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Propaganda and Poetry during the Great War

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

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Masters of Art in History

by

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Sassoon, Wellington House

ABSTRACT

Propaganda and Poetry during the Great War

by

Norma Ruth Compton Leadingham

During the Great War, poetry played a more significant role in the war effort than articles and pamphlets. A campaign of extraordinary language filled with abstract and spiritualized words and phrases concealed the realities of the War. Archaic language and lofty phrases hid the horrible truth of modern mechanical warfare. The majority and most recognized and admired poets, including those who served on the front and knew firsthand the horrors of trench warfare, not only supported the war effort, but also encouraged its continuation. For the majority of the poets, the rejection of the war was a postwar phenomenon. From the trenches, leading Great War poets; Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Sitwell, and others, learned that the War was neither Agincourt, nor the playing fields of ancient public schools, nor the supreme test of valor but, instead, the modern industrial world in miniature, surely, the modern world at its most horrifying.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1914, most European intellectuals believed the economic inter-dependency that existed between the great powers of Europe would either deter the outbreak of war or quickly end it.¹ Communication by railway, telegraph, and stamped postage required international cooperation to support the new technologies and bureaucracies of travel and communications.² European economic production and prosperity as well as the continued flow of established international banking and credit depended on the inter-continental network of cooperation and exchange that had developed between them during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³ “It was not that ‘war’ was entirely unexpected during June and July of 1914. But the irony was that trouble was expected in Ulster rather than in Flanders. It was expected to be domestic and embarrassing rather than savage and incomprehensible.”⁴

At the British Cabinet meeting July 24, 1914, a map of Ireland was spread out on the big table because the members of the cabinet believed “the fate of nations appeared to hang upon parish boundaries in the counties of Fermanagh

¹ John Keegan, “The First World War,” (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc. 2001), 10-18.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Paul Fussell, “The Great War and Modern Memory,” (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 24.

and Tyrone.”⁵ When ashen-face Sir Edward Grey⁶ joined the meeting, he held “in his hand the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia [sic]: *coup de theatre*.”⁷

The Austrian ultimatum presented to Serbia on July 23 was the Habsburg monarchy’s response to the June 28 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife. The ultimatum seemed only to order an investigation into the assassination. However, unknown to Serbia was the promise of support Austria had from Germany for retaliation. ⁸ The ultimatum alleged that the assassination plot had originated in Belgrade; that Serbian frontier authority had not only helped them across the border, but officials had also provided the assassins with weapons. Serbia was to denounce all separatist activities and ban publications and organizations hostile to Austria-Hungary. It was also to cooperate with Habsburg officials in conducting a judicial inquiry and in suppressing subversive activities. (Serbia had known about the separatist activities but had looked the other way.)⁹ Just under the stipulated forty-eight hour deadline, Serbia delivered its reply to Austria. But, on July 25, prior to receiving the reply, Franz Josef ordered mobilization against Serbia, which was to begin on July 28.¹⁰ Nearly every demand was accepted. Serbia agreed to Austrian “involvement in a judicial inquiry only if that inquiry was subject to Serbia’s constitution and to

⁵ Ibid., 25; from John Terraine’s *Impacts of War, 1914 and 1918* (1970), 40.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hew Strachan, “The First World War,” (New York, New York: The Penguin Group, 2004), 13.

⁹ David Stevenson, *CATAclysm, The First World War as Political Tragedy*, (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2005), 10.

¹⁰ Strachan, “The First World War,” 20.

international law.”¹¹ Since the Habsburg monarchy had purposely issued the ultimatum to start a showdown, it quickly seized on the two stipulations as a pretext to break off relations immediately and promptly declared war on July 28.

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There were two powerfully ‘liberal forces’ coinciding in England at the beginning of the Great War. Although the steadfast “belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature”¹³ was still strong, the “appeal of popular education and self-improvement was at its peak, and such education was still conceived largely in humanistic terms.”¹⁴ Believing that the study of literature at Workman’s Institutes and programs like the National Home Reading Union; (volumes of the World’s Classics and Everyman’s Library were the texts,)¹⁵ “would actively assist those of modest origins to rise in the class system,”¹⁶ “The intersection of these two forces, the one ‘aristocratic,’ and the other ‘democratic,’ established an atmosphere of public respect for literature unique in modern time.”¹⁷ Unimaginable to us in today’s world, it was this ‘respect for literature’ that made it not only possible for soldiers of all ranks “to be literate but vigorously literary.”¹⁸ It was the “literary earnestness of the readers of 1914-

¹¹ Stevenson, “CATAclysm,” 9; from M. B. Petrovich’s “A History of Modern Serbia, 1804-1918 (New York and London, 1976), Vol. 2, 613-18.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Fussell, “The Great War,” 157; from Edmund Blunden, “Undertones of War,” (London: R. Cobden-Sanderson, 1928; 1956), 89-90.

¹⁴ Fussell, “The Great War,” 157.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

18”¹⁹ that acted as a stimulus for writers such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.²⁰ “They could be assured of serious readers, like Private John Ball, who at one point takes from his haversack his India Paper edition of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s *Oxford Book of English Verse* and regales himself with bits of William Dunbar’s ‘*Timor Mortis Conturbat Me.*’”²¹ When Lieutenant Edmund Blunden’s “trifling collection of verses” receives a favorable review in the *Times Literary Supplement* “Blunden’s colonel, who has of course read the review in the trenches, removes him from line duty and gives him a nicer job back at battalion headquarters.”²² Regardless of the social class or rank, there were very few who did not hold the belief “that the greatest of modern literatures was the English . . . If not everyone went so far as to agree with Samuel Johnson that ‘the chief glory of every people arises from it authors,’ an astonishing number took literature seriously.”²³ Waiting for their time to go up at the Somme, “John Ball and some friends found a ‘sequestered place’ on a ‘grassy slope’ to sit and talk of ‘ordinary things,’”²⁴ things like “if you’d ever read the books of Mr. Wells and the poetry of Rupert Brooke.”²⁵ There are no thoughts among Ball and his friends “that literature is not the very near center of normal experiences, no sense that it belongs to intellectuals, or aesthetes or teachers or critics.”²⁶ When the war began, “in 1914 there was virtually no cinema; there was no radio at all; and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.; from David Jones, ‘In Parenthesis,’ (New York: n. p., 1963), 95.

²² Fussell, “The Great War,” 157; from Edmund Blunden, “Undertones of War,” 89-90.

²³ Fussell, “The Great War,” 157.

²⁴ Ibid.; “In Parenthesis,” 139-140.

²⁵ Fussell, “The Great War,” 157.

²⁶ Ibid.

there was certainly no television. Except for sex and drinking, amusement was largely found in language formally arranged either in books and periodicals or at the theatre and music halls,”²⁷ or one could be entertained by a “friends’ anecdotes, rumors, or clever structuring of words.”²⁸ Such a world is hard for us to visualize today, but we must “if we are to understand the way literature dominated the war from the beginning to the end.”²⁹

The Great War / World War 1 “became an occasion for a crusade that saw the mobilization of an extraordinary language filled with abstract euphemistic spiritualized words and phrases under which were buried the realities of modern mechanized war.”³⁰ National newspapers, like the *Times*, regularly printed articles and editorials with titles like “Renewal of Youth,’ ‘Glorious Baptism of Fire,’ ‘War and Sacrifice,’ and ‘Heroes: Response to the Ideal.’”³¹ For those who used such language, “maimed “or “shell-shocked soldiers” did not exist, only ‘broken’ heroes. The longer the war lasted, the more ridiculous such elegant words and asinine language sounded to the majority of the common soldiers in the trenches.³²

The language is that which two generations of readers had been accustomed to associate with the quiet action of personal control and Christian self-abnegation (“sacrifice”), as well as with more violent actions of aggression and defense. The tutors in this special diction had been the boy’s books of George Alfred Henty; the male-romances of Rider Haggard; the poems of Robert Bridges; and specially the Arthurian poems of Tennyson and the pseudo-medieval romances of William Morris. We can

²⁷ Ibid. 157-158.

²⁸ Ibid., 158.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ted Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words”: Language, Poetry, and Antimodernism in England in the First World War,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 58, (September, 1986): 643.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 643.

set out this “raised,” essentially feudal language in a table of equivalents:

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A friend is a	<i>comrade</i>
Friendship is	<i>comradeship, or fellowship</i>
A horse is a	<i>steed, or charger</i>
The enemy is	<i>the foe, or the host</i>
Danger is	<i>peril</i>
To conquer is to	<i>vanquish</i>
To attack is to	<i>assail</i>
To be earnestly brave is to be	<i>gallant</i>
To be cheerfully brave is to be	<i>plucky</i>
To be stolidly brave is to be	<i>staunch</i>
Bravery considered after the fact is	<i>valor</i>
The dead on the battlefield are	<i>the fallen</i>
To be nobly enthusiastic is to be	<i>ardent</i>
To be unpretentiously enthusiastic is to be	<i>keen</i>
The front is	<i>the field</i>
Obedient soldiers are	<i>the brave</i>
Warfare is	<i>strife</i>
Actions are	<i>deeds</i>
To die is to	<i>perish</i>
To show cowardice is to	<i>swerve</i>
The draft-notice is	<i>the summons</i>
To enlist is to	<i>join the colors</i>
Cowardice results in	<i>dishonor</i>
Not to complain is to be	<i>manly</i>
To move quickly is to be	<i>swift</i>
Nothing	<i>naught</i>
Nothing but is	<i>naught, but</i>
To win is to	<i>conquer</i>
One’s chest is one’s	<i>breast</i>
Sleep is	<i>slumber</i>
The objective of an attack is	<i>the goal</i>
A soldier is a	<i>warrior</i>
One’s death is one’s	<i>fate</i>
The sky is	<i>the heavens</i>
Things that glow or shine are	<i>radiant</i>
The army as a whole is	<i>the legion</i>
What is contemptible is	<i>base</i>
The legs and arms of young men are	<i>limbs</i>
Dead bodies constitute	<i>ashes, or dust</i>

³³ Paul Fussell, “The Great War,” 21-23.

The blood of young men is

“the red/Sweet wine of youth”--- R. Brooke. ³⁴

The use of “high” diction in poetry, prose, and even newspaper accounts of the war lasted throughout the war. ³⁵ Even as late as 1918, men fighting on the front continued to use the old rhetoric. ³⁶

Leading Great War poets; Owen, Sassoon, Graves, Sitwell, and others, “learned from their service in the trenches that the Western Front was neither Agincourt, nor the playing fields of ancient public schools, nor the supreme test of valor but, rather, the modern industrial world in miniature, indeed, the modern world at its most horrifying.” ³⁷ What they and other junior officers experienced was a war dominated by artillery and machine guns: often the courageous individual’s actions had no meaning, and death was random and hideous and most of all meaningless. ³⁸ They rejected the prewar idealism of the poet as “barb.” Most importantly, through their works they acknowledge, “the true poet must be truthful. “ ³⁹

³⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

³⁵ Ibid, 21-23.

³⁶ Ibid, 22-23.

³⁷ Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 645.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Joseph Cohen, “Wilfred Owen: Fresher Fields than Flanders,” *English Literature in Transition* 7 (March 1964): 4.

CHAPTER 2

BRITISH POETS' CALL TO ACTION

During the Great War the most recognized and admired poets, including those who had served on the western front and knew first hand of the slaughter and horrors of trench warfare, not only supported the war effort but also encouraged its continuation. These admired war poets hid the horrible truth of modern mechanical warfare using archaic language and lofty phrases.⁴⁰ Lyric rejection of the war during the war itself was rare. "For the majority, the rejection of the war was a postwar phenomenon."⁴¹ None of the soldier poets who wrote during the war ever questioned Britain's right to be at war, not even the minority of the British soldier poets who wrote vivid and telling poems critical of the war and its continuation. "The prevailing voices during the war were those who wanted to continue the struggle."⁴² But unknown to the public, an unknown number of these "prevailing voices" were members of a secret organization of eminent writers working with the War Propaganda Office at Wellington House.

Poetry played a more significant role in the war effort than articles and pamphlets. Poetry was the sign of an educated man or woman, and it played a

⁴⁰ Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words," 645.

⁴¹ Annette Becker, "The Avant-Garde, Madness and the Great War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, No. 1, Special Issue: Shell-Shock. (Jan., 2000), 72.

⁴² Fred D. Crawford, "British Poets of the Great War," (London and Toronto: Associated Press, 1988), 23-30; Ted Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words," 643; from Fussell, "The Great War," 11-23.

symbolic role in their lives before the war and after. In the Victorian period and afterwards, classical education in the schools emphasized imitation Greek and Latin poetry. In his study of Great War literature, “Paul Fussell attributes the power of this language over the minds of Englishmen in 1914 to their immersion in a ‘canon’ of literature that included the King James Bible, Pilgrims’s [sic] *Progress*, and not least, Quiller-Couch’s *Oxford Book of English Verse*.”⁴³ This concentration in the classic makes it easier to understand why both soldiers and civilians alike met the events of August 1914 with elaborate wording and phrases.⁴⁴

“The *Times* wielded immense power in British public life, especially in politics, as witness its role . . . in Lloyd George’s rise to power in 1916. During the war, its superb letters columns served as a community forum for the English governing classes.”⁴⁵ From the beginning “The *Daily Mail* rivaled the *Times* in mobilizing inflated prose and romantic verse to celebrate the struggle. On August 8, 1914, e. g., it entitled an editorial on national unity ‘Lift Up Your Hearts’ and prefaced it with lines from Tennyson...”⁴⁶ Printed daily on its leader pages were War poems like “Death and Glory.” On September 3, it declared: “There is not a

⁴³ Ted Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 652; from Fussell, “The Great War,” chapter five, “Oh What a Literary War.”

⁴⁴ Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 652.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 646.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 646, The *Times* was considered the most prestigious, it was aimed at the educated elite, but the *Daily Mail* had a larger circulation, 945,000 compared to the *Times*’ 183,000.

British heart but will be thrilled and uplifted by the imperishable episode of the charge of the 9th Lancers who sacrificed themselves dauntlessly,”⁴⁷

Lofty phrases could give spiritual significance to the most dull subject or speech. Journalist and orators had often used exalted rhetoric as a tool to elevate their written account of great or important events.⁴⁸ “Its employment in poetry transformed even the amateur occasional verse into a sacred vessel of art. Amateur poetry employing the devices of high diction was a vastly popular means by which educated Britons responded to dramatic events.”⁴⁹ The outbreak of the Great War was such an event; there was a massive increase of patriotic verse, the majority written in high diction. Amateur poems on patriotic themes filled newspapers throughout the country.⁵⁰

It was during the Great War that English amateur verse reached its peak; it was also an end of the gentleman poet. “The *Times* alone estimated that it received as many as a hundred such poems a day during August 1914. Nor was this unusual; every English national and provincial newspaper, journal, and review was swamped with amateur effusions in verse.”⁵¹ For the first three months of the war, until the November stalemate, the number of such poems is

⁴⁷ Ibid. n. 646. On August 23, 1914, the 9th Lancers participated in the first engagement between the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and the Germans on the Western Front at Mons. For lack of French support and after 1600 casualties they were ordered to retreat. 8,000 casualties were inflicted upon the British rear-guard at the Battle of Le Cateau on August 26. Troops marched 251 miles, with little sleep or food. Their fatigue and lack of food created mass hallucinations, most famously the “Angel of Mons”. The retreat lasted until September 5. (Jon E. Lewis, ed., “The Mammoth Book of Eyewitness, World War 1,” [New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003], 31-36).

⁴⁸ Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 645.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 647.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.; from “War Poems from ‘The Times’” *Times* (August 5, 1915).

estimated to be in the tens of thousands.⁵² The following is an example of one such poem.⁵³

Boundless Love
By Stanley S. Young

.....

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.
Your country mourns you, mourns you,
gallant men!
Ye gallant Lancers IX! and henceforth
when
Your regiment's name falls on our British
ears
'Twill make our pulses beat, and rouse
our cheers

.....

So now with myrtle wreath we twine the bay,
And, smiling through our tears, we
proudly say,
"On heroes' graves we lay this dual crown,
To ever-living dead, deathless renown!"⁵⁴

Written within the first months of the war, "The poem, of course, is an amateur effort, one of a multitude inspired by the heady days of the opening months of the war. Its naïve patriotic sentiments, archaic vocabulary ("Pelf!"),

⁵² Although it is impossible accurately to assess the number of British war poems produced from 1914 to 1918, one can estimate the number of published volumes of verse by reference to Catherine W. Reilly, *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography* (London, 1978); which lists 2,225 individual war poets and 3,104 volumes (p. xix)." (Bogacz's "A Tyranny of Words," 647).

