

Writing the War: The Literary Effects of World War One

A Senior Honors Thesis

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By Carolyn RC Wilson

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Project Advisor: Sebastian D.G. Knowles, Professor  
Department of English

## Introduction

The first cataclysm of the twentieth century began with two deaths. Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew to Emperor Franz Josef and heir to the crown of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, and his wife, Sophie, were shot when their car stopped in front of a café where a dejected and disappointed Serbian nationalist named Gavrilo Princip was contemplating how he had missed his first chance to assassinate the Archduke. It must have seemed providential to him – the car pulling up in front of him, the driver befuddled by a new route forced upon him by the exigencies of the Sarajevo traffic, the archduke and his wife completely unaware of their peril. Princip took hold of his opportunity; he fired his gun and became the final nudge that started a domino effect whose pieces – militarism, nationalism, imperialism – had been set up even before he was born by people who never anticipated such a horrific result.

The diplomatic intricacies that followed the assassination moved alarmingly swiftly. The Austrian government, suspecting, perhaps rightly, that Princip had been sent on his mission by Serbian authorities, made almost impossible demands of the Serbian government. The Serbs agreed to all but one; Austria prepared to declare war. Russia signaled its mobilization to come to the aid of its fellow Slavic country, and Germany (Austria's greatest ally) struck the final nail into Old Europe's coffin. Following a procedure called the Schlieffen plan, which had been in reserve for some time, Germany prepared to fight France, which the Germans knew would come to the

aid of Russia. Unwilling to fight a two-front war (France in the west, Russia in the east), Germany marched quickly through Belgium and into France, hoping to secure victory in the west before the massive Russian army could mobilize. In so doing however, the Germans violated the Belgian neutrality agreement, and Belgium promptly demanded aid from England, one of the agreement's guarantors. The resulting British involvement ruined Germany's carefully constructed timetables. The six week war settled into a multi-country, multi-continent affair, dragging into four years of savage attrition that took more than ten million lives.

British participation in the war was concentrated mainly on the Western front, in the trench works of Belgium and France. The landscape of No Man's Land, bordered by trenches full of miserable men, has fixed itself in the western mind as *the* image of the Great War. The flower of European youth, the first idealists to volunteer, were mowed down by machine gun fire; few who entered the army in 1914 lived to see the Armistice. Removed from uncomprehending civilians just across the Channel and even from the generals who sent them to almost certain death with orders to go "over the top," men lived in squalid and deadly conditions.

I have divided this thesis into three parts. In the first, I will analyze war poetry by Sassoon, Owen, Graves, and Rosenberg in order to see how men actually involved in the day-to-day operations of the war viewed the war and their role in it. In the second section, I will move on to Pat Barker's *Regeneration* to examine how a novelist imagines

the psychological effects of war upon veterans. From there, I shall analyze work by Modernists Eliot, Woolf, and Lawrence to gain insight into how writers of the immediate post-war period dealt with the war's aftermath in society and its constituents. Finally, in Part Three, I will turn to three novels removed from the war chronologically and thematically, but whose characters are scarred by the war and its aftermath.

Despite the atmosphere and casualty rate, World War One produced some of the finest and most passionate war poets the world has seen, among them Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves. When we think of "war literature," war poets like these four men naturally spring to mind. They lived the reality of war; their accounts are undeniably authentic and often heartbreaking in their poignancy. However, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg never confronted the post-war reality, since they were killed before the war ended. Siegfried Sassoon achieved fame in the most part due to his war poetry, and Graves went on to a literary career that generally avoided the topic of war, so it is best to consider the war poets exclusively in the immediate context of war.

Study of "war literature" cannot be limited to victims and veterans; we must also consider post-war traumas portrayed in literature. It was civilians like T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence who tried to write the post-war experience, despite challenging questions. How can a writer uninvolved in the fighting adequately express

the devastation, physical and emotional, of such a conflict? How can such madness be transferred into post-war life, and thence into literary form? How does the portrayal of war and its aftermath occur in literature decades after the actual event? In short, how have writers since the war written the reality of the war, and how does the approach of the Modernists differ from that of the war poets?

I have mentioned Woolf, Eliot, and Lawrence. These three modernists did not try to write about the war itself; they wrote about its effects on civilians and veterans. It is important to note, moreover, that these works, though covering a range of subjects from the fall of Carthage to dinner-parties to adultery, are more concerned with the war's consequences for human beings than with any other theme. Pat Barker, despite writing at a considerable chronological distance from the Modernists, also belongs in this group of writers. Her award-winning anti-war trilogy includes *Regeneration*, a novel about Sassoon's "rehabilitation" at Craiglockhart, a military mental hospital. Although *Regeneration* was published in the last decade of the twentieth century, the novel's setting – during the war period, but removed from the scene of battle – combines with her reconstruction of Sassoon's treatment to form a compelling portrait of post-war effects on veterans whose war experience is not yet over. Her focus on veterans provides an excellent starting point from which to examine how authors in the 1920s portray veterans and their relationships with civilians within the context of post-war society.

Eliot's poems *The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men" express his idea that the whole of British society, his reality, has been changed for the worse because of the war. Woolf, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, juxtaposes a day in the life of Septimus Warren Smith, a shell-shocked war veteran, with that of Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged, upper-class Englishwoman throwing a party. Lawrence takes a different approach: in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he chooses to portray Connie Chatterley's affair with Oliver Mellors in order to emphasize the sterility of the post-war mental and geographic landscape. His portrayal of Clifford, Connie's cuckolded husband and a war veteran, is unexpectedly less than sympathetic, providing yet a different glimpse into the post-war world. These poems and novels provide retroactive context for the war poetry; by examining the brutal effect of war on civilians and survivors, they emphasize the horror of its actual experience, which is typified in the writings of the war poets.

The selected novels by W. Somerset Maugham, Evelyn Waugh, and Robertson Davies differ from the work of the war poets and Modernists (and Pat Barker's *Regeneration*) in that they are not "about" the war, or its effects on society and personal relations. Nonetheless, the experience of the war, both for individual characters and for society's collective memory, permeates each novel. Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* is written from the perspective of a Second World War British officer recalling his youth during the interwar years. *The Razor's Edge* is Maugham's novel about the lives, sins, and loves of expatriate Americans in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. In particular,

the older narrator is drawn to Larry, an American flyer, who searches for enlightenment in the post-war world. Experiencing war is the turning point in Larry's life, and by extension in the lives of other characters. Robertson Davies published the first novel of his Deptford trilogy in 1970, placing his work farther from the war chronologically than that of Waugh or Maugham, but it still remains relevant. *Fifth Business* is the account of a Canadian school teacher's life, with particular focus on his war years and their effects. Though both author and character are Canadian, the war experience described is so similar to the British experience that I feel it proper to include Davies' novel in this gathering of British works. These three novels certainly include a historical perspective that is missing from the works of the war poets, and serve to illuminate for us how the war reaches into the minds of authors and readers, not just through contemporaneous poems and novels, but also through popular fiction, long after the war is over.

**Part One**

**The War Poets: Reality in the Trenches**

*It is well that war is so terrible,  
or we should grow too fond of it.*

Robert E. Lee



In order to have a clear understanding (insofar as that is possible) of the poems of the Great War, the reader must be generally familiar with the characteristics of daily life in the trenches. Modris Eksteins, in his outstanding cultural history of the war and its consequences, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, devotes a large section of the chapter entitled "Rites of War" to conditions in the trenches.

Apart from the daily risk of death in various awful forms – going over the top to be shot by machine guns, being buried alive in a shell crater, or suffocated by gas, just to name a few – living conditions in the trenches were almost inconceivably dreadful. "The trenches were infested with vermin . . . lice and rats were the major irritants . . . The louse was so fertile, said the *poilu*, that one born in the morning was a grandmother by evening" (149). Far more disturbing than stories of louse-squashing and rat-chasing are the tales of "limbs and torsos . . . churned up again and again by the shelling" (151). These contributed to the overwhelming smell of decomposition and death that haunted the trenches; some body parts even ended up in the sandbags used to fortify the trench works, an occurrence which led to this story:

If those burst, they could divulge their contents in a manner so horrific that black humor became the only defense against hysteria. In the Ypres salient at one point men being relieved all filed past an arm protruding from the side of the trench and shook hands with it – "Tata, Jack." Those effecting the relief did the same on arrival – "'ello, Jack." (151)

One Englishman, part of an ambulance corps, wrote "I am having a wearing time amid sights that would be too full of horrors and pity to bear but for human nature's capacity to get hardened by familiarity to anything" (Eksteins 154). It was under these sorts of conditions that British poets Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg wrote some of the most memorable poetry of the twentieth century, trying to come to grips with their reality by encapsulating it in mere words.

Siegfried Sassoon, born in 1886, spent his youth in a bucolic English setting hunting and writing modest pastoral lyrics. He gave up this pleasant existence in August 1914 to enter the army, where he was greatly admired by the men under his command, who called him "Mad Jack," referring to his daring and outrageous exploits. By 1917, however, he had seen more than enough of a war which he believed was without purpose, and issued "A Soldier's Declaration," a tract condemning the war. Though he could have been punished with a court-martial, his friend and fellow soldier-poet Robert Graves came to his aid, rigging a medical board to have Sassoon sent to Craiglockhart, a mental hospital in Scotland, where he would meet Wilfred Owen. "Cured," Sassoon returned to action after deciding that he was abandoning his troops, but was wounded in the head in July 1918 and sent home. In June of the same year, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, his well-known book of war poetry, was published. Although Sassoon survived the war, he could not escape from it; according

to Paul Fussell, Sassoon spent the second half of his life memoir-izing the first, citing “[his own] queer craving to revisit the past and give the modern world the slip” (Fussell 90-92).

Sassoon’s war poetry is unrelentingly realistic. Often, as in “A Working Party”, “The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still,” “The Death-Bed,” and “Counter-Attack,” his poems take the form of a short story told in verse, while other poems, such as “Base Details,” “Lamentations,” and “Does it Matter” display Sassoon’s talent for bitter irony and a sudden twist ending. Still others – “Glory of Women” and “Repression of War Experience” – clearly convey Sassoon’s unbridled disgust for those who remained at home, whether by their own choice or not. In every poem, however, the reader is well aware that Sassoon has first-hand knowledge of what he writes; his authority and authenticity are unquestionable, as we shall see in examining three of his poems.

“A Working Party” gives the reader insight into the wretchedness of everyday life in the trenches. With calm simplicity derived in part from the very regular meter associated with blank verse, and with enough detail to make a documentary filmmaker envious, Sassoon describes a man moving about in the trenches in the dark, sinking in the mud, passing by smoking soldiers, tripping and snagged by wire. Just as calmly, Sassoon describes a flare burst that illuminates the landscape, “showing nimble rats. . .” (17). The action is in the very specific past – three hours ago, according to the first line,

which suggests to the reader that Sassoon wrote this poem while he was actually in the trenches, and that he witnessed the events he writes about. The nonchalance with which the narrator describes the rifle-shots and shells (“sing[ing]” and “[coming] calmly through the drizzling air / To burst with hollow bang below the hill”, respectively) is chilling; he seems to have become inured to sounds that would terrify most civilians (22-25).

Once we reach the fourth stanza, we learn with certainty that the stumbling young man will “never walk that road again” (27). Before he describes the unnamed man’s manner of death, Sassoon relates what is generally known about the man: his family consists of a wife and two children; he is quiet and not particularly funny, but is still a diligent worker (30-36). Then, quite suddenly, the reader is transported into the young man’s mind: “He thought how slow time went . . . He thought of getting back by half-past twelve, / And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep . . .” (39, 41-42). At the same time, Sassoon grounds the poem in reality by describing how cold the young man is, and what sorts of smells and sounds he expects to encounter when his work is done. And then another flare “gave one white glimpse of No Man’s Land and wire” (47).

