers in the texts, yet separating them has not been possible to any degree of certainty. One reason for this is the

war poets' own involvement in the process of Ghost myth-making and their own involvement in the form of the myth itself. This intersected in equally complex ways with their own self-representation so that the ambivalence and lack of stability that characterised the Ghost myth was reproduced in their own accounts of themselves.

The result was the emergence of a disjointed, fragmented and self-contradictory hero-ghost that could not live up to the hegemonic ideal of masculinity to which he was supposed to aspire. Seen in such contrasting terms, the soldier emerged as a complex and multifaceted figure, and the war poets' narratives as modes for imagining alternative forms of masculinity. In that sense, I have concluded that there was something transgressive about this rebellion against institutions and accepted norms that may have offered the fantasy of liberation. This freer floating of masculinity, combined with more conventional associations of the soldier-hero, may have achieved an integration of normative and non-normative traits that has been elusive to most post-war masculinities. Taken together, these findings have suggested that the resultant friction in the shaping of heroic masculinity did not merely mean a distance from institutions but an alternative mode of being a man.

Moreover, it has also been possible to conclude that the soldier's fractured identity was a symptom of a wider crisis. The anxieties that threatened the stability of the Victorian hero were the product of social encounters as well as fears of conflict within the self, and the responses to war were shaped by the war poets' need to maintain composure in the public as well as in the private spheres. Where the idealised hero was the Victorian symbol of perfect manhood, the telling and retelling of the soldiers' stories in conflicting and contradictory versions turned the war poets' texts into sites of conflict between alternative narratives of heroic masculinity.

To recognise that the representation of heroic masculinity was intrinsically intertwined with male bonding in its different shadings has provided an opening premise for my study of the texts as sites of contradiction. In fact, the awareness of the tension between comradeship and friendship as the embodiment of the conflict between the two dominant myths has contributed to my growing awareness that comradeship limited men while friendship opened

them up to constructive change. I have suggested that the war poets valued and celebrated emotional intimacy as a necessary aspect of male relationships, entailing a vision of heroic masculinity that recuperated strength and courage without sacrificing private, authentic feelings.

My third finding has been, then, the incipient suggestion of an alternative, and superior, heroic self in the texts, characterised by the development of more compassionate and emotionally intimate relationships among men and an enhanced capacity for self-reflection. This new masculinity, which I have called the compassionate hero, was not a new heroic ideal but rather the embodiment of the strong man with a good heart, a modern, renewed knight that could atone for both hero and ghost and pursue transcendental good. I have argued that, protected by the benevolent fabric of humanity, the figure of the compassionate soldier was allowed to display non-normative traits like self-reflection and emotional self-expression and a deep reliance on friendship and brotherly love that challenged the norm and paved the way for less aggressive and more flexible masculinities.

However, as said before, the traditional ideal of manhood has not disappeared, on the contrary, it managed to survive the Second World War and the Holocaust (Paris, *Warrior Nation...* 258) and "it confronts us [today] from all sides in advertisements, film and literature: clean-cut and fit" (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 181). Yet, it was seriously eroded during World War One and, interestingly, that change came not from the outside but from those who had been educated on such a manly ideal. The complex and conflicting nature of masculine heroism has in fact lain at the centre of the war poets' struggle for recognition. Their value for this thesis, thus, has been that they were figures torn by their conflicting selves, yet they constantly strove to take full account of both their elusive masculine integrity and the possibility, the value of heroism in the Great War.

Suggestions for Further Work

Together with male bonding, I have been interested in two other aspects that clearly invoke the contest between the Victorian hero myth and the Ghost myth: the representational (the dispute hero-ghost translated into a textual crisis) and the psychological (how the dispute hero-ghost relates to the management of

fear and war trauma). Since carrying out an in-depth analysis of both would have gone far beyond the scope of this thesis, they have been suggested as areas for further research.

Like the analysis of male relationships, these two aspects will help me explore gender and identity and achieve a thorough and complete assessment of the hero in the literature of the Great War. I will explore both the representation of the soldier and the soldier's self-representation, not only because the figure of the soldier is intimately connected to the issues in question but because he (I will still concentrate on the male soldier) has been crucial as a point of origin of both war myths.

Implicit in my discussion of the representational realm is the notion that war shattered every boundary imaginable and that this blurring of boundaries bled into the text. The text becomes a site of struggle, being the soldier-hero a culturally shared and recognisable form upon which the soldier-writer has to organise his experience in narrative. There is, therefore, a definite need for greater understanding of the place of the two dominant myths in the writing of experience as the tension between myth and the self-attestation to the strength of the soldier's desire to tell 'his truth,' rather than 'the truth' about the Great War. I will thus approach the text as a kind of laboratory through which the conflicting and ambivalent urges caused by the traumatic experience of the Great War strive to find expression within the mandates of hegemonic masculinity.