⁵³ Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words," n. 646.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 647-648; from *Hampshire Advertiser* (September 24, 1914).

and romanticized vision of death on the battlefield strike the modern reader as sentimental and absurd. “⁵⁵

In 1914, professional poets “were looked upon as public men who, true to their Victorian forebears, were expected to speak out on issues of importance to the nation, and as bards, whose pronouncements on the state of the English soul seemed to carry more weight than those of politicians and clergymen.”⁵⁶ When the British declared war on the Central Powers August 4, the younger (chronically speaking) recognized poets were taken more by surprise than their elders. Expressions of poetic military feelings came first from the older established poets. Three of these recognized poets, who were also non-combatants, were Robert Bridges, Rudyard Kipling, and Thomas Hardy.

Robert Bridges (1844-1930), Britain’s Poet Laureate since 1913, was the earliest of all poets to address England as a nation. Known as the silent laureate for frequent refusal of the government’s request to write poetry, his response to the first days of the war exceeded all expectations. His poem “Wake Up, England” is a call to action. An appeal that:

“Ye peacemakers, fight!”

Thou Careless, awake!
Thou peacemaker, fight!

Stand, England for honour, [sic]
And God guard the right!

Much suffering shall cleanse thee;
But thou through the flood
Shall win to Salvation,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 648.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 657.

Using chivalric clichés and abstract diction, Bridges successfully integrated the crusading spirit to his “call to action.” He “is explicit in his appeal to lay mirth aside, to accept the seriousness of the challenge, and to continue an English tradition of upholding justice,”⁵⁸ The fervent archaic rhetoric, effectively removed the poem from the reality of war. ⁵⁹

There is a considerably contrast between Thomas Hardy’s poetry and Bridges’. Unlike Bridges and other early war poets, “Hardy’s approach in poetry to the subject [of war] is almost exclusively a critical one, full of skepticism about the proclamations and purposes of political leaders, identifying itself most readily with the personal tragedies of average men and women affected by war.”

⁶⁰ Born in 1840, Hardy had remembrances of men who had fought not only at Waterloo but also in the Franco-Prussian War, the Crimean War, and the Boer War.⁶¹ Although he had no firsthand knowledge of combat, he focused on the individual’s perspective of the war. Though his poems encouraged enlistment, his prose described the feelings and attitude of the soldier from the soldier’s point of view rather than praise the merits of the military or to glorify death in battle. ⁶²

⁵⁷ Crawford, “British Poets,” 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 32; from James Hazen, “Hardy’s War Poetry,” *Four Decades of Poetry, 1890-1930* 2 (1978): 92.

⁶¹ Crawford, “British Poets,” 32.

⁶² Ibid.

“The traditional ritual meaning is what the poems of the Great War are at pains to awaken. Especially the earliest poems of the war, thoroughly resolute when not enthusiastic, conceive of dawn as morally meaningful, as a moment fit for great beginnings.”⁶³ One such poem is Hardy’s poem “Men Who March Away,” which was first printed in the London *Times* September 5, 1914. ⁶⁴

Edward Thomas, another “call to action poet,” who unquestionably accepted the need to defend England, praised Hardy’s poem in a letter to W. H. Hudson.⁶⁵ “The cocks waiting for the incipient dawn are what he finds memorable: ‘I thought Hardy’s poem in *The Times* ‘Ere the barn-cocks say/Night is growing gray,’ the only good one concerned with the war.”⁶⁶ The poem “became popular as an expression of the public mood during the first weeks of the war, perhaps because the public misinterpreted Hardy’s reticence about the realities of war.” ⁶⁷

“Men Who March Away”

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?

Nay, We well see what we are doing,

⁶³ Fussell, “The Great War,” 58-59.

⁶⁴ Crawford, “British Poets,” 31-33.

⁶⁵ W. H. Hudson (1841-1922) was an English naturalist and writer. (Webster’s New collegiate Dictionary, Biographical Names, [Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1973]).

⁶⁶ Fussell, “The Great War,” 59.

⁶⁷ Crawford, “British Poets,” 33.

Though some may not see
Dalliers as they be
England's need are we; . . . ⁶⁸

Hardy's focus was on the soldiers' sense of conviction instead of the hazards of war. "He ends by affirming the soldiers' optimism: 'Press we to the field ungrieving, / In our hearts believing / Victory crowns the just.'" ⁶⁹ Like Bridges and all the early Great War poets, Hardy uses archaic expressions and language to present the war as a crusade. ⁷⁰

One of the most recognized authors of the Great War is Rudyard Kipling. His "attention to the lot of the soldier and his praise of men in the ranks made him unique among well-known prewar poets." ⁷¹ For a long time after the Boer War, Kipling expected a 'Teutonic' war and argued in support of military conscription (draft) and a stronger military preparedness. ⁷² After the Prussians defeated the Austrians in 1866 and the French in 1870, all leading European nations, with the exception of Britain, recognized the necessity of compelling military training for their young men and their model was the German army. ⁷³ With an army of reservists and conscripts (draftees), the Prussians defeated the Austrians and the French. ⁷⁴

A draftee spent his first two years of full adulthood in uniform and was confined to the barracks, which were administered by distant officers and closely

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 32-33, 158.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ John Keegan, "The First World War," (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 20-21.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

managed by harsh unbending sergeants.⁷⁵ After his discharge from duty, he was obligated to return to the reserve unit of his regiment for annual training for the next five years, then at the end of the five years, he was required to enroll in a secondary reserve unit until the age of thirty-nine or the third-line reserves until the age of forty-five.⁷⁶ “The effect was to maintain inside European civil society a second, submerged and normally invisible military society, millions strong, of men who had shouldered a rifle, marched in step, borne the lash of a sergeant’s tongue and learnt to obey orders.”⁷⁷

“Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) greeted the outbreak of hostilities with mixed feelings, including some measure of relief.”⁷⁸ He received the Nobel Prize for Literature In 1907 and was offered the post of Poet Laureate on three occasions, which he refused. His poem “The Islanders,” infuriated thousands of Englishmen because of its slur against English sport, so his approval “as a man of letters and as an imperialist poet was hardly unanimous. Kipling’s ‘The Islanders’ appeared in the *London Times* in 1902 as a protest against England’s slackness and unwillingness to prepare for war.”⁷⁹

For Kipling, the issue is the very existence of England as a nation.”⁸⁰ While invoking every possible appeal to nationalism, his forty line call to action poem, “For All We Have and Are” constantly “reiterate the passing of ‘Comfort, content, delight’ now that the war has begun, he argues the need for fortitude, and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁸ Crawford, “British Poets,” 33.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 34.

repeats his assertion that only the sacrifice of body, soul, and will can make England prevail,”⁸¹ “For All We Have and Are” begins with the urgency of the struggle:

“For all we have and are”

For all we have and are,
For all our children’s fate,
Stand up and take the war.
The Hun is at the gate!

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One example of the importance of this kind of poetry in molding English attitudes and responses occurred on April 19, 1915, when a *Times* correspondent abruptly broke off in the middle of a report on the Neuve Chapelle⁸³ assault in order to quote from “For All We Have and Are.” Apparently in the reporter’s mind, the poetic sentiments of Kipling’s poem and the actual details of the attack carried equal weight. “Not only journalist but generals as well testified to the importance of poetry in the war. On October 20, 1916, General Sir Ian Hamilton of Gallipoli⁸⁴ fame, attended a meeting of the Poetry Society and declared that ‘poetry was the highest expression of the moral [sic] of a nation.’”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Neuve Chapelle is a ruined village, twenty miles south of Ypres in British Artois sector. On March 10, 1915, the British attacked in a trench-to-trench offensive. The attack ended on March 12 with 11,652 British killed, wounded, missing or prisoners to about 8,600 German loses. (Keegan, “The First World War,” 193-195; from G. C. Wynne, “If Germany Attacks,” [London: n.p., 1940], 30-31, 40).

⁸⁴ Turkey’s entry into the war, November 5, 1914, opened a third front. Alarmed by the Ottoman advance into Russian Caucasia, the Russians appealed to Britain and France for diversionary assistance. This led to the campaign of Gallipoli, a European peninsula separated from the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) by the Dardanelles, a narrow waterway; at its narrowest less than a mile wide. Turkey, who neither bothered to count nor bury their dead lost approximately 300,000 men, killed, wounded or missing. The Allies lost 265,000. Arthur Asquith, the Prime

Kipling's "use of simple rhythms and notions allowed him to reach a vast public audience, while his use of colloquial speech and varied meters inspired several imitators."⁸⁶ George Orwell offered a reasonable view of Kipling's perception admitting that Kipling

Is accused of glorifying war, and perhaps he does so, but not in the usual manner, by pretending that war is a sort of football match. Like most people capable of writing battle poetry Kipling had never been in battle, but his vision of war is of realistic. He knows that bullets hurt, that underfire everyone is terrified, that the ordinary soldier never knows what the war is about or what is happening except in his own corner of the battlefield, and that British troops, like other troops, frequently run away. . . .⁸⁷

Minister's son died at Gallipoli; Rupert Brooke died of blood poisoning before landing. (Keegan, "The First World War," 221-249).

⁸⁵ Bogacz, "A Tyranny of Words," 657. Quoted in the *Times* (October 21, 1916).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; George Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling," *Horizon* 5 (February 1942), 118.

CHAPTER 3

COMBATANTS' CALL TO ACTION

During the first six months of 1916, Sir Douglas Haig⁸⁸, the new British Commander in Chief, and his staff prepared for a massive breakthrough of the German line on the Somme, which Haig believed would end the war. Since the French casualties,⁸⁹ in defense of Verdun, were so great, the main offensive effort on the Western Front had to be British. "The Somme affair, destined to be known among the troops as the Great Fuck-Up, was the largest engagement fought since the beginnings of civilization."⁹⁰

On July 1 at 7:30 in the morning and after a week of bombardment against the German front-line positions, eleven British divisions climbed out of their trenches on a thirteen-mile front and began walking towards the German defenses. Unknown to the British soldiers, the bombardment had not destroyed the barbed wire strung between the German and British lines nor had it damaged the well-constructed German bunkers.⁹¹ Protected and safely sheltered in their

⁸⁸ After a year (1915) of ironic mistakes and severely underestimating the Germans and the difficulties of siege warfare, Sir John French was replaced by Sir Douglas Haig as Commander-in-Chief of British Forces on December 16, 1915. On January 1, 1917, Haig was elevated to the rank of Field Marshall. Haig was both a spiritualist and a fundamentalist. As a young officer he attended séances, where a medium put him in touch with Napoleon; as a Commander-in-Chief he fell under the influence of a Presbyterian chaplain whose sermons confirmed "his belief that he was in direct communication with God and had a major part to play in a divine plan for the world." (Fussell, "The Great War," 11-12, 14; Keegan, "The First World War," 288-289; G. DeGroot, "Douglas Haig," [London: n.p., 1988], 117-118).

⁸⁹ "By the end of June over 200,000 men had been killed and wounded on each side. The losses had fallen more heavily on the French since they had begun the war with a third fewer men than the Germans. But to both armies Verdun had become a place of terror and death that could not yield victory." (Keegan, "The First World War," 285).

⁹⁰ Fussell, "The Great War," 12.

⁹¹ In contrast to the British trenches, which not only stunk, but also wet, cold, and completely squalid; the German trenches, were deep, clean, elaborate, and sometimes even

bunkers during the bombardment, the machine gunners took their machine guns out of the bunkers as soon as the bombardment stop and at 7:31 began to cut down the British soldiers as they walked toward them or stood looking in puzzlement at the barb wire. “Out of the 110,000 who attacked, 60,000 were killed or wounded on this one day, the record so far. Over 20,000 lay dead between the lines, and it was days before the wounded in No Man’s Land stopped crying out.”⁹²

“The expectation was that the ferocity of the bombardment would entirely destroy all forward German defenses, enabling the attacking British troops to practically walk across No Man’s Land and take possession of the German front lines.”⁹³ Snow and freezing mud ended the Somme offense on November 18. They had gained less than three square miles of ground at the cost of an estimated 420,000 casualties,⁹⁴ which included many “pal’s “ battalions,⁹⁵ and

comfortable. ‘Some of the [German] dugouts were thirty feet deep, with as many as sixteen bunk-beds, as well as door bells, water tanks with taps, and cupboards and mirrors.’ They also boarded walls, floors, and ceilings; finished wooden staircases; electric light; real kitchens; and wallpaper and overstuffed furniture, the whole protected by steel outer doors. They were similar to the kind of dugout recalled by the German writer Ernst Junger: “At Monchy . . . I was master of an underground dwelling approached by forty steps hewn in the solid chalk, so that even the heaviest shells at this depth made no more than a pleasant rumble when we sat there over an interminable game of cards. In one wall I had a bed hewn out At its head hung an electric light so that I could read in comfort till I was sleepy The whole was shut off from the outer world by a dark-red curtain with rod and rings” (Fussell, “The Great War,” 44-45; George Coppard, “With a Machine Gun to Cambrai [1969], 87; “Copse 125,” Basil Creighton, translator, [1930], 18-19).

⁹² Fussell, “The Great War,” 13.

⁹³ [http:// www.firstworldwar.com/battles/somme.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/somme.htm): [Accessed March 10, 2007].

⁹⁴ “Casualties were so extensive that newspapers printed lists of the fallen in miniscule type to obscure the number of casualties.” (Crawford, “British Poets,” 22).

⁹⁵ Before conscription (draft) in 1916, Lord Derby encouraged the plan (initially suggested by Sir Henry Rawlinson) of encouraging whole towns and villages to sign up, with the promise of guaranteed employment after the war. Pal’s battalions were made up of soldiers raised in the same locality with the promise they would serve with their friends for the duration of the war. On the first day of the battle of the Somme, many men who signed up together died together. The 11th battalion, an East Lancashire Regiment, started with 700 hundred men and on that first day

the French added another 194,000 casualties to what they had already lost at Verdun. Including the German's losses, estimated to be around 500,000 casualties, there were over a million casualties between July 1 and November 18.

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One of the causes for the disaster was a total lack of surprise. Fussell notes that if the British had stopped their bombardment just for a couple of minutes, they may have tricked the German machine gunners out of their secure bunkers up to their unprotected firing positions. "But one suspects that if such a feint was ever considered, it was rejected as unsporting."⁹⁷ Eighteen years later, reflecting on what both sides had learned by the end of the first day of July 1916, Edmund Blunden⁹⁸ wrote: "By the end of the day both sides had seen, in a sad scrawl of broken earth and murdered men, the answers to the question. No road. No thoroughfare. Neither race had won, nor could win, the War. The War had won, and would go on winning."⁹⁹

E. A. Mackintosh (1893-1917) wrote this "call to action" poem in 1916. He was at Oxford when war was declared, but left to enlist in the 5th Seaforth

suffered 585 casualties. (<http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/palsbattalions.htm>, [accessed 10 March 2007]).

⁹⁶ David Stevenson, "Cataclysm, The First World War as Political Tragedy," (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2004), 136; Hew Strachan, "The First World War," (New York, New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), 192-193.

⁹⁷ Fussell, "The Great War," 13.

⁹⁸ Edmund Blunden, unlike Sassoon, Graves, and Owen, had an attitude of acceptance toward the war. He enlisted in the Royal Sussex Regiment as a lieutenant in 1915; was in the trenches by May 1916. Blunden survived two full years of the roughest fighting of the war. He saw action at La Bassée (1916), Hamel (September 1916), and Thiepval during the Somme Offensive (October and November 1916), and also Ypres during the Passchendaele Offensive (July 1917). His poems are not inflated with archaic rhetoric, but in a quiet way reflect the reality of modern warfare. His "Waggoner" was first published in 1920; not during the war. (Crawford, "British Poets," 158-159).

⁹⁹ Fussell, "The Great War," 13; from *The Mind's Eye* (1934), 38.

Highlanders and earned a commission as 2nd lieutenant. Mackintosh fought in the Battle of the Somme, where he was gassed and wounded; yet he wrote:

“Recruiting”

“Lads, you’re wanted, go and help,”
On the railway carriage wall
Stuck the poster, and I thought
Of the hands that penned the call.

Fat Civilians wishing they
“Could go out and fight the Hun.”
Can’t you see them thanking God
That they’re over forty-one

.....

Like Kipling, Mackintosh detested the civilians who evaded military service. This poem is based on a soldier’s impatience with the slackers who allowed others to fight for them. Even though Mackintosh is encouraging men to enlist, he is questioning the motives of some civilians, who instead of enlisting themselves are encouraging others to enlist.

“Lads, you’re wanted! Over there,”
Shiver in the morning dew
More poor devils like yourselves
Waiting to be killed by you.