The last two lines of “A Working Party” are unexpected, because it seems that after such a long buildup Sassoon will deliver a death to remember, to be angered and inspired by. Instead, the description of the young man’s death is disturbingly tranquil, perhaps necessarily so; he did not die in the frantic upheaval of battle, or trapped in a

dank and muddy trench. He was not expecting death and so was not paralyzed by dread or the fear of cowardice. He dies almost instantaneously after looking up at the wasteland he is assigned to guard: "And as he dropped his head the instant split / His startled life with lead, and all went out" (48-49). There is no period at the end of the poem. There is no finality, because this death "three hours ago" would not be the last.

If we turn to "Base Details," a pithy poem of ten lines, we shall find a poetic voice quite unlike that of "A Working Party." The title itself has a double meaning, which links it to titles like "A Working Party" or "The Death-Bed" or "Counter-Attack," all of which are deceptive in their simple descriptiveness – the poems are not simple at all, nor are the circumstances and events that the titles describe. In this poem's context, "base" could be used in one of two ways; as a noun meaning a military base of operations, or as an adjective, signaling "details" that are dishonorable, ignoble, or vile. The entire scathingly satirical poem is in the subjunctive mood, as the poet considers what his lot would be if he were an older man in a position of military authority.

This older man – "fierce, and bald, and short of breath" (1) – is not assigned to the front, but rather "speed[s] glum heroes up to the line of death" (3) from his position of safety at the Base. Notice that Sassoon terms the front "the line of death," not "the battle field" or "the forward trenches" - and because of this choice of words, it seems that the older persona he has assumed feels the same way about the front as Sassoon himself does, while retaining an unrealistic view of soldiers, since Sassoon is not in the

habit of calling soldiers “heroes” – he leaves that to the propagandists. The sing-song rhyme pattern of the poem (ABAB CDCD EE) suggests not only that this is a fantasy poem whose subject matter is not part of Sassoon’s experience, but also that Sassoon believes men of the sort he imagines do not take war seriously, because they are not the ones sent to their death. Conversely, the rhyme pattern may be Sassoon’s way of conveying irony: this old man’s game ought to be a fantasy, even though it is all too true.

Sassoon has no use for the base-dweller of his imagination; the man has a “puffy petulant face” and spends his time “guzzling and gulping in the best hotel” (4-5) – certainly not the description of a war-weary soldier. The old man’s utter lack of perspective is made clear when he calls an engagement “this last scrap” (8), and the reader shares Sassoon’s sense of gut-wrenching anger when the base-dweller inserts himself into the ranks of the fighting men (“... we’ve lost heavily . . .” [8]). Sassoon also seems to suggest that the old man’s objective is not to win the war, but to exterminate youth, and consequently humanity itself, as even the base-dweller dies at the end of the poem. The war’s end is equated with “youth” being stone dead (9), just as the dead on the “Role of Honour” are “young” (6). One hopes that the base-dweller and the other “scarlet Majors at the Base” (2) at least will be prevented from sending more young men to their deaths (Sassoon does not even consider powerless civilian authorities), while it seems Sassoon clearly wants them dead; he leads the reader on until the last two words

– the old man will die, but in bed. Such a peaceful death is too good for such a man, even if he is associated with the poet's side in the war. Sassoon chooses the adjective "scarlet" intentionally; the color red is the traditional color of the British uniform and also symbolizes the blush of shame. Not only are these old decrepit men 'red in the face' from talking or shouting (but not fighting), but they also have hands coated with the blood of youth.

Repulsed as he is by the non-combatant military leadership, Sassoon's deepest loathing is reserved for civilians, those who are never required to see the bloody front lines, but who nevertheless support their governments' authority to send old men and mere boys to their deaths, be they fathers or brothers or sons. Even "the fair sex" does not escape his revulsion, as we may note in "Glory of Women," another biting satire written in a vein similar to as "Base Details." Sassoon reserves his even-toned and calm poetry for the men at the front, perhaps as an antidote to the frenzy and horror of a soldier's life.

"Glory of Women" is a sonnet, a form made famous by the love poems of Petrarch, Spenser and Shakespeare. This is an ode of a different sort; a condemnation of the folly of women who "love us when we're heroes, home on leave, / or wounded in a mentionable place" (1-2), but who do not experience life and death in the trenches. Though they are part of the war's reality – "you make us shells" (5) – women are destructive, because they contribute to the war's continuation by their attitude and

because they make instruments of death and still believe that chivalry “redeems the war’s disgrace” (3-4), nullifying the terrible price paid by so many men.

“Glory of Women” postulates that women specifically (and, by inference, non-combatants in general) are unconnected to the realities of war; they are still trapped in the pre-war hero mythology, along with its vocabulary and assumptions. For example, Sassoon writes, “You crown our distant ardours while we fight, / And mourn our laurelled memories when we’re killed” (7-8). Words like “ardours” and “laurelled” are devoid of meaning in the midst of such senseless suffering; women would not use such words if they had seen the indignities visited upon every man crouching in a trench.

After nine lines that describe women’s erroneous perceptions, Sassoon delivers the truth to his readers: the “British troops. . . run, / trampling the terrible corpses – blind with blood” (9-11). Reality is always harsher than fantasy; the “. . .mother dreaming by the fire” (12) has no idea that her son is already dead, killed by British troops like Sassoon himself, his face “trodden deeper in the mud” (14). However, this mother is German – why? Everything up to this point in the poems leads the reader to believe that he is referring to British women – “*You love us*” (1, italics mine), “You can’t believe that British troops ‘retire’” (9). Surely Sassoon would not engage in a half-hearted attempt at patriotism; nor is it likely that the adjective appears mistakenly. Perhaps the sudden shift is to force the reader not only into recognizing the behavior of British wives, mothers, and sisters, but to point out that German mothers are also



oblivious to the suffering their sons endure. Young men's death is the unifying factor among unperceiving women and nations; it is the only resolution to the sonnet. Death is the ultimate and inescapable reality, but only the soldier, whether he is German or English, has his eyes open to see it. Everyone else, as we have seen in these three poems, is blind to reality. With these poems, Sassoon is desperately trying to open his readers' eyes; although *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* was much talked about (Virginia Woolf reviewed it) and read by fellow soldiers (Fussell 103), it evidently fell upon deaf ears in the higher military echelons.

One of those fellow soldiers was Sassoon's friend Robert Graves, who enlisted at the tender age of nineteen and served bravely on the Western Front until July 1916, when he was so severely wounded that his commanding officer preemptively notified his parents that Graves was dead (Graves rectified the situation in a very funny newspaper announcement). He recovered and was sent back into action in November, but his lungs had been greatly weakened and eventually he was ordered home to recuperate (from whence he saved Sassoon from a court-martial). Although memories of the war haunted Graves for some time, he went on to have a prolific literary career quite apart from the war.

Though Graves is perhaps best known for his imaginative and gleefully gossipy *I, Claudius*, as well as his war memoir, *Goodbye to All That*, the two poems that are reproduced in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* prove him to be well-qualified

to stand in the company of poets of greater stature, such as Sassoon, Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg. The two poems, entitled "To Robert Nichols" and "Recalling War" manifest two very different styles of writing, perhaps because Graves wrote the former during the war and the latter (clearly) after the conflict.

Graves wrote "To Robert Nichols" in 1917 in reply to a letter, according to the note that precedes the poem itself. The poem is a rhetorical question: how indeed can Graves, given the magnitude of the suffering that surrounds him, write rhyming, happy verses about cherries for a traipsing faun? The poem does have a sort of rhyming pattern, but coupled with the brevity of each line (only six or seven syllables), the effect is one of staccato scribblings taken down between breaks in battle – disconcerting and somewhat removed from continuity. The poet asks why he should keep time for the music making faun (20) when even dreaming in his present situation causes him pain (22), and the reader must wonder if he is even able to do so, since the rhythm of the poem is irregular.

Although "To Robert Nichols" contains only twenty-six lines of direct address, the vast majority (nineteen) of them are used in one full sentence, one thought. In that thought Graves contrasts his present condition with summer in Devonshire – the bleak ice and cold against the green trees and thyme of the English countryside. Still, even though Graves describes the holiday for Nichols's "gay goatish brute" (12) with warm terms - "hot sun and gentle breeze" (9), "drunk with warm melody" (13) – fragments of

Graves' war experience still creep in. The faun has "red and rolling eye" (15) and "lips dark with juicy stain" (18), like a dead or dying soldier might have. Red may be the traditional color of passion and love, but in this context, it has inescapable connotations of blood. Graves is harkening back to poems like Arthur Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du Val" ("The Sleeper in the Valley"), a tender poem that seems to describe a sleeping young soldier lying in the grass. In the poem's last lines, however, we learn "He sleeps in the sun, his hand on his breast / At peace. There are two red holes in his right side." The peace of nature conceals quiet death; no part of the world is safe from the taint of war<sup>1</sup>.

"Recalling War" is a different sort of poem all together. Its structure is more formal than that of "To Robert Nichols" – five stanzas varying in length from seven to twelve lines, almost every one of which is comprised of ten syllables - and its resentment is more measured than in the earlier poem. Most importantly, however, the point of view is that of a veteran, not a current combatant. "Recalling War" is a poem that expresses both the reality of the war and the reality of the war's aftermath – a bridge, if you will, between history and the poet's present. In this poem Graves is speaking on behalf of the silent dead, and on behalf of the war's walking wounded, the veterans, asking what the war meant ("What, then, is war?" [11]).

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Oliver Bernard : Arthur Rimbaud, *Collected Poems* (1962)

Whereas in "To Robert Nichols" Graves emphasizes the contrasts between warmth and cold, home and the front, in this poem the principal imagery and metaphors are related to illness, disability, and death. For instance, in answer to his own question, Graves writes that war was "no mere discord of flags / But an infection of the common sky / That sagged ominously upon the earth . . ." (11-13). In the same stanza, Graves notes that "Natural infirmities were out of mode, / For Death was young again: patron alone / Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm" (17-19). The war devoured young men, and the influenza epidemic of during the year following the armistice carried off abnormally large numbers of young adults, sparing the very old. Graves's use of the term "fate-spasm" in this last stanza, along with "all-flesh" (22) and "nature-look" (8), are uncharacteristic of his poems in general; these expressions have a decidedly modernist tone, and the phrase with which it ends is Whitman-esque in its cadence.

Part of the appeal of "Recalling War" is its realism. The importance of physical comforts and privation on the front is not at all underplayed; indeed, Graves notes that "Sick with delight / At life's discovered transitoriness, / Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind" (20-22). As such, these men, whose lives are likely to be cut drastically short suddenly realize how much they miss "Wine, meat, log-fires, a roof over the head, / A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call" (26-27). These are not even necessarily the comforts of home; Graves could very well be recalling barracks-life

before removal to the front. Even God, who seems so absent in the trenches, suddenly has a purpose: to be used just as a word to curse the deficiency of these same comforts, especially “In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning” (28-30). This is no “Charge of the Light Brigade,” of its “noble six hundred” not a man dismayed,

. . . tho' the soldier knew  
Some one had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred. (Tennyson 9-16)

The similarities between this Crimean War battle and “over-the-top” offensives are eerie – men sent into battle against hopeless odds – but Graves, unlike Tennyson, refuses to glorify the senseless deaths of soldiers.

“Recalling War” powerfully represents the absurdities of war as well as its grim realities. In the second-to last stanza, Graves remembers the “unendurable moment . . . the duty to run mad.” And in the final stanza, Graves compares the riddling of church and factory walls by machine gun bullets to a child’s “nibbling” on piecrust, and the destruction of tree groves to a child flattening dandelions “with a switch” (38-41). In his memory, “Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill, / down in a row the brave tin soldiers fall . . .” – an ironic memory, since the description of childhood activities emphasizes the innocence and youth of many soldiers. The idea of innocence and playfulness is entirely antithetical to the actual experience of the Great War, in which

every “over-the-top” order was tantamount to a militarily sanctioned suicide mission. Also in this final stanza, Graves also uses the first person plural: “we recall,” and “we devote” (38, 45). Veterans like Graves and Sassoon, who lived long enough for their voices and accounts to be heard, were part of the audience for later works about the war, and living reminders of that war’s human toll. Their poetry, and the poetry of others like Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, who did not survive the war, is important because it was the first attempt of the literary community to deal with the war. That Owen and Rosenberg died before they could see their effect on future writers lends a poignant dimension to their work which cannot exist in the poetry of survivors, despite the magnitude of their suffering.