Even if the narratives examined here account for the interaction between myth and the self, the tension is more visible in some writers than in others; particularly in the case of those who, before the war, had been associated with the literary avant-garde – for example Aldington, Lewis and Madox Ford – but felt the need to abandon modernist techniques and use more conventional forms when confronted with the Great War. When Quentin Bell discusses Bloomsbury's aesthetic response to the Great War he claims that "when an author has an argument which he wants to be generally understood he is likely to look for a language more generally accessible than that of *Finnegans Wake*" (240). In search for a textual reading of this before-and-after narrative gap, I will examine the process of writing as remembering and the presence of the writer as witness.

My initial contention is that no event has consequences beyond itself unless it is remembered and that it is the ideas around that which is remembered that shape actions and provide frames of interpretation.

I will look at what writing as remembering might entail in terms of the choice of literary forms and how it might bring into question the self in relation to the dominant myths. In other words, I will explore whether the war poets were able to escape dominant conventions when remembering war or if, in their attempt to represent it, they were complicit in the conventions they said they rejected. Bearing in mind that memory speaks through the texts, sometimes against the writer's will, I will analyse in what ways the reworking of the past shaped heroic masculine identity and to what extent the war poets' identity was determined by what of the war experience they incorporated into the text.

Moreover, in light of the advancements in trauma theory (Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1995) and considering that writing about the Great War implied the acknowledgement of loss, I will examine how the traumatic memory of war was rethought and worked over by the text. That way, the impact of war on the text will be read as a record that has to be made with the aid of both writer-witness and reader-listener. Similarly, the process of remembering will be studied as a communal endeavour that will allow for writer and reader to pose new questions about the experience or ask old questions from new perspectives. Moreover, centring on what Felman and Laub call "testimony" as a literary response to the ongoing consequences of war trauma, I will assess how the cultural and personal crisis produced by war was translated into the text and how the text became a witness to a crisis that could not always be articulated in words. The understanding of the text as testimony grants authority to the writer-witness over the traumatic experience of war, that is to say, over what he knows and what he does not know, or cannot know, as myths interfere with the process of remembering.

Closely related to the representational, the other area of research will be the psychological. The way in which the trauma of war was forgotten and remembered made the difference between those traumatised by war from those who survived it intact. Forgetting was obviously essential to proper remembering. Most of those who were able to turn war into ideas and write

about it were able to cope with war. Yet, those who were unable to forget war were haunted by it. The term shell-shock was coined during the Great War to refer to war trauma. It was believed at the time that the condition resulted from trauma caused by shock waves from shells. Yet the history of combat stress reactions and the different labels assigned to them – soldier's heart, battle fatigue, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Gulf War syndrome, among others – have shown that they refer to psychological disorders resulting from the stress of battle.[300] They have in fact transcended their particular time and place to frame the perceptions, judgements and attitudes of those who suffered war. Showalter argues that shell-shock was nothing less than "the body language of masculine complaint, a disguised male protest not only against the war but against the concept of 'manliness'" (172). In this sense, the shell-shocked soldier of the Great War opens dominant norms of manly behaviour to scrutiny and becomes "a term of mediation" (Winter, "Shell-Shock..." 7) between the figures of the ghost and the hero.

The fact that one-third of the army discharges during the war was attributed to some kind of nervous disorder – the majority of the victims being men who had been awarded medals for bravery – has sparked my interest in the relationship between cowardice in battle, shell-shock and heroic masculinity. Since giving psychological treatment to the great numbers of veterans who suffered from war induced mental illness would have implied accepting that the traditional moral values and physical standards upheld by the Victorian hero myth were being threatened, most of these men were accused of being cowards, deserters or malingerers. Ghost myth narratives, however, started to acknowledge the psychological effects of modern warfare and highlighted emotional breakdown and mental illness, placing war trauma as a recurrent literary theme. From West's shell-shocked Chris Baldry in *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), to the restless Harold Krebs in Hemingway's "Soldiers' Home" (1925), to Faulkner's traumatised and injured Donald Mahon in *Soldier's Pay* (1926) to the paralysed

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[300]   In recent years, psychiatry has expressed a growing interest in the study of "post-traumatic stress disorder" – PTSD – which essentially results from the unavoidable imposition on the mind of horrific events that the mind cannot control. As Young explains, the syndrome is "based on the idea that intensely frightening or disturbing experiences could produce memories that are concealed in automatic behaviours, repetitive acts [hallucinations, flashbacks and other intrusive phenomena] over which the affected person exercise[s] no conscious control" (4).