Go and help to swell the names
In the casualty list.
Help to make a column’s stuff
For the **blasted** journalists.

Help to keep them nice and safe
From the **wicked** *German foe*.
Don’t let him come over here!

“Lads, you’re wanted---out you go.”¹⁰⁰

.....

There’s a better word than that
Lads, and can’t you hear it come
From a million men that call
You to share their *martyrdom*.

.....

You shall learn what men can do
If you will but pay the price,
Learn the gaiety and strength
In the *gallant sacrifice*.

.....

Instead of sensory imagery, Mackintosh uses modern language and adjectives such as blasted and wicked; the diction is at times archaic but the prose appeals to the chivalric spirit (England’s need, German foe, Martyrdom, gallant sacrifice). Although it sounds more realistic than Bridges’s and Kipling’s, “it still glorifies death in battle and the call is painfully direct. Despite the superficial differences between his ironical appeal and others’ appeals to English empire, Mackintosh’s poem emphasizes the same essentials: duty to country, necessity for sacrifice, and purification in the war.”¹⁰¹

Edward Shanks, a poet and a soldier who served in the trenches, imitated Kipling’s use of colloquial speech and mixed meters. Before enlisting in the 8th South Lancashire Regiment in 1914,¹⁰² he associated himself with Sir Edward

¹⁰⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 35-36.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Shanks was medically discharged in 1915 after being gassed. (Crawford, “British Poets,” 34).

Marsh¹⁰³ and Harold Monro¹⁰⁴ of the Georgian movement. Like Kipling he focused on the soldier not the Empire, but the presence of recruits in his poem “The Old Soldiers” “coming from foreign countries and from different walks of life hints unmistakably of empire.”¹⁰⁵

“The Old Soldiers”

We come from dock and shipyard, we come from car and train,
We come from foreign countries to slope our arms again,
And, forming fours by numbers or turning to the right,
We’re learning all our drill again and ‘tis a pretty sight.

Our names are all unspoken, our regiments forgotten,
For some of us were pretty bad and some of us were rotten;
And some will misremember what once they learnt with pain
And hit a bloody sergeant and go to clink again.¹⁰⁶

The appeal of Shanks’s poem is a more subtle than Bridges and Kipling’s direct calls. Shanks offers “his old soldiers as examples of appropriate patriotic conduct.”¹⁰⁷

Some poets wrote to dissuade any attempts to negotiate peace. “The most insidious of these and certainly the most widely known today, is “In Flanders Fields,”¹⁰⁸ which was written by John McCrae. Having served as Lieutenant of Artillery in the South African Field Force (1899-1900) and as a surgeon for the

¹⁰³ Edward Marsh, Sir Winston Churchill’s private secretary, collected works of diverse poets whose poems appeared in the *Georgian Poetry* anthology in 1912. He edited that volume and the four that followed. The Georgian movement was more a collection of diverse poets rather than poetic innovation. (Crawford’s “British Poets,” 22).

¹⁰⁴ Harold Monro founded the *Poetry Review* in 1912. The periodical was a monthly outlet for the Poetry Society. The *Poetry Review* was not a short-lived journal designed for a few people. “It was the visible expression of the British love affair with a certain kind of verse.” Its sponsor was the Poetry Society; a stronghold of the “bardic” ideal of poetry with its associated high diction with branches all over London and the provinces. (Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 653).

¹⁰⁵ Crawford, “British Poets,” 34.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

First Brigade of Canadian Artillery during the second battle of Ypres,¹⁰⁹ he was no stranger to war. As a voice from the grave, he writes: ¹¹⁰

“In Flanders Fields”

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce Heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

In the first nine lines it provides such familiar triggers of emotion as these: The red flowers of pastoral elegy; the “crosses” suggestive of calvaries [sic] and thus of sacrifice; the sky, especially noticeable from the confines of a trench; the larks bravely singing in apparent critique of man’s folly; the binary opposition between the song of the larks and the noise of the guns; the special awareness of dawn and sunset at the morning and evening stand-to’s; the conception of soldiers as lovers; and the focus on the ironic antithesis between beds and the graves where “now we lie.” ¹¹¹

The poem turns from pastoral after the first nine lines and becomes reminiscent of “Stand Up! Stand Up and Play the Game! ”; an obvious insistence on continuing the war:

¹⁰⁹ By April 1915, the Germans had a quantity of chlorine gas, which causes death by stimulating over-production of fluid in the lungs, leading to drowning. On April 22, following a heavy bombardment, at five o’clock in the afternoon a grayish-green cloud began to drift across from the German lines toward the French trenches. Thousands of Zouaves (Berbers, an Algerian tribe) and Algerian Riflemen were soon running to the rear, clutching their throats, coughing, stumbling and turning blue in the face. The Front line, having been abandoned, had an 8,000-yard wide gap. Even though the gas drifted toward the Canadians lines, they held their position and found reinforcements to stop the German advance. Unprotected against gas with a “box respirator” which would come later, the Canadians using cloths soaked in water tied them around their mouths as protection when they were gassed again on April 24. Even though the line was substantially held, it was at the cost of 60,000 British Casualties. (Keegan, “The First World War,” 198-199; Fussell, “The Great War,” 10).

¹¹⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 37.

¹¹¹ Fussell, “The Great War,” 242.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields. ¹¹²

There is an abrupt change from pastoral in the first nine lines to a tone of demand and threat in the last six. “The use of chivalric imagery and diction (foe, failing hands, torch, ye, break faith) are outside the pastoral tradition for which the reader has been prepared. “ ¹¹³

Similar to McCrae, Sir Henry Newbolt, believed the military continuation of the war was essential and indisputable; that any suggestion of a negotiated peace before defeating the Germans was a trap. Newbolt, the author of “*Vitai Lampada*,” which literally equated public-school playing fields with British battlefields, takes McCrae’s argument against a negotiated peace a step further. In “*Hic Jacet Qui in Hoc Saeculo Fedeliter Militavit*” (“Here Lies One Who Fought Faithfully in This Age”), Newbolt describes a soldier who fought without fear. The soldier is “confident that the enemy can never win: ‘For he has left in keeping / His sword unto his son.’”¹¹⁴ Newbolt attempted to bestow on the modern war the glory of antiquity by using “Latin in the title and the image of passing the sword to the next generation make the poem uncongenial to an age which believes that one builds for the future instead of expecting the future to validate the past. “ ¹¹⁵

¹¹² Crawford, “British Poets,” 37-38.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 39.

Rupert Brooke was among the many poets “who regarded the challenge of the war as an opportunity for a purifying, and ennobling experience.”¹¹⁶ Of the Great War poets, none has created more controversy than Brookes. He seemed to represent the best qualities of his generation. The son of a Rugby¹¹⁷ schoolmaster, he studied at Kings College, won honors in classics at Cambridge in 1906, and became a Fellow in 1913. Brooke excelled in both the classics and sports. The critic, Edmund Gosse, “called Brooke ‘the finest specimen of a certain type produced at the universities and then sacrificed to our national necessity.’”¹¹⁸

In his first volume of poetry, which was published in 1911, a bare-shouldered photograph of Brooke on the frontispiece has “irrevocably linked” his appearance to his writing. Nearly everyone who knew him was affected by his intellect and personal beauty. Among his friends were eminent writers and political figures of his time, which included Edward Marsh, Winston Churchill, and the Asquiths.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁷ Rugby School is located in the town of Rugby, Warwickshire and is one of the oldest public schools in England. It was established as a boarding school for boys in the 16th century. During Thomas Arnold’s tenure as Rugby School’s headmaster (from 1828 until his death), he gradually raised Rugby to the rank of a great Public school. Arnold was not an innovator in teaching method; his goal was to reform Rugby by making it a school for gentlemen. He used perfects more fully than any previous headmaster. Under the perfect system the older boys served as house monitors to keep discipline among the younger boys; the system was adopted in most English secondary schools. The Arnold tradition spread to other schools through Rugby pupils and masters. Many schools established after the death of Arnold were modeled on Rugby. Both Rupert Brooke and Lewis Carroll attended school there. In 1882 Dr. Thomas Arnold implemented many reforms to the school curriculum and administration placing the emphasis on sport, “fair play,” and a system of assigning responsibility to boys. (Charles R. Moyer, “The Idea of History in Thomas & Matthew Arnold,” [May, 1955]: 262-264; <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9009582/Thomas-Arnold> [accessed 8 August 2007]).

¹¹⁸ Crawford, “British Poets,” 39, 52.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

Brooke joined the Artists' Rifles ¹²⁰ when England declared war. And by September, due to the effort of Winston Churchill who at that time was the First Lord Admiralty, Brooke became a member of the Anson Battery and was present during Britain's failed attempt to save Antwerp. While home on Christmas leave, Brooke wrote five sonnets, which his current reputation is based on, that were published December 1914. After recuperating from influenza, Brooke sailed for the Dardanelles February 15, 1915. But, while on the island of Skyros Brooke developed blood poisoning and died there on April 23, 1915. ¹²¹ According to Paul Fussell "the equation of blondness with special beauty and value helps explains the frantic popularity of Rupert Brooke, whose flagrant good looks seemed an inseparable element of his poetic achievement. His features were available to everyone in the famous bare-shouldered photograph."¹²²

In the London *Times* April 26, 1915, after Brooke's death, Winston Churchill presented Brooke as a symbol of England's patriotic youth.

The thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward in this, the hardest, the cruelest, and the least-rewarded of all the wars that men have fought. They are a whole history and revelation of Rupert

¹²⁰ In 1914, the "Artist Rifles," a British Army regiment, was formed from the 20th Middlesex Artists Rifle Volunteer Corps. The origins of the Artist Rifles is from a meeting of students from Carey's School of Art in response to the threat of invasion by Napoleon III in 1859. They met and formed the "Corps of Artists." This unit was composed of painters, sculptors, engravers, architects, musicians, poets and actors. It attracted the attention of many men of an artistic nature and recruits from public schools and universities. In October 1914, the Artists' Rifles was established as an Officers Training Corp. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artists'_Rifles [accessed 19 August 2007]; <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTrifles.htm> [accessed 18 June 2008]).

¹²¹ Crawford, "British Poets," 39.

¹²² Fussell, "The Great War," 276.

Brooke himself.¹²³

In his April 5, 1915, Easter sermon Dean Inge¹²⁴ praised Brooke's "V. The Soldier." Dean Inge stated, "The enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism, free from hate, bitterness, and fear, had never found a nobler expression. And yet it fell somewhat short of Isaiah's vision and still more of the Christian hope."¹²⁵ Shortly before Brooke died, he received a clipping from the *Times* containing the statement by Dean Inge. In his last recorded remark, Brooke revealed "a capacity for wry comment--he regretted that the Dean had not though him as good as Isaiah."¹²⁶ Immediately after his death, Rupert Brooke became a legend and was conscripted by Churchill "as a poet in service to a warring state Churchill's eulogy helped to make Brooke an instrument of war propaganda."¹²⁷

"V. The Soldier"

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

¹²³ Crawford, "British Poets," 40. In the London Times (April 26, 1915), reprinted in Dominic Hibberd, ed., *Poetry of the First World War: A Case Book* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 38.

¹²⁴ William Ralph Inge was Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. By 1911, when he was appointed dean, he had already written several books: "Mysticism," (1899), "Truth and Falsehood in Religion," (1906), and "Faith," (1909), which were to become theological classics. He remained at St. Paul's until his retirement in 1934; he became a national figure and contributed to the London *Evening Standard* for twenty-five years. (www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042410/William-Ralph-Inge. [accessed 07 September 2007]) .

¹²⁵ Crawford, "British Poets," 40; Dominic Hibberd, ed., "Poetry of the First World War: A Case Book," (London: Macmillan, 1981), 131; printed in the London Times (April 26, 1915).

¹²⁶ Crawford, "British Poets," 40.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven. ¹²⁸

Describing the immediate impact of Brooke's sonnets and the prevalent cynicism of the post war years Edmund Blunden wrote: "Few of these [Brooke's contemporaries] who where in the early phase of the war service as Brooke was in 1914 and 1915 and heard his 'music' will ever have forgotten it, even though they might survive into years of deepening despair and horror which for them made its graces unsuitable."¹²⁹ More critical than Blunden, another soldier poet, Charles Hamilton Sorley, who died in action at Loos, thought Brooke was "Far too obsessed with his own sacrifice. . . . He has clothed his attitude in fine words: but he has taken the sentimental attitude."¹³⁰

John Lehmann, one of Brooke's biographers, stated:

The weakness of the war Sonnets lies not merely in their even more fulsome use of challenge which faced of such insubstantial rhetoric, but in the fundamental shallowness and inadequacy of the sentiments expressed in relation to the grimness of the young men on the German as well as the British side.¹³¹

It is Lehmann's opinion, and others, that Brooke's poetry would have been significantly different if Brooke had lived to witness the last years of the war, but Brooke shared along with other Georgian poets a personalized perspective that

¹²⁸ Ibid., 40. Edmund Blunden, "War Poets: 1914-1918, British Council and National Book League, Writers and Their Work, no. 100 (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), 18-20.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Charles Hamilton Sorley, "Letters from Germany and From the Army," (privately printed, 1916), 128.

¹³¹ John Lehmann, "The Strange Destiny of Rupert Brooke," (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 135.

was a part of his makeup long before the war.¹³² For almost a decade Brooke had been writing poetry and had already developed his style; it is unlikely that he would have turned away from his dedication to Georgian lyricism.¹³³ Another reason that Brooke's style would not have likely changed is because he was in the Anson Battery, which participated in the British defense of Antwerp and was present when it fell to Germany, so he had already witnessed the misery and horror of modern warfare.¹³⁴ At Churchill's request, he witnessed the evacuation of Antwerp and had personally reported his observations to Churchill.¹³⁵ Brooke wrote a letter to Leonard Bacon dated November 11, 1914, and reported enough to dismiss the assumption that he was not acquainted with the horrors of modern warfare: ¹³⁶

I marched through Antwerp, deserted, shelled, and burning, one night, ruined houses, dead men and horses; and railway-trains with and saw their lines taken up and twisted and flung down as if a child had been playing with a toy. And the whole heaven and earth was lit up by the glare from the great lakes and rivers of burning petrol, hills and spires of flame. That was like Hell, a Dantesque Hell, terrible. But there—and later—I saw what a truer Hell was. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, their goods on barrows and hand-carts and perambulators and wagons moving with infinite slowness out into the night, two unending lines of them, the old men mostly weeping, the women with hard white drawn faces, the children playing or crying or sleeping. That's what Belgium is now: the country where three civilians have been killed to every one soldier. That damnable policy of "frightfulness" succeeded for a time. When it was decided to evacuate Antwerp, all of that population of half a million, save a few thousands, fled. . . .¹³⁷ Half a million people preferred homelessness and

¹³² Crawford, "British Poets," 40-41.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

the chance of starvation, to the Certainty of German rule. It's queer to think one has been a witness of one of the greatest crimes of history.¹³⁸

“This description suggests that Brooke responded to the war by resolving to oppose the instigators of such suffering. Far from shaking his convictions, his observations confirmed his belief that England had to oppose the Germans.”¹³⁹

Julian Grenfell graduated from Eton and Oxford, where like Rupert Brooke, he too excelled in classical studies and sports. Joining the Royal Dragoons in India in 1910, Grenfell became a professional soldier. He moved with his regiment to South Africa in 1911 and to France in 1914, where because of trench warfare his cavalry regiment became infantry at the front.

Grenfell identified himself as a warrior. He often stalked German snipers behind enemy lines killing them in hand-to-hand combat. Whether the more mechanized the war became would have changed his fighting style is unknown. Grenfell died May 26, 1915, from head wounds received at the Second Battle of Ypres.

Upon hearing of Brooke's death, Grenfell wrote “Into Battle,” which was published in the London *Times* on May 27, 1915, the day after Grenfell's death:

“Into Battle”

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 41; from W. K. Thomas, “The War Sonnets of Rupert Brooks.” *English Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1974): 28-29.

¹³⁹ Crawford, “British Poets,” 40-41.