Wilfred Owen was twenty-one years old when the war began in 1914. Prior to his enlistment, he had been an English teacher at a school in France, as well as a tutor to a French family’s children. He did not join the military until 1915, but like Sassoon, he was well liked and respected by his men, described as “conscientious, efficient, and sympathetic” (Fussell 287, 289). Owen had his first taste of trench warfare in January of 1917. That April, he was forced to remain at the front lines in one position with the dismembered body of a fellow officer, leading to an attack of “neurasthenia” and relocation to Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland. It was here that he met Siegfried Sassoon and developed a “poetic crush” on the older man. After his release from the hospital and about a year of home duty, Owen requested that he be sent back to the

trenches (Fussell 289-90). His request was granted in September of 1918; in October he won the military cross; on November fourth he was dead. Fussell writes that "at noon on November 11 the Armistice bells had been pealing for an hour in Shrewsbury when the telegram arrived at his parents' house" (291).

Although his life was cut short, Owen has remained famous because of his war poems, some of which are the most renowned and admired of all those written between 1914 and 1918. "Shy, sensitive, and intense," in his work Owen combined "Victorian and early-twentieth-century homoeroticism" (Fussell 287) with sensitive and ghastly impressions of the war's ravages. Owen's poetry conveys his immense depth of feeling without relying on the sublimated, yet blistering rage that often characterizes Sassoon's work. It is impossible to imagine Sassoon or Graves writing these sentences, from Owen's last letter to his beloved mother, Susan: "I hope you are as warm as I am; as serene in your room as I am here; and that you think of me never in bed as resignedly as I think of you always in bed. Of this I am certain you could not be visited by a band of friends half so fine as surround me here" (Bell 362). This kind of writing, compassionate and genuine, is applied to the war experience with heartrending results, as we may see especially in two of his best-known poems, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth," both included in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*.

“Dulce Et Decorum Est” is arresting in its immediacy and almost overpowering in its imagery. The poem is two modified sonnets joined together by the first two lines of the second sonnet (lines 15 and 16 of the poem as a whole). The first describes a gas attack on a column of men as they march toward a brief respite (in the past tense), while the second section, written in direct address, continues the detailed description of the first while conveying the poet’s anguish and anger at being forced to witness such horror.

The first section’s sestet follows an opening octet of relatively tranquil description. Line nine begins with the poem’s first exclamation: “Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!” Evidently, the octet was just the calm before the storm. Although this section remains in the past tense, Owen’s choice of sentence fragments to express the action produces an “in the moment” tone and feeling in the reader: “- An ecstasy<sup>2</sup> of fumbling, / Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time” (9-10). And then the awful “but” tells us that something is about to go awry – one man has not got his gas mask ready. As the soldier begins to choke, Owen uses the first person singular pronoun for the first time – “I saw him drowning” (14). The poet himself is safe behind the “misty panes” of his gas mask, the tinted lenses of which turn the battered landscape into a “green sea” – hence the “drowning” man (13-14). It should not escape us that Owen describes the soldier’s

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Owen most likely uses this word in its meaning as ‘frenzy’ rather than ‘overwhelming joy.’



“flound’ring” as that of a “man in fire or lime” (12) – which implies that he has witnessed those circumstances as well.

The account in this sestet and the following second half of the poem are believable because of the great detail and concrete description in the poem’s first eight lines. The speaker and his comrades are not just “tired” – “men marched asleep,” “drunk with fatigue” (5, 7); not just ducking – they are “bent double, like old beggars under sacks / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags” (1-2). It seems this march from the trenches in and of itself would provide enough material for a poem without adding insult to injury in the form of a gas attack. After all, they are so desensitized that they do not even notice the “gas shells dropping softly behind” (8). Even the prospect of rest does not hurry them – they “trudge,” some hampered by bloodied feet, having lost their boots somewhere in the trenches (3, 5-6). Owen is a part of the group, but in this section takes on the role of narrator, which is later replaced by his role as spectator (9-14) and finally participant as he recalls the event through his dreams (15-28).

Lines fifteen and sixteen, as mentioned, are the ligaments connecting the two sections of “Dulce Et Decorum Est”: “in all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.” This is Owen’s second use of drowning – it serves to emphasize both the image in the reader’s mind and the idea that the scene recurs in Owen’s mind – for him, it is a never-ending nightmare. His dreams are “smothering” (17) – another allusion to the gas attack, and he believes that if non-

combatants could experience his dreams – not reality, but reality once-removed, they too would understand the evils of war. For Owen, this evil is personal; it causes incredible suffering to fall upon the gassed soldier, whose eyes “[writhe] in his face,” while “. . . blood / Come[s] gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs” (21-22). The dream is always in the present tense; the experience of watching the soldier’s pain is *happening* to Owen, and he wants the reader to experience it too, if only so that he or she will not blithely accept war as noble or worthy, nor allow children (or young men, would-be soldiers) to believe “The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori” (27-28). It is neither sweet nor decorous to die for one’s country, as Owen has just proved. The brevity of the last line (only six syllables, as opposed to the ten in most other lines) expresses Owen’s vehement disgust for such a sentiment; it is clipped short, like the life of the gassed soldier.

Like Sassoon’s “Glory of Women,” “Anthem for Doomed Youth” is a modified sonnet which has very little to do with romantic love. In this poem, Owen takes a step back from the effective first-person point of view of “Dulce Et Decorum Est” to provide a more general view of the war’s casualties. Yet unlike “Glory of Women,” the title is not at all ironic. Although “anthem” suggests a song of patriotic praise, as in “national anthem” (and Owen may be playing upon that connotation), the main usage of the word here is as a funeral dirge, a lamentation. This particular anthem is the only one offered to the dead. “Doomed” also implies the inevitability of fate, which might seem

melodramatic if not for the poem's historical context. Due to the exigencies of trench warfare, it was often difficult to properly bury the dead; even to think of a full-blown funeral service would be ludicrous. In "Anthem for Doomed Youth," however, Owen does his best to become a speaker for the dead, to juxtapose what ought to be their due with what is, unfortunately, their reality. This juxtaposition is the focus of the poem, and within this framework Owen compellingly describes the facets of war that are cruelly visited upon youth.

In the first seven lines, Owen contrasts traditional funeral accoutrements with those available in war time. In place of tolling bells is the "monstrous anger of the guns" (1-2). Soldiers fall to their deaths by "the stuttering of rifles' rapid rattle" (3); the effect of the word "stuttering" and the following use of alliteration is to remind the reader of the sound of the guns. "Shrill choirs of wailing shells" replace mockeries, prayers and bells, and no voice is raised in mourning for the dead – except Owen's (5-7). In order to emphasize the simile "those that die like cattle" (1), the dead are "mourned" in this section by inanimate objects, not by human agents. In this war, death becomes impersonal slaughter.

In the second section of the poem, Owen shifts focus to consider human ability to mourn, both in the trenches and on the home front. Since soldiers cannot light candles for the dead, Owen imagines "the holy glimmers of goodbyes" (9-11); the customary black mourning fabric or dress (pall) is replaced by the pallor (paleness) of girls' brows

(12). In these lines Owen's concern for youth comes into play: the light is not in the eyes of "men" or "soldiers" but "boys"; it is the girls whose brows are pale, not women. It is certainly possible that by emphasizing the tender age of those who mourn, Owen is discrediting the authority of the older generation that led youth into the war – perhaps they do not mourn as much because their age prevents them from serving on active duty and encountering trench life.

Owen leaves this point and continues on with his contrasts. Instead of flowers, the dead are remembered in the "tenderness of patient minds" (13) and at "each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds" (14). These last two references are somewhat strange; though they do fit in with the personal agency that characterizes this section of the poem, neither is related to death or funerals. "The tenderness of patient minds" could allude either to the men and women who mourn, even in silence, or to the soldiers who wait patiently for their own end. More likely, however, is that Owen is using this phrase in a deeply bitter way. "Tenderness" implies something untried, unused to hard labor. "Patient minds" are those of civilians who complacently wait for the war to end without doing anything constructive to stop the suffering. The closing of blinds naturally suggests the blackness of night, but also willfully shutting out the world and its evils, rather like closing one's eyes to shut out bright sunlight. Those on the home front may be drawing down their blinds in order to ignore the soldiers' plight. Civilian

indifference and willful ignorance perpetuate the horrors of the war, and ensure that the only anthems for the dead are Owen's poem and the others like it.

On the other hand, Owen may be focusing on the person needed to draw down the blinds; the soldiers' deaths make it possible for that person to live tranquilly. In this interpretation, the living are the flowers, the delicate monuments to the dead. Then again, maybe Owen intended that readers could draw more than one conclusion from the poem; perhaps he himself was conflicted about the position of civilians during the war. It is a testament to Owen's talent that he dares to combine unsentimental beauty of language with violent emotion and bitterness – it is certainly a great part of what has endeared him to audiences from the immediate post-war period to today, and is also what sets him apart from Sassoon, Graves, and Isaac Rosenberg, to whom we shall now turn.

Like Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg died in France in 1918. Unlike Owen, his acclaim as a poet has been limited, since his poems do not have the mass audience held by Owen's. However, Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* terms Rosenberg's poem "Break of Day in the Trenches" as "the greatest of the war," with "Dead Man's Dump" not far behind (250). Although these two poems are vastly different – "Break of Day in the Trenches" is contemplative and ironic, while "Dead Man's Dump" is more vociferous in its condemnation of war – they both demonstrate Rosenberg's distinctive diction and highly intellectual style.

"Dead Man's Dump" is a poem of fifty-six lines contained in thirteen sections. Its breadth and dimensions are enough to warrant pages and pages of further reflection; I shall attempt only to give some overview of its themes in order to better compare the poem to "Break of Day in the Trenches." As the poem opens, a cart noisily rolls over a "shattered track" with its rusty cargo, tumbling over dead bodies as it goes. The trampling under wheels causes the dead no pain: "though their bones crunched, / Their shut mouths made no moan" (9-10). Death is an equalizer, transforming these men from "friend and foeman" to "man born of man, and born of woman" (11), all of whom are constantly overshadowed by the "crying" shells (12-13). From this point Rosenberg embarks on a rumination concerning the Earth's part in all this death, an image that permeates the entire poem; here Earth is personified as a female waiting anxiously for men's death even while they grow. In the fourth section, "she" sucks their souls into herself, while the bodies – "their soul's sack / Emptied of God-ancestral essences" – are flung onto the ground, "her" back (21, 24-25, 23). The poet feverishly cries out twice for the name of the agent that "hurled" those souls from the dead bodies; he gets no reply, since "None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass, / Or stood aside for the half used life to pass" (27-28). As Owen does in "Anthem for Doomed Youth," Rosenberg points to the tender age of the dead ("half used life").

"Dead Man's Dump" takes an unexpected turn in the sixth section, when Rosenberg questions the fate of those still living, including himself ("What of us . . .")

[32]). He describes the living soldiers like martyrs at the stake: “the shrieking pyre. . . Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us, / A fear may choke in our veins . . .” (32, 36-37). Anyone at the front is a sacrificial victim; if it has not already descended, death is imminent. How can a person survive, let alone maintain his sanity, in an atmosphere in which “the air is loud with death, / The dark air spurts with fire / The explosions ceaseless are” (39-41)? Rosenberg quickly returns us to the present: “. . . some minutes past, / These dead strode time with vigorous life, / Till the shrapnel called ‘An end!’ / But not to all . . .” (42-45). Some men survive their wounds, at least for a time, “dream[ing] of home, / Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts” (46-47) in their agony.

Just as quickly as he turned to portraying his war experience in realistic detail, Rosenberg shifts into direct address toward the Earth in section eight. He seems to take on the perspective of a man flung about by shellfire: “Maniac Earth! Howling and flying . . . Dark Earth! dark Heavens! swinging in chemic smoke . . .” (48, 51). As in section three, Earth is again given bodily form, this time a “bowel / seared by the jagged fire, the iron love” (48-49), and a “heart,” mined for “lightning and thunder” (53) – the metals used to make weapons. However, Rosenberg does not blame Earth directly for the soldiers’ death; instead, the culpability lies with “man’s self” who, with “his blind fingers” (54) mined the earth in search of war materiel, with which he then fabricates the instruments of death. This last line harkens back to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, with

all the concomitant notions of betrayal and disaster, when Cassius says, “the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, for we are underlings” (I.ii.141-142).