Clifford Chatterley in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), shell-shock became a 'literary' disease and the traumatised soldier the most symbolic visual reminder of the Great War.[301]

Bearing this in mind, I will study how the tension between the different attitudes towards the shell-shocked soldier reflected some important developments and changes in the ideas regarding heroic masculinity. Firstly, although shell-shock had been traditionally associated with the ability or inability to control the persisting fear generated by war, what Roper calls "the management of fear" (Roper, "Between Manliness..." 352), the changing attitudes towards the origin and cure of this mental illness tended to shift the focus in the understanding of shell-shock from cowardice to war trauma. I will explore the implications that this shift had on the ongoing tension between heroic and anti-heroic narratives. Secondly, since writers like Herbert, Sassoon, Owen and Graves did not seem to eschew the emotional exploration of trauma or the recognition that in the circumstances of war men might surrender to fear, I will explore to what extent they were expressing their own restrained impulses and feelings or dismantling traditional masculinity in order to implement more dynamic, multidimensional frameworks for understanding men's roles. And thirdly, I will argue for the necessity to supplement the war poets' argument with other narratives to determine whether the impact of shell-shock was only a metaphor restricted to some narratives of war – those of the élite represented by Owen, Sassoon, Graves and Gurney, among others – or if it could be extended to a wider range of texts.

Finally, there is a third aspect I would like to explore which will mean expanding the corpus of analysis to the representation of British heroic masculinity during the Second World War. My interest will centre on how the figure of the compassionate soldier was deployed and redefined in the Second World War and what parallels and common threads, as well as discontinuities, may be found in the articulation of heroic masculinities in both wars. Initially, the most suitable

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[301]   The term shell-shock has been previously mentioned in this thesis when analysing the idea of the ghost as haunting memory for those who were suffering from nervous disorders after the war, mainly Sassoon, Graves and Owen (see pages 119-120) and when studying the cases of desertion, malingering and cowardice in Section IV.2.1, particularly the case of Harry Penrose, the officer shot for cowardice in Herbert's novel (see pages 254-56).

texts for this kind of approach would be those written by men who fought in the war, for instance Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy (*Men at Arms,* 1952; *Officers and Gentlemen*, 1955 and *Unconditional Surrender*, 1961), Rupert Croft-Cooke's *The Licentious Soldiery* (1971), Keith Douglas' Alamain to Zem Zem (1946), Jocelyn Brooke's Orchid trilogy (*The Military Orchid*, 1948; *A Mine of Serpents*, 1949 and The *Goose Cathedral,* 1950), Charles Whiting's *Siegfried: The Nazis' Last Stand* (1982), Vernon Scannell's *The Tiger and the Rose* (1983), and James Lansdale Hodson's *Before Daybreak* (1941), among others.

Taking as my point of departure Rose's notion of the "temperate hero" and Rawlinson's reference to the deeds of "The Few,"[302] I would like to assess whether the figure of the compassionate soldier was assimilated into the Second World War heroic ideal. According to Rose, the hero of the Second World War was a "tempered" man constructed in opposition to the Great War ghost and the 'hyper-masculine' Nazi. In her view, "in Second World War Britain [...] hegemonic masculinity was composed of seemingly incompatible characteristics;" it comprehended "those of respectable and emotionally restrained manhood [what she calls "tempered masculinity"] with those of the military soldier hero" (192). What is more, she argues that "military and heroic masculinity allowed for the assimilation to masculinity of what, in other contexts and articulations, might be considered soft, feminine traits" (192). Yet, Rawlinson suggests that, against the idea that heroism had died on the Western Front, traditional narratives of men at war appeared once again in World War Two but deflected in a new direction: While most Second World War battles eluded narration, "particular campaigns – for instance, the Battle of Britain – achieved salience as turning points or 'decisive battles' [...]" (Rawlinson 23). Within the Battle of Britain, the image of RAF fighters and bomber pilots was promoted by journalism as that of a group of adventure-loving British boys fighting for God, Queen and country: "In the news media's daily tabulation of RAF and Luftwaffe losses in that most elite and duellistic phase of hostilities, the

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[302]   The name stems from a specific line in Churchill's wartime speech to Parliament on 20 August 1940, "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," referring to the efforts of the Royal Air Force pilots against the German Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain.

deeds of highly individuated aces acquired their most pressing significance as numerical aggregates (Rawlinson 23).

At first sight it would seem that the "unstable mix" (193) proposed by Rose may be compared to the more alternative figure of the compassionate hero that emerges from the trenches of the Western Front. Like the compassionate hero, the temperate hero contains both heroic and anti-heroic elements and seems to open up the concept of male heroism into multidimensionality. However, Rawlinson's reference to the heroic resistance of "The Few" against the German suggests that the traditional ideal of manhood did not vanish, even if it was challenged more successfully than ever before by the two World Wars. Attaching the connotations of chivalry to the pilot-heroes preserved the continuity with the older traditions. In any case, further research is needed to see if the findings in this thesis may contribute to a better understanding of Second World War masculinities.

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