Grenfell links the fighting men and natural phenomena together in the next five stanzas; the soldier is comrade to the stars and friend to the trees and so on:

Then in the battle itself, ¹⁴⁰

The burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only joy of battle takes
Him by the throat and makes him blind. ¹⁴¹

The soldier knows that, should he survive, his death was not 'Destined Will.' Should he fall, 'Day shall clasp him with strong hands, / And Night shall fold him in soft wings.'¹⁴² After reading the poem in the *Times*, critic Edmund Gosse, "called it 'the clearest lyrical expression of the fighting spirit of England in which the war has found words.' Rudyard Kipling felt that Grenfell's 'lips must have been touched when he wrote it.'¹⁴³

There were soldier poets who lived longer than Grenfell who saw more than enough carnage to disillusion them about the heroic nature of the war and to change their optimistic views: F.W. Harvey, John W. Streets, Ronald Gorell Barnes, and many others. "But their poems continued to reflect traditional assumptions. Their verse began to emphasize the new conditions of the struggle without questioning the nature or the causes of the war."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Crawford, "British Poets, 52-53.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 52; Edmund Gosse, "Some Diversions of a Man of Letters," (London: Heinemann, 1920), 273.

¹⁴⁴ Crawford, "British Poets," 54-55.

CHAPTER 4
“THE GREAT GAME”

“In nothing, however, is the initial British innocence so conspicuous as in the universal commitment to the sporting spirit. Before the war, says Osbert Sitwell”:¹⁴⁵

We were still in the trough of peace that had lasted a hundred years between two great conflicts. In it, such wars as arose were not general, but only a brief armed version of the Olympic Games. You won a round: the enemy won the next. There was no more talk of extermination, or of Fights to a finish, than would occur in a boxing match. ¹⁴⁶

The British society’s concept of comparing the war with a sporting event was ingrained in the British educational system.¹⁴⁷ During the nineteenth century, private educational institutions known as public schools, which catered almost exclusively to the fee-paying sons of Britain’s titled and wealthy, began to promote games into the curriculum for moral and educational purposes.¹⁴⁸ Educators believed that students learned discipline and self-control through team games while, at the same time, fostering character development, which, in turn, prepared the young men to take their privileged position in the growing British Empire. ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Fussell, “The Great War,” 25.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Colin Veitch, “ ‘Play up! Play up! And Win The War!’ Football, the nation and the First World War 1914-15,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, (July, 1985): 365

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The simple belief that games build character grew. When the influential young men left the public school system, they took with them their enthusiasm for games and the unwavering “conviction that participation in football, cricket and other manly sports inculcated valuable character traits.¹⁵⁰ Team sports, they believed, taught loyalty, consideration and selflessness, while simultaneously generating courage, strength and pluck.”¹⁵¹ These characteristics were believed to groom “the boy for later life, fostering patriotism and preparing him for the moral and military battles he might have to face in the wider world.”¹⁵² These too were the traits military commanders looked for in their junior officers¹⁵³

It is this notion of war as “strenuous but entertaining” that filled Rupert Brooke’s letters home during the autumn and winter of 1914-15. “ ‘It’s all great fun,’ he finds.”¹⁵⁴ Sir Henry Newbolt, in this case, had established the classic equation between war and sport; cricket, in his poem “*Vitai Lampada*,” a public-school favorite since 1898:

“The Game”

There’s a breathless hush in the Close tonight
Ten to make and the match to win
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned [sic] coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame,
But his Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 25. “Letters of Rupert Brooke,” ed. Geoffrey Keynes, (New York, 1968), 625.

In later life, the former cricket brave exhorts his colonial troops beset by natives:

The sand of the desert is sodden red
Red with the wreck of a square that broke
The Gatling's Jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke
The river of death has brimmed [sic] his banks,
And England's far, and Honor a name;
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
"Play up! play up! and play the game!" ¹⁵⁵

Having first met when they were students together at Clifton College, Newbolt and General Douglas Haig, who was appointed Field Marshall January 1, 1917, were lifetime friends; both men were products of the private "public school" education. ¹⁵⁶

According to Lord Northcliffe, cricket *was* okay for instilling the "right spirit," but football was even better. ¹⁵⁷ "The English young man's fondness for it was held to be a distinct sign of his natural superiority over his German counterpart." ¹⁵⁸ That was the conclusion in Lord Northcliffe's "quasi-official and very popular work of propaganda, *Lord Northcliffe's War Book*." ¹⁵⁹

Our soldiers are individual. They embark on little individual enterprises. The German . . . is not so clever at these devices. He was never taught them before the war, and his whole training from childhood upwards has been to obey, and to obey in numbers.

The reason is simple:

¹⁵⁵ Fussell, "The Great War," 25-26.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

He has not played individual games. Football, which develops individuality, has only been introduced into Germany in comparatively recent times. ¹⁶⁰

Lord Northcliffe finds that the English tank crews “are young daredevils who, fully knowing that they will be a special mark for every kind of Prussian weapon, enter upon their task in a sporting spirit with the same cheery enthusiasm as they would show for football.”¹⁶¹

The German’s lack of a sporting spirit is also noted by “Reginald Grant on the first German use of chlorine gas: ‘It was a new device in warfare and thoroughly illustrative of the Prussian idea of playing the game.’” ¹⁶²

Kicking a football towards the enemy lines while attacking was one way to show the sporting spirit. The first time the feat was carried out was at Loos in 1915 by the 1st Battalion of the 18th London Regiment.¹⁶³ Considered an act of courage, “it soon achieved the status of a conventional act of bravado, and was ultimately exported far beyond the Western Front.”¹⁶⁴

Witnessed in the attack on the Turkish lines near Beersheeba in November 1917, one of the soldiers Arthur (“Bosky”) Borton, “who took part in an attack . . . proudly reported home; ‘One of the men had a football. How it came there goodness knows. Anyway we kicked off and rushed the first [Turkish] guns, dribbling the ball with us.’” ¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.; from “*Lord Northcliffe’s War Book.*” (New York: n.p. 1917), 86.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 26-27; Reginald Grant’s, “S.O.S. Stand to!,” (New York, 1918), 32.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Fussell, “The Great War,” 27.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

The most famous football episode to occur during the war was achieved by Captain W.P. Nevill, which took place on the morning of the Somme attack.¹⁶⁶ There is no record that Captain Nevill, commander in the 8th East Surrey Regiment, ever attended public school, but while on leave in London, he bought four footballs, one for each platoon.¹⁶⁷ The first of his platoons, to kick a ball into the German positions was to get a prize. “His sporting contest did have the effect of persuading his men that the attack was going to be, as the staff had been insisting, a walkover.”¹⁶⁸ As the officers’ whistles blew, a survivor observing from a short distance away recalls zero hour:¹⁶⁹

As the gun-fire died away I saw an infantry man climb onto the parapet, beckoning others to follow. [Doubtless Captain Nevill or no man’s land, one of his platoon commanders.] As he did so he kicked off a football. A good kick. The ball rose and traveled [sic] well towards the German line. That seemed to be the signal to advance.¹⁷⁰

The legend was completed by an anonymous poem written in commemoration of that Somme football event:

On through the heat of slaughter,
Where gallant comrades fall,
Where blood is poured like water,
They drive the tricking ball,
The fear of death before them
Is but an empty name.
True to the land that bore them
The SURREYS play the game.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Fussell, “The Great War,” 27.

¹⁶⁹ Colin Veitch, “Play up! Play up! And Win the War,” 363; Private. L. S. Price (8th Royal Sussex), from M. Middlebrook, “The First Day on the Somme,” (New York, 1972), 124.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.; Fussell, “The Great War,” 27.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 27-28.

Men did not exclusively think of the war as a game or sporting event or a medieval crusade. In Winifred M. Letts poetry she offers “encouragement and support,” emphasizing the justice of England’s cause while underlining the “romantic nature” of the struggle.¹⁷² Her best-known poem, “The Spires of Oxford,’ was published in 1918. It was written in appreciation to the “students who ‘Left the peaceful river . . . / to seek a bloody sod.’ . . . For Letts, when they left Oxford, ‘They gave their merry youth away / For country and for God.’”¹⁷³ Her poem “To a Soldier in Hospital,” is comparable to Sir Henry Newbolt poem “The Game.”¹⁷⁴

“To a Soldier in Hospital,”

An Empire’s team, a rougher football field,
 The end---Perhaps your grave
 What matter? On the winning of a goal
 You staked your soul.¹⁷⁵

The war as a game, or “more grandly put, “the Great Game,” was often talked about by the soldiers and mentioned in their letters home.¹⁷⁶ It seems that even before the war ended, the view of the war as a game would no longer exist. But even after the Armistice when the survivors finally came home, the myth continued.¹⁷⁷ “When Gunner C.P. Straw, of the Royal Garrison Artillery, was demobilized in February 1919, he received a letter of thanks from a senior officer couched in the following heroic terms”:¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² Crawford, “British Poets,” 143.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 143.

¹⁷⁶ Malcolm Brown, “1918. Year of Victory,” (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1998), 334.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

You take away with you the priceless knowledge that you have Played [sic] a man's part in the great War for freedom and fair play. You will take away with you also your remembrances of your Comrades, your pride in your Regiment, and your love for your Country.

You have played the game; go on playing it, and all will be well with the great Empire, which you have helped to save. ¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

A DIFFERENT VIEW

Soldier poets such as Charles Hamilton Sorley, Arthur Graeme West, and Isaac Rosenberg felt that it was necessary to describe the reality of trenches so that civilians would have to confront it. In his comprehensive study of the poetry of World War One, John H. Johnson noted that Charles Hamilton Sorley came closer to objectivity than any of the other trench poets.¹⁸⁰ At an early age, Sorley was a surprisingly perceptive critic.¹⁸¹ In 1912 he criticized the poetry of the highly respected poet, John Drinkwater, who was a friend of Rupert Brookes.¹⁸² After reading the paper in which Drinkwater's poem had been praised, he criticized the artificiality of post-Victorian poetry: "The voice of our poets and men of letters is finely trained and sweet to hear; it teems with sharp saws and rich sentiment: it is a marvel of delicate technique: it pleases, it flatters, it charms, it soothes: it is a living lie."¹⁸³

The 1916 Battle of the Somme has been pointed to as the trench poet's awareness of modern mechanized warfare. But Sorley, who died before the Battle of the Somme, already had a very modern view of the war.¹⁸⁴ Before attending the University College at Oxford where, he had won a scholarship, he went to Germany as a preliminary to attain some education abroad at Schwerin and

¹⁸⁰ Crawford, "British Poets," 96; from John H. Johnson "English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form," (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964).

¹⁸¹ Crawford, "British Poets," 96.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., Sorley, "Letters," 184.

¹⁸⁴ Crawford, "British Poets," 96-97.

then the University of Jena. On August 2, 1914, he was arrested while on a walking tour of Germany.¹⁸⁵ Since England and Germany were not officially at war, he was released and returned to England. On August 7, 1914, he applied for a commission and became a subaltern in the Suffolk Regiment.¹⁸⁶

Sorley's quick response to the call of the war was typical but not his attitude toward the war, he did not lose his grasp on reality.¹⁸⁷ ". . .Why the term 'slackers' should apply to those who have not enlisted, God knows. Plenty of 'slackers' here, thank you. I was never so idle in my life."¹⁸⁸ Sorley accepted neither Hardy's nor Brooke's superficial views on the nature of the war. Sorley was not joking when as early as November 1914 he wrote in a letter: "I should like so much to kill whoever was primarily responsible for the war."¹⁸⁹ He rejected Brooke's idealization of death in battle and "called Hardy's line 'Victory crowns the just' the worst line he ever wrote."¹⁹⁰

Sorley deliberately makes a contrast between the men's spirit and their impending death. His poems depend on reminders of natural order like Grenfell's poem, but unlike Grenfell's poem, whose "Nature" acknowledged the fighting man, Sorley's "Nature" remains indifferent to the soldier's activity and nothing is offered to sustain them.¹⁹¹ Sorley's war poem "All the Hills and Vales Along" is very different from the spirit of Hardy's "Men Who March Away" or the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Sorley, "Letters," 149.

¹⁸⁹ Fussell, "The Great War," 86; quoted by Silkin, "Out of Battle" 52.

¹⁹⁰ Crawford, "British Soldiers," 96; Sorley, "Letters," 116.

¹⁹¹ Crawford, "British Soldiers," 96-98.

celebration of Grenfell's "Into Battle." ¹⁹² The speaker remains stunningly detached as he addresses the men:

"All the Hills and Vales Along"

All the hills and vales along
Earth is bursting into song,
And the singers are the chaps
Who are going to die perhaps.

He reminds the soldiers of the indifferent earth which:

Bore with joyful ease
Hemlock for Socrates,
.....
Shall rejoice and blossom too
When the bullet reaches you.

"The Poem wishes the men on 'to the gates of death with song' in a cheerful meter more appropriate to a comic son than to a treatment of men about to die in battle, adding significantly to the poem's irony." ¹⁹³

Sorley wrote his last poem, "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead" after he had had some combat experience. ¹⁹⁴ Written in response to the publication of Brooke's "1914 and Other Poems," his focus is on the war dead instead of descriptions of trench life. Slighting Brooke's sonnets, he presents the opposite or another view: ¹⁹⁵

"When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead"

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Crawford, "British Poets," 98.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 96-99.

That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
Nor honour, [sic] It is easy to be dead.
Say only this, "They are Dead." Then add thereto,
"Yet many a better one has died before."
Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.
Great death has made all his for evermore. ¹⁹⁶

"The poem arouses pity for the slain without sensory description of carnage or battle. The sonnet's impact rests on its understatement."¹⁹⁷ After arriving in France, Sorley was promoted to captain. He died in action at Loos on October 13, 1915, about seven months before the Somme Offensive. ¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 96.

CHAPTER 6

THE MAIN GROUP OF ANTI GREAT WAR POETS

Introduction

The most effective war satirist, next to Siegfried Sassoon, was Osbert Sitwell, the oldest son of Sir George Sitwell, the fourth Barron of Sheffield.¹⁹⁹ Sitwell was “closely linked to the main group of anti-war poets led by Sassoon, Graves, and Wilfred Owen which had emerged by 1917.”²⁰⁰ Unlike Osbert Sitwell, who was a professional soldier, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen were all soldier civilians. All four served on the front lines and experienced trench warfare.²⁰¹ Their “writings all reflect a first-hand vision of this holocaust, and it was this, and the nearness and constancy of death, the comradeship of the trenches, the revelation of a crucified humanity, that filled their minds.”²⁰²

For Sitwell “the war meant something much more complex and involved than the straight forward horror of the battlefield.”²⁰³ In his mind, the German army was not the greatest enemy. To him, the enemy was “those attitudes of

¹⁹⁹ Crawford, “British Poets,” 131. As a conservative, Sir George served in Parliament from 1885 to 1886 and 1892 to 1895. He was very controlling and critical of his children and wife and had a passionate conviction that he always knew what was best and spent most of his life correcting the experts. Sir George married Lady Ida Denison, whom he chose because of her bloodline. Her mother was a Somerset, a daughter of the Duke of Beaufort, who could claim a straight line of descent from the Plantagenets. (John Pearson, “The Sitwells, A Family’s Biography,” [New York and London: A Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Book, 1930, reprint, [1980], 22-27; Osbert Sitwell, “Left Hand, Right Hand,”[n. p., 1944], 26-27).

²⁰⁰ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 19, 88.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 103-104.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 104.

mind,”²⁰⁴ which had “produced the international calamity – the blindness and glib hypocrisy of the old, the games-playing optimism of the young, the herd-instinct with its patriotic call to duty, and all the Edwardian absurdities their parents represented.”²⁰⁵

Sitwell and Sassoon both attacked war profiteers, politicians, inept generals and unsympathetic civilians, as well as the “old men” who wanted to prolong the war. Robert Graves used comedy in his depiction of the war’s brutalities while Wilfred Owen subtly attacked those who wanted to prolong the war, which included not only the “old men,” but also women and the soldier poets who glorified the war. Although Owen considered the war itself as evil and treated it as such, he, nor Sassoon, Graves, or Sitwell or even the lesser-known anti-war poets protested the war’s necessity.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Crawford, “British Poets,” 28.

CHAPTER 7

OSBERT SITWELL

Sitwell's reaction to the war was not typical and very different from the other poets of his generation. By training and profession he was a regular soldier and had resigned from his regiment July 22, 1914.²⁰⁷ When war was declared in August he rejoined the Grenadiers but not with the "excitement with which so many war-starved young civilians rushed off to meet the slaughter in the north of France."²⁰⁸ After having already sat through a number of lectures on the coming war, it was very obvious to him that the very senior officers were incompetent and he strongly doubted that the war was going to be a glorious adventure.²⁰⁹ "As a trained soldier he would have turned a very frosty eye on Rupert Brooke and his 'Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour, / And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping, . . .'" Sitwell did not want 'wakening'; he did not believe in God, and what had 'caught his youth'"²¹⁰ was the eighteen months he had spent as a part of the literary establishment in London prior to the war.²¹¹

Even though Sitwell was a professional soldier, he did not welcome the war as a chance to exercise his craft. He made it very clear that he had very little aptitude for military business and "felt no need to prove himself in battle; he loathed discomfort, was an appalling shot, lacked any real group feeling for his

²⁰⁷ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 88.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.; from Osbert Sitwell, "Those Were the Days," (n. p. 1938), 4.