Suddenly, the reader is jostled back into the present yet again; throughout the poem, the constant shifts in perspective, time, and even rhyme scheme produce a disorienting effect. In this instance, Rosenberg gives us the most ghastly image yet: “A man’s brains splattered on / A stretcher-bearer’s face” (55-56). The man dies, and Rosenberg deals with his “burial” in two lines set off in their own section: “They left this dead with the older dead, / Stretched at the cross roads” (61-62). The allusion to the crucifixion of Christ cannot be accidental. The dead have been “joined to the great sunk silences” – “the grass and coloured clay / More motion have than they” (68, 66-67). This notion of “sunk” and “silent” bodies and souls combines references that appear in section nine (“the drowning soul was sunk too deep”) and in section eight (“what dead are born when you kiss each soundless soul”).

The sense of in-the-moment reality returns anew in section twelve: “*Here is one not long dead*” (69, italics mine). Rosenberg goes on to narrate the soldier’s final moments as if he himself had been there with the other man, focusing on the man’s hope of life encouraged by the sound of the cart (tying back to the poem’s first stanza) and his crying for death or salvation. Rosenberg writes, “We heard his weak scream, / We heard his very last sound, / And our wheels grazed his dead face” (84-86). The narrator has shifted positions at the last moment in order to take on the perspective of



the living men in the cart. But was it the cart that killed the unnamed soldier? Was he already dead? Who is to blame for his death? These questions, relative both to the poem and to the war itself, remained unanswered.

“Break of Day in the Trenches” is a much shorter poem than “Dead Man’s Dump” at just twenty-six lines, but it is the more moving of the two, because of its calm and melancholy mode of expression that does not seek to shock in the way of “Dead Man’s Dump.” In “Break of Day in the Trenches” we clearly see that Rosenberg’s style is less melodramatic than Owen’s and not quite so sardonic or biting as Sassoon’s. And in contrast to Graves, whose poem “Recalling War” is written from the standpoint of a veteran, Rosenberg is *in medias res*, garnering the same legitimacy of in-the-moment experience that is shared by Sassoon, Owen, and Graves in “To Robert Nichols.”

As Fussell points out, “Break of Day in the Trenches” is based in the English pastoral elegiac tradition (250)<sup>3</sup>. The deep-seated irony is, of course, that the poet could not be further from an idyllic setting; he is in a trench at sunrise. The rising sun does not wash the fields in a golden glow; rather, Rosenberg chooses to focus on the darkness as it “crumbles” away (1). Dawn is not a time of beauty and light, or a time of new beginnings, but instead “the same old Druid time as ever” (2). We might next expect more details about the setting, but instead, the poet conveys the rarity of contact with a living thing by using the word “only”: “Only, a live thing leaps my hand” (3). It

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<sup>3</sup> As are many other poems of the period; for example Owen’s “Strange Meeting” or Rupert Brooke’s “1914.”

is “a queer sardonic rat” (4), a personified creature that appears throughout the poem, much like the continuous references to a personified Earth in “Dead Man’s Dump.” The speaker addresses the “droll rat” directly, warning the rat that it would be shot by unspecified men “if they knew [its] cosmopolitan sympathies” (7-8). “Cosmopolitan” is used here in the sense of “multinational,” since, as we learn in the next lines, the rat can touch a German hand just as easily as an English one. This is another of Rosenberg’s ironies: the rat, a hunted and vilified species, can cross no man’s land as if it were a “sleeping green,” unlike the “haughty athletes” and soldiers with “strong eyes” and “firm limbs” (9-10, 12, 14). The rat has a better chance at life than these men, who are subject “to the whims of murder / Sprawled in the bowels of the earth, / The torn fields of France” (15-18). When death comes, it is in the form of “shrieking iron and flame / Hurlled through still heavens” (note the similarities to the diction in “Dead Man’s Dump”) – but the poet still asks the rat what the rat sees in the humans’ fearful eyes, his questions rising to a crescendo at line 22: “What quaver – what heart aghast?” (20-21, 19, 22).

The last four lines see a return to the calm narration that characterized the poem’s first lines, and re-focus on the image of the poppy tucked behind the poet’s ear. Poppies, as Fussell points out, are bright red in Flanders, and legend has it that they bring oblivion and release from pain, and, more importantly, that they subsist on the blood of soldiers. Rosenberg’s first reference to the poppy appears in line five: “As I

pull the parapet's poppy / To stick behind my ear" (5-6). The alliteration and rhythm of the lines provides a sense of lightheartedness incongruous with the poem's thematic material, and with the second reference to poppies:

Poppies whose roots are in man's veins  
Drop, and are ever dropping;  
But mine in my ear is safe,  
Just a little white with the dust. (23-26)

In line twenty-three, the poet specifically alludes to poppies' nourishment being derived from dead men. And because the poppies are "ever dropping," we know that men are still dying; for poppies to die, they must first live and grow. Rosenberg takes ownership of the parapet's poppy, perhaps because it has fed on the blood of men dear to him, or because he wants to keep some element of pastoral beauty with him in the face of a world populated by dead men and rats. Still, the poppy's vibrancy is diminished, as it is "just a little white with the dust." Perhaps the poet thinks his death is approaching (ashes to ashes, dust to dust), even though he is safe for the time being. Perhaps Rosenberg is simply suggesting that nothing can be perfect – not the dawn, not the poppy, not human life – when faced with such a war. Rosenberg's own death is a footnote, an epilogue to this poem. Like Owen, his poems are great. What would he have achieved had he lived? Literary fame, like Graves? Or a quiet existence tortured by memory, like Sassoon? One hopes that someday Rosenberg's efforts will be rewarded with posthumous fame among the general reading public which they richly deserve.

It is impossible not to respect the immediacy and earnestness with which these four poets tried express their war experiences. Writing with clarity, emotion, and even beauty about the unfathomable horrors they saw gave some form to the irrationality, and compelled readers then and now to react to what the poets faced each day, in the ultimately futile hope that such a tragedy would not be borne again. In effect, these poets asked their readers to look into their consciences and ask the questions that were avoided throughout the course of the war.

Important as those questions are, we must look beyond the war poets in order to gain appreciation for the war's effects on the men who lived through it, as well as its effects on British society. Pat Barker's novel *Regeneration* focuses on the former issue, reaching into areas untapped by the war poets, while Modernists Eliot, Woolf, and Lawrence portray veterans as part of a larger society deeply affected by the war. When we depart from the scene of battle, new features of the Great War come into clearer focus.

## Part Two

### Victims and Civilians: War Neurosis in a Warless World

*'Tis not, what once it was, the world;  
But a rude heap together hurl'd;  
All negligently overthrown,  
Gulfs, Deserts, Precipices, Stone.  
Andrew Marvell*

Given the unquestionable authenticity of the war poets and the appalling nature of their experiences, any civilian who wished to express his or her own reactions to the war in writing faced a daunting task. After all, what more could be said that would not seem repetitive or ineffective? Entering into a conversation with a war poet (literally or figuratively), a non-combatant could only hope to learn, not to teach. Modernists T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence worked around this issue by portraying the war's effects on veterans and civilians – effects that were quite possible for them to observe in themselves and in others.

Before examining the Modernist approach to writing the war, I shall begin with Pat Barker's novel *Regeneration*, even though it was published long after the works of the Modernists, because its portrayal of neurasthenia (shell-shock) may elucidate aspects of the other works. *Regeneration* does not belong to the Modernist period, and could not have been written in 1922 (the year of *The Waste Land*'s publication), largely due to its subject matter, but also because due to Barker's historical perspective, it is able to give the reader an idea of veterans' responses to the war *while it is still going on*; veterans are the key component of society when we study the post-war world portrayed in fiction. By writing about veterans who are away from the trenches, but still affected by war, Barker links the war poets (three of whom are portrayed in the novel) to the Modernists.

*Regeneration* is set mainly at Craiglockhart Hospital during the three-month period of Siegfried Sassoon's residence there. The novel focuses on Dr. Rivers's treatment of neurasthenic patients, as well as his attempts to change Sassoon's mind about the efficacy of the war effort. Although Rivers and Sassoon, as well as Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen, are all non-fictional characters that appear in the novel, Barker also invents several patients in order to convey aspects of mental illness and treatment that were not pertinent to Sassoon. Necessarily, some elements of the novel are fictional, such as the imagined dialogue between doctor and patient, and some are not – for example, Sassoon's friendship with Graves and Owen. Overall, the effect of the book is not only to familiarize the reader with some of the symptoms and treatments of shell-shock, but also to point out, from a modern, psychology-driven view, the grave effects of war upon the individual, the fundamental unit of the society that war is supposed to protect.

Sassoon's "treatment" takes up a great deal of the novel; he is not, in fact, ill, but his conviction that the war ought not to go on is one that Rivers feels he must change. At the same time, he empathizes deeply with Sassoon:

He'd suffered repeated bereavements in the last two years, as first one contemporary then another died. In some ways the experience of these young men paralleled the experience of the very old. They looked back on intense memories and felt lonely because there was nobody left alive

who'd been there. That habit of Siegfried's of looking back, the inability to envisage any kind of future, seemed to be getting worse. (118)

Despite lacking classic neurasthenic symptoms, Sassoon does have half-waking hallucinations, which enforce his dislike of civilians. Once, during the day, he sits down on a bench and sees the ground covered in corpses in varying states of decay, being walked upon by passersby (12). Later in the novel, he is haunted at night by apparitions of dead comrades. These apparitions are what finally convince him that he must go back to the front; he informs Dr. Rivers of his decision by giving him a poem:

When I'm asleep, dreaming and drowsed and warm,  
They come, the homeless ones, the noiseless dead.  
While the dim charging breakers of the storm  
Rumble and drone and bellow overhead,  
Out of the gloom they gather about my bed.  
They whisper to my heart; their thoughts are mine.

'Why are you here with all your watches ended?  
'From Ypres to Frise we sought you in the line.'  
In bitter safety I awake, unfriended;  
And while the dawn begins with slashing rain  
I think of the Battalion in the mud.  
'When are you going back to them again?  
'Are they not still your brothers through our blood?' (189)

Rivers is moved to tears by this declaration. He knows that Sassoon still opposes the war in every way, but he also knows that Sassoon would not be able to live with himself if he were to let his men die alone, without his aid. Despite his knowledge that Sassoon may be going back with the intention of getting himself killed, Rivers is pleased with the result of Sassoon's stay at Craiglockhart.



Although the relationship between Sassoon and Rivers is at the center of *Regeneration*, other characters and their stories are also crucial elements in Barker's portrait of war neurosis. Among them is Billy Prior, a fictional character who is the main character in *The Eye in the Door*, and who also appears in *The Ghost Road*, the other novels in Barker's trilogy. Prior comes from a lower class background, but has ascended into the ranks of the officers. His ailment is at first mutism, combined with nightmares and severe asthma; he cannot or will not speak about his war experiences. Prior is at first combative with Rivers, and opens up to the older man only near the end of the novel, after Rivers proves himself to be a man with his patients' best interests at heart. Prior is the only character in the novel who regularly seeks female companionship, in the form of Sarah Lumb, a munitions worker in the town adjacent to Craiglockhart. With her he manages to find the peace missing from his nights; by resuming normative personal relations with her Prior is able, in some small way, to put aside his experiences and think about the future. Like Sassoon, he is convinced that it would be dishonorable not to want to return to the front with the other men; however, he desperately wants to live. Rivers arranges home service for him, and though Prior believes he has failed at "jumping through hoops," he is still grateful to Rivers. They leave each other on a note of mutual, unexpressed affection.