²⁰⁹ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 88

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

regiment, and never learned to read a map. He was a peace time soldier: but since war had come he was prepared to do his duty.”²¹²

“By a strange coincidence, just before Sitwell left for France in December, Sir George and Lady Ida in Scarborough had both felt the power of the enemy when three cruisers from the German battle fleet steamed out of the morning mist and shelled the town.”²¹³ From that time on, Sir George, according to his son Osbert, was convinced that he was one of Germany’s prime targets, and although only a few shell fragments of shells struck their house, that “he had endured a worse bombardment than any that his son was to face at the front.”²¹⁴

During the early months of 1915, Sitwell spent his first tour in the freezing Flanders mud and became depressed by the “grey wretchedness” that surrounded him.

For as long as Osbert could remember it had always been Sir George who had been plaguing him with his continual talk of duty and self-denial – and using his power to inflict boredom and unhappiness on him? Wasn’t this war with its hideous monotony and sacrifice – and old men’s exhortations to the young for duty and self-denial – an obvious extension of the war he had been fighting now for years with his father and his father’s allies? ²¹⁵

²¹² Ibid., 89.

²¹³ At 8:10 on the morning of December 16, 1914, a fleet of German battleships bombarded Scarborough, Hartlepool, and Whitby. Commander Franz von Hipper led the attack with five battle cruisers: *Seydlitz*, *Moltke*, *von der tann*, *Derrflinger* and *Blucher* plus the accompanying light cruisers and destroyers. The attack resulted in 137 fatalities and 592 casualties, many of which were civilians. The Germans believed the attacks were valid because these ports were heavily fortified and therefore military targets. Three German cruisers, which included the *Blucher*, were damaged after coastal defense batteries in Hartlepool began shelling the attacking ships. Sir George and Lady Ida were in Scarborough at their home, Woodend on The Crescent, at the time of the attack. The attack lasted for about one and a half hours. (Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 89; <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/scarborough.htm>. [accessed 29 June 2007]).

²¹⁴ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 89.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 91; from Osbert Sitwell, “Laughter in the Next Room,” (n. p. 1948), 78-86.

In the coming weeks, any doubts that Sitwell might have had concerning his father's duplicity were dismissed "as the finest troops of the British professional army – the same army which the generals had maintained would bring home victory by Christmas – attempted to make one decisive thrust against the encircling Germans." ²¹⁶

Sitwell's second tour of duty on the front found him waiting in reserve for the big offensive, which would go down in history as the Battle of Loos. He already believed the war was a military disaster costing some of his brightest friends (Julian Grenfell and Ivo Charteris) their lives. ²¹⁷ The day before the battle, one of the generals enthusiastically boasted of the secrecy of the British battle plans. To him, the general's voice sounded familiar. "He could not fail to see a similarity between the generals and Sir George; the same brand of optimistic yet fallacious logic, the same way of bravely staying safely in the rear, the same glib reliance on the young to do the fighting." ²¹⁸ The battle was a catastrophe; the British battle plans were no secret; the Germans knew them and had been waiting.

"Loos was a battle of outrageous blunders, of missed opportunities and wasted lives."²¹⁹ Because of the delay in bringing up the reserves, Sitwell's battalion saw the gruesome results. The bodies of friends and enemies lay in "curious crumpled shapes swollen and stiff in the long yellow grass under the

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 91-101.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 101; from Osbert Sitwell, "Laughter," 95.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

blue chicory flowers.”²²⁰ The British army was shattered. Loos confirmed what he already knew. The terrible disaster was the result of the “powerful elders who were so certain they knew best.”²²¹

After the Battle of Loos, which was Sitwell’s final battle, he was promoted to captain and given a company. He remained in Flanders throughout the early spring of 1916 when in April he contracted blood poisoning from an injured foot.²²² After several weeks in the hospital, he was sent home, which was commonly done during that phase of the war.²²³

It was during a rest period in Ypres, that Sitwell discovered his ability to concentrate his thoughts and compose verse. Previously he had only seen himself as a “champion of the arts and artists.”²²⁴ His first result was the poem “Babel.” Its verse was not so exceptional that it stood out from all the other war poems that were being written, but his sister Edith brought “Babel” to the attention of Richard Jennings, a poetic talent scout, who had ensured the publication of her own poetry in the *Daily Mirror*.²²⁵ Through the efforts of Jennings, “Babel” was published in the *London Times* May 11, 1916. In some ways it was an answer to the warlike sentiments of Julian Grenfell’s “Into Battle,” which had been published a week or two earlier.²²⁶

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 101.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 103.

²²⁵ Ibid., 101-103.

²²⁶ Ibid., 102-103.

“Babel”

Deep sunk in sin, this tragic star
Sinks deeper still, and wages war
Against itself; strewn all the seas
With Victims of a world disease
And we are left to drink the lees
Of Babel’s direful prophecy. ²²⁷

Sitwell frequently singled out the older generation for abuse. He opens his poem “Arm-Chair” with lines recalling Sassoon’s “Base Details.” “If I were now of handsome middle-age, / I should not govern yet, but still should hope / To help the prosecution of the war.” ²²⁸ He summarizes the activities of civilians who planted victory gardens, wrote letters to the *Times*, and sent their sons to France, while encouraging others to do the same.²²⁹ “If I were old or only seventy,” ²³⁰ the poem’s speaker “would become either a military leader or a politician, send grandsons to France, and make the ‘Bishops go nigh mad with joy’ by not making peace until all the younger generation had been crippled in battle.”²³¹ In the last stanza he “regrets that, younger than ninety, he is not old enough to govern and ends with a wish: ‘O let me govern, Lord, at ninety-nine!’”²³²

Whereas Sitwell attacks the old men and politicians at home, Sassoon attacks the elderly military leaders who although they were in France avoided getting close to the trenches and the fighting. They link the apparent

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 131.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

endlessness of the war to the older generation. To them the “one way of dealing with the intolerable suspicion that the war would last forever was to make it tolerable by satire” ²³³ like the “Arm-Chair” and Sassoon’s poem:

“Base Details”

Written in Rouen March 4, 1917

If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath [sic],
I’d live with scarlet Majors at the Base,
And speed glum heroes up the line to death.
You’d see me with my puffy petulant face,
Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel,
Reading the Roll of Honour. “Poor young chap,”
I’d say --- I used to know his father well;
Yes, we’ve lost heavily in this last scrap.”
And when the war is done and youth stone dead,
I’d toddle safely home and die --- in bed. ²³⁴

Sitwell attacks the older generation again in “The Eternal Club.” In this poem the old men empathize with Joseph regarding the conduct of Jesus:

Warming their withered hands the dotards say:
“In our youth men were happy till they died.
What is it ails the young men of to-day---
To make them bitter and dissatisfied?” ²³⁵

The friends of Joseph “do not understand his son’s reaction to the money-changers in the temple, denial of family, Sermon on the Mount, or protest against the *status quo*.” ²³⁶

But Sitwell considered the real enemy to be “what he called the ‘platitudinous multitude,’ the mass of the insensitive, complacent public who

²³³ Fussell, “The Great War,” 72.

²³⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, “Siegfried Sassoon, The War Poems,” arranged and a forward by Rupert Hart-Davis, (London: faber and faber, 1983), 7.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

were expecting the young men to fight for them.”²³⁷ Sitwell believed that “The unforgivable thing about this ‘platitudinous multitude’ was that they were led by safe old men trying to tell the young men who were facing death not to be morbid, not to be critical, above all not to think. Instead they should be happy with the simple life:”²³⁸

Then would you grow to a malign old age,
Watching your sons a-cricket on the green
And hear your daughter’s cello in the dusk,
These are the joys the future holds in store.²³⁹

As the poem ends, Sitwell points out, that “the talk of unquestioning love of the simple life is beside the point at a time when ‘Moloch, God of Blood,’²⁴⁰ is devouring young men by the million. As the awful god rides by, Osbert pictures him holding in his hand ‘a fingered treatise on Simplicity.’”²⁴¹ In Sitwell’s ‘Hymn to Moloch,’ he again attacks the older generation. From the safety of home, they pray to Moloch “to refrain from saving youth at the front:”²⁴².

“World – Hymn to Moloch”

Eternal Moloch, strong to slay,
Do not seek to heal or save.
Lord, it is the better way
Swift to send them to the grave.
Cast on us thy crimson smile
Moloch, lord, we pray to thee,

²³⁷ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 113; *Wheels* 12nd ed. v. There is some confusion about who actually began *Wheels*, a poetry magazine. Nina Hamnett, who was around at the time, but was writing poetry long afterwards, wrote: Nancy Cunard, started the magazine *Wheels* in 1916. Three young poets called Sitwell wrote for it. Pearson’s, (“The Sitwells,” 106.); After the war, with his siblings Edith and Sacheverell, Osbert Sitwell edited the six “cycles” of *Wheels* (1916-1921); (Crawford, “British Poets,” 131).

²³⁸ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 113; *Wheels* 12th ed. v.; Crawford, “British Poets,” 131.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Send at least one victory.
Those of us too old to go
Send our sons to face the foe,
But, O Lord! we must remain
Here, to pray and sort the slain. ²⁴³

Sitwell's first satire coincided with the worsening of the war in 1917. And it was during this time that Robbie Ross introduced him to Siegfried Sassoon, who was already acquainted with most of the London literary establishment, including Gosse and Edward Marsh. ²⁴⁴ Sitwell immediately felt a bond with Sassoon, who reinforced his pacifism to the point where Sitwell "agreed that the war must be ended by almost any means. Their targets were essentially the same, the profiteers, the generals, the complacent patriotic public and the glib journalist and politicians who still egged them on against the enemy." ²⁴⁵ With Sassoon for inspiration, Sitwell took up the position as a staunch "controversialist, ready and willing to do instant battle against a number of opponents . . . warmongers, fathers, press-lords, generals, philistines, the middle classes and the church." ²⁴⁶ He opposed any politician who desired to prolong the war.

In his book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell "has written of how the war finally produced a whole 'generation of bright young men at war

²⁴³ Ibid., G. A. Cevasco, "The Sitwells, Edith, Osbert, & Sacheverell," (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 21.

²⁴⁴ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 114.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 115.

with their elders.”²⁴⁷ Osbert Sitwell could justifiably claim to have been the first of the soldier Great War poets to put this warfare into words.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103; Fussell, “The Great War,” 109.

²⁴⁸ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 103.

CHAPTER 8

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

“Siegfried Sassoon ²⁴⁹ was the first soldier poet to achieve public notoriety as an opponent not only of the war, but also of those whose complicity allowed it to continue,”²⁵⁰ However, at the beginning of the war, he was unthinkingly patriotic. Before Sassoon saw action and experienced what seemed unending trench warfare, there were no sarcastic poems or angry realistic war verse. There was little about his early poetry that “distinguished it from Brooke’s except for Brooke’s superior talent. . . . ‘Absolution’ reveals the extent to which abstractions [not realism] dominated his verse before” he saw action: “ ²⁵¹

“Absolution”

The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes
till beauty shines in all that we can see.
War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,
And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.

Horror of wounds and anger at the foe,
And loss of things desired; all these must pass.

²⁴⁹Siegfried Sassoon’s mother, Theresa Georgina Thornycroft, was the daughter of the distinguished sculptor Thomas Thornycroft. Her maternal grandfather John Francis was also a renowned sculptor. One of her brothers, Sir John Isaac Thornycroft, a naval architect, built the first British torpedo-boat and her brother Sir William Hamo Thornycroft, the sculptor; works include the statue of Gordon in Trafalgar Square. His father Alfred Ezra Sassoon was the son of David Sassoon who had been the Saraf Bashi (Chief Treasurer of Baghdad) As the Pasha’s Treasurer he was formally recognized among the Jews of Baghdad as their “Nasi,” or Prince. Because of the dangerous intrigue between Baghdad and the Ottoman Empire, David Sassoon and his family left Baghdad and established themselves as merchants in Bombay where their wealth became as great if not greater than the Rothschild’s, with whom several of Siegfried Sassoon’s cousins had married. His father and uncles eventually settled in England. They were guests and host of the various members of the Royal Family with whom they were friends. Siegfried’s Uncle Arthur had been King Edward’s host at Brighton only a week or so before his death in 1910. (Cecil Roth’s, “The Sassoon Dynasty,” [New York: Arno Press, 1977], 22-36, 113, 157-158).

²⁵⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 119.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 120.

We are the happy legion, for we know
Time's [sic] but a golden wind that shakes the grass.

There was an hour when we were loth to part
From life we longed to share no less than others.
Now, having claimed this heritage of heart,
What need we more, my comrades and my brothers? ²⁵²

Sassoon noted in "*The War Poems*" that "People used to feel like this when they 'joined up' in 1914 and 1915. 'No one feels it when they 'go out again'. They only feel, then, a queer craving for 'good old times at Givenchy' etc. But there will always be 'good old times', even for people promoted from Inferno to Paradise"! ²⁵³ "Absolution" was begun in April 1915 and not completed until September, five months later. ²⁵⁴

Although Sassoon studied law and then history at Clare College, Cambridge, he left without taking a degree. There was nothing in his prewar life that suggested he would become a public spokesman or anti establishment. ²⁵⁵ He loved anything to do with horses. His prewar life was devoted to cricket, foxhunting, book collecting, and poetry. ²⁵⁶ It was through his Aunt Rachel Beer, his father's sister, that he became acquainted with the London literary establishment. ²⁵⁷

²⁵² Siegfried Sassoon, "The War Poems," 15; quoted in Crawford's, "British Poets," 120.

²⁵³ Sassoon, "The War Poems," 15.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Crawford, "British Poets," 118-119.

²⁵⁶ Crawford, "British Poets," 119; Roth, "The Sassoon Dynasty," 195-197.

²⁵⁷ At one point Rachel edited two rival London newspapers, the Observer, which she owned, and the Sunday Times, which her husband owned. (Crawford, "British Poets," 119; Roth, "The Sassoon Dynasty," 197; Pearson, "The Sitwells," 114).

By the morning of August 5, 1914, Sassoon was in uniform as a 28-year-old cavalry trooper. ²⁵⁸ He shortly transferred to the Royal Welch Fusiliers as a second Lieutenant of Infantry. In his *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, he wrote that he “did not need Hardy’s ‘Song of the Soldier’s’ [“Men Who March Away”] to warn me that Remounts [the cavalry] was no place for me.” ²⁵⁹ Sassoon broke his arm while training with the Sussex Yeomanry in January 1915, which delayed his arrival at the front until November 1915. ²⁶⁰

Both Sassoon and Robert Graves were in the Royal Welch Fusiliers’ First Battalion. ²⁶¹ Graves, who was in “A” Company, was visiting a friend in “C” Company when he noticed the *Essays of Lionel Johnson* lying on a table. In his book *Good Bye To All That*, Graves writes that it was the first book he had seen since he had come to France, that was not a military text-book or a “rubbish” novel, other than his own Keats and Blake. ²⁶² Wanting to know whom the book belonged to, Graves looked at the flyleaf:

I looked round to see who could possibly be called Siegfried Sassoon and bring Lionel Johnson with him to the First Battalion. He was obvious, so I got into conversation with him, and a few minutes later we were walking to Bethune, being off duty until that night, and talking about poetry At that time I was getting my first book of poems, *Over the Brazier*, ready for the press; I had one or two drafts in my pocket-book and showed them to Siegfried. He told me that they were too realistic and that war should not be written about in a realistic way. In return he showed me some of his own poems. . . . This was before Siegfried had been in the trenches. I told him, in my old-soldier manner, that he would soon change his style. ²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Fussell, “The Great War,” 91; Crawford, “British Poets,” 119.

²⁵⁹ Crawford, “British Poets,” 119-120.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Robert Graves, “Good Bye To All That, An Autobiography,” ed. Richard Perceval Graves, (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 160.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

The Sassoon poem that Graves refers to in his book was written January 4, 1916. It was printed anonymously in *The Times* January 15.²⁶⁴

“To Victory”

Return to greet me, colours [sic] that were my joy, Not in the
woeful crimson of men slain,
But shining as a garden; come with the streaming
Banners of dawn and sundown after rain

I want to fill my gaze with blue and silver,
Radiance through living roses, spires of green
Rising in young-limbed copse and lovely wood
Where the hueless [sic] wind passes and cries unseen.

I am not sad; only I long for luster,
I am tired of the greys and browns and the leafless ash.
I would have hours that move like a glitter of dancers
Far from the angry guns that boom and flash.

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.

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After the war Sassoon explained: “The observation here is as false as the sentiment France’ falsifies the emotions of men at war with its idea that the British soldiers are fortunate to die for the lovely landscapes of France.”²⁶⁶ He further explains “the significance of my too nobly worded lines was that they expressed the typical self-glorifying feelings of a young man about to go to the

²⁶⁴ Sassoon, “The War Poems,” 21.

²⁶⁵ Moore, Jr., “Siegfried Sassoon,” 205; Sassoon, “The War Poems,” 21; Graves, “Good Bye,” 160; L. Hugh Moore, Jr., “Siegfried Sassoon and Georgian Realism,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 14 (January, 1969): 205-206.

²⁶⁶ Moore, “Siegfried Sassoon,” *Twentieth Century Literature*: 206.

Front for the first time The more I saw of the war, the less noble-minded I felt about it.”²⁶⁷

Eight months later, October 31, 1916, Sassoon wrote the following:

“They”

The Bishop tells us “When the boys come back
They will not be the same; for they’ll have fought
In a just cause: they lead the last attack
On Anti-Christ; their comrades’ blood has bought
New right to breed an honourable [[sic] race,
They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.”

“We’re none of us the same!’ the boys reply.
“For George lost both his legs; and Bill’s stone blind;
Poor Jim’s shot through the lungs and like to die;
And Bert’s gone syphilitic: you’ll not find
A chap who’s served that hasn’t found some change.”
And the Bishop said: “The ways of God are strange!”²⁶⁸

Sassoon notes in *The War Poems* that “They” was:

Written at 40 Half Moon street about 1 a.m., after a long evening with Robbie Ross, More Adey and Roderick Meiklejohn. I was so sleepy I could hardly keep my eyes open, but the thing just wrote itself. And Eddie Marsh, when I showed it to him one wet morning (at 10 Downing Street), said: “It’s too horrible.” As I was walking back I actually met “the Bishop” (of London) and he turned a mild shining gaze on me and my M. C.²⁶⁹

A courageous and capable officer, Sassoon’s “conduct during the war demonstrated the highest ideals of courage. He won the Military Cross for bringing back wounded men after a raid, and during the Somme Offensive he single handedly occupied a section of German trench.”²⁷⁰ On his last leave before the Somme Offensive, Sassoon, believing that uncut wire was going to be

²⁶⁷ Ibid.; Siegfried Sassoon, “Siegfried’s Journey 1916-1920,” (London: n. p., 1945), 63.

²⁶⁸ Siegfried Sassoon, “The War Poems,” 57.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 120.

one of the problems, went shopping.²⁷¹ He bought two pair of wire cutters with rubber-coated handles from the Army and Navy stores, which, upon his return, he issued to his company. “These were, he says, ‘my private contribution to the Great Offensive.’”²⁷² Called “Mad Jack” by his men, “Sassoon, like Julian Grenfell, made independent forays into No Man’s Land to stalk German snipers.”

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Although “initially enthusiastic, he was very soon appalled by what he saw there. But throughout he was an extremely brave and able officer.”²⁷⁴ On one occasion, when Sassoon was “ordered to rehearse his men---already much over-rehearsed---for an attack, he led them into a wood and read the *London Mail* to them.”²⁷⁵ In 1916 he was wounded in the shoulder; after his convalescence in England, he “returned to the line, where, as Frank Richards remembers, he was greatly admired by the troops: ‘It was only once in a blue moon,’ says Richards, ‘that we had an officer like Mr. Sassoon.’”²⁷⁶ In April 1917, during the battle of Arras,²⁷⁷ Sassoon was shot through the neck. When he was sent home to

²⁷¹ Fussell, “The Great War,” 65.

²⁷² Fussell, “The Great War,” 65; Siegfried Sassoon, “Memoirs of an Infantry Officer,” (London: n. p., 1930), 52.

²⁷³ Crawford, “British Poets,” 121; Fussell, “The Great War,” 91.

²⁷⁴ Fussell, “The Great War,” 91.

²⁷⁵ Crawford, “British Poets,” 120-121.

²⁷⁶ Fussell, “The Great War,” 91; from Frank Richards, “Old Soldiers Never Die,” (London: n. p., 1933), 271.

²⁷⁷ The first day of the battle of Arras was on April 9, 1917. It was a British triumph. Within a few hours they broke through the German front to a depth of between one and three miles. They suffered only a few casualties and took 9,000 prisoners and apparently cleared a way towards open country. A predicated pause of two hours after the objectives had been gained prevented the leading troops from continuing the advance. By the time they did so, the day was ending and they had lost their momentum. On April 10 the first German reserves began to appear to stop the gap. When on April 11, an attempt was made to widen the break-in by an attack on the right at Bullecourt, which was part of the front; they found uncut wire, which the handful of accompanying tanks could not break. An intermission was then ordered, to allow casualties to be replaced and the troops to recover. By then, loses totaled nearly 20,000, one-third of those suffered on the first day of the Somme, and the divisions engaged were exhausted.

convalesce, he was suffering from his wound and a bad case of nerves, trench fever, and hallucinations. ²⁷⁸

After writing a letter against the continuation of the war, Sassoon went before the Medical Board at Liverpool on July 20, 1917. ²⁷⁹ He was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh where he met Wilfred Owen. ²⁸⁰ His statement against the continuation of the war was read before the House of Commons on July 30, 1917 and published in *The Times* the next day. ²⁸¹

On November 26, Sassoon was declared fit for General Service and in February 1918 assigned to the Twenty-Fifth Battalion R.W. F. and sent to Palestine; by May 1918, Sassoon was back in France with his Battalion. ²⁸² After receiving a head wound on July 13, 1918, he was sent home in August to convalesce where he remained on indefinite sick leave until he officially retired from the Army March 12, 1919. ²⁸³ That same month he wrote:

“Aftermath.”

Have you forgotten yet? . . .

For the worlds events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked while at the crossing of city-ways:
And the hunted gap in your mind have filled with thoughts that
 flow
Like clouds in the lit heaven of life; and you're a man reprieved

When the battle resumed on April 23, the Germans had re-organized and reinforced and were ready to counter-attack on every sector. As a result, attrition set in, dragging on for a month, and bringing another 130,000 casualties for no appreciable gain of ground. Although the Germans suffered equally, they rebuilt their positions and were in no danger of undergoing a further defeat on the Arras front. (Keegan's, "The First World War," 325-326; Strachan, "The First World War," 245-248).

²⁷⁸ Roth, "The Sassoon Dynasty," 214.

²⁷⁹ Sassoon, "The War Poems," 13.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 14.

²⁸³ Ibid.

to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.
But the past is just the same---and War's a bloody game . . .
Have you forgotten yet? . . .
Look down and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at
Mametz-----
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags
on parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench-----
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, "Is it all going to happen again?"

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack-----
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads---- those ashen-grey
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

Have you forgotten yet? . . .
Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴Sassoon, "The War Poems," 143.

CHAPTER 9
WILFRED OWEN

Unlike most of Owen's generation, "unrestrained enthusiasm" was not his first response to England's declaration of war. When war was declared, Owen was in France working as a tutor, where no romantic idealism about the impending German invasion existed.²⁸⁵ "He came to the conclusion, and declared it in a rather defensive tone, that a poet was more useful to England alive than dead He was finally persuaded by several factors, including recruiting propaganda in newspapers sent to him from home" ²⁸⁶ to enlist. Because of his contract, Owen stayed in France until September 1915 and in October enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. Following his training, Owen received his commission in the Manchester Regiment on June 4, 1916; by January 1917, he was in the trenches on the front.

Two significant changes would occur in Owen's attitude after being sent to the front. When Owen first arrived in France he had an elitist attitude and was insensitive toward the lower ranks; "in a letter dated January 4, 1917 Owen writes: "The men are just as Bairnsfather²⁸⁷ has them—expressionless lumps. We feel the weight of them hanging on us." ²⁸⁸ Before seeing action at the Somme in January 1917, he wrote his mother: "There is a fine heroic feeling

²⁸⁵ Crawford, "British Poets," 175; from Dominic Hibberd's, *Wilfred Owen* (London: Longman, 1975), 28.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Bruce Bairnsfather (1888-1959) was an English cartoonist; (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, (1973), s. v. "Biographical Names.")

²⁸⁸ Crawford, "British Poets," 175; Dennis Welland, "Elegies to This Generation" from Hibberd, "Casebook," 140.

about being in France, and I am in perfect spirits.”²⁸⁹ But sixteen days later everything had changed: “I can see no excuse for deceiving you about these 4 days. I have suffered seventh hell. I have not been at the front. I have been in front of it.”²⁹⁰ His attitude toward the fighting had changed considerably. “In a letter home from the front he had described ‘everything unnatural, broken, blasted, . . . the most execrable sights on earth. In poetry we call them most glorious.’”²⁹¹

Flanders and Picardy were well known for their humidity and abundant rain; it also happens to be where the water table is the highest and where the British had dug their trenches. Since the trenches were always wet and often flooded several feet deep, thigh-boots or waders were issued to the British soldiers as part of their uniform.²⁹² At the beginning of 1917, Wilfred Owen, wrote his mother from the Somme: “The waders are of course indispensable. In 2 ½ miles of trench, which I waded yesterday, there was not one inch of dry ground. There is a mean depth of two feet of water.”²⁹³ Can you imagine having to go to the latrine in these conditions?²⁹⁴ In the end “there was no defense against the water but humor. ‘Water knee deep and up to the waist in places,’ one soldier notes in his diary. ‘Rumors of being relieved by the Grand Fleet.’”²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ “Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters,” eds., Harold Owen and John Bell, (1967), 421-27; Fussell, “The Great War,” 81; Crawford, *British Poets*,” 175.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Paul Norgate, “Wilfred Owen and the Soldier Poets,” *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 40, (November, 1989): 519.

²⁹² Fussell, “The Great War,” 47-48.

²⁹³ Owen and Bell, eds., “Collected Letters,” 426; Fussell, “The Great War,” 47-48.

²⁹⁴ Fussell, “The Great War,” 47-48.

²⁹⁵ Fussell, “The Great War,” 48; R. W. Mitchell, in manuscript or typescript material in the archives of the Imperial War Museum. (IWM).

Owen's first experience in the trenches was in the middle of January 1917 and far worse than anything he could have imagined.²⁹⁶ From then on he was dominated by emotions of horror, outrage, and pity: "horror at what he saw at the front; outrage at the inability of the civilian world---especially the church---to understand what was going on; good-looking boys victimized by it all."²⁹⁷

By the third year, poetry written by soldiers serving on the front began to attract more attention: not just verse of established heroic poets such as Rupert Brooke's but work from a variety of men who were actually fighting. In 1916 Galloway Kyle took over the editorship of the *Poetry Review*. He quickly realized the change of popular interest and immediately made a regular feature of poems from men on active duty at the front. Selecting poems from the feature, Kyle, under the pseudonym of Erskine Macdonald, produced and published, in September 1916, "Songs of the Fighting Men" by 'The Soldier Poets.' Within three months the anthology went into reprint twice and was followed the next year by "More Songs of the Fighting Men." Both volumes were very popular and received enthusiastic critical reviews exhorting: "a little volume to treasure . . . contains poems that will become classics."²⁹⁸

Some of the Soldier Poets' poems occasionally hinted about the undesirability of war, but without any apparent difficulty they accepted and endorsed "the necessity for continued prosecution of *this* war and all the

²⁹⁶ Fussell, "The Great War," 47- 48.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

²⁹⁸ Norgate, "Wilfred Owen," 517; quoted in Kyle's introduction to the reprinted editions.

sacrifices entailed---including the grim conditions of the Western Front.”²⁹⁹ What was different about these poems was the significance of the individual soldier: “If I should die, you will know that I have sacrificed my Youth in the fight for Liberty and Right. I recall the beauties of England and I know that our struggle is part of God’s plan. Our spirit and our memory will be sweet comfort to our mothers, wives and sisters, and glorious inspiration to our brothers. . . .”³⁰⁰ It was a continuous self-renewing refrain. All these phrases or expressions in their entirety cannot be found in each individual poem, but “any part may be taken to represent the whole, and key ‘motifs’---Courage, England, Home, God, Victory, Mother, etc.---need only be deployed, not explored or explained . . . The soldier Poets, speaking from the front itself, sanctioned the continuation of the war.”³⁰¹

From the beginning of 1917 through late April, Owen was in and out of the front six times. He “had an understanding with his mother that when he used a double line to cross out ‘I am being sent down to base,’ he meant he was at the front again.”³⁰² “What finally broke him was an action in late April when he had to remain in a badly shelled forward position for days looking at the scattered pieces of a fellow officer’s body.”³⁰³ How he reacted is not known but he was evacuated and diagnosed with neurasthenia.³⁰⁴ Considering Owen’s own war

²⁹⁹ Norgate, “Wilfred Owen,” 517.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 518.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Owen and Bell, eds., “Collected Letters,” 520; Fussell, “The Great War,” 185.

³⁰³ Fussell, “The Great War,” 289.

³⁰⁴ The public schools in England had for decades seen as their primary task the building of character and will-power in their elite charges: to this end, team sports and the prefect system were crucial. As late as 1917, one psychologist could maintain ‘that products of public schools were less prone to shell-shock, for they had had the benefit of that atmosphere . . . in which character and manliness are developed side by side with learning’, and which ‘seems to prevent

experience it is easy to understand why he could not relate his experiences with the Soldier Poets' "Songs":

In April 1917, Owen was left fighting without relief for 12 days at Savy Wood. At some point he was forced to take refuge for several days in a hole with the month-old bits and pieces of another British officer. It is not clear whether he was hemmed in by enemy fire or unconscious for some time or paralyzed by shock. When he did return to base it was apparent to his colonel that his mental state was so bad that he had become incapable of leading his men. ³⁰⁵

Before being sent to Craiglockhart, Owen wrote his sister from the Casualty Clearing Station:

I certainly was shaky when I first arrived. . . . You know it was not the Bosche that worked me up, nor the explosives, but it was living so long by poor old Cock Robin (as we used to call 2/Lt. Gaukroger), who lay not only near by, but in various places around and about, if you understand. I hope you don't! ³⁰⁶

After Owen³⁰⁷ was hospitalized at Craiglockhart, an experimental hospital near Edinburgh, he had a very different literary experience than previously. It was at Craiglockhart that he met Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon and

neurasthenia.' (Ted Bogacz, *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, No. 2 Studies on War, [April 1989]: 231). The term 'shell-shock' denoted a violent physical injury, albeit of a special kind. That injury was validated by the term, enabling many people and their families to bypass the stigma associated with terms like 'hysteria' or neurasthenia' connoting a condition arising out of psychological vulnerability. 'Shell-shock' was a vehicle at one and the same time of consolation and legitimization. (Jay Winter, "Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, No. 1 Special Issue: Shell-Shock, [January, 2000]: 9).

³⁰⁵ James Najarian, "Greater Love": Wilfred Owen, Keats, and a Tradition of Desire," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47, (Spring, 2001): 24.

³⁰⁶ Owen and Bell, eds., "Collected Letters," 456; Fussell, "The Great War," 289.

³⁰⁷ To Newbolt, the wartime sufferings of such as Wilfred Owen were tiny-and-whinny-compared with Haig's: "Owen and the rest of the broken men," he says, "rail at the Old Men who sent the young to die: they have suffered cruelly, but in the nerves and not in the heart--they haven't the experience or the imagination to know the extreme human agony . . ." (Fussell, "The Great War," 26; Patrick Howarth, "Play up! And Play the Game," (1973): 7.)

became acquainted with Sassoon's caustic satire of trench life sketches. ³⁰⁸

While there, Owen edited *The Hydra*, the hospital magazine, in which he published both his and Sassoon poems. ³⁰⁹

Meeting Sassoon had a considerable influence on Owen's work. It was a turning point for Owen. His own writings, "which were creative and critical, seemed to explode." ³¹⁰ At Craiglockhart "Sassoon provided Owen with significant insights into the relationship of poetry and war He showed Owen drafts of poems, which would appear in Sassoon's 'Counter Attack.'" ³¹¹ During Owen's convalescence he was also forming his own response to the war. Contrary to the popular prose of the established poets or the Soldier Poets' "Songs," Owen did not use romantic dialogue or archaic rhetoric. ³¹² Meeting Sassoon did not necessarily change Owen's poetical theory or method, but he learned from Sassoon how to connect the relationship of poetry and war. ³¹³

It was not long after meeting Sassoon that Owen, using a blunt colloquial style, wrote "The Dead Beat," which was unlike any of his previous writings. Focusing on the attitude of British officers, physicians, and civilians, "The Dead Beat" is about a "shell-shock" soldier who dies after one night in the infirmary. In the poem, Owen shows the contempt that was felt toward those who suffered shell shock. He not only reveals the attending physicians lack of compassion but the apparent loathing he feels for his patient. The poem ends with: "That scum

³⁰⁸ Crawford, "British Poets," 176.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Owen and Bell, eds., "Collected Letters," 484; Norgate, "Wilfred Owen," 519. Fussell, "The Great War," 103.