Part of what sets this novel apart from works contemporary with the immediate post-war period is its ability to treat on subjects that were, at the time, taboo. Three in

particular stand out. The first is sexuality, particularly homosexuality; both Sassoon and Owen were gay, and Barker is not reticent in her allusions to the fact. For example, at one point Rivers asks Sassoon about his personal medical history; knowing Sassoon is gay, he mentions that he won't include any "intimate details." Sassoon replies, "Probably just as well. My intimate details disqualify me from military service" (70). Barker includes this conversation to emphasize the sheer stupidity of excluding a courageous, intelligent, honorable man from military service on the basis of his sexual orientation. Near the end of the novel, Graves comes to see Sassoon. During their conversation, Graves reveals that his secondary school platonic crush, a boy named Peter, was arrested for "soliciting" near a military barracks. Graves is horrified that his "friend" is actually homosexual, and rushes to inform Sassoon that he himself is not gay, that he is in a relationship with a woman. What is more, Peter ("Dick" in Graves' memoir, *Goodbye to All That*), rather than rotting in jail, is being sent to Rivers to be "cured" (199). Clearly, Graves has no idea how much he is hurting Sassoon. When Rivers hears of the conversation, he advises Siegfried to stop tilting at windmills and to enter "the real world" (204-05). It is an interesting comment, and one uncharacteristic of Rivers. Rivers knows that Sassoon's world is the world of the trenches, where homophobia is noticeably absent, and is the world most real to Sassoon; the "real" world, the civilian world, is one that Sassoon despises.

The second subject that Barker is able to elaborate upon is the array of physical effects that accompany neurasthenia. As we shall see in *Mrs. Dalloway* and in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, respectively, a veteran's shell-shock and injuries may be described, but specific bodily functions are left out of the text. Barker makes sure to focus the readers' attention on the effects, but manages to do so without prompting disgust; rather, we feel a deep sense of pity that such willing and strong men must be so degraded by the workings of war and their own minds.

Two examples are particularly noteworthy. Anderson, Sassoon's golf partner, was a doctor during the war, and hopes to be one after its end; after his breakdown, the sight of blood, even from a shaving cut on his roommate's face, sends him screaming into the fetal position. He urinates on himself, but thankfully Rivers is sensitive enough to allow Anderson to pretend it did not happen. Another patient, David Burns, is so tormented by memories that every time he tries to eat, especially in public, he vomits. After one such incident, nurses hurry him away from the dining room. When Rivers offers to let him eat in his own room, Burns is appreciative, because he thinks it will make the other patients more comfortable. The moment is heartbreaking; Burns is a decent and kind boy whose life has been devastated by his experience.

A third subject is the graphic depiction of battlefield injuries, lacking in many novels of the war period, that Barker uses to emphasize her point about the horrors of war, perhaps because modern audiences are somewhat inured to violence. The scenes

she portrays, however, are enough to make even an iron stomach turn. One such incident involves Billy Prior, a memory that Rivers helps him recover through hypnosis. After passing two of his men while on morning patrol, Prior hears a shell burst, and retraces his steps, only to find their bodies in bits. As he and another soldier start to clean the trench, Prior sees something beneath the boards. He picks it up, and it is the eyeball of one of his men. In shock, Prior says, ““What am I supposed to do with this gobstopper?”” (103). It is worth noting that Prior is disgusted that this is the incident that precipitates his collapse; he thought it would be something worse, like firing on his own men accidentally (105). Even more horrifying is the case of David Burns, the man who cannot eat because of his worst memory: “he’d been thrown into the air by the explosion of shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he’d had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh” (19). The sheer ferocity and bluntness of Barker’s writing sets her apart from more removed authors like Eliot. At the same time, examining her work gives the twenty-first century reader a solid foundation in the specific circumstances of the war’s aftermath before approaching the Modernists, whose contemporary readers may already have had personal interactions with war veterans.

T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is perhaps the most famous modernist work that deals with the Great War and its cultural aftermath. The poem is a maze of allusions –

classical and modern – and also includes multiple languages and multicultural themes. However, with effort, we can glean Eliot's war commentary from this poem of great scope and enormous complexity. His view of the war is necessarily quite different from the views of the war poets, since he was not in the army and never saw the front. However, his great friend and possible youthful romantic interest Jean Verdenal, whom he met while studying in France, was killed at Gallipoli, which contributed to Eliot's personal sense of loss (Miller 19). Nonetheless, Eliot feels and writes the war as an overwhelming cultural tragedy, not just for himself or for Britain, but for Europe, and, by extension, the whole of Western civilization.

*The Waste Land* is divided into five sections, and I am concerned with the first two, "The Burial of the Dead" and "A Game of Chess." "The Burial of the Dead" opens with one of the most famous lines in modern poetry: "April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (Eliot 1-4). These first four lines seem to be from the perspective of a bereaved person, seeing the lilacs springing out of the "dead land" as unwelcome reminders of life lost and cruelly ironic symbols of new life bred from the bodies under the ground; years after *The Waste Land's* publication, Eliot recalled Verdenal "'coming across the Luxembourg Gardens in the late afternoon, waving a branch of lilac, a friend who was later (so far as I could find out) to be mixed with the mud of Gallipoli'" (Miller 19).

The next lines abruptly shift perspective: “winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers” (Eliot 5-7). The speaker here is a body buried under the ground, kept warm and covered by snow. The juxtaposition of the cruel spring with the comforting winter is foreign to human experience and therefore rather disconcerting. Without leaving the first person plural voice, Eliot shifts again to the persona of Marie, an aristocratic Austrian who remembers an idyllic time before the war. The reference to her cousin, the arch-duke, could have triggered only one association in the mind of a 1922 reader: Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the assassinated heir to the Austrian throne.

Immediately following this recollection is a break, and yet another shift in viewpoint and subject matter. Now we are introduced to an Old-Testament wasteland, a landscape threatening and frightening in its deadness:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (19-30)

In his explanatory notes that follow the poem, Eliot refers to Ezekiel 2:1 (“O son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak with you”) and Ecclesiastes 12:5 (“when one is

afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about in the streets"). The speaker in this section is powerful, a figure of authority, prophecy, and fear. Evelyn Waugh borrowed the title of *A Handful of Dust* from this section; Eliot himself uses imagery similar to line twenty-two in his 1925 poem "The Hollow Men."

After quoting *Tristan und Isolde*, an opera about futile love and death, Eliot takes on the persona of a man who gave a girl hyacinths; this man remembers the girl's words, but also recalls his feelings when they returned from the garden: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence. / Od' und leer das Meer"<sup>4</sup> (38-42). This feeling, similar to the accounts of shell-shock in *Regeneration*, and the inability to feel experienced by Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, is bleak, but the meter makes the lines sonorous and beautiful.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of *The Waste Land* is Eliot's vision of the dead crossing London Bridge:

Unreal City,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.  
...  
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him crying: 'Stetson!

---

<sup>4</sup> German, "How wide and empty the sea"

'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!  
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (60-63, 69-73)

Here the references to the poem's opening (the corpse in the garden, the frost) combine with the eerie spectacle of the dead traversing a bridge to give us a picture of Eliot's dreams. Does he feel guilty because death has "undone so many" but passed him over? Because Eliot was not in the trenches, he does not describe the human toll of the war in its actual setting; he describes the wasteland itself, but removes the victims to his own milieu, London. Contrast this section with part of Sassoon's "Repression of War Experience": "There must be crowds of ghosts among the trees, – / Not people killed in battle, – they're in France, – / But horrible shapes in shrouds – old men who died / Slow, natural deaths, – old men with ugly souls, / Who wore their bodies out with nasty sins" (27-31).

While "The Burial of the Dead" focuses mainly on the deadness of the wasteland, "A Game of Chess" emphasizes its sterility; whereas part one deals with concrete details of an actual wasteland, part two is largely made up of one-sided conversations, one between two women, and one between a woman and a man. Let us focus on the second, more colloquial conversation first. It takes place in a pub as the bartender calls closing time. An unnamed woman recounts to her companion a conversation she had with Lil, a woman whose husband, Albert, has just been "demobbed" – demobilized. Apparently, she advised Lil to have new teeth put in to please her husband, because



“he’s been in the army four years, he wants a good time” (148). Lil informs the speaker that her “antique” appearance is not due to bad teeth, but to an apothecary who gave her medication to induce an abortion. This fact highlights Eliot’s belief in the sterility of the post-war world. Lil cannot bear children, ostensibly because she almost died in childbirth with “George.” However, I think Eliot may be pointing out that it is better not to bring children into a world so cruel and miserable and mad. This position gains further credence when we read the section’s last line, Ophelia’s final line from *Hamlet*: “Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night, good night” (172). Ophelia is driven to madness after the combined shocks of Hamlet’s decline and the death of her father. Gertrude had hoped that she would be Hamlet’s bride, and provide him with heirs, but Ophelia’s madness leads to death and inevitable sterility – not only her own, but Hamlet’s as well.

Madness, which Eliot associates with death and sterility, is also evident at the beginning of “A Game of Chess.” For the first thirty-three lines we are led through the chamber of a great lady – whether a historical figure or the speaker of the lines that follow is difficult to tell. In any case, the woman speaker asks her husband to stay with her, because her “nerves are bad tonight” (111). She orders him to speak and to think; his inner voice, despairing, says to himself, “I think we are in rats’ alley / Where the dead men lost their bones” (115-116). This is a reference to the trenches, where the rats had free reign (note the possessive) and the bodies of soldiers were blown to pieces, and

often never recovered. But why does this upper class British man compare himself to an inhabitant of the trenches? The answer lies in Eliot's belief that post-war England was a civilization in its death-throes.

The woman continues chattering, and the man (perhaps the poet himself) shuts himself away in his own mind, thinking of their possible activities for the day – sterile, dispassionate things. He does nothing to remove himself physically from her, but nothing whatsoever to relate to her. The complete breakdown of personal relations is clear, especially when the man says, “we shall play a game of chess / Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door” (137-38). The knock of death? Chess is a game that may be played in complete silence, except for two words: “check” and “checkmate.” If this upper class couple is just waiting for death, what is the purpose of living? Sterile and unwilling to love, they and their lower-class counterparts are linked by their common sense of despair and madness – they are hollowed-out shells of people.

Like *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot's “The Hollow Men” (1925) is comprised of five sections; it is, however, a much shorter and more succinct poem than the earlier work. The title refers to the post-war “lost generation,” like the characters portrayed in *The Waste Land* – particularly those who did not actively serve in the war. He writes, “we are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men / . . . Our dried voices, when / We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless.” “The Hollow Men” is a poem of dichotomies,

including heaven and hell (“death’s dream kingdom” and “death’s twilight kingdom”) and life and sterility (“lips that would kiss / Form prayers to broken stone”). Eliot describes a scene very much like that of *The Waste Land*. In a spiritual desert, the hollow men take on disguises ultimately associated with trench warfare – “rat’s coat, crowskin, crossed staves” – to avoid the eyes of those who have died and crossed into “death’s dream kingdom.”

“The Hollow Men” could easily serve as the connective tissue between the other three texts in this section; its overriding theme is the emptiness and ineffectuality of men, religion, society, and even life itself in the post war period. The oppressive insanity of the Great War contaminated all aspects of society, from religious traditions (which had no ability to stop the slaughter) to political entities, to the class system, down to the self-worth of individuals. Aside from portraying the very real feelings of inadequacy that some people suffered from, this poem also expressively conveys the utter emptiness of life after the war. The war’s end brought no great victory, no triumph of good over evil, or even of progress and civilization. Sassoon in *Regeneration* sees this, and the realization that the war is purposeless drives him to his declaration and to despair. *The Waste Land* mourns the loss of tradition, personal relations, and sanity, while the women and veterans in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, as we shall see, must confront a world forever changed. The famous last lines of Eliot’s homage to the new “modern world” are telling:

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

This is also the way the war ends.

Virginia Woolf, being a woman, did not have the option to serve in the Great War; she had no experience of the trenches or of the shelling. However, in her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, she expertly conveys shell-shock through her portrayal of Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran experiencing life in London on the same day that socialite Clarissa Dalloway prepares for her party. Unlike Eliot, who in *The Waste Land* and “The Hollow Men” focuses on the war’s effects on civilians and civilization in general, Woolf pays particular attention to Smith without losing sight of the subtly tragic changes the war worked upon civilians, particularly women. For Woolf, “this late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears” (Woolf 9).