³¹¹ Crawford, "British Poets," 176.

³¹² Norgate, "Wilfred Owen," 519; Crawford, "British Poets," 176.

³¹³ Ibid.

you sent last night soon died. Hooray.”³¹⁴ Although it was never mention by Owen, Graves said “It preyed on his mind that he had been unjustly accused of cowardice by his Commanding Officer.”³¹⁵

All of Owen’s major poems were written during the brief year of his convalescence. Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum est” is generally read as an attack upon the “belligerent” ignorance of the non-combatant civilians, which at one point was subtitled: “To a Certain Poetess.” The poetess in question was Miss Jessie Pope, whose poems were published frequently in newspapers and journals.³¹⁶ It was not only the men, but also women poets such as Jessie Pope, Katharine Tynan, and Mary Symon, who continued to support the war even after the heavy losses. Without the finesse and style, “They wrote calls to action poetry in the same mode “of Robert Bridges’ ‘Wake Up, England,’ encouragement to continue the fight despite tragic losses in the vein of John McCrae’s ‘In Flanders Field’ and appeals for heroism in the mode of Herbert Asquith’s ‘The Volunteer.’”³¹⁷ In Miss Pope’s poem “The Call,” she encourages enlistment in one stanza then promises a reckoning to those who don’t enlist in the next:

“The Call”

Who’s for the trench---
Are you, my laddie?
Who’ll follow the French---
Will you, my laddie?
Who’s fretting to begin,
Who’s going out to win?

³¹⁴ Crawford, “British Poets,” 178.

³¹⁵ Robert Graves, “Good-Bye To All That,” ed., Richard Perceval Graves, (Providence, R.I., and Oxford, U.K.: Berghahn Books, 1995), 234; Fussell, “The Great War,” 289.

³¹⁶ Crawford, “British Poets,” 140; Norgate, “Wilfred Owen,” 520.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

And who wants to save his skin---
Do you, my laddie?

In the following stanza she states that you will continue to be either a noble hero or a base coward after victory:

Who'll earn the Empire's thanks---
Will you, my laddie?
Who'll swell the victor's ranks---
Will you, my laddie?
When that procession comes,
Banners and rolling drums---
Who'll stand and bite his thumbs---
Will you, my laddie ? ³¹⁸

“If the subject were not so serious, one could afford to laugh off Miss Pope as the faintly ridiculous lady she was. But it was she, not Owen, who had the public ear, and her jingling verse was a lie no less terrible for the inanity it displayed.”³¹⁹

Mary Symon wrote “A Call To Arms,” which was published in the *Graphic* December 26, 1914. She states the situation very badly in her appeal but makes no threats against the “laggards”:

“A Call To Arms”

Your country needs you.
Leave the plough
To rust in homeland sod,
Give weakling hands your work to do,
Leave child and wife to God. ³²⁰

³¹⁸ Crawford, “British Poets,” 140-141.

³¹⁹ Crawford, “British Poets,” 141; Arthur E. Lane, “An Adequate Response: The War Poetry of Wilfred and Siegfried Sassoon,” (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 47.

³²⁰ Crawford, “British Poets,” 141-142.

Katharine Tynan was an Irish poet who worked as a nurse during the war helping the war victims and supporting soldier's families. She had one son who fought in Palestine and another in France; to her the war was necessary and just. That she pictures "the war as an exercise in chivalry becomes apparent in "New Haven," where she describes modern soldiers: 'Paradise now has many a Knight, / Many a lordkin, many lords, / Glimmer of armour, [sic] dinted and bright, / The young Knights have put on new swords": ³²¹

Paradise now is the soldiers' land,
Their own country its shining sod,
Comrades all in a merry band;
And the young Knights' laughter pleaseth God. ³²²

As a nursed of the war victims, she had to know of the brutalities the soldiers suffered on the front. Yet, despite the causalities, she continues to support the war. In "To the Others," she tells a mother:

Your son and my son, . . . / Should they be broken in the Lord's wars---Peace! /He Who has given them---are they not His"? The poem ends with the unmistakable conclusion that casualty list should not deflect the nation from its "Holy War": Your son and my son for the Great Crusade, / With the banner of Christ over them---our knights new-made."³²³

Poems titled "Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori"³²⁴ had already been written by other soldier poets. *Poetry Review* and "More Songs of the Fighting Men" first printed Cpl. H. J. Jarvis's "Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori. Another "poem with the same title, written by Major Sydney Oswald, was also

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid., 142.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Dulce et Decorum Est pro Patria Mori had been inscribed above the chapel door at Sandhurst in 1913. (Norgate, "Wilfred Owen," 520-521; D. Hibberd and J. Onions eds., "Poetry of the Great War," [1986]: 204).

published in *Poetry Review* and in “Songs of the Fighting Men.”³²⁵ “Oswald celebrated deeds of combat in the line, and the impulse to invest such action with significance is clearly evident in his concluding lines”:³²⁶

O`Glory is theirs; the People’s narrative
Of fame will tell their deeds of gallantry,
And for all time their memories will live
Shrined in our hearts.³²⁷

Owen begins his “Dulce et Decorum Est” with the unvarnished ‘truth’.³²⁸ He describes realistically the “soldiers at the front, ‘Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-Kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,’ and includes descriptions of the men’s weariness and exhaustion, obliviousness to the sound of exploding shells, and limping along without boots,”³²⁹ In the second stanza, when the men see the “green sea” of gas they fumble for their gas masks, “ but one man does not react quickly enough, and ‘As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. / In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning,’”³³⁰ After illustrating accurately the “glory” of the trenches, Owen, directly addresses the reader stating that “one who marched behind the wagon bearing the victim ‘would not tell with such high zest/ To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie: Dulce et

³²⁵ Cpl. H.J. Jarvis’ poem was published in *Poetry Review*, 8, (Jan-Feb, 1917): 32-34., and “More Songs,” 73. Major Sydney Oswald poem was published in *Poetry Review*, 7, (Jan-Feb, 1916): 37., and “More Songs,” 69. (Norgate, “Wilfred Owen,” 520-521).

³²⁶ Norgate, “Wilfred Owen,” 521.

³²⁷ Jarvis’s poem was published in *Poetry Review*, 8, (Jan-Feb, 1917), 32-34, and in “More Songs,” 73; Oswald’s poem was published in *Poetry Review*, 7, (Jan.-Feb., 1916): 37, and in “More Songs,” 69. (Norgate, “Wilfred Owen,” 520-521).

³²⁸ Ibid., 520-521.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

decorum est / Pro patria mori.”³³¹ (It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country.)

In comparison to Oswald poem, Owen writes about “people who suffer and die, not ‘the People ‘ who applaud and sanctify. With persistent emphasis on its degrading, nightmarish setting, Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum est’ images a random and futile death, far removed from any meaningful action”³³² and whose memory offers no comfort or heroic reassurance.³³³

Owen modernizes the story of Abraham and Isaac, but instead of building an altar for the sacrifice, the “old man” bounds the youth with “belts and straps” and builds parapets:

“The Parable of the Old Man and the Young”

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
and builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! An angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns:
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.³³⁴

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid., 521.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Crawford, “British Poets,” 185.

Having never blamed any individual or country in his other poems, the “Old Man” most likely represents all the European countries or their governments. Owen felt it was not only necessary “to present the tendency of old men to sacrifice the young but also to specify the extent of the carnage.”³³⁵

Owen’s entry into the recognized literary circles resulted from his friendships with Sassoon, Graves, and Osbert Sitwell. When he was released from the hospital in the autumn of 1917, Sassoon gave him an introduction to Robert (Robbie) Ross³³⁶ who met Owen in London and introduced him to Osbert Sitwell. Although Osbert Sitwell was a captain in the Grenadiers and Owen a “mere” lieutenant in the South Wales Borderers, the two of them became friends and in the following months, whenever Owen came to London, Sitwell made an effort to meet him.³³⁷

Their relationship was as “one war poet to another. Their opposition to the war was, Osbert wrote, like the ‘force with which faith had knitted together the early Christians,’ and they began exchanging poems as they wrote them.”³³⁸ It was the satirical poem, which Sitwell wrote regarding “the clam and satisfaction

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ross, who was once a friend (his lover) of Oscar Wilde, was now a friend of almost everyone who mattered in literary London. He first met Wilde in 1886, but was replaced by Lord Alfred Douglas. True to Wilde even after his disgrace (jailed because of his homosexuality), Ross went to Wilde in France where he had gone after his release from prison, and stayed with him while he was dying. Ross was pro-German by inclination, and anti-war in practice. Ross and Sitwell were also friends of Edmund Gosse, the literary critic of the *Sunday Times*. (Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 110, 121-122).

³³⁶ Pearson, “The Sitwells,” 122.

³³⁷ Ibid., 121-122.

³³⁸ Ibid.

with which Clemenceau ³³⁹ might have reacted to the new of Christ's crucifixion -- which brought back in reply one of the moving letters Owen ever wrote":

For 14 hours yesterday I was at work – teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine he thirst until after the last halt; I attended his Supper to see that there were no complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails. I see to it that he is dumb and stands at attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.³⁴⁰

Having been assigned to light duty after his release from the hospital in the autumn of 1917, Owen managed the Officer's Mess (Dining Hall) for the 5th Manchesters in Scarborough; although he felt he would be killed, he wanted to return to the front. ³⁴¹ He had seen what the men on the front were enduring and felt he had to be near them to be a lyrical witness on their behalf. He was on home duty for a year before being pronounced fit for duty in France:³⁴²

It was in the summer of 1918 that Osbert saw the last of Owen, who was in London *en route* for France. It was a fine, hot, summer day. Sassoon was back, and he and Osbert met Owen and took him to hear their friend Violet Gordon Woodhouse play the clavichord, making 'the afternoon stand out as an oasis in the desert of war.' Afterwards the three poets had raspberries and cream at Swan Walk and then sat for a while beneath the mulberry trees in the Physic Garden before Owen left to catch his rain. . . .³⁴³

Owen was back on the front line in September 1918 and in an attack in October, where he won the Military Cross. ³⁴⁴ On November 4, a week before the Armistice, Owen was machine-gunned to death in an attack across the Sambre

³³⁹ Clemenceau was a French radical politician who was appointed Prime Minister by the French President Poincare' in 1917. (Keegan, "The First World War," 185, 402).

³⁴⁰ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 122; Owen and Bell, eds., "Collected Letters," 562; Fussell, "The Great War," 119.

³⁴¹ Fussell, "The Great War," 290-291

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Pearson, "The Sitwells," 122.

³⁴⁴ Fussell, "The Great War," 290-291.

Canal near Ors.³⁴⁵ His parents received the telegram on November 11; an hour after the Armistice bells had been ringing. Owen was twenty-five years old when he was killed.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 10

ROBERT GRAVES

Within two days after war was declared, Robert Graves,³⁴⁷ who thought of himself as a pacifist, enlisted. Since only a very short war was expected, “two or three months at the very outside,”³⁴⁸ he thought that the war just might last long enough to delay his going to Oxford in October, which he was dreading.³⁴⁹ He believed his enlistment would mean garrison service at home while the regular forces were away and that he would not be actively engaged in the actual fighting of the war. Ready to believe the worst of the Germans, Graves forgot his pacifism and became outraged as he read of the alleged defiant violation of Belgian neutrality. Graves explains: “I entirely believed that France and England had been drawn into a war which they had never contemplated and for which they were entirely unprepared. It never occurred to me that newspapers and statesmen could lie.”³⁵⁰

Graves, who lived in Harlech, enlisted at the nearest regimental depot which was at Wrexham; the Royal Welch fusiliers garrison. The adjutant, upon learning that Graves was a public-school boy and had been in the Officers’

³⁴⁷ The Graves side of his family was Irish with a pedigree that dated back to the Norman Conquest. His father, Alfred Percival Graves, was a poet, editor, songwriter and expert on Irish folk songs. His grandfather had served as the Protestant Bishop of Limerick. His father’s mother was a Scotswoman, a Cheyne from Aberdeen with a pedigree that was flawless right back to the medieval Scottish kings, the two Balliol’s, the 1st & 2nd David, and the Bruce.” Later, the Cheynes were doctors and physicians. On his mother’s side Graves was a descendant of a German family, which included the 1st modern historian Leopold von Ranke, his great uncle. His mother’s father was loyal to the “Kaiser, with whom once or twice he went deer-shooting, Graves’, grandfather, Herr Geheimrat Ritter von Ranke was a renown doctor and was prominent in Bavarian society. (Graves, “Good Bye,” 8-9, 109).

³⁴⁸ Robert Graves, “Good-Bye To All That,” 69.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

Training Corps at Charterhouse, encouraged him to take a commission. ³⁵¹

Nineteen years old, Graves became an immediate hero to his family, he recalls his mother saying to him: “My race has gone mad,” ³⁵²and that she regarded his going as a religious act, and that his father simply said that he had “done the right thing.”³⁵³

Prior to going to France, Graves was “sent off on detachment duty to Lancaster to a newly-formed internment camp for enemy aliens.” ³⁵⁴ Arrested and detained in the camp were seamen from German merchant ships in Liverpool harbor, German waiters, members of German bands, which included little boys connected to the bands; German commercial travelers and shopkeepers, as well as Germans who were married and had lived in England peacefully for years. ³⁵⁵ Graves wrote: “The only comfort that we could give was that they were safer inside than out; anti-German feeling was running high, shops with German names were continually being raided and even German women were made to feel that they were personally responsible for the Belgian atrocities.” ³⁵⁶

Herr Wolff, an exchanged prisoner, account of his experiences as a prisoner at Lancaster in 1914 was printed in the German newspaper *Through German Eyes*, which in the summer of 1915, was reprinted by *The Times*. ³⁵⁷ Herr Wolff alleged “that he and forty other waiters from the Midland Hotel,

³⁵¹ Ibid., 70-71.

³⁵² Ibid., 71.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 71-72.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

Manchester, had been arrested and taken, handcuffed and fettered, in special railway carriages to Lancaster under the escort of fifty Manchester policemen armed with carbines “³⁵⁸ According to Graves, *The Times* found Herr Wolff’s allegations absurd and very amusing. But, said Graves: “It was true, because I was the officer who took them over from the chief inspector,”³⁵⁹ just as Wolff’s allegations of children being interned in the camp was true, which *The Times* also claimed to be absurd.³⁶⁰

In the trenches a few months later, Graves realized he happened to belong to a company mess in which four of the young officers out of five had, by coincidence, either a German mother or a naturalized German father.³⁶¹ Graves records one of them saying: “Of course I’m glad I joined when I did. If I had put it off for a month or two they’d accused me of being a German spy.”³⁶² Graves, who had three or four uncles and several cousins fighting for Germany and one of his uncles a General, replied: “that’s all right. I don’t brag about them. I only advertise the uncle who is a British admiral commanding at the Nore.”³⁶³

His uncle, Baron von Aufsess, whose home he had visited several times as a young boy, was an officer on the Imperial German Staff and was killed in the war.³⁶⁴ His cousin Wilhelm, who lived at Laufzorn, his Grandfather’s old manor-house near Munich, was killed in an air-fight; shot down by a school mate of

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid. 70-73.

³⁶² Ibid. 70.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 28-30, 70.

Graves.³⁶⁵ Seven months prior to the war, Graves and his cousin Conrad had ridden toboggans and skied together at Zurich, where Conrad's father was the German consul. Graves describes him as a "gentle, proud creature, whose chief interest was natural history."³⁶⁶ Conrad had spent "hours in the woods studying the habits of wild animals; he felt strongly against shooting them."³⁶⁷ However his cousin "Conrad served in a crack Bavarian regiment all through the war, and won the 'Pour le Merite' Order, which was more rarely awarded than the British Victoria Cross. He was killed by the Bolsheviks after the war in a village on the Baltic where he had been sent to make requisitions."³⁶⁸

Graves was posted to France as a replacement officer in the spring of 1915. His Welch Regiment was largely a mishmash of poorly trained men, from Burford, who was sixty-three to Bumford, who was fifteen.³⁶⁹ "By 1916 Graves war experiences included front line duty in two of the war's bloodiest battles; the action at Loos and the Somme."³⁷⁰ On July 20, near High Woods on the Somme, Graves was so severely wounded he was listed among the dead and his name appeared on the casualty list. He was able to write home a few days later to assure his parents he was going to recover.³⁷¹ But the severity of his wound excluded Graves from further line duty; like Owen, and Sassoon, he also suffered shell shock.³⁷²

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 70.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Fussell, "The Great War," 211.