Indeed, Woolf’s first references to the war do not involve Septimus. Clarissa, on her way to buy flowers for the party, thinks to herself that

The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favorite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven – over. (5)

In this small passage we have two portraits of women: Mrs. Foxcraft, who seems more concerned over a piece of property than its late, unnamed owner, and Lady Bexborough, whose son is named, and who has the fortitude to bear her burden and still open a bazaar. This latter portrait might also seem sarcastic, in the manner of Owen's poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth," until we read later that Clarissa admires Lady Bexborough most because she opened the bazaar. For Clarissa, Lady Bexborough is all that Clarissa is not – "slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man" (10). We get the sense that Clarissa would not have been able to stand such a loss; this is, perhaps, a credit to her character.

The war may be over, but its memory and effects linger. Rezia, Septimus Warren Smith's wife, juxtaposes war and marriage and contemplates that everyone lost friends who were killed in the war (66). The War is still a source of sentimentality for "little Mr. Bowley" on Bond Street (20); Clarissa herself, on her way to buy flowers, notices a glove shop "where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves" (11). Miss Kilman, Elizabeth's friend, was dismissed from studies (presumably because of her German heritage) during the war, which engenders in her a sense of pride in her misfortune (12). "War" is always capitalized, in a manner reminiscent of the pre-twentieth century habit of capitalizing ideas like "Chivalry" or "Honor." War is all that matters now; it is the last great theme that deserves demarcation.

Septimus is introduced to us after an “explosion” – just a car backfiring on Bond Street, but to Clarissa it sounds like a pistol, and to Septimus, “with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too,” it must sound like a shell. This is one of two moments in the entire novel in which their paths cross: both look at the car, Clarissa with curiosity and Septimus with fear. His experience of the stopped motor car differs violently from the reaction of those around him, and we understand that he is the outsider, the other, even among his own countrymen. For Septimus, “this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him.” In his paranoia, Septimus believes that he is the one preventing people from moving along, that he is the focal point (14-15). And in a way, he is. He represents all the walking wounded, the veterans sound in body and disturbed in mind, the men whom no-one wishes to think or talk about. Memories of the war cannot fade if such grim reminders walk the streets in daylight.

The refusal to acknowledge the plight of shell-shocked veterans extends even into the medical establishment, as Woolf powerfully demonstrates with her portrayals of two psychiatrists, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw. Holmes is an unfeeling fool, “large, handsome, flicking his boots” (91) who tells Rezia that Septimus “[has] nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts” (21). He suggests excursions, hobbies, and bromide tablets to cure Septimus (90). Septimus

associates Holmes with human nature and loathes him, refusing to see Holmes when he calls a second time (92). The other doctor is Sir William Bradshaw, whose conclusion is that Septimus lacks “a sense of proportion” (his euphemism for madness); he prescribes isolated bed rest for a period of six months (96, 99). Woolf first describes Bradshaw as a man with “the reputation (of the utmost importance when dealing with nerve cases) not merely of lightning skill, and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis, but of sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul” (95). However, she later moderates this initial impression by characterizing his patients as victims and his goal not as “Proportion” but as “Conversion.” Even his wife has succumbed to Bradshaw’s persistent attempts to subordinate her will to his (100-102).

Bradshaw’s callousness stands out in stark relief when compared to Woolf’s almost tender characterization of Septimus. Woolf paints him as a boy poet, “one of the first to volunteer.” She writes that “he went to France to save an England that consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (86). In the army, Septimus seems to grow up, as it were; he acquires “manliness” and promotion, and the affectionate comradeship of his commanding officer, a man named Evans. The two are inseparable until Evans is killed just before the armistice. However, “Septimus, far from showing any emotion . . . congratulated himself on feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. He had gone through the whole show . . .” (Woolf 86). Here, the use of the term “show” has

three functions. First, it harkens back to Septimus "showing" very little emotion at Evan's death. Secondly, the word conveys a sense of flippancy and bravado; Stallworthy comments "'show' was soldiers' slang for battle'" (Stallworthy 133). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it may refer to Wilfred Owen's poem "The Show," in which the speaker looks over a battlefield with Death, and falling to earth at the poem's end, sees his own severed head (Stallworthy 133). Owen, like Evans, died just a week before the armistice; like Septimus, he was a gentle and sensitive man.

Septimus's sensitivity may account, for some of his most dreadful hallucinations. For Septimus, even a word like "time" can trigger his symptoms, which most often take the form of Evans speaking to him, imparting what Septimus thinks is great knowledge and prophecy. Despite Smith's familiarity with Evans, he is still terrified when Evans appears: "'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead" (Woolf 70). Perhaps this is so because he has seen too much death already; perhaps Woolf is only calling attention to his madness by suggesting that he thinks Evans is alive.

In addition to these visions, Septimus is plagued with overwhelming depression and cynicism, believing at first that he cannot feel anything, and eventually concluding that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning." He thinks that "Shakespeare loathed humanity- the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of mouth and belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden



in the beauty of words" (88). As he watches his wife make decorations for a hat, Septimus meditates, feeling that "human beings have neither kindness nor faith nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment" (89). This particular phrasing is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach": ". . . for the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / . . . / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (Bloom 655).

Septimus's world certainly is devoid of joy. It is a world made modern, hiding the pain of its war wounds with new interests, particularly in mobility, mechanization, and speed. Motor vehicles play an unexpectedly large role in *Mrs. Dalloway*. First, the car on Bond Street introduces the first connection between Clarissa and Septimus; their differing reactions to the sound of the backfiring engine reveal their distinct perspectives, and allow Woolf to transfer perspective from Clarissa to Septimus. Sir William Bradshaw's large grey automobile symbolizes his great wealth and prominence, which are two of the determining factors in his immense power over Septimus: "Indeed it was –Sir William Bradshaw's motor car; low, powerful, grey with plain initials interlocked on the panel, as if the pomps of heraldry were incongruous this man being the ghostly helper, the priest of science" (94). In contrast to the expensive car and its owner is Elizabeth Dalloway, Clarissa's daughter, a young woman who "liked people who were ill," and who "competently" mounts a public omnibus (136, 139). It is an act indicative of her grace and elegance, her comfort with the world

growing up with her. In contrast, Septimus watches the same omnibuses mid-hallucination; in the novel, almost every time an automobile is mentioned, it signals a shift to Septimus's perspective. One exception is the sound of the ambulance that (we assume) bears the remains of Septimus to the hospital: "One of the triumphs of civilization, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of triumphs of civilization, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded" (151). These are possibly the most ironic lines in the novel – the sound of the triumph of civilization signals a death of a member of that society, a member who ought to have been respected for the enormous burden he had to carry. Instead, civilization triumphs by allowing him to die, to release itself from the burden of his pain.

The last intersection of Clarissa and Septimus (following Peter Walsh's run-in with the ambulance) is the most important. Sir William Bradshaw and his wife arrive late for her party, and Lady Bradshaw takes Clarissa aside to explain the reason for their tardiness. "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (182). Clarissa goes into another room, expecting to discover guests, but instead, finding herself alone, she muses on Septimus. She can see his death within herself; she understands, without knowing him, what led Septimus to take his own life: "death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre, which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (184). For Mrs.

Dalloway, the rapture seems to have ended. She was once kissed by Sally Seton, long ago, when they were young, and now they are both middle-aged, respectable, appearing at a party. But as she watches an old woman puttering about, going to bed, she thinks, "she felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away . . . the leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back" (186). Septimus did not die in vain; he was a visionary, a prophet unwanted in his own land, but his (a soldier's) death allows Clarissa (and by inference, civilians in general) to appreciate life, to appreciate beauty. Her life, though she fears it, is a good one. This revelation is the "bang" that sets *Mrs. Dalloway* apart from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

D. H. Lawrence finds neither such happy conclusions nor such drama nor such beauty in his most famous novel. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, though (in)famous for its graphic depiction of adulterous sexuality, may profitably be read to extricate Lawrence's attitude toward the reality of post-war life in industrial English society. Indeed, Lawrence begins the novel with a first-person observation: "Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. . . ." (Lawrence 1). The reader consequently learns that these are Connie Chatterley's thoughts, but the initial impression of authorial agency and opinion is a lasting one.

Connie is the novel's protagonist, despite the title's suggestion, and this alone is an indication of the post-war situation in England – women make up the majority of the population, and because the war has so devastated men of marriageable age, women have newfound independence. Even though the direct experience of the war fell to men like Owen, Sassoon, and Graves, women were also profoundly affected by the catastrophe. Connie represents this fact: "The war had brought the roof down over her head" (1). Before she begins an affair with Oliver Mellors, Wragby's groundskeeper, Connie's existence is drab, grey, and lifeless, passing ". . . as the clock does, half past eight instead of half past seven" (17).

Connie's husband, Clifford, is perhaps the novel's strangest and most intriguing character. He chooses to put on a uniform in order to look more dashing while critiquing policy and politics, and suffers the consequences – a spirit smashed as thoroughly as his body (6, 1). As both a wounded veteran and a cuckold, one might think that Lawrence would portray Clifford with at least a modicum of sympathy, but instead, Connie's husband is characterized as cold, unfeeling, sterile, and infantile. Because the portrayal is so unexpected, it becomes more plausible, even though Clifford's antics are at times a bit much even for an undiscerning reader. For example, his relationship with Mrs. Bolton, the housekeeper, is bound to raise eyebrows. Though described in the novel's first chapter as ". . . just a little bit frightened of middle and lower class humanity . . ." (7), Clifford takes to Mrs. Bolton with an unhealthy keenness.

Late night card-playing sessions evolve into a very personal mother-infant dynamic, as Mrs. Bolton tends to Clifford's needs not only as a paralytic, but also as if he is a small child. To Connie, she comments, "But all men are alike: Just like babies, and you have to flatter them and wheedle them and let them think they're having their own way." However, it is clear from her conversation with Connie that Mrs. Bolton's husband did not crave the sort of attention that Clifford does; she even shaves him, bathes him, and puts him to bed (255-56, 186).

Also fascinating is the fact that Lawrence does not depict any other war veteran in depth to counter-balance Clifford's negative portrayal. Mellors would be the obvious choice for contrast, and he did serve in the military in India, but illness prevented him from serving in Europe (150). The only other soldiers mentioned specifically are Clifford's elder brother and Hilda and Connie's first lovers, but they are summarily dismissed: "Before Christmas of 1914 both their German young men were dead: whereupon the sisters wept, and loved the young men passionately, but underneath forgot them. They didn't exist anymore" (6). In a way, the pre-war Clifford does not exist either; with his crippling injuries comes the inability to father a child, leaving Wragby with no male heir, since Clifford's elder brother had died in the war. Sir Geoffrey, Clifford's father, "died of chagrin (9)" upon learning of his son's debilitating injury. This mocking tone describing Sir Geoffrey's death indicates not only the lack of compassion in Clifford's family, but also mirrors the futility and senselessness of the

war itself. For the characters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the war itself was like a cold and calculating machine of industry – its only output death.

Ironically, industry is fundamental to Clifford's financial success - both Wragby and Clifford's wealth depend on mining. As Connie moves away from Wragby's maelstrom toward an affair with Mellors in her pursuit of personal connections, Clifford, under the influence of Mrs. Bolton, becomes deeply embedded in the workings of the mine, sloughing off his earlier faux-intellectualism in favor of throwing himself into technological improvements (110). Since Clifford is not capable of producing children, he turns to producing coal, which in turn fuels the industrial movement that is so anathema to Connie and Mellors. Clifford's fascination with mining, industry and industry's resultant enabling of motion could be a reaction to the static and immobile style of warfare that characterizes the First World War. It was the introduction of the tank that appeared in many minds to be the conflict's turning point. Clifford himself is immobilized as a result of his participation in the war, and even his motorized wheel chair runs into difficulties when it confronts the natural landscape.