³⁷⁰ Crawford, "British Poets," 110. Fussell, "The Great War," 212-215.

³⁷¹ Fussell, "The Great War," 215-217. Crawford, "British Poets," 114.

³⁷² Ibid.

He convalesced and wrote poetry that “expressed his sense of the soldier’s endurance, the failure of British institutions, outrage at the brutality of war, and the soldier’s agony. . . .His war poetry expressed his struggle with his belief that ‘To fight and kill is wrong---/ To stay at home wronger.’”³⁷³ Graves’ had conflicting thoughts about the war. On the one hand he was “proud of his battalion, publicly nonchalant in the face of death,”³⁷⁴ but “contemptuous of established English values, and outraged at the carnage of the war. He recognized his retreat from contradictions, which he persistently stated ironically: ‘We held two irreconcilable beliefs: that the war would never end and that we would win it.’” ³⁷⁵

Despite Graves’ ironical twists, many of his poems imply an idealistic and an ennobling picture of soldiers’ suffering and often go beyond Kipling’s colloquialisms. ³⁷⁶ His “sense of camaraderie with the soldiers of his unit” ³⁷⁷ is expressed in:

“Two Fusiliers”

And have we done with war at last?
Well, we’ve been lucky devils both.
And there’s no need of pledge or oath
To bind our lovely friendship fast.
By firmer stuff
Close bound enough.

By wire and wood and stake we’re bound,
By Fricourt and by Festubert.
By whipping rain, by the sun’s glare,

³⁷³ Crawford, “British Poets,” 111.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁷⁵ Crawford, “British Poets,” 110, from Graves, “The Kiser’,” 10.

³⁷⁶ Crawford, “British Poets,” 112.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

By all the misery and loud sound,
By a spring day,
By Picard's clay.

Show me the two so closely bound,
As we, by the red bond of blood.
By friendship blossoming from mud,
By Death we faced him, and we found
Beauty in Death,
In dead men, breath. ³⁷⁸

In Graves' "Two Fusiliers" his "poem supports the martial attitude without denying the discomforts of soldiering."³⁷⁹ His poem "A Dead Boche," is "the most striking expression of Grave's 'curative realism . . . which was among the first poems to describe the physical realities of battle,'" ³⁸⁰ The focal point of the poem was the putrefaction of a corpse:

"A Dead Boche"

To you who'd read my songs of War
And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
"War's Hell!" and if you doubt the same,
To-day I found in Mametz Wood
A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
In a great mass 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. ³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Crawford, "British Poets," 112; <http://www.bartleby.com/120/7.html> [Accessed 07/19/2007].

³⁷⁹ Crawford, "British Poets," 112.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 114.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

In the poem, "A Dead Boche," Graves "forces inexperienced readers to face the horror of the trenches and to place it into a moral context."³⁸² Graves, to protect himself from his experience, "developed a protective callousness and a comedic approach,"³⁸³ which enabled him to express the horror of the war through his poetry.³⁸⁴

Graves' anger toward those he considered responsible for the war was easy for him to sustain. "England was strange to the returned soldier. He could not understand the war-madness that ran about everywhere looking for a pseudo-military outlet. Everyone talked a foreign language; it was newspaper language."³⁸⁵ After being on the front and the having experienced the horror of trench warfare, soldiers were confronted at home with propaganda pamphlets encouraging the continuation of the war. Insensible and unfeeling to Graves was "the infamous propaganda pamphlet containing the letter by 'a Little Mother,' reprehending any thought of a negotiated peace and celebrating the sacrifice of British mothers who have "given" their sons."³⁸⁶ In Graves' words, it was: "sentimental, bloodthirsty, complacent, cruel, fatuous, and self-congratulatory, all at once and . . . accompanied by a train of earnest illiterate testimonials from third-rate newspapers, non-combatant soldiers, and bereaved mothers."³⁸⁷

³⁸² Ibid., 114.

³⁸³ Ibid., 110.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 109-114.

³⁸⁵ Fussell, "The Great War," 216; Graves, "Good Bye.," 202.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.; Graves, "Good Bye," 203.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.; Graves, "Good Bye," 203-205.

Allegedly, in the Autumn of 1915 Asquith had been offered peace terms on the basis of *status quo ante* and his wiliness to consider them was the reason for the fall of the Liberal Government, and for Lloyd George's "Win-the-War" Coalition Government.³⁸⁸ Both Sassoon and Graves believed the terms should have been accepted; to them the war became non-political: "We no longer saw it as a war between trade-rivals; its continuance seemed merely a sacrifice of the idealistic younger generation to the stupidity and self-protective alarm of the elder."³⁸⁹

In the margin of the poem "called 'Goliath and David,' (in which the biblical legend was reversed and David was killed by Goliath.)"³⁹⁰ Graves facetiously wrote following:

War should be a sport for men above forty-five only, the Jesse's [sic] not the David's [sic]. 'Well, dear father, how proud I am of you serving your country as a very gallant gentleman prepared to make even the supreme sacrifice. I only wish I were your age: how willingly would I buckle on my armour [sic] and fight those unspeakable Philistines! As it is, of course, I can't be spared; I have to stay behind at the War Office and administrate for you lucky old men.' 'What sacrifices I have made,' David would sigh when the old boys had gone off with a draft to the front singing *Tipperary*. 'There's father and my Uncle Salmon and both my grandfathers, all on active service. I must put a card in the window about it.'³⁹¹

Although Graves "recognized and recoiled from the horror of war . . . he would not commit himself to an action that presumed knowledge of a solution or suggested that participation in the war was 'wronger,'" ³⁹² When he sees "Sassoon's Declaration, he is appalled at the risk of court-martial Sassoon is

³⁸⁸ Graves, "Good Bye," 206.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.; Crawford, "British Poets," 114.

³⁹⁰ Graves, "Good Bye," 206.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Crawford, "British Poets," 114.

taking and distressed by Sassoon's political and rhetorical naiveté: . . . The public temper had already found its spokesman in the Little Mother."³⁹³

³⁹³ Fussell, "The Great War," 218.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

Although hundreds of British poets fervently expressed a variety of viewpoints and experiences about the war through poetry, patriotic spontaneity was not the source of all these poems. The British “government quickly recognized the usefulness of such famous poets as Kipling in mobilizing public opinion at home and abroad and enlisted them in September 1914 in the Wellington House Propaganda Department.”³⁹⁴ Charles Masterman, the head of the War Propaganda Bureau, invited twenty-five leading British authors to Wellington House to discuss ways of best promoting Britain’s interest during the war.³⁹⁵ Arnold Bennett, a popular novelist, recorded in his journal September 2, 1914, that he received an official invitation to go to London to “meet Masterman as to the war.”³⁹⁶ Also present at that meeting were: Arthur Conan Doyle, John Masefield, Ford Madox Ford, William Archer, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Henry Newbolt, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Gilbert Parker, G. M. Trevelyan, and H. G. Wells.³⁹⁷ Recording the meeting in his journal, Bennett wrote:

Conference at Wellington House of “eminent authors,” Hall Caine, Zangwill, Parker, among them. Masterman in chair. Zangwill talked a great deal too much, the sense was talked by Wells and Chesterton. Rather disappointed in

³⁹⁴ Bogacz, “A Tyranny of Words,” 658, from D.G. Wright, “The Great War, Government Propaganda and English ‘Men of Letter,’ 1914-1916,” *Literature and History*, 7 (Spring 1978): 70-100.

³⁹⁵ <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm>. [Accessed 7-26-2007].

³⁹⁶ Arnold Bennett, “The Journal of Arnold Bennett,” (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1932, 1933), 524.

³⁹⁷ <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm>. [Accessed 7-26-2007].

Gilbert Murray, but I like the look of little R. H. Benson.³⁹⁸ Masterman directed pretty well, and Claud Schuster³⁹⁹ and the Foreign Office representative were not bad. Thomas Hardy was all right. Barrie introduced himself to me; Scotch [sic] accent, sardonic canniness. . . . I was much pleased with the serious, confident, and kind demeanour [sic] of every one. . . . Spender⁴⁰⁰ told me that the military clubs were full of old officers in a panic. I had such a fearful headache after the conference that I had to dine alone at the club. ⁴⁰¹

“Masterman began to establish his literary bureau at Wellington house.

Working in strict secrecy under the aegis of the Foreign Office. Wellington House rapidly developed into the most active of the propaganda departments.” ⁴⁰²

Bennett was soon to become one of the leading members in the organization. His first contribution to the propaganda effort was “Liberty: A Statement of the British Case,” It first appeared in the Saturday Evening Post as an article, but in December, 1914 it was expanded and published as a pamphlet using Hodder and Stoughton ⁴⁰³ imprint to disguise the fact that it was a government publication by the War Propaganda Bureau. “Extreme care was taken to disguise the source of all material produced in order to preserve the credibility of the

³⁹⁸ R. H. Benson, who died that same year, was Monsignor Benson. He was the author of several works on Catholic subjects, and the brother of two other distinguished writers, A. C. and E. F. Benson. (Bennett, “The Journal,” 525).

³⁹⁹ Claud Schuster was Masterman’s chief executive officer at Wellington House. He served as Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor from 1915 to 1944. (Philip M. Taylor, “The Foreign Office and British Propaganda during the First World War.” *The Historical Journal*, 23 [December 1980]: 880.)

⁴⁰⁰ J. Alfred Spender was the editor of the Westminster Gazette. (Bennett, “The Journal,” 1066).

⁴⁰¹ Bennett, “The Journal,” 524-525;
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm> [accessed 26 July 2007].

⁴⁰² Philip M. Taylor, “The Foreign Office and British Propaganda during the First World War,” *The Historical Journal*, 23, (Dec., 1980): 877.

⁴⁰³ Prior to the early 1920s Hodder and Stoughton was a Christian publishing company. During the First World War the secular list did not accept fiction for publishing. In the 1920s the company began to gradually accept fiction subject to moral censorship. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hodder_&_Stoughton. [accessed 26 July 2007].)

views expressed.”⁴⁰⁴ In his journal on September 14, 1914, Bennett wrote: “Nothing much happens. I wrote *Liberty* last week for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Daily News* article last Sunday but one and [sic] yesterday.”⁴⁰⁵

Although overseas propaganda was the principal objective of the War Propaganda Bureau, ⁴⁰⁶ overseas and neutral countries were not their only targets. The Wellington House writers and poets were actively writing poems and articles for the home front as well as neutral countries in support of England’s right to be in the war while promoting anti-German feelings.⁴⁰⁷

George Bernard Shaw, who was unaware of the existence of the War Propaganda Bureau, attacked what he believed to be jingoistic articles and poems being produced by British writers during the war. In the second part of *Common Sense About War*, he addresses the use of poetry to encourage enlistment, titled “Recruiting,” he wrote:

We are passing out of the first phase of the war fever, in which men flock to the colours [sic] by instinct, by romantic desire for adventure, by the determination not, as Wagner put it, “to let their lives be governed by fear of the end,” by simple destitution through unemployment, by rancor and pugnacity excited by the inventions of the press, by a sense of duty inculcated in platform oration which would not stand half an hour’s discussion, by the incitements and taunts of elderly non-combatants and maidens with a taste for mischief, and by the verse of poets jumping at the cheapest chance in their underpaid profession. The difficulty begins when the men susceptible to these inducements are enlisted, and we have to draw on the solid, skeptical, sensible residuum who know the value of their lives and services and liberties and will not give them except on substantial and honorable conditions.” ⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ Taylor, “The Foreign Office,” 877.

⁴⁰⁵ Bennett, “The Journal,” 525; <http://Spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm>. [accessed 26 July 2007].

⁴⁰⁶ Taylor, “The Foreign Office,” 876.

⁴⁰⁷ Crawford, “British Poets,” 31-32

⁴⁰⁸ George Bernard Shaw, “Current History of the War,” *The New York Times*, (September, 1914), 571.

Bennett, chosen by the War Propaganda Bureau to reply to Shaw's *Common Sense About War*, defended the writings that Shaw had attacked.

Bennett replied in a letter to the *New Statesman* in September 1914. Following is an excerpt from the letter; he wrote:

As war is preeminently an affair of human nature, a triumph of instinct over reason, it seems to me not improper that serious novelist (who are supposed to know a little about human nature and be able to observe accurately and write) would be permitted to express themselves concerning the phenomenon of a nation at war without being insulted. ⁴⁰⁹

In June 1915, the War Propaganda Bureau arranged for Bennett to tour the Western Front. On Sunday, June 20, Bennett wrote: "London on Friday. I paid three visits to Godfrey, Mair's secretary, to get my pass port for France and police pass" ⁴¹⁰ He left for France June 21st and was there until July 13, 1915. Recorded in his journal:

June 24th, Meaux,

House by roadside, roof damaged, contents taken away by G.'s. Why?
What they couldn't take they destroyed.

Trenches, Character [sic] of country: rolling upward. Farms. Wheat, oats, poppies. Heavily wooded in places. High

Shaw must not have been offended by the reply. Bennett records in his journal, December 4, 1914: "This morning, with an endorsement by G.B.S. himself, I received a suggestion from Mark Judge that I should edit Shaw's manifesto for volume publication." Mark Judge was the Chairman of the Committee on War Damage. He published *The War and the Neutral Powers---International Law* in 1914. (Bennett, "The Journal," 538; <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm>. [Accessed 07-26-07]). The Neutral Press Committee and the War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House were established independently of the Foreign Office. The Neutral Press Committee was formed under the auspices of the Home Office on Sept. 11, 1914 in connection with the Press Bureau. Two weeks later, the committee was placed under the direction of G. H. Mair, the recently retired assistant editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. (Taylor, "The Foreign Office And British Propaganda," *The Historical Journal*, 23, [Dec., 1980]: 871.)

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Bennett, "The Journal," 558.

horizon of tree-lined roads. Tombs here and there.

Thence to Chambry. Many tombs in wheat and hidden by wheat.

Barbed wire on four stout posts (a bird on post), white wooden cross. Always a small white flag. Not always a name. On every side in these fields the gleam of cross or flag, as far as you can see. Scores and scores. Dark green-purple of distant wooded hills against high green of fields.

Cemetery used for firing from. Holes in wall. Wheat absolutely growing out of a German.

The battlefield is between Barcy and Chambry, Barcy is high; Chambry is low, like Meaux. Round through battlefield German Army was going southeast, and chiefly east.

General impression: How little is left. How Cultivation [sic] and civilization have covered the disaster over! ⁴¹¹

This is the only recorded account in Bennett's journal of his visit to a battlefield. Bennett's friend and biographer, Frank Swinnerton, states that Bennett "visited the front as a duty, and was horrified at what he saw and felt that he must not express that horror." ⁴¹² Although horrified, he agreed to provide an account of the war that would encourage men to join the British Army. He wrote the pamphlet "Over There; War Scenes on the Western Front" in 1915, after his return from France. ⁴¹³

If Bennett felt that he must not express the horror he saw, the trench anti-war poets felt no such constraint. Unlike the Wellington House group and the prevailing Great War poets who used elaborate words and phrases to obscure the ugly reality of the war, the anti Great War poets used colloquial expressions

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 561.

⁴¹² <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JBennett.htm> [Accessed 07-27-07].

⁴¹³ Ibid.

and plain language to speak the truth.⁴¹⁴ There was no glorious death in the trenches. They “lashed out at civilian insensibility,”⁴¹⁵ war profiteers, their elders and inept Generals.

Even Rudyard Kipling, who had written poems at the beginning of the war encouraging enlistment, became one of the most vicious and critical voices of the inept political and military leadership.⁴¹⁶ In “Mesopotamia” Kipling “contrast ‘the plight of the young who fell with the rise of political leaders.’” Calling them “idle-minded overlings who quibbled while they died.”⁴¹⁷ He ends each stanza “by asking if these inept and corrupt leaders will ‘come with years and honour [sic] to the grave’ or ‘confirm and re-establish each career?’”⁴¹⁸ Brutally direct in “A Dead Statesman,” Kipling wrote:

I could not dig; I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?⁴¹⁹

But none of them; Sitwell, Sassoon, Owen, nor Graves, or even Kipling or the lesser known anti-war poets questioned or protested the war’s necessity; none of them!⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁴ Crawford, “British Poets,” 131-133.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 28.

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