In contrast to Clifford, Connie Chatterley focuses on natural life, attempting to bear a child and to flee the drab trappings of Wragby by escaping into nature. Wragby and the surrounding environs, like Clifford, serve as reminders of the post-war landscape: unfertile, unwelcoming, and over-mined. At first, as Connie wanders through the land contiguous to the house and park, she ruminates that the daily events

in her life are themselves lifeless – “Why should there be anything in them, why should they last? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Sufficient to the moment is the *appearance of reality*” (16). However, once she connects with Oliver Mellors and retreats into Wragby wood, she begins to gain a new perspective. While sitting on the hut’s stoop, she thinks to herself that “Perhaps this was one of the unravished places. Unravished! The whole world was ravished. Some things can’t be ravished. . . And so many women are like that, and men. But the earth. . . !” Her contemplation of nature takes a turn into a broader theme: “Ravished! How ravished one could be without ever being touched. Ravished by dead words become obscene, dead ideas become obsessions” (98). This observation clearly refers to the inadequacy of pre-war ideals and language in a post-war context.

Though Clifford’s father cut down many trees in an ill-advised attempt to support the war effort, Wragby wood remains a place of refuge for Mellors and Connie, and seems to be the only location in the novel that is not wholly ruined. Still, it is not quite the Edenic paradise that both characters wish it to be: “But [Mellors] knew that the seclusion of the wood was illusory. The industrial noises broke the solitude, the sharp lights, though unseen, mocked it” (126). Other places that Connie had enjoyed in the past, such as Shipley, have also been victims of the war and its economic consequences; Connie laments their loss and in so doing also laments the loss of pre-war certainty and order (168). Evidently, the wood is not safe from the incursion of the hostile industrial

world, represented in one instance by Clifford Chatterley. Connie does not want to walk beside his mechanized bath chair, a symbol of the encroaching industrialism, and almost inevitably Clifford's chair breaks down and he must call Mellors for assistance (192-23, 200-07). Lawrence is using the scenario to comment upon the reality of post-war Britain. The static, withered industrial portion of society cannot function without the labor supplied by middle and lower class men, and the latter provide the labor because it is the only thing left to them to do.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* ends with the proverbial "whimper." While critics have criticized the weakness of the conclusion, it seems likely to me that Lawrence intentionally allowed the novel to trail off into an uncertain and not particularly optimistic ending (despite the novel's last words). Connie does manage to depart Wragby for Scotland (not the most hospitable country, by all accounts), but the novel leaves her waiting for the birth of her child, with no plans but to wait for Mellors to gain enough experience with farming so that the two can make a start together. Mellors is once again consigned to the life of labor that seems to be inextricably linked to his class status, and his missive to Connie, which ends the novel, is more of a meditation on the problems inherent in a capitalist economy than a love letter. He does recognize their separation and concomitant chastity as important and natural, "like a river of cool water in my soul," but still stresses that ". . . a great deal of us is together, and we can but abide by it, and steer our courses to meet soon." Mellors sounds like someone who



knows the truth of what is to come, but is desperate to conceal it, preferring rather to clothe himself in unrealistic expectations: "John Thomas says good night to Lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart" (328).

As we shall see, the rather pessimistic view of wartime and post-war British society shared by Barker, Woolf, Eliot, and Lawrence begins to diminish with time, until the immediate post-war period becomes an idyllic time of soul-searching and self-awakening in the minds of later authors.

**Part Three**

Beyond Post-War: Making Meaning from the Pieces

*Again the guns disturbed the hour,  
Roaring their readiness to avenge,  
As far inland as Stourton Tower,  
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.*

Thomas Hardy

April 1914

If we examine the work of Evelyn Waugh, W. Somerset Maugham, and Robertson Davies, we may detect an attitude toward the war that differs greatly from that of the Modernists; instead of viewing the war as a horrific cataclysm, Waugh, Maugham, and Davies begin to envision the war as a formative (or even missing) experience for their characters. They try to make meaning from the pieces. Their novels, *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Razor's Edge*, and *Fifth Business*, respectively, are not "about" the war; nevertheless the war (and its aftermath) permeates the lives of all three novels' characters, just as it does in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* stands in stark contrast to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. While Lawrence's novel regards the immediate post-war period as one of uncertainty, gloom, and desperation, Waugh's narrator, Charles Ryder, regards the early 1920s as an extraordinarily bright period in his life. The section concerning this phase of his life is even entitled 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (And I am in Arcadia), denoting a pleasant, peaceful existence. Of course, the phrase is written on a skull, implying that Death also stalks Arcadia. The disparity between appearance and reality is a recurring theme in *Brideshead Revisited*. For instance, despite framing the novel with scenes from the Second World War, it is the influence of the First World War that Waugh's characters cannot escape, even in the heady flush of the 1920s. After realizing that he has made camp at Brideshead, Ryder's flashback begins in 1923 at Oxford University,

and the first reference to the war appears almost immediately; for Lunt, Ryder's servant, ". . . things could never be the same as they had been in 1914" (Waugh 22).

While the reality of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is firmly grounded in a dismal rural aesthetic, the reality that Waugh chooses to write about in *Brideshead Revisited* (and in *Vile Bodies*) is the opulent lifestyle of young, well-educated, upper-class Britons.

Although they lack Connie's boredom, Clifford's mental and physical paralysis, and Mellors's general discontent, no character in *Brideshead Revisited* is completely whole or satisfied. Sebastian Flyte is the most notable example; beloved by family and friends, he still tries to drink himself into oblivion. Charles Ryder is never completely sure that his friendships are real and his pursuits worthwhile; Julia seeks salvation in marriage and then in faith, but cannot allow herself to be happy. Without the experience of the war to give them some purpose, these characters are walking wounded, unsure of what matters in a world turned upside down. Cordelia, Sebastian and Julia's younger sister, fares best out of the three, but even she seeks out war to prove her usefulness.

Perhaps the most notable motif in *Brideshead Revisited* vis a vis the Great War is the sense of inadequacy that afflicts several of the male characters, Charles Ryder in particular. During Britain's general strike of 1926, Ryder and various compatriots return to England to defend their country against any threat of proletarian takeover; Ryder remarks that tales of such happenings in Europe had become so commonplace that ". . . it had become part of one's experience, at second hand, like the mud of

Flanders or the flies of Mesopotamia" (Waugh 201). In less than ten years, the war has been mythologized and absorbed into the common consciousness; the men that were too young to fight are both plagued and blessed that the Flanders mud was *not* part of their experience. As Ryder and his former school associate, Boy Mulcaster, meet in a night club to share drinks and patriotism, their conversation, though drunken, and predicated on a ridiculous assumption, is nonetheless full of true feeling:

'You and I,' he said, 'were too young to fight in the war. Other chaps fought, millions of them dead. Not us. We'll show them. We'll show the dead chaps we can fight, too.'

'That's why I'm here,' I said. Come from overseas, rallying to old country in hour of need.'

'Like Australians.'

'Like the poor dead Australians.'

'What you in?'

'Nothing yet. War not ready.' (Waugh 205)

Clearly, both the serious Ryder and the boorish Mulcaster feel the need to prove themselves as men, not by acquiring wealth or marrying well, but by fighting like "the dead chaps." The post-war reality of peace is easily thrown aside in favor of entering into another inevitable conflict ("War not ready"), despite the disastrousness of the first. Charles joins up with a "unit" searching for trouble, and finding none, Charles realizes

“it had not been worth leaving Paris.” In a final statement of irony, the narrator adds that “Jean, who joined another company, had a pot of ferns dropped on his head by an elderly widow in Camden town and was in hospital for a week” (Waugh 206-07).

Compared to the descriptions of wounds in Barker’s *Regeneration*, this injury is almost charming.

As in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, *Brideshead Revisited*’s most sympathetic characters are those most intent on the intricacies and importance of personal relations. This concern is one that pre-dates the Great War; for example, we see it clearly in E. M. Forster’s portrayal of the Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*. However, *Howards End* leaves the reader with the impression that those who are committed to maintaining personal relationships may do so even in the face of a modernizing world, while *Brideshead Revisited* provides no such assurances. The two characters with the best prospects, Charles and Julia, are separated by Julia’s faith, which may be no more than a façade to hide her uncertainty about the future. After the Great War, when so many were lost to others, all relationships between people themselves and people and places become tenuous and fleeting; nothing and nobody is stable. Sebastian Flyte is an alcoholic who ends up in Morocco, deserting friends and family; Charles and Julia both conduct extra-marital affairs; Charles flees to the wilds of South America to escape his familial duties; Cordelia seeks out nursing work in parts foreign (since she was too young to experience

the war itself). A sense of inevitable melancholy pervades the novel, as we may discern from Ryder's thoughts upon recalling a conversation with Julia:

Perhaps, I thought, while her words still hung in the air between us like a wisp of tobacco smoke – a thought to fade and vanish like smoke without a trace – perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; a hill of many invisible crests; doors that open as in a dream to reveal only a further stretch of carpet and another door; perhaps you and I are types and this sadness that sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us. (Waugh 303)

Clearly, Charles Ryder is in Arcadia no more; perhaps he never was. The war's hopelessness, which seemed to have dissipated in the novel's earlier sections, returns with renewed force in this passage; Ryder's quest for happiness is thwarted.

Larry Darrell, the American hero of W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, has his own quest, one that is completely precipitated by his involvement in the Great War. Like Ryder aching to break skulls during the General Strike, Larry wants to take part in the violence that calls to his generation. He therefore lies about his age and, just like Dunstan in *Fifth Business*, enters into the Canadian armed services. As Anglophilic American Elliott Templeton says, "it was damned sporting of him to run away and join

the air corps, but I'm a pretty good judge of character . . . my opinion is that Larry will never amount to very much" (Maugham 33). And from Elliott's point of view, Larry never does anything spectacular, but his encounter with war sets him on a path to self-knowledge that proves to be emotionally harrowing to the men and women who surround him. The novel is narrated by a version of the author W. Somerset Maugham, who refers to his own books. This narrator (henceforth "Maugham") is also affected by Larry's war experience and its consequences; and he is fascinated by Larry himself, relishing their chance meetings and conversations, and perceiving in the younger man a kindred spirit, a keen observer of the human condition, especially his own.

Although he is an American and does not participate in trench warfare, Larry's particular form of combat is still one that is tied almost exclusively to World War One. He is a biplane pilot, sent up to dogfight in flimsy contraptions that had been pioneered less than twenty years before. This occupation, though certainly not infused with the daily misery that accompanied life and death in the trenches, was none too safe, and rife with gruesome ways to die. Years after war's end, Larry relates his early feelings to the narrator:

'They were terrible gimcrack planes we flew in then, and you practically took your life in your hands each time you went up. The heights we got to were absurd, judged by present standards, but we didn't know any better and thought it wonderful. I loved flying . . . I'd known that men had



been killed by the hundred thousand, but I hadn't seen them killed. It didn't mean very much to me. Then I saw a dead man with my own eyes . . . that boy, he was only three or four years older than me, who'd had such energy and daring, who a moment before had had so much vitality, who'd been so good, was now just mangled flesh that looked as if it had never been alive.'

I didn't say anything. I had seen dead men when I was a medical student and I had seen many more during the war. What had dismayed me was how trifling they looked. There was no dignity in them.

Marionettes that the showman had thrown into the discard. (251-252)

Maugham's comment comes from personal experience; he was in the Red Cross ambulance corps during the war, originally as interpreter, but then as a driver when he saw the need for them was greater (Morgan 186-7). At one hospital,

The dead were stacked in an outhouse. He saw men with wounds that medical school had not prepared him for, "great wounds of the shoulder the bone all shattered, running with pus, stinking gaping wounds in the back; wounds where a bullet had passed through the lungs; shattered feet so that you wonder if the limb can possibly be saved. (189)

Death and corpses were terrifyingly common facts of life during the war for anyone who lived in or near the trenches. For Larry, however, death is not always so close-up

as it was for Maugham, since manned planes look like little specks from a great height, even when crashing, and therefore the initial shock of close-up death becomes the most lasting impression of war-death for him. Larry suffers from classic survivor guilt, exacerbated by the fact that the boy he describes was his best friend who saved Larry's life just minutes before his own death. Patsy, a short redhead who took Larry under his wing, guns down a plane about to shoot down Larry, and in the process is mortally wounded. A consummate jokester, Patsy bore no ill will toward the "enemy" – dogfights were like a game to him. "He simply couldn't look upon bringing down one of their planes as anything but a practical joke," says Larry to a lover, Suzanne Rouvier (Maugham 56). His tragicomic death scene is presented almost without remark by Larry:

'Suddenly a strange look came over his face. It had just come to him that he was dying, and the possibility of death had never so much as crossed his mind. Before they could stop him he sat up and gave a laugh.

"Well I'm jiggered," he said.

'He fell back dead. He was twenty-two. He was going to marry a girl in Ireland after the war.' (57)

This story comes to the reader third-hand – Larry to Suzanne to "Maugham" to us. What we first learn about are Larry's post-war "symptoms." He has no desire to take a well paying job from a friend's father in order to pave the way for marriage to the

more-than-comely Isabel; his stated ambition is to “loaf” (37). But “loafing” would make for a very dull novel indeed; so Larry is fascinated by philosophers, mystics, seers, metaphysicians. In Paris, he tells a horrified Isabel that “I see vast lands of the sprit stretching out before me, beckoning, and I’m eager to travel them . . . I want to make up my mind whether God is or God is not. I want to find out why evil exists. I want to know whether I have an immortal soul or whether when I die it’s the end” (71). Clearly, his war experience combined with the extraordinary trauma (for a civilian, at least) of Patsy’s death has compelled Larry to search for what amounts to the meaning of life.

To this end, Larry begins a worldwide exploration for knowledge and truth, leaving behind Isabel, his family, and his inheritance. He devours libraries from Paris to Cologne; traipses across Western Europe, performing manual labor by day, learning languages and reading philosophy by night. That he spends a good deal of time in Germany is important; it signals to the reader Maugham’s awareness that some of the bitterness born from war (the First World War, that is) has passed, and that the great German thinkers have something to offer.

After gleaning all that he wishes from the West, Larry travels eastward to India, where he seeks enlightenment from the monks and yogis. Larry is retrieving ancient knowledge, in much the same manner that Charles Ryder paints old manor houses to immortalize them before they are physically destroyed to make space for modernized

and mechanized new structures. Even more importantly, Larry's spiritual quest is mirrored by several of the other characters in *Brideshead Revisited*. Sebastian becomes a lay worker at a monastery in Northern Africa as he attempts to manage his alcoholism; Cordelia, also a fervent (and probably celibate) Catholic serves as a nurse in various war-torn places; Julia leaves Ryder to reclaim her spiritual heritage; and Bridey and his mother remain the towering figures of traditional Catholicism, in spite of personal tragedies, war-related and otherwise. Both Waugh and Maugham suggest that in an environment fractured and broken by war, men and women try to heal themselves, or even protect themselves, by seeking out one of the most fundamental concepts in the human experience: spirituality. These characters look for answers in religio-spiritual traditions that would make sense, make meaning out of the horror; Maugham and Waugh attempt the same thing by writing novels.

After several years, Larry returns to Paris, to find some of his acquaintances resolutely unchanged, and others altered irrevocably. Ever the snob, Elliott is still gaming for the best invitations from Paris elites; having taken a turn for the religious himself, he is tied up in concerns over his Papal commission. "Maugham," our intrepid narrator, is still going about making astute observations. Gray, Larry's best friend from school, is still in love with Isabel; they are married and residing in Paris since the Crash proved disastrous to Gray's business interests. As old friendships are somewhat renewed, they run into Sophie MacDonald, once a shy girl in Chicago, now an alcoholic

drug user with implied nymphomaniac tendencies. Isabel wants to shun her, but Larry is fascinated by Sophie's pain, perhaps because he has experienced so much himself as a war veteran. They become engaged to be married, and Sophie sobers up, though how much for Larry's benefit instead of her own is unclear.

Isabel contrives to reverse Sophie's hard-won sobriety, and she disappears back into the French underworld. Some time later, she is found dead, throat slit, elsewhere in France. At her funeral, Larry reveals to "Maugham" that, having liberated himself from his inheritance, he plans to travel back to America as a deckhand on a tramp steamer, and perhaps find work as a taxi-driver in New York. Naturally, given the sorts of ideas Larry has been working with for years, the narrator is surprised, but not shocked. After the trauma of war and a long recovery, Larry is finally going back to his roots, to his home country.

The notion of returning home also plays a large role in *Fifth Business*, the first book in the acclaimed Deptford Trilogy by the late Canadian author Robertson Davies. Published in 1970, *Fifth Business* concerns the life and times of Dunstan Ramsay, a retiring history teacher at a prestigious boys' preparatory school in Canada. In response to a simpering piece on his retirement from the pen of a former colleague, Dunstan recounts the strange history of his life to the headmaster; this retelling makes up the novel. That it takes the form of a memoir is no accident; like many of the real survivors of the Great War, among them Sassoon and Graves, Dunstan is compelled to

give his own account of what happened to him between 1914 and 1918, as well as what led up to his war experience and what followed after its end.

Born in a small village set in its habits, characters, and prejudices, Dunstan wishes to escape the grasp of his overbearing mother, and does so at barely seventeen by enlisting in the Canadian Army. As he puts it, "I was tall and strong and a good liar, and I had no difficulty in being accepted. She wanted to go to the authorities and get me out, but my father put his foot down there" (Davies 64). Dunstan characterizes his mother as a good but over-controlling woman, while he seems to have great respect for his father who has "a poor opinion of soldiers and as he had run some risks by being pro-Boer in 1901 he had serious doubts about the justice of any war." As it did in England at the war's start, sentiment in the little Canadian town tends toward the "romantic," and boys (and a few girls) look up to and admire Dunstan as he awaits his call to active service. Before he leaves, Mrs. Dempster, the child-like, quasi-saintly wife of the Baptist minister whom Dunstan believes to be a miracle worker tells him to remember that "it does no good to be afraid. So Dunstan promises "not to be afraid, and may even have been fool enough to think [he] could keep [his] promise" (64-65).

On that note, Davies launches into the book's second section, titled "I Am Born Again" – a play on the Baptist religious background of Mrs. Dempster and on the first line of *David Copperfield*, which Dunstan disparages in his earlier address to the headmaster. This section begins with a description of Dunstan's experience during the

war – a wry, brief, and honest account of the miseries of life before, during, and after battles. . . If it were not for Dunstan’s mention of the fact that he was assigned to the second Canadian Division, there would be nothing to distinguish his experience from that of a British infantryman. He sums up his part in the action thus: “Commanders and historians are the people to discuss wars; I was in the infantry, and most of the time I did not know where I was or what I was doing except that I was obeying orders and trying not to be killed in any of the variety of horrible ways open to me” (67). He speaks about the unbelievable boredom of training and war (though “loneliness was replaced by fear” [69]), the effort made by superior officers to convince the men that the enemy were a lot of brutes bent on ravaging and pillaging, and the notion that the soldiers believed it was their duty, not “to run mad,” as Graves writes in “Recalling War,” but to restore “decency” to the world. Eksteins, in *Rites of Spring*, notes that the English were ruled by a sense of “playing the game,” thinking of war as the natural successor to the sports prevalent in schools: “The British mission . . . was principally one of extending the sense of civic virtue, of teaching both the foreigner and the uneducated Briton the rules of civilized social conduct, the rules for ‘playing the game’ . . . Civilization was possible only if one played the game according to rules laid down by time, history, precedent, all of which amounted to the law” (Eksteins 117). As with all games, they thought war should have rules and procedures (gas, therefore, was quite

out of bounds); it appears, from Davies' characterization, that the Canadians were impelled by a similar sense.

Davies, like Barker, does not shrink from describing the dreadful details of the Great War, and even takes the opportunities afforded him by prose to comment on some of its more distinctive features. For instance, Dunstan says "my war was greatly complicated by horses, for motor vehicles were useless in Flanders mud; if one was among the horses during a bombardment, as I once chanced to be, the animals were just as dangerous as the German shells" (Davies 70). He remembers looking at cavalry officers in wonder; the Great War was the last in which cavalry were considered essential, "for there were still generals who thought that if they could once get at the enemy with cavalry the machine-guns would quickly be silenced" (70). Interestingly, Dunstan describes corpses as having an "unimportant look," similar to Maugham's analysis of corpses in *The Razor's Edge*; but what truly horrifies him are the mortally wounded men:

It was the indignity, ignominy, the squalor, to which war reduced a wounded man that most ate into me. Men in agony, smashed so that they will never be whole again even if they live, ought not to be something one ignores; but we learned to ignore them, and I have put my foot on many a wretched fellow and pushed him even deeper into the mud, because I had



to get over him and onto some spot that we had been ordered to achieve or die in trying. (70).

It is this sort of writing that allows the work of an author born in 1913 to be compared with the work of men who consciously lived through the war. Davies seems to have an intrinsic understanding and respect for the suffering of soldiers, and portrays Dunstan, not as a hero or villain, but as an honest human being.

Soon enough, Dunstan too is wounded. Having risen to the rank of sergeant (he claims as a result of heavy losses and his talent for hiding his fear), Dunstan is ordered to make a night raid on a German machine-gun nest. While trying to avoid flares, machine-gun fire, and the shells of his own comrades, he runs into the German position he had been ordered to capture. After killing the Germans (an act he is not proud of), Dunstan attempts to crawl to safety, is wounded in the leg, and passes out of consciousness in the ruins of a church (75-77).

Though description of his participation in the war takes up only a small part of the text, the event is nonetheless a formative one in Dunstan's life, for a number of reasons. Before he loses consciousness at Passchendaele, Dunstan has a vision that transforms the course of his life. In the light of a flare, he sees an image of the Virgin and Child in the church, and, incredibly, the face of the Virgin is the face of Mrs. Dempster. It is this vision, Dunstan thinks, which he takes to be from the book of *Revelation* (the Crowned Woman standing on the moon, threatened by the Red Dragon)

that sends him into the oblivion of the unconscious. The vision remains with him even when he is confronted by the delectable distraction of a pretty English nurse named Diana. With her he experiences intimacy and warmth for the first time in his life; for her, he is a replacement for the young man she lost to the war. Despite the pleasant prospect of a life being nursed by Diana, Dunstan is determined to make his own way in the world, to get an education, and to explore the mystery of the Madonna with the face of Mrs. Dempster. Diana grudgingly acquiesces to his plan, and rechristens him Dunstan (his name had been Dunstable, his mother's maiden name). His new life has begun, one that is his own and one that leads him to places and people far stranger than he could have expected before he went to war.

The Great War proves to be Dunstan's trial by fire, the purifying experience that awakens in him a new awareness of himself and of the world. Dunstan's war experiences, though fictional, are similar in tone and form to those described by the war poets and by Pat Barker in *Regeneration*. Dunstan's post war reality is infused with colorful characters, uncanny coincidences, and a great deal more drama than might be expected for a one-legged Canadian school teacher. Significantly, Dunstan encounters these characters while on a quest infused with religious intent; the novel's emphasis on religious symbolism and magic realism sets it apart from other works that use the war as the main theme or as fodder for plot development. In a way, Dunstan follows the court and quest pattern of medieval epic: he leaves a place of refuge (his native

country) on a dangerous mission to discover what he can of a holy object(ive), only to return to place where he started. The war, then, takes on new significance as a proving ground.

Charles Ryder, too, follows this paradigm; Brideshead is his court, fraught with its own difficulties but a sort of “home” nonetheless. He leaves to seek his fortune, to determine the path of his life, runs into a war (the Second World War, not the first), and unwittingly returns to his origins. Larry Darrell from *The Razor’s Edge* is quite obviously on a quest, though more spiritually oriented than those of Charles and Dunstan. All three characters, however, are possessed of a strong sense of individuality; though certainly interested in those around them, they allow their experiences to guide them into situations considered non-normative by society (“loafing” and philosophizing, painting in South America, saint-hunting in Europe), but crucial to preserve their own identities. The Great War becomes their starting point, not the point that defines each of them, even if its consequences pervade every level of the society in which they live.



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